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# ARTHUR'S HEIRS: SITUATING MEDIEVAL WELSH, SPANISH, AND SCANDINAVIAN TEXTS IN THEIR LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEXTS

Nahir I. Otaño Gracia  
*University of Massachusetts Amherst*

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ARTHUR'S HEIRS: SITUATING MEDIEVAL WELSH, SPANISH, AND  
SCANDINAVIAN TEXTS IN THEIR LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CONTEXTS

A Dissertation Presented

By

NAHIR I. OTAÑO GRACIA

Submitted to the Graduate School of the  
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

May 2014

Program of Comparative Literature  
Department of Languages, Literatures and Cultures

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Dissertation Presented

By

NAHIR I. OTAÑO GRACIA

Approved as to style and content by:

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Maria Tymoczko, Chair

---

Elizabeth Petroff, Member

---

James Hicks, Member

---

Sherrill Harbison, Member

---

Albert Lloret, Member

---

William Moebius, Department Head  
Department of Languages, Literatures and Cultures

---

Maria Barbon, Program Director  
Comparative Literature Program

## DEDICATION

Para mi familia, la roca que me aguanta: mi esposo Matthew, mi hija Violet, y el resto de los poetas de mi casa. Recuerden que de poetas y locos todos tenemos un poco y nosotros más que otros.

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daughter, Violet – the two most important people in my world. Let us ride dragons together.

## ABSTRACT

ARTHUR'S HEIRS: SITUATING MEDIEVAL WELSH, SPANISH, AND  
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MAY 2014

NAHIR I. OTAÑO GRACIA, B.A., UNIVERSITY OF PUERTO RICO RIO PIEDRAS

M.A., UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS AMHERST

Ph.D., UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS AMHERST

Directed by: Professor Maria Tymoczko

My dissertation addresses a significant gap in Arthurian scholarship and calls for the study of Arthurian literature as a transnational phenomenon. Inspired by postcolonial and translation theory, my dissertation research offers a new perspective on medieval Arthurian texts in the peripheries of Europe (also called “second-tier” Arthurian texts). Instead of concentrating on the canonical texts (French, English, and German), I analyze materials from the Celtic (Irish and Welsh), Scandinavian (Norwegian and Icelandic), and Iberian (Castilian and Catalan) traditions, demonstrating how these Arthurian texts played different roles in each culture and how they were shaped by, and in turn shaped, their environments.

Chapters II and III introduce the ways that Celtic texts present a delicate balance between praising kings for their amazing deeds and chastising them for ultimately leading to the downfall of their people and the lands they should have protected. Thus, the Celtic texts concentrate on both Arthur and his knights as a unit.

Chapter IV shifts the analysis to a transnational perspective by comparing the Arthurian texts of Geoffrey of Monmouth and Chrétien de Troyes, among the most



canonical Arthurian texts, pointing out the ways in which their uses of Arthur and his knights fit with their own historical and cultural contexts. Each text creates a different Arthur that has family resemblances to the other Arthurs.

The Arthurian texts from the Iberian Peninsula concentrate on the knights, but turn them into kings, a very different interpretive move from the Arthurian texts discussed above. Chapter V discusses how Iberian courtly ideals were intertwined with ideas of chivalry and knighthood. Arthurian literature served as an example for the nobles of the Castilian and Catalan courts. The kings in these tales emulated Arthurian journeys and jousts and even imitated the behaviors of Arthur's knights. The obsession of the Iberian courts with Arthurian ideals is the subject of one of the most important critiques made by Cervantes in *Don Quixote*.

By contrast, in Scandinavian Arthurian texts the knights take center stage. Chapter VI explores how the Arthurian texts relate to the characters of the Icelandic sagas such as *Egils saga skallagrímssonar*. The sagas depict Icelandic settlers interacting with the kings of Norway. A close comparison of the Icelandic sagas with the Nordic Arthurian tales reveals parallels between the relationship of Arthur to his knights and the relationship of the kings of Norway to the Icelandic Vikings. The primary parallel exists in the exaltation of those that travel (knights and Icelandic Vikings) over the kings (Arthur and the Norwegian kings). I conclude that this correlation between the sagas of the Icelanders and the Arthurian texts clarifies why Scandinavian Arthurian texts were first translated in Norway but only survive thanks to copies made in Iceland. Chapter VI also addresses the fact that the Icelandic Tristan is Spanish and fights "heathens" that pray to Mohammed, exposing the ways in which Spaniards were constructed in the north.

My work demonstrates the transnational qualities of Arthurian tales, emphasizing the ways in which the peripheral cultures take the Arthurian motifs and transform them, while still presenting King Arthur and his knights. Moreover, my research reveals that our notions of the canonical Arthurian texts (emphasizing the English, French, and German texts) are not shaped by the literary reality of medieval texts, as Arthurian literature was present throughout the entirety of Europe. A scholarly comparison between the Arthurian material of the Iberian Peninsula and Scandinavia has not been undertaken to date. This dissertation calls for the study of Arthurian literature as a transnational phenomenon that moves beyond nationalistic points of view reflecting the perspectives of the culturally dominant modern European nations.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCING THE KINGS

#### Understanding the Arthurian Web

A review of Arthurian texts in the cultural peripheries of Medieval Europe involves two distinct points of departure. First, I attempt to answer the question of why some Arthurian texts such as Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia regum Britanniae* (c. 1136) concentrate on Arthur, while other Arthurian texts such as the romances of Chrétien de Troyes concentrate on the Knights of the Round Table.<sup>1</sup> This inquiry leads to the hypothesis that different cultures in different times and places reshaped the Arthurian materials to fit their own political and historical contexts. Each new rendition and translation of the Arthurian texts carries cultural and historical markers and connotations from the culture that creates it. The needs of the cultures and the writers determine how the material is presented and transmitted.

The second point of departure is an interest in understanding how cultural and geospatial peripheries use Arthurian texts. Postcolonial theory emphasizes the importance of the study of the peripheries. Alejandro Tapia y Rivera's *Póstumo envirginado* (1882), for example, uses the Arthurian persona to advocate for equality for Puerto Rico. Speaking of medieval Arthurian texts from the peripheries of Europe implies not only a set of locations, but also a literary hierarchy because most of the texts analyzed in this project are understudied by Arthurian scholars.

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1. Major works by Chrétien de Troyes include poems *Erec and Enide* (c. 1170); *Cligès* (c. 1176), *Yvain, the Knight of the Lion* (c. 1180); *Lancelot, the Knight of the Cart* (c. 1181); and *Perceval, the Story of the Grail*, written between 1181 and 1190, but left unfinished.

To help close the gap in the literature of understudied peripheral Arthurian texts, I examine texts in the cultural peripheries of Europe, including the Celtic (Welsh and Irish), Iberian (Castilian and Catalan), and Nordic (Icelandic and Norwegian) traditions, in their literary-historical contexts. Using translation and postcolonial theory, this research questions notions about peripheral Arthurian texts and their role in both a local and transcultural medieval Europe. The research takes advantage of postcolonial views such as those of Leslie Marmon Silko, a Laguna Pueblo Native, who writes:

I want you to hear and to experience English in a nontraditional structure, a structure that follows patterns from the oral tradition. For those of you accustomed to a structure that moves from point A to point B to point C, this presentation may be somewhat difficult to follow because the structure of Pueblo expression resembles something like a spider's web – with many little threads radiating from a center, criss-crossing each other. As with the web, the structure will emerge as it is made and you must simply listen and trust, as the Pueblo people do, that meaning will be made. (Silko 1981: 54)

Each chapter of this dissertation illuminates a thread of the web, articulating the ways in which Arthurian material shaped and was shaped by the literatures of the cultures examined. Moreover, this research demonstrates that, like a web, the interconnections among the different Arthurian texts were not examples of one-way transfer or radiating influence, but instead interlacing threads between many different times and places. The study analyzes Celtic, Scandinavian, and Iberian medieval Arthurian texts and related materials as case studies of the interconnections among Arthurian and medieval literature.

A study of Arthurian texts and related materials from the Celtic, Scandinavian, and Iberian cultural peripheries is important because evidence suggests constant interaction between these peripheral spaces along waterways and sailing routes. My research uses a similar approach to the one used by Mediterranean studies, refocused to explore the relationship among British, Scandinavian, and Iberian cultures. By

reimagining Arthurian literature as transnational and juxtaposing the unique roles Arthurian stories play in their cultures of origin, I explore possible forms of interaction among these different societies.

In *Rethinking the Arthurian Legend Transmission in the Iberian Peninsula* (2006), Josefa Conde de Lindquist traces the possible sources of Peninsular Arthurian texts. Conde de Lindquist argues that Vikings traveled from Scandinavia to the British Isles and coastal France and from there south to Spain. Using historical evidence, she raises the possibility that Vikings or Celts brought Arthurian material to Spain from the British Isles when she writes that

The fact remains, as stated previously, that the Vikings were everywhere in England, Scotland, Ireland, and Normandy, therefore, they were possibly familiar with the Arthurian legend prior to the existence of the French texts of the 13th century and may have transmitted some of their knowledge to the Spanish. (Conde de Lindquist 2006: 77)

Although Conde de Lindquist has no definitive proof that the Vikings or Celts brought any knowledge of Arthur, she does confirm that Vikings, Celts, and Spaniards had contact with each other. Moreover, Conde de Lindquist concludes that

The narratives that encompass the Arthurian legend share a common inheritance in the traditional lore of Briton-speaking Celts, who inhabited an area extending from the “old North” down to Wales and Cornwall, and across the channel into Brittany. As shown above, knowledge of the tale of Arthur could have come many years before the texts were produced through the Vikings, Normans, Anglo-Normans, and Italo-Normans via the Aragonese. Even if not concretely proven, the coincidences point to a massive spread of the legend into the Iberian Peninsula due to its strategic location along Mediterranean trade routes. (Conde de Lindquist 2006: 83)

Conde de Lindquist is speaking from the point of view of the Iberian Peninsula, but her argument points to the fact that there were interconnections among Wales, Ireland, Scandinavia, and the Iberian Peninsula.

Furthermore, we have proof that Arthurian names and figures were present in Castile and León in the 1130s. For example, in the Santiago de Compostela Cathedral an image of an ailing Tristan appears on a column. These Arthurian names predate Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia* and the column predates the extant French poems by Chrétien de Troyes. A unique aspect of both the Icelandic and Spanish Tristan legends is the fact that Tristan is Spanish; in fact, he is the King of Spain, and he fights Muslims, connecting the Arthurian legends to the Crusades and to the Iberian Peninsula as a space of crusade. There is very little research on this subject and there are no studies comparing the Arthurian texts from the Celtic, Scandinavian, and Iberian peripheries.

### **Arthurian Interpretations: The Field of Comparative Arthurian Studies**

Historical evidence points to connections among the seemingly distant regions of Ireland, Wales, Scandinavia, and the Iberian Peninsula, despite the fact that there is little research exploring the many interactions among these cultures. Arthurian literature is an important tool for researching these interactions because each of these cultures creates its own versions of the Arthurian texts. Comparative research on Arthurian texts, however, tends to concentrate narrowly on canonical Arthurian texts.

Scholarly research on medieval Arthurian material is generally quite extensive, especially regarding canonical Arthurian texts. Those most studied by medieval scholars include Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia regum Britanniae*; the late twelfth-century romances of Chrétien de Troyes and Hartmann von Aue;<sup>2</sup> the early thirteenth-century

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2. Major works by Hartmann include *Erec* (c. 1192) and *Iwein* (1203).



works of Wolfram von Eschenbach;<sup>3</sup> Gottfried von Strasburg's *Tristan* (left unfinished c. 1210); the French Vulgate and the Post-Vulgate of thirteenth-century France; the late fourteenth-century romance *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*; and Thomas Malory's *Le morte d'Arthur* (1485).<sup>4</sup>

Research on lesser-known medieval Arthurian texts is usually conducted by scholars of the particular country the texts come from or by scholars comparing lesser-known Arthurian material with canonical texts that might have served as inspiration for the tales in question. Many of the texts, in fact, are translations, pseudotranslations, or rewritings of French, German, and English works. There are critical texts that concentrate on exposing the wide range of Arthurian material available.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, they are only overviews of the materials. There are also research anthologies about Arthurian legends that encompass all of Europe, dividing the material by country and engaging specialized national-language scholars to discuss specific texts.<sup>6</sup>

Experts on the Arthurian material of each country carry out research limited to the version of Arthur arising from that particular country. Many scholars present the material through particular research interests and summarize the conversations and discussions of experts in the field of that particular country. Many of the discussions that predominate about such works are nationalistic in nature and deal with potential origins of available

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3. Major works by Wolfram include *Parzival* and *Willeham* (both dated between 1199 and 1220), and *Titurel* (c. 1217).

4. For an interesting introduction that tries to emphasize both canonical and second-tier Arthurian texts see Norris J. Lacy (1996: vii-xi).

5. See, for example, Lacy (1996 and 2006) for general overviews.

6. For examples of research anthologies see Roger Sherman Loomis (1959); Alan Lupack (2002 and 2005); and Helen Fulton (2009).

Arthurian texts. Furthermore, the lesser-known Arthurian material becomes secondary to the canonical texts and the countries to which the canonical texts belong.<sup>7</sup>

Although the available research is important and has brought significant insights to Arthurian scholarship, the research has also created a tiered system in which texts from England, France, and Germany are privileged over texts produced in other areas of Europe. A disproportionate body of scholarship on canonical texts attempts to locate their potential origins, to the detriment of lesser-known Arthurian texts. Theoretical frameworks that discuss and compare the lesser-known Arthurian materials are few, and texts from countries outside England, France, and Germany are often referred to as “second-tier” Arthurian texts. Hereafter, I refer to the so-called “first-tier” texts as canonical texts and the so-called “second-tier” texts as texts from the European peripheries so as to differentiate between them without inherent preference.

An interesting example of the position peripheral Arthurian texts occupy in Arthurian scholarship is found in the work of Norris J. Lacy. In his preface to *Lancelot-Grail: The Old French Arthurian Vulgate and Post-Vulgate in Translation*, Lacy writes as follows.

The Post-Vulgate Cycle is further complicated for modern scholars and readers – and this is a complication almost beyond resolution – by the fact that some portions of the Old French text have long since disappeared, whereas others have survived only in fragments or in translations into Portuguese and Spanish. Extraordinary scholarly efforts, especially by Fanni Bogdanow, have made it possible to reconstitute significant portions of the texts. (Lacy 1993, x)

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7. Examples include Rosemary Morris (1982); Stephen Thomas Knight (1983); Martin Shichtman and James Carley (1994); R. Last (1985 and 1987); Marion Wynne-Davies (1996); Laurie Finke and Martin B. Shichtman (2004); Lacy, *Medieval Arthurian Literature*; Lacy (1996 and 2005); and Laura C. Lambdin and Robert Lambdin (2008).

Many sections of the “Post-Vulgate” in Lacy’s English translation use reconstructions of Old French from Portuguese and Spanish. Translating from Spanish and Portuguese directly into Old French and then into English poses several problems. First, there are often multiple translations of the text in question, and it would be easier to translate from Spanish and Portuguese into English. The second problem is that the title, *The Old French Arthurian Vulgate and Post-Vulgate*, implies that the text was in Old French and fails to acknowledge the role of the Spanish and Portuguese texts in creating the specific form of the putative translations. In this instance, the term “second-tier” is tied to language, because the French text is depicted as the original that must be reconstructed even if it never existed, and the Spanish and Portuguese are depicted as secondary Arthurian texts.

Wales has the interesting position of being considered both canonical and “second-tier” because it is home to the oldest Arthurian texts but is peripheral in terms of its relative position among other European nations. Welsh Arthurian texts are often studied as the original source of French Arthurian literature, but at the same time many texts produced in Wales are valued less than their French counterparts. Roger Sherman Loomis, whose work has been influential in Arthurian scholarship, exemplifies these tendencies in *The Grail: from Celtic Myth to Christian Symbol* (1963). Loomis writes,

It is apparent that, since the stories of the Grail belong to the Arthurian cycle, the most likely regions in which to look for their origin and their pristine meaning are Wales and Ireland. It is in the early literature of these Celtic Lands, so long and so closely linked by cultural bonds, that we may most profitably pursue our search.

The search for a clean, original, and pristine source of these texts is a main goal that scholars pursue in comparing Arthurian texts from different cultures, times, and places.

Another example is Ian Lovecy's discussion of *Peredur* in "*Historia Peredur Ab Efracw*" (1995), which spends considerable time on the French counterpart of the text. In fact, Lovecy's analysis concentrates as much on Chrétien de Troyes's *Perceval ou Conte du Graal* (c. 1181) as *Peredur Son of Efracw* (date unknown),<sup>8</sup> the text it supposedly analyzes. Lovecy concludes that

In this context, to look for an underlying theme in *Peredur* is doomed to failure. The tale is made up from a number of stories connected by the identity of the hero and little else, with the addition of a part of a Gwalchmai story which is there because the redactor found it with other material. . . . In comparison with Chrétien's *Conte du graal*, *Peredur* is a failure; looked at on its own terms, as a series of exciting adventures, it is in the main as good as its modern television counterparts. (1995: 180)

Lovecy's conclusion is a direct result of comparing the two romances. His analysis prompts a number of questions, including why this comparison leads to claims regarding which text is better, in what context *Peredur* is a failure, and why an article dealing with *Peredur*'s place in the context of Welsh Arthurian medieval literature ends by praising its French counterpart. Lovecy concentrates on the supposed value of the text in contrast to the French version, and glosses over the fact that *Peredur* in the Welsh literary system provides insights into Welsh literature and culture.<sup>9</sup> My research moves the study of

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8. A specific date for *Peredur* is difficult to assess. The earliest four manuscripts date to the fourteenth century, but have traces of earlier orthography. Lovecy explains that "There are four early versions of the tale: (a) the *White Book of Rhydderch* (MS Peniarth 4), mid-fourteenth century (*WM* col.117-78); (b) MS Peniarth 7, no later than the beginning of the fourteenth century (*WM* col.5-48); (c) MS Peniarth 14, from the second quarter of the fourteenth century (*WM* col.180-90); (d) *Red Book of Hergest*, from the end of the fourteenth century (*RM* col.655-97). The longest version is found in (a) and (d), which are very close; (d) has sometimes been regarded as a copy of (a). However, the *Red Book* text contains traces of twelfth-century orthography not found in MS Peniarth 4, which suggest rather that both are copies of an earlier original" (1995: 171).

9. For an excellent assessment of *Peredur* in a Welsh context see John K. Bollard (2000). I also find Lovecy's statements to be derisive of pop culture, for the most part

Arthurian texts forward by comparing them both with other texts from the same cultural system and with other Arthurian texts in order to elucidate how they function in their own cultural contexts as well in the context of transnational medieval Europe. I do not attempt to place value on the various texts.

Despite the fragmented nature of Arthurian texts and peripheral Arthurian research, Arthurian material is still analyzed with the assumption that the Arthurian corpus is cohesive in nature. In contrast to the dominant mode of Arthurian scholarship, my research starts with the assumption that the extensive Arthurian corpus differs greatly from culture to culture, also allowing for various forms of interactions among these cultures. I demonstrate that differences reveal literary markers from the cultures that created the texts, because each adaptation creatively engages the material, making each text a unique part of the transnational Arthurian system. There is not merely one Arthurian story, but many stories linked by a network of similarities and differences, creating an Arthurian “web.” To concentrate principally on finding an original, common, or universal Arthurian tale is fundamentally to misunderstand the complex phenomenon of Arthur and, practically speaking, to exclude many of the most interesting variations. I propose to move the Arthurian stories away from a national setting, elevating the stories to a transnational setting by emphasizing the critical role these Arthurian texts played in shaping their target cultures while still participating in a Pan-European system.

### **Translating Arthur: The Role of Translations, Pseudotranslations, and Rewritings**

Research on the transnational nature of Arthurian texts in the north of Europe

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considered non-canonical in academia, and non-linear plot lines which, as Silko observes, are favored by Natives, Caribbeans, and other minority groups.

benefits from a study that incorporates different theoretical strategies. This project employs the metaphor of a web as an organizing principle for analyzing Arthurian texts, and likewise employs the same metaphor also in designating the theoretical approaches used to study medieval Arthurian literature. While there is a broad theoretical viewpoint informing this study as a whole, there are theoretical threads that engage with the narrower specificities of each chapter. This project uses translation theory and postcolonial theory to emphasize the local and transcultural elements of the texts analyzed. I now turn to the theoretical approaches that underline this project, both as a whole and in individual chapters.

Translation theory has had a long and fruitful career in academia since the 1980s. Scholars understand now more than ever the importance of translation and interpretation in creating communication in an increasingly transcultural world. Translations, however, could shift paradigms even in medieval times (Tymoczko 1986). European medieval cultures, for example, show a plurality of languages, ethnicities, and ideologies interacting in different ways and by different means. Translation theory is a useful tool for studying such complex interactions. For this research on translations, pseudotranslations, and rewritings of Arthurian texts in the Celtic, Scandinavian, and Iberian peripheries, translation theory provides useful language and concepts for analyzing the materials as a transnational Arthurian system encompassing the whole of Europe and as part of local systems that belong to particular cultural spaces.

A basic tenet of translation theory is that translations tell us as much about the translating culture as the translated one. Jón Karl Helgason writes, for example, that

Contrary to traditional discourse on translation, which examines, discusses and evaluates the translated text in view of the original text, Translation Studies

recognizes the translation as a product in its own right, constrained by the poetics and ideology of the receptor culture as much as the linguistic elements of the original. (1999: 2)

Following Helgason's view, I use translation theory in focusing on the relationship of Arthur to his knights in order to demonstrate how that relationship reproduces aspects of the translating culture. I also analyze both the cultural and literal aspects of translation, focusing on the relationship of Arthur to his subjects (both male and female), in order to analyze differences among Arthurian texts from different cultures.

A framework of translation studies helps scholars explore the significance of a specific text that transcends the source text. Translation theory has investigated the relationship of the target audience to the afterlife of the source text. In "The Task of the Translator" (1923), Walter Benjamin argues that translations are part of the afterlife of a text. According to Benjamin, the translatability of a text has an inherent significance; he writes that

Translatability is an essential quality of certain works, which is not to say that it is essential that they be translated; it means rather that a specific significance inherent in the original manifest itself in its translatability. It is plausible that no translation, however good it may be, can have any significance as regards the original. Yet, by virtue of its translatability the original is closely connected with the translation; in fact, this connection is all the closer since it is no longer of importance to the original. We may call this connection a natural one, or, more specifically, a vital connection. Just as the manifestations of life are intimately connected with the phenomenon of life without being of importance to it, a translation issues from the original – not so much for its life as from its afterlife. For a translation comes later than the original, and since the important works of world literature never find their chosen translators at the time of their origin, their translation marks their stage of continued life. (2000: 16)

Translations express a stage of continued life for a given text, which is also related to the fame of the text. By applying Benjamin's ideas to Arthurian literature, we can trace the fame of Arthur but also the translatability and prolonged afterlife of the Arthurian literary

system. The translations of Arthurian texts and new variations in particular cultures attest to the afterlife of Arthur.

Analyzing the variations of Arthurian tales allows us to better understand Arthurian literature as a whole. Benjamin's work on translation also helps illuminate why there are diverse variations of Arthurian texts. Benjamin writes:

There it is a matter of showing that in cognition there could be no objectivity, not even a claim to it, if it dealt with images of reality; here it can be demonstrated that no translation would be possible if in its ultimate essence it strove for likeness to the original. For in its afterlife – which could not be called that if it were not a transformation and a renewal of something living – the original undergoes a change. Even words with fixed meaning can undergo a maturing process. (2000: 17)

The afterlife of texts is defined by their capacity to transform and change. In this dissertation I demonstrate that medieval Arthurian literature is able to transform and change, both inspiring and being inspired by the cultures that translated and rewrote the texts. Benjamin's concept of translation is important to understanding how translations fit in the literary systems that create texts.

The translations, pseudotranslations, and rewritings of Arthurian texts reveal family resemblances that both distinguish and unite the material in the Arthurian web. This idea of family resemblances is taken from the work of the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein. In *Philosophical Investigations* (1953), Wittgenstein rejects the idea that certain concepts can be defined through one common set of necessary and sufficient conditions. Instead, he describes such concepts as a “complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing” (2009: 36). He uses the idea of family resemblances to investigate the plurality of this idea. He concludes that

I can think of no better expression to characterize these similarities than “family resemblances”; for the various resemblances between members of a family –



build, features, colour of eyes, gait, temperament, and so on and so forth – overlap and criss-cross in the same way. (2009: 36)

For example, you may have the eyes of your mother and the nose of your father, while your sibling has the eyes of your aunt and the nose of your mother. Although Wittgenstein is not a translation studies scholar, his work has been influential in translation studies (Tymoczko 2007). My project in particular is inspired by Wittgenstein's view of the philosophy of language, which I use as a foundation for moving away from the scholarly Arthurian tradition that concentrates on searching for an original or a cohesive tale. I propose instead that there are "family resemblances" among the stories of various cultures and times. The different Arthurian texts are connected by their family resemblances, united as part of an Arthurian corpus, but also unique in their own right. Wittgenstein's ideas about language are useful for discussing the Arthurian material as a whole. Arthurian texts are entrenched in the cultural systems that gave birth to a family of texts: the heirs of Arthur.

Systems theory is also useful for discussing Arthurian texts as a whole. Systems theory describes how translations function in literary systems both to maintain and challenge dominant standards of the receptor culture.<sup>10</sup> Itamar Even-Zohar (1990a: 27) defines a system as "the network of relations that can be hypothesized for a certain set of assumed observables ('occurrences'/'phenomena')." Systems theory is useful for explaining family resemblances in an Arthurian context because systems theory presupposes that both literatures and translations alike are affected by the various systems that govern a given culture. Even-Zohar asks

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10. For more information, see Itamar Even-Zohar (1990a and 1990b); Gideon Toury (1980 and 2012); and André Lefevere (1979, 1980, 1982, 1987, and 1992).

Is there any basis for a different assumption, that is for considering translated literature as a system? Is there the same sort of cultural and verbal network of relations within what seems to be an arbitrary group of translated texts as the one we willingly hypothesize for original literature? What kind of relations might there be among translated works, which are presented as completed facts, imported from other literatures, detached from their home contexts and consequently neutralized from the point of view of center-and-periphery struggles? (1990a: 45-46)

Systems theory places translations as part of the same “cultural and verbal coherence” as literature created at the time as the translations. Even-Zohar (1990: 46) writes that he “conceive[s] of translated literature not only as an integral system within any literary polysystem, but as a most active system within it.” Applying systems theory to Arthurian texts contextualizes the Arthurian material in the target culture that creates the translations, pseudotranslations, or rewritings of the texts analyzed. Thus, medieval Arthurian texts are both local, belonging to the target cultures that created the particular renditions, and transcultural, belonging to the Arthurian web in which these different texts interact, transgressing cultural boundaries throughout Europe.

Understanding the differences among translations, pseudotranslations, rewritings, and their source texts also helps us understand the material in the context in which it was created. The use of systems theory as a tool for discussing translations also creates new ways to define translations and their afterlives in any given system. Gideon Toury (2012: 50), for example, examines the role and importance of pseudotranslations, namely texts that disguise themselves as translations. Pseudotranslations take their material or form from translated texts, so as to interact with their own cultural context. For Toury, pseudotranslations are connected to tiered cultural systems.

Be it as it may, the decision to disguise a text as a translation always implies a deliberate act of *subordination*, namely, to a culture which is considered prestigious, important, or dominant in some way. An attempt is thereby made to

impart to the new text part of the prestige of the “donating” culture as it is seen in the eyes of the persons-in-the-“domestic”-culture, as a way of directing, even manipulating, the reception of the new work by its intended audience. (Toury 2012: 50)

The act of pseudotranslation is linked to translation because pseudotranslations are disguised as translations and because the act of translating has an assigned function in the society that creates such texts (Toury 2012: 52). Such an act implies a relationship of power in which disguising the material as a translation imparts a level of prestige to the text.<sup>11</sup> Pseudotranslations incorporate tactics associated with actual translations from the target culture (Toury 2012: 53). They often take the form of the types of texts found in a source language or culture, or the textual traditions that inform actual translations (Toury 2012: 53). Toury describes pseudotranslations as being similar to parodies because both tend to exaggerate their sources (2012: 53). Although parodies exaggerate a source to mock it, pseudotranslations exaggerate the material as a form of recognition, according to Toury. He writes,

No wonder, then, that many pseudotranslations are in a position to give a fairly good picture of notions shared by the members of a community, not only as to the status of translated texts, but also as to their salient characteristics. . . . and overdoing something in imitation is a clear, if extreme, sign of such recognition. (Toury 2012: 54)

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11. Toury states that despite the “ad hoc” nature of pseudotranslating, there is a host of them that speak of a subsystem of importance. He writes that “The decision to put forward a text as if it were a translation is always an ad hoc one. And yet, in certain cultures, circumstances seem to have prevailed which gave rise to a multitude of pseudotranslations in a short period of time, often from the same ‘source’ language/culture. Thus, a whole tradition came into being in the ‘receiving’ culture, a sub-system whose significance was much greater than that of the sum total of the individual texts. Such a proliferation may shed interesting light on the organization of the ‘target’ culture as a whole, as well as its relative position in the ‘world language system.’ . . . Above all, it highlights the position and role of translations, or possibly of a particular sub-system thereof, within the culture, which the pseudotranslators are aware of and put to use” (Toury 2012: 50-51).

Toury places pseudotranslations alongside translations in the study of translation as a form of literary theory.

Another important component of systems theory is the description of the process of rewriting a text. In “‘Beyond Interpretation’ or the Business of (Re)Writing” (1987), André Lefevere introduces rewriting as part of translation practices. He expands on this notion in *Translation, Rewriting and the Manipulation of Literary Fame* (1992). Lefevere describes different forms of rewriting including translation, anthologization, and historiography. He also describes criticism as one form of rewriting.<sup>12</sup> The process of rewriting benefits a target culture by taking source texts and transforming them to fit the poetics or ideologies of the target culture. Lefevere describes two important sources for the creation of rewritings. First, there are the “critics, reviewers, teachers of literature, translators, and other rewriters who will adapt works of literature until they can be claimed to correspond to the poetics and the ideology of their time” (Lefevere 1987: 20). Second, there is the system of “patronage,” which Lefevere defines “as the powers (persons or institutions) which help or hinder the writing, reading, and rewriting of literature. Patronage is usually more interested in the ideology of literature than in its

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12. André Lefevere uses criticism as an example of rewriting, but also to emphasize the importance of poetics in the creation of rewritings: “If we want to deal with criticism as rewriting, or rather, as one form of rewriting among others which insures the continuity of a literature and makes possible its further development, we shall have to come to terms with the fact that such rewriting is not only, or not even necessarily, done in the service of a metaphysics or an ideology, but also, and probably more often, in the service of a poetics. If we want to do justice to the influence poetics and ideology exert on the rewriting of literature, and if we are willing to admit that the rewriting of literature is at least as important as its actual writing in terms of the reception, or rather the impact of (a) literature on (a) society, we shall have to cure ‘the fixation on literary texts by an investigation into the whole complex social system in which literary items (in the broadest sense of the term) are produced, mediated, received and post-processed’” (Lefevere 1987: 19; internal quote is from S. J. Schmidt).

poetics” (Lefevere 1987: 20). Patronage viewed as a force that creates rewritings hints that such rewritings must fit the parameters set by the patrons (Lefevere 1987: 23).<sup>13</sup> As already mentioned, Lefevere sees rewritings as a way of maintaining established poetics and of maintaining the literary system of the society in question (Lefevere 1987: 19).<sup>14</sup>

The work of Even-Zohar, Toury, and Lefevere were shaped by formalist and structuralist approaches to literature. Their theories tend to slide into the universal and into absolute notions by assuming that all translations and literary works from diverse societies can fit their patterns.<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, systems theory is helpful in outlining the local and transcultural qualities of Arthurian literature. Translation scholars inspired by systems theory have created scholarship that better defines the role of translations in individual cultures. Edwin Gentzler points out that

Several aspects of Toury’s theory have contributed to development in the field: (1) the abandonment of one-to-one notions of correspondence as well as the possibility of literary/linguistic equivalence (unless by accident); (2) the

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13. Lefevere describes patronage as follows: “Patronage basically consists of three elements, which can be seen to interact in various combinations. There is an ideological element, which acts as a constraint on the choice and development of both form and subject matter. There is also an economic element: the patron sees to it that writers and rewriters are able to make a living, by giving them a pension, appointing them to some office – think of Chaucer as . . . the King’s envoy, the controller of customs . . . and the subforester of North Petherton – by paying royalties on the sale of books, or by employing them as teachers, reviewers, critics. Finally, there is also a status element. Acceptance of patronage means integration into the lifestyle of a support group, whether the court of Louis XIV or one of the many contemporary subcultures” (1987: 22).

14. Lefevere defines poetics as having two components: “one is an inventory of literary devices, genres, motifs, prototypical characters and situations, and symbols; the other a concept of what the role of literature is, or should be, in the society at large. In its formative phase the poetics reflects both the devices and the ‘functional view’ of the literary production dominant in a system at the time when its poetics was first codified. Once a poetics is codified, it exerts a tremendous system-conforming influence on the further development of a system” (1987: 25).

15. Theo Hermans (1999: 119); and Edwin Gentzler (2001: 130).

involvement of literary tendencies in the target cultural system in the production of an translated text; (3) the destabilization of the notion of an original message with a fixed identity; (4) the integration of both the original text and the translated text in the semiotic web of intersecting cultural systems. (2001: 131)

Systems theory, then, is a useful tool to explore how translations work in a cultural or literary context.<sup>16</sup> Theo Hermans likewise confirms that

Of course, polysystem-inspired work comes in many shades and variations. The various essays which Maria Tymoczko, for example, has devoted to translations into English of Early Irish texts take account of their political and ideological environment at every step. The essays, now reworked into a book (Tymoczko 1999), recognize that translation is both shaped by and in turn helps to shape that environment. (1999: 119)

The notions that translations shape and are shaped by their environment is critical for this project on medieval Arthurian texts and their role as both local and transcultural literature.

In *Translation in a Postcolonial Context* (1999), Tymoczko presents several methods for analyzing translations. Among her parameters, Tymoczko finds that representing culture, representing humor, and representing names “take us to the heart of cultural power in translation, exposing the ways the translators reflect fundamental patterns of difference” (1999: 159). Translation theory helps explain the position of the translated text, not only as a translation, but also with respect to the culture that created the text. Tymoczko also notes the importance of names for a specific culture. She states: “Not only do names in many cultures have lexical meaning, they function as

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16. Helgason makes a case for the useful nature of systems theory in his analysis on rewritings of *Njals saga*: “Polysystems theory, stress[es] that semiotic phenomena, such as culture, language, literature, and society, need to be studied and understood as a multiple, dynamic system. In particular, [Even-Zohar] was interested in the ways in which various semiotic systems were hierarchised within the polysystem (central vs. peripheral, canonised vs. non-canonised, primary vs. secondary) and in the struggle among the various strata” (Helgason 1999: 2).

sociolinguistic signs, indicating tribal and family affiliation; gender and class; racial, ethnic, national, and religious identity; and the like” (1999: 223). In other words, names carry a wealth of information about a specific culture. Tymoczko raises the question of how names should be translated, or indeed whether they should be translated at all. She explains the paradox of the various options and the seeming impossibility of such translation. She states that

If the name is transferred orthographically, the name is lost because a new name is created phonologically; and if the name is translated, the name is lost because a new name is created orthographically or semantically. . . . One becomes tempted to invoke a doctrine of “untranslatability,” checked only by familiarity with instances of astonishing practical ingenuity on the part of actual translators. (1999: 238-39)

Tymoczko presents the problematics of translating names for a dominant culture, and notes that marginalized cultures are those that are most affected by the translation choices concerning the meaning of a name. Therefore, the translation of names is an important and difficult task for a translator, especially if dealing with marginal cultures. We will see that the translation of names in the Arthurian web is an important marker for analyzing cultural reappropriations of the texts and the power dynamics between the source and target cultures.

The theoretical framework provided above establishes general language for discussing the Arthurian web. Medieval Arthurian literature, both canonical and peripheral texts, can be described using translation terminology. Chrétien de Troyes begins his romances, for example, by stating that he is translating or rewriting other ancient books or by mentioning his patronage (see Chapter IV for more information on these subjects). Moreover, the many texts discussed in this project are rewritings or pseudotranslations, and Arthurian names are transformed depending on the contextual

realities of the texts.

## **Local Arthurs: Translation and Postcolonial Theory as a Tool to Highlight**

### **Specificity**

The study of Arthurian tales as both local and transcultural benefits from a theoretical framework that encompasses the entire project and differing theoretical frameworks in each individual chapter. The Irish, Welsh, and Scandinavian medieval materials, for example, benefit from a theoretical that deemphasizes the original source material, because in many cases the supposed original texts of presumed translations do not exist at all. Helgason also takes this view in his study of *Njáls saga* when he writes,

This view is appropriate when one approaches *Njáls saga*, as the original text is lost (if it ever existed). Written in the late thirteenth century, and claiming to relate historical events taking place in Iceland some 250-300 years before, the saga was based (to an uncertain extent) on an oral tradition, but it is by now only preserved in copies (or copies of copies) of the first written version. For this reason, the case of *Njáls saga* may undermine the distinction customarily made between oral traditions and written texts. (Helgason 1999: 4-5)

A similar problem occurs in the study of Arthurian texts. The Welsh Arthurian tale *Culhwch and Olwen* has linguistic elements that suggest that the text dates to c. 1100 (Roberts 1991: 74). The tale, however, is only available in manuscripts that date to the thirteenth century (Bromwich et al. 1995: 7). Irish, Welsh, and Scandinavian literatures all have strong oral antecedents and oral literary translations manipulate texts openly and radically, creating new refractions of the materials (Tymoczko 1990: 54).

The Scandinavian material also benefits from an approach that emphasizes translations as political tools that foreignize and domesticate the materials for their target audience. Friedrich Schleiermacher discusses different methods of translating in the early



nineteenth century. In 1813, Schleiermacher wrote that “Either the translator leaves the author in peace as much as possible and moves the reader toward him; or he leaves the reader in peace as much as possible and moves the writer toward him” (Schleiermacher 2004: 49).

Schleiermacher’s views are further developed by the work of Lawrence Venuti, whose work discusses Schleiermacher’s distinction in terms of foreignizing and domesticating strategies; Venuti also sees them as cultural and political agendas (See Venuti 2008). Venuti discusses the invisibility of the translator, especially in the context of dominating and dominated cultures. He observes that a domesticating translation appears transparent and fluent, but effaces the foreign culture by allowing the reader to believe the translation is the actual text (Venuti 2008). Venuti argues that

Translating is always ideological because it releases a domestic remainder, an inscription of values, beliefs, and representations linked to historical moments and social positions in the domestic culture. In serving domestic interests, a translation provides an ideological resolution for the linguistic and cultural differences of the foreign text. (Venuti 2000: 485)

Domesticating and foreignizing translations are strategies that serve the interest of the translating culture but only in relation to the cultural moment of reception of the text (Venuti 2008: 272).

Although a postcolonial perspective is apparent throughout this entire dissertation, it is discussions of the Welsh and Iberian materials in relation to the canonical texts that most benefit from postcolonial theory by using historical and postcolonial output to contextualize the medieval materials. Such analysis has been a rich endeavor for authors such as Sharon Kinoshita. In *Medieval Boundaries: Rethinking Difference in Old French Literature* (2006), Kinoshita historicizes French medieval texts to explore the role of

medieval French literature in cultural interactions. Her introduction points out that many medieval French texts are set beyond the borders of the French-speaking world:

*Medieval Boundaries* began with the curious realization that many of the best-known works of medieval French literature take place on or beyond the borders of “France” or even the French-speaking world: the *Chanson de Roland*, the *Lais* of Marie de France, Chrétien de Troyes’s *Cligès*, *Aucassin et Nicolette*, and a host of others. Capitalizing on this insight, *Medieval Boundaries* sets out to rethink Old French literary production (circa 1150-1225) through the thematic of cultural interaction. The inaugural phase of vernacular French literature, I will argue, is inextricably linked to historical situations of contact between French-speaking nobles and peoples they perceived as their linguistic, religious, and cultural others. (Kinoshita 2006: 1)

Kinoshita historicizes the Old French material and uses postcolonial theory to analyze Old French texts. This dissertation extends Kinoshita’s argument on the interconnections of historical contacts among different peoples and literature beyond the boundaries of a canonical setting.

This dissertation is also concerned with literature and society in relation to the power structures of the culture in which Arthurian texts were written. Such a perspective complements the approaches based on translation theory and postcolonial theory outlined above, because it is helpful to analyze Arthurian texts in their own historic moment. By studying the relationships among the Arthurian characters alongside other literary materials and historical information, we can analyze how Arthurian stories correspond to the cultures that created them, instead of concentrating on Arthurian material in a vacuum. The power relations between the kings and their subjects is an important marker to use for studying Arthurian material because they illuminate how each culture shaped the written material about Arthur to fit a specific historical context. Through such analyses, I demonstrate that the relationship of the king to his subjects – specifically in medieval Irish, Welsh, Iberian, and Scandinavian texts – differs in culturally significant

ways, although the interconnections of these cultures do still allow for comparison.

I have divided my analysis into six sections. Chapters II and III introduce the Irish and Welsh texts, which represent a delicate balance between praising kings for their amazing deeds and chastising them for ultimately leading to the downfall of their people and the lands they should have protected. Thus, the Celtic texts concentrate on the kings and their subjects as a unit. This section also elaborates relevant theoretical frameworks in the context of the Arthurian materials. These chapters discuss the importance of studying Arthurian texts through the cultures that created them by looking at the early images of the Irish and Welsh chiefs and heroes, providing a background for the Celtic material that is often seen as shaping the early Arthurian texts. Chapter II also explores the ways in which female characters shape Celtic literature by focusing on their role as sovereignty figures and their connection to the land. I emphasize that the relationship between the land and women is used to validate or to discredit the sovereignty of kings and chieftains. I use several Irish king tales, tales from the Ulster cycle, and Welsh Arthurian tales from the *Mabinogion* as examples.

Chapter IV shifts the analysis from a Celtic system to a transcultural perspective by comparing the Arthurian texts of Geoffrey of Monmouth and Chrétien de Troyes, some of the most canonical Arthurian texts, to demonstrate that the use of Arthur and his knights fits each cultural and literary context. Each text creates a different Arthur that has family resemblances to the other Arthurs. I compare Geoffrey's *Historia Regum Britanniae* and Chrétien's *Yvain ou Le chevalier au lion*. I establish that many of the thematic differences among these texts can be analyzed through the social and historical contexts of the writers.

After introducing the Celtic and canonical Arthurian background, I turn to an analysis of the Iberian material in Chapter V. Arthurian texts from the Iberian Peninsula, mainly the Castilian and Catalan courts, concentrate on the knights but turn them into kings, a very different perspective on knighthood and kingship from the Arthurian texts discussed in the earlier chapters. The chapter concentrates on how Iberian courtly ideals were intertwined with ideas of chivalry and knighthood. Arthurian literature served as an example for the nobles of the Castilian and Aragonese courts. They imitated Arthurian journeys and jousts and even imitated the behaviors of Arthur's knights. The obsession of the Iberian courts with Arthurian ideals is the subject of one of the most important critiques made by Cervantes in *Don Quixote* (1605, 1615).<sup>17</sup> I analyze the Castilian romances *El libro del Caballero Zifar* (1300)<sup>18</sup> and *Amadís de Gaula* (c. 1300)<sup>19</sup> and the Catalan texts *Curial e Güelfa* (1440-60)<sup>20</sup> and *Tirant lo Blanc* (1490),<sup>21</sup> which are inspired by Arthurian material and the stories of chivalry (Sharrer 1986a). They also serve as a general introduction to the Iberian treatment of romance. This chapter also emphasizes the Castilian version of *Tristán* written between the late fourteenth and early sixteenth centuries.

In Scandinavian Arthurian texts, the knights take center stage. Chapter VI explores the Arthurian texts' relationship to the characters of the Icelandic sagas, such as

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17. The dates of publication for Volumes I and II are 1605 and 1615 respectively.

18. See Harvey Sharrer's dating of the text (1986c: 648).

19. I use Juan Manuel Cacho-Blecua's dating of the text (2008: 80).

20. On the date see Pamela Waley (1982: xi).

21. See Montserrat Piera for dating (1999: 45).

*Egils saga Skallagrímssonar* (1220-40)<sup>22</sup> and *Laxdæla saga* (1250-70).<sup>23</sup> The sagas depict Icelandic settlers interacting with the kings of Norway. A close comparison of the sagas and the Nordic Arthurian tales draws parallels between the relationship of Arthur to his knights and the kings of Norway to the Icelandic Vikings. The comparison illustrates that the Scandinavian texts exalt those that travel (knights and Icelandic Vikings) over the kings who do not (Arthur and the Norwegian kings). I conclude that the correlation between the sagas of Icelanders and the Arthurian texts elucidate why Scandinavian Arthurian texts were first translated in Norway but only survive thanks to copies made in Iceland, because the Arthurian sagas have a similar literary ideology as the Icelandic sagas.<sup>24</sup> I concentrate on *Ívens saga* (1226) and *Möttuls saga* (ca. 1250), which were originally commissioned by King Hákon Hákonarson (1204-63), and *Saga af Tristram ok Ísodd*, an Icelandic version of the Tristan tale. Of special interest to a transnational viewpoint is the fact that the Icelandic Tristan is Spanish and fights Moors, highlighting the way in which Spaniards were constructed by writers in the north.

My final chapter recapitulates the differences among the Arthurian materials under discussion to show that the variations are important because they are markers of the cultures that produced the texts. My conclusion reiterates the transcultural qualities of Arthurian tales, emphasizing that peripheral cultures take the Arthurian motifs and

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22. On dating see “Egil’s Saga” (2000: 3).

23. See “The Saga of the People of Laxardal” (2000: 270).

24. Most of the Arthurian texts from Scandinavia are considered translations of the French romances of Chrétien de Troyes but are better described as rewritings. The manuscripts available are Icelandic from the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries, but most were originally commissioned in Norway in the thirteenth century. See Marianne E. Kalinke (1981: 1).

change them, although they still use King Arthur and his knights as central figures.

Moreover my research demonstrates that our notions of the canonical Arthurian texts are not shaped by the literary reality of the web of medieval Arthurian texts. The reality was that Arthurian literature was available and relevant throughout all of Europe. Thus, my dissertation reimagines Arthurian literature as a transnational phenomenon extending well beyond limited national points of views focused on the canonical Arthurian texts.

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## CHAPTER II

### EXPLAINING ARTHUR: IRISH KINGS AND EARLY CELTIC LITERATURE

A study of the interconnections among the cultures that navigated the Irish Sea, also referred to as the Mediterranean of the North can draw from the many Arthurian texts available from the diverse societies that occupied what we now call Britain, Scandinavia, and the Iberian Peninsula. This analysis must begin, however, with early Irish texts, which, ironically, and unlike the rest of this project, do not deal with Arthur or his knights. An understanding of early Irish kingship as constructed in early Irish literature is nonetheless helpful for an analysis of Arthurian literature and its representation of kingship, especially in medieval Welsh Arthurian literature.<sup>25</sup>

A scholar of Irish literature benefits from a variety of materials that touch on the relationship of the king to his subjects. My analysis finds that early Irish law tracts and early Irish literature construct the relationship of the king and his subject as a reciprocal relationship in which the whole community (male and female) partakes in choosing the king. The law tracts and the literature emphasize the role of kings as warriors. Because the community chooses the king and because the king is a warrior, the literary texts explore questions of kingship and heroism and also present many different character types.

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25. There is also a wealth of scholarship that traces how early Irish motifs, early Welsh motifs, and Arthurian literature interconnect. Some examples are John B. Coe and Simon Young, (1995); Jean Markale (1994). John B. Marino gives an excellent overview of the treatment of Celtic sources in discussions of the Grail legend. He traces the discussions on the possible Celtic or Christian beginnings of the legend and how scholars treat the material. See his “Introduction: Popular Culture and Grail Scholarship” (1-14) and “Christian vs. Pagan: Origins and Culture Wars” (28-81) *The Grail Legend in Modern Literature* (Marino 2004).

Scholars divide most of the Irish literature into four cycles. The Mythological Cycle deals with pre-Christian Irish deities. The Ulster Cycle consists of tales about the warriors of Ulster. The Finn Cycle centers on the warriors led by the mythical Finn Mac Cumhaill. The fourth group consists of the king tales, namely tales about the kings of Ireland, historical or otherwise. In addition to the four cycles, there are also the *immrama* or voyage tales about pagan or Christian men voyaging on the sea, as well as learned materials, such as treatises and placelore, and a great deal of poetry. As a group, the Ulster Cycle is the most archaic of the early Irish texts. The tales deal with the warriors of the province of Ulster and their adventures throughout Ireland.<sup>26</sup> The Irish king tales are stories about various kings of Ireland, often based on fictional and pseudo-historical information.

Irish stories were preserved both orally and in writing by the native literary classes of Ireland. Many of the tales begin by asking a question and then proceed to offer an answer. In the eighth-century “The Adventures of Connla,”<sup>27</sup> for example, the story asks why Art is called *Óenfer* or ‘single man.’ Beginning with a question intended to be answered by the story indicates an oral background. Thus, the early Irish stories have markers that indicate a previous oral tradition. The orality of the tales is often confirmed by the performative aspects of the stories. In *Serglige Con Culainn* (ninth to eleventh

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26. Some of the chief characters are Conchobar, King of Ulster; Cú Chulainn, the main hero of the Ulster Cycle; Lóeg, charioteer and companion of Cú Chulainn; Fergus, an early King of Ulster who is replaced by Conchobar and later joins the province of Connacht; Conall Cernach, the foster brother of Cú Chulainn; and Sencha, a druid and poet.

27. For more information on the text, including the date see Kim McCone (2000).

century),<sup>28</sup> for example, the characters recite poetry that clarifies and adds details to the story. The plot of the story stops to allow the poems to be recited by the characters (Tymoczko 1996). In the “Exile of the Sons of Uisliu” (eighth or ninth century),<sup>29</sup> Deirdre recites poetry that explains her feelings about the characters. Poetry is also often used to describe the otherworld, to which the poets and heroes often have access.

Early Irish tales often depict a chieftain who has a mythic and religious relationship to the land that sustains his sovereignty over his people. This mythic relationship is maintained through the chief’s relationship to his subjects, including his warriors and poets, and his relationship to the women in the stories, who at times take on the role of goddess and personify the land. Although Old Irish narratives are varied and lively in subject matter and content, many of the best examples are from the Irish king tales and from the Ulster Cycle.

The Irish king tales and the Ulster cycle both have texts that deal with kingship and sovereignty. Sovereignty in Irish tradition is complicated because it is earned and it can be lost. The land must give its sovereignty to the leader. This is represented in two principal ways: by the land producing a bountiful harvest and by the female characters who represent the goddess of the land choosing the king. The chieftain must maintain friendship with his subjects by giving gifts, granting favors, accepting the hospitality of his people, and traveling through his land with his retinue, among other things.<sup>30</sup>

Friendship is integrally connected to the land; the chieftain cannot “make a circuit” of the

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28. I use the date provided by Myles Dillon (1975).

29. I use Maria Tymoczko’s dating of the text. See Tymoczko (1985-86: 145).

30. Friendship has a legal sense in Celtic customs; it is the reconciliation of two different groups (*The Mabinogion* 2007: 242).

land without its sovereignty and the king's sovereignty requires the acceptance and friendship of his subjects. The Irish king tales and the Ulster cycle include several examples of accounts of the sovereignty of the king. *Echtra Airt meic Chuind* ("The Adventures of Art son of Conn," fifteenth century),<sup>31</sup> *Echtrae Chonnlai* (The Adventures of Connla), *Scéla Conchobair maic Nessa* ("The Tidings of Conchobar Son of Ness," twelfth century),<sup>32</sup> *Mesca Ulad* ("The Intoxication of the Ulstermen," c. 1100-60),<sup>33</sup> and *Loinges mac nUislenn* ("The Exile of the Sons of Uisliu") offer excellent examples of the relationship between the chieftain and his subjects, both male and female, through friendship and sovereignty. The role of the otherworld as sustainer of the king is also important in early Irish literature, as are the relations of the otherworld with the heroes and kings in general.

### **A Celtic Lens: Kings and Subjects in the Law and in Literature**

There were many types of kings in Ireland.<sup>34</sup> The distinctions among the Irish words *rí*, *ruiri*, and *ríg ruirech* differentiate among levels of kingship. There were many, perhaps hundreds, of groups called *túath* or 'people,' 'laity,' 'tribe,' 'territory,' or 'petty kingdom,' and each of the groups had a king (Jaski 2000: 38). The term used for a king of a *túath* is *rí*, or the "the king of an individual *túath*" (Zumbuhl 2005: 22). The word *rí* is

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31. I use the date provided by R. I. Best (1907: 149).

32. See Whitley Stokes (1910: 18).

33. I use J. Carmichael Watson's dating of the text (1983: vii).

34. For extensive information on Irish kingship, see Daniel A. Binchy (1970); Maire Herbert (1992); Bart Jaski (2000); F.J. Byrne (2001); and Mark Joseph Zumbuhl (2005).

cognate with Indo-European terms *rex*, *reich*, and *raj*, showing its basis in a long history of kingship. The position of the *rí* is closely aligned with wealth of goods, animals, and land, and with a contractual relationship between the chief and his subjects. The *rí* played a major role in making war and peace with other *túatha*, and his ability to make the right decisions was connected to the prosperity of the land. The *rí* needed to make the right decisions for his people and his land to prosper, which was the hallmark of a good king. I will return below to the question of sovereignty and the relationship between the king and the land.

The Irish system of kingship is also complicated by the fact that kings at one level could become subjects of stronger kings, pointing to a hierarchy of kingship. Mark Joseph Zumbuhl writes that

Thus a number of kingdoms, though each with their own king, might have an overking also, though what relationship they had with this overking varied. Some of these hierarchical relationships between kingdoms had a relatively stable and enduring existence, and thus we can speak of an overkingship of several *túatha*, the aggregate overkingdom sometimes referred to as a *mórthúath*. These overkings, normally called *ruiri* ‘great king,’ might find themselves in more or less regular submission to even more powerful kings, *ríg ruirech* who had nominal status (but not necessarily authority) over considerable areas of Ireland; such kings are normally considered the provincial overkings of Munster, Leinster and the like. (2005: 21-22)

The *ruiri* was overlord of the kings of several *túatha* and could also be under the kingship of a stronger over-king known as *rí ruirech*, namely the king of a province. Nevertheless, Daniel Binchy (1970) and F. J. Byrne (2001) find that the over-kings who seem to be competing for Ireland from the ninth century onward were essentially *ríg túaithe*.

There continues to be much debate about early Irish kingship and an in-depth discussion of the subject is beyond the scope of this study. Of interest to our discussion of Arthurian literature is the relationship between the kings and their people in an early Irish



context. Bart Jaski disambiguates the role, definition, and function of both the *túath* and the *rí* by using early Irish law tracts (2000: 37-56). On the relationship between the king and his people, he describes contractual obligations between both parties as follows.

The king . . . acts as the leader and representative of the *túath* in political and military affairs in dealing with other *túatha* and by caring for internal order and welfare. The rule of a king can be beneficial to the people, but his powers are clearly related to the duties he is to carry out. King and people form two equal parties and their relationship is based on mutual cooperation. (Jaski 2000: 48)

Lawfully, the relationship between king and people is one of reciprocity. Therefore, it seems that the *túatha* chose their kings. The succession from one king to the next is not decided simply by primogeniture or might; rather, there is a complicated system that continues to baffle scholars and create much lively debate on the matter.

In *Celtic Ireland* (1921), still one of the most important books on early Irish kingship, Eoin Mac Neill synthesizes the “Irish law of dynastic succession” in three tenets.

In ancient Irish law, a person eligible to succeed (*rígdomna*) to a kingship must belong to the same *derbfine* as a king who has already reigned.

The *derbfine* was a family of four generations, a man, his sons, grandsons, and greatgrandsons.

Among the persons thus lawfully eligible, the succession was determined by election. (1988: 114)

The men eligible to become king were those connected to the previous king within four generations and the new king was chosen from among those eligible for the kingship.

Although Irish succession was more complicated than these three tenets, they are helpful in understanding early Irish kingship. As the information provided above outlines, the *rígdomna*, meaning ‘material of a king,’ is a man who is eligible for succession to

kingship.<sup>35</sup> The *tánaise rí*g, however, is the one who normally becomes the next king.

Dáibhí Ó Cróinín points out that

The *tánaise* . . . was certainly expected to succeed to the kingship and, so far as I can see from the evidence, he invariably did. In the law tract *Críth Gablach* the term *tánaise rí*g is explained in this way: “The *tánaise rí*g, why is he so called? Because the whole tribe looks forward to him for the kingship without dispute.” This can hardly be reconciled with the concept of *rí*gdomna, which is nowhere taken to imply that the person so called is *expected* to succeed. (1995: 67-68)<sup>36</sup>

It seems, then, that early Irish law tracts have terminology for those eligible to kingship and those chosen to become king. The *tánaise rí*g could die or be killed allowing another eligible candidate to succeed to the kingship.

The law tracts are also explicit about the procedures for selecting kings. Apart from the three tenets above, to be eligible to become king, a person needed to possess the following traits: “good legal standing” or *innraic*, not to be guilty of theft, not to have any physical blemishes, and to have property (Ó Cróinín 1995: 70). The detailed information available on kingship suggests that succession was an important aspect of the relationship between the people and the king. Nevertheless, the extent to which the rules were followed and the ways these rules may have altered in meaning over time continue to be important questions.

Early Irish laws depict the relationship between the king and the people as having an inherently contractual nature: both parties have rights and responsibilities and are equal partners. In the narrative literature, however, there is a second aspect of succession

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35. The *Dictionary of the Irish Language* defines *rí*gdomna as “‘material of a king,’ hence the heir-apparent of a king or chief; . . . merely son of a king (chief), prince; later identical with *tánaise*” (2007). MacNeill defines *rí*gdomna as “eligible prince of the blood royal” (1988: 114).

36. Cróinín uses MacNeill’s translation of *Críth Gablach* (1988: 300).

and kingship, namely the relationship of the king with goddess figures as represented by the female partner of the king. Proinsias MacCana provides an excellent explanation of the sacral status of the Irish king.

He was not a priest-king, but his office was a sacred one guarded by an elaborate complex of ritual and tabu, and so closely was he identified with the realm that it reacted in its very substance to his own moral and physical traits: if he showed the qualities of a just ruler, which are epitomized in the term *fír flaithemon* ‘truth of a ruler,’ the Irish equivalent of the Indian *rājadharmā*, then the land responded with an increase in its fertility and general prosperity; if he was an unjust or illegitimate ruler, or blemished in his person, it became barren and strife-torn. No doubt political expediency played its part together with rules of kingship (not normally primogeniture) in the selection of the king, but in order to acquire the seal of legitimacy he must be ritually sacralized. This took the form of a sacred marriage with the goddess who represented both the abstract sovereignty and the physical substance of his kingdom. In pre-Christian times this ceremony, the *banfheis rígi* or ‘marriage of sovereignty’ presumably included an enactment of the union of king and goddess, and this doubtless explains why the Christian Church seems to have opposed it from the outset in the paramount instance of Tara, which enjoyed a special prestige as the centre *par excellence* of sacral kingship. (1980: 8)

MacCana’s observations about sacral kingship yield a different view of kingship and succession than that found in Irish laws: in sacral kingship both women and the land play a part in legitimizing the next king.

Jaski suggests that there is a discrepancy between early Irish laws and the narrative literature and that sacral kingship is a literary ideal of kingship not based in reality (Jaski 2000: 57-58).<sup>37</sup> He divides the literary references to kingship from those of

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37. Jaski does point out several examples where sacral kingship plays a part in Irish history, stating that “The similarities between the theme of women incorporating sovereignty by marrying successive kings and the above marriage ties are quite apparent, and it suggests that the symbolism of marrying one’s predecessor’s wife was not lost on the kings of Tara. This does not mean that it was customary to marry the wife of one’s predecessor, but it occurred often enough to suspect that the literary motif of women embodying sovereignty was sometimes acted out in reality. Of course, it may also have served other political advantages, such as continuation of a marriage alliance or humiliation of one’s past rival” (Jaski 2000: 71).

early Irish law books and emphasizes the political aspects of kingship, even sacral kingship. As an example, he points out that marrying the wife of a predecessor does not need to be connected to either sacral kingship or sovereignty. In fact, Jaski concludes his second chapter by asserting that

The overall impression is that the sources express an ideal rather than a precondition for rulership. It added to a king's royal stature if he showed those qualities the early Irish writers and poets cultivated, but we can be sure that not all Irish kings were as good, wise, brave, strong and handsome as their legendary role-models. A serious lack in character, intellect or physical form could disqualify a person from the kingship, simply because it obstructed his ability to rule and lead his people. This in agreement with the relationship between king and people as expressed in *Críth Gablach* and other sources. The material considered here has not given rise to an image of sacral kingship in the documentary period in which the king stood above his subjects and acted as mediator between society and (super)natural forces. And why should there be, when there were bishops, priests and other clerics to attend to this task? This does not mean that the early Irish kingship ideology was stripped of all its former "sacral" characteristics, but rather that they were "de-sacralized" or "secularized" and fruitfully integrated with Christian concepts of kingship. (Jaski 2000: 88)

Jaski distinguishes the "sacral" conception of kingship from a "secular" conception, illustrating that the early law texts point to "secular" rules of kingship and that narrative texts point to a "sacral" kingship. Jaski's division of sacral and secular kingship deemphasizes the role of women in Irish kingship, as he underplays the importance of sacral kingship and the role of women in kingship and succession. His conclusion describes the narrative texts as tales that idealized kings. My findings, however, indicate that the kings and the heroes who could ascend to kingship were not idealized in the literary texts, but instead were carefully portrayed and crafted.

Welsh Arthurian literature, like Irish literature, displays ambivalence toward its very human kings. The stories do not explore sacral kingship alone, but also the rules presented in the early Irish law texts, pointing to a complicated system of kingship that

allowed writers to be critical of kings and kingship as practiced. Early Irish literature presents an ambivalent portrayal of the king and shows both the positive qualities of kings and negative views of kings who have overstepped their jurisdiction.

### **The Sovereignty Goddess: A Woman's Right to Choose**

Female characters positioned as sovereign figures are important to consider in a critical examination of Irish kingship. Furthermore, early Irish literature presents an exciting range of roles for women; from warriors to satirizers to sovereignty goddesses, women are an integral part of early Irish literature and early Irish life. Sacral kingship and its role in early Irish texts is an indicator of the role of women as a vital part of early Irish society.

Early Irish tales portray the relationship among sovereignty, the goddess, and the land as important for the power structures of the stories, by either supporting or challenging the king. In *Celtic Mythology* (1985), MacCana argues that the female characters in the tales are often reflections of goddesses and that they exhibit, in one way or another and to various degrees, the different characteristics that mark them as goddesses: they are representations of war, love, land, the happy otherworld, and sovereignty. As an example, the female character Medb is figured as a goddess of war, whose very appearance deprived warriors of two thirds of their valor. But the otherworld can also be the land of women and there are otherworld queens as well. They are often called goddesses of the happy otherworld and they entice mortal men to follow them. Lí Ban and Fann, in *Serglige Con Culainn*, are examples of such figures. They entice Cú Chulainn, a main hero of the Ulstermen, to go to their world. Connla son of Conn is

another example of a man that leaves with a woman from the otherworld. As the examples suggest, goddesses and other female characters are an important component of early Irish literature.

Because women are characterizations of the divine, it is common for them to play a mythological role rather than a personal one (MacCana 1985: 84). In “Women in Irish Mythology,” MacCana describes the role of women as sovereignty goddesses as follows.

In the traditions of the insular Celtic peoples the feminine embodiment of the realm is of necessity coeval with it; she cannot die except if the realm itself dies, or is destroyed. But she can be, and in the nature of things very often is, bereaved of the human partner who is her elected spouse and the temporal custodian of her domain. (MacCana 1985: 7)

Women, then, represent the land and, as representations of the land, also elect the kings. Some Celtic goddesses are considered divine mothers and a personification of the land. Such a figure is the shaper and the guardian of the land. For example Anu, an Irish goddess, is associated with two mountains in Kerry named *Dá Chích Anann* or ‘the two paps of Anu.’<sup>38</sup>

The goddess of sovereignty represents the land, its soil, substance of territory, and legal and spiritual dominion; she is primarily concerned with the prosperity of the land, its fertility, animal life, and security against external forces.<sup>39</sup> MacCana argues that “the criterion of a rightful king is that the land should be prosperous and inviolate under his rule – and this can be achieved only if he is accepted as her legitimate spouse by the goddess who personifies his kingdom” (1985, 92). There is, for example, a goddess called *In Flaithius* or “The Sovereignty.” Tymoczko explains that

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38. See MacCana (1980 and 1985); and Tymoczko (1994)

39. See Tymoczko (1980); and MacCana (1985).

In a number of early Irish stories, a goddess appears who is called explicitly *In Flaitheus*, ‘The Sovereignty.’ In these stories the goddess ensures the rule of a king or his successors by granting a drink (or drinks) of ale or other beverages. The stories are associated with the motif of the transformation of the Sovereignty from hag to beautiful woman. . . . though other cultures have developed myths in which king and goddess are joined, the feature of the *puella senilis*, the hag changed to young girl by the new union, is particularly Celtic. (1994: 100)

In this case, the woman not only determines the new king, but that decision brings about her transformation from an old hag to a young woman. This is a motif made infamous by the character of the Wife of Bath in Geoffrey Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales* (c. 1400).

The most famous Irish story of this type is *Echtra mac nEchach Muigmedóin*, or “The Adventure of the Sons of Eochaid Muigmedón” (eleventh century), in which Niall of the Nine Hostages consummates a union with the hag, who then transforms into a young woman and gives Niall and his descendants the kingdom of Ireland. MacCana summarizes the story well.

When Niall of the Nine Hostages was hunting with his brothers they stopped to cook a meal and went each in turn looking for water. And each in turn encountered a hideous looking hag guarding the well who asked for a kiss in return for the water. All refused except Niall who consented to kiss her and to lie with her. Immediately she was transformed into a beautiful young girl who identified herself as the sovereignty of Ireland and prophesied that Niall’s descendants would rule over the land. Here we have two of the essential elements in the primitive inauguration ritual, the coition and the libation, together with the motifs of the hunt and of the physical transformation which are familiar features of the myth of royal initiation. In this instance the whole scenario is exploited as a piece of blatant propaganda in favor of the political ambitions of the Uí Néill dynasty who were descended from Niall – but then the sovereignty myth was by its very nature political and never far removed from propaganda. (1980: 8)

The story of Niall exhibits several themes associated with sacral kingship, including the giving of a drink. In many occasions giving the heir-apparent a drink signals that the woman chooses him as a partner (MacCana 1980: 8).

Whether the tales use the motif of the hag turning into a beautiful woman, the

woman giving a drink to the man,<sup>40</sup> or sexual intercourse, the woman chooses the rightful king: “But while the goddess depended upon the advent of a worthy prince for the preservation or recovery of her beauty and youthful vigor, hers was the discretion to decide whom she would legitimize by mating with him in the *hieros gamos* or sacred marriage” (MacCana 1980: 9). The woman decides who will be the king and have sovereignty over the land. Sacral kingship and secular kingship, as Jaski describes them, might represent different forms of kingship and succession in Ireland. They both, however, have a very important similarity: the king is chosen by the men, women, and even the land the king lives in. He is appointed by his society, secular and religious, giving the community a way to criticize and glorify those in power and those who might hold power.

The Irish notions of heroism and kingship are connected to the sovereignty of the leader. A Celtic leader and his family can lose sovereignty because kingship is not passed down from one generation to the next. Sovereignty is earned and the land bestows it. A younger leader can take the sovereignty away from another man if the former is proven worthy. If the king makes the wrong decisions or is unfair in his ruling, the land will not produce and his subjects will suffer, creating an opening for a new leader to step forward and obtain the sovereignty. Thus, in the Irish texts, the leader and the heroes can take center stage equally because good kings are praised, heroes represent the future prospects of the community, and the son of a king can only become king if he can win the

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40. Concerning the role of Medb as a sovereignty goddess, MacCana writes that “In fact, of course, her moral misdemeanors were all performed as it were in the line of duty and had a sound mythological motivation, since the primary function of a goddess of sovereignty was to mate *en série*. Her very name, Medhbh, literally ‘she who intoxicates,’ identifies her explicitly as the goddess who presents the draught of sovereignty to one king and husband ‘in the shadow of another’” (1980: 9).



sovereignty.

### **The Law of the King: “Fír Flaithemon” and “Togail Bruidne Dá Derga”**

There are several characteristics that Irish kings should have in order to fulfill their duties as kings. Perhaps the most important characteristic is associated with the concept of *fír flaithemon* or ‘ruler’s/prince’s truth/justice’ (Jaski 2000: 72). The truth or justice of those in power indicates their ability to rule and to maintain a reciprocal relationship with their people. In order for the king to maintain his position of power, he must have the power of truth, meaning that he keeps his obligations. An interesting example of a king that does not keep his obligations, breaking the *fír flaithemon*, is found in the early Irish tale titled *Togail Bruidne Dá Derga* or “The Destruction of Da Derga’s Hostel” (eighth or ninth century) about the untimely death of Conaire Mór.

In “The Destruction of Da Derga’s Hostel,” Conaire becomes high king thanks to a ritual where a man drinks from the broth of a bull and he has a dream vision of the next king. In the ceremony of his succession, Conaire is given several *geasa*<sup>41</sup> that he must abide by in order to become a successful king. For example, Conaire is forbidden to hit or kill birds because: “here there is no one that should not be dear to thee because of his father or mother” (“Destruction” 1996: 97). Keeping his obligations, which includes making sure he does not break his *geasa*, will bring prosperity to his people.

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41. Tymoczko defines a *geis*, pl. *geasa*, as a “positive injunction as well as a prohibition. Individuals, positions (such as a kingship), and places could all be subject to the constraints of *geis*” (1999: 169). Tymoczko also explains that a personal *geis* can create conflicts for Irish heroes: “The conflicts between personal *geis* and the requirements of the honour code make for absolute – even existential – dilemmas in Irish hero tales, and such conflicts of cultural values are often the focus of the stories, contributing to the problematization of heroism in the early Irish texts” (1999: 169).

Thy reign will be subject to a restriction, but the bird-reign will be noble, and this shall be thy taboos:

Thou shalt not go righthandwise round Tara and lefthandwise round Breg.

The evil-beasts of Cerna must not be hunted by thee.

And thou shalt not go out every ninth night beyond Tara.

Thou shalt not sleep in a house from which firelight is manifest outside after sunset, and in which light is manifest from without.

And three Reds shall not go before thee to Red's house.

And no rapine shall be wrought in thy reign.

And after sunset a company of one woman or one man shall not enter the house in which thou art.

And thou shalt not settle the quarrel of thy two thralls.

Now there were in Conaire's reign great bounties, to wit, seven ships in every June of every year arriving at Inver Colptha, and oak-mast up to the knees in every autumn, and plenty of fish in the rivers Bush and Boyne in the June of each year, and such abundance of good-will that no one slew another in Erin during his reign. And to every one in Erin his fellow's voice seemed as sweet as the strings of lutes. From mid-spring to mid-autumn no wind disturbed a cow's tail. His reign was neither thunderous nor stormy. ("Destruction" 1996: 98)

The reign of Conaire is prosperous until he breaks the *fír flaithemon* and breaks the law.

His foster-brothers plunder and steal and he banishes them instead of killing them. After this first transgression, he continues to break various *geasa*: first by settling a quarrel before he was asked to intervene and then by staying five nights with each of the two quarrelling parties. After he breaks these *geasa*, he is forced to break the rest, and the consequences for his realm are visible.

After settling the two quarrels, he was travelling to Tara. The way he took to Tara was past Usnech of Meath; and he saw raiding from east and west, and from south and north, and he saw warbands and hosts, and men stark-naked; and the land of the southern O'Neills was a cloud of fire around him.

"What is this?" asked Conaire. "Easy to say," his people answered. "Easy to know that the king's law has broken down therein, since the country has begun to burn." ("Destruction" 1996: 100)

Conaire is placed in a position where he continues to break the law and ends up in a supernatural hostel called Da Derga's Hostel. Conaire is slain, and as in the tale involving

the head of Brân to be discussed in the next chapter, his slain head speaks.<sup>42</sup> Thereafter the men of Ireland die in battle. “The Destruction of Da Derga’s Hostel” emphasizes the importance of *fír flaithemon* by demonstrating that breaking the law leads to destruction and war.

### **Irish Kings and Subjects: Choosing the Rightful King**

The Irish king tales and the Ulster tales contain other examples of kings who break their obligations and the negative implications of those decisions, as well as of kings who fulfill their obligations and demonstrate their right to kingship. The stories also allude to the reciprocal relationship between the king and the king’s subjects, because his decisions affect his community and vice versa. *Echtra Airt meic Chuind* or “The Adventures of Art Son of Conn” is an example of a narrative dealing with both Art and his father and portrays a kingdom that is wasting because the father took the “wrong” woman as a wife.

In “The Adventures of Art,” we see many of the motifs found in Irish king tales.<sup>43</sup> Conn the Hundred-Fighter loses his wife and equal partner. Thus, he cannot govern the kingdom properly.

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42. Mac Cecht recuperates the head of Conaire and gives the decapitated head a drink. The head says the following: “A good man Mac Cecht! an excellent man Mac Cecht! / A good warrior without, good within; / He gives a drink, he saves a king, he doth a noble deed; / Well he ended the champions I found; / He sent a flagstone on the warriors; / Well he hewed by the door of the Hostel. . . . / So that a spear is against one hip that he is cut. / Good should I be to far-renowned Mac Cecht / If I were alive. A good man!” (“Destruction” 1998: 125).

43. The tale of Art is taken from the *Book of Fermoy*, a codex from the fifteenth century found in the Royal Irish Academy (1907: 149). The text is thought to belong to Old Irish tradition c. sixth to the tenth century (Cross and Slover 1996: 491).

Ocus ní roibh ní a n-easbaidh Éirenn an tan sin ach madh æn-ní rígh Eirenn gan bancéile a dingbhala do faghbhail dó tar eis a mhna. (“Adventures of Art” 1907: 150)

And there was nothing lacking to Ireland at that time but one thing only, that the king of Ireland should not have found a helpmate worthy of him in her stead. (“Adventures of Art” 1907: 151)

The king takes Bécuma Cneisgel, daughter of Eogan Inbir, as wife; although she is described as very beautiful, she is not worthy to become queen of Ireland because she had been banished.<sup>44</sup> Bécuma demands that Art leave for a year so she can marry Conn, and Conn agrees to banish his own son. Because the king banishes his own son from his land, which is considered a transgression, there is neither corn nor milk in Ireland during that time. Perhaps it might be more accurate to say that we know that the king committed a transgression by banishing his son because the land refused to partake in the decision of the king by failing to produce a harvest. At the story’s conclusion, Art returns after finding his proper mate and banishes Bécuma.

This tale indicates that in early Irish culture the king is connected to the land and that his choices affect those around him, including his people and the land. Sovereignty implies having responsibility for your surroundings and those that live in your surroundings. Having an equal partner is crucial for the relationship between the land and the king. This need for accord between partners represents the need for reciprocity between the king and the land. The king cannot commit transgressions or the land will not produce and the people will suffer.

Conn transgresses twice: he marries an unequal partner and he banishes his son

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44. The story states that “Ach mad æn-ní nirbha dingbhala dochum airdrigh Eirenn ben arna hindarba trina mígním fein” (“Adventures of Art ” 1907: 152). “One thing only, however, a woman was not worthy of the high-king of Ireland who was banished for her own misdeed” (153).

Art at his partner's urging. Following these transgressions, the land stops producing. In contrast to Conn, Art voyages to other lands and finds an equal and suitable partner who tells him what to do to save his land and kingdom: banish Bécuma.<sup>45</sup> After that Art returns and rescues his father and the kingdom from peril, demonstrating his own sovereignty over the land. In this tale Art is not yet king, but he is the main character of the tale and proves he is worthy of sovereignty. Although his father is still king, Art becomes *tánaise rí*g or 'heir apparent.'

In the Ulster tales sovereignty is exemplified in two ways: by the fertility of the land, exemplified by the vigor of the animals, the harvest, and the humans, and by the female characters, who bestow the land upon the king. Many of the tales about Conchobar use the theme of sovereignty both to question and support his place as the king of Ulster. In *Scéla Conchobair maic Nessa* or "The Tidings of Conchobar Son of Ness," Ness, daughter of Eochaid Sálbuide and the mother of Conchobar, is a warrior. Her foster parents are killed and she destroys the land and the people of the land while trying to find their killers. Such actions connect her to the war goddesses. Later, Ness meets Cathbad at a spring; she becomes his wife and Conchobar is born. Conchobar receives the kingship of Ulster because his mother gives it to him. She bestows kingship upon her son by marrying Fergus, the king of Ulster prior to Conchobar. Fergus asks her for her hand in marriage and Ness agrees to marry Fergus with the condition that Conchobar rule for a year in his stead. With the counsel of his men, Fergus obliges. Ness then tells Conchobar to make the men of Ulster follow him instead of Fergus, which leads

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45. I am inclined to think that Art's travels take him to the otherworld. I discuss the otherworld later in this chapter.

to his taking of the kingship.<sup>46</sup>

As a sovereignty figure, Ness did not legitimately marry Fergus because their union did not legitimize his position as king; instead she stripped his kingship from him and gave it to Conchobar. In this tale, in order for Conchobar to become high king, he needs the blessing of the goddess, given to him by his mother, and the approval of the men of Ulster, which he receives by following his mother's advice. Thus Ness personifies the goddess of sovereignty and supports the legitimacy of Conchobar as king by choosing him over Fergus. His legitimacy is also apparent because the men gather and choose him, he has sexual intercourse with every woman before she is married, and the land produces bounty.

Ba mór ind airmitiu tra doratsat Ulaid do Chonchobur. Ba si a airmitiu ám leo .i. cech fer di Ultaib doberad ingin macdacht, a feiss la Conchobar in chetaidchi, co mbad hé a cétmunter.

Ni rubai for talmain gein bad gáithiu. Nocho ruc breith ríam uair nocho léichthe do, fobíth na rucad gubreith, naptis messaiti a thorthi. (“Tidings of Conchobar” 1910: 24)

Great, indeed, was the reverence that the Ulstermen gave to Conchobar. This truly was the reverence they had – namely, when any man of the Ulaid married a grown-up girl, she slept with Conchobar on the first night, so that he became her first husband.

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46. Sections 7 and 8 read as follows. “Tanic didu cend na ree hísín dia blíadne. Dorimgart i suidiu Fergus a giallu. Immacallaim immi, or Ulaid. Ro imraidsetar i n-oendáil. Ba dímicin mór leo Fergus dia tabairt hi tindscra. Roptar buidig immorro do Chonchobar ar a degthidnacul dóib. Bas sí immorro a n-immacallaim, an ro rir Fergus scarad dó friss: an ro chennaig Conchobar anad aici. . . . Is andsin tra ro scar Fergus fri ríge n-Ulad, ocus iss andsin tra ro congaired ardrige choicid Herenn do Chonchobar mac Cathbad (“Tidings of Conchobar” 1910: 24). “Now on that day year the end of that time arrived. Thereupon Fergus, claimed his pledges. ‘A colloquy about it!’ say the Ulstermen. They took counsel in a single assembly. They deemed it a great dishonor that Fergus had given them (to Ness) as a bride-price. But they were thankful to Conchobar for his goodly gift to them. This then was their suffrage: ‘What Fergus sold, let it part from him: what Conchobar bought let it stay with him.’ . . . So ’tis then that Fergus parted from the kingship of Ulster, and ’tis then that Conchobar was called the overking of a fifth of Ireland” (“Tidings of Conchobar” 1910: 25).

On earth has been no wiser barn. He never delivered a judgment at a time when it was not permitted him, in order that he might not deliver a false judgment, so that his crops might not be the worse thereof. (“Tidings of Conchobar” 1910: 25)

Conchobar receives the kingship of Ulster through his mother, the daughter of a king, and is able to maintain kingship because the land is prolific and he is wise.

In *Mesca Ulad*, “The Intoxication of the Ulstermen,” Conchobar’s sovereignty is once again validated by the prosperity of the land. At the beginning of the tale, the kingdom of Ulster is divided among Conchobar, Cú Chulainn mac Sualtain, and Fintan mac Néill Níamglonnaig. Sencha mac Ailill and Cathbad convince Cú Chulainn and Fintan respectively to let Conchobar rule the province for a year, and, if Conchobar is the rightful king, to let him keep the kingship of Ulster.<sup>47</sup> Conchobar proves his right to kingship and becomes sole ruler of the province of Ulster.

In tí thánic i cind blíadna, ro boí in cóiced ina thopor thuli 7 téchta ac Conchobar, cona rabi aithles fás falam ótá Rind Semni 7 Latharnai co Cnoc Úachtair Fhorcha 7 co Duib 7 co Drobaís cen mac i n-inad a athar 7 a shenathar ic tairgnam da thigernu dúthaig.

Is and so do-rala cáincomrád etir Coin Culainn 7 Emir.

“Atar lim,” ar Emer, “is ardrí Ulad ifechtsa Conchobar.”

“Ní liach cíambad ed,” ar Cú Chulainn.

“Is mithig a choibled rígi do dénam dó badechtsa,” ar Emer, “ar is rí co suthain é.”

“Déntar didiu,” bar Cú Chulainn. (*Mesca Ulad* 1983: 6-7)

He that came at the end of a year found the province a fountain of desire and of wealth with Conchobar; so that there was not a residence waste or empty from Rinn Seimne and Latharna to the hill of Uachtar Forcha and to Dub and to Drobaís, without a son in the place of his father and his grandfather, serving his hereditary lord.

At this time a conversation occurred between Cu Chulainn and Emer.

“Methinks,” said Emer, “Conchobar is now High-King of Ulster.”

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47. The Irish text states that “is é in tipra ’na telluch thechtaide é na fétaither d’athgúd ná d’éligud, úa rígi Hérenn is Alban” (*Mesca Ulad* 1983: 4). “[Conchobar] is the fountain in its proper site that cannot be stained or defiled, the descendant of the kings of Erin and Alba” (“Intoxication of the Ulstermen” 1986: 217).

“Not sad, if it were so,” said Cu Chulainn.

“It is time to prepare his banquet of sovereignty for him now,” said Emer, “because he is a king forever.” (“Intoxication of the Ulstermen” 1986: 218)

The text demonstrates Conchobar’s worthiness to hold sovereignty over the land and the kingship of Ulster because the men of Ulster ask for Conchobar to rule and the land becomes fertile under his kingship. Furthermore, Emer, the wife of Cú Chulainn, states that Conchobar is high king and Cú Chulainn acknowledges her statement – that the land is better for Conchobar being king.

Peace, acceptance by the retinue, the prosperity of the land, and approval by the goddess of the rightful king are all important qualities for a king. The two tales leave no doubt about Conchobar’s legitimacy as king of Ulster. These two tales can also be viewed as a response to a crisis. Why do these tales make sure to state that Conchobar is the rightful ruler? Why must his kingship be validated so completely? I believe this occurs in the tales because there was no consensus about his place as king of Ulster. Moreover, because the community chose their king, they could also scrutinize the king’s choices. In “The Exile of the Sons of Uisliu,” for example, the sovereignty of Conchobar is questioned by using the same literary motifs described above to hint that the kingdom should now belong to another man. Deirdre, a character who has aspects of a sovereignty goddess, rejects Conchobar for Noísiu, a much younger man who seems also to have a claim to the kingship of Ulster.

Fecht n-and didiu baī-seom int-í Noísi a óenur for dóe inna rrátha .i. ina Emna, oc andord. Ba bind *immurgu* a n-andord mac n-Usnig. Cech bó ocus cech míl ro·chluined, no·mbligtis dā trian blechta d’immarcraid ūadib. Cech duine rod·chluined, ba lór síthchaire ocus airfítuid dóib. Ba maith a ñgaisced *dano*. Cīa no·beth cōiced Ulad i n-ōen-baili impu, acht corro·chured cách díb a triur a druim fri araile, ni·bertais búaid diib ar fébas na ursclaige ocus na imdíten. Bat comlūatha *dano* fri conaib oc tafonn. No·marbdais na fīada ar lúas. (*Loinges* 1949: 45)



This man Noisiu was chanting by himself one time near Emain, on the rampart of the stronghold. The chanting of the sons of Uisliu was very sweet. Every cow or beast that heard it gave two thirds more milk. Any person hearing it was filled with peace and music. Their deeds in war were great also: if the whole province of Ulster came at them at once, they could put their three backs together and not be beaten, their parrying and defense were so fine. Beside this they were swift as hounds in the chase, killing the wild beasts in flight. (*Exile* 2002: 12)

The sons of Uisliu have the qualities needed to be king. They can make the land produce, they bring peace to their people, and they can protect the territory (Tymoczko 1985-86: 156). Directly following the moment described above, Deirdre goes to Noísiu and forces him to accept her as his partner, despite the fact that she is “destined” for Conchobar.<sup>48</sup> She chooses Noísiu and in the process the tale questions Conchobar’s right to sovereignty.<sup>49</sup>

As the tale continues, Deirdre and the sons of Uisliu are exiled for a period of

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48. The text reads, “‘Is cáin,’ ol-se-sseom, ‘in t-šamaisc tête sechunn!’ / ‘Dlegtair,’ ol-si-si, ‘samaisci móra bale na·bít tairb.’ / ‘Atá tarb in chóicid lat,’ or-se-sseom, ‘.i. rí Ulad.’ / ‘No·togfainn-se etruib far ndís,’ or-si-si, ‘ocus no·gēbainn tarbín óag amalt-so.’ / ‘Ni-thó!’ ol-se-sseom. ‘Cid fo bīthin fáitsine Cathbad.’ / ‘In dom fémed-sa adeiri sin?’ / ‘Bid dō immurgu,’ or-se-ssem. / La sodain fo·ceird-si bedg cuci corro·gab a dá n-ó fora chinn. ‘Dá n-ó mēle oculus cuitbiuda in-so,’ ol-si, ‘manim·bera-su latt.’ / ‘Eirgg ūaim, a ben!’ ol-se. / ‘Rot·bia ón,’ ol-si-si” (*Loinges mac nUislenn* 1949, 46). “‘That is a fine heifer going by,’ he said. / ‘As well it might,’ she said. ‘The heifers grow big where there are no bulls.’ / ‘You have the bull of this province all to yourself,’ he said, ‘the king of Ulster.’ / ‘Of the two,’ she said, ‘I’d pick a game young bull like you.’ / ‘You couldn’t,’ he said. ‘There is Cathbad’s prophecy.’ / ‘Are you rejecting me?’ / ‘I am,’ he said. / Then she rushed at him and caught the two ears of his head. / ‘Two ears of shame and mockery,’ she said, ‘if you don’t take me with you.’ / Woman, leave me alone!’ he said. / ‘You will do it,’ she said, binding him” (“Exile of the Sons of Uisliu” 200: 12).

49. Concerning Deirdre, MacCana states that “Predestined for tragedy, Deirdre willingly elected a life of perilous love which fate had decreed must inevitably end in killing and treachery, and her character is a remarkable blend of the eminently human qualities of love and loyalty, self-will and sexual seductiveness. Yet nonetheless, there can be little doubt that Deirdre – in common, it might be said, with virtually all the other heroines of medieval Irish literature – is an adaptation in human terms of the archetypal goddess figure” (1980: 9).

time. The men of Ulster ask for their return and Conchobar sends the sons of Uisliu word that they can come back. They are, however, betrayed, which leads to the destruction of Ulster. Fergus, Dubthach, and Cormac had promised that no harm would come to the sons of Uisliu if they returned. In addition, Fergus's son, who was with the sons of Uisliu to make sure they would be received safely, is killed. Conchobar not only betrays the brothers, he also kills Fergus's son, and in the process forces Fergus, Dubthach, and Cormac to avenge the deaths of the sons of Uisliu or lose their honor:

Ro·marbtha ĩar suidiu sethnón na faithche conna·térna ass acht a ndecltaid do rind gāi agus di giun chlaidib; agus rucad-si in-nunn co Conchobar co·mbaí fora láim agus ro·cumrigthe a lláma íarna cúl.

At·chūas do Fergus ĩarum an-í-sin agus do Dubthach agus do Chormac. Tāncatar side co·ndernsat gníma móra fo chēt-óir .i. Dubthach do marbad Mane maic Conchobuir agus Fiachna mac Feidilme ingine Conchobuir do guin dond ōen-fógab agus Fergus do marbad Thraigthreoin maic Traiglethain agus a bráthar agus sārugud Conchobuir impu agus cath do thabairt eturru ĩar sin isind ōen-lōu co·torchratar tri chét de Ultaib eturru agus in-genrad Ulad do marbad do Dubthach rīa matain agus Emain do loscud do Fergus. (*Loinges* 1949: 47-48)

Then the slaughter broke out all over the green. No one left except by spike of spear or slash of sword. Deirdre was brought over to Conchobar and stood beside him with her hands bound at her back.

Fergus was told of this, and Dubthach and Cormac. They came at once and did mighty deeds. Dubthach killed Maine, Conchobar's son. Fiachna, son of Conchobar's daughter Fedelm, was killed with a single thrust. Fergus killed Traigthren, Traiglethan's son, and his brother. Conchobar was outraged, and on a day soon afterward battle was joined between them, and three hundred among the men of Ulster fell. Before morning Dubthach had massacred the girls of Ulster and Fergus had burned Emain. ("Exile" 2002: 15)

The men and women of Ulster are killed, and Fergus, Dubthach, Cormac and their followers leave Ulster. The actions of Conchobar and his choice to betray his promise to the sons of Uisliu demonstrate the beginning of the decline of the Ulstermen (Tymoczko 1985-86: 158). Emain Macha, the capital of the Ulstermen in Irish literature, is burnt down and the heroes and the young women of Ulster are killed. The decline is made more

apparent when Deirdre kills herself so that she does not have to be with Conchobar.<sup>50</sup> By the end of the story, Conchobar has broken his word, brought death and strife to his people, and caused the burning of his homeland. His actions produce the opposite effects of those associated with legitimate sovereignty.

The death of the sons of Uisliu brings about a transformation in Deirdre. She stops smiling, combing her hair, and eating. The motif of the *puella senilis* or the hag that transforms into a beautiful woman is reversed when Deirdre's beauty is diminished by her grief. Tymoczko also points out that a different transformation occurs through Deirdre's speech: she begins the tale making noises associated with cattle and animals and ends reciting poetry (Tymoczko 1985-86: 154). Deirdre is transformed into a poetic figure and her death signals the death of Emain. Her choice of king was not respected and the violation of this important principle brings about the destruction of the people of Ulster.<sup>51</sup>

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50. Conchobar decides to share Derdriu with Éogan, the killer of Noísiu, and she kills herself. The story says the following. "Lotar ĩarna b rach do  enuch Macha. Bu -si ĩar c l Eogain i carput. Do-rarngert-si na-haicc-fiuth a d  c ile for talmain i n- en-f cht. / 'Maith, a Derdriu,' ol Conchobar, 's il ch rach eter d  rethe gn -siu etrum-sa ocus Eogan.' / Ro-ba  ail chloiche m r ara cinn. Do-ll ici a cenn immon cloich co-nderna br rig dia cinn co-mbo marb" (*Loinges mac nUislenn* 1949, 51). "They set out the next day for the fair of Macha. She was behind Eogan in the chariot. She had sworn that two men alive in the world together would never have her./ 'This is good, Derdriu,' Conchobar said. 'Between me and Eogan you are a sheep eyeing two rams.'/ A big block of stone was in front of her. She let her head be driven against the stone, and made a mass of fragments of it, and she was dead" ("Exile of the Sons of Uisliu" 2002: 19-20).

51. MacCana writes as follows. "But if Deirdre dominates the story of the Sons of Uisnech just as Medhbh dominates *T in B  Cuailnge* and other tales of the Ulster Cycle, the reason is simply that both are literary variations on the exemplar of the goddess who by her own right selects her partner for his kingly qualities and thereby validates him in office" (1980: 10).

## Irish Poems and Otherworld Sightings: Irish Themes Anticipating Arthurian Adventure

The cycle of poems about the traditional kings of Ireland and the Ulster cycle portrays a diverse array of kings. There are several characteristics that the kings have in common, many of which I have already discussed. Kings protect the land, have sovereignty over it, and have a reciprocal relationship with their communities. Other important qualities include their roles as hunters and warriors and their connections and access to the otherworld.

Dáithí Ó hÓgáin describes the *síd* as follows.

The otherworld community that, according to Irish folklore, inhabits the landscape side by side with, but usually invisible to, the human race. The word *sí* (earlier *sídh*) originally meant a mound and the early Irish literature has several references to otherworld dwellers in the tumuli and cairns that dot the country side” (2006: 206)

In Irish tales, the otherworld is connected to the heroes of the tales; it is an integral part of the story. The *síd* is the community of the otherworld. The *Dictionary of the Irish*

*Language* defines the word *síd* as:

1 *síd, síth* . . . I (a) a fairy hill or mound . . . Later in a more general sense, wondrous, enchanting, charming, delightful . . . II In pl. = áes síde supernatural beings, fairies. (*Dictionary of the Irish Language* 2007)

There is also a second entry for *síd* in the dictionary which has the following definition.

2 *síd, síth* . . . (a) peace, goodwill, peaceableness; a state of peace; a period of peace, a truce; terms of peace; peacemaking, pacification, conciliation . . . (b) a peace-offering, compensation, atonement, indemnity; compact of peace; in pl. peace-conditions . . . (c) pardon, forgiveness . . . (d) of natural phenomena, peace, quietness, stillness. (*Dictionary of the Irish Language* 2007)

In *Loinges mac nUislienn* (“The Exile of the Sons of Uisliu”), Deirdre recites poetry lamenting the loss of Uisliu. One of the poems ends with

Fáilte, in-diu ni-dam úain

I ndáil Emna – ercdair saír –  
Na síd na suba na sám  
Na tech már na cumtach caín. (*Loinges* 1949: 50; emphasis added)

What use for welcome have I now  
with all these nobles crowding Emain?  
Comfortless, no *peace* nor joy,  
Nor mansion nor pleasant ornament. (“Exile” 2002: 18; emphasis added)

In this poem recited by Deirdre, *síd* has the connotation of peace; more specifically, she is lamenting that she does not have this state of peace.

Tymoczko asserts that

In Ireland as late as the mid twentieth century there persisted a belief in an otherworld which was conceived as coexisting with this world but involving another space-time continuum. Sometimes in early Irish texts this otherworld is spoken of as ‘the other side’ or ‘the other half,’ suggesting the conception of a division of the cosmos into two equal realms. (1999: 167)

The otherworld is described as parallel to the actual world and is associated with peace and enchantment. It is considered a real place to which only a select few have access. The otherworld is incorporated into the stories either by oral report (the *fili* speak of the otherworld) or by accounts of the heroes’ travels into the otherworld.

A prominent theme surrounding the otherworld in the Irish tales is that the otherworld is *ingnáth*, which has the connotations of ‘unfamiliar, strange, wonderful, and beautiful.’ Lóeg in *Serglige Con Culainn*, for example, begins his description of the otherworld (*síd*) by using the words *ingnád* (‘unfamiliar’) and its opposite *gnád*.

Ránacsa rem rebrad rán,  
bale ingnád cíarbo gnád,  
connici in carnd, fichtib drong,  
hi fúar Labraid lebarmong. (*Serglige* 1975: 16)

I found before my eyes a place that is splendid,  
a strange place but also familiar,  
in there, with a company of twenty,  
I found long-haired Labraid. (My Translation)

After describing Labraid and his mound, Lóeg describes the otherworld as a paradise, a place with plenty of food, strange animals, and beautiful women.

Atát arin dorus tíar,  
insinn áit hi funend grían,  
graig ngabor nglas, brec a mong,  
is araile corcordond.

Atát arin dorus sair  
tri bile do chorcor-glain,  
dia ngair in énlaithe búan bláith  
don macraid assin rígráith.

Atá crand i ndorus liss,  
ní hétig cocetul friss,  
crand airgit ris tatin grían,  
cosmail fri hór a roníam.

Atát and tri fichit crand,  
comraic nát chomraic a mbarr,  
bíatar tri cét do chach crund  
do mes ilarda i mlum.

Atá tipra sint síd thréll  
cona tri cóctaib breclend,  
7 delg óir cona lí  
i n-óe checha breclenni.

Dabach and do mid medrach  
oca dáil forin teglach:  
maraid béos, is búan in bás,  
conid bithlán do bithgrés. (*Serlige* 1975: 17-18)

There is, out from the door to the west,  
a place where the sun sets.  
There, a drove of turquoise horses with shimmering colored manes  
and another herd is purple brown.

There is, out from the eastward door,  
three trees of purple crystals,  
from which the gentle and unceasing birds sing,  
near the playing boys in the royal fort.

There is a tree in the doorway of the liss,  
the choral melody against it is not ugly,  
a tree of silver in which the sun shines,  
its great brilliance is like gold.

There are sixty trees,  
their leafy-tops are meetings that are not meetings,  
three hundred are fed of each tree,  
with ripe plentiful food.

There is a spring there in the otherworld, moreover,  
there are hundreds of brightly colored mantles,  
with a gold colored broach,  
in the corner of each brightly colored one. (My translation)

We do not encounter these aspects of the otherworld in the tale itself. We are only told about them in the poems spoken by Lóg, Cú Chulainn's charioteer.<sup>52</sup> Having the characters recite their adventures indicates the performative and oral aspects of the tale (Tymoczko 1996).

By contrast, in *Echtrae Chonnlai* ("The Adventures of Connla") is a tale in which the otherworld figures prominently: Art's brother, Connla, leaves Ireland with a woman from the *síd* in a crystal boat and never returns. Connla goes to the otherworld because he has fallen in love with the woman. In a poem, she describes the otherworld to him as a place of plenty. She states that

Dodeochadsa for in ben a tírib beó áit inna bí bás nó peccad na imorbus.  
Domelom fleda búana can rithgnom caíncomrac leind cen debaid. Síd mór i taam  
conid de suidib nonn ainmnigher áes síde. ("Echtrae Chonnlai" 1929: 302)

I come from the Lands of the Living, where there is neither death nor want nor sin. We keep perpetual feast without need for service. Peace reigns among us without strife. A great fairy-mound (*sid*) it is, in which we live: wherefore we are called "folk of the fairy-mound" (*aes side*). ("Adventures of Connla" 1986: 488)

She also describes herself and her lineage as follows.

Adgladadar mnaí n-óic n-alaind soceneoil nad fresci bás na sentaid ro charus  
Condla Rúad cotgairim do Maig Mell inid rí Boadag bidsuthain rí cen gol cen

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52. In the tale Lóg is the first character to access the otherworld; then he tells what he sees to Cú Chulainn and to the other Ulster warriors. In fact, it is Lóg who most closely resembles the *fili* or 'poet.' He gains access to the otherworld and then he tells others about what he saw. He convinces Cú Chulainn to go to the otherworld because of what he has seen there. Lóg is reproached by Emer, Cú Chulainn's wife, because he has been to the otherworld and has not found a way to help Cú Chulainn. Once Lóg is in the otherworld, he is the only one who can help calm Cú Chulainn's warp-spasm, a transformation similar to that of a berserkr. Much as the *fili* is a poet, historian, and druid, Lóg is commanded to fulfill these obligations.

mairg inna thír ó gabais flaith. (“Ectra Condla” 1929: 302)

[Connla] is speaking to a young and beautiful woman of noble descent, who will know neither death nor old age. Long have I loved Connla, and I summon him to Mag Mell, where Boadach the Eternal is king, a king in whose realm there has been no weeping and no sorrow since he began his rule. (“Adventures of Connla” 1986: 488)

The King Conn, then asks his druid to protect Connla from the woman because he is powerless to stop her. Conn relies on the druid to engage the woman by reciting an incantation against her.

Despite the efforts of the druid, by the end of the story, Connla leaves with the woman in a crystal boat.

O tharnic dond ingin a haithesc. Focaird Condla iar sudiu bedg úadib co mboí isind noi glano .i. isin churuch comthend commaidi glanta. Atconnarcatar úadib mod nad mod .i. in fat rosiacht índ radairc a roisc. Ro ráiset iarom in muir úadib 7 ni aicessa o sin ille 7 ní fes cid dollotar. (“Ectra Condla” 1929: 303-04)

Then Connla gave a leap into the woman’s crystal boat. The people saw him going away. Hardly could their eyes follow Connla and the maiden as they fared forth over the sea. From that day forward they were never seen again. (“Adventures of Connla” 1986: 490)

Connla is taken to the otherworld by the woman and neither the king nor the druid is able to stop her. Her description of the otherworld paints the otherworld as a place filled with food and peace, the very things that a good king should be able to provide for his people.

Moreover, Conn compares the woman’s calling of his son to sovereignty.

Asbert Cond fria druid Corán a ainm side. Ar rochúalatár uili an ro rádi in ben cenco n-acatár.

.r. Not álim a Chorán mórchétlaig mórdanaig forbond dodomanic as dom moo áirli as dom moo cumachtu níth náchim thánic o gabsu flaith mu imchomruc delb nemaicside cotoméicnigidar immum macc rochaín d’airchelad tre thoathbandu dí láim rígdain brectu ban mberir. (“Ectra Condla” 1929: 302)

Then Conn spoke to his druid (Corann was his name), for they had all heard everything the woman had said, although they did not see her:



I appeal to you, Corann,  
Skilled in song, skilled in arts!  
A power has come over me  
Too great for my skill,  
Too great for my strength;  
A battle has come upon me  
Such as I have not met since I took the sovereignty.  
By a treacherous attack the unseen shape overpowers me,  
To rob me of my fair son,  
With heathen words of magic.  
He is snatched from my royal side  
By women's words of magic. (“Adventures of Connla” 1996: 489)

Again, the female character is connected to sovereignty, but in this case, she is connected to negative forces that result in a man leaving, never to be seen again.

Many of the Irish heroes have access to the otherworld, experience adventures there, and are able to return. In many of the early Irish stories, the heroes assist those of the otherworld by defeating their enemies in battle. In *Serglige Con Culainn*, for example, Cu Chulainn goes to the otherworld to help Labraid Lúathlám-ar-Claideb (Labraid Swift-Hand-on-Sword) defeat his enemies. In the Irish tales, the otherworld is a part of the narrative world. The otherworld is also connected to the kings and heroes of the stories.

### **Ambivalent Kings: Heroism and Chieftains in Early Irish Literature**

Kingship in early Celtic societies was not a right and to be eligible for kingship, one needed to belong to the *derbfine* of the king or be within four generations of an actual king. There is also the institution of the *tánaise rí*g or ‘heir apparent,’ who usually becomes king. This particular structure leaves room for many people to be eligible for kingship and requires that the king be chosen from a large pool of candidates. Within this structure, the *túath* chooses the king. In contrast, sacral kingship requires that the

woman/goddess choose the king. The early Irish tales reflect these ideas; the texts repeatedly deal with the right of the king to power and the notion that his actions directly affect the people and the land.

Another theme inherent in the Irish tales is the role of the hero, who could either be the *tánaise rí*g or belong to the *derbfine* of the king. More importantly, the heroes of the stories are part of the community and also have a role in choosing the king. The whole community – including the heroes, the poets, the women, and even the land – has a voice. They are all important characters that move the stories. Both the heroes and kings are praised for their valor and heroism, but criticized for rash decisions that might lead to war and death. The tales from the Ulster Cycle in particular illustrate the destabilizing nature of warfare and depict it in negative terms. The kings and heroes of the stories are not infallible; their relationships to their kingdoms and retinues corroborate the idea that their actions are scrutinized by those who chose them to be in power.

The Irish tales present a delicate balance between praising the kings for their amazing deeds and chastising them for ultimately leading to the downfall of their people and the lands they should have protected. The two attitudes, praising and satirizing, are two duties of Celtic poets and storytellers.<sup>53</sup> The early Irish tales portray their kings through the ideologies of their own culture and their traditional values concerning kingship. The Irish tales like the Welsh stories to which we will turn next, point to the ambivalent nature of kings and their heroism. The tales praise the valor and heroism of the kings, but also question any resulting war, death, or loss of land.

The role of the goddess as the source of sovereignty confirms that the position of

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53. See F.N. Robinson (1912); Myles Dillon and Nora Chadwick (1967: 90, 230); and Tymoczko (1994: 139).

the king is not absolute. Kingship is bestowed on the king by the goddess associated with the land and by his men. Kingship, then, is a privilege bestowed by the community and the right to sovereignty is earned from the community. Whether the community did, in fact, have the right to choose their kings or not, the stories as well as the legal materials and annals point to an ideology where the men, women, and the land chose their king from the *derbfine*. This system of kingship allows for early Irish texts to emphasize both the kings and their subjects. The kings are not beyond reproach and the nature of their relationship to their kingdoms and retinues is such that the community can question their choices.

The Ulster tales use sacral kingship to both praise the kings and to hold them accountable for their actions. They point to the fact that the king is chosen by his subjects and must adhere to the choices made by his people and respect their well-being. The Ulster stories also exemplify the important role that the land and the female characters play in early Irish literature. Furthermore, the stories depict sovereignty as connected to acceptance by the retinue and acceptance by the goddess, or a central female figure. “The Exile of the Sons of Uisliu,” in particular, portrays war as the destruction of the land and the people (male and female), and as a sign of the decline of sovereignty. The story also points to an evaluation of heroism because the heroes or the warrior class are the ones who participate in war. As we will see the early Welsh Arthurian tales are also ambivalent regarding the heroic aspects of kingship, favoring a king that brings peace over one that brings war. The early Irish texts also display kings with characteristics similar to those reflected in medieval Welsh texts about Arthur. The next chapter moves the analysis toward exploring the relationship between the king and his subjects in early

Welsh Arthurian literature.

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### CHAPTER III

#### REAPPROPRIATING WALES, REAPPROPRIATING ARTHUR: ARTHURIAN WELSH TEXTS IN HISTORIES, PSEUDO-HISTORIES, AND TALES

There is a collective ideal related to Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table that continues to influence our image of Arthur to this day. Although the earliest Arthurian texts do not feature a round table, they do mention some well-known Arthurian characters, such as Gawain, Mordred, and Kay.<sup>54</sup> The first texts that deal with Arthur differ in their content and in the way that they present Arthur from later, better-known tales. The wealth of Welsh texts, from allusions to pseudo-historical accounts to folk legends to tales, leaves as many questions as answers. Welsh Arthurian narratives introduce Arthurian scholars to a set of multifaceted Arthurs, the products of history, folklore, and myth. The Arthurian texts available through Welsh manuscripts are literary examples indicating that the Welsh courts and their rulers used the Celtic and Roman past of Wales to represent themselves as equals to their Anglo-Norman rulers.

Most manuscripts written in Welsh date from the thirteenth century or later. These manuscripts include the *Law of Hywel Dda* (Hywel the Good); several versions of *Brut y Brenhinedd*, the Welsh translation of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia*; and collections of early British and Welsh poetry, as well as several texts dealing with or mentioning Arthur. From 1250 to 1350 there are almost fifty manuscripts available, "making it the most important period for the conservation of Welsh literature" (S. Davies 2013: 660). The manuscripts that deal specifically with Arthur include the Black Book of Carmarthen

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54. Gawain, Mordred, and Kay are Arthur's nephews and foster-brother respectively.



(National Library of Wales, Peniarth 1) which includes the poem “Pa gur yu y porthaur” or “What man is the gatekeeper?”.<sup>55</sup> The White Book of Rhydderch (National Library of Wales, Peniarth 4 and 5) contains the earliest known versions of “Pwyll Prince of Dyfed,” “Branwen Daughter of Llŷr,” “Manawydan Son of Llŷr,” “Math Son of Mathonwy,”<sup>56</sup> “Culhwch and Olwen,” “The Dream of Rhonabwy,” “Owain,” “Peredur,” and “Geraint and Enid.” As a group, these stories are the core of the collection known as the *Mabinogion*.<sup>57</sup> Finally, the Red Book of Hergest (Oxford, Jesus College, MS III) contains an impressive array of vernacular materials including “The Welsh Triads”<sup>58</sup> and the tales from the *Mabinogion* among others.<sup>59</sup>

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55. The poem was probably written in the middle of the thirteenth century. See S. Davies (2013: 662).

56. These four tales are known as the four branches of the Mabinogi; they are thematically connected by the appearance of Pryderi.

57. The *Mabinogion* is the best-known collection of Welsh texts. The stories in the *Mabinogion* give several examples of Welsh texts as propaganda that delineates the role of the kings. Many of the tales also present remnants of Celtic influence. Of the thirteen tales traditionally included in the *Mabinogion*, the first four are known as the four branches of the Mabinogi because they are thematically connected by the appearance of Pryderi. *Culhwch ac Olwen* or “Culhwch and Olwen” is the oldest surviving Arthurian prose tale. “The Dream of Rhonabwy” also deals with Arthur. Finally “Owain,” “Peredur,” and “Geraint and Enid” are the Welsh versions of the romances told in French tradition by Chrétien de Troyes, namely *Yvain*, *Perceval*, and *Erec et Enide* respectively. The material in the *Mabinogion* draws upon various systems, including early Celtic motifs, folktale motifs, and early medieval French romances. They create a uniquely Welsh compilation of texts. *The Mabinogion* is found in the White Book of Rhydderch dated c. 1350, and the Red Book of Hergest dated between 1382 and c. 1410 (*The Mabinogion* 2007: ix). Dating the tales is difficult; Brynley Roberts dates the most archaic of its language to c. 1100 (1995: 73), but S. Davies places the dating between the end of the eleventh and the beginning of the fourteenth centuries (*The Mabinogion* 2007: xvii). Furthermore, the dating of many early Welsh texts is disputed. See S. Davies (2013), and Simon Rodway (2007: 45-87).

58. The Welsh Triads were also written between 1250 and 1350. See S. Davies (2013: 662).

Although the most important Welsh manuscripts date from the thirteenth century or later, the texts point to a literary culture from an earlier period. Recent work in linguistics has modified some earlier datings or proven that we have “no certain date” to work from (Rodway 2007: 45-87), leaving scholars with very few answers about the original dates of the texts (See Rodway 2007 and S. Davies 2013: 663). My study of Welsh Arthurian texts does not delve into the possible time periods of origin, but instead focuses on why there are so many manuscripts from the thirteenth century, why the Arthurian stories were written down, and the ways in which they relate to Welsh history and culture.

The wealth of manuscripts from the thirteenth century provides a window on a lively array of texts written in the Welsh vernacular. These materials include the bardic genres of elegy, eulogy, and prophecy; various types of religious works; nature and gnomic literature; and other forms of poetry and prose (S. Davies 2013: 663). These texts provide a lens through which to analyze the ways in which the Welsh constructed themselves and their own past in resistance to their position as Other to the Anglo-Saxon and Anglo-Norman elites. Sioned Davies aptly writes that

The content of much early Welsh literature is interwoven with fluctuating political scenarios together with a response to political and social events, to conquest and colonization. The post-Roman era in Wales may be regarded as one of the most significant in the country’s history, as it was during this period that Wales began to emerge as a distinct territorial and cultural entity. The land was divided into a number of small, fluid kingdoms, each with its own ruler and each vying for supremacy – there was no dominant hegemonic polity. By the second half of the eighth century, Wales was clearly visible as “the other.” Offa, king of

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59. See *Trioedd Ynys Prydein* (2012). Other important studies on the Welsh Arthur and the various manuscripts are Rachel Bromwich, A. O. H. Jarman and Brynley F. Roberts (1995); and Thomas Green (2007). For a more in-depth analysis of Welsh manuscripts, see Daniel Huws (2000: 57-64).

Mercia from 757 to 796, built a huge earthwork stretching for much of the length of the country to demarcate the boundary between Mercia, the dominant Anglo-Saxon kingdom of the time, and the Welsh kingdoms to the west; it still stands today and is known as Offa's Dyke, a lasting symbol of domination. (2013: 664)

Early Welsh history and culture have been shaped in part through their relationship with the rest of Britain.

Taking into account the historic context of Wales is important in order to analyze the portrayal of Arthur and his men.<sup>60</sup> Viewed in this context, Arthur is a multifaceted character, both praised and derided in the Welsh texts. The construction of Arthur points to the anxieties of the Welsh people. The Welsh enjoyed a glorious past through their early connections to Rome and their Celtic origins. In the post-Roman period, however, the Welsh were constructed as the Other by the Anglo-Saxons, were threatened by Viking invasions, and had a host of kings and princes that alternately united, separated, built, and destroyed Wales. Welsh literature reflects the multicultural and multilingual realities of Britain in general, and Wales in particular, where there existed many diverse communities living in close proximity. Karen Jankulak and Jonathan M. Wooding observe that

The "matter of Britain," which gave rise to "pseudo-" or "synthetic" histories of British cultural identity as well as to poems and stories for performance in the setting of rulers' courts, was in part a product of the rich relationship between the Irish, Welsh, and English during the eighth to tenth centuries. Already in the ninth century Welsh and English rulers such as Merfyn Frych of Gwynedd and Alfred the Great can be seen as the patrons of learned men of international origin, active in their royal courts. By the beginning of the second millennium the reformed monastic orders on the Continent had begun to find patrons in both Anglo-Saxon England and Celtic Britain. The appearance of the Normans in this environment, as well as the Bretons who followed in their train, fueled what was already a dynamic court and church culture interested in the "British" past, an interest which found its greatest advocate in Geoffrey of Monmouth. (2009: 73)

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60. Overviews of the history of Wales include R. R. Davies (1987); John Davies (1993); and Geraint H. Jenkins (2007).

The Welsh Arthurian materials available help us to define a “Welsh” identity that distanced the Welsh from their construction as the Other by the Anglo-Saxons and the Anglo-Normans. The Arthurian texts align Wales with both their Celtic and Roman pasts, creating a uniquely Welsh body of literature.

### **Establishing Context: Welsh Kings and a Fractured/Unified Wales**

The Welsh Arthurian materials can be viewed within several different frameworks, including an early Celtic framework, both Welsh and Irish,<sup>61</sup> and a British framework that takes into account the relationship between the Welsh and the Anglo-Saxons and Anglo-Normans.<sup>62</sup> I will concentrate on the kingship system of Wales in order to better explore why Arthur is depicted as both historical and legendary and as both a great and problematic leader.<sup>63</sup>

In this section, I provide an outline of kingship and succession. I discuss early Welsh rulers and the ways in which they begin to create ties with each other after the

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61. For information on the Celtic sources for Arthurian literature and the connections between Irish and Welsh literature see L. C. Lovecy (1977-78: 133-46); A. O. H. Jarman (1981: 1-21); Wendy Davies (1982); Patrick Sims-Williams (1982: 235-57 and 1989: 412-26); O. J. Padel(1994: 1-31); Coe and Young (1995); and Ceridwen Lloyd-Morgan (2000).

62. The majority of historical research on the subject devotes considerable time to the relationship between the Anglo-Normans and the Welsh. This chapter emphasizes the works of Wendy Davies (1982); R. R. Davies (1992); A. D. Carr (1995); J. R. Crick (1999: 60-75); Huw Pryce (2005); and Jankulak and Wooding (2009: 73-83).

63. An important date for Welsh kingship is 1064 because “before 1064 only four rulers had been able to extend their power over a substantial part of Wales; these were Rhodri Mawr (d. 878) and Gruffydd ap Llywelyn (d. 1064) of Gwynedd and Hywel Dda (d. 950) and Maredudd ab Owain (d. 999) of Deheubarth” (Carr 1995: 27). I am following the dates given by A. D. Davies (2005) and Carr (1995).

construction of Offa's Dyke (757-96), thus expanding the territory under the control of Wales until the death of Gruffydd ap Llywelyn in 1063 put a halt to such ambitions. I then move to an analysis of the rulers of Wales in the twelfth century and their role in stabilizing the principalities of Gwynedd, Powys, and Deheubath, which become important territories in Welsh geography. The historical facts ground my argument that the many personas of Arthur found in Welsh literature are consistent with the image of a unified Wales; this image was imposed on Wales by the Anglo-Saxons and the Anglo-Normans and then reappropriated by the Welsh. Welsh literature uses the Celtic and Roman past of the Welsh not only to present a unified Wales, but to establish Welsh sovereignty over Welsh territory.

### **The History of the Kings of Wales: a Brief Introduction to Medieval Welsh History and Kingship**

Ascending to kingship in Wales was similar in many ways to ascending to kingship in Ireland. A. D. Carr concisely explains Welsh succession.

Political authority in a Welsh kingdom lay with the king; he might seek the advice of those who knew the law and the precedents but his was the final word. The court, composed of the king and a body of officials with a large retinue, travelled regularly around the kingdom, being maintained by the fruits of the labor of the bondmen on the local demesne and the food renders, labor services and billeting obligations of the rest of the king's subjects. The king was chosen from among the members of the royal kindred during the lifetime of his predecessor; the kindred was a four-generation group, which meant that eligibility involved being at least the great-grandson of a king. He was the enforcer of law and justice and the custodian of public order; he was also the source of patronage and was expected to be open-handed and generous, especially to the church and to poets. (1995: 29-30)

Similar to Irish patterns of kingship, Welsh kingdoms were headed by kings, usually called *tywysogion*, ‘prince,’ and the communities that advised and chose those kings.<sup>64</sup>

Similar to the portrayal of kingship in Irish literature, Welsh Arthurian literature demonstrates an ambivalent relationship to kingship, stemming from a system where many have a right to kingship and the community has a role in choosing the king.<sup>65</sup>

Wales followed a Celtic kingship system and retained remnants of the Roman system, as it had been configured c. A.D. 500. Although both Celtic and Roman customs flourished in various parts of Wales, Wales was fragmented by its landscape and its multiple kingships. R. R. Davies points out the relationship between the land and the people.

It was the region, large or small, which was often the most obvious focus of communal identity and loyalty for many of its inhabitants. Its boundaries demarcated the horizons of their social contacts and territorial claims, its mother church and its patron saint the focus of their religious affections, its traditions and lore the framework of their collective memories. This attachment to region was all the stronger in a world where political hegemonies and dynastic fortunes were so brittle; in a fluid and uncertain political world the region or *gwlad* represented a welcome element of continuity and stability. (1987: 13)

Wales consisted of a variety of commonalities owing allegiance to different kings who controlled different territories.

After the construction of Offa’s dyke (757-96) between Mercia and the Welsh kingdoms, Welsh kings begin to create ties among themselves and to have ambitious

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64. This general explanation about kingship only takes into account several members of the communities such as the warrior class and poets.

65. Pronsias MacCana points out that there were Irish scholars in Gwynedd whose role as educators and literary agents must not be overlooked (2007: 29).

plans beyond their borders.<sup>66</sup> By the tenth and eleventh centuries, the relationships among Welsh rulers lead to diverse forms of unification.

What is striking in the tenth and eleventh centuries is the extent to which the ruling families, now very much of shared ancestry, formed polities that increasingly came to reflect the bonds of ancestry and marriage. The marriage of Hywel ap Cadell (Hywel Dda, “Hywel the Good,” d. 949/50) to Elen of Dyfed probably helped to legitimize the royal family of Gwynedd’s claim to rule both Gwynedd and Dyfed. (Jankulak and Wooding 2009: 76)<sup>67</sup>

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66. Jankulak and Wooding assert that “we begin to see the emergence of ambitious rulers whose courts had familial and intellectual links beyond Wales. The father of Merfyn Frych (d. 844), Gwriad, is commemorated on an inscription (*crux Guriat*, ‘the cross of Gwriad’) at Maughold in the Isle of Man, implying relations that took his interests beyond the local context. Merfyn is shown as a king already with pretensions to overkingship when he is described in the famous Bamberg cryptogram as ‘glorious king of the Britons.’ The cryptogram itself is evidence for the presence of Irish scholars in Gwynedd, a presence that serves to give a context to education and literary ideas at the royal court. This relationship – logical in terms of the proximity of Anglesey to Ireland – also provides a context for the presence in the *Historia Brittonum* (chs. 13-14) of material later found in Irish pseudo-historical narratives.

Rhodri Mawr (d. 878), the son of Merfyn Frych and Nest of Powys, was the figure who oversaw the rise to dominance of Gwynedd in the ninth century. His inheritance of both Gwynedd (844) and Powys (855), and his marriage to Angharad of Ceredigion, saw Rhodri, on the death of Angharad’s brother Gwgon (872), gain control of the greater part of Wales. Rhodri’s son Anarawd raided in south Wales, inspiring the kings of Dyfed and Brycheiniog to build relationships with the ascendant Alfred the Great (r. 871-99) of Wessex” (2009: 75).

For more information on Gwriad’s commemoration see: P. Kermodé (1907: 122-23); for more information on Bamberg cryptogram and the presence of Irish scholars in Gwynedd see MacCana (2007: 2); and for more information on the *Historia* and Irish pseudo-historical narratives see Nennius (1980: 61 and 201).

67. Jankulak and Wooding argue that “The later tenth and eleventh centuries saw control of Gwynedd and Dyfed (the latter in the eleventh century being merged with the southeastern kingdoms to form the larger polity known as Deheubarth) fluctuate with the fortunes of descendants of these two, now interlinked, dynasties. The longest reigning ruler of Gwynedd in this period, Gruffudd ap Llywelyn of Gwynedd (r. 1039-63), was the son of Llywelyn ap Seisyll, who had married into the Dyfed line but who won control of Gwynedd (1018) and Deheubarth (1022) by force. On Llywelyn's death Iago ab Idwal, a member of the Gwynedd line, assumed power in Gwynedd, but on his death (perhaps at the hand of his own troops) in 1039, Gruffudd assumed power. Iago’s son Cynan was exiled to Dublin, whence his son Gruffudd ap Cynan (d. 1137) would return in 1075 and 1081 to fight the Normans . . . ” (2009: 76).

The interconnections of the polities, especially Gwynedd and Dyfed, lead to the almost complete unification of Wales under the rule of Gruffydd ap Llywelyn, who came to power in 1039 (Jankulak and Wooding 2009: 74). After his death in 1063, however, Welsh politics reverted to a fragmented state, with Gwynedd and Powys controlled by Llywelyn's half-brothers Bleddyn and Rhiwallon ap Cynfy, and Deheubarth and Morgannwg restored to their previous rulers (Carr 1995: 133). The death of Llywelyn brought back many of the problems that plagued fractured Wales including Viking attacks on the coast and the advance of the English in the East (R. R. Davies 1987: 26). This was the situation in Wales when the Normans gained power in 1066 and inherited the overlordship of Wales from the Anglo-Saxon kings (R. R. Davies 1987: 27 and Carr 1995: 31).<sup>68</sup> The Othering of the Welsh by the Anglo-Saxons and the idea that Wales was a single unified people continued to have an effect on the political relationships between Anglo-Norman and Welsh kings.

Wales played a peripheral role in Anglo-Norman politics until the twelfth century. The death of Henry I in 1135 and the ensuing civil war helped Welsh kings regain territory lost to the Anglo-Normans.

The situation changed dramatically on the death of Henry I in 1135; within a month war had broken out in south Wales and much territory was rapidly regained by the Welsh. This recovery was facilitated by the disputed succession in England; Henry's nephew Stephen of Blois had been elected king but his daughter, the Empress Matilda, had a strong body of support, much of it in the march. The resulting civil war meant that Welsh rulers had a free hand in recovering their lands. Most of Deheubarth was won back early in 1136. Gruffydd ap Cynan died in 1137, as did Gruffydd ap Rhys of Deheubarth, his son-in-law and the son of his old comrade-in-arms . . . [The former] was succeeded by his son Owain, known as Owain Gwynedd, one of the greatest members of a dynasty whose history is the history of independent Wales; with Madog ap Maredudd in

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68. Carr attests that William inherited the complicated relationship that was already established between the Welsh and the Anglo-Saxons.



Powys and Rhys ap Gruffydd in Deheubarth as well as Owain Gwynedd, Wales was particularly fortunate in its rulers in the twelfth century. (Carr 1995: 42)<sup>69</sup>

By 1167 Owain Gwynedd controlled north Wales, from Anglesey to the Dee estuary (R. R. Davies 1987: 49).<sup>70</sup> Madog ap Meredith from Powys was also a successful ruler (1132-60), referred to as “cadarn angor dyfnfor diffaith” or “a firm anchor in a deep sea” (R. R. Davies 1987: 49).<sup>71</sup> In 1137 the four sons who inherited Deheubarth worked together in order to recover Deheubarth from the Normans. By 1155 only Rhys ap Gruffydd remained alive (R. R. Davies 1987: 51), successfully keeping Deheubarth a unified territory.

The expansion and recovery of Wales through the principalities of Gwynedd, Powys, and Deheubarth dominate the subsequent history of Wales (R. R. Davies 1987: 51). After much turmoil between Henry II and the Welsh rulers, 1171-72 marks a moment of relative stability for Wales:

Henry II had learnt to be content with an acknowledgement of his overlordship and to match his military ambitions in Wales and his support for the Anglo-Norman lords there more realistically to his resources and to the overall needs of his “empire.” The Welsh princes, and Rhys ap Gruffydd in particular, had relearned the lesson that under a strong king the acceptance of their client status was the beginning of wisdom; demeaning it might be, but it brought with it a measure of security, especially against the ambitions of the Anglo-Norman barons. . . .

The settlement of 1171-72 marks the end of an era. No English king would again invade Wales for almost forty years. The map of the division of Wales between Anglo-Norman lordship and native Welsh principalities had taken a

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69. See also Carr (1995: 42-49) and R. R. Davies (1987: 46-49). I give more information on this subject in Chapter IV, which treats the material from a Norman perspective.

70. See also Carr (1995: 42-49) for more information on the Welsh rulers of the twelfth century.

71. See the poem *Llsg. Hendregadredd*, in J. P. Clancy’s *The Earliest Welsh Poetry* (1970: 119) and the translation by D. M. Lloyd in *A Guide to Welsh Literature* (1976: 163-64).

shape which, in greater or lesser degree, it was to retain until 1277. (R. R. Davies 1987: 54)

The period of revival and recovery in Wales in the twelfth century also witnessed the creation of some of the best Welsh medieval poetry and the reinstatement of native law, attributed to Hywel Dda, under the leadership of Rhys ap Gruffydd in Deheubarth (Carr 1995: 46). The *llys*, namely “prince’s court,” became the center of literary, military, governmental, and cultural business (Jankulak and Wooding 2009: 73). The relationship of the court poet to the Welsh rulers is a relationship that goes beyond patronage, the poets become the consciousness of the rulers; they both rebuke and praise their rulers’ actions.<sup>72</sup> The courts of Gwynedd, Powys, and Deheubarth, as well as many smaller courts throughout Wales, created a cultural milieu that made possible the wealth of manuscripts available from the thirteenth century onward (Jankulak and Wooding 2009: 73).<sup>73</sup>

The terms conflict and fragmentation are often used to describe medieval Wales.<sup>74</sup>

Nevertheless Wales was perceived as having a distinctly Welsh identity by outsiders.

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72. Literature went beyond entertainment and was an important part of the court. For more information on the subject see Carr (1995); D. Jenkins (2000: 150 and 159-60). For more information on the Welsh king and his court see Thomas. M. Charles-Edwards, Morfydd E. Owen, and Paul Russell (2000).

73. Jankulak and Wooding write that “Several great courts stand out: one, often retrospectively described as the first *eisteddfod*, was held in 1176 by the Lord Rhys at his court at Cardigan with competitions between poets and musicians” (2009: 73). In *Brut y Tywysogion* it is claimed, for example, that the competition was “proclaimed a year before it was held throughout Wales and England and Scotland and Ireland and many other lands” (*Brut y Tywysogyon* 1955: 166-67).

74. See Carr (1995); R. R. Davies (1987); and S. Davies (2013) as examples. R. R. Davies writes that “Wherever we look at medieval Wales it seems to dissolve into plurality; its history appears to be no more than the sum of its individual parts. Indeed, this impression of fragmentation was to be further accentuated by the character and pace

With the sea to the north, south, and west and Offa's Dyke to the east, Wales was territorialized from the eighth century onward. The notion of the Welsh as the Other constructed by their neighbors, but the notion of the Welsh as the Self also began to take shape by the eighth century. R. R. Davies writes that

. . . In spite of all its divisions, Wales had an identity of its own and so did its people. Outsiders had no doubt about that. In the writs of the first century of Norman rule, the Welsh are invariably greeted as one people and Wales is referred to as one country – an obvious point, maybe, but one which emphasizes that to outsiders the distinctiveness of Wales was as impressive as its fragmentation. (1987: 15)

Shifting Davies's notions, this chapter focuses instead on the fact that the Welsh consisted of a diverse group of peoples with different cultures and ideologies and that the Welsh begin to shape a unified identity in response to being perceived as a unified people by the Anglo-Saxons and Anglo-Normans, who subordinated them to their overkingship. The creation of a single body of people that in reality represents different groups is easily discerned in other contexts: for example, the use of the word *Indian* to describe the many native groups in the Americas and the term *Latin American* to describe the many countries and cultures of North, South, and Central America. Questions about individual identities and a forced collective identity have been widely discussed in postcolonial and Native scholarship.<sup>75</sup> The Welsh people's position as Other and as subordinates

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of the Anglo-Norman conquest of Wales: Wales, or rather parts of Wales, now became a country of two peoples as well as of many regions" (1987: 15).

75. By 1978 scholars such as Robert F. Berkhofer were already pointing out the "forced" unified identity of Natives: "Since the original inhabitants of the western hemisphere neither called themselves by a single term nor understood themselves as a collectivity, the idea and the image of the Indian must be a White conception. Native Americans were and are real, but the Indian was a White invention and still remains largely a White image, if not stereotype. (1978: 3). The many misconceptions about First Nations come from this unification of indigenous peoples into one single entity. We can

demanded a different practical and cultural approach, in which Welsh rulers reappropriated the image of Wales for their own political aims. In turn, the actual history of the Welsh demands a new scholarly approach.

The Anglo-Saxons and Anglo-Normans began a process of “forced unification” in Wales, which led to the Welsh “nationalist ideology of thirteenth-century native Welsh propaganda” (R. R. Davies 1987: 14). Once Wales was classified as one people with one identity, the Welsh reappropriated this notion of one people for their own political advantage. Analyzing medieval Welsh literature in general and medieval Arthurian literature in particular using approaches from postcolonial theory and translation theory results in an understanding of Welsh texts as a complicated literature that portrays ambivalence to kingship. My analysis points to Arthurian texts, which became a popular motif throughout Britain and Brittany in the twelfth century, as part of a literary and courtly trend that uses pseudo-historical and literary texts to solidify the myth of a unified Wales. This myth was espoused by both Anglo-Norman and Welsh leaders, but for different reasons.<sup>76</sup> For the Welsh in particular, Arthurian texts helped create a Welsh identity by aligning Wales with both a Celtic and Roman past, a past that legitimized Welsh kings and Welsh culture beyond the role of the Other espoused first by the Anglo-Saxons and then by the Anglo-Normans.

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argue that a similar project is underway in the construction of Wales. Sharon Kinoshita, for example, discusses the othering of the Welsh populace in the *Lais* of Marie de France (2006: 105-32).

76. See Chapter IV below for information on the *Historia* and its political implications from an Anglo-Norman perspective.

## **Mythical Histories: The Pseudo-Historical Arthur**

Arthur is both a legendary and historical character in early Welsh texts. This dual nature is still an important aspect of his character in literary and academic circles. As the scholarly works of Thomas Charles-Edwards (1995), Ronald Hutton (2009), Alan Lane (2009), N. J. Higham (2009), and Lister M. Matbeson (2009) among others indicate, there is still much debate on the historicity of Arthur. Most scholars agree that there is not sufficient evidence to prove the existence of a historical Arthur, but that his character has certainly left a mark in early historical records, now mainly discussed as pseudo-historical texts. Charles-Edwards aptly concludes that

At this stage of the enquiry, one can only say that there may well have been an historical Arthur; that the historian can as yet say nothing of value about him, but that later conceptions of Arthur are likely to interest historians almost as much as they do students of medieval literature. (2000: 29).

There is no significant proof of a historical Arthur, yet the diverse renditions of Arthur and his men are a treasure trove for both historians and literary scholars.

The concept of a historical Arthur continues to be an appealing subject mainly because many of the themes in his early depictions contain some historical aspects. In “The Early Arthur: History and Myth,” Hutton discusses the possibility of a historical Arthur using textual, folkloric, and archeological information (2009: 21-35). Hutton uses the archeological findings of Ken Dark to suggest the possibility of a historical Arthur; his discussion of Dark’s archeological findings is worth quoting in its entirety.

Now Dark has pieced together a great deal of scattered evidence to conclude that the forts along Hadrian’s Wall were renovated, reoccupied and linked anew to the old Roman legionary base at York at some time around the year 500. He commented that this looks as if somebody was making an attempt to revive the late Roman regional command of an officer called the *Dux Britanniarum*. He added that an apparent lack of minor kings in the area, suggested by the absence of reoccupied hill forts of the sort common in the south, reinforces the sense of a

single great leader in charge of the whole region at that period. To this he related Gildas's comment that the most important of the monarchs whom he was denouncing, Magloconus, was "almost" the greatest ruler in Britain of his time. The hint here is that there was a greater elsewhere in the island, and that person could have been the one who possessed the revived jurisdiction of the *Dux*.

Ken Dark has therefore identified archaeological evidence for a figure who corresponds very well to the Arthur of the *Historia*, and in doing so found viable solutions to two classic problems of the texts: Gildas's apparent lack of mention of the hero, and the significance of the *Historia*'s emphasis that he was a *dux* as well as, or instead of, a king. Dark himself, however, never speaks of Arthur in the course of this discussion, and for entirely understandable reasons: as an archaeologist of the present time, he is not interested in the legend, and there is nothing that directly relates it to the data that he is analyzing. The implications drawn from his analysis are my own; and I in turn am not attempting to make a case for the "discovery" of a northern Arthur (by appropriating somebody else's scholarship). What I am trying to do, rather, is show how, just as an Arthur-sized gap still exists in the history of Britain, so an Arthur-shaped figure can still plausibly be detected in the archaeological record. (Hutton 2009: 33-34)

There is room to explore Arthur as a historical figure because there are so many questions left unanswered and because the available material points to many figures that may have served as king or even *Dux*.

Despite the evidence or lack of evidence to establish a historical Arthur, the authors that do describe Arthur historically do so in order to discuss concerns about their own historical times, which were centuries removed from the time Arthur might have ruled (c. 500). The early Arthurian texts are now described as pseudo-historical narratives. Some early Latin texts that deal with Arthur are the *Historia Brittonum* ("History of the Britons"), the *Annales Cambriae* ("Welsh Annals"), and several genealogies and hagiographies.<sup>77</sup> The texts present differing versions of Arthur and the

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77. The texts are dated from the ninth to the early twelfth century. Higham writes that "Arthur emerges for the first time in an insular context as a pseudo-historical character in a series of Latin works written in Wales and Brittany in the ninth, tenth, eleventh, and early twelfth centuries" (2009: 30). The hagiographies in particular were written in southwest Wales and date from the tenth century (Higham 2009: 30).

material is adapted from one text to the next. J. Higham observes that “Arthur emerges as a highly adaptable figure, capable of being recast in a variety of guises to fulfill the differing needs of writers producing works at different times, for very divergent audiences” (2009: 43). The early Latin texts suggest an Arthur that can be used for the political and clerical motivations of those writing the texts. Jankulak and Wooding begin, “Insofar as the Arthurian legend is historical, it is the history of the fifth and sixth centuries interpreted in terms of the cultural nationalism of later centuries” (2009: 73); the early Welsh texts utilize Arthur as part of a movement that relies on Celtic tradition and pseudo-historical interests to support an emerging courtly and clerical tradition,<sup>78</sup> a tradition presenting Wales as a unified culture.

One of the best textual examples of the creation of a unified Wales by the Anglo-Normans and its subsequent reappropriation by the Welsh is the *Historia Regum Britanniae* by Geoffrey of Monmouth (c. 1136). Although the *Historia* was written for an Anglo-Norman audience,<sup>79</sup> the Welsh translated the text because it benefited the Welsh. The afterlife of the *Historia* in Wales has had a significant impact on Wales as a unified

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Regarding the various texts mentioned above, Higham describes them as the work of clerics who shared a common tradition (2009: 30).

78. Jankulak and Wooding conclude that “The historical background to the Arthurian legend in the ninth through thirteenth centuries is thus one of a literate Celtic tradition, only traceable from limited sources but clearly with a considerable historical and pseudo-historical interest, finding its place in an emerging court culture. By the end of the first millennium, after centuries of exchange between English, Welsh, and Scandinavians, court culture in Britain and Ireland was already international and multi-ethnic in flavor. The advent of first the reformed religious orders and then the Normans brought further ideas of history into this environment, and drew upon the matter of Britain from both their new conquests in Wales and their earlier connections in Brittany” (2009: 83).

79. See Chapter IV for more information on this subject.

people.<sup>80</sup> Some of the earliest materials about Arthur in Welsh are translations of the *Historia* under the title *Brut y Brenhinedd* (S. Davies 2013: 662). Brynley F. Roberts asserts that Geoffrey's *Historia* granted the Welsh "their first coherent history of themselves, a glorious view of their past, critical of them in parts perhaps, but suggesting for the reader wishing to find it, the possibility of a new British age" (1976: 245). Moreover, Carr writes that "Geoffrey's influence on Welsh historical thinking was profound and long-lived . . . the influence of Geoffrey on Welsh historiography, with the accompanying faith in his account, survived until the eighteenth century and later" (Carr 1995: 5). The influence of the *Historia* in Wales speaks to its afterlife. The *Historia*'s translatability derives from its usefulness to the Welsh, because it both gave Wales a recorded and authorized history and marked the Welsh as those with a right to kingship and succession.

The *Historia* was translated and normalized for a Welsh audience. Geoffrey of Monmouth uses names that were originally Welsh and translates them into Latin so that they fit with the Latin *Historia*. When the *Historia* was translated into Welsh, the Welsh translators changed the names back to Welsh and even added patronymics or epithets from their native Welsh sources, thus completing a progression from Old Welsh to Latin Middle Welsh (Roberts 1995: 111). Maria Tymoczko points out that names are an important parameter for understanding the position of a translation, signaling a form of cultural power that reflects difference between cultures (1999: 159); Tymoczko also highlights the wealth of meanings a name can have in different cultures and that

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80. For more information about the notion of the afterlife of a text, see Walter Benjamin (2000: 15-22).



translating for a dominant culture can marginalize the meaning of a name.<sup>81</sup> Geoffrey of Monmouth's choice to use Welsh names but to render them in Latin points to his position of power as an agent of the dominant Anglo-Norman culture. The choice by the Welsh translators to change the names to their own contemporary Middle Welsh and to add information from their own native sources was a political choice that reclaimed the names as part of Welsh culture.

Most Welsh translations of the *Historia* eliminate the introduction, in which Geoffrey of Monmouth dedicates the *Historia* to Robert Earl of Gloucester and to Waleran Count of Mellent, both important Anglo-Norman figures. Geoffrey's introduction confirms that the *Historia* draws on Welsh tradition, but is an example of the afterlife of Welsh written and oral sources created for an Anglo-Norman audience. The introduction exposes the Anglo-Norman aspects of the text clearly because it highlights that Geoffrey is writing for an Anglo-Norman audience. Eliminating the introduction decontextualizes the *Historia*, allowing for the afterlife of the narrative to become Welsh and for a Welsh audience. The *Historia* creates an Arthur for the Anglo-Normans who are the contemporaries of Geoffrey<sup>82</sup> and later it is translated to fit Welsh literary and historical systems for Welsh audiences, in the process creating one of the most important accounts of the history of Wales, an account that equates Wales with the Anglo-Normans and presents Wales as a unified entity. This analysis is consistent with the fact that *Brut y Brenhinedd* is not only available in some of the earliest Welsh manuscripts, but that there

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81. Already cited in my introduction, Tymoczko writes, "Not only do names in many cultures have lexical meaning, they function as sociolinguistic signs, indicating tribal and family affiliation; gender and class; racial, ethnic, national, and religious identity; and the like" (1999: 223).

82. See Chapter IV for more information on Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia*.

are several versions of the text. The existence of multiple versions of the texts points to its translatability and importance in Welsh courts.

### **A Family of Arthurs: Anxiety, Leadership, and Scrutiny in Early Arthurian Texts**

There are few sources that present the Celtic aspects of the Welsh Arthurian material (Jankulak and Wooding 2009: 73). Nevertheless, many Arthurian texts follow a common Celtic literary pattern that figures the king or chieftain, as well as the heroes of the stories, as much-scrutinized characters. There is reproach for any action or decision on the part of the hero or king that might lead to war or the destruction of the kingdom. This is possible because of the structure of Celtic kingship, best illustrated in Irish literature.<sup>83</sup> The use of a Celtic and Roman past to describe Wales points to the role of the poet as the conscience of the Welsh rulers (Carr 1995: 46 and Jankulak and Wooding 2009: 73). Celtic and Roman ideology are used to describe greatness and follies in past leaders, including Arthur. Arthurian texts portray Arthur as both imposing and dangerous, even when he is not the main character of a tale. The multiple Arthurs present in Welsh Arthurian texts are constructed in order to praise heroic deeds that enhance Welsh sovereignty and to lambast deeds that might lead to Wales being conquered.

In an exposition of the early Welsh Arthurian texts, Brynley F. Roberts (1995) makes two important observations: that Arthur is an ambivalent character, both praised as a great leader and reprimanded for his arrogance, and that he loses stature in the Continental romances. Roberts writes,

The tone of some of the Triads, the ironic, less than serious, treatment of, for example, Arthur's relationships with Cai in *Culhwch ac Olwen*, the mockery of

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83. See Chapter II above.

*Breuddwyd Rhonabwy*, together with the clerical portrayal of Arthur may suggest that the Arthur of Welsh tradition was not the uniformly heroic character which is suggested by most of the evidence. (Roberts 1995: 84)

He concludes by stating that “Arthur, not integral in any foreign story-telling context, never achieves, in Continental romance, the active central role which he has in the earliest Welsh evidence, and even the later Welsh texts fail to maintain his real pre-eminence” (Roberts 1995: 85). Roberts is aware that Arthur, the hero, is not always portrayed in a positive manner and that his character changes drastically in later renditions – both in Wales and on the European continent.

Similarly, Patrick Sims-Williams argues that the *Ymddiddan Melwas a Gwenhwyfar* (“The Dialogue of Melwas and Gwenhwyfar”) is a predecessor of Chrétien de Troyes’s *Chevalier de la Charette* because it assigns the main role to Arthur instead of his knights, pointing to the fact that the portrayal of the characters can help determine information about the text (1995: 60). Sims-Williams formulates this hypothesis in arguing that Welsh narratives influenced Chrétien’s poem. He states that

Behind Chrétien there probably lies a Welsh story about the rescue of Gwenhwyfar from an Otherworld Island of Glass, similar to *Preiddeu Annwn* and its analogues. The Welsh original does not survive, unless the *englynion* are remnants of it, but an adaptation appears already in the Latin *Life of St Gildas* which Caradog of Llancarfan wrote for the monks of Glastonbury in the 1120s or 1130s. (1995: 60)

The statement is made to show that the Welsh material is older and to speculate about an original source of the French version. The Celtic tradition of Ireland and Wales show that an ambivalent portrayal of the heroes was common, which explains why Arthur can be the most imposing character in a tale and still be mocked or derided and why both chieftains and heroes play a crucial role in early Welsh Arthurian literature. An ambivalent depiction of Arthur also aligns Welsh texts with a Welsh Celtic past and with

the role of the poet as the conscience of Welsh rulers. Arthurian texts point to the necessity of thoughtful, just rulers who are able to keep sovereignty and unify Wales.

The depictions of Arthur in Welsh literature present him in a destabilizing manner. Arthur, the hero and king, is both praised and disparaged. In the poem that begins “Pa gur yv y porthaur?” (“What man is the gatekeeper?”), a fragmentary poem found in the Black Book of Carmathen, the gatekeeper will not allow Arthur and his men to come in unless Arthur vouches for them:

[Arthur:]       What man is the porter?  
[Glewlwyd:]    Glewlwyd Mighty-grip.  
                  Who asks it?  
[Arthur:]       Arthur and Cei the Fair.  
[Glewlwyd:]    Who comes with you?  
[Arthur:]       The best men in the world.  
[Glewlwyd:]    Into my house you will not come  
                  unless you deliver them.  
[Arthur:]       I shall deliver them,  
                  and you will see them.  
                  Wythnaint, Elei,  
                  and Sywyon, these three;  
                  Mabon son of Modron,  
                  Servant of Uther Pendragon,  
                  Cystaint son of Banon,  
                  and Gwyn Godybrion;  
                  harsh were my servants  
                  in defending their rights. (Bollard 1994: 17)

Arthur, as their lord, takes charge of his men and vouches for them. Arthur then reveals he is traveling with Cai and several other warriors and praises the warriors and their great skill. The poem also hints that the rest of the men were killed in battle. The line: “The servants that I had, / it was better when they were alive” (Bollard 1994: 18) implies the loss of Arthur’s men.

The tone of the poem implies an Arthur that is not part of the present. Sims-Williams states that “the repeated use of the imperfect tense gives an elegiac color to

Arthur's boasting; perhaps we should imagine an Arthur down on his luck, accompanied by Cai and only three other warriors ('the vultures of Eléi'), and living in the past" (1995: 38). Although the story presents Arthur and his men as part of a glorious past, the gatekeeper is also wary of the men and perhaps what they represent in his present.

The portrayal of Arthur is also ambivalent in *Culhwch ac Olwen* ("Culhwch and Olwen"). The story could be classified as a wooing tale, a well-known classification in Irish literature.<sup>84</sup> Culhwch's stepmother imposes on him the condition that, if he is to marry, he may only marry Olwen, the daughter of Ysbaddaden Bencawr (Ysbaddaden, Chief Giant). In order to fulfill the condition, Culhwch enlists the help of his cousin, Arthur. Arthur and his men help Culhwch by finding out where Ysbaddaden lives and fulfilling Ysbaddaden's demands in order for Culhwch to marry Olwen.<sup>85</sup> In the story, Arthur and Arthur's men travel throughout the land having adventures. At the end of the story, they fulfill all of the demands and Culhwch marries Olwen.

"And you need not thank me for that, but thank Arthur, the man who arranged it for you. If I'd had my way you never would have got her."

. . . And that night Culhwch slept with Olwen. And she was his only wife as long as he lived. And Arthur's men dispersed, each one to his country. And that is how Culhwch won Olwen daughter of Ysbaddaden Bencawr. ("Culhwch and Olwen" 2007: 213)

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84. Brynley F. Roberts states that "[Culhwch ac Olwen] has no title in the manuscripts but the explicit, 'how Culhwch gained Olwen the daughter of Ysbaddaden Chief Giant,' places the tale in the category of wooings, a recognized type in the Old Irish tale classifications" (1995: 74). The tale also combines the "Six go through the World" and "The Giant's Daughter" tale types. For further discussions on this subject see: Kenneth Hurlstone Jackson (1961: 71-80); Doris Edel (1983a and 1983b); Linda M. Gowans (1988: 11-24); J. Radner (1988: 41-60); Roberts (1995: 73-96); Padel (2000); and Helen Fulton (2009a: 94).

85. I am inclined to think that, similarly to "The Adventures of Art," Olwen and her father Ysbaddaden live in a sort of otherworld. See Chapter II for more information on the Otherworld.

In this passage, Arthur is the powerful agent who can fulfill the demands of Ysbaddaden.

In “Culhwch and Olwen,” Arthur is the most imposing character, even if the story is supposedly about Culhwch. Brynley F. Roberts asserts that the Arthur in “Culhwch and Olwen” is already a well-established character whose retinue (Cai, Bedwyr, and so on) have important characteristics that become more apparent in later tales, such as Cai’s rude personality (1995: 79). In the story there is an established Arthurian court where brave warriors exert themselves. More importantly, the tale presents Arthur as a warrior with no equal. Roberts states that

From his entry to Arthur’s court up to the slaying of the giant, Culhwch’s importance and role in the story decline and he all but disappears from the narrative (as the giant remarks when Olwen is won – “and don’t thank me for that, but thank Arthur who brought it about for you”). The Arthurian scene – king, companions, an acknowledge legend of exploits and death – was so well defined that Arthur could not be less than central in any narrative in which he appeared. (1995: 79)

“Culhwch and Olwen” presents an Arthur whose literary presence is well established and an Arthur whose character imposes itself throughout the tale.

Despite the greatness of Arthur in “Culhwch and Olwen,” he is not depicted as infallible. His treatment of Cai shows otherwise.

And then Arthur sang this *englyn*:

A leash was made by Cai

From the beard of Dillus son of Efrai.

Were he alive, he would kill you.

And because of that Cai sulked, so that the warriors of this island could hardly make peace between Cai and Arthur. And yet neither Arthur’s misfortune nor the killing of his men could induce Cai to have anything to do with him in his hour of need from then on. (“Culhwch and Olwen” 2007: 207)

In the passage, Arthur’s mocking poem makes one of his most trusted men leave his side.

The text also indicates that Arthur will have misfortune, that his men will be killed and that he will have an hour of need, foreshadowing the war and conflict that will diminish

Arthur's court and retinue. The fact that Arthur will have need of Cai right after he has insulted Cai serves to illuminate why Cai acts the way he does and may even explain why Arthur will end up in a predicament: because he behaves rashly with those around him. In fact, Arthur's ill-conceived poem makes him one of the "Tri Oberbeird Enys Prydein" or one of the "Three Frivolous Bards of the Island of Britain."<sup>86</sup> The triad points to the fact that Arthur's treatment of Cai was unnecessary and reckless.

*Trioedd Ynys Prydein* ("The Triads of the Island of Britain") also presents Arthur in ambivalent terms. Although many of the triads describe Arthur as a great king, other triads question some of his choices. For example, in triad 2 Arthur is presented as the most generous man in the Island of Britain (*Trioedd* 2006: 5); in triad 52 he is the most exalted prisoner of the island (*Trioedd* 2006: 146).<sup>87</sup> Many of the triads also deal with the various characters found in Arthur's retinue, showing Arthur's prominence and great stature. At the same time the triads illustrate an Arthur prone to arrogance, whose choices

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86. This group is one of the Triads, see triad 12 of the *Trioedd Ynys Prydein* (2006: 22). The triads are said to be compiled in the eleventh or twelfth century but the available texts are from the thirteenth century onward. I am using the 2006 edition of *Trioedd Ynys Prydein: The Triads of the Island of Britain* with an introduction, translations, and commentary by Rachel Bromwich. Her work is based upon a full collation of all of the manuscripts available (xi). Peniarth MS 16 or "the early version" has triads 1-46. Triads 47-69 are found from Llyfr Gwyn Rhydderch (the White Book of Rhydderch) and in Llyfr Coch Hergest (the Red Book of Hergest). Triads 70-80 are found in Peniarth 47, triads 81-86 are in Peniarth 50, and triads 87-96 are later additions (Bromwich 2006: xi).

87. Triad 52 says: "Three Exalted Prisoners of the Island of Britain: / Llyr Half-Speech, who was imprisoned by Euroswydd, / and the second, Mabon son of Modron, / and third, Gwair son of Geirioedd. / And one (Prisoner), who was more exalted than the three of them, was three nights in prison in Caer Oeth and Anoeth, and three nights imprisoned by Gwen Pendragon, and three nights in an enchanted prison under the Stone of Echymeint. This Exalted Prisoner was Arthur. And it was the same lad who released him from each of these three prisons-Goreu, son of Custennin, his cousin" (2006: 146).

affect the island of Britain. For example, in triad 37 R, Arthur “discloses” or disinters the Head of Brân the Blessed: “And Arthur disclosed the Head of Bendigeidfran (Brân the Blessed) from the White Hill, because it did not seem right to him that this Island should be defended by the strength of anyone, but by his own” (*Trioedd* 2006: 95).<sup>88</sup> In triad 59, Arthur’s decision to divide his men into three groups is considered an unfortunate choice (*Trioedd* 2006: 166), implying that this division leads to misfortune for Arthur and his men. These triads depict an Arthur who is unable to defend the island of Britain and who makes decisions that leave the island unprotected and open to attack.

The triads are one of the most significant sources of evidence about the role of Arthur in Welsh literature and Welsh folk tradition. Helen Fulton notes that

The process by which Arthur became drawn into an existing set of folk-tale names and traditions which defined, for medieval Welsh storytellers and their listeners, an idealized period of British political sovereignty is shown most clearly in those Triads where Arthur’s name is added as a fourth item in a pre-existing Triad. In Triad 2, for example, his name is appended in some of the manuscripts to a group of three (2009: 91).

Although many triads portray a positive version of Arthur, others are wary of Arthur and insinuate that some of his actions cause his downfall and defeat, leave the island vulnerable to attack, and bring about the downfall and defeat of Britain. Roberts writes that

“The Triad of the Three Unfortunate Disclosures” (triad 37R) gives Arthur his legendary role as the defender of the Island, but notes that the talismanic burying of Bendigeidfran’s head in the White Hill in London – an episode related in the

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88. The tale of Brân the Blessed is told in the *Mabinogion*, specifically in “Branwen ferch Llŷr” where after a great battle the few men that survive are told by a mortally wounded Brân to take his head back to Britain. After a series of events where the men hold conversations with the head, the head is finally buried facing France to protect Britain from invasions. Bromwich describes the episode as a possible primitive belief “of a (human) burial which acts as a talisman for the defense of the country” (*Trioedd* 2006: 95-96).



*mabinogi* of Branwen – was rendered futile when Arthur revealed it . . . . There is no other evidence for this episode and it cannot be decided how well founded the reference may be, but though Arthur’s role as leader and defender of his realm is central, criticism of his pride and arrogance as potential causes of downfall and deceit seems to be equally an aspect of his legend. (1995: 81-82)

Arthur is considered an excellent hero but his actions are scrutinized, especially when he insults his men or makes decisions that could potentially hurt Britain. The descriptions of Arthur are consistent with a court whose poet functioned as the conscience of the rulers and with a system of courts creating propaganda in favor of Welsh rulers and their kingdoms.

### **Welsh Romances, Welsh Knights, and Welsh Identities**

The Welsh Arthurian texts use native Welsh sources to create an image of Arthur that is consistent with Welsh ideology. The Welsh counterparts to Chrétien de Troyes’s *Erec et Enide*, *Yvain ou Le Chevalier au Lion*, and *Perceval ou Le Conte del Graal* – *Geraint ab Erbin* (*Geraint son of Erbin*), *Chwedl Iarlles y Ffynnon* (*The Lady of the Fountain*, also known as *Owain*), and *Peredur vab Efrog* (*Peredur son of Efrog*), respectively – also tackle important issues for medieval Welsh courtly audiences. The Welsh pseudotranslations and rewritings, however, shift the focus away from native Welsh literature to outside sources, reclaiming the material for Welsh audiences.<sup>89</sup>

Comparisons of the French and Welsh versions usually investigate which version came first and whether the Welsh texts are dependent on or independent of the French

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89. For more information on pseudotranslations and rewritings see Gideon Toury (2012: 50-54) and André Lefevere (1992 and 1987).

versions.<sup>90</sup> Despite the similarities between the French and the Welsh versions, the texts are significantly different. Even from the titles themselves we can begin to see differences between the texts; the Welsh versions use the Welsh names of the main characters and, in the case of *Chwedl iarllles y ffynnawnn*, the title emphasizes the lady rather than the knight. R. L. Thomson writes that

The Red Book . . . names it in the colophon *Chwedyl iarllles y ffynnawn* ‘The tale of the lady (or countess) or the spring (or fountain, or well)’ and so gives the leading place to one of the female characters, possibly one of the highest rank though not the one with the biggest part to play in the narrative, and in fact one whose personal name is never given” (1995: 160).

Both the Welsh and French Arthurian materials follow literary markers from the very different cultures that created them.<sup>91</sup>

Chrétien de Troyes’s versions of the tales portray a crisis in King Arthur’s court; this particular crisis, however, is only present in the French texts. Chrétien’s *Yvain*, for example, begins by delineating a court in crisis. Arthur has fallen asleep, to the consternation of his men. Afterwards, Yvain leaves Arthur’s court in secret, breaking courtly protocol, to arrive at the fountain before Arthur. *The Lady of the Fountain*, the Welsh version of *Yvain*, eliminates this crisis. Arthur’s men are not bothered by Arthur going to sleep. In fact, he is the one that prompts the guests to tell stories. Arthur says: “Men, as long as you do not make fun of me, . . . I would like to sleep while I wait for my food; and you can tell each other stories, and Cai will bring you a jugful of mead and

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90. The debate is known as the *Mabinogionfrage*. For several discussions on the topic see R. L. Thomson (1995: 167-68); Ceridwen Lloyd-Morgan (1995: 193-94); and Rachel Bromwich (1995: 209).

91. I discuss the romances of Chrétien de Troyes in the next chapter (Chapter IV).

some chops” (“*The Lady of the Well*” 2007: 116).<sup>92</sup> There is no outcry because of Arthur’s actions, and it is not Arthur’s knights who move the story forward by entertaining themselves, but Arthur himself who tells them what to do and how to do it. Arthur moves the plot, even if he is asleep as it unfolds.

As in the French *Yvain*, Owain leaves the court secretly to avenge his cousin and prove Cai wrong. In the Welsh counterpart, however, Arthur does not say he will go to the spring to avenge Calogrenant (Cynon in the Welsh version) and therefore Owain does not leave the court because he wants to arrive before Arthur. His secrecy is not due to breaking one of his obligations to his master by disregarding his decision. The specific crisis present in the French version is not found in the Welsh: Arthur never leaves his place of honor and Owain does not undermine Arthur’s decision by leaving. The Welsh romance of *The Lady of the Fountain* does not align with the French version; it has been rewritten to fit a Welsh cultural and literary system.

*Peredur*, the Welsh counterpart of *Perceval*, perhaps best exemplifies the traits that relate the Welsh romances to the rest of the Welsh materials. The very beginning of *Peredur*, for example, places the story in a cultural system that questions unnecessary violence.

Earl Efrog held an earldom in the North, and he had seven sons. Efrog made his living not so much from his land but from tournaments and battles and wars. And as often happens to those who follow battle he was killed, himself and his six sons. And his seventh son was called Peredur. He was the youngest of his seven sons. He was not old enough to go to war or battle – had he been, he would have been killed as his father and brothers were killed. (“*Peredur*” 2007: 65)

From the start, we are told that Earl Efrog and his six eldest sons were killed as a

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92. In the French version, Arthur’s men are upset that Arthur fell asleep because he was entertained by Guinevere and was late.

consequence of their lifestyle. Efrog did not make a living from his land; he made a living by purposely seeking out violence. The text underlines that such a life leads to inevitable loss. The only son to survive is Peredur because he is too young to go to battle. There is a clear reproach in the text of unnecessary violence.

In “Theme and Meaning in *Peredur*,” John K. Bollard discusses the themes in *Peredur* in detail. Bollard states that

This contextual study has helped to reveal that the Welsh story of *Peredur* fits within [a Welsh cultural] milieu and tradition so comfortably that there can be little doubt that it is, in essence and in most detail, a Welsh creation, incorporating, of course, a range of continental influences. (2000: 73)

He concludes by examining the kinds of questions *Peredur* asks of the audience.

Throughout the tale, Peredur’s attitude is similar; he consistently does the best he can with the information he has available, learning from both experience and mistakes. But the relative simplicity of the early and middle episodes has developed into the complexity and ambiguity of the final episodes. Whether one’s actions will produce good or harm may not be easily determined.

The moral and thematic issues in these final episodes have no simple resolution. They are, however, among the most significant questions we might ask ourselves: How do we decide whom to believe or trust? How can we know the right action to take? How do we balance strength, forthrightness, and humility? Surely the questions of behavior raised and developed by this tale, with their particular emphasis on fame, honor, bravery, and courtesy, would be of interest to an aristocratic, courtly Welsh audience in the twelfth, thirteenth, and fourteenth centuries. (Bollard 2000: 88)

*Peredur* expresses a similar ambivalence to kingship as other Welsh Arthurian texts. The end of the tale does not portray a character that has found his place and all the answers. Instead, we are confronted with a text that demands thoughtful examination of kingship, knighthood, and conflict. The text is rendered in Welsh for a Welsh audience.

Both *The Lady of the Fountain* and *Peredur* are rewritings of the romances of Chrétien de Troyes. André Lefevre points out the importance of patronage for the

creation and tenor of rewritings.<sup>93</sup> Welsh patronage clearly supports Welsh Arthurian texts. The texts speak to Welsh courtly audiences about the various themes affecting their own courtly society; at the same time, the rewritings integrate the Welsh court into a transnational milieu beyond the Welsh borders and beyond Britain. Similar to the historical coherence in the rewritings of Geoffrey of Monmouth, the rewritings of Chrétien's texts are made local while they simultaneously present Welsh courts at the same level as other courts, such as the French and Anglo-Norman courts. Welsh Arthurian texts are part of a system that uses the Roman and Celtic past of the Welsh and the mythology of a unified Wales to raise a Welsh courtly milieu on par with other European courts and to shift the Welsh image as the Other of the Anglo-Normans.

### **Conclusions: Ending the Welsh Heroic Age of Arthur**

There are many Arthurs in Welsh literature. One version of Arthur is the imposing warrior king who helps Culhwch win Olwen, but who stumbles when he mocks Cai ("Culhwch and Olwen"); mockery is not the proper behavior of a king, because kings must respect their retinue. This version of Arthur also blunders when he discloses the head of Brân the Blessed because kings should protect their land from war (*Trioedd* 2006, Triad 37R, 94). Triad 51 states that Medrawd is the most dishonored man because he betrayed Arthur (*Trioedd* 2006, Triad 51, 139-40). The same triad also takes considerable space to explain that the Island of Britain is lost to the Saxons, the Picts, and the Scots and that Arthur is mortally wounded in the battle of Camlan, pointing to the fact that Arthur is unable to protect the land from invaders. Despite the imposing and heroic

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93. See Lefevere (1987 and 1992) and Chapter I above.

qualities of Arthur, he is not able to defend his territory. He belongs to a glorious past that no longer exists.

Arthur is not the only Celtic hero who is unable to protect his land or who in some way causes the beginning of the end of a group of people. Tymoczko points out that many Irish and Welsh texts provide an ending to their heroic ages.

All heroic cycles need an ending, for every heroic cycle raises an implicit question. There must be an explanation of how the heroic age ended, in order to explain why the heroic age did not persist to the present. An ideal end for the heroic age is to have the heroes self-destruct in some way rather than be destroyed by an external enemy. In this way the heroes of a cycle can maintain their legendary status as the best of the land and yet still pass away.

To judge from comparative evidence, the Celts seem to have had a favorite version of the self-destruction motif as the ending of a heroic cycle: self-destruction and internecine fighting are often motivated in Celtic literature by conflict over a woman. This is a pattern most well known from the story of Arthur, Mordred, and Guenivere; it is also found in *Branwen* and to a lesser degree in the Tristan story in Welsh literature. (1985-86: 158)

The tales of Arthur and his men present magnificent heroes, but they also function as cautionary tales about the dangers of those who participate in war or those whose actions might lead to war. Moreover, the women fought over in the tales can also signal sovereignty.

The multiplicity of Arthurs in medieval Welsh literature points to a multiplicity of reasons for writing and reciting Arthurian stories. Welsh Arthurian tales performed many roles in Wales: they gave Wales a unified past, helped poets be the conscience of those in power and question unnecessary war, and gave the Welsh courts stature equal to that of other European courts. The stories were part of a Welsh literary and historical system that reappropriated the Welsh position as the Other in order to present a strong culture with an authoritative past that would survive to have a future. The myth of Arthur was perhaps the best tool for developing such decisive and strong propaganda in favor of the Welsh.

England, France, Spain, Iceland, and Italy, among others, all have their own myths of Arthur. Although characters such as Arthur, Tristan, Cai, and Owain are well-known, the wealth of Arthurian texts and characters present in medieval European literature expands the names we associate with Arthurian literature. Different cultures reshape the Arthurian material to fit their own political and historical contexts. Each new medieval rendition, rewriting, and translation of Arthurian texts carries cultural and historical connotations and markers from the cultures that created them. The needs of the cultures and writers help decide the ways in which the material is transmitted and presented. The next chapter moves my study toward Geoffrey of Monmouth and Chrétien the Troyes, two canonical writers of Arthur, to provide different contexts from the Welsh, Irish, Scandinavian, and Iberian materials presented in this project. My research points to the transcultural aspects of Arthurian texts, which must be analyzed from multiple cultural and analytical perspectives.

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## CHAPTER IV

### ARTHUR'S FAMOUS HEIRS: A CANON'S WEB

#### Shifts in the Arthurian Works of Geoffrey of Monmouth and Chrétien de Troyes

The introduction of this dissertation outlines the tendency in Arthurian scholarship to focus on the origins of Arthurian texts, especially when comparing medieval Welsh Arthurian literature with the canonical Arthurian materials, a tendency also prevalent in discussing Arthurian texts of the European peripheries. Scholarly discussions of the indigenous origins of an Arthurian tale are usually centered on works produced within a national boundary, either linguistic or regional, and the text's position as either written before or after other Arthurian texts. Ian Lovecy (1995), for example gives considerable time to Chrétien de Troyes's counterpart of *Peredur*, concluding that *Peredur* is a failure in comparison to Chrétien's version.

Such studies primarily concentrate on finding similarities that aggrandize the canonical texts, at the same time promoting a sense that the Arthurian material is a cohesive unit that follows a traceable development through the tales, reaching its zenith with the canonical French, English, and German texts. Arthurian texts, however, are not, in fact, a cohesive body of material, and comparisons of the Arthurian material have neglected the many differences found in the tales that point to the creation of different Arthurs. One result is that comparisons of the texts treat the material through a national gaze which favors a cohesive analysis.

A close analysis of the Arthurian legend shows that the themes presented in the texts relate to the social and historical contexts of the culture that created the texts. Consequently, comparative analysis of the texts should take into account the social and

historical contexts of the cultures and not merely the potential origin of the plot. This chapter contrasts Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History of the Kings of England* (c. 1135-38)<sup>94</sup> and the romances of Chrétien de Troyes (c.1160-91),<sup>95</sup> some of the most researched Arthurian texts, to demonstrate that they portray Arthur and his subjects differently and that each portrayal is marked by the culture that created the texts.

Translation theory allows for the study of the translatability of Arthurian texts and the ways Arthurian texts are rewritten. My approach, grounded in translation studies, begins with an analysis of the times and places in which the texts were created. The writers create their own great kings based on their own cultures. I analyze the texts of Geoffrey of Monmouth and Chrétien de Troyes by concentrating on several markers that point to their uniqueness. The works of Geoffrey and Chrétien use language and translation to speak to their contemporaries. Geoffrey and Chrétien's texts mention a written antecedent in their introductions, a technique not found in the Welsh and Irish texts discussed in previous chapters. Geoffrey writes in Latin and Chrétien in French, a difference that marks their distinct places and moments of creation and their audiences. Although they both include "supernatural" elements in their texts, they completely transform the Welsh or Celtic otherworld or the otherworld is simply not present. Moreover, their interpretations of Arthur and his relationship with his knights are distinct from the Irish and Welsh texts.

The various ways each author deals with Arthur and his men can be explained by

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94. Ad Putter dates the texts c. 1135 (2009: 36); and Helen Fulton dates them in the period of 1136 and 1138 (2009: 45).

95. John W. Baldwin accepts that Chrétien de Troyes wrote from 1160 to 1191 (2005: 5). June Hall McCash places the patronage of Marie, one of Chrétien's patrons, from 1179 to 1198 (2005: 16).

the cultural and historical context of the material. Because kingship and the relationship of the king to his subjects demonstrate the power relations of the court, the differences can be markers of actual power relationships in the writers' cultures. The construction of the relationships can be best analyzed through the historical facts of the respective cultures and realities of the writers. In each case, Arthur's relationship with his knights and the emphasis on either Arthur or his knights fits the historical realities of the culture in which the Arthurian texts were created.

Chapters II and III have examined the Irish and Welsh kings, reaching the conclusion that both the king and his subjects can play equal roles because of the cultural idea about kingship in Ireland and Wales, namely that the community chooses the king. I conclude that in Irish and Welsh stories both the king and his men play key roles because of the relationship of the king to the communities; community members have the power to give kings their position or to take it away. The stories create a position from which to criticize and question, as well as to praise, kings and heroes because the community (men, women, and even the land) have a say in who becomes king. This chapter continues to explore the various relationships between kings and their subjects and how the portrayal of these relationships reflects their cultures of origin. The chapter also explores the role orality and literacy play in the texts, especially in the context of translation theory. I also explore the depictions of the court in contrast to the fantastical places in the tales, which have been compared to the Irish and Welsh otherworlds.

This chapter is divided into two sections. I discuss first Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae* and second, the romances of Chrétien de Troyes. In each case I provide historical and cultural information that elucidates the ways the texts treat the

kings, their subjects, and the territories they rule, pointing to the transformations each story undergoes. The family resemblances of the texts mark them as part of an Arthurian tradition, but the social and historical contexts of the texts differentiate them.

Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia* portrays a relationship among the kings, his men, and their territory that is not the same as those presented in the Irish and Welsh texts. The *Historia* strongly advocates for a single leader who can unify the kingdom, bringing peace. The land becomes a territory to be conquered and changed. Emphasis is given to the creation and building of roads and cities, and women play only a minor role. By contrast the romances of Chrétien de Troyes concentrate on Arthur's knights, shifting the gaze from the king to his subjects. The texts advocate for travel and adventure, which bring new knowledge and understanding to the knights and improvements to the court. The knights subjugate the lands they encounter. The female characters are closely aligned to this subjugation; in many cases, it is the subjugation of the women to the knights that brings a territory into the court milieu. Thus, the construction of Arthur in the *Historia* and in Chrétien de Troyes's romances differs. Furthermore, both differ from the construction of Irish and Welsh kings and subjects. Although the Irish and Welsh texts alternate between emphasizing the kings and the subjects, the *Historia* focuses on the kings and the romances of Chrétien de Troyes primarily follow the knights rather than King Arthur.

### **Geoffrey of Monmouth's Arthur: One King, One Country**

We know very little about Geoffrey of Monmouth's life. Most of the information is found in his own writing or in ecclesiastical documents. He was a cleric and possibly a



canon at the College of St. George. More than likely he came from Monmouth, on the Welsh border. Some of his contemporaries refer to him as “Gaufridus Artur” or Geoffrey Arthur which suggests his interest in Arthur (Padel 1984: 2). He wrote the *History of the Kings of Britain* while a cleric in Oxford.<sup>96</sup> As Lewis Thorpe discusses in his introduction to the *Historia*, Geoffrey was most likely of Welsh descent (Thorpe 1966: 13).

Nevertheless, when he wrote the text, neither the places nor the men he was associated with were Welsh. Instead, they are from an Anglo-Norman and French milieu. Geoffrey, for example, dedicated the book to Robert Earl of Gloucester, the illegitimate son of King Henry I, and to Waleran Count of Mellent, son of Robert de Beaumont, the Earl of Worcester, neither of whom is associated with Welsh tradition, but instead with the French speaking elite. Thus, his possible Welsh ancestry was not directly connected to his intended readership.

The *History of the Kings of Britain* begins with Brutus, the supposed grandchild of Aeneas, the founder of Rome in the *Aeneid*, and the purported eponym of the name “Britain.” The text catalogues the stories of various rulers of the island, their deeds, conquering expeditions, and the catastrophes associated with their reigns, as well as detailing the times the island itself was conquered. The text further describes the “history” of Britain, marked by the degeneration of the Britons and the ruling of *Loegria* by the Saxons, specifically Adeltand, who was the first Saxon crowned king in Britain. The most descriptive passages outline the devastation of the wars waged on the island, usually caused by inner conflicts; these wars tend to be followed by periods of

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96. By 1152, Geoffrey was ordained a priest and given the bishopric of Asaph in North Wales. Geoffrey did not actually go to Asaph and remained in Oxford where he died c. 1155. See Fulton (2009: 45).

reconstruction and strengthening of the roads and cities on the island by a strong and caring king. Perhaps most importantly, the text articulates the fact that the most terrible forces attempting to conquer the island were aided by men who betrayed their kinsmen.

Arthur is the last great king mentioned in the text and his reign is the most prominent and treated at greatest length in the text. Alongside Arthur, the *Historia* mentions many of the knights presented in Welsh Arthurian tales, including Gawain, Mordred, Kay, and Bedevere.<sup>97</sup> Although the knights play an important independent role in later Arthurian tradition, in Geoffrey of Monmouth's text they serve to increase Arthur's fame and glory, and perhaps also cause his fall.

Geoffrey of Monmouth directly addresses the intent of his account in his dedication. He writes that "At Walter's request I have taken the trouble to translate the book into Latin, although, indeed, I have been content with my own expressions and my own *homely style* and I have gathered no gaudy flowers of speech in other men's gardens" (Geoffrey of Monmouth 1966: 51; emphasis added). He also makes a similar statement in describing a battle between Arthur and Mordred: "[Geoffrey of Monmouth] will, however, in his own *poor style* and without wasting words, describe the battle which our most famous King fought against his nephew, once he had returned to Britain after his victory . . ." (Geoffrey of Monmouth 1966: 257-58; emphasis added). Geoffrey makes it clear that he writes at the request of Walter (who was probably also Anglo-Welsh and was the arch-deacon of Oxford),<sup>98</sup> and says that he writes in his own words

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97. Arthur's nephews, foster-brother, and cup-bearer, respectively.

98. See Harper-Bill and Houts (2002: 203). The role of Walter Map in the creation of the *Historia* has brought to light interesting ideas. Brynley F. Roberts, for

and style. These examples are markers that Geoffrey is literate, and that he is writing his version of the history of Britain for a specific purpose.

In the dedication of the text, Geoffrey of Monmouth stresses that the text is a product of his own language and prose. He also begins the dedication praising Arthur and other great kings by stating that oral tradition has preserved their deeds. He writes,

I have not been able to discover anything at all on the kings who live here before the Incarnation of Christ, or indeed about Arthur and all the others who followed on after the Incarnation. Yet the deeds of these men were such that they deserve to be praised for all time. What is more, these deeds were handed joyfully down in oral tradition, just as if they had been committed to writing, by many peoples who had only their memory to rely on. (1966: 51)

This very first paragraph of the dedication equates the importance of oral tradition with that of written texts. Geoffrey states, however, that he is translating “a certain very ancient book written in the British language” into his own homely language and style (1966: 51). The two statements seem to pull the text in two different directions: he establishes the text he is translating as an ancient text (and qualifying it as ancient in turn makes it authoritative) and he places oral tradition at the same level of importance as written literature. Is Geoffrey using oral tradition to write about Arthur, is he translating from British or Welsh into Latin, or is he doing both?

When Geoffrey of Monmouth says that he is conveying an ancient text in translation in his own homely oral style, he implies he has translated the material and transformed it for his own culture. I would go so far as to say that he uses the ancient oral tales and translates them into his own “homely” Latin to fill in the gaps about the history of the kings of Britain by adding material that benefits his own ideology. Geoffrey

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example, argues that while the use of the ancient book is a topos, Walter might have had access to manuscripts with native Welsh materials (1995: 101).

creates a new history of Arthur, one that may have taken inspiration from the Arthur of Welsh literature and culture, but that does not belong to that cultural or literary system. He is creating his own Arthur for his own Latin-literate contemporaries, who are generally of Anglo-Norman descent or part of that milieu, and who can understand his “homely style,” which he may be implicitly contrasting with the style of the *Aeneid*.<sup>99</sup> Thus, the role of Arthur and his knights in Geoffrey’s account of the kings of Britain is closely linked to Geoffrey’s oral and literary reality.

The *Historia* bears the imprint of Geoffrey of Monmouth’s expressions and ideas because he is creating his own history of the kings of Britain for his contemporaries. Geoffrey of Monmouth does use Welsh and Breton material to construct the *Historia*, but alters them for his contemporaries thus extending the life of the Welsh material by transforming it for a new audience.<sup>100</sup> For example, he takes the Welsh names and changes them to Latin equivalents. Instead of Cai and Bedwyr, his text refers to Kaius and Beduerus as Arthur’s companions; instead of Gwalchmai, Gualgvanus as his nephew; instead of the queen Gwenhwyfar, the queen Guenhuuara. The changed names hint that the material is no longer Welsh, but something new, created for a different audience with different ideas.<sup>101</sup> Geoffrey of Monmouth’s choice to translate the names from Welsh to Latin confers the Welsh characters with legitimacy among the learned classes that would have read the Latin text. In Britain Arthur was considered a historical character well into

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99. I am indebted for this suggestion to Maria Tymoczko (personal communication).

100. See Walter Benjamin (2000) and Chapter I above.

101. See Maria Tymoczko (1999: Chapter I et passim).

the later Middle Ages, thanks to Geoffrey's *Historia*,<sup>102</sup> pointing to his success in legitimizing the Welsh characters as historical figures.<sup>103</sup>

Oral influence in the *Historia* also changes significantly from that of the Irish and Welsh texts.<sup>104</sup> The *Historia* is written in medieval Latin, a language associated with written literature; even if the introduction and the text mention an oral background, the oral substratum is not structurally apparent in the Latin version. The *Historia* also mentions that it is based on another book. The literary nature and supposed oral antecedents of the *Historia* are both used to give validity to the text.<sup>105</sup>

The Celtic representation of the otherworld is absent in the *Historia*. Geoffrey of Monmouth provides only one glimpse of the fantastic, which appears in his "Prophecies of Merlin" about the greatness of Arthur; this text was written before the *Historia* and it exists as a document on its own.<sup>106</sup> This segment reads differently from the rest of the text because it prophesizes Arthur's future, whereas the rest of the book historicizes Arthur. The change in tone implies that this section is disconnected from the rest of the text, and although Arthur is the subject of the prophecies, he does not participate actively in them. The "Prophecies of Merlin" also uses symbolism to describe the attack of the

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102. See Putter (2009: 43); and J. A. Burrow (2009: 69).

103. As discussed in Chapter III above, later Welsh translators of the *Historia* changed the Latinized Old Welsh names into Middle Welsh. They also eliminated the introduction.

104. On the oral elements in the Irish and Welsh materials, see Chapter II above.

105. Although the Irish texts do not mention any oral antecedents, orality is an inherent characteristic embedded in the structure of the texts. See Chapter II above.

106. For example, in 1218 the Icelandic monk Gunnlaugr Leifsson translated "The Prophecies of Merlin" (titled *Merlínús Spá*) into native meter (*fornyrðislag*).

Saxons on the Britons, a technique that is not used in the rest of the *Historia*. For example, Geoffrey writes, “Alas for the Red Dragon, for its end is near. Its cavernous dens shall be occupied by the White Dragon, which stands for the Saxons whom you have invited over. The Red Dragon represents the people of Britain, who will be overrun by the White One” (Geoffrey of Monmouth 1966: 171).

By separating the fantastical elements from the reality of Arthur and the court Merlin lives in, the prophecies turn Arthur into a secular messiah who is predicted to repel the Saxons. Fulton writes that “Arthur is represented as the true product of prophecy; as a secular messiah, his coming is predicted by Merlin as the ‘boar of Cornwall’ who will repel the foreigners (the Saxons), command the forests of Gaul, and strike fear into the House of Romulus (Rome)” (2009: 56). Thus, the prophecies use a supernatural system that has been accepted since biblical times. The prophecies reveal that Arthur will be great and will guard the Britons for many years: “He who will achieve these things shall appear as the Man of Bronze and for long years he shall guard the gates of London upon a brazen horse” (Geoffrey of Monmouth 1966: 172).

Geoffrey of Monmouth’s Arthur does not engage with the otherworld; he does not even play an active part in the *Historia* until two sections after the “Prophecies of Merlin.” Merlin himself does not enter into any dealings with the otherworld but only prophecies about the future. This is because in the *Historia* there is no otherworld. We can talk about the “Prophecies of Merlin” as political prophecy (Putter 2009: 39), a form of writing that was part of a belief system well-known in Geoffrey’s time and culture and in Welsh culture as well. Nevertheless, the prophecies do not reflect the Irish and Welsh view of the supernatural, which allowed heroes and poets to engage with the otherworld

physically and directly.

In Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia*, Britain has many enemies who try to conquer the island. In moments of peace, Britain is described in a utopian manner, paired with depictions of those who want to exploit the island's riches. The Romans and the Saxons are very successful in conquering Britain, and both groups of people are introduced into the island by the treachery of an insider. First the Romans, with Caesar at the forefront, twice to try to conquer Britain without success thanks to the prowess of Cassivelaunus as king of the defenders, but eventually succeed with the help of Androgeus. Second, the Saxons are invited to the island by Vortigern, a man who gains power through treachery. The role of Cassivelaunus in the text illustrates that the presentation of Arthur as a great ruler is not unique to Arthur, but part of the structure of the text where there is a tradition of heroism.

Cassivelaunus is the king of the Britons and his strong leadership keeps Caesar at bay and off the island. The description of Cassivelaunus portrays an agile warrior who is kind and values his family. This portrayal is similar to that of Arthur later in the text. Cassivelaunus rules a peaceful country following the tradition of other kings before him. The kings are described as "compassionate" to their people, "righteous," and "administrators of justice." Lud,<sup>107</sup> the brother of Cassivelaunus and king before Cassivelaunus, is depicted as famous for his town planning activities, which lead to the

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107. Geoffrey of Monmouth writes that from Lud comes the name London. "However many other cities he might possess, this one he loved above all and in it he passed the greater part of each year. As a result it was afterwards called Kaerlud and then, as the name became corrupted, Kaerlundein. In a later age, as language evolved, it took the name London, and later still, when the foreign invaders landed and conquered the country, it was called Lundres. When Lud died his body was buried in the above-named city, near to the gateway which in the British tongue is still called Porthlud after him, although in Saxon it bears the name Ludgate" (1966: 105-106).

reconstruction of towns, houses, and cities (Geoffrey of Monmouth 1966: 106).

Cassivelaunus's great kingdom comes to an end with the defeat of Britain by the Romans. The Romans are able to conquer Britain because Cassivelaunus has a conflict with one of his own men, Androgeus. This conflict between the king and another powerful figure who opposes the king's wishes brings about the defeat of Britain by Rome. The struggles between Cassivelaunus and Androgeus, however, are described in an ambivalent way. Even though Androgeus is portrayed more negatively than Cassivelaunus, their respective descriptions establish that both are at fault for the events that lead to the Romans' victory. The king is too angry and he ravages his own lands. As a result, Androgeus feels he has no choice and therefore betrays his countrymen. The description of Androgeus is not favorable but is also not condemning, because the introduction of Roman values is considered a positive influence in the text. The Romans, like the Britons, are supposedly descendants of Aeneas of Troy. In addition, the Romans are described as the rightful rulers of the world and the propagators of the Christian faith.<sup>108</sup> In fact, it is thanks to the Romans that Britain becomes Christian, a distinction that is used later in the text to contrast the Britons with the Saxons.

In the *Historia* the Saxons are introduced to Britain via a shipwreck and through the treacherous actions of a leader named Vortigern. Vortigern is not the rightful ruler of Britain. He uses treachery against the sons of Constantine to gain the kingdom and he betrays the Picts in the process. Vortigern's need for additional men to fight against the Picts and the imminent threat of the rightful heirs compels him to forge an alliance with the Saxons.

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108. Geoffrey, for example, describes the Romans as "the acknowledged overlords of the whole world" (1966: 121).



“I am greatly grieved,” replied Vortigen, “by your belief, which, indeed, can better be called unbelief; but all the same I am delighted that you have come, for either God Himself, or someone else, has brought you here to help me at a most convenient moment. My enemies harass me on every side; and if you share with me the hardship of my battles, then I will welcome you in all honor to my kingdom and enrich you with gifts of all sorts and with grants of land.” (Geoffrey of Monmouth 1966: 157)

The treachery of Vortigern to others makes him the enemy of the Picts, Ambrosius, and Utherpendragon. The threats that he himself creates force him to invite the Saxons to Britain, a choice that helps bring about the destruction of the Britons. Geoffrey introduces Arthur and his men through this pseudo-historical context.

Arthur is described in a manner similar to all the great kings of Britain presented in the text. Geoffrey of Monmouth depicts Arthur as a generous man and a brave warrior who is loved by his men. The first time we meet Arthur, he exemplifies these qualities: “Arthur was a young man only fifteen years old; but he was of outstanding courage and generosity, and his inborn goodness gave him such grace that he was loved by almost all the people” (Geoffrey of Monmouth 1966: 212). The deeds of his warriors are, in turn, reflections of Arthur’s greatness. His capacity to unite his people and the young men of his country for one common cause rewards his people with peace and prosperity. The *Historia* establishes Arthur as an incredible warrior who unites Britain and conquers “the world.”

Arthur is described as a great leader. Nonetheless, like all the other great kings of Britain whose kingdoms fail, he is betrayed by one of his own: “Mordred, in whose care he had left Britain, had placed the crown upon his own head. What is more, this treacherous tyrant was living adulterously and out of wedlock with Queen Guinevere, who had broken the vows of her earlier marriage” (Geoffrey of Monmouth 1966: 257).

While Arthur is conquering other lands, Mordred makes a treaty with Chelric, the leader of the Saxons. He also makes a treaty with the Scots, the Picts, and the Irish to defeat Arthur. In the resulting battles, many great men die, including Gawain, Mordred, and Arthur himself. The deaths on both sides are great and Britain never truly recovers. The Saxons start dominating and civil war between the heirs of Mordred and Arthur continues and undermines any defense against the Saxons.

The text points out that the treachery of individuals searching for power over the rightful rulers of the island generates chaos and mayhem, creating civil strife. A strong king who controls the island maintains peace, rebuilds the towns, and brings fame to all the people. This allows the king and other valiant men to conquer other countries, make fortunes, and create names for themselves as warriors. By contrast, internal conflict created by individuals who want more power than they deserve brings civil war, invites other countries to conquer the weakened towns, and consequently brings the destruction of the land and its people.

Because Arthur is a strong king who can unite the island and bring peace, the text eliminates any ideas about the possibility of more than one person having any rights to Britain. Thus, his knights serve to make him a better king, and Mordred serves to cause the downfall of Arthur to illustrate the perils of internecine conflict. The end of the text makes Geoffrey of Monmouth's intentions clear.

You foolish people, weighed down by the sheer burden of your own monstrous crimes, never happy but when you are fighting one another, why have you so far weakened yourselves in domestic upsets that you, who need to submit far-distant kingdoms to your own authority, are now like some fruitful vineyard which has gone sour and you cannot protect your own country, wives and children from your enemies? Keep on with your civil squabbling and forget what the gospel says: "Every kingdom divided against itself shall be brought to desolation, and a house divided against itself shall fall." Because your kingdom was divided against itself,

because the lunacy of civil war and the smoke-cloud of jealousy obscured your mind, because your pride did not permit you to obey a single king, that is why you see your fatherland ravished by the most impious heathens and your homestead overturned one upon the other, all of which things those who come after you will lament in the future. (1966: 264)

This summarizes Geoffrey's ideology: civil war and internal conflict have destroyed and will destroy Britain. The fact that this is the message of his text is not surprising, considering that in 1135 civil war broke out in Britain.

Geoffrey's *Historia*, in fact, is one of several texts that discuss the civil war between King Stephen and Matilda, as Paul Dalton observes.

The works of Geoffrey of Monmouth, Henry of Huntingdon, Geoffrey Gaimar, and Ailred of Rievaulx were all intended, in part, to appeal to those who might be or were engaged in sin, treachery, and armed aggression to mend the error of their ways, prevent and stop the fighting, and avoid thereby the disastrous consequences of their actions, consequences that, in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia*, were manifest in the cataclysmic destruction of Norman rule in England. They were another of the many and varied means by which some churchmen, and some of their secular patrons and friends, sought to defuse the civil war of King Stephen's reign, bring it to an end, and bolster the threatened British hegemony of the Normans. In the process, they played a significant part in transforming, in historical literature at least, the nature of English identity. (2005: 712)

Thus, we can best understand Geoffrey of Monmouth's portrayal of Arthur by looking at his cultural context, as well as his literary system already discussed above.<sup>109</sup> In 1120 William, the son of Henry I died leaving no heir to the throne.<sup>110</sup> Henry tried to avert a crisis by making his men swear allegiance to his daughter Matilda in 1127 and 1131. Stephen, the nephew of Henry I, and the rest of Henry's men did so, but they had many

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109. For an excellent synopsis of the *Historia* and its cultural contexts, see Dalton (2005). For information on England and Henry I, see William of Malmesbury (1998) and Warren C. Hollister (2001).

110. Note that if the English had the Irish or Welsh system of kingship, they would not have been in this bind . . . they would be in a different one.

reservations, especially after Matilda married Geoffrey of Anjou in 1128.<sup>111</sup> There was also tension between Henry and the people of Wales and Scotland.<sup>112</sup>

Once Henry died, Stephen took back his oath and had the nobles swear allegiance to him. His poor leadership skills meant that many nobles stole land from each other and gave him little respect. Matilda and her husband led several campaigns against Stephen at the same time as rebellion broke out in Wales and Scotland.<sup>113</sup> Dalton summarizes this situation as follows.

In England, Stephen faced rebellions and a Scottish invasion of the North in 1136, and in 1138 he was confronted by more serious and widespread risings and two further major Scottish incursions. During the second of these, a Scottish army defeated an English force at Clitheroe in Lancashire, and another entered North Yorkshire and fought the Battle of the Standard. In the same period (1136–38), Anglo-Norman power suffered major reverses in Wales inflicted by widespread Welsh rebellions, the most serious of which, led by Owain and Cadwaladr (sons of King Gruffudd ap Cynan of Gwynedd), led to the Welsh reconquest of nearly the whole of Ceredigion. (2005: 693)

The sovereignty of the English was in jeopardy within their own borders as well as

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111. See Dalton (2005: 692); Hollister (1986: 145–69); William of Malmesbury (1998: xxxvii–xlii); and Edmund King (2000: 271–96 and 289–91).

112. Paul Dalton writes that “Trouble was also brewing in Wales and Scotland from c. 1120, if not before. In 1121 Henry campaigned in Wales, for only the second time in his reign, to deal with rebellions. Welsh resistance probably continued to simmer thereafter. Gerald of Wales claimed that the Flemings who had settled in Wales sold their possessions and left the country a year to six months before Henry I’s death (December 1135), because they feared future Welsh reprisals. In 1121–22 there were also signs of political tension between England and Scotland, and although King David of Scots swore the oath to Empress Matilda in 1127 and remained loyal to Henry I, his ambitions to secure control of large parts of northern England became manifest soon after Henry died” (2005: 693).

113. Dalton writes that “Stephen reneged on his oath of 1127 and secured his coronation. But Matilda disputed his royal title, and her husband Geoffrey led several invasions of Normandy during the next few years, a time when the duchy was further disturbed by baronial warfare and uprisings” (2005: 693). See Chapter III above for a Welsh perspective on the events.

Scottish and Welsh territory. Geoffrey of Monmouth was well aware of the shifts occurring in England at the time of the writing of the *Historia*.

Geoffrey of Monmouth dedicated the *Historia* to Robert Earl of Gloucester, who was in favor of Matilda rather than Stephen, and Waleran Count of Mellent, who fought in favor of Stephen rather than Matilda. Geoffrey wanted the strife to end and the civil war to stop because they threatened to destroy the kingdom, as Dalton indicates.

Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia*, especially its *Prophecies*, needs to be interpreted against this background of civil war and threats to Norman dominion over England and Wales, anticipated and actual. Geoffrey was greatly concerned in the *Historia* with the passage of dominion over Britain from the Britons to the Saxons, from the Saxons to the Normans, and from the Normans back to the Britons in the shape of their Welsh and Breton descendants. He was intent on using history and prophecy to teach his powerful contemporaries that, unless they mended the errors of their ways and terminated the civil war in which they were engaged, they would lose their power over England to foreign invaders. (2005: 694)

In this context, the importance of portraying Arthur as the main figure and his knights as secondary characters becomes clear. Geoffrey of Monmouth is speaking against civil war and revealing what for him is the best, most lasting solution to the crisis: freedom, peace, and unity under one leader.

The relationships among the king, his kingdom, and his people in the *Historia* are intimate but are not about reciprocity, as it is in the Irish tales. The relationships are about conquest, strength, and succession, to which Mordred has no right. Geoffrey of Monmouth speaks of building roads and farms and of conquering and pillaging other lands for their riches. This description exemplifies the expectations Geoffrey of Monmouth and his contemporaries had for a good king. Geoffrey's specific version of kingship is significantly influenced by the civil war, rebellion, and strife that plagued twelfth-century England. The notions of a good king are quite distinct from those of the

early Irish and Welsh tales.<sup>114</sup>

The role of Arthur, particularly in England, was political and historical well into the fourteenth century. J. A. Burrow writes that

The peoples of England and Wales naturally had a particular interest in him – the Welsh as an ancestral Celtic hero, the English as a great predecessor of their own kings. Both Edward I and Edward III cited Arthur's conquests, as faithfully recorded by Geoffrey of Monmouth, in support of their claims to overlordship of Scotland; and both of them liked to represent themselves as latterday Arthurs, notably when in 1344 Edward III proposed to set up his own Round Table. Arthur still belonged, in fact, to the real world of history and modern politics, and it seems that most readers would have learned about him, not from romances, but from chronicles, especially Geoffrey's Latin *Historia Regum Britanniae* (*History of the Kings of Britain*) and its vernacular derivatives, chief among them the *Roman de Brut* of the Anglo-Norman poet Wace. (2009: 69-83)

The *Historia* is an excellent case study illustrating how literature and translations both shape and are shaped by their environments, creating a historical account of Arthur that has lasting effects in England and Wales, and which in turn helps to shape Arthurian literature. In England, in particular, Arthur is treated historically well into the late Middle Ages and even later, with *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and Malory's rewriting of the Vulgate cycle as significant later products of Arthurian literature in English.

### **The Arthur of Chrétien de Troyes: The Knights that Could**

In twelfth-century France, Arthur and his men take two different roles in the literature. As Jane Taylor writes,

On the one hand . . . [there was] an historical Arthur, the Arthur whose life-story and political mission were celebrated by the unimpeachable Geoffrey of Monmouth and his authoritative verse translator and adapter Wace. On the other . . . [there was] a sequence of wonderfully inventive verse romances which focused on individual heroes more or less loosely attached to Arthur and his Round Table:

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114. See Chapters II and III above for more information on Welsh and Irish kingship.

the romances principally of Chrétien de Troyes, of course, but also of the Tristan tradition. (2009: 53)

The role of Arthur and his men shifts in France, particularly with the work of Chrétien de Troyes, who emphasizes the men of Arthur over Arthur himself.

Almost nothing is known of Chrétien de Troyes, other than that he was probably a cleric and perhaps a minstrel (Putter 2009: 44). He was writing in or came from Troyes and his patrons were Marie de Champagne and possibly Count Philip of Flanders. He is known for writing *Erec et Enide* (*Erec and Enide*), *Lancelot ou Le Chevalier à la charrette* (*Lancelot or The Knight of the Cart*), *Cligès*, *Yvain ou Le Chevalier au Lion* (*Yvain or The Knight of the Lion*), and *Perceval ou Le Conte du Graal* (*Perceval or The Story of the Grail*). Ad Putter writes that

Because Wace and Lazamon believed Geoffrey's account of Arthur's reign to be true, they did not take great liberties with the story they inherited. It needed a writer who felt no obligations to history to change the face of Arthurian literature: that writer was Chrétien de Troyes. About his life we know little more than what he tells us in his Arthurian romances, *Erec*, *The Knight with the Lion* (*Yvain*), *The Knight of the Cart* (*Lancelot*), *Cligès* and *The Story of the Grail* (*Perceval*). His name suggests he came from Troyes, where the Count and Countess of Champagne (Henry the Liberal and Marie) had their main residence. *The Knight of the Cart* addresses "my lady Marie," and the unfinished *Story of the Grail* is dedicated to Philip of Alsace, Count of Flanders. After Henry the Liberal's death on crusade in 1181, Philip briefly courted his widow Marie – a period to which Chrétien's dedication of his last romance perhaps belongs. (2009: 43-44)

Despite the little information available, it is known that Chrétien de Troyes translated and wrote for several patrons. The specific dates of his works are still in question, but it is generally accepted that he wrote between 1160-91 or during the lifetimes of Count Henry the Liberal (1152-81), Countess Marie (1164-98), and their son Count Henry II (1187-97) (Baldwin 2005: 5).

The surviving romances of Chrétien de Troyes vary in content and character, but they all portray a knight of King Arthur's court going on adventure. Matilda Bruckner states that

Chrétien constructs his plot as a series of episodes centered on combat and adventure, connected by one or more quests. *Aventure* is a key term and signals through its etymology that "what will happen" on the hero's route will put him to the test and form his identity. . . . Chrétien's art of conjunctions becomes apparent when he moves from the short-story-like structures of his source material to the complex arrangement of a romance where multiple segments are layered together: an initial series of adventures ends in success (here marked by marriage), but a crisis puts into question the hero's identity and necessitates a second series of adventures, culminating in superior achievement and enhanced heroic status. (2008: 82)

Chrétien de Troyes's knights thus learn to be truly civilized men because of their superiority as knights and courtly subjects.

Both *Yvain* and *Perceval* involve this type of narrative structure. In their adventures, the two protagonists learn to be better knights because of their adventures.<sup>115</sup> They learn to be chivalrous in the court and on the roads. Yvain, for example, betrays his wife by breaking his promise to stay on the road only for a year; he spends the remainder of the story learning to keep his promises as he travels and in the court. Emphasis is clearly placed on the knights and not on Arthur in Chrétien de Troyes's stories.

Although Chrétien de Troyes's romances function as texts belonging to the Arthurian system, there is no proof that they are influenced by Irish and Welsh texts directly. Bruckner suggests that Chrétien de Troyes draws on the *Historia* and the *Roman de Brut* by Wace (c. 1155), its Anglo-Norman French adaptation (Bruckner 2008, 81). Despite the lack of proof, there exists an assumption that even with the differences

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115. The term knight has several connotations; for example the word *knight* is translated into Spanish as *caballero*, which means both "knight" and "gentleman/noble."



among the texts, the Welsh and Irish texts must have been the original sources.<sup>116</sup>

Like Geoffrey of Monmouth, Chrétien de Troyes says that his romances are based on other older books. For example, he introduces *Perceval* thus: “Therefore Chrétien will not be wasting his efforts as he labors and strives, on the count’s orders, to tell in rhyme the finest story ever related in a royal court. That is the Story of the Grail, found in the book the count gave him” (*Perceval* 1991: 374-75). The introduction tells us that Chrétien de Troyes claims to have transformed another book into French so as to recite the material to his contemporaries. Owen states regarding this passage that

The “book” Chrétien mentions as his source has prompted much conjecture. I have proposed as its likely contents some form of the Fair Unknown legend, itself exploiting Celtic material that can be traced back to Welsh and Irish myth. It was probably in French or Anglo-Norman and may have been in prose or verse. (1991b: 521)

There is, however, no proof whatsoever about this book; it is unknown whether it even existed or not. Both Geoffrey of Monmouth and Chrétien de Troyes claim that they are creating their texts to speak to their contemporaries because they both write at the request of someone else. Although Geoffrey states that he uses “homely” language, he is writing in Latin, the lingua franca of Europe spoken in churches and monastic settings. Chrétien de Troyes however writes in French not Latin, marking the texts as aimed at the court, to be read out loud and shared with the nobles of Champagne.<sup>117</sup>

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116. See Roger Sherman Loomis (1963); D. D. R. Owen (1991b: 521 and 1968); K. Sarah-Jane Murray (2008); John Carey (2007).

117. *Romanz* was widely used in government settings as well. The *Magna Carta*, for example, was translated into French a few years after being written in Latin. See the French version of the *Magna Carta* (Rouen: Bibliothèque municipale, MS Y. 200, Fos. 81r-87v). Copied c. 1219-26 to facilitate its dissemination in Hampshire, this version was circulated to the political community by Elias of Dereham, archbishop of Canterbury (“Magana Carta”).

In the romances of Chrétien de Troyes, language, form, and translation are markers that Chrétien is creating a new image for the Arthurian themes. First, he uses language differently because he is writing in *romanz*; in other words, he is writing in French instead of Latin. French was a language that the court could understand and that Chrétien used to entertain the court, making Chrétien's work part of the French-speaking courtly milieu.

Maria Tymoczko points out that translation plays a central role in the rise of romance in France in the twelfth century. She writes the following.

Let us turn to the way these early challengers of the *chanson de geste* relate to romance. The relationship is in the first instance philologically direct, for the earliest term for such a translation is *romanz* (roman) – literally, a literary work in a vernacular romance language, such as French, as opposed to literature in another language, Latin in particular. Thus, the rise of romance as a genre is preceded in the twelfth century by a system of translation called by the same term as romance later was. This translation system was heteroclitic in genre from a modern point of view, but coherent as a system challenging the dominant poetics and ideology of traditional oral epic.

The later development of the genre of romance involves the shift of the semantics of the term *roman* away from translation in general and its use as a more restricted genre term. This development can be construed as happening no earlier than Chrétien de Troyes, and it comes after at least two generations of the use of the term *roman* in the more general sense of “translation into the vernacular” or “literary work written in the vernacular.” (Tymoczko 1985: 12-13)

The genre of romance not only borrows its name from the language of translation, but it also acts as a pseudotranslation by characterizing itself as a translation of another book (Tymoczko 1986: 12-13). Thus, translation in twelfth-century France is used to create innovative techniques in literary texts (Tymoczko 1986: 12-13).

Translations and the genre of romance are also associated with the introductions of new ideologies and forms of thinking as Tymoczko indicates.

In the translations of the mid twelfth century, there are ideological elements associated with romance: the introduction of new codes of manners and customs,

including the elements of *courtesie*, a taste for luxury and wealth, the introduction into narrative of concepts of *amour courtois*, an adaptation into narrative of the lyric tradition and ethos from Occitan literature, the growing interest in and recognition of women and their power. Thus, the translations of the mid twelfth century had a primary function in expressing or promoting a new ideology as well as a new poetics. All these elements indicate that the translation system was associated with a shift in value structures, precisely the same shift we associate with romance, but a shift well underway by the time romances began to be written. (1986: 13-14)

Translations and romances in twelfth-century French literature transformed their material to fit in an emerging cultural system that promoted courtly ideals and chivalry.

An important aspect of romance is the combination of chivalry and courtly love. There is much lively debate on the subject, thus, drawing an exact distinction between chivalry and courtly love is difficult, if not impossible. Nevertheless, both play a crucial role in the discussion of medieval literature by modern scholars.<sup>118</sup> Wollock writes that “The idea that love is ennobling and necessary for the education of a knight comes out in the lyrics of this period, but also in the romances of knighthood. Here the truest lovers are now the best knights” (2011: 42). Courtly love and chivalry become a means to dream about the object of desire in the texts of Chrétien de Troyes. The notions of courtly love and chivalry are not present in the early Irish texts and are not a prominent motif in the Welsh texts.<sup>119</sup>

Another important marker establishing the ways that the romances transformed the Arthurian material is the handling of fantastical elements, which differs dramatically between the romances of Chrétien de Troyes and Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *Historia*. It

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118. For further information on chivalry and courtly culture, I suggest Roger Boase (1977), Maurice Keen (1984), and Jennifer G. Wollock (2011), among others.

119. As I mentioned in my previous chapter, elements of romance make their way into the Welsh texts. The elements, however, are changed in the Welsh system.

has often been argued, for example by John Carey, that the visit of Perceval to the Fisher King's castle is a standard trip to the Celtic otherworld (Carey 2007: 109-15). In *Perceval Chrétien* writes that

Two other youths came, holding in their hands pure gold candlesticks inlaid with black enamel. The lads carrying the candelabras were extremely handsome. At least ten candles were burning in each candelabra.

A damsel, who came with the youths and was fair and attractive and beautifully adorned, held in both hands a grail. Once she had entered with this grail that she held, so great a radiance appeared that the candles lost their brilliance just as the stars do at the rising of the sun or moon. After her came another maiden, holding a silver carving-dish. The grail, which proceeded ahead, was of pure refined gold. And this grail was set with many kinds of precious stones, the richest and most costly in sea or earth: those stones in the grail certainly surpassed all others. (*Perceval* 1991: 417)

Carey argues that the connections between the otherworld in the Irish tales and the Fisher King's castle are striking because many Irish texts describe the otherworld as a place filled with light, food, and beautiful people. Nevertheless, the above description does not prove that Chrétien is repeating Celtic images.

The above description is also an international literary motif. Joachim Bumke writes that

Medieval reality was very different. Our sources tell us very little about the lives of the common people, their poverty and troubles, their oppressive bondage. Even for the rich and noble the conditions of daily life were anything but pleasant. Tight, gloomy spaces in the castles, unimaginably primitive hygienic conditions, a lack of light and heating, the absence of expert medical care, an unhealthy diet, rough table manners, degrading sexual behavior towards women: this was the reality. . . .

In counterpoint to these negative manifestations of medieval life, the courtly poets constructed an image of society that lacked everything that made life difficult and oppressive, and from which all economic and social pressures and all political conflicts were excluded. (1991: 1 and 4)

The use of excessive light and food found in Chrétien de Troyes's texts are part of a systemic portrayal of the courts found in medieval literature, especially in texts from the

High Middle Ages, rather than necessarily being a specific evocation of the Celtic Otherworld.<sup>120</sup> The Fisher King's castle is clearly not the otherworld, however exotic; it is part of the setting Perceval lives in because the castle belongs to his family.

Furthermore, the Fisher King is a vassal of King Arthur. In Chrétien de Troyes's work there is no otherworld. There are, however, elements of the fantastic.

The fantastic as part of a literary milieu is complex and there are several critical approaches that can help us understand its presence in the texts of Chrétien de Troyes. Rosemary Jackson argues, for example, that fantasy literature is subversive and is a dialogue between the real and the imagined (1981: 3-7). Similarly Eric Rabkin describes the fantastic as something contrary to expectation, but also based on reality, that can be achieved by the willing participation of the reader (1976: 7-8).<sup>121</sup> Thus, the reader is complicit in the construction of the fantastic.

Rabkin argues that

What we have been examining is the complex process whereby the intra-literary history of genres, and the extra-literary history of readers, together generate new genres and modify the perspectives held in the world by readers. This dialectic process, with its concentration on the fantastic, compliments normal literary history, which traditionally makes literature a reflex of historic moments or sees literature pursuing an independent growth tied only to the biographies of its authors. Our more detailed analytic methods flesh out traditional insights and join them in a dialectic, developmental view of the history of literature and its audience. (1976: 181-182)

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120. Bumke (1991) describes courtly life up until the 1300s. Although he uses several texts from the twelfth century, he mainly concentrates on material from 1100-1300.

121. There are many other important theorists discussing the fantastic in particular and fantasy literature in general. I have quoted Rabkin because his work is the most useful for my discussion on the use of the fantastic in the works of Chrétien de Troyes. Other important proponents of fantasy theory include Gray (2009), Mendlesohn (2008), Sandner (2004), Nikolajeva (2003), Brooke-Rose (1981), Jackson (1981), Irwin (1976), Scholes (1975), and Klinger (1971), among others.

Rabkin also states that

The wide range of the preceding chapters, dealing primarily with narrative materials, suggests that the fantastic may be a basic mode of human knowing. The structure of diametric reversal, which signals the fantastic in narrative, might, in theory, arise just as readily in any mental activity that occurs through time or in any temporally extended perception. In theory at least, our perspectives on science, poetry, politics, theology, or on anything whatever, are as subject to reversal as are our perspectives on the ground rules of a narrative world. If such a diametric and fundamental reversal were to occur while perceiving some member of the class of phenomena that is science, poetry, politics, theology, or whatever, then that reversal should produce the affect we associate with the fantastic. (1976: 189)

For both Jackson and Rabkin, fantasy literature has an intimate connection with the reader, who must accept the fantasy world. The vacillation between the real and the imagined is an important aspect that helps readers suspend their disbelief and allow themselves to be engulfed by the fantasy story. Chrétien de Troyes uses the authority of an “ancient text” to deliver a sense of universal courtly truth that diverges from experiences of his contemporaries.

The fantastic in the works of Chrétien de Troyes helps the audience explore the new systems emerging in the French-speaking world to which he belonged. The descriptions of Arthur’s court in the romances of Chrétien de Troyes are similar to the descriptions of the Fisher King’s castle. *Yvain, Erec et Enide*, and *Lancelot* all begin with a festival filled with food, wonderful knights, and beautiful ladies. *Erec and Enide* begins: “One springtide, on Easter Day, King Arthur held at his stronghold of Cardigan a court more lavish than had ever been seen; for it was attended by many good, bold, brave and proud knights and rich ladies and maidens, fair and noble daughters of kings” (Chrétien 1991a: 1). Similarly *The Knight of the Cart* begins,

King Arthur, one Ascension Day, had left Caerleon, and had held a most magnificent court at Camelot with all the splendor appropriate to the day. After their meal, the king did not leave those in his company. In the hall there were many nobles; and the queen was there too and with her, I believe, numerous beautiful courtly ladies conversing easily in French. (Chrétien 1991b: 185)

The festivals are described as sumptuous, magnificent, and lavish. The greatness of King Arthur's court is on full display. The court is filled with light, it is clean, and it has an excess of food and beauty. This is a description that does not depict the reality of medieval French castles and homes, where light and food were often scarce. Thus, the material world has been altered by the fantastic. There is no cohesive thread linking the Irish otherworld and the Fisher King's castle. Perhaps these changes can best be described as part of the shifts happening in twelfth-century France (Tymoczko 1986: 7-12). The texts show a possibility for opulence that may not have existed there before. The element of the fantastic in the texts draws the reader in, making the reader complicit in the quest for this opulence; contemporaries in medieval France would have desired such luxuries that were beyond their reach. This opulence can also be connected to the effects of the Crusades that brought twelve-century Western Europe in contact with Byzantium and also Islam, to be discussed below.

Soon after their sumptuous beginnings, both texts present Arthur and the heroes of the tales who go on adventure and must learn to correct their flaws in order to become better knights. The need for the knights to go on adventure to become better documents a crisis in the court of Arthur. In *Yvain*, this crisis is also manifest in Arthur himself who leaves the Pentecost feast to rest, which disturbs many guests and indicates bad courtly manners.

But upon this day of which I speak, great was their astonishment at seeing the King quit their presence; and there were some who felt chagrined, and who did

not mince their words, never before having seen the King, on the occasion of such a feast, enter his own chamber either to sleep or to seek repose. But this day it came about the Queen detained him, and he remained so long at her side that he forgot himself and fell asleep. (Chrétien 1991d: 42-48)

While Arthur rests, his knights are waiting for his return, and Calogrenant tells of his misadventures with a knight in a forest near a spring of water. Calogrenant's adventure story moves the listeners into the realm of the fantastic by creating a tale within a tale. The listeners of Chrétien's Arthurian tale are listening to Calogrenant and to the teller of the story, creating the means for the reader to enter the fantastic and to willingly participate in the story. Calogrenant is shamed in his tale, and Yvain promises to avenge Calogrenant's honor, while Kay mocks him. Once Arthur awakens, he is told of Calogrenant's shame, and Arthur also promises to avenge him. Because both Yvain and the king make the same promise, Yvain leaves the court without asking permission from the king. The actions of both Arthur and Yvain attest to a court in crisis. The King leaves his place of honor at the banquet, and his men leave his sight without his permission, undermining his decision.

Yvain leaves, finds the spring, fights the knight Esclados, and kills him. Before Yvain meets Esclados, he meets a strange man who can control the bulls around him.<sup>122</sup> The text does not give great emphasis to this character nor is he treated like a god-figure. He does, however, introduce the woods as part of the fantastic, a different milieu from the Arthurian court.

Yvain also falls in love with the wife of Esclados, Laudine; with the help of her maiden, Lunette, he marries Laudine. After having her for a wife for a short time, he

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122. Some scholars believe that this is an interpretation of the Celtic god Cernunnos. See MacCana (1985) and Carey (2007).



leaves for the Arthurian court with her consent at the request of Arthur and his men. Laudine grants him a year of absence, but he overstays his allotted time, and, as a consequence, she refuses to take him back. By the end of the romance, Yvain learns how to be both a husband and a knight, to keep his promises and manage his time.<sup>123</sup>

Ironically, in reverse symmetry, Yvain's fault parallels the king's fault articulated at the beginning of the story. The king remains with his lady, forgets himself and the time, and falls asleep to the dismay of members of the court, who cannot believe his actions. Consequently, his knights must wait for him. In contrast, Yvain leaves his lady for adventure, forgets himself as time elapses, and stays away for too long. Like the court with the king, his lady cannot believe his actions and is left waiting for him.

The crisis portrayed in the Arthurian court of Chrétien de Troyes has its roots in Chrétien's reality as a writer under the patronage of the Countess Marie de Champagne, who was part of a court that participated in the Crusades. In the real life "adventures," the French encountered other cultures that had better living conditions. In fact, the descriptions Chrétien uses to talk about the Arthurian court and the Grail castle are used by other Europeans to describe Muslim cities and Constantinople.<sup>124</sup> An example is rabbi Benjamin of Tuleda who visited Constantinople and wrote that

The Greeks who inhabit the country are extremely rich and possess great wealth

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123. As discussed in Chapter III of this dissertation, the Welsh version dismisses many of the acts that characterize the heroes of the French romances of Chrétien de Troyes. Although we can argue that the Welsh *Perceval* also shows a crisis, it is unrelated to the situation portrayed in the romances of Chrétien. While the Welsh text describes tournaments as leading to war and death, Chrétien's texts portrays knighthood as an adventure. The crisis in Chrétien's court comes from what the court lacks that the adventures will bring back.

124. See James E. Lindsay (2005: 87-138). Lindsay's chapter on "Cities" shows similarities between the descriptions of Chrétien de Troyes and Islamic cities.

of gold and precious stones. They dress in garments of silk, ornamented by gold and other valuable materials; they ride upon horses, and in their appearance they are like princes. The country is rich, producing all sorts of delicacies, as well as abundance of bread, meat and wine, and nothing on earth equals their wealth. They are well skilled in the Greek sciences and live comfortably, “every man under his vine and his fig tree.” (quoted in Grumeza 2010: 143)

During the Crusades, the French realized that other cultures were more “civilized” because of their better living conditions, their knowledge of medicine, and their art.

Muslims and Jews also realized how “uncivilized” the French were. For example, the memoirs of Usāmah Ibn-Munqidh describe many of the French as barbarous. He states that

Mysterious are the works of the Creator, the author of all things! When one comes to recount cases regarding the Franks, he cannot but glorify Allah (exalted is he!) and sanctify him, for he sees them as animals possessing the virtues of courage and fighting, but nothing else; just as animals have only the virtues of strength and carrying loads. I shall now give some instances of their doings and their curious mentality. (2000: 161)

The Crusades allowed Western Europeans to learn new ways of living and gave Europeans a way to see their surroundings as less than ideal.

The knights of Chrétien de Troyes left the Arthurian court and, as a consequence, they improved the court with the experiences they brought back. Similarly, the French went on Crusades that put them into contact with other cultures, a contact that bettered French culture afterward.<sup>125</sup> Many encounters during the Crusades promoted trade and allowed men to travel and learn about new civilizations, new ideas, and new ways of being.

The encounters among different cultures in the Mediterranean are part of shifts in European cultural systems that, among other things, created a European self by othering

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125. I am well aware of the negative aspects of the Crusades. Here, I am focusing on the positive implications the Crusades had for the French.

the Saracens. As Sharon Kinoshita discusses in *Medieval Boundaries* (2006), the connections between Europeans and Saracens are complicated. These encounters document positive interconnections between Muslim and Christian cultures as well as devastation and crusade. Using postcolonial theory, Kinoshita argues that literature portrays and blurs the boundaries between Christians and Muslims and between Welsh and Anglo-Norman writers. Kinoshita concentrates on medieval texts written in Old French and remarks that some of the most canonical Old French texts do not occur within the walls of a French-speaking space, but beyond it (2006: 1). She concludes her chapter on the *Chanson de Roland* as follows.

For the past century and more, medievalists have cultivated the *Chanson de Roland* as a *lieu de mémoire* of the origin of a precocious French national sentiment. Unpacking that site reveals the poem's critical history to be inseparable from a history of Franco-German conflict and colonial ideology. Disengaging the *Roland* from this colonial context, in which alterity is implicitly or explicitly cast in the taxonomic categories of racialized difference, reveals surprising histories of accommodationism and exchange and brings into focus the fluidity characterizing medieval notions of difference. This in turn reveals "France" and "Europe" to be not geographical entities given in advance but ideological constructs with their own deeply complicated history of conquest, colonization, and acculturation in ways that continue to resonate, for example, in political debates on multiculturalism in France or in the emergence of the European Community. The *Roland*, it turns out, *is* an exemplary text – not for its depiction of heroic sacrifice or its articulation of a precocious national sentiment but for the way it concentrates and imbricates questions of self and other, gender and genre, history and ideology. (Kinoshita 2006: 45)

For Kinoshita, the *Chanson de Roland* is the first example in French literature in which appears the binary where difference between the European Self and the Saracen Other.

Moreover, in her chapter titled "The Politics of Courtly Love: *La Prise d'Orange* and the Conversion of the Saracen Queen," Kinoshita argues that courtly love and the female body become vehicles and motivations for conquest in *La Prise d'Orange*. She describes Orable, the Saracen object of desire, accordingly.

At once representative of her people and utterly unique, Orable incarnates the very possibility of assimilation through conversion. In some ways, she is the forerunner of *la Malinche*: the indigenous woman whose sexual liaison with the Christian intruder is a symbolically central betrayal leading to the conquest of her people. By gendering its politics of conquest, *La Prise d'Orange* anticipates the strategy of later colonial administrations that sought to collaborate with the women under the pretext of liberating them from oppression by their own men. From the Frankish perspective, on the other hand, Orable is like the saint choosing *translatio*; the success of her conversion signals not simply her willingness but its rightness in the eyes of God. In actively choosing feudal Frankish Christianity, she confirms it. The result is an eroticized representation of Frankish aggression against the Saracens of Spain that, for all its comic inversion, vindicates the military and amatory prowess of a masculinized French feudal society. (2006: 72-73)<sup>126</sup>

Kinoshita dismisses the notion of a binary opposition between epic and romance and instead proposes that *La Prise d'Orange*: “emphasizes love-as-war and war-as-seduction,” combining courtly thematics into the masculine mode of the epic in order to create a scenario of desire, crusade, and conquest (2006: 148). Nevertheless, Kinoshita separates the seduction of Orable from that of other tales of courtly love. She writes that

In Guillaume’s pursuit of the proud Saracen queen, the politically troubling or inconvenient aspects of medieval social practices and literary discourses are brilliantly recuperated, projected onto the Saracen Other or mobilized to the benefit of Guillaume’s amorous crusade in the service of Christendom. And the key to this ideologically satisfying gendered representation of medieval colonialism is the conversion of Orable, whose seduction makes standard tales of courtly love seem like stylized, depoliticized repetitions. (2006: 148)

Chrétien’s romances are no less politicized. Chrétien de Troyes’s emphasis on the knights reflects the historical realities of this time and place. The subjugation of the female characters under a knight who would champion their needs is of utmost importance in Chrétien’s work. In *Yvain*, for example, Lunette betrays her lady and her kingdom merely because Yvain was courteous to her (Chrétien 1991d: 294). Yvain also

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126. The idea of choosing Christianity as being right in the eyes of God is also prevalent in early Castilian and Catalan texts. We will return to this topic in chapter V below.

saves many women who have been trapped and used for manual labor (Chrétien 1991d: 351-59). Understanding Chrétien's work as part of a "military and amatory prowess of a masculinized French feudal society" (Kinoshita 2006: 73) places the adventures and the use of the fantastic as a form of subjugation and othering not present in the *Historia* or the Irish and Welsh texts.

Although the French were improved by the "adventures" in the Crusades and although they solidified the Self, the new opportunities offered by the encounters proved to the Europeans that they were not as "civilized" as they thought. New possibilities imply change, and change is both exciting and terrifying. Thanks to the Crusades, the possibility of change allows Chrétien de Troyes to write his fictional tales of a past that presents possibilities for the future. In a way, everything becomes possible, allowing Chrétien to create courtly romances that emphasize the knights instead of Arthur and use the fantastic through an eroticized masculinity.

Another reason for Chrétien de Troyes's emphasis on the knights instead of Arthur is his patron.<sup>127</sup> Marie de Champagne was wife of Henry I, Count of Champagne. Marie was daughter of the King of France, Louis VII, and of Eleanor of Aquitaine, who later married King Henry II of England. Although Marie's husband had power and wealth, he was not a king. June Hall McCash points out that

Unlike her husband, Marie apparently did not read Latin well and preferred texts in the vernacular. Her requests for biblical translations are among the earliest in French. Marie's independent patronage seems to have occurred primarily during her husband's absence from court on Crusade and during her widowhood, that is, from 1179 until her death in 1198. (2008: 16)

The Crusades are clearly connected with Marie's patronage.

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127. On the importance of patronage in the shaping of translations, see the discussion in Chapter I above.

Marie's position as a powerful figure underlies much of the content of the works of Chrétien de Troyes. To speak of the knights instead of the king would allude to the greatness and independence of Henry I, even if his lands were subjugated to several networks and levels of patronage. John W. Baldwin discusses the territories of Count Henry and his wife Marie, writing,

If we accept the dates of 1160 to 1191 as the time period during which Chrétien wrote, the court of champagne is framed by the careers of Count Henry the Liberal (1152-81), his wife Countess Marie (1164-98) and their son Count Henry II (1187-97). They inherited a vast feudal complex of fragmented and dispersed lands lying both to the east and west of Paris. To the east the broad open country was known as Champagne (*campania*) and consisted chiefly of regions surrounding the towns of Troyes, Provins and Meaux. To the south and west were the fiefs of Sancerre, Blois, Châteaudun and Chartres. . . . The feudal complexity of this conglomeration was remarkable. Only Meaux was held from the king of France, with Troyes from the duke of Burgundy, and important lands in the east from the archbishop of Reims and even the German emperor. The poor soil to the east was compensated by the commercial wealth that came from the famous fairs of Champagne located at Troyes, Provins, Lagny and Bar-sur-Aube that had become centres of international trade. (2005: 5)

Just as the knights answered to King Arthur and still had independence, fame, and glory, and just as they could better the kingdom and the king's court, so could Henry I.

The complex arrangement that comprised the lands of the court of Champagne exposes the benefits for Henry I of the Crusades and of being under the rule of a docile king. Troyes was one of the major centers of trade in Europe, and as such saw the material benefits of the Crusades with the introduction of new goods from the East and other imported materials. Thus, in some ways the court of Champagne was much wealthier, more luxurious, and more illustrious than that of the king of France. The king of France, Louis VII (1137-79), did not in fact control the affairs of the courts of his various vassals. Louis VII directly ruled only a small amount of land, "overshadowed by the powerful Flemish to the north (Vermandois lay only twenty-five kilometers from

Paris), the Champagne family to the east and south and the vast Anglo-Norman-Angevins fiefs to the north-west and west” (Baldwin 2005: 5). Much like Louis VII, the Arthur of Chrétien de Troyes was suzerain of his kingdom, but he did not control the movement of his knights or the lands they subjugated by combat and marriage.

These romances deal with the adventures of the knights of King Arthur’s court. The knights leave the court, learn from the people and the land, and bring the teachings back to the court and Arthur. The relationships among the king, his nobles, and his knights are very different in the writing of Chrétien de Troyes from the relationship between the king and his subjects in the Irish and Welsh texts and the *Historia Regum Britanniae*. Chrétien’s work emphasizes the knights who can resolve the crisis of the Arthurian court and expand the territories associated with the court by subjugating other lands through marriage and conquest.

It would not be unreasonable to compare the focus on the knights rather than Arthur with the praise the counts and dukes received, which went beyond the praise received by Louis VII. Geoffrey of Anjou, who was married to Matilda (who had inherited the crown of England before Stephen usurped the position and became king), and his son Henry of Anjou both antagonized Louis VII (Thompson 2002: 79 and Power 2004: 349). Rotrou II was also a powerful figure who had connections with Henry I and the young King Louis. He was a successful warrior in the First Crusade and had effectively established his county of Perche (Thompson 2002: 83). His wife and widow, Hawise d’Evereux, married Robert Capet, the younger brother of King Louis VII (Thompson 2002: 87). Unlike Rotrou II, who was successful in the First Crusade, King Louis went on the Second Crusade with disastrous consequences. He had no real

experience in handling large armies and the incoherent actions of his army cost many lives (France 1999: 140). His royal court was austere in comparison to the court of the counts and dukes that surrounded him. In many ways Louis VII occupied a role similar to the one Arthur occupies in Chrétien de Troyes's portrayal: he was a formal figurehead but was overshadowed by the great deeds of those around him.<sup>128</sup>

### **Arthur, the Land, and the People**

The *History of the Kings of Britain* and the romances of Chrétien de Troyes draw on an Arthurian past in order to communicate to their contemporaries about their present. We can correlate these ideas with historical facts and with the themes presented in the texts. In addition, all the factors combine to help us understand the necessity of having Arthur figured as the main character in the *History of the Kings of Britain*, in contrast with having his knights appear as the main protagonists in the romances of Chrétien de Troyes.

The language and style of the introductions of the works of both Geoffrey of Monmouth and Chrétien de Troyes suggest that they are writing for their contemporaries. Geoffrey and Chrétien each begin their stories by stating that someone asked them to write the text and each asserts that his story is based on another book. Translation theory suggests that both writers have transformed their work: Geoffrey writes in his own style

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128. W. L. Warren cites Stephen of Rouen who maintains that Henry I was advised by Matilda and the count of Flanders to allow Louis to save face after a raid on his arsenal by allowing Louis to destroy one of Henry's towns (1973: 103). Although the story seems unlikely, historians still believe that Matilda counseled Henry to find a way for Louis to retreat honorably (Chibnall 1991: 173 and Ferrante 2001: 884). I find the incidents indicative of the role of Louis as a figurehead with no real authority over the surrounding territories. They are comparable to several acts by Arthur in Chrétien de Troyes's romances.



and probably used oral tales, and Chrétien writes in French and probably recited his romances to the court. Neither introduction emphasizes the origins of the texts they use other than to vaguely mention an older book; instead they emphasize their own writing and style. Scholars credit Geoffrey as an inspiration for Chrétien, but Chrétien has rewritten the material into a new genre, and this afterlife of the earlier Arthurian texts renders Chrétien's works unique among his contemporaries.

Geoffrey and Chrétien also portray the relationship of the king with the land and his people in quite different ways. In Geoffrey of Monmouth's text the relationship between the king and the land is not reciprocal. The king owns the land and subjugates it. This subjugation brings prosperity to his people. In addition, the land is passed down from father to son, and should not be taken away by others who covet the throne or the result will be civil strife and failure. Chrétien de Troyes's romances present an alternative connection to the land. The knights go out to subjugate the land and those to whom the land belongs, creating an environment that is fantastic. The stories belong to a literature that is creating a new self through the othering of the Saracens; the fantastic in Chrétien is an objective correlative of the contemporary encounters with others in the world.

The relationship between Arthur and his men and the way that the writers portray that relationship can help us analyze medieval Arthurian texts more precisely. The Welsh and Irish texts present the heroes and kings in an equal light, and women are key to sovereignty. The *Historia* demands unity under one king and women play a minor role. The romances of Chrétien the Troyes concentrate on the knights and their relationship with and subjugation of women and the land. The two writers use the material differently, participating in the afterlife of the Arthurian tales, but also creating separate new works

that speak to their own cultures and contemporaries. Comparative Arthurian scholarship concentrates on finding ways to trace the origins of the Arthurian material rather than emphasizing that the cultures that created subsequent texts shaped those texts to become a new rendition of the material.

This chapter demonstrates that some of the most canonical Arthurian texts fit into the social and historical contexts of the cultures that created them. The texts relate to their own cultures and the differences among them become markers that help us better understand the materials and the cultures that created the internal differences in the Arthurian corpus. There are family resemblances among the tales, but the historical and cultural contexts of the stories, their afterlife, give insights into their specific meanings.

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## CHAPTER V

### ARTHUR'S HEIRS: EXPANDING BOOKS, EXPANDING LANDS IN THE IBERIAN PENINSULA

Arthurian literature had a significant impact on the various courts of the Iberian Peninsula.<sup>129</sup> Iberian texts mention the *matière de Bretagne* as early as the twelfth century. Arthurian names were known in Castile and León in the 1130s, and in the Cathedral at Santiago de Compostela there is an image on a column of an ailing Tristan. The names are evidence that Arthurian stories predate the *Historia* of Geoffrey of Monmouth and the image of Tristan predates the extant French verse poems (Sharrer 1986b and Grimberty 2009). Thus, there is evidence of early reception of Arthurian texts in the Iberian Peninsula that is not necessarily connected to France or England.

Iberian Arthurian texts influenced by French and English Arthurian materials were created after the late twelfth century. An important center of diffusion of Arthurian texts in the Iberian Peninsula is the Aragon court. *Jaufré* (c. 1170), the only Provençal Arthurian romance, belongs to the court of Alfonso II of Aragon (1157-96). Alfonso's successor, Pedro II (1196-1213) was often linked to Arthur (Grimbert 2009: 155), and Alfonso V (1396-1458) saw himself as a new Galahad (Abulafia 2011a: 49). Almost simultaneously with the dissemination of Arthurian literature in the Aragon courts, the Castilian courts were also taking up Arthurian materials. Alfonso VIII of Castile, for example, married Eleanor of England (1170), daughter of Henry II and Eleanor of Aquitaine, two important literary patrons in the Middle Ages. Eleanor of Aquitaine was

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129. See William J. Entwistle (1925); María Rosa Lida de Malkiel (1959); Ángel Valbuena Prat (1981); Harvey Sharrer (1986b and 1977); Joan Tasker Grimberty (2009).

also the granddaughter of Guillaume IX, the first troubadour (Grimbert 2009: 155). Nevertheless, scholars generally agree that the translations, pseudotranslations, and rewritings of thirteenth-century French romances – mainly the Prose *Tristan*, the Vulgate Cycle, and the Post-Vulgate *Roman du Graal* – had their most significant impact on the Iberian Peninsula from the early fourteenth century through the sixteenth century.<sup>130</sup> Peninsular Arthurian texts were written in a variety of different languages, but mainly in Galician-Portuguese, Castilian, Aragonese, and Catalan.

The impact of Arthurian literature on peninsular literary cultures is evident in the extensive peninsular Arthurian corpus. Some examples include *Libro del caballero Zifar* (c. 1300), the oldest Spanish chivalric romance; *Amadís de Gaula* (c. 1400),<sup>131</sup> which was influenced by the Prose *Lancelot* and Prose *Tristan*; *Curial e Güelfa* (c. 1440-60) and *Tirant lo Blanc* (1490), both written in Catalan; and Miguel de Cervantes's (1547-1616) famous work, *Don Quixote* (1605, 1615),<sup>132</sup> considered both the zenith and collapse of the appropriation of Arthurian materials in Castilian courtly culture. Spanish courtly culture already had a complicated relationship with chivalric ideals before Cervantes's

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130. For an excellent overview of Spanish Arthurian legends see Grimbert (2009: 145-59). She discusses the Spanish *Tristan* material, the supposed sources of inspiration, and the various changes the texts underwent, and briefly surveys other Arthurian materials.

131. *Amadís* is thought to have been written in the late thirteenth or early fourteenth century, following a pattern similar to other Arthurian tales. In the *Cancionero de Baena*, for example, Pedro Ferruz (c. 1380) mentions an *Amadís* in three books. The earliest extant copy of *Amadís*, however, was published in five books in 1508 by Garci-Rodríguez de Montalvo in Saragossa Spain. For more information on the origins of *Amadís* see Harvey Sharrer (1986a); and Juan Manuel Cacho-Blecua (2008).

132. I rely on Harvey Sharrer's dating of the texts except for *Curial e Güelfa*, for which I use the dating in the introduction by Pamela Waley (1982: xi-xii). See Sharrer in *The New Arthurian Encyclopedia* (1991a-i).



masterpiece, in which courtly literature and the ideals of chivalry and courtly love were intertwined.

The influence of Arthurian literature in the Iberian courts is also evident in the many allusions to the material found in Iberian literature (poems and *crónicas*, for example). In *Historia de la literatura Española*, Ángel Valbuena Prat mentions several texts and writers who were influenced by or read Arthurian texts (Valbuena Prat 1981). Pero Lopez de Ayala (1332-1407), Pero Ferrús (1380), and Miçer Francisco Imperial (c.1400), for example, refer to chivalric Arthurian literature such as *Lanzarote* and *Amadís*, and Arthurian characters such as Artús and Tristán.<sup>133</sup> The poetry of Ferrús, found in the *Cancionero de Baena* (1445), mentions several Arthurian characters, including Arthur (Artús), Lancelot (Lanzarote), Guenevere (Ginebra), and Tristan (Tristán) (Valbuena Prat 1981: 289). Ferrús also mentions that the tale of *Amadís* is told in three books (Valbuena Prat 1981: 331; Cacho-Blecua 2008: 68). Many Spanish texts also take inspiration from the Arthurian materials. *Cárcel de Amor* (c.1470) and *Calisto y Melibea* or *La Celestina* (1499) were influenced by *Tristán* (Valbuena Prat 1981: 509 and 547). The literatures of the Peninsular courts were thoroughly immersed in Arthurian literature.

Clearly, Arthurian literature had a long life on the Peninsula. Grimbert explains that “If the Arthurian legend’s appeal endured well into the Renaissance, it is because chivalry was held in high esteem in Spain, where *La Reconquista* justified the existence

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133. In most of the Spanish texts, Arthur is named Artús, the Latin version of the name rather than the French version.

of a class that assured national survival and defense of the faith” (Grimbert 2009: 154).<sup>134</sup> As I demonstrate in this chapter, the Iberian Arthurian corpus portrays a situation in which knights can become kings. Such an idea is viable because of the visions of knights and conquistadores both on the Iberian Peninsula and beyond, in the Americas. On November 8, 1519, for example, the soldier-chronicler Bernal Díaz del Castillo described the encounter between Cortez and Moteuczoma (Montezuma) in Tenochtitlán as a marvelous scene from *Amadís*. Arthurian literature becomes a locus in which the Iberian imagination can play the role of *el caballero*, where knights can become kings. Although most Peninsular Arthurian texts are considered translations from French texts, the cultural and ideological reasons behind their success are very different from the cultural and ideological reasons that motivated the creation and reception of Arthurian texts in Welsh, English, and French-speaking areas.

The afterlife of Arthurian literature on the Iberian Peninsula follows a pattern similar to other literary genres in medieval Iberia.<sup>135</sup> Genres such as the *crónicas*, genealogies, and *cancioneros* were used as political and cultural tools to support the positions of kings and their followers, promote policies of expansion, and legitimize the kingdoms of Castile and Aragon in Iberia and beyond.<sup>136</sup> Translations and pseudotranslations of well-known Arthurian narratives such as the Tristan tale prioritize

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134. For more information on the subject see also J. B. Hall (1983: 85).

135. For more information on the afterlife of a text and its translatability see Walter Benjamin (2000) and Chapter I above.

136. For more information on the use of genealogies, autobiographies, and *crónicas* as forms of propaganda, see Jean-Pierre Jardin (2008); and Jaume Aurell (2012). For more information on the *cancioneros* as a form of propaganda see Suzanne Cawsey (2002); and Óscar Perea Rodríguez (2009).

the concept of chivalry, becoming part of the Iberian literary and cultural system that promoted the Castilian and Aragon dynasties.<sup>137</sup> Perhaps more telling are the Iberian Arthurian rewritings, such as *Zifar*, *Tirant*, and *Curial*,<sup>138</sup> which use Arthurian themes and motifs and locate them in Iberian contexts, creating uniquely Iberian knights who transcend English or French Arthurian settings and become proponents of Iberian ideology.

The most prolific researcher on Iberian Arthurian literature is currently Harvey Sharrer,<sup>139</sup> whose work on the subject appears in several compilations discussing Arthurian literature.<sup>140</sup> He has written many articles on the subject, along with a book titled *A Critical Bibliography of Hispanic Arthurian Material; 1: Texts: The Prose Romance Cycles*, which discusses the Iberian medieval manuscripts and editions available, where they are housed, and their content (1977). Other scholars include Joan Tasker Grimbert, who discusses the legend of Tristan and Isolt in France, Italy, and Spain, and Josefa Conde de Linquist, who rethinks Arthurian transmission to the Iberian Peninsula by positing possible sources of transmission other than the French or English

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137. For more information on pseudotranslations see Gideon Toury (2012: 50) and Chapter I above.

138. See André Lefevere (1992 and 1987).

139. Sharrer's extensive scholarly work includes "Letters in the Hispanic Prose Tristan Texts" (1981-82); "La fusión de las novelas artúrica y sentimental a fines de la Edad Media" (1984); and "La fusión de la novela arturica y la novela sentimental" (1991).

140. Some of his contributions to Arthurian compilations include articles in *The New Arthurian Encyclopedia* (1991) and *The Romance of Arthur III: Works from Russia to Spain, Norway to Italy* (1988).

traditions.<sup>141</sup> There are many scholars discussing individual Iberian Arthurian rewritings. All writers mentioned discuss the influence of Arthurian texts in Iberian works, but they typically engage other important aspects of the works, thus devoting little time to the role and position of the tales as Arthurian rewritings. This chapter focuses on several Iberian Arthurian rewritings, as well as on translations and pseudotranslations of the Tristan legend, to explore their entrenchment in Iberian literature and culture and their role as forms of propaganda that lasted well into the sixteenth century.

An interesting example of the impact of Arthurian literature on the Castilian aristocracy is the way in which chivalric literature directed the actions of Juan II. In 1434, with the consent of Juan II of Castile, a knight named Suero de Quiñones and nine of his friends did not allow other knights to cross over a bridge as a tribute to Suero's love, resulting in injury and even death in the process. Pedro Rodríguez de Lena describes the event in the *Libro del passo honroso* (1434), reinscribing the episode in a literary realm. Thus, in Castilian courtly culture, the ideals of chivalry were important and had great impact on the literature and in literary constructions of the men of the court, including the king, even in the fifteenth century. I argue in this chapter that the historical episode of Juan II and his knights at the bridge, which illustrates that chivalric ideals found very real outlets in the Castilian court, highlights the tendency in Iberian Arthurian literature to exalt knighthood, presenting kingship as an extension of chivalric prowess.

Courtly ideals were intertwined with ideas of chivalry and knighthood. To be a courtier was to be a knight, and a knight was closely linked to the Arthurian romances: "Throughout Christian Spain and Portugal, Arthurian literature served as an exemplar for

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141. See Grimbart (2009: 145-59); and Josefa Conde de Linares (2006).

aristocratic society, prompting the mimicry of Arthurian journeys and jousts, even molding the behavior of individuals” (Sharrer 1986b: 520). Thus, the king himself was expected to be the best knight, because he was at the top of the social hierarchy.

Peninsular Arthurian literature implies that kingship and knighthood are connected: good knights can become kings, but only if kingship is granted to them, usually by God, a Queen, or a Princess and if they follow a chivalric protocol. This ideology was helpful for both Castilian and Catalan control of their territories and ideologies of expansion. A concise introduction to the history of the Iberian Peninsula is helpful in understanding the role of Arthurian texts in an Iberian context and the reasons that Arthurian texts are connected to kingship and chivalry.

### **Entangled Histories: The Iberian Peninsula in History and Literature**

The entanglements of cultures, languages, and ideas in the Iberian Peninsula has a long history and includes the appearance of the Celts c. 750 B.C., the Roman conquest from 217-19 B.C., a Visigoth kingdom c. 480-711, and the Moorish “conquest” from 711-18 to name a few.<sup>142</sup> Beginning early in the history of the Iberian Peninsula, there were both friendly and hostile relationships among the various groups that lived on the Peninsula and along its borders. From Visigoths to Arabs and Syrians, Iberia was a place

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142. For general overviews on the history of Spain see: Stephen Clissold (1969); Jane S. Gerber (1992); Peter Pierson (1999); Fernando García de Cortázar and José Manuel González Vesga (2005); José María Monsalvo Antón (2000 and 2010); William D. Phillips and Carla Rahn Phillips (2010).

where different groups coexisted or at the very least were forced to live near each other and interact in complex ways.<sup>143</sup>

The historical information presented below outlines the creation and destruction of various kingdoms or regimes in the Iberian Peninsula. Although the point of view depicted in the Iberian Arthurian texts is Christian, it is important to keep in mind that there are other religious influences in the material discussed that are often not given the full attention they deserve. This study concentrates on events from the eleventh to the thirteenth century to elucidate the role of Iberian Arthurian texts from the thirteenth century to the sixteenth century, a role in which Arthurian texts were inscribed with an ideology of expansion that was used in the Iberian Peninsula to justify what we now call the *La Reconquista*.

Iberian medieval history is roughly divided into three periods: the *alta edad media* from the fifth to the tenth centuries; the *plena edad media* from the eleventh to the thirteenth centuries; and the *baja edad media* from the fourteenth to the fifteenth centuries (Monsalvo Antón 2010). The *alta edad media* includes the Visigoth reign in Spain and the creation, ascendancy, and reign of al-Andalus, one of the most important cities in the Islamic world in the ninth and tenth centuries. The *plena edad media* brings

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143. In her seminar-talk titled “Medieval Medicine as a Medium of Exchange: Incantations, Talismans, and Occult Virtues,” Katelyn Mesler outlined how Hebrew medicine books translated medicinal incantations from Latin into Hebrew and discussed the number of cases where Jewish doctors were tried in court for practicing medicine, several in Toledo. She points to the possibility that these doctors had both Christian and Jewish patients and thus needed to be acquainted with Christian/Latin forms of medicine. Although this is a very specific example, it gives an example of the complex forms of interactions found in the Iberian Peninsula. The talk was delivered on September 24, 2012, as part of several seminars in the series “Institutionalization, Innovation and Conflict in Thirteenth Century Judaism: A Comparative View” delivered in the Herbert D. Katz Center for Advanced Judaic Studies in Philadelphia.

the solidification of Christian courts, such as those of Castile, Aragon, and Portugal and their expansion into Muslim territories. The *baja edad media* witnesses Christian powers continuing to expand their territories and driving Muslims out of the Peninsula, with only Granada remaining under Muslim control. In other words, in the 800s only Asturias was under Christian control; by 1035, Barcelona, Aragon, Navarre, Castile, and León had become Christian territories and Christians politically controlled the northern Iberian Peninsula. The early 1200s saw the expansion of Castile and Aragon and the creation of Portugal, but the south of the Peninsula remained under Muslim control. By 1291, only Granada was under Muslim authority. Castile and Leon united to control central Spain; and Portugal and Aragon controlled opposite sides of the Peninsula.<sup>144</sup> In 1492 Granada became part of the Christian world, Jews were expelled from the Spanish territory, and Muslims were forced to convert to Christianity. By 1609 the majority of the descendants of the Muslim population (Moriscos) were expelled. Thus, the later Middle Ages saw an expansion of Christian control over the Peninsula until it was complete in 1492.

The process of expansion was arbitrary and in many cases luck and the help of outside forces were important factors in the shift of territories from Muslim to Christian control. Outside forces, however, brought different ideologies from the ideologies from those people who lived in the Iberian Peninsula. By the end of the eleventh century, for example, monks and foreign knights came to the Peninsula an attitude similar to that of the knights who fought in the Crusades. Foreign knights arrived bringing their chivalric services, as well as a new form of hostility toward Muslims (O' Callaghan 2004). A comparison of *El poema del Cid* to *La Chanson de Roland* highlights the differing

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144. For an excellent disambiguation of the political control of territories in the Iberian Peninsula, see José María Monsalvo Antón (2010).

perspectives on Muslims of Christians from the Peninsula and of those from France and elsewhere. Both of these “national” Christian texts are from the twelfth century and recount events in the Iberian Peninsula occurring at least a hundred years before, and both distort historical facts to fit their twelfth-century ideologies. Their perspectives on Muslims, however, are very different, and both are problematic.<sup>145</sup>

On the one hand, *El Cid* demonstrates that the expansion into Muslim territories by Christians was both political and religious. The Cid’s conquests benefited him as a knight and resulted in his daughters marrying into the nobility. In fact, the word *Cid* comes from Sayyidī, an Arabic word meaning “My Lord” (Cortes 1998: xi), illustrating an entanglement between Christian and Muslim cultures.<sup>146</sup> On the other hand, *La Chanson de Roland* depicts a great Christian-Islamic confrontation and turns Roland into a martyr of sorts.

Sharon Kinoshita points to the *chanson* as a locus where the ideas of crusade are constructed (2006).<sup>147</sup> Kinoshita discusses the differences between the historical account

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145. Both perspectives highlighted in this paper are problematic because they come from a point of view that privileges Christian perspectives of the events. To say that knights from the Peninsula were more tolerant does not take away from the fact that they were still intolerant of Muslims as well as Jews. My analysis continues to privilege a Christian perspective by relating the event from a Christian point of view.

146. The *Cid* also shows an encounter between the Cid with two Jews, Raquel and Vidas, in which the Cid tricks them and steals their money. The encounter is clearly anti-Semitic.

147. In her introduction to *Medieval Boundaries*, Kinoshita explains that “Rather than skimming this episode as a plot device designed to set Roland’s heroic death in motion, I consider it against the contemporary Iberian institution of *parias*: the payment of tribute money by the Muslim *tāwīfa* kings to the Christian rulers of Castile and Aragon. After showing how many Normans and other northerners had intimate, firsthand experience of Iberian politics, I argue that the *Roland* does not so much reflect a pre-existing ideology of crusade as actively work to construct it, precisely by taking on the



of the attack and the way the tale reconstructs the events to demonstrate how the story's rewriting constituted an "ideological distortion" (Kinoshita 2006: 40).<sup>148</sup> Kinoshita points out that

the distant historical event underlying the Roland legend was an ambush suffered by the rearguard of Charlemagne's army in 778. Far from an apocalyptic crusade between the Muslims and Christians, this campaign began as one of those alliances, so frequent in the history of the Middle Ages, across confessional lines. In 778, Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabī, the Muslim governor of Barcelona, had come to Paderborn seeking Charlemagne's aid in his revolt against <sup>c</sup>Abd al-Rahmān I, the Umayyad emir of Cordoba. The campaign started well but stalled outside the gates of Saragossa when one of Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabī's co-conspirators proved unreliable; meanwhile, news of a Saxon revolt made Charlemagne turn for home. High in the Pyrenees, his army was attacked – its baggage train looted and its rearguard massacred – not by "Saracens" but by a contingent of Basques. (Kinoshita 2006: 16-17)

The alterations between what we know of the historical incident and what is written in the *Roland* reimagine Roland as a legend and turn the Basques into Saracens. As already discussed in Chapter IV, the relationship between Europeans and Saracens in the context of France, for example, is a relationship centered on creating the Self and the Other. Thus, the *Chanson de Roland* becomes an exemplar of the way in which memory is used to create the self, establishing a binary opposition between the Franks and the Saracens, and constructing an ethos for supporting the Crusades. The portrayal of Muslims in *El Cid* and *Roland* reflect two very different attitudes.

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Realpolitik clearly governing Christian-‘Saracen’ relations at the poem’s outset” (2006: 9).

148. Kinoshita writes that “This image of total war [in *Le Chanson de Roland*] is, as we have seen, completely contrary to the course of Alfonso the Battler’s historical conquest of Saragossa, managed with a restraint meant to assure the prosperity of Muslim lands newly brought under Christian rule. My purpose is not to impugn the Roland’s historical ‘accuracy’ but to emphasize the degree of ideological distortion involved in crafting such a vision for an Anglo-Norman audience whose fathers and grandfathers may have been veterans of Alfonso the Battler’s Ebro valley campaigns” (2006: 40).

The differences between the portrayal of Muslims in *El Cid* and in *La Chanson de Roland* indicate that the two texts, although both Christian, came from different cultures with different historical backgrounds. Thus, the resulting literature is very different. The comparison points to two different Christian perspectives about the Iberian Peninsula, one from within its borders and kingdoms, where a double discourse is apparent (Christian expansion but in a framework of the co-existence of peoples of different religious groups),<sup>149</sup> and another from those who saw the expansion of Christianity on the Peninsula as part of the Crusades. Interactions between Christians and Muslims in early Iberian history involve a vast degree of tolerance compared to the attitudes of Christians from other parts of Europe.<sup>150</sup> The expansion of Christian territories in the Iberian Peninsula creates a wealth of Christian literary production that highlights collisions and

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149. Kinoshita gives an interesting example of Iberian Christian-Muslim relations: “Far from forcing the city’s Muslims to convert, Alfonso encouraged them to remain: they would be allowed to keep their own officials and to move freely within his realm. Those wishing to leave could emigrate with all their possessions. In the late twelfth-century, the Muslim historian Ibn al-Kardabus reported that as they vacated the city, Alfonso stopped them and demanded to see their wealth. ‘If I had not asked you to show me the riches that each of you is carrying with him, you would have been able to say: “The king didn’t know what we had; otherwise, he would not have let us leave so easily.” Now you can go wherever you like, in complete safety,’ he said, providing them with an escort to the border of his realm. Such negotiated surrenders, meant to ensure a peaceful transition of power, were common practice in medieval Iberia: the treaty of Saragossa served as the model for later surrenders at Tudela (1119) and Tortosa [1149]. Its success in preserving the land’s Muslim population may be measured by the persistence of Arabic-speaking Muslim communities in the Ebro valley over the next several centuries” (2006: 20).

150. O’Callaghan discusses the different attitudes towards Muslims between “those Christians who had continual contact with Muslims and those who did not” in terms of degree. On the one hand the latter group displayed “zeal and fanaticism;” on the other hand the former showed “comparative tolerance” (1975: 197).

cohabitation of different points of view.<sup>151</sup> Medieval Iberian Arthurian literature is inextricably related to the events taking place on the Peninsula. The Arthurian texts support ideologies of expansion, legitimizing Christian control of the Iberian Peninsula.

The expansion of Christian control over the Iberia peninsula also helped create the kingdom of Portugal. Enrique de Lorena, a knight of Alfonso, married Alfonso's illegitimate daughter Teresa, and received an extensive amount of land as dowry. Once Enrique died in 1112, Teresa acted as queen in the name of her son, Alfonso Enrique, who, once he gained power, expanded the territory and declared himself king in 1143. In 1179, he received papal recognition as the King of Portugal. As in *El Cid*, the children of knights who help expand Christian control can become royalty. In line 3724 of *El Cid*, we read "Oy los reyes d'España sos parientes son" (*Poema* 2001: 275; "Today, the kings of Spain are descended from him;" *Poem* 1998: 167). Paul Blackburn confirms this statement.

In 1140, to prevent a war between the king of Navarre, García Ramírez (grandson of the Cid), and Alfonso VII, emperor of Castile, a mediation committee of bishops and relatives of the principals arranged a marriage of their children: the Princess Blanca de Navarre, great granddaughter of the Cid, with Sancho, the heir of Castile. The marriage was consummated in 1151, and their son, Alfonso VIII, was the first king of Castile descended from the Cid. His daughters carried the blood of Ruy Díaz to the royal house of Portugal in 1208 and to that of Aragon in 1221. (*Poem* 1998: 174)

Even in the oldest literary constructions of Spain, the idea is present that a great knight should be able to become king. In the *Cid*, in particular, it is the Cid's lineage that helps him to gain kingship.

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151. I am restricting my discussion here to Christian attitudes, omitting the attitudes of the Muslims and Jews that lived in the Iberian Peninsula.

The expansion of Christian control continued throughout the late Middle Ages. In some instances the Christian kingdoms worked together. Such was the case in 1212, when knights from Castile, Aragon, León, Navarre, and even France campaigned against the Almohad army at Las Navas de Tolosa and won. Later Fernando III conquered Córdoba (1236), Murcia (1241-43), Jaén (1246), and Seville (1248). Seville in particular was won with support of the Muslim king of Granada. Again the entanglements between Christians and Muslims is apparent, as well as the push for expansion by Iberian Christian powers.<sup>152</sup>

The Aragonese court also expanded its dominion. In 1137 Ramón Berenguer unified and ruled the Aragonese and Catalans (J. Aurell 2012: 22),<sup>153</sup> carefully preserving the union by balancing the needs of both groups, an attitude that his successors also adopted.<sup>154</sup> In 1238 Jaume conquered the city of Valencia and by 1248 he had conquered the entire kingdom of Valencia. Catalan became the main language spoken in Valencia, as well as in the Balearic Islands. The defeat at Muret in the south of France brought about the political, territorial, and commercial expansion into the Mediterranean in the first half of the thirteenth century (J. Aurell 2012: 40).<sup>155</sup>

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152. For more information on the Iberian Peninsula and the reconquest see O'Callaghan (2004). An excellent overview on the multifaceted aspects of the Iberian Peninsula is B.F. Reilly's *The Medieval Spains* (1993).

153. Jaume Aurell writes that "Ramon Berenguer IV, count of Barcelona, acceded to the throne when he married the daughter of Ramiro the Monk, King of Aragon, in 1136 and Ramiro retired to a monastery. This union between the Aragonese and Catalans formed what is known generally as the Crown of Aragon" (2012: 22).

154. For more information on the expansion of the Aragon court see J. Aurell (2012: 21-38); Martin Aurell (1995); and José Enrique Ruiz-Domènec (1996).

155. See also Marta van Landingham (2002).

When Jaume possibly dictated most of his *Llibre dels fets del rei en Jaume* (c. 1229-76), his courts were becoming the political and cultural centers of medieval societies, as Jaume Aurell indicates.

At the same time, the feudal model of the rural world was being abandoned and the court was established as the political and cultural center; chivalric values were spreading; an urban patrician class increasingly committed to expansion was on the rise; cities were growing physically and demographically, strengthening their juridical and fiscal autonomy; and, last, the monarchy was being definitely consolidated as the political backbone of Catalan society. (J. Aurell 2012: 40-41)

The Catalan courts were becoming centers of power because of the wealth acquired through conquest. The growth of power and the importance of knighthood and conquest in the Catalan courts are apparent in texts such as the *Llibre dels fets del rei en Jaume*, a chronicle of the life of Jaume of Aragon from childhood to his conquests in Mallorca and Valencia, including several altercations with the Saracens he conquered.<sup>156</sup> Jaume Aurell effectively argues that the *Llibre dels fets* should be read as “an account of the Crusades, a genre that became popular in Europe at the start of the thirteenth century” (2012: 42). J. Aurell also describes the text as a chivalresque autobiography (2012: 42). In keeping with Aurell’s assertions, this chapter discusses the *Llibre dels fets* to underscore that Jaume understood the cultural customs of the Saracens, that conquest is depicted as part of what makes a good king, and that the text presents the idea that being king and conqueror is a God-given right. These three points mirror literary tendencies found in *El Cid* and in Iberian Arthurian texts.

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156. The text owes much to oral narrative, as it is believed that Jaume dictated the book to be copied down. The text did not receive much attention in medieval times and it seems that few people knew of the text outside of the royal court of Aragon. See Josep M. Pujol (1996).

There are several examples that indicate the three ideas expressed above. One can surmise that Jaume (James I) understood Muslim customs based on his seizure of Valencia from King Zaén. Just before the capture of the city of Valencia, Jaume met with representatives of King Zaén of Valencia (specifically with Abū l’Hamlāt), in order to negotiate a treaty. Once Abū l’Hamlāt and King Jaume greeted each other, Jaume offered food to Abū l’Hamlāt: “Now we invited him to eat, but he told us that though he thanked us very much for the invitation, he would not eat outside the town, because he had been forbidden to do so by his lord” (James I 2010: 225). Damian J. Smith and Helena Buffery contend in the footnote that

Offering food was more than simply a matter of politeness. Rather it shows the king’s understanding of the importance of dining rituals held in the mind of the medieval Muslims. James was fully aware that if Abū l’Hamlāt were to accept the offer then a friendship was established between them and implicitly the first step to a negotiated surrender had been taken. (James I 2010: 225)

The description of Jaume in the first meeting with Abū l’Hamlāt illustrates that he knew and understood Muslim customs and serves as an example of the entanglements between Muslims and Christians in early Iberian history.

The conquest of Valencia by Jaume resonated positively with the rest of Christian medieval Europe, as Smith and Buffery indicate.

The news of James’s conquest of Valencia was greeted ecstatically by Pope Gregory IX, Louis of France (who sent a thorn from the crown of thorns to Valencia), the north Italian cities (who wished James to lead a crusade against Frederick II) and in much of Christendom (though not necessarily in Languedoc, since the troubadours lamented that James had not paid sufficient attention to protecting their region). In England, Matthew Paris recorded, gleefully and inaccurately, that the king of Aragon had ravaged the great city of Valencia through bloody war . . . . The chronicle of Saint Denis . . . more accurately said that, in order that James did not have to wait a long time, he settled form terms. (James I 2010: 108)

That the Iberian Peninsula is figured as a territory of contention, understanding, and entanglements between Muslims and Christians is apparent in Iberian texts. By contrast, outside histories of the Peninsula present Peninsular history as a Crusade against Muslims.

All of Christian Europe, including the court of Aragon, believed that Jaume's victories were a sign of his good kingship and that God was on his side. As Joseph M. Pujol indicates, "All the episodes that follow the departure from Monzón present the same structure and revolve around the central idea of medieval Christian monarchy: the King as a representative of God and guarantor of peace and justice for his people" (Pujol 1996: 52). There are several instances in the texts that validate Pujol's assertion. For example, when Jaume describes his father in the text, he states that

Our father, King Peter, was the most generous king there ever was in Spain, and the most courteous, and the most affable. In fact his generosity was such that his revenues and lands decreased. Moreover, he was a good knight at arms, if ever there was a good one in the world (James I 2010: 21).

Emphasis is given to King Peter's generosity to his men and his prowess in battle.

Concerning Jaume himself, several examples demonstrate the connections among kingship, knighthood, and God. In the conquest of Majorca, Jaume outlines several reasons to fight and take Majorca: "we set out on this voyage in the faith of reasons: to convert them or to destroy them, and to return that kingdom to the Faith of Our Lord. As we go in the name of God, we are confident that he will guide us" (James I 2010: 79). The main reason given for conquering Majorca is that it is the will of God. Once Jaume conquers Majorca, Ramon de Montcada is upset with the king because he put his life in danger in order to win the battle. Guillem de Montcada responds to Ramon by saying that Jaume might have been foolish, but that it was done for good deeds of arms. Guillem

further explains that Jaume would have been the best man in the world even if he had died, because he would have died conquering the lands of Majorca: “And console yourself thinking that, from the moment you have set foot in this land, you are king of Majorca. And if you die, you would die as the best man in the world, and although you might be ill in bed, you can hold this land as your own, for it is yours” (James I 2010: 85). Holding the lands he conquered transforms Jaume into the best man in the world.

A final example connecting the conquest of lands with good kingship and with God is found in Jaume’s description of Saint George’s help during the battle to conquer Majorca.

And according to what Saracens themselves told us, they saw a white knight with white weapons enter first, on horseback; and our belief is that it was Saint George, as we have found it written in histories that in other battles between Christians and the Saracens he has been seen many times. (James I 2010: 107)

Jaume relies on the report by Saracens and ascribes to it Christian meaning. Once the white knight is seen as Saint George, Jaume has definite proof that it is God’s will that allowed him to conquer Majorca. To be a knight is also connected to sainthood and godliness because Saint George is described as a knight who fights for Christians against Moors. The *Llibre dels fets del rei en Jaume* illustrates the way in which Jaume and later scribes construct kingship. The early courts of Castile, Aragon, and Portugal believed that in order to gain or remain in power and to be king, one must conquer lands, an ideology that served the Christian courts well against Muslims in power.<sup>157</sup> In Iberia during this period, a king needed to be generous, a good knight, and ordained by God.

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157. As Philips and Philips explain, by the second half of the thirteenth-century most of Spain was in Christian hands: “All told, as the thirteenth century ended, the various Christian powers in Iberia were clearly in an expansive mode. They had nearly completed their takeover of the peninsula from the Muslims, with the Leonese-Castilian



The use of literary genres to promote and support power structures is well documented. In *Authoring the Past* (2012), Jaume Aurell points out that different historical texts helped the political agenda of the Aragon courts.<sup>158</sup> He argues that historical genres support, explain, and help expand the political and cultural agendas of the Aragonese dynasty. Aurell discusses the historical writings of King James, Bernat Desclot, Ramon Muntaner, and King Peter, placing their texts in both an Aragonese and a European context. The relationship between chivalry and kingship is discussed in the works of Jaume I, as we have seen, and in the *Crónica* of Ramon Muntaner as well.

Ramon Muntaner (1265-1336) served several Aragonese kings (James the Conqueror, Peter the Great, Alfonse the Liberal, James the Just, and Alfonse the Benign).<sup>159</sup> Muntaner was fluent in several languages, including Catalan, Latin, Sicilian, French, Greek, and Arabic, and he witnessed the expansion of the Aragonese courts into Greece. A citizen of Valencia, Muntaner wrote late in his life (c. 1325-28) about the kings of Aragon. His *Crónica* begins in 1207 with the accession of Jaume I and ends in 1328 with the coronation of King Alfonso, covering the most important events in

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conquest of much of Andalusia, the Catalan-Aragonese conquest of Valencia, and the Castilian-Aragonese conquest of Murcia. In the independent kingdom of Portugal, Christian forces completely drove the Muslims out, with the conquest of the Algarve by 1249. In the Spanish kingdoms, only Granada remained in Muslim's hands. With the medieval reconquest of Iberia all but over, the notable political developments during the last centuries of the Middle Ages would play out in Christian lands" (2010: 78).

158. For more information on the Aragon court, see Joan-Pau Rubiés (2011) and Cawsey (2002).

159. For more information on Muntaner, his historical context, and the seminal ideologies of his *Crónica*, see Michel Zimmerman (1987); Joan-Pau Rubiés (1995-96); and van Landingham (2002).

thirteenth-century and early fourteenth-century Cataluña.<sup>160</sup> His chronicle ends with both the Aragonese dynasty securing the largest domain in its history and Aragon becoming one of the first “modern European states” (J. Aurell 2012: 78), and also beginning to separate as the house of Barcelona was divided into three kingdoms, namely Aragon, Majorca, and Sicily.

As Joan-Pau Rubiés convincingly argues, the *Book of Ramon Muntaner* (1325) is a highly ideological narrative about Muntaner’s accounts, deeds, and battles, situated as a form of propaganda calling for dynastic unity in the courts of Aragon in order to maintain Aragonese-Catalan control (Rubiés 2011). Rubiés concludes that the Aragonese dynasty was intimately connected to a chivalric and providential ethos.

Muntaner’s book was most obviously a work of dynastic propaganda. It was also, however, a book of advice, full of exempla, and in this respect a mirror for princes and vassals alike. Despite his overt emphasis on the honor and grace that God has shown to the House of Aragon, Muntaner’s dynastic enthusiasm was in fact connected to the lands inherited or conquered by the royal lineage, and to the peoples whom they ruled. A hierarchical but also participatory theory of power, by which sacred grace descended upon the dynasty and, through it, to its various peoples, held the picture together. As Muntaner never ceased to repeat, all power came from God, and all human things were ephemeral; human ethics consisted of using any power one happened to have responsibly and charitably, always remembering that, in reality, it truly belonged to God. The Aragonese and the Catalans, together with their Sicilian allies and those of Montpellier who remained faithful to the legacy of James I, were not simply subjects or spectators, but also active agents of the providential story of the House of Aragon. They were

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160. J. Aurell writes that “Muntaner describes in his chronicle the most significant milestones of the history of thirteenth-century Catalonia, familiar to all from the historical accounts of James I and Bernat Desclot: the peninsular expansion achieved through the conquest of Majorca, Minorca, Ibiza, Valencia, and Murcia against the Muslims; the marriage of Peter the Great; the strained relations between the houses of Barcelona and Anjou; the growing association between the Crown of Aragon and the kingdom of England; the siege of Girona by the Angevins; the conquest of Sicily in 1282; the defiance of Sancho of Castile; the treaty of Anagni and Admiral Roger de Llúria’s early conquests; and, finally, the conquests of the Catalan Company, at the beginning of the fourteenth century, on the way to Greece and Constantinople, which open up an unexpected expansive front in the eastern Mediterranean” (2012: 77).

called to a responsible use of their temporary and limited power, guided by the twin human attitudes of fear and love towards their superiors. Without their faithful and heroic service, nothing would have been possible. The chivalric and providential ethos of the dynasty was therefore intimately connected to the national spirit, however plural its empirical reality, however humble its witness. (Rubiés 2011: 19-20)

Muntaner's work serves a chivalric mirror for princes, articulating both the rationale for why the Aragon court must wield power and how this power can be maintained.

An important aspect of Muntaner's message is that it is a God-given right to hold power and land, and, in a sense, it is this God-given right that unites the Aragonese court.

Muntaner's work is also linked to Arthurian literature.

[Muntaner] displays great familiarity with the French chivalric *romans* in verse and in prose (especially the Arthurian cycle), as well as the poetry of the troubadours, which remained important practice in the various courts of the Catalan kings. One of Muntaner's explicit models for his own account of the great deeds of Catalans and Aragonese in the wars of Sicily was the *Book of Jaufré*, a chivalric novel in Provençal verse particularly popular at the Aragonese court. (Rubiés 2011: 7)

Arthurian texts contribute to the language necessary to legitimize power and control over the kingdoms controlled by the Aragonese court. There is a relationship among literature, kingship, and chivalry in the *Crónica* of Muntaner and in the *Llibre dels fets*, which helps legitimize the kingdom of Aragon.

The use of literature, in the form of mirrors for princes, *cronicas*, and chivalric and Arthurian texts as a tool to legitimize power is apparent in the Trastámara dynasty of Castile as well.<sup>161</sup> Enrique II, an illegitimate son of Alfonso XI of Castile, was able to

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161. The dynasty of the Trastámara, an offset of the House of Burgundy, gained power of Castile and later Aragon, Navarre, and Naples. The Trastámara gained power in 1369 after a three year civil war. For more information on the Trastámara dynasty see Jardin (2008) and Monsalvo Antón (2000) among others. For more general information on the many conflicts that brought about the ascend of the Trastámara line and the conflicts that their ascend created, see José Manuel Nieto Soria and María Victoria

win the crown of Castile from his legitimate brother Pedro I. The long and arduous process of conquest took several years and spurred alliances and disputes among the different kingdoms in Iberia. Of importance for this chapter on Arthurian literature are the assertions by Jean-Pierre Jardin that Enrique II (1369-79) used the *crónicas* as a form of propaganda to legitimize the reign of the Trastámara (Jardin 2008). Jardin argues that the *sumas de crónicas*, an offshoot of the earlier *crónicas* that originate in the Trastámara reign, justify the actions of Pedro I. Jardin points out that the *Corónica de los reyes e emperadores*, for example, uses moral, providential, and juridical justifications for Pedro's ascendancy to sovereignty (Jardin 2008: 270-71). The *sumas de crónicas* reach their zenith during the reign of Juan II and Enrique IV and diminish in popularity afterwards. By the time of the death of Fernando el Católico (1516), they are no longer popular (Jardin 2008: 269). These texts were manipulated for political reasons and were instrumental in changing the image of Castilian kings up to the sixteenth century (Jardin 2008: 283). The use of the *sumas de crónicas* to consolidate the position of the king as the rightful heir to the throne illustrates the use of literature as a way to legitimize kingship.

A reading of Iberian Arthurian romances through this lens indicates the ways in which Arthurian Iberian texts present powerful knights who become kings or knights who exponentially expand their territories. The conquest of Iberia by Christians through chivalric and knightly attributes was linked to one's capacity to be a good and knightly king. Chivalric ideology legitimized the power of the kings, and thus kingship was inextricable from concepts of chivalry and conquest.

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López-Cordón (2008). The articles in this compilation deal with cultural and political upheaval on the Peninsula, many discussing the Trastámara dynasty in particular.

The importance of chivalric texts lasted well into the sixteenth century despite changes in the reality of the courts in the Iberian Peninsula. Juan II of the House of Trastámara of Castile (1405-54), for example, was better known as a reader of chivalric genres than an actually chivalrous king. Fernando Gómez Redondo synthesizes the virtues and faults that Pérez de Guzmán, a contemporary of King Juan II, attributes to him.

Pérez de Guzmán no silencia las extraordinarias cualidades intelectivas de este monarca y su notable pericia al conocimiento de artes y ciencias; sin embargo, esas virtudes destacan aún más el principal de sus defectos: la ineptitud absoluta para gobernar el reino y su falta de voluntad para asumir sus obligaciones; con ironía, señala el poco provecho que había sacado este rey de las *estorias* a que era tan inclinado a leer. (Gómez Redondo 2002: 2451)

Pérez de Guzmán does not ignore the extraordinary intellectual qualities of this monarch and his obvious skill at learning arts and sciences; nevertheless, these virtues throw even more into relief the greatest of his defects: his absolute ineptitude at governing the kingdom and his lack of desire to assume his responsibilities; ironically, he shows the little benefit the king got from the *estorias* that he was so inclined to read.<sup>162</sup>

Juan II is portrayed as a man who reads the books of chivalry, but contrary to what is expected of him, he does not act like the knights in the texts. By contrast, the grand-master (*condestable*) Álvaro de Luna (1390-1453), an important advisor of Juan II, is described as a great knight and the very embodiment of chivalry.

El triunfal regreso de don Álvaro del destierro de Ayllón, en 1428, marca un hito en la construcción del imaginario caballeresco de la corte; la corrección de la *Crónica de don Álvaro* tuvo que ordenarse en ese momento; pero, además, el de Luna procuró promover una nueva caballería en torno a su figura . . . (Gómez Redondo 2002: 2202)

The triumphant return in 1428 of don Álvaro from exile in Ayllón is a milestone in the construction of imagined chivalry in the court; a correction of the *Crónica de don Álvaro* was ordered at that very moment. Moreover, Álvaro de Luna sought to promote a new form of chivalry based on his figure . . .

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162. All translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.

The various Iberian courts were avid readers and listeners of texts like the Arthurian romances and the *crónicas*.<sup>163</sup>

Arthurian texts also helped legitimize new forms of expansion and kingship. In the late fifteenth century, Isabel of Castile and Fernando II of Aragon unified the courts of Aragon and Castile (1469), began the Inquisition (1492), took over Granada (1492), and began a new enterprise of expansion, *La Conquista* of the Americas. These developments also benefited from the Arthurian chivalric romances that were produced using the ideologies of expansion promoted by earlier courts. Stephen Clissold, for example, directly links *La Reconquista* and *La Conquista*.

The Conquest was a joint enterprise between the Crown and private individuals. In an agreement known as a *Capitulación*, the Crown authorized the expedition concerned and specified the conquistador's rights of exploration, conquest and colonization and the financial rewards and privileges he might expect from its success. The conquistador, on his side, undertook to raise the armed force and cover the expenses of the expedition (sometimes in collaboration with the Crown). This was essentially the practice followed in the medieval war against the Moors, and shows the intimate connection between *Reconquista* and *Conquista*. (Clissold 1969: 57)

The crowns of Castile and Aragon continued the ideologies of expansion used in *La Reconquista* in *La Conquista* of the Americas, pointing to *La Conquista* as a new form of chivalry where God and country were once again intertwined and served as legitimate reasons for gaining power, this time over the New World.

The connections among *La Reconquista*, *La Conquista*, and the Inquisition are also apparent in chivalric romances and courtly culture. As previously mentioned, there were at least two different perspectives on the Muslims in Iberia present in Christian

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163. Shifts in the Aragonese court are also apparent and will be discussed later in the chapter.

Europe: that of Christians in Iberia and that of the rest of Christian Europe. These two different perspectives, however, take on different meanings later in the history of Iberia. As France and England witnessed the expansion of the courts of Aragon and Castile, the Iberian Peninsula ceases to be described as a locus of Crusade. The Spaniards are themselves described as Other, placed in the same peripheral position as Arabs, Muslims and Jews in Europe.<sup>164</sup> One of the reasons for the ethnic cleansing of Muslims and Jews in the *Siglo de Oro* is to remediate this new construction of the Spaniard as a non-European Other.

Kinoshita points out that the historical impact of Old French stories, such as *La Prise d'Orange*, connected and supported French ideologies of expansion into southern France, which includes sections controlled by Aragon.

An eroticized representation of Frankish aggression against the Saracens of Spain that, for all its comic inversions, vindicates the military and amatory prowess of a masculinized French feudal society. Ironically, however, in legitimizing the northern French conquest of southern France, the tales of Guillaume Fierebrace's expeditions to Nîmes and Orange inadvertently prepared the ideological ground not only for the Crusades in Iberia and the Levant but for the northern French invasion of the south, soon to be realized, . . . in the Albigensian crusades of the early thirteenth century. (Kinoshita 2006: 73)

What is known today as northern France began to construct southern France and the Iberian Peninsula as a Muslim Other, despite the fact that they were mainly controlled by Christians in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The construction of knights and kings in Iberian Arthurian texts, mainly those from the fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries, reflects the complicated history of the Iberian Peninsula in the texts. In the texts, knights become kings and kings stay in power by expanding their territories thanks to their prowess in battle and the help of God, just as the Christian kings did, legitimizing their

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164. See Barbara Fuchs(2007); and Irene Silverblatt (2007).

enterprise of conquest on the Peninsula and later in the Americas, and simultaneously distancing “European” Christian monarchies from the “Saracen” Other.

The Arthurian material discussed in this chapter benefits from a basic understanding of the history of the Iberian Peninsula during the Middle Ages. Establishing the connections between Iberian Arthurian texts and French Arthurian texts is not sufficient to help us understand the immense popularity of these texts or the powerful influence they exerted in the Iberian Peninsula. Centrally important to the history of the Christian Iberian Peninsula and the historical construction of the monarchy of the Iberian courts is the idea that expansion, chivalry, and godliness are connected to kingship. Arthurian texts are entrenched in this Christian cultural system because the diverse literary knights described follow a similar construction as the kings and knights from Iberian history.

### **Tristán and King Mares: Chivalry and Kingship Head to Head**

I now turn to *Tristán de Leonís* (c.1482) as a backdrop to aid in understanding Iberian Arthurian texts, such as the *Libro del Caballero Zifar* (c.1300), *Curial e Güelfa* (1440-60), and *Tirant lo Blanc* (1490),<sup>165</sup> as case studies in the relationship between the knights (Zifar, Curial, and Tristán) and kings, keeping in mind the historical underpinnings of *La Reconquista* in Iberia. Beginning the analysis of Iberian Arthurian texts with the Tristan legend showcases the way in which Arthurian stories with a strong European tradition are adapted to fit Iberian societies. The Arthurian texts point to the

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165. Because of space, I have chosen to limit my analysis to lesser-known Arthurian translations and rewritings. *Amadís de Gaula* (1508) is the most analyzed of Iberian Arthurian texts and thus I have chosen to omit it from this analysis.



complicated relationship between literature and history, particularly because of the role of literature in shaping medieval Iberian history. Literary scholars generally consider the Iberian Arthurian texts as translations, pseudotranslations, or refractions of the Vulgate, Post-Vulgate, and Tristán legends. There are no Iberian versions of Chrétien de Troyes's work, but *Jaufré* can be described as a response to Chrétien's work and in *Zifar*, the empress, who marries Zifar's son, is reading the story of *Yvain*.<sup>166</sup> The role of Arthur and his knights in Iberian Arthurian literature has a strong influence on the Iberian Peninsula because the Iberian afterlife of the Arthurian texts fits well with medieval Iberian Christian ideology.

Although *Tristán de Leonís* is the last medieval version of the Spanish Tristan cycle (1501), it resembles earlier fourteenth-century Spanish Tristan manuscripts and other earlier Iberian Arthurian materials.<sup>167</sup> There are several fragments of fourteenth- and fifteenth-century manuscripts of the Tristan legend in Catalan, Galician-Portuguese, and Castilian. Complete narratives of the Iberian *Tristán* are only available in Castilian, and we only have a few pages of the early fourteenth-century manuscripts. The first printed text of the story was produced in Valladolid by Juan de Burgos (1501). Scholars

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166. Professor Caroline D. Eckhardt from Pennsylvania State University has informed me that for her dissertation, titled "Arthurian Comedy," she discussed *Jaufré* as a response to Chrétien de Troyes's work (personal conversation, ACLA conference 2012).

167. The Castilian legend of Tristan, as well as other European versions of the story, share many common plot elements. In both texts, either one or both of Tristan's parents die early in his childhood; he goes to the kingdom of his uncle (the uncle's name differs in the various tales); he fights against oppression created by a knight (usually an Irish knight); under the effects of a love potion, he falls in love with Isold, who will become the wife of his uncle; and both Tristan and Isold die. Although the plot follows a pattern that makes it clearly the story of the international Tristan, the specificities of each individual version expose the cultural and historical backgrounds of the texts.

are in agreement that the 1501 version of the legend closely resembles the fourteenth-century excerpts except for the additions made by the editor (Sharrer 1977: 30-31), who adds materials from Juan de Flores's *Grimalte y Gradissa*. The second edition, published in Seville by Juan Cromberger (1528), is a close copy of the 1501 edition but adds a preface. Domenico Robertis published the 1534 printed text in Seville.<sup>168</sup>

*Tristán de Leonís* closely follows earlier fourteenth-century manuscripts. A sequel to *Tristán de Leonís*, *Don Tristán de Leonís y del rey don Tristán de Leonís el joven, su hijo* continues the story of the Castilian Tristan tale, and includes a section about Tristan's son (1534).<sup>169</sup> This last printed version is divided into two sections. The first section follows earlier versions of the Castilian Tristan legend. The second section narrates the lives of the son and daughter of Tristan and Isold. The second section intertwines late medieval Castilian history with the lives of Tristan's children, effectively rendering the text a pseudotranslation of earlier Tristan narratives. Both Castilian narratives, *Tristán de Leonís* and its sequel, uphold the chivalric code and at the same time inject an element of instability into courtly and chivalric culture.

In the latest Spanish versions of Tristan, although Tristan is not Spanish, his son, *el joven Tristán*, becomes King of Spain and fights against the Moors, revealing that by the sixteenth century Spaniards had also subscribed to the view of a Christian Spain that fights Muslims. The earlier fourteenth-century versions of the Tristan tale have an English Tristan, but the last Castilian version introduces the innovation of a Spanish

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168. See Sharrer (1977) for all the available manuscripts and editions of Tristan and other Iberian Arthurian translations and pseudotranslations of the Vulgate (Lancelot), and the Post-Vulgate (Roman du Graal) cycles.

169. *Coronica nuevamente enmendada y añadida del buen caballero don Tristán de Leonís y del rey don Tristán de Leonís el joven, su hijo* (1534).

Tristan, thereby moving away from an Anglo-French origin and reacting to the historical construction of the image of Spain in both the Iberian Peninsula and the rest of Europe.

The Castilian Tristan narrative is important because it synthesizes European Arthurian motifs and Spanish chivalric ideals (Cuesta Torres 1993). The Iberian Arthurian materials available highlight chivalric values over courtly cultural values, such as courtesy. The word *caballero*, for example, means both knight and gentleman in Spanish, providing a quick example of the interconnections between chivalry and courtly life in Spain. The value placed on chivalry over courtly culture might explain why there are no versions of Chrétien de Troyes's romances available in the Iberian Peninsula.

In *Tristán de Leonís*, Tristán is described as a better knight and man than King Mares. Similar to the *Llibres dels fets*, the Spanish Tristan tales highlight chivalric values and ideas of conquest. The ideals of chivalry, however, did not need to be embodied by the king. The portrayal of King Mares in the Castilian tales reveals a king that is derided for not following the chivalric and courtly ideals. The description of King Mares at the beginning of *Tristán de Leonís* is significant. Once King Mares becomes King of Cornwall, he pays tribute to Morlot of Ireland, accepting Morlot's demands without consulting the men of his court. Pernán, the brother of Mares, disagrees with his actions and tells him to fight Morlot or release the kingship of Cornwall to someone willing to fight.

Entonces dixo Pernán que si [Mares] no quisiese combatirse por defender su tierra e reino, que dexase la corona del reino, que bien habría caballero que la defendiese. Y el rey dixo que no quería e que haría en esto y en todo su voluntad, queriendo él o no. (*Libro del esforzado caballero* 1943: 14)

Then, Pernán said that if Mares did not want to go and fight to defend his land and kingdom, then he should relinquish the Crown of the kingdom, that there would be a knight who would defend it. And the King said that he did not wish to, and

that he would follow his own will in this and everything else, whether Pernán liked it or not.

Mares pays tribute to Morlot and then decides to kill his brother in secret to avenge Pernán's words. In the very first chapter of the Spanish Tristan, Mares is presented as a tyrant who does not ask his men for counsel, acts according to his will rather than according to what is best for his kingdom, and kills those who reproach his actions, even when the person is his own brother.

In *Tristán de Leonís* King Mares is described as of less value than Tristán because Tristán is a better knight. In the chapter “De cómo Tristán llegó a Cornualla e cómo la dueña del lago del Espina le envió a decir que se fuese a ver con ella” (“How Tristán arrived to Cornualla and how the lady of the lake of Espina sent to tell him to meet with her”), King Mares realizes that the woman he is interested in, the lady of the lake of Espina, has sent a message to Tristán (*Libro del esforzado caballero don Tristán de Leonís* 1943: 48). King Mares speaks to the messenger and the following conversation occurs.

El rey dixo: “Enano, sabe que yo quiero tanto de bien a ésta que no puedo ver ni oír a otra dueña, salvo a ella. E agora veo que ando engañado con ella e que ella escogió lo peor”. “¿Cómo?, dixo el enano, ¿escogió lo peor? ¿Cómo? ¿Vos no sabéis que Tristán es el mejor caballero del mundo?” (*Libro del esforzado caballero* 1943: 48)

The king said: “Dwarf, you know that I love her so much I cannot see nor listen to another lady, but her. And now I see that she is deceiving me and has chosen the worst.” “What?” said the Dwarf “She chose the worst? How? Don't you know that Tristán is the best knight in the world?”

The next chapter, “De cómo el rey se combatió con Tristán de Leonís,” (“How the king fought with Tristán de Leonís”), describes Tristán beating the king in combat without

realizing whom he has just attacked. Mares secretly waits for Tristán so that he can kill him during the night. When the king's *escudero* (squire) realizes this, he says,

¿Cómo, señor, recaudador sois vos fecho de aquella vuestra tierra, que salteáis los caballeros que buscan sus aventuras? Por Buena fe, señor, que descortesía facéis. E las gentes que lo supieren a mal vos lo contrarán. E deshace mucho en vuestro honor. (*Libro del esforzado caballero* 1943: 49-50)

How, my lord, can you collect revenue from the land you own, when you jump upon the knights who are looking for adventure? By my faith, sir, what a discourtesy you are doing. And if people knew they would find it a bad thing. And it greatly diminishes your honor.

Following this conversation, King Mares is defeated in combat by Tristán. Thus, King Mares is described as a man who does not follow the chivalric and courtly ideals of the court. Rather, Tristán, his nephew and vassal, is described as the best knight in the world, an example of the chivalric and courtly ideals. Kingship is praised in characters such as Tristán and Artús, and King Mares is criticized because he fails to exhibit chivalric conduct.<sup>170</sup>

In fact, the Castilian Mares decides to marry Iseo, the niece of Morlot, because he wants Tristán to die, and he believes that Tristán will be killed in the process of asking for her hand on Mare's behalf. The title of the chapter summarizes the situation well.

De cómo don Tristán se tornó a la corte y pesó al rey Mares con él. Y de cómo le envió a Irlanda por Iseo la brunda, porque lo matasen allá, por cuanto la reina, mujer del rey Languines, lo quería mal porque mató a su hermano Morlot, e la truxo consigo por su buena caballería. (*Libro del esforzado caballero* 1943: 58)

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170. Although King Mares is described negatively, Arthur is described as the best king in the world who has the best knights under his command. After chapter XIX of *Tristán de Leonís* most of the action places Tristán in the Arthurian milieu and demonstrates his greatness by his addition into the Knights of the Round Table (*Libro del esforzado caballero* 1943: 62). In chapter XLV in particular, Arthur is described as a great knight, and he and Tristan are aided by the hand of God. Good chivalric manners are imperative to good kingship (*Libro del esforzado caballero* 1943: 139-40).

On how Tristán went back to court and weighed King Mares with himself. And how [Mares] sent him to Ireland for Iseo the blonde so that he would be killed there, since the queen, the wife of King Languines, wished him ill because he killed her brother Morlot, but he brought her back with him because of his great chivalric skills.

Although the Castilian version follows a plotline similar enough for us to know it is a different version of the same tale, the differences in the details are striking, including the personality of Tristán's uncle, the actions of king, and the way in which he ends up with Iseo. The differences are significant because they usually signal the uniqueness of the adaptation. They also underscore that in the Castilian Tristán tale, kingship is connected to chivalric values, and a lack of such values in Mares allows the king's position to be undermined.

### **Defending Women: Injecting Proto-Feminism into Tristán**

*Tristán de Leonís* also exhibits a shift in the portrayal of women, corresponding to a shift in the position of women in the courts of the Iberian Peninsula. Evidence points to a shift in the role of women in Castilian Arthurian texts between earlier versions of the legends and the later versions. Although, for the most part, the text of *Tristán de Leonís* follows fourteenth-century manuscripts of the story, the editor of the 1501 edition incorporated passages of Juan de Flores' *Grimalte y Gradissa* (1495), a printed *novela sentimental* that critiques the discourse of chivalry.<sup>171</sup> Of interest here is that the editor

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171. Gradissa, a Castilian woman, is heartbroken by the fate of Fiometa, who is based on a character by Boccaccio. Gradissa decides to reject the advances of all men including the advances of Grimalte, her lover. Grimalte searches for Fiometa and tries to reconcile her with her lover Panfilo. Eventually Panfilo rejects Fiometa and she kills herself. Panfilo retreats to a forest. Grimalte returns to Gradissa, who convinces him to seek Panfilo once more. At the end of the novella, both Grimalte y Panfilo seclude

chose to incorporate the tomb scene of Fiometa in the tomb scene of Tristán and Iseo. In “Juan de Flores y Tristán de Leonís,” Pamela Waley states that

The 1501 *Tristán de Leonís* in fact borrows largely from Flores’ *Grimalte y Gradissa*, containing seven lengthy passages from it. Some of these are quoted without alteration – the tomb of Tristán and Iseo’s an exact repetition of the description of part of that of Fiometa, and the final verse of *Grimalte* becomes the song of a love-sick knight – but the other are altered, usually with care, to fit their new context. (1961: 1)

The addition of several passages, including the tomb scene of Fiometa from *Grimalte y Gradissa*, signals that new ideologies are being adopted by the readers of the Arthurian texts. *Grimalte y Gradissa* presents material from a different genre that was emerging in the late fifteenth century, *novelas sentimentales*, a genre that was part of print culture and had a different perspective on the role of women than earlier chivalric texts, pointing to a shift in the construction of the role of women.

In “Espacio y alienación en *Grimalte y Gradissa* de Juan de Flores” (1997), Rina Walthaus suggests that the death of Fiometa symbolizes the alienation of the main characters and distances the story from that of the ‘libros de caballería.’ She writes that

El rechazo definitivo de Pánfilo origina el suicidio de Fiometa, por el cual ésta será condenada a las llamas eternas del infierno. Para *Grimalte* significa el fracaso definitivo de sus intentos. Mientras en los libros de caballerías el héroe suele partir de la corte (por ejemplo, artúrica) para, después de realizar las aventuras de su *quete* en otras partes del mundo, volver en triunfo a ella y reintegrarse en su propio mundo, en *Grimalte y Gradissa* no hay tal triunfo, ni vuelta con reintegración. (1997: 14)

The complete rejection by Pánfilo results in the suicide of Fiometa, for which she will spend eternity in the eternal flames of hell. For *Grimalte* it means the complete failure of his attempts. Although in the books of Chivalry the hero usually leaves his court (for example the Arthurian court) so that after he finishes the adventures of his *quete* in other parts of the world, he comes back

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themselves from civilization and live in the woods where *Grimalte* is plagued by visions of Fiometa in hell. See Juan de Flores (1495).

triumphantly to the court and is reintegrated into his own world, in *Grimalte y Gradissa* there is neither success nor reintegration.

*Grimalte y Gradissa* critiques the ideals of courtly culture and exposes its dangers, including the possibility that women like Fiometa might endure eternal damnation and that knights who leave for battle may not necessarily reintegrate into society or even come back at all.

The addition of new material to the Castilian Tristán legend also creates contradictions between the main story and the added materials. In *Tristán de Leonís* Belisenda kills herself because Tristán will not marry her. Her tomb bears the following inscription: “Aquí yace Belisenda, Fija del rey Feremondo, la cual se mató por amores de Tristán de Leonís” (*Libro del esforzado caballero* 1943: 29; “Here lies Belisenda, daughter of King Feremondo, who killed herself because she loved Tristán de Leonís”). The fact that Belisenda is not considered important becomes clear from the actions of those around her, who are more preoccupied with Tristán than with her. The title of the section, “De cómo tuvieron a don Tristán para cortar la cabeza, porque no quería amar a Belisenda, hija del rey Feremondo” (*Libro del esforzado caballero* 1943: 29; “How they held Tristán to cut his head off because he did not want to love Belisenda, daughter of King Feremondo”) is especially telling because it focuses on Tristán. Belisenda’s death is only significant because it increases Tristán’s stature. In stark contrast to *Grimalte y Gradissa*, *Tristán de Leonís* does not emphasize the rejection of Belisenda by Tristán or her eternal damnation. Instead, it concentrates on Tristán.<sup>172</sup>

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172. The above example of Belisenda follows the same trend as *Amadís* where the role of the women is to show the greatness of the knight. For an interesting analysis on the role of women in Castile as mediators between the knight and society, and thus exalting the knights in the process see Ranka Minic-Vidovic (2007).



The addition of Fiometa's tomb scene at the end of the text expresses a new and different ideology from the one presented in the rest of the text. To include both the description at the tomb of Tristán and Iseo and that of Fiometa is to highlight the tragedies of their deaths. The incorporation of material from *Grimalte y Gradissa* in the Tristán tale points to the fact that although influenced by the eras that produced them, these tales are still based on earlier materials. The incorporation of the material also points to a shift in fifteenth-century ideology. The fusion between the Arthurian texts and the *novelas sentimentales* begins to change the way Arthurian texts are read and handled. There are two systems at work in the 1501 printed text of *Tristán de Leonís*, that of an earlier chivalric and courtly tradition and a new system that questions chivalry and courtly culture. Such a shift in the role of chivalric literature in Castilian courtly society reaches its zenith with Cervantes's *Don Quijote*.

There are several layers of ideology present in the 1501 text of the Castilian *Tristán de Leonís*. Chivalry is questioned indirectly by incorporating material from a new genre that interrogates many of the ideologies inherent in the earlier Arthurian texts. Nevertheless, here, as in Iberian Arthurian literature as a whole, the text emphasizes chivalric ideals over courtly love and even rank. In the text instances of chivalric ideology idealize knighthood, promoting ideologies of expansion and the idea that the best warrior deserves to be king.<sup>173</sup> King Mares does not follow the chivalric code and is

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173. For more information on the changing notion of knighthood in Iberia, see Jesús Rodríguez Velasco (1993). Rodríguez Velasco distinguishes between literary constructions of knights and actual knights and presents the changes knighthood undergoes between the law tracts *Espéculo* (c. 1256-60) and *Las siete partidas* (c. 1270). Rodríguez Velasco points out that knighthood evolves from a specialized warrior who goes to battle (1993: 59) to an order to which only the nobles and the king belong, creating a liaison between the king and his vassals through knighthood. Rodríguez

described as a tyrant. Tristán is a vassal of King Mares, but because he follows chivalric conduct, he is described as better than the king. Although these chivalric ideologies play a main role in the texts, by 1500 other elements begin to question chivalry, such as the inclusion of passages from *Grimalte y Gradissa* in the 1501 Castilian version of the legend. The Castilian Tristán legend manages to keep many of the elements of the transnational Tristan story, while adding Castilian ideas to the text, rendering it uniquely Iberian.

### **Godly Knights and Ladies: Strength and Worth in the Zifar and Iberian Arthurian Texts**

The remaining chivalric Arthurian texts discussed here, *Libro del Caballero Zifar* (c. 1300), *Curial e Güelfa* (1440-60), and *Tirant lo Blanc* (1490) portray Iberian knights who live in an Arthurian world or in settings where a strong knowledge of Arthurian texts is apparent. Thus, Iberian texts use Arthurian imagery and knowledge to create their own Arthurian knights. These knights follow similar trajectories in that they are knights who

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Velasco concludes that “El fracaso legal del *Espéculo* pretende solucionarse a través de una nueva intervención legal. Una en la que sus adversarios sean incluidos en el mismo estado que el propio rey y del cual éste es la cabeza. Un orden social que los una indisolublemente, como vínculo natural que es. Es la nobleza la que se integra a la caballería, no los caballeros los que son ennoblecidos. La caballería ya no es oficio, sino la más alta dignidad, aquella en la que todos los nobles se encuentran y desde la cual construyen una imagen legal que expresa el desideratum de un rey en pugna con unos nobles que le son, sin embargo, imprescindibles para todos sus proyectos, así los interiores como los exteriores” (1993: 77; “The legal failure of *Espéculo* pretends to be fixed through a new legal intervention. One in which the king’s adversaries are included on the same level as the king but of which he is the head. A social order that unites them indissolubly, like a natural bond, as the nobility integrates to knighthood rather than making the knights nobles. Knighthood is no longer a job, but the most important dignity, one in which all the nobles find themselves and from which they construct a legal image that expresses the desideratum of a king struggling with certain nobles who nevertheless are indispensable for all his projects, both in interior and exterior affairs”).

become kings or gain prestige, fame, and riches through knighthood. They also promote ideologies of expansion and power that legitimized the kings in power.

*Libro del caballero Zifar* (or Çifar) is considered the first great chivalric Spanish romance. Written around 1300, the poem includes certain Arthurian elements, such as Arthur and his fight with the cat, Palug (from the Vulgate *Merlin*) and an encounter between the Caballero Atrevido and a woman from the lake (similar to Marie de France's *Lanval*).<sup>174</sup> The tale is not an Arthurian text, but it is marked by both Arthurian literary ideals and Iberian courtly ideals.<sup>175</sup> The text is also considered a Byzantine romance with a didactic and religious tone, and contains oriental and epic influences.<sup>176</sup> There are many important aspects to consider when analyzing *Zifar*. This chapter is particularly interested in the relationship between the kings and the knights, and the fact that Zifar and his sons are knights who become kings.

The trajectory of the tale of *Zifar* is important for a discussion of Iberian Arthurian literature because it helps clarify the reason that Arthurian texts in Iberia concentrate on the knights and not on Arthur. *Zifar* is the first chivalric romance in Castilian and the text demonstrates that the writer was borrowing plot elements from Arthurian literature. Despite the fact that the text is a romance, it has many elements similar to Iberian chivalric literature, mainly that Iberian literature, like the romances of Chrétien de Troyes discussed in the chapter above, allowed for men other than the king to

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174. Sharrer (1986c: 648-49); Valbuena Prat (1981: 338-40); and María Rosa Lida (1966).

175. See Martín de Riquer (1951); Lida (1966); Valbuena Prat (1981: 336-39); and Cacho-Blecua (2008: 19-29).

176. Sharrer (1986c: 648-49). See also Vincent Barletta (1978).

be praised. As already discussed, this ideology comes from a long historiographic and literary tradition of placing primacy on chivalry and acts of military prowess in the Iberian Peninsula, as well as glorifying those who execute such heroic acts. An important theme in early Iberian literature is the position of the king and his military prowess, which was granted by God; this was equally an important ideology in early Iberian history, especially during times of war against neighboring courts, particularly when the enemies were not Christian.

*Zifar* is divided into five sections. Following the prologue, there is a section titled “El Caballero de Dios” (“The Knight/Gentleman of God), in which Zifar and his wife and two children go on traveling adventures. During their adventures, they are all separated by “providence” and Zifar becomes the King of Mentón by marrying the daughter of the previous king. In the next section, “El rey de Mentón” (“The King of Mentón”) we encounter Zifar as the king of Mentón; his first wife comes by “providence” to Mentón to open a hospital, and his sons come to Mentón because they want to be knights of the king. By the end of the section, the reigning queen of Mentón dies, and Zifar is able to make his first wife queen (he never consummated his marriage to the Mentón maiden) and his sons princes. In the third section, “Castigos del rey de Mentón” (“Punishments by the King of Mentón”), Zifar tells his sons how to be good kings. The final section, “Los hechos de Roboán” (“The deeds of Roboán”), deals with Roboán, Zifar’s younger son, who leaves on adventure and becomes emperor of the Islas Dotadas by marrying the daughter of the lady of Pareçer and Yvan, son of Orian.<sup>177</sup>

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177. Gonzáles Muelas mentions that “Baist opinaba que el autor del *Zifar* conocía el *lai Lanval* bajo el nombre *Ivains*. Otras posibles fuentes: el *Lanval* de Marie de France, o el anónimo *Graelent*” (“*Libro del caballero*”1990); “Baist believed that the author of

The “prologue” situates the text as a translation made by the first Cardinal buried in Spain.

E porque la memoria del ome ha luengo tiempo e non se pueden acordar los omes de las cosas mucho antiguas si non las falló por escrito, e por ende el trasladador de la estoria que adelante oiredes, que fue trasladado de caldeo en latín e de latín en romance, e puso e ordenó estas dos cosas sobredichas en esta obra porque los que venieren después de los de este tiempo sepan quando el año jubileo á de ser, porque le puedan ir a ganar los bienaventurados perdones que en aquel tiempo son otorgados a todos los que allá fueren. E que sepan que este fue el primer cardenal que fue enterrado en España. (Libro del caballero 1990: 56)

Because man’s memory spans a long time, men cannot remember the ancient things if they are not put into writing. Therefore the translator of the story you will hear from this point on, which was translated from Syriac into Latin and from Latin into Spanish, placed and established these two aforementioned things in this work in order that those people who will come after the people of this time will live when the year of jubilee is to be celebrated and that they may go to Rome to win the fullest pardons, which will be granted at that time to all who may go there, and that they may know that this was the first cardinal who was interred in Spain. (*Book of the Knight Zifar* 1983: 5)<sup>178</sup>

The text continued by telling the story of the cardinal and repeating that he is buried in Spain, before advancing the main story. This is a technique similar to that used in the *Arabian Nights* and it is used throughout the tale. The prologue not only commences with the narrative style found throughout the story, but also marks the text as a translation: first from “Caldeo” (translated “Syriac,” but probably Arabic) into Latin, and finally into a Romance vernacular language (Spanish).

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*Zifar* knew the *Lai of Lanval* as *Yvain*. Other possible sources are: *Lanval* by Marie de France or the anonymous *Graelent*). See also Richard Wagner (1903); and Robert M. Walker (1975). Harvey Sharrer mentions that these scenes make allusions to Chrétien de Troyes’s *Yvain* but he makes no mention of the *Lais* of Marie de France as a possible source (1986c: 648-49). Although *Zifar* seems to allude to both Chrétien’s and Marie’s work, in both instances the material is shaped to fit Iberian ideology.

178. This example is a possible source of Cervantes parody.

The influence of the “Syriac,” Latin, and Romance systems throughout the text is frequent in early Iberian literature. Vincent Barletta points out that

The discursive diversity of Iberian texts from the medieval period takes many forms. Extensive examples can be found in the Arabic and Hebrew literature of al-Andalus, where classical literary forms from the East (e.g. the *qasiida* and *maqama*) related in complex ways to distinctly Andalusí modes of expression (e.g. the *muwashshah* and *zajal*). Also important is the Christian practice of recentering Arabic and Latin texts of diverse genres within works redacted in vernacular Romance – the *Libro de buen amor* being perhaps the most famous and most avidly studied case of this. (2004: 239)

The tale also ends similarly by reminding the reader that the story is a translation.

Onde dize el traslaudador que bienaventurado es el que se da a bien e se trabaja siempre de fazer lo mejor. Ca por bien fazer puede ome ganar a Dios y a los omes e pro e onra para este mundo y para el otro, non se enojando nin desesperando de la merçed de Dios. (*Libro del caballero* 1990: 434)

Wherefore the translator says that the one who gives himself over to good works is very fortunate and always strives to do his best, for by doing good, a man can attain the love of God and men, and advantages and honors in this world and the next, never getting angry or despairing of the favor of God. (*Book of the Knight Zifar* 1983: 312).

In his analysis of the ending of *Zifar*, Barletta finds that “embedded in the *Zifar* is a gloss on al-Ghazali's *Intentions of the Philosophers*, which is itself a commentary on Avicenna's and al-Farabi's earlier commentaries on Aristotle's *Physics*” (Barletta 2004: 250). The tale implies that the writer or “translator” had knowledge of Latin and Arabic texts, as well as knowledge of Arthurian literature, and thus created an Iberian text that draws from these diverse systems. Although the chivalric aspects of the text and the relationship between knights and kings are at play here, it is important to keep in mind that the *Zifar* draws from a cluster of cultural systems that make it uniquely Iberian and from the early history of the Iberian Peninsula.

The text's three sections, "El caballero de Dios," "El rey de Mentón," and "Los hechos de Roboán," investigate the relationship of kings with their knights, and express the view that being a good knight leads to kingship. Each of the sections emphasizes that being a loyal servant to one's superiors also leads to upward mobility. The text makes the case that kingship is a God-given right and suggests that a knight can become king if God grants it. In this sense being king is not necessarily tied to a birthright, although the text implies that Zifar comes from a kingly lineage. The text further implies that those who serve a just king will be rewarded.

According to the story Zifar is the best knight but has one problem: his horses always die after ten days (giving new meaning to the words *caballero andante*, literally knight errant/walking). His liege decides that it is too expensive to keep Zifar and asks Zifar to leave his service. Zifar decides he must gain a kingdom, as he is a descendant of a king; he sets off to travel with his wife, Grima, and his two sons, Garfin and Roboán. His grandfather explains to him that their family lost their kingdom because their ancestor was a bad king and advises that only by being good and by earning a kingdom can his family restore their kingship.

Respondió mi avuelo; dixo que por maldat de aquel rey onde deçendimos, "ca por la su maldat nos abaxaron así como tú vees; e çertas non he esperança – dixo mi abuelo – que vuestro linage e nuestro cobre fasta que otro venga de nos que sea contrario de aquel rey e faga bondat e aya buenas costumbres; e el rey que fuere ese tienpo que sea malo e lo ayan a desponer por su maldat; e éste fagan rey por su bondat; e puede esto [f. 15v] ser con la merçed de Dios." "¿E si yo fuese de buenas costumbres – dixe yo – , podría llegar a tan alto lugar?" E él me respondió reyéndose mucho, e me dixo así: "Amigo pequeño de días e de buen entendimiento, dígo te que sí, si bien te esforçares a ello e non te enojares de fazer bien; ca por bien fazer, bien puede ome subir a alto lugar." (*Libro del caballero Zifar* 1990: 77)

My grandfather answered: "It was through the evil of the king from whom we are descended that we have come to such humble station as you now see. And I in

truth have no hope that I will regain your rightful inheritance and ours until another member of our family comes who is the opposite of that deposed king – one who does good deeds and is virtuous. If the king who reigns at that time is wicked, they will depose him for wickedness and make the latter king on account of his virtues. And this can be true with the grace of God.” “And if I were so exemplary,” I said, “would I be able to reach such high estate?” He answered me with a smile, “My very young and wise friend, I say that you can, with the grace of God, if you strive hard and do not tire of doing good. By doing good, a man can surely rise to high position.” (*Book of the Knight Zifar* 1983: 21)

After Zifar tells his wife about the conversation with his grandfather, they set out so that Zifar can earn a kingdom. Throughout their adventures Zifar proves that he is a great knight and leader and helps others win battles and keep their kingdoms.

The tale of Zifar also implies that being a loyal servant can result in upward mobility for those who are loyal. While traveling, Zifar meets a *ribaldo* or ruffian who decides to become his squire (very similar to Sancho Panza in *Don Quixote*). The *ribaldo* helps Zifar, feeds him, and gives him advice. Once Zifar is in Mentón and has proven his worth, he presents the *ribaldo* as a knight to the people of Mentón, and he becomes a man of high rank and social standing known as the knight Amigo (Friend). Later in the text, during the adventures of Roboán, Amigo becomes a Duke. Amigo proves his worth through his chivalric actions but he needs the will of God to be able to rise in the court. Amigo is also loyal to Zifar and his sons, always doing what is best for their kingship. The text makes a case for kingship and nobility as a God-given right, but rank is likewise earned through the heroic actions of the kings and nobles. The story’s message again legitimizes the power that Christian knights secured in the expansion of Christian control over Iberia. Being a knight brought kingship to some, but even for those who did not become kings, being loyal and fighting as a knight of the king brought fame, glory, rises in station, and riches. The ideals of chivalry presented in *Zifar* – that your status is both



the will of God and earned – reflects the ideology of early Iberian texts, such as Jaume I's book and the *Crónica* by Muntaner. Basing status on these ideals also makes it possible to criticize kingship if a king did not have chivalric qualities.

### **Tirant lo Blanc and Curial e Güelfa: From England to France to Constantinople**

The study of Castilian and Catalan Arthurian texts provides insights into the ideologies of the various Iberian courts. Both the Spanish and Castilian texts can be analyzed using the same historical backdrop, and in both cases the texts work as propaganda that legitimizes the power of the Christian courts. Nonetheless, *Tirant lo Blanc* and *Curial et Güelfa*, both written in Catalan, reflect different historical influences from those of *Zifar* and *Tristán*. Moreover, not only do these texts speak to the realities of the Iberian Peninsula, but they also have an intricate connection to the ideologies of expansion of the Catalan court in what is now the south of France and in Italy. These texts are also connected to Castile through Alfonso V, who became King of Aragon in 1416 and was one of the most important kings in the fifteenth century (Abulafia 2011a: 47). Alfonso V comes from the Trastámara line of Castile, connecting the Catalan and Castilian court and their uses of chivalric texts to gain legitimacy. Alfonso was interested in expanding his dominion in Mediterranean lands.

The unique constructions of *Tirant lo Blanc* and *Curial et Güelfa* in comparison to their Castilian counterparts, mainly *Amadís de Gaula*, has prompted Martí de Riquer's assertion that these texts should be called "chivalresque novels" instead of "books of chivalry" because they are so different from their counterparts (1990: 578). Nevertheless, Alberto Varvaro points to the many generic elements that the novels share with other

contemporary texts (2002). A close study of the historical realities of the texts and their plots indicates that both texts use Arthurian literature as the foundation of their efforts to legitimize the position of the Aragonese court. Like their Castilian counterparts, the writers of *Tirant lo Blanc* and *Curial et Güelfa* employed Arthurian motifs and Arthurian literary settings to create their own contemporary knights, responding to the decline of power in the Aragonese courts.

The writers of both *Tirant lo Blanc* and *Curial e Güelfa* use their knowledge of Arthurian literature to make a case for the protoimperialist agenda of the kingdom of Aragon and to rewrite the historical realities of the decline of the Aragonese court. The two fifteenth-century chivalric novels share several themes and strategies in the process. They both refer to historical events and use realistic elements. Both *Tirant* and *Curial* are held captive in North Africa, they both convert “infidels” to Christianity, and they both fight and defeat the Turks in Constantinople (Piera 1999: 48). Montserrat Piera observes that the two texts are created during a time period when the Aragon court was declining.

It is in the fifteenth century (1453) that Constantinople is forever lost to the Turks and it is the same century which marks the irreversible political decline of the Crown of Aragon. It is in this context that these two “different” and outstanding Catalan romances were conceived and composed. (Piera 1999: 48).

*Curial* and *Tirant*, thus, use historical facts to shape their narratives; they rewrite the victory of the Turks in Constantinople.<sup>179</sup>

A brief digression is useful regarding the historical significance of the struggles of Alfonso V with René d’Anjou over Naples, as well as Aragon’s relationship to the various courts in France and Italy during the events leading to and following the fall of

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179. Other important research discussing both *Tirant* and *Curial* include: Antoni Ferrando (2011a and 2011b); and Anton Espadaler (2003).

Constantinople. The historical realities underscore that the Arthurian milieu and Arthurian motifs are used in the texts to legitimize the need for expansion of the Aragonese court and to rehistoricize the events in Constantinople in order to deal with the frustrated attempts of the Aragonese court to expand.

Alfonso V of Aragon and René d'Anjou were both promised the kingship of Naples by Joanna II of Naples (1373-1435; Abulafia 2011a: 48). Joanna II died in 1435 without an heir, resulting in a conflict between René d'Anjou and Alfonso V (Ferrando 2011a: 22). By 1443 Alfonso had obtained the Kingdom of Naples and Italy was thus divided among Milan, Florence, Venice, the Papacy, and the Aragonese court, with Aragon controlling a substantial part of Italy (Abulafia 2011a: 48). Alfonso's ideology of expansion came to a halt with the fall of Constantinople to the Turks in 1453.

The actions of Alfonso V prior to 1453 highlight that Alfonso was not very invested in protecting Constantinople against the Turks. On the one hand, Alfonso V presented himself as a new Galahad who fought in favor of Christendom (Abulafia 2011a: 49). On the other hand, he had his own agenda of expansion. In 1447, for example, Alfonso V promised to help the king of Hungary against the Turks, but after recruiting troops, he sent them to his own war in Tuscany (Abulafia 2011a: 49). The fall of Constantinople in 1453 resulted in several political challenges for Alfonso. A year after the fall of Constantinople, Milan, Florence, Venice, and the Papacy signed the treaty of Lodi, which promised peace among these powers in order to deal with the Turkish threat. Alfonso V signed the treaty in 1455, ending his push for expansion in what is now Italy (Abulafia 2011a: 48). Alfonso even tried to organize another Crusade against the Turks, but died in 1458 before any attempt was made (Housley 1992: 294). Piera astutely

argues that the events described above, particularly the fall of Constantinople, mark the decline of the Aragonese court.

The real union between Castile and Aragon took place much earlier, in 1412, when the kings who ruled both kingdoms belonged to the same Castilian family. Henceforth we witness not a renewed power of the House of Aragon but an irreversible decline in the social, political and linguistic conditions of the Kingdom of Aragon. It is true that the fifteenth is a century of brilliant literary and cultural achievements in the Crown of Aragon, especially in Valencia. Nevertheless, as the century progresses it becomes evident that Aragon is losing its pre-eminence. Politically, Aragon ceases to be a maritime power and linguistically, Catalan begins to be subtly persecuted, especially after the establishment of the Inquisition in Valencia and Catalonia in the 1480s by the Catholic Monarchs. (Piera 1999: 56-57)

These historical realities mark the end of the *La Reconquista* of the Aragonese court and are featured in both *Curial* and *Tirant*. The Aragonese dynasty expanded beyond the Peninsula to the north of Africa, Sicily, and the eastern Mediterranean.<sup>180</sup> Both texts express anxiety over the position of the Aragon court in the Mediterranean and beyond and both texts use Arthurian motifs and ideologies to do so. *Tirant* ends by recalling events from the *Mort Artu* and presenting an idealized king, rehistoricizing the role of Alfonso V in Constantinople. By contrast, *Curial* uses knowledge of the Arthurian literary tradition to present Cataluña as preeminent but at the same time displaces the Catalans to roles as secondary characters. Both *Tirant* and *Curial* present Catalan knights as the best knights in Christian Europe.

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180. Piera argues that “For the Catalan-Aragonese the fall of Constantinople meant, to some extent, the end of their *Reconquista*. The concept of *Reconquista* which has been defined as a solely Castilian phenomenon which supposedly contributed to the configuration of a singular Castilian national identity is, in fact, a much wider phenomenon . . . The ambitions of the Crown of Aragon responded to this desire of expansion common to all the European nations of the period. Even though, as we have seen, Aragon actively participated in the military campaigns to reconquer Iberian soil from the Muslims, very early on its interests also took other directions outside the boundaries of the Peninsula, namely the north of Africa, Sicily and the eastern Mediterranean” (1999: 50).

*Tirant lo Blanc* is known for the use of overt love scenes and descriptions of the daily life of both Christians and Muslims, and for its projection of despair by the end of the text. The text describes the adventures of Tirant first in England, then France, and finally in the Byzantine Empire. In both England and France he participates in tournaments where he is demonstrably the best knight. He is asked to fight against the Turks in Constantinople and he is decisive in winning against them. He continues to fight against Turks in different parts of the Mediterranean and Africa. He dies as he is about to marry the heiress of the Byzantine Empire. For David Abulafia, Tirant represents an idealized version of Alfonso V and the figure he aspired to be as the new Galahad. The text, for example, is full of advice on how to defeat the Ottoman army (Abulafia 2011a: 49). *Tirant* was, in part, reacting to the history of Alfonso and his unfulfilled quest for expansion.<sup>181</sup>

The ambivalent ending of *Tirant lo Blanc*, in which the hero dies before marrying into the kingship of the Byzantine Empire, suggests a sense of hopelessness, especially in view of the fact that Tirant was the one to increase Christian faith in the enemy territories of the Muslim Turks (Chapters 472 and 474). As already mentioned, *Tirant lo Blanc* draws elements from the *Mort Artu*.

A comparison with other texts that belong to the genre of the medieval romance can offer some insight into this new tragic sense of hopelessness that permeates *Tirant lo Blanc* and which suggests a dismal view of the chivalry world. The *Mort Artu*, which is the last romance of the “Vulgate Cycle,” displays a tragic element to the story that was only latently present in twelfth-century Arthurian romances. When King Arthur dies, the Round Table is destroyed and with it the harmonious society of chivalry. The causes of such a denouement further underscore the tragedy of this society's destiny: Arthur and his knights were unable to renounce the courtly values in order to succeed in the quest of the Grail. When they most

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181. For an interesting article that brings connections between Alfonso's reign and *Tirant*, see Rafael Beltrán (2007).

needed to uphold the virtues of chivalry, they faltered and their imperfection brought about the demise of their world. (Piera 1999: 57)

*Tirant*, recalling the *Mort Artu*, implicitly questions chivalry without describing chivalry as a failure. *Tirant lo Blanc* uses the afterlife of Arthurian texts to express nostalgia about the loss of power of the Aragonese court.

*Curial et Güelfa* also deals with the expansion of the Aragonese court into the Mediterranean and also uses Arthurian motifs to express pro-Catalan ideologies. *Curial* is written in Catalan and takes place in various locations in Europe, Africa, and the Byzantine Empire. Ferrando points out that

the novel reserves a special place for King Peter the Great (1240-1285), monarch of the realms of the Crown of Aragon (Aragon, Cataluña, the Balearic Islands, and Valencia), and, as consort of Constanza of Hohenstaufen, also King of Sicily. Though the text expresses hostility to the Angevins, French cultural influence is dominant, and it is on French territory that most of Curial's deeds of chivalry take place. (Ferrando 2011a: 1-2).

Although Curial and Güelfa are Italian, the best merchants, knights, and kings in the story are from the Aragon court.

The text is clearly using chivalric motifs but is heavily influenced by Byzantine romance. The text is comprised of three books. In the first book Curial joins the service of the Marquis of Montferrat. Güelfa, the Marquis's sister, decides to finance Curial's ascendancy into knighthood. His travels begin because of two envious men who slander his name and get him banished. He goes to the aid of the Duchess of Austria who has been slandered, defeating her two accusers. Then Curial returns to Montferrat and is joined by three Catalan Knights who together defeat Boca de Far. The book concludes by praising King Don Pedro of Aragon.

In the second book Curial travels to a tournament held by the King of France. He has many adventures on his travels as a knight errant. He meets with Aragonese knights and joins their group. Curial joins Aragonese and Burgundian knights against French and British knights. King Pedro of Aragon fights with Curial's party incognito and, together with the rest of the Aragonese knights, they defeat the French and British knights. Curial then fights the Boar of Vilahir, deemed the most terrible knight. Because of slander Curial is banished from the French court and loses the favor of Güelfa. Book III takes Curial to North Africa in the company of a Catalan knight and later to Constantinople, where Curial defeats the Turks and regains his good reputation. In this last book Curial is able to defeat Muslims by converting Qamar, the daughter of a wealthy Tunisian who is forced to marry the King of Tunis. Qamar kills herself because she cannot be with Curial. He also defeats Muslims by fighting in Constantinople and against the Turks.

There are clear elements that place Curial in what is now Italy and as part of the Aragonese court and that directly speak to events in Alfonso's reign. Antoni Ferrando argues that

For that reason, if we situate *Curial* in Italy at the time of Alfonso the Magnanimous and accept that its author showed a decided preference for the Aragonese cause, he could hardly be indifferent to a political issue of great salience: the claims of René of Anjou and of Alfonso the Magnanimous to the throne of Naples on the death without heir of Joanna II in 1435, and hence the confrontation between the partisans of the Angevin and Aragonese causes, reproducing in the 15th century the parallel conflict of the 13th, between the Guelphs, supporting the papacy, and the Ghibellines, supporting the Holy Roman Empire. (Ferrando 2011a: 22)

The writer favors Aragonese control of Naples in preference to control of Naples by René d'Anjou.<sup>182</sup> The text depicts Curial, a product of Catalan and Italian descent, as the hero who can protect Constantinople, a similar configuration to the one taken by the writer of *Tirant*.

As already mentioned, there are several connections between *Curial* and *Tirant*, including the use of Arthurian motifs (representing the afterlife of both Iberian and French Arthurian texts) and the rehistoricizing of actual events in Mediterranean lands. As Antoni Ferrando explains, there are many allusions in *Curial* to Arthurian texts from France and Spain.

They are to be seen in the reuse of episodes, descriptions and proper names taken from romances of the Breton cycle, and from narratives of chivalry, whether in prose or in verse. From *Lancelot*, which is perhaps the most widely exploited source, come, for example, episodes like the attempted seizure of Arta in accord with the “*mala costuma d'albines*” [Fr. *mauvaise coutume* ‘wicked practice’]. The other major Arthurian source is *Tristan*. The description of the sweet sounds and gentle fragrances that Curial and his companions experience as they awake from the dream on Parnassus seems to be inspired by a similar description in *L'Estoire du Saint Graal*. (Ferrando 2011a: 9)

Ferrando mentions *Tristan*, *Lancelot*, and *L'Estoire du Saint Graal* as the major Arthurian sources used by *Curial*. As in *Tirant*, chivalry, especially Arthurian chivalry, is evoked but also derided in order to make Catalan knights appear better than those exalted in other Arthurian romances. *Curial*, for example, has Melchior tell Güelfa his deeds. Melchior states,

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182. Ferrando continues: “Indeed, there are reasons to believe that the author of *Curial* used the work to promote in his readers an attitude favourable to the Aragonese cause, parallel to the attempt in Neapolitan dynastic historiography to justify the claim of Alfonso the Magnanimous to southern Italy, against the pretensions of René of Anjou, initially supported by the papacy. So in the novel Güelfa's name suggests the Church, or more exactly the papacy, which claimed the right to nominate the candidate to the throne of Naples, as it had previously done with respect to Sicily” (2011a: 23).



E digau, senyora: ¿e en tant petit treball e peril se viu Curial com combaté a Parrot de Sant Laydier, cavaller de vint-e-cinch anys, tan gran com un jagant, fort e rebust pus que altre que fos en tot l'imperi, brau e ardit més que un léo, en tant que en la plaça on ell era tothom li feya loch e degú no's gosava pendre ab ell . . . ¿E qual Lançalot ne qual Tristany feren jamés tal fet? Açò miracles són, que no són obres de home mortal ne humanal. (*Curial e Güelfa* 1930: 1.140)

Tell me, madam, was it so small a task, was there so little danger, for Curial to fight Parrot de Saint-Leydier, a knight of five-and-twenty years, as tall as a giant, stronger and sturdier than any other in the whole empire, fiercer and bolder than a lion, so that wherever he went everyone gave way to him and no one dared to take up his challenge . . . What Lancelot and Tristram ever did such a deed? These are miracles, not the work of any mortal, human man! (*Curial and Guelfa* 2011: 82-83)

Based on the description, Curial is clearly considered better than both Tristan and Lancelot.<sup>183</sup> The text continues the motif of Curial being a better knight than those of English and French origin by having Curial fight and defeat knights from various European courts. In Book II, for example, Curial overcomes both English and French knights with the help of the Aragonese knights and the King of Aragon.

Another interesting example of the knowledge that the writer had about Arthurian and chivalric texts appears in the paragraph that introduces Book II.

En aquest libre se fa menció de cavallers errants, jasta que és mal dit “errants,” car deu hom dir “caminants.” “Erre” és vocable francès, e vol dir “camí,” e “errar,” vol dir “caminar.” Emperò yo vull seguir la manera d'aquells catalans qui trasladaren los libres de Tristany e de Lançalot, e tornaren-los de lengua francesa en lengua catalana, e tots temps digueren “cavallers errants,” car aquest vocable “errants,” que vol dir “caminants,” nulls temps lo volgueren mudar, ans lo lexaren axí, no sé la rahó per qué. E axí, diré yo “errar,” per “caminar,” seguint la costuma dels antichs, jatsia que parlaré impropri e seré algún poch digne de reprensió. (*Curial e Güelfa* 1931: 2. 7)

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183. A close study of *L'Estoire du Saint Graal* presents Lancelot as the only knight who changes in the text. While Gawain, for example, cannot find the Grail because of his “worldly” attributes, Lancelot is able to shift his behavior from more worldly concerns, such as the Queen, to spiritual concerns, namely the Grail. There are no other characters in the text whose knightly qualities shift as Lancelot's do.

In this book mention is made of “knights errant,” although “errant” is used incorrectly, because one should say “travelling:” *erre* is a French word that means “way,” and *errer* means “to travel.” But I propose to follow the usage of those Catalans who translated the books about Tristram and Lancelot from French into Catalan. They always said “knights errant,” for they refused to alter this word “errant,” meaning “travelling,” leaving it as it was, for what reason I cannot tell. So I shall say “errant” for “travelling” also, following the old usage, although I shall be speaking incorrectly and be rather deserving of reproach. (*Curial and Guelfa* 2011: 106)

Several important points come to light in this passage. First, the writer of *Curial* makes it clear that he knows both French and Catalan sources of the Tristan and Lancelot tales. He also connects himself to and distances himself from past Catalan writers. He distances himself by pointing out their incorrect usage of the word *errant*, but for the sake of continuity he agrees to continue to use the word. The writer also distances the text from the French Arthurian texts in using *errant* not because it is what the French meant to say but because it is what the previous Catalan writers of chivalry have done. The writer also places the text as a chivalric text but not as a translation of French material. The writer makes it clear that this is a Catalan text that will maintain continuity with earlier Catalan works, for it is more important to keep continuity with Catalan tradition than to translate French ideas or words correctly.<sup>184</sup> Nevertheless, it is important to keep in mind the transcultural qualities of *Curial*. The many Italian, Castilian, and Catalan models that

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184. There are debates on *Curial*'s “national” identity. For more information on authorship, its place of creation, and its national/international context see Antoni Ferrando (1997 and 2012); Germà Colón (2011); Júlia Butinyà (1987-88); and Pere Balanyà (1980).

influence the text are well-documented and point to a vibrant transcultural community despite the strong Catalan ideologies that surface in the text.<sup>185</sup>

*Tirant lo Blanc* recalls motifs of Arthurian texts in order to express hopelessness, whereas *Curial* uses Arthurian motifs to exalt Catalan knights. Both *Curial* and *Tirant* use Arthurian texts, especially French texts, to present Catalan ideologies. Both texts also use their knowledge of Arthurian texts to construct Tirant and Curial as better knights than those of the Arthurian court. The movement from England to France in *Tirant* and the defeat of both English and French knights in *Curial*, combined with the clear knowledge of Arthurian motifs and ideologies by the writers of both texts, point to the use of French Arthurian texts to glorify Catalan knights. Both texts end their battles with the heroes winning against the Turks in Constantinople, presenting Catalan knights as better than the Muslim Turks and perhaps hinting that a stronger Catalan force in the battles against the Turks would have prevented the Turks from taking over the city.<sup>186</sup>

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185. For more information on the various models used in the text see Lola Badia and Jaume Torró (2010); Matilde Cortés (2000); Butinyà (1999); and Giuseppe E. Sansone (1963).

186. Badia and Torró state that “Las cruzadas de los siglos XIV y XV tenían por escenario el bajo curso del Danubio, en los límites orientales del Imperio. El mariscal Bouciquaut no tuvo mucha suerte al combatir en Nicópolis en 1396, que fue un duro revés para los caballeros franceses, borgoñones e ingleses que acudieron a luchar con el emperador Segismundo contra el sultán turco Bayaceto I. Antes y después de la caída de Constantinopla en 1453 se sucedieron numerosas derrotas y también victorias, las últimas posibles modelos para el final del *Curial*. En el *Curial* la guerra de cruzada tiene dos fases. En el capítulo 30 del libro tercero el protagonista se presenta en la frontera con un ejército propio tras su vuelta del cautiverio en Túnez. Gracias a su arrojo y a su confianza en la victoria de la fe verdadera, logra vencer en combate singular a un destacado capitán turco a quien se compara con Hércules y que se llama Critxí. Curial se comporta en este momento como Tristán en ocasión de la invasión sajona de Cornualles” (2010: 48-49; “The crusades of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries had as their setting the low end of the Danube, in the eastern limits of the Empire. The Mariscal (Marshall) Bouciquaut did not have much luck in his battles in Nicolosis in 1396, which was a strong setback for the

Both *Curial* and *Tirant* use French Arthurian texts as foils for their heroes and Catalan knights. *Curial* not only uses Arthurian literature to dissociate Curial from French and English chivalry and chivalric literature, but also uses Arthurian literature to connect the Aragonese court with the Castilian court. Piera argues that the real union of the Castilian and Aragonese courts happened in 1412, when members of the same royal family ruled both kingdoms (Piera 1999: 56-57). Thus there is a link between both kingdoms in fact as well as fiction. This link takes interesting turns in *Curial*. In Book III, for example, Curial is shipwrecked in North Africa and is made a slave. At the time of his enslavement, he is accompanied by and enslaved with Galceran de Mediona, a Castilian knight. Arthurian literature is rewritten and adapted for the new realities of the Castilian and Aragon courts.

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French, Bugundian, and English knights that went to fight with Emperor Segismund against the Turkish Sultan Bayazed I. Before and after the fall of Constantinople in 1453 there were many victories and defeats; the last ones are possible models for the ending of *Curial*. In *Curial* the crusade wars have two parts. In chapter 30 of the third book the main character shows up with his own army after his return from captivity in Tunis. Thanks to his courage and his trust in the victory of the true faith, he manages to beat in single combat an outstanding Turkish captain who is compared to Hercules and who is named Critxí. Curial behaves in this instance the way Tristan behaves in the Saxon invasion of Cornwall”).

Moreover they argue, “Pero la segunda parte de la guerra de cruzada, la relatada en el capítulo 32, es mucho más enjundiosa. Curial deja de ser un caballero andante que acude por necesidad a una guerra y asume el papel de estratega por encargo del anciano emperador. Sus planes pasan por visitar personalmente al sultán en su campamento, que no puede evitar el gesto de orgullo de mostrarle todas sus tropas. El día del combate los turcos despliegan sus cuerpos de ejército, frente a los de los cristianos que, ordenados por Curial, que conoce bien las fuerzas contrarias, causan innumerables bajas en el enemigo” (2010: 49; “But the second part related to the war of the crusades, the one recounted in chapter 32, is much more important. Curial stops being a knight-errant who goes to war out of necessity and assumes the role of a strategist by hiring the aging emperor. He begins his plans by personally visiting the Sultan in his camp, who by his pride cannot avoid showing off all his troops to Curial. On the day of battle, the Turks extend their battle-lines against the Christians, who, following Curial’s orders because he knows the enemy army well, end up causing numerous casualties to the Turks”).

The writer of *Curial* was also acquainted with *Amadís de Gaula*, and mentions Amadís and Oriana in the text.<sup>187</sup> Thus, *Curial* demonstrates a positive affinity for Castilian knights and a knowledge of Castilian Arthurian texts. Another connection between Castilian and Catalan texts is that *Curial* and the 1501 version of *Tristán* both utilize sentimental elements. *Tristán* quotes *Grimalte y Gradissa* and *Curial* uses sentimental elements indicating its Italian influence.<sup>188</sup> The use of sentimental motifs points to a shift in these Catalan and Aragonese texts, shifts that present the texts as unique to their own places and times of creation.

*Tirant lo Blanc* and *Curial e Güelfa* use Arthurian motifs to create their own contemporary knights. Both works point to the ideologies of crusade the expansion of the power of the Iberian Peninsula, and an affinity between the Catalan and Castilian courts. They are also texts deeply rooted in a Catalan ideology of expansion. They are connected to the historical events of the court of Alfonso V of Aragon and signal the frustration of the Aragonese court with regard to expansion in the Mediterranean lands. Whereas *Curial* marries Güelfa and gains the lands of Güelfa, becoming a marquis, *Tirant* dies before he can marry the princess of the Byzantine Empire, which will be lost to the Turks with his death.

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187. Ferrando writes that “Among pairs of lovers are included Amadís and Oriana, which implies familiarity with the original version of *Amadís de Gaula*, and, among the names of rivals in love, the character Qamar includes Madreselva and Artemisia, protagonists of the *Carta de Madreselva a Mauseol* of Juan Rodríguez del Padrón, secretary of Cardinal Juan de Cervantes (1382-1453), who resided in Italy during the sessions of the Ecumenical Council of Basel-Ferrara-Florence (1431-45)” (2011a: 12).

188. See Antonio Rubió y Lluch (1901) and Ferrando (2011a: 13). In addition to chivalric, Italian, and sentimental elements in the text, both Rubio y Lluch and Ferrando mention other borrowed elements from several genres, including the Moorish novels and novels of adventure.

## Conclusions to the Trajectory of Arthurian Chivalry on the Peninsular Courts

The chivalric texts discussed in this chapter use Arthurian motifs to create their own contemporary Iberian knights. There is a clear call to expansion (*Zifar*) and even the mourning of failed expansions (*Tirant* and *Curial*) in the structure of the texts. Joan-Pau Rubiés writes that Roger of Luria, Roger of Flor, Berenguer of Entença, and Bernat of Sarrià

also worked to support a royal policy of dynastic acquisition and consolidation of sovereign titles which was accompanied by various forms of settler colonialism. It is this combination which makes it hard to avoid the word imperial as an analytical category, if by that we mean the extension of a sovereign power over various peoples and territories through a combination of military might and various policies of assimilation of political elites. The crown of Aragon in the fourteenth century was imperial in the way that early modern multinational monarchies would be imperial. (Rubiés 2011: 13)

Although Rubiés is describing the Aragonese courts, his definition of a proto-imperial agenda is evident not only in the Aragonese courts but also in the Castilian courts. The rewriting of the Arthurian tradition by creating Castilian and Catalan knights aligns with a reading of a proto-imperial Iberia. Similar to the *crónicas* and other literary works that helped create and sustain an agenda of expansion, these Iberian Arthurian rewritings also carry similar ideologies. *Zifar* becomes king by his prowess and by God's will, for example. These texts use God to legitimize the conquest of Muslim territories and rewrite history so that heroes are victorious, even in battles which the real knights of history failed to win (as in the fall of Constantinople to the Turks).

The various works discussed here validate that Iberian Arthurian texts are part of a literary trend promoting expansion and crusade. The works praise knighthood rather than kingship; they assert that to be a good king, you must also be the best knight. *Zifar*

depicts a belief that men can prove their worth as knights and then become great kings. *Tristán* demonstrates a preference for knighthood rather than kingship in a much more overt way. Tristán dies and Mares continues to be king, but the men of Cornualla wish that King Mares had died and not Tristán.

Another difference among the texts is seen in the role of the women in relation to the men. In *Zifar* the queen is the catalyst that helps Zifar become king, but his kingship is ultimately gained through his knightly deeds and through God. Even his legitimate wife and children need to prove they are royalty through their deeds and in relation to God. In *Tirant lo Blanc* and *Curial e Güelfa*, the impossibility of expansion beyond the Mediterranean lands is mourned and history is rewritten so that Catalan-speaking knights can save Constantinople from the Turks. The women provide the knights with the means of expansion, and they become vessels of power, as in *Zifar*. Curial marries and becomes a Duke; Tirant dies before becoming Emperor of Byzantium. In these texts, kingship becomes impossible, hinting at the frustrations of the Aragonese court. By contrast, in *Tristán* women heighten the stature of Tristán by choosing him over the king. The illegitimate union of Tristán and Iseo, who is married to King Mares, leads to the death of the lovers. Perhaps for Tristan to be with Iseo was to usurp the place of the king, a line that Zifar, Curial, and Tirant did not cross.

In the texts discussed, it is the knights who play the most important role, even if by the end of the text they become kings. Medieval Iberian Arthurian literature concentrates on the characters of the knights but suggests that they are as great as kings. In Castilian Arthurian literature in particular, knights are praised more than kings, even if in reality no knight would oppose the king. These texts present a direct correlation

between greatness and knighthood and suggest that greatness in battle should lead to kingship: this is an ideology expressed as early as *El Poema de Mio Cid* and clearly expressed in *Zifar*.

*Curial, Tirant, and Tristan* emphasize chivalric values and simultaneously hint at a growing disenchantment with chivalric ideals. Nevertheless, Iberian Arthurian texts were entrenched in Iberian courtly society until Cervantes's masterpiece. *Don Quixote* takes the ideals of Arthurian literature into the realm of insanity, asking whether Arthurian chivalric texts still have a place in Iberian society and concluding that they do not.<sup>189</sup> Shannon Polchow observes that

There is no doubt that Miguel de Cervantes was greatly influenced by the *libros de caballerías*. While he found chivalric adventures and situations to parody in *Don Quixote*, he went further than that by appropriating the narratological structure of various books of chivalry. . . . Cervantes had little formal education, he obviously went to school in the books of chivalry for important dimensions of his narrative technique, specifically the use of a translator, of an editorial voice or supernarrator, and frequent recourse to metalepsis. (Polchow 2005: 81)

Cervantes was not the only Iberian that “went to school in the books of chivalry.” *Don Quixote* exploits a literary encounter among the ideas of chivalry, literature, and culture that began early in Iberian history in order to promote ideologies of expansion and power, especially those of the Aragon and Castilian dynasties.

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189. See, for example, Edwin Williamson (1984) and Shannon M. Polchow (2005).



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## CHAPTER VI

### ARTHUR'S HEIRS: VIKINGS OF THE ROUND TABLE

The previous chapters outline the ways that some of Arthur's heirs portray Arthur and his men differently, depending on the cultural and historical contexts of the texts. This chapter continues a similar analysis with the Scandinavian Arthur. The Scandinavian Arthurian texts are considered translations, pseudotranslations, or rewritings of the *matière de Bretagne* and the *matière de France*. I compare the Scandinavian Arthurian texts with the Icelandic family sagas to illustrate that these Arthurian translations fit within the Scandinavian literary and cultural systems, emphasizing the relationship between the Norwegian royalty and the Icelandic Vikings. I offer a possible explanation for the reasons that the medieval Scandinavian Arthurian corpus became popular in Iceland, where the texts were copied numerous times and influenced the family sagas.

Medieval Arthurian literature had an enthusiastic reception in Scandinavia. The Norwegian King Hákon Hákonarson (1217-63), for example, commissioned translations of many of the French Arthurian texts. There are several translations of the Tristan legend; there are translations of four of the romances by Chrétien de Troyes: *Ívens saga* (*Yvain*), *Parcevals saga* (*Perceval*), *Valvens þáttr* (*Valvens þáttr* tells the tale of Gawain that is also found in *Perceval*), and *Erex saga* (*Erec et Enide*). In addition, there are two *lais*, *Geitarlauf* (*Chievrefueil* by Marie de France) and *Januals ljóð* (*Lanval* by Marie de France), and a fabliau, *Möttuls saga* (*Le mantel mautaillié* is an anonymous fabliau).<sup>190</sup> In addition to the Arthurian material, there are translations of French romances, such as *Flóres saga ok Blankiflúr* (*Floire et Blancheflor*), and *chansons de geste*, such as that of

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190. See Marianne E. Kalinke (1981: 7-8).

Roland found in *Karlamagnús saga*.<sup>191</sup>

The first Arthurian translated text was *Saga af Tristram ok Ísönd*, the only complete translation of Thomas's *Tristan* that has survived. The introduction tells us that a Brother Robert translated it in 1226 for the Norwegian court.<sup>192</sup> Scholars agree that it is possible that *Ívens saga*, *Percevals saga*, and *Valvens Þátr* were also translated at the Norwegian court at the same time (Kalinke 1981: 5).

The status of other Arthurian sagas, such as *Erex saga*, is less certain, because “structurally and stylistically the work deviates from the other literature which we know to have been translated during the thirteenth century in Norway” (Kalinke 1981: 5). Works like *Erex saga* have the characteristics of a pseudotranslation.<sup>193</sup> Although the *matière de Bretagne* and the *matière de France* were originally imported through the Norwegian court, they are generally available in Icelandic manuscripts, some even centuries removed from the Norwegian material.<sup>194</sup> There is also *Breta sögur*, an Icelandic translation of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *The History of the Kings of Britain*; an Icelandic translation of Book VII of the *Historia* titled *Merlínusspá*;<sup>195</sup> and an Icelandic refraction of *Tristan and Isold*, titled *Saga af Tristram ok Ísodd*, that exists in fifteenth-

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191. *Karlamagnús saga* is a conflation of several materials including the *Chansons d'Otinél* and *d'Aspremont*, and *Le Pèlerinage de Charlemagne*.

192. See “The Saga of Tristram and Ísönd (1999: 28 and 29).

193. For more information on pseudotranslations, see my introduction and Gideon Toury (2012: 50).

194. See Eyvind Fjeld Halvorsen (1959) and Kalinke (1981: 2-3).

195. *Merlínusspá* is written in native Icelandic meters and Gunnlaugr Leifsson is considered the translator. He was a monk in the monastery at Þingeyrar and he may have died in 1218 or 1219 (Kalinke 1981: 14).

century vellum manuscripts, but is dated to the fourteenth century.<sup>196</sup>

Most of the Icelandic Arthurian material is written in prose narrative following the same form as that of the Icelandic sagas. Foster W. Blaisdell and Marianne Kalinke observe that “the repetitive, subjective, and at times, psychoanalytical, approach of Chrétien de Troyes is transformed into the terse, impersonal style favored by the native literary tradition of the thirteenth century” (Blaisdell and Kalinke 1977: x-xi). By contrast, the German and English versions of Chrétien’s *Erec* and *Yvain* are rhymed metrical romances (Blaisdell and Kalinke 1977: x), illustrating that Old Norse-Icelandic texts have a distinct preference for prose narrative.<sup>197</sup> The Scandinavian Arthurian materials discussed here follow a clear pattern of normalizing the texts to fit into the historical, social, and literary contexts of their places of creation, namely Iceland and Norway.

An analysis of the Scandinavian Arthurian material by comparing the texts to the family sagas elicits important information about some predominant ideas of the host cultures. Concentrating on their relationship with the French romances as translations instead of as part of an Arthurian Scandinavian family diminishes the value of the texts. By locating the Nordic Arthurian texts in the literary, historical, and social systems of Scandinavia – Iceland and Norway, specifically – we can better understand not only the Arthurian texts but also the family sagas. By analyzing the sagas of Icelanders and the Scandinavian Arthurian texts as part of the same large literary system and by

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196. For more information on the dating of the manuscript, see Kalinke (1981: 5) and Geraldine Barnes (2011: 71).

197. In this regard they are similar to the Welsh versions of the texts.

understanding that there are Wittgenstinian family resemblances linking these texts,<sup>198</sup> we can also see how the translations change the original source text to carry important concepts of the target culture.

Scholarly work in English on the Scandinavian Arthur has been shaped by the work of Marianne Kalinke. Kalinke has written a book in English that deals with the Scandinavian Arthur (Kalinke 1981), has edited a three-volume set of translations of the sagas into English that includes most of the Scandinavian Arthurian romances (Kalinke 1999), as well as a collection of essays on the Arthurian legend in the Norse and Rus' realms (Kalinke 2011a). Like much of the research discussed in Chapter III above, Kalinke's analysis of the Nordic Arthurian texts devotes considerable attention to comparing the Scandinavian Arthur with Chrétien de Troyes's Arthurian romances, as the French texts are the "original" source texts. Kalinke's seminal work on the Scandinavian Arthur is more than thirty years old, however, and very few new articles or books on the topic are easily accessible.<sup>199</sup> Although this chapter is greatly informed by the work of Marianne Kalinke, I bring new insights to the materials by using translation theory and by focusing on the relationship of Icelandic Vikings to the Norwegian kings and the shifting role of women and marriage in Iceland. In both instances, a comparison between the family sagas and the Arthurian texts helps clarify the ambivalent relationship between the Icelandic Vikings and the kings and the role of women and marriage in the social

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198. For more information on family resemblances see Ludwig Wittgenstein (2009). For more information on Wittgenstein's concepts in relation to Arthurian texts see Chapter I.

199. Recent articles on the Scandinavian Arthur include Sif Rikhardsdottir (2008) and Susan E. Farrier (1990). *The Arthur of the North* (2011) is the latest book on the subject. It is a compilation of articles edited by Kalinke.

contexts of Scandinavian cultures.

A comparison of the sagas of the Icelanders with the Nordic Arthurian texts demonstrates the relevance of Arthurian material to Nordic culture, principally showing that the texts emphasize those who travel (knights and Icelandic Vikings) rather than kings (Arthur and the Norwegian kings). The comparison provides a possible explanation as to why Scandinavian Arthurian texts were first translated in Norway but survive in Iceland. The Arthurian material exalts characters that are more similar to the Icelandic Vikings and in many instances portrays Arthur as both powerful and powerless. Such characteristics conform to the sagas' descriptions of the Norwegian kings, hinting at a sense of nostalgia over Iceland's loss of independence to Norway in 1262 and a continued memory of their glorious, free, and heroic past – the Viking era.

### **Scandinavian Arthurs: Old Norse Icelandic Markers in the Arthurian Sagas**

The introduction of the *matière de Bretagne* and the *matière de France* in Norway was a product of interconnections among various European courts and the popularity of knightly tales in those literary systems. King Hákon Hákonson inherited the throne of Norway in 1217. Unlike previous reigns, his was relatively peaceful. He had connections to other courts, including the English court.<sup>200</sup> He commissioned several translations, including *Tristrams saga ok Ísöndar*, which served as entertainment for the court and followed the literary fashions of other European courts (Kalinke 1981). Sif Rikhardsdóttir states that “the opulence of [King Hákon's] court at Bergen, in comparison with prior and other Scandinavian royal sites, as well as the education of his sons bear witness to a

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200. See Halvorsen (1959) and Rikhardsdóttir (2008).

predilection for the sophistication evidenced by his English and French neighbors” (Rikhardsdottir 2008: 148). The Norwegian court was emulating other European courts and translated the Arthurian material made famous in those courtly milieus.

Although the Arthurian material was introduced to Scandinavia by the Norwegian court, most texts available are written in Old Norse-Icelandic. Kalinke confirms that

Ultimately, the Icelanders were responsible for the preservation as well as transmission of Arthurian literature in the North, a foreign import at a time when their own literature was at its height. In the same epoch that the deeds of Gunnar, the poetry of Egill and of Kormákr, and the loves of Guðrún were set down in writing, the North also learned of the magnificence and munificence of Arthur, of the chivalrous deeds of Erec, Yvain, Gawain, and Perceval, as well as of the tragic love of Tristan and Isolt. (Kalinke 1981: 1)

The Icelanders preserved the Arthurian material and at the same time created their own literary corpus. Because the introduction of the Arthurian material to Scandinavia came through Norway and because the Norwegian versions were later manipulated by Icelandic copyists,<sup>201</sup> the relationship between Iceland and Norway is an important factor in an analysis of the material. The *matière de Bretagne* and the *matière de France* were recorded at the same time as the great sagas of the Icelanders. The Arthurian sagas are thus marked by saga ideology and vice versa.

The Old Norse-Icelandic Arthurian texts are marked by ideologies of the Scandinavian cultures that create them. In *King Arthur, North by Northwest* (1981), Kalinke highlights the fact that the Old Norse-Icelandic romances (*riddarasögur*) relate to the earlier French material.<sup>202</sup> Kalinke argues that the way the texts are translated can

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201. See Marianne E. Kalinke (1975 and 1977) and Farrier (1990).

202. Similarly to the *Novelas de caballerias*, the name *riddarasögur* (saga of riders) emphasizes the fact that the tales are sagas about riders: ritter means ‘knights on horseback.’

become markers about the translating culture. She states that the translation of the *Historia* into Old Norse was likely written by an Icelander, because the preserved redactions omit references that depict Iceland negatively (Kalinke 1981: 13). The Icelandic version cites Norway, Denmark, and several other places as places conquered by Arthur. It does not mention, however, as the source text did, that Iceland was conquered by Arthur right after Ireland (Kalinke 1981: 13).<sup>203</sup> Although Kalinke is aware that the choices of translators can aid in the analysis of texts, she concentrates on the connections between the *riddarasögur* and the French romances.

The Scandinavian Arthurian translations reshape the texts to fit the culture that translated them and thus simultaneously expose the texts as translations that are different from the source texts. At the beginning of *Ívens Saga*, for example, the narrator introduces King Arthur thus.

Hinn ágæti kóngur Artúrus réð fyrir Englandi, sem mörgum mönnum er kunnigt. Hann var um síðir kóngur yfir Rómaborg. Hann er þeira kóngr frægastr er verit hafa þann veg frá hafinu ok vinsælastr annarr en Karlamagnús. Hann hafði þá röskustu riddara er í váru kristininni. (“*Ívens saga*,” 1999: 38)

The excellent King Arthur ruled England, as is known to many. After a time he became king of Rome. He was the most illustrious of the kings who had lived on this side of the ocean and the most popular other than Charlemagne. He had the bravest knights who lived in Christendom. (“*Ívens saga*” 1999: 39)

The text describes Arthur as a famous, illustrious, popular king, with a following of amazing knights. If the audience is unfamiliar with the material and with Arthur, they are quickly informed of Arthur’s importance and role. The narrator also conveys one of the customs of Arthur’s court.

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203. Also, at Arthur’s coronation feast, there are representatives from Norway and Denmark but none from Iceland, although in the source text a “Maluasius, rex Islandiae” was present (Kalinke 1981: 13-14 and Geoffrey of Monmouth 1966: 227).

Þat var einn tíma sem jafnan, at hann hafði stefnt til sín öllum sínum vinum ok held mikla hátíð á *pikkisdögum*, er vér köllum *hvítasunnu*. (“*Ívens saga*” 1999: 38; emphasis added)

It happened one time, as was customary, that he had convoked all his friends and held great festivities at *Pentecost*, which we call *Whitsun*. (“*Ívens saga*” 1999: 39; emphasis added)

The writer explains that these customary gatherings of the Arthurian court are held during Pentecost which is the same festival as *hvítasunnu*.<sup>204</sup> The description is a saga convention that effectively uses both the source and target languages, effectively foreignizing the term for the reader.<sup>205</sup> The narrator informs the reader about the court, but also distances the reader or listener by referring to the foreign terms and names. Thus, from the beginning of the text, the narrator establishes the site of the story as a foreign place, and points to some of the differences between the court and the reality of the listeners.

Foreignizing the Arthurian sagas adds value, cultural capital, and helps domestic policy. It creates a tension between foreign and domestic ideologies and produces systemic effects that are in turn observable in the Saga literature. The use of both foreignizing and domesticating strategies in the Scandinavian Arthurian sagas help the Arthurian materials follow saga conventions more closely, as the sagas also use a similar tactic in their storytelling. The sagas focus on particular characters, they discuss family successions, and they use “historical” references in order to present the supposed

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204. “*Möttuls saga*” begins similarly: “<Á> þeiri hátíð er heilög kirkja kallar *pentecosten* en Norðmenn kalla *pikkisdaga* . . .” (1999: 6; emphasis added; “During the festive period which the Holy Church calls *Pentecost* but the Norse call *Pikkisdagar* . . .” 1999: 7; emphasis added).

205. For more on domestication and foreignization see Chapter I above, as well as Lawrence Venuti (1986, 1992, 1998, 2000, 2008 and 2009), Mona Baker (2001), and André Lefevere (1992).



histories of the Icelanders. This tendency to combine supposed historical facts with literary motifs has created a style that seems “matter of fact” while presenting a story, thus creating tension between the historical and the literary. The Old Norse-Icelandic Arthurian texts use strategies that successfully and simultaneously estrange and normalize the texts for the reader or listeners.

In *Erex saga*, the redactor also changes the material for a Scandinavian audience. The writers of the Arthurian sagas want both to appeal to Viking sensibilities and to maintain a sense of the material as foreign. In the episode of the “Joy of the Court” in *Erec et Enide*, for example, the material is altered; instead of having the knight give up his freedom because his lover asks for it (a notion accepted in courtly culture but not in Icelandic culture), the knight and the lady are lovers of different social standing. Their union is thus impossible because he is daring to court a woman above his station. Kalinke and Foster W. Blaisdell conclude that

the romantic notion of the knight enslaved by his beloved was transformed into the more realistic dilemma of inequality of social standing. Marriage with a man of inferior rank brought with it loss of honor, something a Scandinavian audience could well understand. (Blaisdell and Kalinke 1977: xiii-xiv).<sup>206</sup>

There are other examples where language is used to ease a Scandinavian medieval readership into understanding the Arthurian texts. In their introduction to *Erex saga* and *Ívens saga*, Blaisdell and Kalinke examine the differences between the French sources

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206. Farrier described the incident thus: “In explaining the curious imprisonment of Mabonagrain in the “Joy of the Court” episode, the saga writer uses another technique. Readers of, say, Hartmann von Aue's *Erec* could be expected to accept that the knight gives up his liberty because his lady-love demanded it. An Icelandic audience, however, might find such slavish devotion incomprehensible if not actually blameworthy. Therefore the saga writer has the knight add that his lady's father is a powerful earl who might try to have the knight killed for presuming to court a lady above his station” (1990: 2).

texts and the Old Norse translations, and demonstrate that these differences refer to Old Norse ideology. Redactors at times changed some of the French names or added names when the source texts gave none.

For example, the name of the knight held captive by the two giants is Cadoc of Tabriol in Chretien's *Erec*, . . . whereas in the saga he is called Kalviel of Karinlisborg; moreover, the knight's lady, who is nameless in the romance, receives a name as well as a father in the saga. (Blaisdell and Kalinke 1977: xii)

Names are an important marker in Viking ideology. Many of the sagas, for example, begin by giving the genealogy of the family the saga describes. Changing the names of characters and adding names where none existed previously was a priority of the redactor.

Similarly, in *Ívens saga*, the character of the man in the woods, “an ugly dark fellow,” states: “Slíkr maðr em ek sem nú máttu sjá. Aldri skipta ek skepnu minni” (“*Ívens saga*” 1999: 40; “I am the man that you see before you. I have never shifted my shape,” “*Ívens saga*” 1999: 41). It is likely that the ugly fellow mentions that he never changes his shape to distance his character from a *hamramr*, a person that was able to take the shape of different animals, a shape shifter (Blaisdell and Kalinke 1977: xii).<sup>207</sup>

By distancing the dark man of the forest from a *hamramr*, the reference also hints that the description of the man might otherwise lead a Scandinavian audience to think him a *hamramr*.<sup>208</sup> The episode both allows for an appreciation of the text as a translation and

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207. Blaisdell and Kalinke explain that “The reference, not found in the French *Yvain*, is probably to a person, found in Old Norse literature, who was capable of assuming the form of various animals (cf. Old Icelandic *hamramr*)” (1977: xiii).

208. The description of the ugly fellow as follows. “Hann hafði járnleggju mikla í hendi. Han hafði meira höfuð en asni. Upp stóð hans hár allt; enni hafði han sköllótt ok tveggja spanna breitt. Eyru hafði hann opin, ok innan hári vaxin; augu kolsvört ok krókótt nef, svá víðr munnr sem á leóni. Tennr hans váru sem í villigelti, hvassar ok digrar. Hár hafði

offers some information about the Old Norse-Icelandic literary culture producing the translation.

Another important example in *Ívens saga* is found in Chapter 12. Íven is about to fight the men who accused Luneta because she brought about the marriage between her mistress and Íven. The men ask Íven to make sure his lion does not attack them. Íven responds,

Eigi hafða ek león þetta hingat til þess at þat væri berserkr eða hefði einvígi ok eigi beiddumz ek vildara en ek haldi sjálf. En ef svá verðr at hann hleypr á yðr, þá veriz honum, þvíat ek vil eigi ábyrgjaz verk hans. (*Ívens saga* 1999: 80)

I have not brought my lion here for it to act like a berserker or to engage in single combat, and I don't expect anything better than what I can accomplish myself. But if it should happen that he leaps at you, then defend yourselves, for I will not answer for its actions. (*Ívens saga* 1999: 80)

The comparison of the lion with a *berserkr* is revealing. *Berserkr*s are warriors in Scandinavian culture and many fought on behalf of different kings in Scandinavia.

*Berserkr*s are thought to fight under a reckless fit of madness; they would fight in a wild, animal-like frenzy.<sup>209</sup> In *Ancient Germanic Warriors* (2004), Michael Speidel treats the

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hann mikit ok skegg sem hrosstagl. Haka hans var gróin við brjóstit. Hann hafði langan hrygg ok kúluvaxinn ok hallaðiz fram á sleggju sína. Hann hafði hvárki í klæðum sínum ull né lín; heldr hafði hann fest um sik tvær griðunga húðir” (*Ívens saga* 1999: 40; “He had a large iron club in his hands. His head was larger than that of an ass. His hair stood on end; his forehead was completely bald and two ells wide. His ears were wide open and overgrown with hair inside; his eyes were black as coal and his nose crooked; his mouth was as broad as a lion’s. His teeth were like those of a wild boar, sharp and thick. He had a lot of hair and a beard like a horse’s tail. His chin was attached to his chest. He had a long back with a hump, and he was leaning on his club. He had clothes of neither wool nor linen; instead he had tied around himself two bulls’ hides,” *Ívens saga* 1999: 41). This description is similar to that of the French texts, but for a Scandinavian audience it could lead to the association of the man with a *hamramr* because of the animal similies used to describe him.

209. *Ynglinga saga*, *Grettis saga*, and *Egil’s saga* have several examples of *berserkr*s that fit the above description.

rage of the *berserkr* not only as a state of mind passed down from father to son (2004: 68) but also as a fighting style favored by certain warriors. Speidel argues that originally *berserkr* meant a warrior who fought with a bear hood and only in later medieval times began to have the connotation of a lack of control (Speidel 2004: 213). The comparison of the lion with a *berserkr* favors both of these descriptions of the *berserkr*.

As in the French version, the lion is given human qualities throughout the text. When Íven saves the lion from the dragon, instead of attacking Íven, which is what Íven fears, the lion surrenders.

En leó snýr þegar upp á sér maganum ok skreið at honum sem hann vildi biðja sér friðar með tárur, ok gaf sik svá í vald herra Íven. En hann tók því glaðliga ok þakkaði guði, er hann hafði sent honum þvílíka fylgð. (“*Ívens saga*” 1999: 72)

But the lion immediately turned its belly up and crawled toward him as though it wanted to ask for peace with its tears, and thus it surrendered to Sir Íven. And he accepted this gladly and thanked God for having sent him such a companion. (“*Ívens saga*” 1999: 73 and 75)

The lion also suffers for his master, howling and trying to kill himself when he thinks his master has died (“*Ívens saga*” 1999: 74-75).

The fact that *berserkrs* are described like animals and the lion is described as human-like is a significant link. The human qualities of the lion and the animal qualities of the *berserkr* make the comparison possible. Also, if *berserkrs* are seen as men who follow a specific fighting style (Speidel 2004: 79, 83), Íven asserts that the lion will not fight as a *berserkr* and disclaimer of responsibility if the lion attacks suggests the lion into a type of warrior. The lion attacks only when he sees that Íven needs to be saved and this can be viewed as a fighting strategy. The lion occupies a strategic position in the fights, marking him as distinct from but also similar to a *berserkr*. The description of the lion in the French romance as an animal with human qualities was left intact in the

Scandinavian version. The redactor, however, provided information for his Scandinavian audience who might have thought of a *berserkr* when confronted with the description of the lion. The lion might seem like a *berserkr* because he is an animal with human qualities, and his fighting style, to attack only if Íven needs help, is a deliberate action. These similarities between the lion and *berserks* are not lost on the redactor or the audience.

The above examples suggest the ways in which the Scandinavian Arthurian texts were adapted for a Scandinavian audience. The adapted texts present a glimpse of how the Scandinavians understood the relative concepts of the *hamramr* and the *berserks*. Below I analyze the Scandinavian Arthurian texts further, comparing them with the Icelandic family sagas and exploring the constructed relationship between Icelanders and Norwegians in the family sagas, in particular *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar* (c. 1220-40) and *Laxdæla saga* or “The Saga of the People of Laxardal” (c. 1250-70).<sup>210</sup> I focus on the importance of gifts in the interactions of Icelandic settlers with the Norwegian court, and note the ambivalent relationship between the kings and the Vikings. Finally, I analyze the shifting role of women in the sagas, and the fact that the Arthurian texts contain markers of these shifts.

### **Kings and Sagas: Norway and Iceland in an Icelandic Literary Context**

The Icelandic family sagas are historical fictions that present complex characters and interesting plot lines, some describing the beginnings of Icelandic settlement by the Vikings. The sagas were written to preserve a cultural past during a time of conflict and

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210. I will refer to these texts as *Egil's Saga* and *Laxardal Saga*, respectively.

feud that led to the dissolution of the independent Icelandic state and its submission to Norwegian rule. They present the most heroic individuals from Iceland's past, on many occasions insinuating that their noble status was equal to the royalty of their contemporaries, especially compared to members of the Norwegian court. On the one hand, the sagas tell the stories of Iceland's most accomplished heroes and better-known citizens from the settlement of Iceland (c. 850-900) to the introduction of Christianity and some of its aftermath (c. 1000-50). On the other hand, the sagas also reflect ideologies from the period in which they were written (c. 1100-1300), which can contradict the ideologies of earlier Vikings. The sagas deal with cultural aspects from both the past they portray and the present situation that influenced their writing.

The relationship between Norwegian kings and Icelandic Vikings in *Egil's Saga* and *Laxardal Saga* illustrate how Icelandic literature constructs Icelandic Vikings as the equals of the Norwegian kings, presenting kings in an ambivalent light. Iceland began to be settled in the second half of the ninth century and by 930 Iceland was a free state or commonwealth with no monarchy. In the year 1000, the Icelandic commonwealth declared that Christianity would be the religion of Iceland, but Norse pagan practices could continue in secret.<sup>211</sup> The Commonwealth of Iceland lasted until 1262, when Iceland pledged fealty to the King of Norway, following the breakdown of civic order.

Both *Egil's Saga* and *Laxardal Saga* discuss some of these events from a literary perspective. *Egil's Saga* covers events from approximately 850, when Egil's father Skallagrim, his grandfather Ulfr, and his uncle Thorolf lived in Norway. The saga describes Skallagrim's emigration to Iceland, the adventures of Egil and his brother

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211. This arrangement lasted only briefly.

Thorolf, and ends with Egil's death in old age around the year 1000. *Egil's Saga* is one of the oldest sagas available, written in the period 1220-40.<sup>212</sup> *Laxardal Saga* covers the lives of the people of Laxardal, located in western Iceland. Composed between 1250-70, the saga describes events from approximately 890-1030,<sup>213</sup> including the settlement and Christianization of Iceland. This chapter focuses on the adventures of Kjartan, Gudrun, and Bolli and their love triangle in *Laxardal Saga*. Both sagas have sections that deal with the relationship between Icelandic Vikings and the kings of Norway.

Saga literature presents the relationship between Iceland and Norway as an ambivalent relationship; the family sagas were written when Iceland was under Norwegian control about a time when Iceland was independent. In the *Íslendingabók* ("Book of Icelanders"), Ari claims that Iceland was settled during the reign of King Harald the Fair-haired (c. 850-933) by men from Norway.

And then a great many people began to move out here from Norway, until King Haraldr forbade it, because he thought it would lead to depopulation of the land. They then came to the agreement that everyone who was not exempt and travelled here from there should pay the king five ounces of silver. And it is said that Haraldr was king for seventy years and lived into his eighties. These were the origins of the tax which is now called land-dues, and sometimes more was paid for it and sometimes less, until Óláfr the Stout made it clear that everyone who travelled between Norway and Iceland should pay the king half a mark, except for women and those men whom he exempted. Fiorkell Gellisson told us so. (*Íslendingabók* 2006: 4)

For Sían Grønlie, *Íslendingabók* helps create an Icelandic identity that aligns itself with Norway.

Central to an understanding of what lies behind Ari's composition of a history for the Icelanders is the emergent sense of Icelandic identity in the early twelfth-century. The title of Ari's *Íslendingabók*, . . . includes one of the earliest recorded

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212. See Bernard Scudder (2000: 3).

213. See Keneva Kunz (2000: 270).

uses of the term “Icelander” and other twelfth-century writings show a similar consciousness of a separate Icelandic identity: it was in 1117–18, as Ari tells us, that the laws were first written down, and the *First Grammatical Treatise* speaks of providing *oss Íslendingum* ‘us Icelanders’ with a written language, something especially important, of course, to the correct understanding and interpretation of the written law. (Grønlie 2006: xxiv)

One of the means that Ari uses to create this Icelandic identity is to erase other important immigrant groups, such as the Irish, and to simplify the material he has available.<sup>214</sup>

Ari’s silence about the mass of conflicting traditions recorded in *Landnámabók* suggests that he is deliberately simplifying and streamlining to provide a distinct people with a distinct geographical origin – Norway. The privileging of this particular origin is likely to reflect contemporary power relationships and Iceland’s dependence on a political relationship with Norway; it may also reflect the ancestry of the *Haukdælir* family, since Bishop Ísleifr’s father, Gizurr, was second cousin to Óláfr Tryggvason. (Grønlie 2006: xxvi)

This literary tendency to present Norway as the main source of Icelandic settlement and to compare Icelanders with the Norwegians is intensified in *Egil’s Saga*.

Haraldr konungr var mjök gjörhugall, þá er hann hafði eignazt þau fylki, er nýkomin váru í vald hans, um lenda menn ok ríka búendr ok alla þá, er honum var grunr á, at nökkurrar uppreistar var af ván, þá lét hann hvern gera annat hvárt, at gerast hans þjónustumenn eða fara af landi á brott, en at þriðja kosti sæta afarkostum eða láta lífit, en sumir váru hamlaðir at höndum eða fótum . . .

En af þessi áþján flýðu margir menn af landi á brott, ok byggðust þá margar auðnir víða bæði austr í Jamtaland ok Helsingjaland ok Vestrlönd, Suðreyjar, Dyflinnarskiði, Írland, Norðmandí á Vallandi, Katanes á Skotlandi, Orkneyjar ok Hjaltland, Færeyjar. Ok í þann tíma fannst Ísland. (*Egils saga* n. d.: chapter 4, n. p.)

Once King Harald had taken over the kingdoms he had recently won, he kept a close watch on the landholders and powerful farmers and everyone else he suspected would be likely to rebel, and gave them the options of entering his service or leaving the country, or a third choice of suffering hardship or paying with their lives; some had their arms and legs maimed . . .

Many people fled the country to escape his tyranny and settled various uninhabited parts of many places, to the east in Jamtland and Halsingland, and to the west in the Hebrides, the shire of Dublin, Ireland, Normandy in France,

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214. Most of the Irish that came to Iceland before the Vikings were monks. Later Irish settlers were slaves taken in Viking raids. Their omission also signals a class distinction.



Caithness in Scotland, the Orkney Isles and Shetland Isles, and the Faroe Islands. And at this time, Iceland was discovered. (*Egil's Saga* 2000: 11-12)

The tale presents King Harald (850-933) as a tyrant and uses his reign to explain the emigration of Norwegians to many places, including Ireland and Iceland. In the literary tradition of Iceland, it is the Norwegian court that brought about the colonization of Iceland. Historical records suggest that the migration of Norse settlers into Iceland was one of opportunity and self-interest. The settlers were mostly free farmers and some small-scale chieftains from Scandinavia, mainly Norway, some of whom came from encampments and colonies in Ireland, Scotland, and the Hebrides, and brought Celtic followers, including their wives and slaves (Byock 2001 and Sigurðsson 1988). *Egil's Saga*, by contrast, suggests that it was the tyranny of King Harald that initiated Icelandic settlement. *Egil's Saga* not only states that King Harald was the immediate cause of men moving to Iceland, but is itself about a particular family forced to relocate to Iceland because of King Harald. *Egil's Saga* will be discussed in further detail later in the chapter.

Despite the construction of the Norwegian court as the catalyst for the settlement of Iceland, the actions of King Harald are portrayed as those of an unjust ruler. Thus, from the first supposed interactions between the Norwegian court and the Icelandic Vikings, their relationship is positioned as rather antagonistic. Other texts also present interactions between the Norwegian court and Icelanders, and portray an ambivalent relationship between the Icelandic characters and the court. The sagas respect the court and hold it in high regard, even as they exalt their own independence from a monarchical system. Historically many Icelanders joined the Norwegian court to demonstrate their talents and prowess, returning to Iceland with bounty, a good reputation, and in many

cases lavish gifts.

The contradictions between past and present, between literature and history, also make an appearance in the Icelandic Arthurian sagas. The position of the Scandinavian Arthurian texts in a Scandinavian cultural context is apparent in the portrayal of kings and the knights. In *King Arthur North by Northwest*, Kalinke effectively argues that the Scandinavian Arthurian texts were generally translated originally for the entertainment of the Norwegian court (Kalinke 1981: 20-45). She conceptualizes them as fantasy texts that are escapist in nature.

The French romances that King Hákon Hákonarson had translated into Norwegian are hardly a King's Mirror for the edification of his court. They are rather a literature of fantasy and escape intended to amuse and distract. That the Arthurian romances were a successful form of diversion can be inferred from the popularity the *riddarasögur* – both translated and indigenous – enjoyed in Iceland. (Kalinke 1981: 45)<sup>215</sup>

Kalinke's main argument proving the escapist nature of the texts is the "split personality" of Arthur in the *riddarasögur*. *Tristrams saga*, the first Arthurian text translated, portrays an Arthur similar to that in Celtic tradition, an Arthur who fights giants and is both a king and warrior. Regarding the saga, Kalinke suggests that "*Tristrams saga* depicts the quasi-historical Arthur, the Arthur of action, the slayer of giants, who accepts challenges and avenges misdeeds. This is the Arthur of Wace, of Geoffrey of Monmouth, the Arthur of *Breta sögur*" (Kalinke 1981: 44). Although Kalinke only associates this Arthur with that of Geoffrey of Monmouth and Wace, this Arthur is also similar to that of the Celtic tradition.

Although Kalinke may be correct in her assessment of the purpose of the

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215. Kalinke's use of King's Mirror refers to a medieval genre that instructs the nobility about the practical ideals and duties of kings.

Norwegian Arthurian materials, most of the Old Norse-Icelandic Arthurian texts dismiss this version of Arthur and treat him as a secondary character of little importance (“*Tristrams saga*” 1999: 44). Arthur is not the narrator’s primary subject in the remainder of the text. In other sagas, the ambivalent nature of Arthur continues to surface: Arthur is imposing, but is also at the mercy of his knights (Kalinke 1981: 39). Kalinke’s assertions, however, only help to clarify the role of the Arthurian texts in the Norwegian court: they were a form of entertainment. She also notes that they connected the Norwegian court to other European courts, such as those of France and England. Kalinke’s argument does not, however, make clear why Icelanders copied down the texts, when they had neither a monarchy nor a court.

Kalinke remarks that the Norwegian *Tristrams saga* presents a strong Arthur, in keeping with the sagas and the knights in Arthurian romances: “*Tristrams saga*, in which Arthur's court plays no role whatever, nonetheless depicts the king as a most forceful personality, as a ruler who accepts challenges, and as a great fighter” (Kalinke 1981: 41). Moreover, she notes that

This Arthur gets angry, swears mighty oaths, sets out on a pilgrimage to observe the workings of a magic spring, and is entertained by the reports of adventures encountered by his knights. King Arthur is surrounded by the trappings of a magnificent court and lauded for every virtue imaginable. In short, Arthur is the embodiment of royal perfection. (Kalinke 1981: 44)

The *Saga af Tristram ok Ísodd* is an Icelandic refraction based on the Norwegian version whose story is more in keeping with Scandinavian customs; it portrays kings differently. In *Tristrams saga*, the Norwegian version, Arthur plays an important role in two different scenes. First, Arthur slays a giant who uses the hair of kings’ beards to make a cloak. In the second scene, Arthur kills the giant of Mont Saint Michel. Both episodes are from

Geoffrey of Monmouth, and are not thought to come from the source text. For Kalinke they fit better with the Icelandic version of the tale, which is more in keeping with Viking customs.

The two Arthurian episodes are in keeping with the spirit of the Icelandic *Saga af Tristram ok Ísodd* . . . but hardly with the otherwise courtly Norwegian *Tristrams saga*, despite its being a tale of adulterous love. One wonders why on the one hand the two episodes were not deleted in translation or transmission, and why on the other they did not find their way into the Icelandic saga. (Kalinke 1981: 43)

Kalinke poses important questions through her observations. Why is the Arthur of the Norwegian version of Tristan much more powerful than in courtly versions of the romance, assuming a role similar to the knights of French romances and behaving similarly to Celtic heroes? Also, why is it that such a strong Arthur, more in keeping with the characters of Viking tradition, was not transmitted to the Icelandic version of the tale? Concentrating on the French romances and comparing them with the Scandinavian versions cannot adequately answer these questions. It is the Icelandic sagas and their portrayal of Icelandic Vikings and Norwegian kings that provide important insights into answering these questions.

Both the family sagas and the *riddarasögur* exalt travelers (knights and Vikings) rather than kings, exposing an ambivalent relationship between the Icelandic Vikings and European royalty, especially that of Norway. As already stated, most of the Scandinavian Arthurian romances were commissioned by the Norwegian court, but survive in Old Norse-Icelandic redactions. Although the tales were first commissioned by the Norwegian court for entertainment, in the tradition of well-established European courts, Icelanders translated the material not only for these reasons but also because the Arthurian texts could fit with their own ideologies. Namely, Icelandic Arthurian

romances portray Arthur with ambivalence and the knights as courageous, just as the Icelandic family sagas treat Norwegian kings with ambivalence and the Icelandic Vikings as courageous.

### **From King Olaf with Love: Gifts from the Norwegian Court**

In Old Norse society, giving gifts created allegiances and also created conflict. The sagas make it clear that to give and receive gifts is an important method of gaining connections and friendships. Some gifts turn individuals into family, and a gift given in exchange for a favor could be seen as a form of payment.<sup>216</sup> To give, receive, and exchange gifts are all important acts. On the one hand, gift-giving creates a bond of trust and solidarity and forms relationships. To give and to accept gifts strengthens the connections between the individuals who participate in such relationships. On the other hand, gifts can be used to insult others and to place them under the giver's power.<sup>217</sup> To give a gift of insignificant value or a gift of such value that the receiver cannot repay the gift back can be considered an insult. The former implies that the receiver has no worth and the latter points to the receiver's lack of means. In both instances the gift creates inequality between the giver and the receiver. Thus, gift giving plays an important role in many sagas, including *Egil's Saga* and *Laxardal Saga*. In *Egil's Saga* in particular, in *Laxardal Saga* to a lesser extent, and in the Scandinavian Arthurian texts in general, gift giving is connected to the construction of the relationship of kings to Vikings and of

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216. In *Njal's Saga*, Flosi and Eyjolf are prosecuted in the Fifth court because Flosi gave and Eyjolf received legal payment, a violation of Althing procedure (*Njal's Saga* (2001: 351).

217. It can be argued that the women in *Egil's Saga* become a type of gift that creates ties and friendship between the characters, but less so in *Laxdaela Saga*.

kings to knights.

The giving of gifts had a legal aspect in both Iceland and Norway. There were laws to reclaim the transfer of lands, to reclaim gifts,<sup>218</sup> and laws that forbade heads of households to give more than ten percent of their belongings to charity unless their heirs gave their consent (Miller 2007: 16).<sup>219</sup> Gifts given by kings and men of high standing are named differently: “Gifts from kings and other high people get their own special nomenclature in Old Norse; the gift itself gets a name by adding *naut* (meaning ‘gift,’ ‘present’) to the genitive of the name or title of the giver, as long as the giver is of notable rank: Olaf’s-*naut*, king’s-*naut*, jarl’s-*naut*, Hakon’s-*naut*” (Miller 2007: 13-22). *Naut* gifts are usually portable gifts such as cloaks, swords, or rings or larger gifts that can carry the person around, such as a ship (Miller 2007: 17). In both *Egil’s Saga* and *Laxardal Saga*, gifts create bonds between kings and Icelanders, and these bonds create both friendship and conflict.

There is an ambivalent reaction to the kings in the Icelandic family sagas, especially the kings of Norway, and the exchange of gifts plays into this ambivalence. In

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218. Gifts needed to be requited for at least half their value (William Ian Miller 2007: 21).

219. Laws on gift giving are found in the *Grágás*. In a footnote Ian Miller explains that: “The laws of the Norwegian Gulathing, in a passage that is rather obscure and whose translation is uncertain, appear to give ‘everyone a right [to recall] a gift unless it has been requited with a better payment; a gift is not requited unless an equal amount is set over against that which was given.’ But then come the limits on the right, which include apparently ‘gifts that the king gives us or that we give to him shall remain valid;’ *Gulathing Law* §129, in *Norges gamle Love indtil 1387*, ed. R. Keyser and P. A. Munch (Christiania, 1846), 1:54. Laurence Larson’s translation supplies the “to recall,” which seems necessary to make sense of the very elliptical Norse; Laurence M. Larson, *The Earliest Norwegian Laws, Being the Gulathing Law and the Frostathing Law* (New York, 1935), 118-19” (Miller 2007: 21). The *Grágás* are available in the *Laws of Early Iceland* (2000).

*Egil's saga*, gift-giving plays an important role in the relationship of the kings with some of the main characters of the story. In the beginning of *Egil's Saga*, King Harald offers gifts and support to Thorolf, making him one of his most esteemed men and a landholder. Thorolf sends tribute to the king and makes several gifts to the king, including otter skins and a boat. Hildirid's sons, however, convince the king that Thorolf's gifts and tribute are inadequate and that Thorolf wants to kill him and take his place. They tell the king "Hann hefir ok hirð um sik sem konungr" (*Egils saga*: chapter 12; "he keeps followers about him like a king," "*Egil's Saga*" 2000: 22). King Harald decides to test Thorolf by asking him to give up the lands the king gave him and stay by his side. Thorolf refuses, partly because he is "reluctant to relinquish this band of men," ("*Egil's Saga*" 2000: 27). Ultimately, the king kills Thorolf. King Harald gave Thorolf the lands, and the king took them away, disposing of them as he wished.

King Harald kills Thorolf and then meets Thorolf's brother, Skallagrim. The king asks Skallagrim to join him but Skallagrim refuses, earning the enmity of the king. This ambivalent relationship continues between Skallagrim's family and the kings of Norway, especially with the sons of Skallagrim – the younger Thorolf and Egil. Both sons have several encounters with the kings of Norway, which result in Egil's exile. Like his uncle, Thorolf, who gave King Harald a boat earlier in the text, the younger Thorolf Skallagrimsson gains the trust of King Eirik, son of King Harald, by giving him a boat ("*Egil's Saga*" 2000: 57). Later in the text, King Eirik gives Thorolf the gift of a beautiful axe.

En er hann var búinn til ferðar, þá fór hann á fund Eiríks konungs. En er þeir skilðust, seldi konungr i hendr Þórólfi öxi, er hann kveðst gefa vilja Skalla-Grími. Öxin var snaghyrnd ok mikil ok gullbúin, upp skellt skaftit með silfri, ok var þat inn virðiligsti gripr. (*Egils saga*: chapter 38)

When he was ready to leave, he went to see King Eirik. At their parting, Eirik presented Thorolf with an axe, saying he wanted Skallagrim to have it. The axe was crescent-shaped, large and inlaid with gold, and its hilt was plated with silver, a splendid piece of work. (*Egil's Saga* 2000: 59-60)

Thorolf takes the gift to signify friendship between the king and himself. The axe, however, breaks when Skallagrim uses it to slaughter oxen.<sup>220</sup>

Pat var um haustit einn hvern dag at Borg, at Skalla-Grímr lét reka heim yxn mjök marga, er hann ætlaði til höggs. Hann lét leiða tvá yxn saman undir húsvegg ok leiða á víxl. Hann tók heustein vel mikinn ok skaut niðr undir hálsana. Síðan gekk hann til með öxina *konungsnaut* ok hjó yxnina báða senn, svá at höfuðit tók af hvárumtveggja, en öxin hljóp niðr í steininn, svá at muðrinn brast ór allr ok rifnaði upp í gegnum herðuna. Skalla-Grímr sá í eggina ok ræddi ekki um, gekk síðan inn í eldahús ok steig síðan á stökk upp ok skaut öxinni upp á hurðása. Lá hon þar um vetrinn. (*Egils saga*: chapter 38; emphasis added)

At Borg one day in the autumn, Skallagrim had a large number of oxen driven to his farm to be slaughtered. He had two of them tethered up against the wall, with their heads together, and took a large slab of rock and placed it under their necks. Then he went up to them with his axe *King's Gift* and struck one blow at both oxen. It chopped off their heads, but it went right through and struck the stone, and the mount broke completely and the blade shattered. Skallagrim inspected the edge without saying a word, then went into the fire-room, climbed up on a bench and put the axe on the rafters above the door, where it was left that winter. (*Egil's Saga* 2000: 60; emphasis added)

The use of “king’s-*naut*” in this instance underscores the fact that the axe is a gift of the king and a gift that is worthless, just like the “friendship.” Later in the tale, Thorolf takes the axe and throws it in the sea.<sup>221</sup> Eventually, Thorolf joins the retinue of King Athelstan of England, where he dies in battle.

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220 At several moments in the tale oxen are slaughtered for sacrifices (*Egil's Saga* 2000: 60 and 128).

221. “Þegar Þórólfr kom til skips, þá er hann hafði tekit við öxi þeiri, er Skalla-Grímr hafði fengið í hendr honum, þá kastaði hann öxinni fyrir borð á djúpi, svá at hon kom ekki upp síðan” (*Egils saga*: chapter 40; “On reaching his ship, Thorolf took the axe that Skallagrim had given to him, and threw it overboard into deep water, so that it never came up again,” *Egil's Saga* 2000: 64).



The tale uses gift-giving between the King of Norway and both Thorolfs as a way to express the ambivalent relationship between the kings and the family, a relationship that was already problematic (the King of Norway drove Skallagrim away to Iceland and killed his brother, Thorolf, dishonorably). With Egil, however, this ambivalent relationship takes on new dimensions. Although there are many encounters between Egil and the kings of Norway, mainly King Eirik and his brother King Hákon,<sup>222</sup> two encounters are of particular interest.

In Chapter 57, Egil asks for the inheritance of his wife, Asgerd, after the death of her father, Bjorn. Berg-Onund, husband of Bjorn's daughter Gunnhild, says that Egil has no claim to the inheritance because the mother of Egil's wife was married unlawfully.<sup>223</sup> The second reason that Berg-Onund gives for claiming rights to the land is that King Eirik and his Queen, also named Gunnhild, promised him that he would have their support on every cause in their territory. Berg-Onund finishes his claims against Egil by saying that he should not even be in Norway, because he has been outlawed by the king and that Egil's wife, Asgerd, was conceived when her parents were also outlawed by the king.

After this incident, Egil's friend, Arinbjorn, defends his cousin, Asgerd, and produces witnesses to support his claims that she should inherit. King Eirik can give no reply and Egil speaks a verse defending his wife as Bjorn's heiress.

Pýborna kveðr þorna  
þorn reið áar horna,  
sýslir hann of sína  
sígirnð Önundr, mína.

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222. See chapters 44, 48, 49, 54, 57, 66, 71, 73, 80, and 82 for example.

223. The marriage of Egil and Asgerd will be discussed again later in this chapter.

Naddhristir, ák nesta  
norn til arfs of borna.  
Þigg, Auða konr, eiða,  
eiðsært es þat, greiða. (*Egils saga*: chapter 56)

This man pinned with thorns claims  
that my wife, who bears my drinking-horn,  
is born of a slave-woman;<sup>224</sup>  
Selfish Onund looks after himself.  
Spear-wielder, my brooch-goddess  
is born to an inheritance.  
This can be sworn to, descendant  
Of ancient kings: accept an oath. (*“Egil’s Saga”* 2000: 98)

The queen incites her husband into taking action against Egil in this suit by threatening her husband with the loss of his kingdom.<sup>225</sup> The queen replies to Egil’s poem thus.

Þetta er undarligt, konungr, hvernig þú lætr Egil þenna inn mikla vefja mál öll fyrir þér. *Eða hvárt myndir þú eigi móti honum mæla, þótt hann kallaði til konungdómsins í hendr þér?* En þótt þú vilir enga órskurði veita, þá er Önundi sé lið at, þá skal ek þat eigi þola, at Egill troði svá undir fótum vini mína, at hann taki með rangendi sín fé þetta af Önundi. (*Egils saga*: chapter 56; emphasis added)

How peculiar of you, King, to let this big man Egil run circles around you. *Would you even raise an objection if he claimed the throne out of your hands?* You might refuse to make any ruling in Onund’s favor, but I will not tolerate Egil trampling over our friends and wrongly taking this money from Onund. (*“Egil’s Saga”* 2000: 98; emphasis added)

Earlier in the text, King Eirik’s father, King Harald, is incited into taking action against Egil’s uncle, Thorolf, by the false accusation that Thorolf wanted to be king. Following suit, King Eirik and his queen do not agree to Egil’s request and instead side with Onund. The scene suggests that Egil and his family are a threat to the king because they have the potential to be of equal status.

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224. The implication is that because Asgerd’s mother was stolen she was a slave-woman and not legitimately married.

225. For an excellent overview of the role of women in the sagas, see Judith Jesch (2001).

Another encounter showcasing the ambivalent relationship between the kings of Norway and Egil occurs in Chapter 63. Egil meets King Hákon after he overthrows King Eirik and Queen Gunnhild, and once again Egil asks for the inheritance of his wife. He also expresses his desire to be one of King Hákon's men. King Hákon replies:

Ekki muntu, Egill, gerast mér handgenginn. Miklu hafið þér frændr meira skarð höggvit í ætt vára en þér muni duga at staðfestast hér í landi. Far þú til Íslands út ok ver þar at föðurarfi þínum. Mun þér þá verða ekki mein at oss frændum, en hér í landi er þess ván um alla þína daga, at várir frændr sé ríkastir. En fyrir sakar Aðalsteins konungs, fóstura míns, þá skaltu hafa hér frið í landi ok ná lögum ok landsrétti, því at ek veit, at Aðalsteinn konungr hefir mikla elsku á þér. (*Egils saga*: chapter 63)

“You will not enter my service, Egil,” said the king. “You and your kinsmen have carved too deep a breach in my family for you to be able to settle down in this country. Go out to Iceland and look after your inheritance from your father there. You will not suffer harm at the hands of myself or my kinsmen there, but you can expect my family to remain the most powerful in this country for the rest of your days. For King Athelstan's sake, however, you will be left in peace here and win justice and your rights, because I know how fond King Althelstan is of you.” (*Egil's Saga* 2000: 122)

The scene is of interest because the king speaks of both Egil and himself as part of a larger family unit. The king also says that in Norway his kinsmen are more powerful than those of Egil. Again the scene insinuates that the kinsmen of the king and the kinsmen of Egil can be compared to each other and they cannot share the same space.<sup>226</sup> Egil,

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226. There are other instances where Egil is compared to the king with the conclusion that Egil and the king should not be in the same space. In chapter 49 Lord Thorir goes to make sacrifices with King Eric and Queen Gunnhild. He tells Arinbjorn that he will not take Egil, “Nú mun ek, sagði hann, fara til blótsins, en ek vil ekki, at Egill fari þangat. Ek kann ræðum Gunnhildar, en kappsemð Egils, en ríki konungs, at þess mun eigi hægt at gæta alls saman” (*Egils saga*: chapter 49; “I am going to the sacrifice,” he said, “and I don't want Egil to go. I know about Gunnhild's conniving, Egil's impetuosity and the king's severity, and we cannot keep an eye on all three at once,” *Egil's Saga* 2000: 78). Later in the tale Egil asks Arinbjorn to speak on his behalf in front of the king. He agrees, but asks Egil to stay behind. “Þykkir mér sem því muni óhægt saman at koma, Egill, kappi þínu ok dirfð, en skaplyndi konungs ok ríki hans, því at ek hygg hann vera engan vin þinn, ok þykkja honum þó sakar til vera” (*Egils*

however, also offers to be one of the king's men and the king reasserts that he is more powerful than Egil. Egil wishes to belong to the court of King Hákon, but Hákon refuses him because of their families' relationship. In this instance we see a clear example of the ambiguous relationship of the Icelandic Vikings with the Norwegian kings.

The relationship of the Icelandic Viking to the kings of Norway present the Icelander as willing to belong to a king's court (uncle Thorolf belonged to the court of King Harald, and Egil and his brother Thorolf belonged to the court of the English King Athelstan), but they are also men of free will and leaders who are compared to the kings because of their prowess. Thus, they cannot belong to Eirik's court because they are a threat to it.

Uncle Thorolf, however, dies dishonorably; Egil lives to an old age despite the charges against him by the kings.

Egill bjó at Borg langa ævi ok varð maðr gamall, en ekki er getit, at hann ætti málaferli við menn hér á landi. Ekki er ok sagt frá hólmgöngum hans eða vígaferlum, síðan er hann staðfestist hér á Íslandi.

Svá segja menn, at Egill færi ekki í brott af Íslandi, síðan er þetta var tíðenda, er nú var áðr frá sagt, ok bar þat mest til þess, at Egill mátti ekki vera í Nóregi af þeim sökum, sem fyrr var frá sagt, at konungar þóttust eiga við hann. Bú hafði hann rausnarsamligt, því at fé skorti eigi. Hann hafði ok gott skaplyndi til þess. (*Egils saga*: chapter 78)

Egil lived at Borg for a long time and grew to an old age. He is not said to have been involved in disputes with anyone in Iceland. Nor is anything told about him dueling or killing anyone after he settled down in Iceland.

People also say that Egil did not leave Iceland after the incidents that were described earlier, the main reason being that he could not stay in Norway because of the wrongs that the king felt he had done him, as narrated before. Egil lived

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*saga*: chapter 68; “I don't expect there's much chance of reconciling your temper and rashness with the king's disposition and severity, because I don't think he is a friend of yours or feels any reason to be, either,” “*Egil's Saga*” 2000: 131). In both instances, the king and Egil are described side by side to explain why they cannot be in the same space together. The juxtaposition of the two also makes it possible to compare the King and Egil with each other.

lavishly, for he did not lack the means to do so, and he had the temperament as well. (*Egil's Saga* 2000: 158)

Egil is able to survive his encounters with the kings, but his uncle, Thorolf, is not. Uncle Thorolf, however, is Norwegian. He has land in Norway and becomes a man of the king. Egil was an Icelander, born in Iceland, part of the next generation. Thorolf's story serves as an illustration of why the men of Norway moved to Iceland. Egil is an Icelander, and his relationships are that of a freeman choosing his liege. Thorolf was accused of betraying his lord, but Egil did not have a lord other than Iceland. This is an important difference between Egil and Thorolf, and the text makes it clear that Egil is one of the great men of Iceland, but only a visitor in Norway.

The ambivalent relationship between the Norwegian court and the Icelanders has interesting connotations in *Egil's Saga*. Egil belongs to the first generation born in Iceland, and the story deals extensively with the relationship of his family with the Norwegian court. He is a traveler, a Viking knight, and an Icelander. He does not need to be royal or a member of the court to be exalted. He is exalted because he is a Viking – traveling, raiding, and fighting – revealing the need of Icelanders to present themselves as equals in stature to the Norwegian court. Gift-giving also plays an important role in the tale, illustrating this ambivalent relationship. The kings-*naut*, the axe, breaks, and is not a good gift.

This ambivalent relationship between Icelanders and the Norwegian court continues in *Laxardal Saga*. In this tale, however, the comparisons between Norwegian royalty and the Icelandic Vikings are more striking. There is still respect for the court, but the Icelandic Vikings are presented as complete equals to the kings of Norway.

*Laxardal Saga* deals with the lives of the people of the Laxardal valley. An

important character in the tale is Kjartan. On his expedition to Norway, Kjartan meets King Olaf at a swimming match. After the encounter King Olaf gives Kjartan a cloak.

The king then removed a fine cloak from his own shoulders and gave it to Kjartan, saying it wouldn't do for him to return to his men without a cloak. Kjartan thanked the king for the gift, went back to his followers and showed them the cloak. They were not at all pleased, as they felt Kjartan had put himself in the king's debt, but nothing more occurred. ("The Saga of the People of Laxardal" 2000: 348)

In this instance, Kjartan receives a gift for demonstrating his strength. His acceptance of the gift, however, is seen in a negative light because Kjartan becomes indebted to the king. The gift can potentially become a tool for the king to control Kjartan, or at least his men seem to think so. The encounter also demonstrates that in swimming he is a match for the king, hinting that Kjartan is equal to the king.

The equality of Kjartan and the King becomes even more apparent when "the king gave Kjartan a complete suit of newly made clothes of scarlet. They suited him very well, as people said that he and King Olaf were men of the same size when measured" ("The Saga of the People of Laxardal" 2000: 352). In this example, there is no mention of Kjartan being indebted to the king, although the audience would have understood this; furthermore, the comparison between Kjartan and the king as equals is made explicit. They are of equal "size" and by extension equal status.

Finally, King Olaf gives Kjartan a sword as a parting gift. The king predicts that as long as he carries the sword, no weapon will be able to wound him, and Kjartan thanks the king for his honor and hospitality ("The Saga of the People of Laxardal" 2000: 357). Gift-giving is a protocol in Viking culture. Parting gifts are a common literary motif in the sagas; kings give Icelanders departing gifts because they are most likely never to return from Iceland (Miller 2007: 14). In the case of Kjartan and King Olaf, it is not only

that Kjartan is leaving to settle back in Iceland, but also that the king predicts that Kjartan will die.<sup>227</sup>

King Olaf is by no means the only character from the Norwegian court to give Kjartan a gift. Ingibjorg, the sister of King Olaf, also gives him a parting gift. This gift, however, is not for him but for Gudrun:

Ingibjorg then reached for a nearby casket, from which she took a white head-dress, embroidered with golden threads, which she gave to Kjartan and said she hoped Gudrun Osvifdsdottir would enjoy winding this about her head.

“You are to give it to her as a wedding present, as I want Icelandic women to know that the woman you have consorted with here in Norway is hardly a descendant of slaves.” (“The Saga of the People of Laxardal” 2000: 357)<sup>228</sup>

The head-dress is meant to indicate Ingibjorg’s status to the Icelandic women. The gift is for Gudrun’s wedding day, and it seems that both Kjartan and Ingibjorg assume that on that day she would be marrying Kjartan. The scene implies that both Gudrun and Kjartan are regarded as equal to royalty and should be together. In the interim, however, Gudrun married Bolli, Kjartan’s foster brother and best friend, and when Kjartan arrives back in Iceland, he gives the white head-dress to Hrefna, who becomes his wife.<sup>229</sup>

Both the sword and the head-dress are stolen in the story. These two instances and

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227. Miller, for example, raises the following questions about gift giving: “Can the giver ask for his gifts back if you try to give them away? Might he be able to sue to recover it? Can he justly hate you for giving it away, feel wronged? Does it matter whether the gift was the initiatory gift, the one that started it all, or that it was a payback for a prior gift, or that it was a closing gift, a gift to send someone on their way never to return, as were the swords and cloaks Norwegian kings gave to departing Icelanders? Are there different rules for different kinds of gifts, a sword by one rule, a cloak or an ox or an axe by another” (2007: 14).

228. “Ingibjorg comparing herself to descendant of slaves is an ironic understatement.

229. There are several instances in the saga that reflect that the writer had an understanding of medieval romances. See Kalinke (2011b) for an overview of the role of the Arthurian romances in saga literature.

others involving gifts become the beginning of an escalating feud between Gudrun and Bolli and Kjartan and his family,<sup>230</sup> in which some of the best men of Iceland, including both Kjartan and Bolli, will die. Instances of gift-giving in *Laxardal Saga* express Icelandic ambivalence towards the Norwegian court. Iceland became part of Norway because of the feuds that brought down civic order, but in *Laxardal Saga* Norwegian gifts are used to escalate this civic collapse.

Gift-giving in both *Egil's Saga* and *Laxardal Saga* reflect an ambivalent relationship between the Icelandic Vikings and the Norwegian court. This ambivalence is supported by the historical relationship between Norway and Iceland. Iceland lost its independence to Norway in 1262. Many of the sagas romanticize the period of independence, but also investigate the reason that independence was lost.<sup>231</sup> This complicated relationship between Iceland and Norway clarifies why the Icelanders wrote down the Scandinavian Arthurian tales: they, too, had an ambivalent relationship to kingship, both praising and deriding the king. They also exalted those who traveled, fought, and served kings diligently, like the Vikings Kjartan and Egil.

### **From King Arthur with Love: Gift-Giving in *Möttuls saga***

The ambivalent portrayal of kings is also apparent in the Icelandic versions of the Arthurian romances. Arthur is described as the best king, but he is also often portrayed as powerless. In both *Möttuls saga* and *Tristrams saga*, for example, a stock motif appears

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230. Bolli tries to give Kjartan a gift of an extremely fine horse and three mares but Kjartan does not want to accept them.

231. *Njal's Saga*, for example, explores that the honor system destroyed two prominent and important families.



in which a king makes a rash promise that he must keep to avoid public censure (Kalinke 1981: 35). In *Tristrams saga*, King Markis (King Mark) cannot fight against the Irish harpist, and his men will not fight in his stead because the Irishman is fierce and bold. Although this episode is present in the French counterpart of the story, the Scandinavian text makes it a point to describe Markis as a weak king who cannot defend his people. Only a knight like Tristan, a knight connected to the court but who comes from a different place, is strong enough and brave enough to fight and win against the Irish harpist. Similarly, in the family sagas discussed above, the Icelandic Vikings are the main characters, and they too are connected to the court culturally but come from a different place.

In *Möttuls saga*, Arthur accepts a gift in exchange for a promise, and keeping that promise portrays the court negatively. *Möttuls saga* is a translation of *Le lai du cort mantel* (“Tale of the Short Mantle”).<sup>232</sup> A young man brings to the court a mantle that will not fit any woman who has been deceitful or disloyal to her partner. King Arthur grants the man a boon to let all the women in the court try the mantle, thinking that all the women in the court are loyal. All the women in Arthur’s court, however, are deceiving their partners except for the beloved of Karadin, and the mantle fits her perfectly. The text also depicts Karadin as loyal to his lady; he urges her not to try the mantle, because he loves her and would still love her even if she had been unfaithful to him.

The tale places Arthur in a difficult situation; he granted the young man a boon to

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232. The French lay was probably composed at the end of the twelfth century or beginning of the thirteenth century. The mantle-test narratives are found in several Arthurian narratives. The motif belongs to a larger corpus of medieval and modern texts devoted to chastity tests. See Kalinke (1994: 209) for more information and an excellent translation of the Icelandic tale.

have all the women try the mantle, but all the women and the men of the court are being disgraced. Arthur tries several times to stop the women from trying the mantle, but to do so is to disgrace himself and the court even further.

Þá er allar höfnuðu möttlinum ok engi dirfðiz at klæðaz honum, þá mælti kóngr: “Nú megum vér fá sveininum möttulinn, þvíat eigi má hann hér dveljaz með oss sakir engrar þeirar meyjar er í váru valid er.”

Þá svarar sveinninn: “Eigi er þat rétt, herra, eða sæmiligt né yðvarri tign tilheyrligt. Ok aldri skal ek fyrr við taka möttlinum en ek sé at allar konur ok meyjar hafa honum klæz, þvíat þat sem kóngr gefr ok játar á aldri at ónýtaz ok apr takaz sakir enskis manns vilja né eggjanar orða.” (*Möttuls saga* 1999: 16)

When all drew back from the mantle and no one dared to put it on, the king spoke: “Now we shall return the mantle to the young man, for he cannot stay here with us on account of the maidens in our charge.”

But the young man answered: “That is not right, sire, nor honorable, nor in keeping with your station; by no means do I intend to take back the mantle before I see that all the women and maidens have tried it on, for whatever a king grants and promises must never be rescinded or revoked because of anyone’s demanding or inciting words.” (*Möttuls saga* 1999: 17)

Similar to the French version, the tale places Arthur in a double bind that makes him powerless to protect both his honor and that of his court. This is hardly the portrait of a strong king. Instead, this Arthur is a king who makes decisions rashly, placing his retinue and himself in danger.

Once the beloved of Karadin is found to be faithful, however, the young man who brought the mantle proclaims that he has found no woman in any other court who is faithful. The young man gives the mantle to the lady. He says

En nú játa ek þér þessi skikkju hinni dýrligu, at svá er ágæt at engi er þvílík í heiminum, þvíat hana kann engi maðr at meta með réttu verði. Ok þú ein mátt réttlíga bera, hirða, ok hafa ok þínum örfum gefa. (*Möttuls saga* 1999: 28)

Never before has it shown your like in the purity of your maidenhood. And now I bestow on you this precious mantle, which is so excellent that there is none like it in all the world. No man can estimate its true value, and you alone may rightfully keep it, wear it, possess it, and leave it to your heirs. (*Möttuls saga* 1999: 29)

The value of the maiden makes her worthy of the gift. She is the most valuable because she is the most virtuous.

The tale portrays the women of the court as deceitful, but also emphasizes that only a maiden of King Arthur's court is pure enough to receive the mantle. At the end of the tale, Karadin departs from the court with his beloved, taking the mantle with them. Karadin and his beloved are part of the court but they also leave the court. Although the messenger gives the mantle to the lady, Arthur also declares: "at hún ein mætti réttlíga hafa skikkjuna ok hún ein væri verðug at eiga" (*Möttuls saga* 1999: 28; "that she alone might rightfully have the mantle since she alone was worthy of owning it," *Möttuls saga* 1999: 29). In a sense, then, the gift is also from King Arthur, who proclaims her virtue and value. After the meal, Karadin takes leave of the king, which turns the mantle into a parting gift.

There is an ambivalent description of King Arthur and his court in the text that is similar to that of the Norwegian court in *Egil's Saga* and *Laxardal Saga*. Arthur is placed in a situation that shames his court and exposes his rash decision. His court, however, is also the only court to have a woman who is not deceitful and a man who would rather be shamed than place his lady in such an uncomfortable position. In this sense King Arthur and his court are both mocked and elevated. Karadin and his beloved can be compared to the Icelandic Vikings who give honor to the kings' courts (Kjartan in Norway and Egil in England); yet, once they bring honor to the court and to themselves, they leave the court with parting gifts and go back to Iceland.

## **Transnational Tristan: Kingship and Creating an Icelandic-Spanish Tristan**

Although the French source of *Möttuls saga* contains a description of Arthur and his court similar to that in the Scandinavian translation, the reason these translations were copied down and survive in Old Norse-Icelandic manuscripts from Iceland is because the material fits well within an Icelandic literary system. Some Arthurian texts concentrate on the knights rather than on the kings, just as the family sagas concentrate on the Vikings rather than on the kings. Nevertheless, as discussed above, these translations also reshape the material, expanding its life for a new audience. *Saga af Tristram ok Ísodd* not only foregrounds Tristram in preference to the king, it also displays an awareness of Iceland as part of a bigger European system and critiques courtly culture.

*Saga af Tristram ok Ísodd*, the Icelandic version of the Tristan tale, is inspired by the Norwegian translation of the French redaction of Thomas's Tristan. At the beginning of the Icelandic version, Mórodd, the Icelandic equivalent of King Mark, becomes King of all England by two different means. First, he is accepted as the king of England by the men of the court. Second, he beats Plegrus, the champion of King Mórodd's sister, who was trying to conquer England for her. The Icelandic Tristan begins by presenting King Mórodd as an accomplished king that deserves his kingdom.<sup>233</sup>

Tristram describes King Mórodd as his superior. The Icelandic text has several scenes in which the mother of Ísolt, Queen Flúrent, offers Ísolt to Tristram as a wife and Tristram refuses because there is a better man for her – namely King Mórodd:

Flúrent dróttning bauð, Tristram Ísodd fyrir þat hit mikla þekvirki, er hann hafði drepit orminn.

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233. This description of King Mark does not conform to other descriptions of the king. The Spanish Mares, for example, is described as a tyrant. See chapter V for a comparison of the Castilian King Mark and the Castilian Tristan.

Tristram svarar. “Ekki vil ek þat,” sagði hann, “þvíat ek veit þann manninn, at henna sómir at eiga; en þetta er henna of lágt.”

Hún frétti, hverr sá væri.

Tristram svarar: “Mórodd kóngur, frændi minn,” sagði hann. (“*Saga af Tristram ok Ísodd*” 1999: 274)

Queen Flúrent offered Ísodd to Tristram in return for his great and daring deed in killing the reptile.

Tristram replied: “I do not want that,” he said, “because I know the very man that it is fitting for her to have. But this is too humble for her.”

She asked who it was.

Tristram replied: “King Mórodd, my kinsman,” he said. (“*Saga af Tristram ok Ísodd*” 1999: 275)

The queen believes Tristram is the right man for her daughter because he has shown bravery and might by killing the reptile. Tristram, however, disagrees believing the king to be a better man. Although he becomes a passive figure once Tristram enters the tale (Kalinke 1981: 38-43), King Mórodd is described positively. In this version of the Tristan legend, the king is an honorable man that deserves the kingship of England.

King Mórodd is described as a rightful king, but there are several important changes in the Icelandic version that turn Tristram into the equal of King Mórodd. These changes remap the legend beyond the borders of Wales and England and even Iceland. The most important alterations for the concerns here are that Tristram’s father is from Spain, Tristram is raised in Spain by his foster father (“*Saga af Tristram ok Ísodd*” 1999: 256-57), most of the tale is set in Spain, and Tristram becomes king of Spain. Tristram fights “heathens” who are equated with Muslims.

Þá mæltu heiðingjar: “Þetta er fjándi en ekki maðr, er oss gerir svá mikinn skaða, ok hinn helgi Maúmet verði honum reiðr ok lægi hans dramb” . . . (“*Saga af Tristram ok Ísodd*” 1999: 282)

Then the heathens said: “This is a devil, and not a man, because he does us so much harm. May the holy Mahomet be angry with him and humble his pride” . . . (“*Saga af Tristram ok Ísodd*” 1999: 283)

The image of the Spanish as knights fighting against Muslims does indeed reach the rest of Christian Europe. Tristram becomes king by marrying Ísodd the Dark from Spain.

In the Norwegian version of Tristan and in other versions of the story, there is Isold the Blond (Tristan's love and the primary female character in the story) and Isold of the white hands (a type of doppelganger of Isold the Blond). In the Icelandic *Saga af Tristram ok Ísodd*, however, Isold the Blond becomes Ísodd *bjarta* (Ísodd the Fair) and Isold of the White Hands is transformed into Ísodd *svarta* (Ísodd the Dark) from Spain (in Old Norse *svarta* means dark and refers to her hair and eyes). The shift in the name of the second Ísodd underscores her Spanish heritage and contrasts her with the main female character known as Ísodd the Fair. This addition of dark eyes and hair may come from the idea that Spaniards are “dark” because they are also part Arab; such characteristics were stressed in countries such as France and England once the Spanish courts became powerful entities.<sup>234</sup> At the end of the tale, the Icelandic Tristram dies as the king of Spain.

*Saga af Tristram ok Ísodd* takes place in Spain, an event that is found only in this version and the 1534 Spanish version of the tale.<sup>235</sup> The text nevertheless has markers that show it has been reshaped for a Scandinavian audience. The legend emphasizes Tristram's adventures away from Ísodd, and the behavior of courtly culture is criticized because it does not lead to honorable conduct. Early in the text, for example, Blenziblý,

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234. For more on the perceptions of Spaniards in France and England, see Sharon Kinoshita (2006); Barbara Fuchs (2007); and Irene Silverblatt (2007).

235. The *Coronica nuevamente enmendada y añadida del buen caballero don Tristán de Leonís y del rey don Tristán de Leonís el joven, su hijo* was published by Domenico de Robertis in Sevilla in 1534. This version of the Tristan legend incorporates a section in which Tristan's son becomes King of Spain.

Tristram's mother, wants to meet Kalegras, the knight who will later become Tristram's father. She and her page, Pollornis, have the following conversation.

“Ek hefi sét í dag,” sagði hún, “þann mann at ek hefi eigi litit hans jafningja, ok þér satt at segja, þá hefi ek svá mikla ást felt til hans, at ek má fyrir engan mun annat, en nú þegar í stað verð ek at senda þik til fundar við Kalegras, ok bið hann koma til mín, ok seg at ek vil hafa ást hans.”

Pollornis svarar: “Frú, þú munt vera drukkin, er þér mælit slíka fólsku, þar sem hann hefir gert yðr svá mikinn skaða, at hann hefir drepit Plegrus riddara, vin yðvarn, er fyrir skömmu settuð þér höfðingja yðvars hers. Líz mér hit ráðligra, at ek fara of drepa hann ok færa [ek þér] höfuð hans; er þa vel hefnt várs manns.” (*Saga af Tristram ok Ísodd* 1999: 248)

“I have seen today,” she said, “the man whose equal I have never seen, and to tell you the truth, I then fell deeply in love with him that, as a result, now, at this moment, I can act in no other way than to send you to meet Kalegras. Ask him to come to me, and say that I desire to have his love.”

Pollornis replied: “Lady, you must be drunk since you say such foolish things, seeing that he has done you so much harm in that he killed the knight Plegrus, your friend, whom not long ago you appointed as commander of your army. It seems a better idea to me that I should go and kill him and bring you his head. Then our man would be properly avenged.” (*Saga af Tristram ok Ísodd* 1999: 249)

Although the page did ask Kalegras to meet Blenziblý, a meeting that is essential to the story, Pollornis clearly reproaches her actions and the courtly system in general. In Viking society vengeance is extremely important and is one of the main themes in the sagas (Byock 2001: 185-247). The lady's subsequent actions, which do not punish Kalegras and instead enhance his honor, go against one of the most explicitly significant aspects of Viking culture, but fit exceedingly well with courtly culture. The actions of Blenziblý differ from one of the most important literary constructions of female Vikings – to incite the men into action against those that have brought dishonor to the family unit (Jesch 1991). Pollornis's reaction is not only consistent with Viking culture but also reminds Blenziblý of her role as a Viking woman, a role she rejects. The text reveals that courtly ideals do not correlate well with the ideals of many Vikings by simultaneously

projecting two different reactions: that of Pollornis, whose sentiments follow those of the Vikings, and that of Blenziblý, whose sentiments are similar to the ideals of courtly culture. The episode's openly negative reaction to the courtly system is unique to the Icelandic version.

The *Saga of Tristram ok Ísodd* shows that courtly culture is treated ambivalently in the Arthurian sagas. The ambivalent elements present in the Old Norse-Icelandic Arthurian sagas, which portray the knights in a better light than Arthur and present differing reactions to the court and their customs, are also present in the family sagas. This ambivalence is understandable, in view of the long history of relations between Iceland and Norway. The Old Norse-Icelandic literary descriptions of Iceland being formed by exiles from Norway (*Egil's Saga*), the descriptions of Icelandic Vikings as equal to Norwegian royalty, and the ambivalent description of the Norwegian kings and their courts as something to be both desired and rejected point to a nostalgia for the independence lost to Norway.

### **Shifting Systems, Changing Women: The Role of Marriage in the Family Sagas**

Scandinavian Arthurian texts help us explore the ambivalent relationship between the Icelandic Viking and the Norwegian kings, and also shed light on the shifting role of women in Scandinavian society. Women's status in Icelandic society is a topic of great debate. The family sagas present many women with independence and authority, a sharp contrast to the submissive role of women in thirteenth-century sagas about contemporary



affairs.<sup>236</sup> In Icelandic medieval literature women occupy an important place as strong and independent characters (Clover 1993 and Sawyer and Sawyer 1993), but they are also portrayed as possessions of the men who surround them (Kalinke 1981: 108). Gudrun, for example, is portrayed as a strong woman who divorces her first husband and incites her sons to take revenge for the death of her third husband, Bolli. Nevertheless, she was forced by her father to marry Bolli against her will. *Egil's Saga* depicts women much differently than does *Laxardal Saga*. In *Egil's Saga*, women are treated like property but seem to prosper anyway; in *Laxardal Saga* the same customs bring hardship and pain to the main female characters.

Although there are several reasons for the discrepancies in the depiction of women, in these two texts the dates of composition and the dates they are set in provide some insight into the discrepancies. *Egil's Saga* is set before the conversion to Christianity and is the oldest saga extant, whereas *Laxardal Saga* was written some 60 years after *Egil's Saga* and the bulk of the storyline is set after the conversion. In the essay "Regardless of Sex: Men, Women and Power in Early Northern Europe" (1993), Carol J. Clover discusses the ways in which Christianity shifted Northern Europe's notions of gender. Clover begins by illustrating the problems behind translating the word *blauðr*.

The need in English for two words (*coward* and *female*) where Norse uses one (*blauðr*), . . . hint at the aspect of early Scandinavian culture, and perhaps Germanic culture in general, that this essay is about: a sex-gender system rather

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236. See Birgit Sawyer and Peter Sawyer (1993: 189). The authors write, "It is . . . commonly assumed that in the early Middle Ages housewives had a great deal of independence and authority, doing much of the work on their farms, and that they were entirely responsible for running them when their men were away on Viking expeditions . . . Such dominant women are conspicuously absent from the sagas about contemporary events in thirteenth-century Iceland" (1993: 188-89).

different from our own, and indeed rather different from that of the Christian Middle Ages. (Clover 1993: 1)

She bases her argument on translations, demonstrating that translations help reveal cultural markers. For Clover the family sagas portray both a Christian and a pagan mapping of gender roles, and these roles were very different in the pagan and Christian time periods. Clover also shows that gender is not necessarily linked to sex, and men and women could slip into a gender role depending on their actions and what others said about them. The word *blauðr* means a woman, but it also means a coward.<sup>237</sup> To be called a woman is to be insulted. Men who were called *níð* (sodomite) would become feminized.<sup>238</sup>

Symbolic or not, the *níð* taunts figure the insultee as a female, and in so doing suggest that the category “man” is, if anything, even more susceptible to mutation than the category “woman.” For if a woman's ascent into the masculine took some doing, the man's descent into the feminine was just one real or imagined act away. Nor is the “femaleness” of that act in doubt. Anal penetration constructed the man

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237. Clover gives the dictionary entries of both *blauðr* and *hvatr* to show the difficulty in expressing the meanings of these words, “The adjective *blauðr* poses a translation problem. Cleasby-Vigfusson's entries under it and its antonym *hvatr* read as follows: BLAUÐR, adj. Properly means *soft, weak*, answering Latin *mollis*, and is opposed to *hvatr*, ‘brisk, vigorous’; hence the proverb, *fár er hvatr er hrörask tekr, ef í barnaesku er blauðr* [few are *hvatir* in action who are *blauðir* in childhood]. Metaphorically *blauðr* means ‘feminine,’ *hvatr* ‘masculine,’ but only used of animals, dogs, cats, fishes; *hvatr-lax* = *haeingr* = *salmo mas*; [the feminine noun] *bleyða* is a ‘dam,’ and metaphorically ‘a coward, a craven.’ *Blauðr* is a term of abuse, a ‘bitch, coward.’

HVATR, adj. ‘Bold, active, vigorous.’ II. ‘Male,’ opposed to *blauðr*, ‘female,’ of beasts” (1993: 1-2).

238. Clover translates *níð* as ‘sodomite,’ but also as ‘female.’ “To what extent sodomy, consensual or otherwise, was practiced in early Scandinavia is unknown. What is clear from a survey of *níð* examples is that the charges to that effect are ‘symbolic’ (as Folke Ström would have it) or ‘moral’ (as Meulengracht Sørensen prefers) insofar as they refer not to an act of sex but rather to such ‘female’ characteristics as ‘a lack of manly courage,’ ‘lack of prowess,’ or ‘unmanliness’ in both its physical and its mental sense,” or “certain mental qualities, not to mention duties that were considered specifically female” (1993: 9).

who experienced it as whore, bride, mare, bitch, and the like – in whatever guise a female creature, and as such subject to pregnancy, childbirth, and lactation. In the world of *níð* (male) anus and vagina are for all imaginary purposes one and the same thing. (Clover 1993: 9)

Both male and female gender roles are linked to actions performed by or insults thrown at the characters of the sagas.

For Clover this ability to slip into different gender roles is clear evidence that

Scandinavia had a different gender system. She writes that

I mean in this essay to turn the question inside out and ask whether the paradox – extraordinary women, contempt for femaleness – may not have more to do with the virtual absence of *any* notion of "womanhood" than it does with the existence of some more spacious or flexible notion than our own. The evidence points, I think, to a one-sex, one-gender model with a vengeance – one that plays out in the rawest and most extreme terms a scheme of sexual difference that at the level of the body knows only the male and at the level of social behavior, only the effeminate, or emasculate, or impotent. (Clover 1993: 18)

Clover discusses the paradox of the sagas as having complicated and strong female characters, but also having contempt for the role of women in general.

The general notion, that sexual difference used to be less a wall than a permeable membrane, has a great deal of explanatory force in a world in which a physical woman could become a social man, a physical man could (and sooner or later did) become a social woman, and the originary god, Óðinn himself, played both sides of the street. (1993: 18-19).

Clover also believes that Christianity had an important role in the shift of the

Scandinavian gender model. She states that

In the northern world, at least, the social organization of Christian Europe must have been perceived as entailing a profoundly different sex-gender system – one that despite its own stories of real and imagined gender crossings (particularly within religious discourse) drew a line of unprecedented firmness between male and female bodies and natures. (1993: 18)

Following Clover's argument, we can see that the sagas include at least two different ideologies and that the Arthurian texts, which have strong Christian underpinnings,

explore themes that are predominant in sagas that are more influenced by Christianity, such as *Laxardal Saga*, rather than sagas such as *Egil's Saga* whose events predate conversion. The Scandinavian Arthurian materials become an interesting indicator about shifts in ideology, which will be discussed in the next section. Although Clover focuses on gender in her essay, the sagas seem also to include contrasting ideologies other related issues, such as marriage.

Marriage was an important form of social stability because it created bonds between families.

Virgins are rare in the profane literature of thirteenth-century Scandinavia. Their absence may have been in part because of the great importance of marriage and marriage alliances in Scandinavia, especially in Iceland, where, in the absence of a superior authority, social stability largely depended on the links formed between families. (Sawyer and Sawyer 1993: 201)

Marriage also involved strict rules for women.

Once married, a woman was expected to assume a completely feminine role with her own well-defined responsibilities quite distinct from those of her husband. In Icelandic law her duties were entirely confined to the farm, where she had great authority symbolized by the keys on her belt. (Sawyer and Sawyer 1993: 194)

In some sagas, women have little say about marriage exchanges; their fathers choose the men they marry and the consent of the women is not necessary although on many occasions it is sought. In other instances women have great influence over their choice of husbands, and Scandinavian law gave widows more say over who they could marry.

In *Egil's Saga*, for example, we see one end of this spectrum: women are treated as property and the actions of the male characters dictate their value. Two interesting examples are found in Hildirid and Sigrid. We meet Hildirid after Bjorgolf decides he likes the girl; he goes to Hogni's home and forces him to give her away. Bjorgolf calls Hogni over and says,

Björgólfr kallar til sín Högna bónda ok segir honum, at – “erendi er þat hingat, at ek vil, at dóttir þín fari heim með mér, ok mun ek nú gera til hennar lausabrullaup.”

En Högni sá engan annan sinn kost en láta allt svá vera sem Björgólfr vildi. Björgólfr keypti hana með eyri gulls, ok gengu þau í eina rekkju bæði. Fór Hildiríðr heim með Björgólfi í Torgar. Brynjólfr lét illa yfir þessi ráðagerð. (*Egils saga*: chapter 7)

“The reason I have come here is to take your daughter home with me and I will celebrate our wedding here now.”

Hogni saw he had no other choice than to let Bjorgolf have his way. Bjorgolf paid an ounce of gold for Hildirid and he shared a bed with her afterwards. She went home with him to Torgar, but his son Brynjolf disapproved of the whole business. (*“Egil’s Saga”* 2000: 14)

The scene described above is followed by Bard, Bjorgolf’s grandson, asking to marry Sigrid, the daughter of Sigurd.

Þar bjó maðr, er Sigurðr hét. Hann var auðgastr norðr þar. Hann var lendr maðr ok spakr at viti. Sigríðr hét dóttir hans ok þótti kost beztr á Hálogalandi. Hon var einberni hans ok átti arf at taka eftir Sigurð, föður sinn.

Bárðr Brynjólfsson gerði heimanferð sína, hafði skútu ok á þrjá tigu manna. Hann fór norðr í Álöst ok kom á Sandnes til Sigurðar. Bárðr hefir uppi orð sín ok bað Sigríðar. Því máli var vel svarat ok líkliga, ok kom svá, at Bárði var heitit meyjunni. Ráð þau skyldu takast at öðru sumri. Skyldi þá Bárðr sækja norðr þangat ráðit. (*Egils saga*: chapter 7)

A wise landholder named Sigurd lived there, the richest man in that part of the north. His daughter Sigrid was considered the finest match in Halogaland; as his only child, she was his heir.

Brynjolf’s son Bard set off from home on a boat with a crew of thirty men, and sailed north to Alost where he visited Sigurd at Sandnes. Bard announced that his business was to ask for Sigrid’s hand in marriage. His proposal was answered favorably and Bard was promised her for his bride. The wedding was set for the following summer, when Bard was to go back north to fetch his bride. (*“Egil’s Saga”* 2000: 15)

The actions of Bjorgolf and Bard serve as an important contrast between the role of Hildirid and Sigrid as wives. Bard takes the same number of men as his grandfather, but instead of demanding, he asks for Sigrid’s hand in marriage. Sigurd, Sigrid’s father, agrees, and the wedding is set for the following summer. Bjorgolf gives Hogni no choice

but to give him his daughter, and has sexual intercourse with her with no delay. The actions that bring about the union of Hildirid and Bjorgolf rely on force, whereas those that unite Sigrid and Bard rely on friendship.

When Bjorgolf dies, Hildirid's sons ask Bjorgolf's other children, their half-siblings, for part of the inheritance because he had paid an ounce of gold for her, making her legally a wife. Although gold is usually positive, in this case Hogni, Hildirid's father, was offered only one ounce – the lowest monetary value of gold. This was not an adequate exchange and by no means a deserved transaction. Brynjolf, Bjorgolf's son, and Bard, his grandson, do not agree with Bjorgolf's actions, and they do not consider Hildirid his legitimate wife. In their eyes, the juxtaposition of Bard's courtship with that of Bjorgolf serves to undermine the legitimacy of Bjorgolf's marriage. Hildirid's relationship with Bjorgolf could count as a marriage if the ounce of gold is considered as a dowry, however small; nevertheless, if marriage is a form of property exchange that strengthens family ties, then her union with Bjorgolf is unsuccessful. This paradox is supported in the saga by the contrast with Bard's actions to attain Sigrid, the subsequent lasting friendship between Bard and Sigurd, and the fact that ultimately Hildirid's sons do not get legal compensation from their nephew Bard.

*Egil's Saga* does not portray Hildirid's sons positively. They lie to the king, they fail in their assigned tasks, and they are identified with Hildirid rather than with their father. By identifying them with a matronymic instead of the patronymic, which was the accepted custom, society passed judgment on Bjorgolf's character. The contrast between Hildirid's rape and Sigrid's marriage exposes the way in which the actions of the male characters lend different values to the female characters in *Egil's Saga*. The value placed

on them as wives or as concubines is directly related to the inheritance the male characters, their sons, receive in the tale. The tale exposes a system in which women are property and their bodies are also the place where the rights to property are transacted. Once the legitimacy of Sigríð as a wife is established, for example, she becomes the body through which several male characters receive their inheritance.

Chapter nine of *Egil's Saga* depicts the death of Bard, the grandson of Björgolf, and the husband of Sigríð. Bard dies from wounds he receives in a battle in which he fights under the command of King Harald. Bard has also become great friends with Thorolf, Egil's uncle. Bard asks the king to allow him to dispose of his bequest himself, to which the king agrees. Bard says,

“Arf minn allan, vil ek, at taki Þórólfr, félagi minn ok frændi, lönd ok lausa aura. Honum vil ek ok gefa konu mína ok son minn til uppfæðslu, því at ek trúi honum til þess bezt allra manna.” (*Egils saga*: chapter 9)

“I want my kinsman and companion Thorolf to inherit everything, my lands and my goods, and I also want to place my wife and son in his care, for I trust him best of all men for that task.” (*Egil's Saga* 2000: 18)

Thorolf marries Sigríð, inheriting everything that belonged to Bard, including Sigríð.

Sigríð's value as a “proper” wife means that Thorolf inherits all the lands and goods of Bard.

Hildirid's sons, once again, try to claim an inheritance as the sons of Björgolf, but Hildirid's degraded status once again denies them any inheritance.

Þórólfr svarar svá: “Þat var mér kunnigt of Brynjólf ok enn kunnara um Bárð, at þeir váru manndómsmenn svá miklir, at þeir myndi hafa miðlat ykkur þat af arfi Björgólfs, sem þeir vissi, at réttendi væri til. Var ek nær því, at þit hófuð þetta sama ákall við Bárð, ok heyrðist mér svá sem honum þætti þar engi sannendi til, því at hann kallaði ykkur frillusonum.” (*Egils saga*: chapter 9)

“I knew Brynjolf well, and Bard even better,” Thorolf answered. “They were men of such integrity that they would have given you the share of Björgolf's

inheritance that they knew was yours by rights. I heard you make this same claim with Bard, and he did not sound as if he thought there was any justification for it. He said you were bastards.” (“Egil’s Saga” 2000: 19)<sup>239</sup>

Thorolf is loyal to Bard and adheres to his wishes. His decision to slight Hildirid’s sons initiates a chain reaction that results in dishonorable death, an ironic fate for one who

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239. This scene is not the only instance where the status of the women is used to deny land to a character in the text. Later in the tale Egil is denied land under the pretext that his wife is a bastard: “Gunnhildr, kona mín, ‘sagði hann,’ er dóttir Bjarnar ok Álofar, þeirar konu, er Björn hafði lögfengit. Er Gunnhildr réttir erfingi Bjarnar. Tók ek fyrir þá sök upp fé þat allt, er Björn hafði átt, at ek víska, at sú ein var dóttir Bjarnar önnur, er ekki átti arf at taka. Var móðir hennar hernumin, en síðan tekin frillutaki ok ekki at frændaráði ok flutt land af landi. En þú, Egill, ætlar at fara hér sem hvarvetna annars staðar, þess er þú hefir komit, með ofkapp þitt ok ójafnað. Nú mun þér þat hér ekki týja, því at Eiríkr konungr ok Gunnhildr dróttning hafa mér því heitit, at ek skal rétt hafa af hverju máli, þar er þeira ríki stendr yfir. Ek mun færa fram sönn vitni fyrir konungi ok dómöndum, at Þóra hlaðhönd, móðir Ásgerðar, var hertekin heiman frá Þóris, bróður síns, ok annat sinni af Aurlandi frá Brynjólfs. Fór hon þá af landi á braut með víkingum ok útlögum konungs, ok í þeiri útleð gátu þau Björn dóttur þessa, Ásgerði. Nú er furða at um Egil, er hann ætlar at gera ómæt öll orð Eiríks konungs, þat fyrst, er þú, Egill, hefir verit hér í landi, síðan er Eiríkr konungr gerði þik útlægan, ok þat, þótt þú hafir fengit ambáttar, at kalla hana arfgengja. Vil ek þess krefja dómendr, at þeir dæmi mér allan arf Bjarnar, en dæmi Ásgerði ambátt konungs, því at hon var svá getin, at þá var faðir hennar ok móðir í útleð konungs.” (*Egils saga*: chapter 56; “Berg-Onund spoke. ‘My wife Gunnhild is the daughter of Bjorn and Olof, Bjorn’s lawful wife,’ he said. ‘Gunhild is therefore Bjorn’s legal heiress. I claimed ownership of everything Bjorn owned on the grounds that Bjorn had only one other daughter and she had no right to the inheritance. Her mother was captured and made a concubine without her kinsmen’s approval, and taken from one country to another. And you, Egil, want to act as unreasonably and overbearingly here as you do everywhere else you go. But you do not stand to gain by it this time, for King Eirik and Queen Gunnhild have promised me that every case of mine in their realm will be ruled in my favour. I present irrefutable evidence to the king and queen and members of the court to prove that Thora of the Embroidered Hand, Asgerd’s mother, was captured from her brother Thorir’s home and on another occasion from Brynjolf’s in Aurland. She travelled from one country to the next with Bjorn and some Vikings and outlaws who had been exiled by the king, and while she was away she became pregnant with Asgerd by Bjorn. It is astonishing that you, Egil, intend to ignore all King Eirik’s rulings. For a start, you are here in this country after Eirik outlawed you, and what is more, even though you have married a slave-woman, you claim she has a right to an inheritance. I demand of the members of the court that they award me all of Bjorn’s inheritance, and declare Asgerd a king’s slave-woman, because she was begotten when her mother and father were under king’s outlawry,” “*Egil’s Saga*” 2000: 97).



followed the code of honor in all of his decisions.<sup>240</sup>

Thorolf dies at the hands of King Harald. He dies face down, which is not considered honorable. Thorolf's kinsmen, Olvir and Eyvind, ask to leave the retinue of the king because they are troubled by the king's role in Thorolf's death. The king responds by keeping Olvir by his side because he is a valued poet, but gives Thorolf's wife, Sigrid, to Eyvind. The king says,

“Nú vil ek, Eyvindr, at þú farir norðr á Hálogaland. *Vil ek gifta þér Sigríði á Sandnesi, konu þá, er Þórólfr hafði átt. Vil ek gefa þér fé þat allt, er Þórólfr átti. Skaltu þar hafa með vináttu mína, ef þú kannst til at gæta.*” (*Egils saga*: chapter 22; emphasis added)

“Now I want you, Eyvind, to go north to Halogaland and *marry Sigrid from Sandnes, Thorolf's widow. I will give you all the wealth that belonged to Thorolf, and you will have my friendship too, if you know how to look after such things.*” (*Egil's Saga* 2000: 37; emphasis added)

Once again possession of Sigrid includes the ownership of her former husband's land and goods, as well as the King's friendship. *Egil's Saga* portrays women as property and places value on them as such. Women unite men in friendship, kinship, and possession, both physical and ideological.

Except for Gunnhild, wife of King Eirik, other female characters in *Egil's Saga* are few and play minor roles. Gunnhild is presented as strong and capable, and would fit the definition of a *hvatr*, effectively rendering her husband, King Eirik, as a *blauðr*. Her role in *Egil's Saga* is not to present a strong woman but to feminize King Eirik and thus exalt Egil in comparison to the king. Most female characters experience similar fates to the ones just discussed and represent the body of land owned by their previous husbands or fathers. In the early Irish texts, as we have seen, the female characters are aligned with

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240. The irony behind the death of Thorolf is not perhaps very surprising if we take into account that the family sagas are very ironic.

sovereignty, and the king demonstrates his sovereignty through his relationship with the goddess figure.<sup>241</sup> The women in *Egil's Saga* are also connected to the possession of land and yet the construction of those figures is starkly different. In the early Irish and Welsh tales, the women choose the legitimate king, whereas in *Egil's Saga*, the value of the women is assigned by men, and the right to possess women and their legitimacy as wives is also granted by the men. In *Egil's Saga*, women are possessions, and when exchanged they create family bonds and represent the wealth of men. The systems that created the Irish texts and *Egil's Saga* are very different, and those differences are highlighted in the roles of the women.

In *Laxardal Saga*, however, women seem to have more control over their marriages, and it is frowned upon for fathers to marry them off without their consent. Widows, for example, have a say in whom they married; a widow under “Scandinavian law, had more of a right to decide for herself whether she would remarry and to choose her own husband” (Blaisdell and Kalinke 1977: xiv-xv). In *Laxardal Saga* we meet Gudrun, a beautiful woman who is fated to have four husbands, to outlive them all, and to become a nun. Apart from her four husbands, she is also connected to Kjartan, a handsome man considered to be best among the Icelandic young men. Gudrun is forced to marry her first husband, whom she does not love. She takes matters in her own hands by sewing him a shirt too low and divorcing him on the grounds he was dressed as a woman (the low cut of the shirt implies that he might be exposing his breast). Gudrun loves her second husband, but he drowns. Her third husband is Bolli, whom she does not want to marry but is pushed to by her family: “Osvif then said, ‘If you refuse a man like

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241. See Chapter II.

Bolli many people will say that your answer shows more recklessness than foresight. But as long as I'm still alive, I intend to direct my children's actions in matters where I can see more clearly than they'" ("The Saga of the People of Laxardal" 2000: 355-56).

Gudrun does not want to marry Bolli even though he is a good match, because she wants to wait for Kjartan ("The Saga of the People of Laxardal" 2000: 354).

Despite the fact that she is a widow, Gudrun is forced to marry Bolli by her father. The marriage of Bolli and Gudrun is an important element in a complicated chain reaction that leads to the deaths of both Bolli and Kjartan. The tale seems to criticize the fact that she is forced to marry Bolli and that her preference not to marry is undermined by both Bolli and her father. This reading is strengthened by contrasting the courtship of Bolli and Gudrun with the courtship of Olaf and Thorgerd, Egil's daughter, in the same saga. When Olaf asks Egil for Thorgerd's hand in marriage, Egil makes it clear that it is her choice whether to accept the marriage proposal. Thorgerd refuses Olaf at first and only accepts his proposals after conversing with him. Whether or not to marry Olaf is Thorgerd's choice exclusively.

### **A Right to Marry: Viking Women in Old Norse-Icelandic Arthurian Literature**

Scandinavian Arthurian texts give greater leeway to women to choose whom they marry. This shift, however, is uniquely Scandinavian; the French versions of the Arthurian romance do not give women such choices. In *Möttuls saga*, the women are treated in many respects like those in *Egil's Saga*: the women become the space where the men gain respect and honor or, alternatively, shame. As we have seen, *Möttuls saga* is about a mantle that reveals the fidelity or infidelity of the women that wear the mantle.

Before the women in the story try on the mantle, the men are eager to show that their women are loyal to them by making remarks about their greatness. As each woman puts on the mantle, which inevitably fails to fit her properly, each woman is proven unfaithful. In response, the rest of the men, particularly Sir Kay, mock the woman's respective partner. When it is the turn of Sir Kay's lady to try on the mantle, he says that it is to her honor if she is proved to be faithful and to her disgrace if she fails. When she tries the mantle, however, and is found to have deceived Kay, the text states that

Ok er kæi sá hversu unnasta hans hafði fallit, þá vildi hann heldr at aldri hefði hún þar komit en þvílíka skömm ok svívirðing fengit. (*"Möttuls saga"* 1999: 18)

When Kay saw how his beloved had fallen, he would have preferred that she had never come there rather than to receive such shame and disgrace. (*"Möttuls saga"* 1999: 19)

Once she is found guilty, the shame is Kay's disgrace and not that of his lady. Karadin takes the opposite attitude. He tells his lady not to try the mantle because he would rather not disgrace her if she was deceitful. Although many of the women that had been deceitful have names, it is worth noting that Karadin's love in particular is not named.

Karadin is the exception among the men in Arthur's court. The portrayal of women as the platform where men gain honor or experience shame is similar to the way in which women's bodies serve as the site where men gain lands, goods, and friendship in *Egil's Saga*. The Old Norse-Icelandic Arthurian sagas, however, give women more control than they have in *Egil's Saga*. After all Karadin, the main knight of the tale, refuses to let his lady be a platform, marking him as superior to the other men just before she is shown to be the only faithful woman in any court.

Icelandic Arthurian sagas criticize men who try to force women to marry. In fact, many of the Scandinavian redactors change their tales from the French source text to

undermine attempts to marry women without their consent. In the view of Blaisdell and Kalinke the Arthurian sagas present women differently from their French counterparts. “The [French] romance’s attitude toward woman, who is at the same time an object of slavelike veneration and a piece of property to be acquired and disposed of at will, gives way to the image of the rather independent woman found frequently in the native sagas” (Blaisdell and Kalinke 1977: xiv). In *Erex saga*, for example, Earl Placidus respects Enide’s wishes not to marry, letting her decide for herself (Blaisdell and Kalinke 1977: xiv). In the French romance, by contrast, the Earl makes her go through a wedding ceremony (Blaisdell and Kalinke 1977: xiv). The treatment of Enide by Earl Placidus in *Erex saga* is more akin to the interactions between women and men in sagas such as *Laxardal Saga*. In the French text by Chrétien de Troyes, Enide is handed in marriage to Erec without asking for her consent. In the Scandinavian version, her father makes sure to ask for her consent, which she immediately gives.

Opt hefi ek heyrt þín getit at hreysti ok riddaraskap, ok at engum vil ek því neita at gipta þér minna dóttur, ef þat er hanna vil. . . . Ek var fyrri ríkr ok mikils ráðandi af höfðingjum; en nú þykkir engum um mik vert síðan fátæktin sótti mik. En þess væntir mik at af viti ok kvennligum listum hafi mín dóttir eigi síðr en vænleik. Ok nú segi hún sinn vilja. (“*Erex saga*” 1999: 226 and 228)

I have often heard your bravery and chivalry mentioned, and by no means do I want to refuse to give you my daughter in marriage, if that is her will. . . . But I suspect that my daughter is no less endowed in intelligence and womanly accomplishments than in beauty. Now let her speak her own mind. (“*Erex saga*” 1999: 227 and 229)

In this sense, Chrétien de Troyes’s *Erec et Enide* (c. 1170) has more in common with *Egil’s Saga* which reflects a pro-Christian ethos about women.

In *Ívens saga*, the redactors also change the source material to give women a choice. In Chapter 13, for example, the father of a maiden offers her hand in marriage to

Íven for battling the giants. In the French romance Yvain excuses the offer by stating that she is too beautiful for the likes of him, but in the Icelandic version Íven refuses to bargain over the fate of a woman. Íven says,

Guð láti mik eigi hana kaupa, heldr skal hún jafnan frjáls fyrir mér. (*Ívens saga* 1999: 86)

God keep me from bartering for her, rather she shall always be free on my account. (*Ívens saga* 1999: 87)

The French Arthurian texts give women less power over their own marriage; the Scandinavian Arthurian materials give women control to decide who to marry.

As Clover points out, there are ideological differences between the portrayal of men in *Egil's Saga* and other Christian influenced sagas, such as *Njal's Saga*. She believes that Christianity brought about a different gender system, replacing the previous system. Could the right of women to choose who they marry, which is often a strong component of the Arthurian sagas, be influenced by Christianity which – in theory at least – required mutual consent in all marriages?

If Christianity did have this influence in the Norse tradition, then the French romances remain to be explained, as they were also created within the context of a Christian culture but offer women less voice in the realm of marriage than their Scandinavian counterparts. There are several elements at work in the French and Scandinavian texts that can account for this discrepancy. First, there was a tendency in Old Norse-Icelandic society to give women more rights, as seen by the right of widows to choose their second partner. Moreover, the women portrayed in the Scandinavian texts do not have the same role as their counterparts in the French romances. As discussed in Chapter IV, Chrétien de Troyes's romances find their place at the heart of an emerging

literary system. His romances use the element of the fantastic as a way to comment on the Crusades and other social issues. In his texts, female characters become the object of conquest in which the men solidify the Self. Enid, for example, is not named until she marries Erec (Putter 2009: 45). The Scandinavian counterparts to these stories do not function in the same way. Giving women more freedom in their marriage choices shifts the texts away from ideologies of expansion toward concepts that give those in subaltern positions power, a position endorsed by Icelanders in relation to the Norwegian kings.

As argued in the first section of this chapter, the knights become a reflection of the Vikings and the sagas present Norwegian kings and Arthur ambivalently because of Iceland's subservience to Norway. If female characters become a space of conquest in the French texts, then they are a space of redemption in the Scandinavian. The men of Iceland chose to work for the kings of Norway and they chose to become Christian. Giving women a choice about whom they marry in the Arthurian sagas conforms to the fact that Christian ideals made their way to Iceland. The Icelandic texts also continue the shift from narratives of conquest to narratives in which men travel to demonstrate their talents and prowess, but then return home to a community that has choices. Thus, the Scandinavian Arthurian texts eliminate the role of the knight as a crusader because they are dealing with different historical realities. The Icelandic Arthurian redactors follow a similar literary system as *Laxardal Saga*, in which forcing women to marry is discouraged. Therefore they alter their versions of Arthurian literature to fit their own ideas about women, marriage, and society.

The Scandinavian Arthurian texts are reshaped to fit a Scandinavian ideology. The Arthurian texts as a system are clearly transcultural because different cultural

systems adjust them to their own particular needs. Although both France and Scandinavia were Christian at the time the Scandinavian stories were written, they were not Christian in the same way, and though the French and Scandinavian stories all praise travel and movement, they do not do it for the same reasons nor does the focus on the knights rather than kings reflect the same motivation.

### **Vikings and Knights: The Honor of the Traveling Spirit**

The relationship between kings and Vikings on the one hand and Arthur and his knights on the other in Old Norse-Icelandic literature displays a culture in awe of kings and at the same time desirous of independence from them. The implication that Icelandic settlers are equal to the kings of Norway, but are also unable to survive in the same atmosphere (Egil cannot set foot in Norway and Kjartan's death is prophesized by the king of Norway) suggests nostalgia for independence, which the Icelanders lost to Norway in 1262. In light of the changes between the French and Scandinavian texts, I would also argue that the portrayal of women in the sagas point towards the same nostalgia. The women are given a choice so that they are not part of a system of subjugation and conquest that is similar to the subjugation of Iceland to Norway.

The Scandinavian Arthurian texts were translated in Norway because they comprised the literature read in most European courts at the time. They functioned as a form of entertainment (Kalinke 1981: 20-45). The texts were adapted to fit Scandinavian culture, altered to help a Scandinavian audience accept and enjoy the texts. In this part of the afterlife of Arthurian romances, the maturing process of the texts brings the material closer to a Scandinavian readership. Icelanders continued to translate the texts after they



were out of fashion in other courts, such as those of the Norwegians. It is the Icelandic translations that have thus survived in Old Norse. Comparing the Old Norse-Icelandic Arthurian sagas with the Old Norse-Icelandic family sagas provides clues as to why the French Arthurian romances have a specific inherent significance that manifests itself in translatability into Old Norse-Icelandic. This translatability is connected to the structure of the texts, in which the knights are the main characters as opposed to Arthur.

As demonstrated in Chapter IV, two possible explanations exist for the French romances' concentration on the knights and not on Arthur: Chrétien de Troyes worked in the court of a nobleman rather than the king. Moreover, Chrétien wrote during the Crusades, a time period when knights were traveling and having adventures. The Icelandic versions of the texts also concentrate on the knights, but for very different reasons. The glorification of knights who travel fits with one of the most important aspects of the sagas: the honoring of Icelandic Vikings who travel.

Although the French and Old Norse-Icelandic Arthurian romances have a similar structure in which the knights take center stage, the reason for choosing such a structure differs greatly. The Scandinavian texts transformed the tales to fit a Scandinavian system. Icelanders continued to translate the material because it allowed them to express their ambivalence toward kingship, displaying a need to belong to the court but also expressing their equality to it as free citizens of Iceland and elevating the memory of themselves as descendants of adventuresome Vikings. The Icelandic version of the Tristan tale clearly and openly discusses courtly customs and exposes how different they are from the Icelanders' own ideologies and behaviors. The Scandinavian heirs of Arthur used the material in a decidedly different way from those featuring the Welsh, English, French,

and Iberian Arthurs. In each, it is the context in which the Arthurian tales are presented coupled with information on specific Arthurian texts that helps reveal the reasons behind the specificities of each version of the Arthurian story.

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## CHAPTER VII

### A FAMILY REUNION: THE TRANSNATIONAL NATURE OF MEDIEVAL ARTHURIAN LITERATURE

The Arthurian texts of the European peripheries require a nuanced, dialectical investigation, an investigation rooted in the cultures that created them, and simultaneously, in their juxtaposition with the canonical Arthurian corpus. The texts of the peripheries merit new investigations that do not give precedence to the canon. Addressing the significant gap in comparative scholarship of Arthurian texts from the peripheries of Europe, I suggest that Arthurian texts are not examples of a one-way transfer of narrative from source to target, but instead, a reciprocal relationship is formed between the source and target cultures. As a whole, the Arthurian texts do not form a cohesive literary corpus; rather, the multiplicity of Arthurian texts rearticulates common narrative materials in different ways, generating a variety of themes. The individual texts belong to the cultural systems in which they were produced, as well as to a medieval, “European” system and an Arthurian system. The texts have overlapping similarities, demonstrating they are part of an interrelated family, yet they remain decidedly different based on the cultures and historical periods that produced them.

This project focuses on the British, Iberian, and Scandinavian Arthurian texts in order to establish Arthurian literature as a transcultural phenomenon that was redefined and recreated across a range of milieus. The afterlife of the Arthurian texts differs depending on the location and moment in which they were created. Furthermore, this research project addresses the necessarily multicultural nature of the northern Mediterranean, where Irish, British, Iberian, and Scandinavian cultures interacted through

and across the various waterways of Europe, most notably the Irish Sea and the Atlantic littoral.

Translations of medieval Arthurian texts in the peripheries of Europe provide evidence of an intricate series of manipulations performed on the texts. The stories are translations, pseudotranslations, and rewritings of the Arthurian materials adapted to conform to the necessities of the specific cultures and courts that produced them. These Arthurian texts present a complicated relationship, not only between the kings and their subjects, but also between neighboring courts and their agents.

Arthurian literature is found throughout Europe and beyond. Comparative research on Arthurian texts, however, tends to study the materials from the perspective of a national literature rather than across national literatures. Some of the most important research compilations on Arthurian literature divide the materials by nationality. Norris J. Lacy's *A History of Arthurian Scholarship* (2006), for example, surveys the most important Arthurian scholarship. The book segregates the materials by country; an expert on Arthurian literature for each country outlines their national scholarship on the subject.<sup>242</sup> Comparative approaches tend to be centered on the canon, comparing canonical texts with one another and comparing noncanonical texts to the canon. This dissertation demonstrates the rich scholarly perspectives that are available to those willing to think outside contemporary national boundaries and discuss the materials comparatively without foregrounding the canonical Arthurian texts.

A study of Arthurian texts from the peripheries benefits from the application of translation and postcolonial theoretical approaches. Translation theory is important in

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242. Similar compilations include Roger Sherman Loomis (1959); Alan Lupack (2002 and 2007); and Helen Fulton (2009).



order to understand the afterlife of the translated texts. This approach points out that translations tell us as much about the target cultures as the source cultures. Scholars such as Gideon Toury, André Lefevere, Maria Tymoczko, and Jón Karl Helgason have highlighted the important role translations play in the cultural systems that govern different bodies of literature.<sup>243</sup> Applying a translation theoretical approach to the analysis of Arthurian texts demonstrates the various ways these texts adapt the Arthurian materials to serve the specific purposes needed in the different courts throughout medieval Europe.

Training a postcolonial theoretical lens on the Arthurian texts from the peripheries strengthens the analysis of the differential power relations present in the Arthurian corpus. Sharon Kinoshita's seminal text, *Medieval Boundaries* (2006), applies postcolonial theory to an investigation into why many popular medieval French texts are set in the peripheries of the French courts. Her discussion of textual features, such as the construction of the Saracens as Other in the *Chanson de Roland*, exposes their relationship to the construction of a coherent French-Christian subjectivity. Kinoshita's work on French literature has been a stimulus to my project's effort to resituate the Arthurian texts as central to the construction of stable identities for the cultures of Britain, Iberia, and Scandinavia. Each chapter in this text discusses historical power relations, as well as the relationships between kings and their subjects, in order to understand the role of Arthurian texts both in their local and European systems.

Chapter II discusses kingship and succession in early Irish texts in order to analyze the construction of sovereignty in Welsh literature and Arthurian literature. Irish

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243. Gideon Toury (2012); André Lefevere (1992 and 1987); Maria Tymoczko (1986, 1990, and 1999); and Jón Karl Helgason (1999).

kingship and succession was not based on primogeniture. Instead, Irish law tracts point to a kinship system in which the men of the community chose their king. The king was picked from the kin of an earlier king, up to four generations removed. The legal tracts distinguish those that have a right to *ríghdomna*, or kingship, from those that do become *tánaise rígh*, and eventually king.

In addition, Chapter II considers the role of women in the early Irish texts. Irish literature abounds with examples of different types of female characters, from satirists and warriors to poets and goddesses. Irish literature represents an array of female figures who have agency (or at the very least die in pursuit of agency) and are an integral part of the community presented in the texts. These women also play an important role in choosing the king. They represent the land and legitimize sovereignty by having sexual intercourse with the rightful king. As evidenced by *Echtra mac nEchach Muigmedóin* “The Adventures of the Sons of Eochaid Muigmedón” (eleventh century), the goddess of sovereignty who personifies the land also chooses those who have the right to ascend to the throne. Further, if the king is the rightful king and is making the correct decisions, the land produces a fruitful harvest. If a man is not the rightful king, the land decays. Thus, the entire community, men, women, and even the land, plays a role in choosing the king.

Further, this chapter addresses an important characteristic associated with Irish kingship: the concept of *Fír flaitheam* or ‘ruler’s/prince’s truth/justice.’ *Fír flaitheam* represents the ability of the king to rule and to maintain a reciprocal relationship with his people. The power of truth is associated with the king’s willingness to keep his obligations to his community. If a king breaks his obligations he breaks the *geasa*, or the rules imposed on him by the community. Chapter II discusses an illustrative example of

a king who breaks his *fír flaitheamon* with the tale *Togail Bruidne Dá Derga* (“The Burning of Dá Derga’s Hostel). The tale demonstrates that through keeping obligations to the community, a prince demonstrates *fír flaitheamon*, and maintains peace and goodwill; breaking these obligations leads to destruction and war. There are other tales of Irish kings as well as tales from the Ulster cycle that explicate kings either maintaining their obligations to their communities or breaking those obligations. Each story emphasizes the importance of the community, including men, women, and the land, to kingship.

Beyond the political ideologies related to kingship, Irish literature also presents the concept of the *síd* or otherworld. The otherworld is a community existing side-by-side with humans, but inhabited by those who have superhuman powers. The otherworld is a place that warriors can access and is best described through poetry. The description of the otherworld becomes important as a comparative tool to understand differences among Arthurian texts produced at different times and in different places.

Early Irish texts emphasize both kings and their communities. The legal texts and literature reflect an intricate relationship between the community and the kings. Irish literature both praises kings and heroes for their valor and good judgment and critiques them for their carelessness and recklessness. Early Irish poets praised those that brought good fortune to their communities and mocked and derided those failing to do so. Analyzing the construction of kingship and the otherworld in Irish literature in Chapter II expands the possible analyses of Welsh Arthurian texts.

By applying translation and postcolonial theoretical approaches, Chapter III outlines the view that Welsh Arthurian texts belong to a body of literature that constructs the image of a unified Wales. Welsh courts reappropriated the image of Wales created by

their Anglo-Saxon and Anglo-Norman neighbors in order to present Welsh courts as equal to the courts of their contemporaries.

Welsh Arthurian manuscripts are available from the thirteenth century and range in style and content from pseudo-histories to folktales. They include the *Law of Hywel Dda*, *Brut y Brenhinedd*, the *Mabinogi*, early Welsh poetry, and Welsh Arthurian texts. These materials point to an early literary tradition in Wales. New linguistic work, however, has modified the dating of many of these texts and maintained that there is “no certain date” for the available manuscripts. Accordingly, my analysis of Arthurian texts concentrates on why there was such a deluge of texts, specifically Arthurian texts, after the beginning of the thirteenth century.

Welsh kingship functioned in similar ways to Irish kingship, allowing for many men to have a right to rule the polities in Wales. The Celtic system in Wales reveals a multifaceted group of individuals who saw themselves differently depending on the lands they inhabited. Nevertheless, as I have shown, the history of Wales has been shaped in part by its relationship with its Anglo-Saxon and Anglo-Norman neighbors. My analysis begins with King Offa from Mercia, the builder of what is known as Offa’s Dyke from 757-96, which separated Wales from his Anglo-Saxon kingdom. The dyke served as a symbol of long-lasting domination.

The relationship between the Welsh and the Anglo-Saxons and Anglo-Normans served to unify the different polities in Wales. The Anglo-Saxons viewed the Welsh as a single, unified people with a common identity. The Welsh rulers used this ideology to advance their positions, gaining power and prestige. Welsh kings in the twelfth century best exemplify these tendencies. With Owain Gwynedd controlling the north of Wales,

Madog ap Meredudd controlling Powys, and Rhys ap Gruffudd keeping Deheubarth unified, the history of Wales would be mapped and written through these territories and the courts that flourished under these leaders.

The revival and recovery of Wales in the twelfth century lead to the *Ilys*, or ‘Prince’s court,’ becoming the center of cultural and governmental policy. Poets were the conscience of their rulers, praising good deeds and questioning bad choices. The unification of Wales and the construction of the Welsh as a single people led to the proto-nationalist ideologies present in thirteenth-century Wales, thereby stimulating the creation of a body of literature that can be described as native Welsh propaganda. Among those texts, Arthurian texts served a specific role in the creation of a Welsh identity.

Chapter III advances to a discussion of the role of Arthur in pseudo-historical texts. These texts employ Arthur to discuss matters significant to their own historical period. The most prominent example is *Brut y Brenhinedd*, the Welsh translation of the *Historia Regum Britanniae* by Geoffrey of Monmouth. The text provided Welsh courts a history of their past and exerted influence well into the eighteenth century. The text was normalized for a Welsh audience, eliminating clues that might have revealed the elements of its Anglo-Norman descent. Moreover, the changes in the text were also political, reappropriating Welsh materials that Geoffrey had appropriated for his Anglo-Norman audience. The text also legitimized Welsh hegemony by pointing out that the Welsh were the descendants of the Celts and the Romans that inhabited Britain prior to the coming of the Anglo-Saxons and Anglo-Normans.

Welsh Arthurian texts include instances where Arthur serves as an example of heroism and kingship, as well as instances where he exhibits irresponsible and selfish

behavior. His depictions range from a great warrior to a bad poet, and there is no consensus about Arthur's character. The earliest Arthurian texts available, "Pa gur yv y porthaur" ("What man is the gatekeeper"), *Culhwch ac Olwen* ("How Culhwch won Olwen"), and *Trioedd Ynys Prydein* ("The Triads of the Island of Britain") present Arthur as a strong, imposing character taking center stage, even when he is not the central protagonist. At the same time, he is criticized for his rash and negative actions that lead to war and the destruction of his people and territory. Similar to the heroes and kings in early Irish literature, Arthur is both praised for his good deeds and reprimanded for his careless and reckless actions. Such portrayals of Arthur are consistent with those offered by the Welsh poets, who served as the conscience of the rulers.

Chapter III also explores the rewritings of Chrétien de Troyes's romances, which likewise reveal a system that questions war and death. These texts are rendered in Welsh and are normalized for a Welsh audience. *Chwedl Iarlles y Ffynnon* (*The Lady of the Fountain*) is a rewriting of *Yvain*. The Welsh version of this text changes the story such that Arthur is not derided at the beginning of the text and some of the themes discussed in the French version are eliminated. Similarly, *Peredur*, the Welsh version of *Perceval*, begins and ends by calling unnecessary violence into question, pointing out the perils inherent in the decisions that kings and knights face and underscoring that these decisions affect their community. Both *Chwedl Iarlles y Ffynnon* and *Peredur* are rendered in Welsh, and their production signals the transnational nature of the material, as well as the many ways Welsh courtly society imagined itself equal to the courts of the Anglo-Normans and the French.

Chapter III recognizes the ways that the histories, tales, poems, and other

rewritings of the Arthurian narrative constitutive to the courtly system benefited the creation of a coherent Welsh identity. Court poets employed a common Celtic and Roman ancestry to gain leeway in their criticism of unnecessary violence, and their presentation of the Welsh courts as equal to those of the Anglo-Normans. The texts elevate Welsh courts beyond the position of alterity to which they had previously been relegated by the Anglo-Saxon and Anglo-Norman courts.

Chapter IV dismantles the notions of a cohesive body of Arthurian literature with a traceable progression that locates the canonical French, English, and German texts at its pinnacle. This chapter points out that the Arthurs in the works of Geoffrey of Monmouth and Chrétien de Troyes fit the historical contexts in which they were created. Whereas Geoffrey used the Arthurian material in writing to a contemporary, Anglo-Norman audience, warning of the potentially negative effects of a civil war, Chrétien addressed the French-speaking courts, integrating fantastical elements to allegorize the contemporary expansion of French courts into Muslim territory during the Crusades.

Chapter IV analyzes Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia*, which begins with a prologue explaining his reasons for writing the text. He relates that he was asked to write by Walter, his patron, and is translating from the British language into his "homely" Latin. He is writing for a literate, Anglo-Norman audience. In doing so, Geoffrey alters the material. He converts Welsh names into Latin, for example. Rather than rely on the Irish and Welsh motifs that can be described through the concept of the *síd*, the *Historia* uses alternative literary systems to construct "otherworldly" moments.

The "Prophecies of Merlin" are classified as examples of the genre of political prophecy, which was well-known in Geoffrey's time. The *Historia* recounts the lives of

the kings of Britain. Good kings are praised for building roads and cities. Bad kings are criticized for failing to protect Britain from invasions. Arthur is described as similar to the previous great kings of Britain and like other great kings, Arthur's reign ends with his betrayal by one of his own men. Throughout the *Historia*, civil war is situated as the main threat to the British throne. In response to this fear, Geoffrey's text emphasizes the kings of Britain positioning their men in ways which aggrandize the king and his reign.

Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia* belongs to a body of literature intended to diffuse the conflicts that plagued the reign of King Stephen. In the process these texts bolstered the hegemony of the Normans. In 1120, the son of King Henry I died, leading Henry to force his men to swear allegiance to his daughter, Matilda. Once Henry died, however, his nephew Stephen retracted his oath and the nobility swore allegiance to him. King Stephen's poor leadership skills, coupled with Matilda's intent to regain her throne, and the uprisings in Scotland and Wales, posed a significant threat to the sovereignty of the English King. Geoffrey foregrounds Arthur in lieu of his knights to present the image of a strong, sovereign Britain rather than a Britain that is fighting a civil war. Whereas the Irish texts present the relationship among the king, his people, and his kingdom as one of reciprocity, the *Historia* discusses kingship in terms of conquest, strength, and succession. Geoffrey's ideologies concerning sovereignty are influenced by the history of the Norman Conquest and the civil war that plagued England in the first half of the twelfth-century. The *Historia*'s account of Arthur locates the historical Arthur in Wales and England.

It took the work of Chrétien de Troyes in France to move Arthur back into the realm of fiction. Chapter IV continues by examining the two different roles French



Arthurian literature plays during the twelfth century: the historical Arthur, introduced in the rewriting of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia* by Wace, and the Arthur found in the verse romances produced by Chrétien de Troyes. Chrétien's works emphasizes Arthur's knights rather than Arthur. These romances tend to depict the knights on adventures, learning to be truly civilized through their superiority as courtly subjects. Scholars such as Matilda Bruckner suggest that Chrétien was inspired by the *Historia* and by Wace's translation, while other scholars believe that early Celtic texts must have been the original sources.<sup>244</sup> Like the *Historia*, Chrétien mentions that he is translating from a book given to him by his patron. The *Historia* uses "homely" Latin; in contrast, Chrétien writes in vernacular French, marking his work as aimed at a courtly audience.

This act of translation represents Chrétien de Troyes's attempt to provide new texts for his contemporaries. Translations play an important role in the rise of the genre of the romance; romances employ similar structures as translations, and, in fact, can be considered an outgrowth of Old French translations (Tymoczko 1986: 7-27). Moreover, romances enlist translation to transform previous materials to fit within a new literary system, combining the ideals of courtly love and chivalry. This "marriage" of courtly love and chivalry is not a theme in the *Historia* or in early Celtic tales.

The otherworld elements are also transformed in Chrétien de Troyes's romances. Although there are similarities between the sumptuousness of the otherworld and the sumptuousness of the castles presented in the romances, the castles are not part of the otherworld. Instead, they are the places the knights inhabit. Chrétien's romances include no encounters with the *síd*, as such. Instead, the knights have encounters with the

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244. Matilda Tomaryn Bruckner (2008: 81). The most well-known scholar on the Celtic influence on French Arthurian texts is Roger Sherman Loomis (1963).

fantastic, which requires the reader or listener to suspend disbelief and become complicit in the extravagance presented in the romances. The use of the fantastic to project a space of opulence is consistent with shifts occurring in twelfth-century France (Tymoczko 1986: 7-12).

Chrétien de Troyes's romances suggest an awareness of such shifts; they demonstrate that the shifts also produced an identity crisis. In *Yvain*, this is apparent as both Arthur and Yvain are unable to live up to their obligations because both remain away from their courts too long. Moreover, Yvain has left his master, Arthur, without permission, breaking his oath to his liege. Reading these aspects of *Yvain* as an indicator of crisis is consistent with the political situation in France at the time. Chrétien de Troyes was under the patronage of Countess Marie de Champagne, who was part of a court that participated in the Crusades. The Crusades brought French knights into contact with cultures that were more civilized and luxurious than their own, similar to the knights' experiences in the romances. As Sharon Kinoshita (2006) aptly argues, early French literature created a binary between the French as Self and the Saracens as Other. For the French, those that were categorized as the Other hand, in fact, preferable living conditions.

The political implications of the romances are also apparent in their portrayal of women who are mobilized in the texts to embody the conquest of the Other. The subjugation of the female body by a knight who champions her needs by becoming the king of her kingdom is a recurrent motif in the romances. Chrétien de Troyes's works, then, combine amorous and military prowess with the fantastic in order to imaginatively subjugate the territories beyond the French borders, producing a discourse of the exterior

as Other. In these adventures the French are improving themselves, solidifying their sense of self, and conquering the Other, which is necessarily depicted as less civilized.

The Crusades necessitated the emphasis on the knights rather than Arthur, and Chrétien's patronage had a direct impact on his work in this respect. His patron was a member of the wealthy Champagne family. Henry I, husband of Marie de Champagne, had wealth and territory, and his counties hosted lavish fairs that were centers of trade. He exerted political control over a vast territory and his wealth rivaled that of the King of France. King Louis VII of France, however, was suzerain of his kingdom, yet lacked control over both the movement of his men and the territories they controlled. The relationship between Arthur and his knights in Chrétien de Troyes's romances parallel the relationship between the King of France and the nobility.

Chapter IV articulates that the choices of both Geoffrey of Monmouth and Chrétien de Troyes as writers are connected to their historical places and times. The authors have transformed their "source" materials, in part by portraying the relationship of the king with his subjects in distinct ways. Geoffrey favors a strong king who controls and subjugates his territories in order to curtail conflicts among different parties and to avoid civil strife and political failure. Chrétien's romances favor the knights over Arthur, and the knights in his stories subjugate the new territories they enter, often portrayed as fantastic spaces, by dominating the women who "possess" these territories. The romances produce a masculine self by articulating women as desirable but also as the locus of conquest and crusade, a tactic that also serves to legitimize the conquest of the lands that are being conquered both in the narratives and in the Crusades.

The canonical texts analyzed in the chapter portray varied relationships between

Arthur and his men. There is no singular, cohesive thread linking the canonical texts, which has left scholars with a variety of afterlives for the Arthurian material. Each text was written for a specific audience both temporally and spatially. Nonetheless, these texts share familial resemblances that unite the material as part of a European, transcultural medieval Arthurian literary system even as each work is uniquely rendered throughout Europe.

Chapter IV complements the analyses of kingship discussed in Chapters III, V, and VI. On the one hand, my study of Geoffrey of Monmouth balances the analysis of Welsh literature in Chapter III. The same conflicts that inspired Geoffrey to write motivated the courts of the princes of Wales in the twelfth century. These princes helped shaped the constitution of Wales to the present day. Moreover, the Welsh rewritings of Geoffrey's work were seminal for the Welsh revival in the thirteenth century. On the other hand, the analysis of Chrétien de Troyes's romances serves to ground my study on ideologies of expansion present throughout the literatures of the Iberian Peninsula discussed in Chapter V and my analysis of the Scandinavian translations, pseudotranslations, and rewritings of the romances in Chapter VI.

Arthurian texts play an important role in the Castilian and Catalan courts, and this role is the focus of Chapter V. There is evidence of an early reception of the Arthurian tradition predating both Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia* and Chrétien de Troyes's romances. Textual evidence of Arthurian motifs, however, only appears in the late twelfth century. The Aragon and Castilian courts were all centers of distribution of Arthurian literature. *Jaufré* (c. 1170), for example, is an Occitan Arthurian romance created in the court of Alfonso II of Aragon (1157-96) with no known source. However,

the bulk of the materials available are translations, pseudotranslations, and rewritings of thirteenth-century French romances. The impact of Arthurian literature on the Peninsula is evident from the extensive Arthurian corpus written in the various languages of the Iberian Peninsula. There are also many allusions to Arthurian literature in the poetry and other literature of the Peninsula.

Iberian Arthurian literature has a long history on the Peninsula. It was linked to the concept of chivalry which, due in large part to *la Reconquista*, was highly influential in Spain (Grimbert 2009: 154 and Hall 1983: 85). The Iberian texts present knights as expanding the kingdoms of the men they serve through their prowess and their God-given abilities. Ultimately, the knights are able to expand their own territories as well, improving their own positions. Although the texts are considered translations of French Arthurian texts, the ideological implications of their construction and their success are different from those produced in French.

Iberian Arthurian texts share their ideologies with other literary genres on the Peninsula. The *crónicas*, genealogies, and *cancioneros* were also political and cultural tools that promoted the position of the kings, endorsed policies of expansion, and helped legitimize the kingdoms of the Castilian and Catalan courts. The Arthurian texts discussed in Chapter V— principally *Tristan*, *Zifar*, *Tirant*, and *Curial*— use Arthurian settings and motifs to discuss specifically Iberian ideologies, including the exaltation of knighthood such that kingship is an extension of chivalric prowess.

An overview of the history of the Iberian Peninsula is helpful in understanding the role of Arthurian texts on the Peninsula. Chapter V concentrates specifically on a Christian perspective of *La Reconquista* and the connection between literature and

history in constructions of kingship during this period. The expansion of the Christian realms of the kings on the Peninsula was perceived as a crusade and many knights from other parts of Europe contributed their services to the endeavor. These men came with their own preconceived notions of Iberian Muslims and were often more intolerant than the Christian knights from the Peninsula. The differences between *El Cid* and the *Chanson de Roland* in their construction of Saracens are very telling. Whereas *El Cid* provides a moment of connection and understanding between the Cid and Muslims, the *Chanson de Roland* completely dehumanizes the Saracens. From early in *La Reconquista*, there were varying beliefs at play among the peoples participating in the Crusades.

The process of *La Reconquista* was also seminal in the creation of Portugal. Alfonso Enrique, son of Enrique de Lorena, a knight of King Alfonso and Teresa, the illegitimate daughter of King Alfonso, declared himself king of Portugal in 1143, gaining papal recognition in 1179. Thus, the child of a knight became king. This is not the only instance of the children of knights gaining access to kingship. The descendants of Ruy Díaz, also known as el Cid, ascended to the throne as well.

Both the Castilian and Aragon courts expanded their territories during *La Reconquista*. By 1137, Ramón Berenguer ruled both the Aragonese and the Catalans. His son, Jaume, conquered Valencia in 1248. By the first half of the thirteenth century, the Aragon courts had political, territorial, and commercial control in parts of the Mediterranean. Jaume put together his *libre* as the courts were becoming political and cultural centers and as chivalry was spreading throughout the expanding Catalan society (J. Aurell 2012: 40-41).

The *Libre dels fets del rei en Jaume*, an account of the Crusades and a chivalresque autobiography (J. Aurell 2012: 42 and 45), illustrates that Jaume understood several customs of the Saracens and that conquest was considered part of being a good king, which was seen as a God-given ability. Similar ideological positions are present in *El Cid* and the Iberian Arthurian tales. These ideologies are also apparent in the *crónicas*, which functioned as a form of propaganda supporting the reign of Enrique II of the Trastámara (1369-79). Enrique was the illegitimate son of King Alfonso XI and he usurped the throne from Pedro I, King Alfonso XI's legitimate son. The *crónicas* were a tool used by Enrique II to legitimize his assumption of the kingship from his brother.

Ideologies of expansion are also found in several other literary genres on the Iberian Peninsula that supported, explained, and assisted the expansion of the Christian courts on the Peninsula and beyond. These texts were part of a Christian, chivalric, protoimperialistic system that articulated ideals of expansion and power among the Castilian and Catalan courts. The representation of conquest in Iberian literature asserts that the Iberian Peninsula has been "reconquered" by Christian forces through their military prowess. The kings were idealized, exemplifying the chivalric attributes necessary for such a Christian conquest. Chivalric ideology legitimized the power of the kings and led to the tripartite association of kingship, chivalry, and conquest.

Whereas texts from the Iberian Peninsula employed chivalry and conquest to legitimate Christian expansion across the Peninsula, texts from England and the north of France began to construct the Iberian Peninsula and the south of France as a Muslim Other that needed to be conquered and Christianized. The positioning of *La Reconquista* as a crusade, the connections between kingship and chivalry, and the complicated power

relations between Christians and Muslims are all reflected in Iberian Arthurian texts. Moreover, kingship is constructed through the ideals of chivalry, expansion, and godliness.

Chapter V follows with an analysis of the Castilian version of *Tristán de Leonís* (c.1501, 1534), a helpful introduction to Iberian rewritings of Arthurian texts such as *Libro de Caballero Zifar* (*The Book of the Knight Zifar* c.1300), *Curial e Güelfa* (*Curial and Güelfa* 1440-60) and *Tirant lo Blanc* (*The White Knight* 1490). The Iberian Tristan legend showcases that Arthurian stories were adapted for Iberian societies. The relationship between Tristán and King Mares, his uncle, is of particular interest. The text presents King Mares as a tyrant. Tristán, in contrast to King Mares, is celebrated for his chivalric deeds. King Mares' main fault is his inability to follow the chivalric conduct, which is the textual source for derision. In the 1534 version of *Tristán*, Tristán's son, *el joven Tristán*, becomes King of Spain by fighting and beating the Moors.

*Tristán de Leonís* also offers an interesting portrayal of women. The 1501 edition of *Tristán* incorporates passages of *Grimalte y Gradissa* (1495), a *novela sentimental* that critiques chivalry. *Tristán de Leonís* presents a knight integrating back into society and includes portrayals of women killing themselves for the knights. The addition of material from *Grimalte y Gradissa* represents a shift in Iberian ideology; the editor of these editions of the tale incorporated material critical of chivalry into a chivalric text.

*Libro del Caballero Zifar*, a rewriting of Arthurian texts, is considered the first great chivalric Spanish romance. The text is part of a Christian, Iberian tradition of "recentering Arabic and Latin" (Barletta 2004: 239). *Zifar* draws from various available elements because of the unique history of the Iberian Peninsula. In the text, Zifar



becomes King of Mentón due to his chivalric prowess, his good deeds, and the help of God. Zifar is not the only character that gains access to “upward mobility” by adhering to chivalric principles. Zifar’s family and companions are also required to prove themselves. *Zifar* presents chivalry as a Christian ideal constitutive of kingship.

The Catalan Arthurian texts, similar to the Castilian Arthurian texts, serve as propaganda to legitimize the power dynamics present in the Christian courts. Moreover, these Catalan texts are tied to ideologies of expansion used by the Catalan courts to justify conquering the Mediterranean lands. Their connection to the Castilian courts is also apparent through the 1416 ascendancy of Alfonso V. Alfonso V belonged to the Trastámara dynasty of Castile.

Both *Tirant* and *Curial* rewrite Arthurian literature and promote protoimperialist Catalan ideologies present in the fourteenth and fifteenth-centuries, later rewritten as historical facts. *Tirant* and *Curial* express anxiety over the position of the Aragon courts in the Mediterranean through the use of Arthurian motifs. *Tirant* recalls the *Mort Artu* to implicitly question chivalric ideals, but stops short of describing chivalry as a failure (Piera 1999: 57). The figure of Tirant represents an idealized version of Alfonso V, signaling the frustration of the Catalan courts over their failed expansion further into the Mediterranean (Beltrán 2007: 59-93). *Curial and Güelfa* is of both Catalan and Italian descent, a Mediterranean text. The tale makes allusions to Arthurian motifs from both France and Spain and describes Curial as a superior knight to the Arthurian knights, comparing him favorably with Tristan and Lancelot.

Chapter V outlines that Iberian Arthurian texts are rewritten to present Iberian knights, such as Zifar, Curial, and Tirant, as the best knights in the world. These knights

surpass the English and the French, not only as knights but also as figures able to expand their courts beyond their borders and into the space of the Other, including Muslim-controlled territory. Early Iberian texts depict knights becoming kings, but later examples begin to question chivalry and knighthood, pointing out the perils of war and the impossibility of knights returning to society after experiencing conflict. The popularity and importance of these texts comes to an abrupt end with Cervantes's masterpiece, *Don Quixote*, in which the ideals of chivalry and knighthood are pushed to the realm of insanity.

Chapter VI turns to Arthurian literature in Scandinavia, where Continental romances were well-received. The first Arthurian texts produced in Scandinavia were translations commissioned by King Hákon Hákonarson (1217-63). The Norwegian kings commissioned the translations of Chrétien de Troyes's romances as a form of courtly entertainment. The translations further served to engender a relationship between the Norwegian court and the contemporary French and English courts. The Norwegian kings attempted to copy the fashion in other medieval European courts.

The majority of the surviving Scandinavian manuscripts, however, were translated in Iceland by Icelanders who had experience with neither kings nor courts. My analysis of the interactions between Icelandic Vikings and the Norwegian kings reveals that both the family sagas and Icelandic Arthurian texts preference those characters who travel over kings who stay in their kingdoms. Reading Arthurian Icelandic texts in relation to the family sagas reveals a nuanced and ambivalent relationship between the Vikings/knights with the kings/Arthur, a relationship in which the Vikings are compared favorably and equitably with the kings. Such a reading is also consistent with the fact that

Iceland lost its independence to Norway, and consequently the Icelandic Vikings found themselves subjugated to the Norwegians.

Scandinavian Arthurian texts reshape the material to fit into a Scandinavian context. In these texts, a knight's rationale for fighting also follows Viking ideology. Further, the Scandinavian Arthurian texts provide genealogies for the families of the knights described in the sagas. In these ways, Arthurian narrative is transformed for a Scandinavian audience. The family sagas are necessary for understanding the Arthurian sagas. Chapter VI compares the Arthurian sagas with the family sagas, *Egil's Saga* and *Laxardal Saga*, in order to analyze the role these translations played in medieval Iceland.

The Icelandic family sagas were written to provide a record of the most heroic individuals of the Icelandic past and to investigate the conflicts and feuds that led to the dissolution of the Icelandic independent state and its subsequent submission to Norwegian rule. These stories present the prestigious farmers of Iceland as comparable to members of contemporary royalty, especially the members of the Norwegian court. The sagas reflect both the time period they depict (c. 850-1050) and the time period when they were written (c. 1100-1300), touching upon the cultural aspects of both periods.

Icelandic literature tends to present Norway as the catalyst of the settlement of Iceland. From the alleged initial interactions between the Icelandic Vikings and the Norwegian court, the relationship is ambivalent. The Norwegians are constructed as the immediate descendants of the Icelanders, although their circumstances are products of the expansion of Norwegian tyranny. This ambivalent relationship between the Icelandic Viking and the Norwegian court parallels the relationship between Arthur and his knights in Scandinavian Arthurian literature, because men who travel are privileged over the

kings. Many of the sagas romanticize the time period of independence or investigate why the commonwealth failed. This complicated history also helps explain why the Icelanders continued reproducing the Arthurian sagas even after they fell out of fashion among the Norwegians. The Scandinavian Arthurian sagas express an ambivalent relationship to kingship, alternatively praising and deriding Arthur, echoing the ambivalent relationship between Iceland and Norway.

*Saga af Tristram ok Ísodd*, an Icelandic pseudotranslation of the Norwegian version of the myth, not only emphasizes Tristan over the King, but the tale also articulates a vision of Iceland as part of a larger European system and critiques courtly culture. The pseudotranslation resituates the tale in an Icelandic context, and simultaneously positions the story in a larger European milieu by turning Tristan into a Spaniard.

Chapter VI also examines the role of women in both the family sagas and the Arthurian tales, shedding an interesting light on the shifting role of women in medieval Scandinavian society as well. Whereas the family sagas provide at least two distinct articulations of marriage (one pagan and the other Christian), in the Arthurian sagas the construction of marriage is similar to its articulation in the Christian-influenced sagas, such as *Laxardal Saga*. These narrative changes point to the shifts in gender discussed by Clover (1993). It is also apparent that the Scandinavian texts give women more control over their choice of partners than their French counterparts. An analysis of the differences between the female characters in the French versions and the Icelandic versions of the romances elicit very different readings of the texts. The French versions present women as objects of desire who are tied to the territory the knights conquer and obtain; the

Scandinavian versions shift this notion by giving women the right to choose their partners in marriage, disassociating marriage from conquest.

The Arthurian sagas offer women agency absent in the French versions. These tales are altered from texts that conform to ideologies of expansion to narratives that articulate both men and women as agents in their destinies. Both the French and Scandinavian versions of the stories concentrate on the knights rather than Arthur, but the reasons for their focus on the knights are dramatically different.

Although this research project contextualizes the Arthurian materials in their specific historical and cultural settings, it also frames the tales in a transnational environment. The texts considered come from various cultures and represent the afterlives of earlier materials but they are also rewritings that demand equal consideration on their own terms. We see this importance in the case of the Welsh, Scandinavian, and Iberian texts that serve as propaganda for expansion, identity construction, and even as entertainment. In all the case studies analyzed for this project, the materials were shaped by and, in turn, reshaped their environments as they responded to their cultural position as part of a transcultural Europe.

The position of medieval Arthurian texts as agents that foreground distinctive cultures and simultaneously present connections among cultures is especially apparent in the names used to describe knights. The words *caballero* in Castilian and *riddara* in Old-Norse Icelandic, for example, have different connotations even though they are understood to be translations representing the same word in French or Latin. Moreover they are in turn translated as knight, gentleman, or nobleman in English, depending on the particular textual imperative and context.

By reimagining medieval Arthurian literature as a transcultural phenomenon, moving beyond boundaries and spaces, this project illustrates the ways that medieval European cultures came into contact with each other and the ways in which Arthurian tales both influenced and were influenced by the literatures and cultures rewriting the texts. Because the various cultures discussed in this dissertation were interconnected along the waterways of Europe, in particular by the Irish Sea, their treatments of Arthur suggest that the writers had an understanding of their positions within a greater European context. This balance of similarity and difference is key to understanding how the Arthurian legends spread not only through England, France, and Germany, as is commonly discussed, but throughout the entirety of Europe.

Studies of Arthur traditionally emphasize the French, English, and German texts. A quick search of Arthurian scholarship exposes a significant gap in the discourse surrounding the Arthurian texts. There are hundreds of critical texts written about the canonical Arthurian texts, but little work dealing with the literary peripheries has been undertaken. For example, there are only a few books in English about the Scandinavian Arthur, all of which are composed or edited by a single scholar (Kalinke 2011). Scandinavian Arthurian texts are receiving attention in Scandinavia, but strictly from a national perspective. This project represents one of the first studies, if not the only one, to discuss the interrelations of Welsh, Nordic, and Iberian Arthurian texts. It also functions as a call for increased research comparing the peripheries of medieval Europe and exploring how the peripheries communicated and how they were interconnected.

The cultural and kingly relations described above are only visible when the Arthurian texts are contextualized in relationship to the cultures that created them and

when the differences among the translations, pseudotranslations, and rewritings of Arthur are analyzed. This project serves as a starting point for a greater conversation regarding Arthur beyond the boundaries of the canon. Comprehensive cultural and historical analysis of the Arthurian texts and of the different cultures on the peripheries of Europe remains beyond the scope of this thesis. Each chapter provides an overview of important historical facts, foregrounding the historical context in support of the literary analysis of the Arthurian texts and situating these texts in relation to other literary materials. Further historicizing these texts, especially the Iberian and Scandinavian texts, is important work and could span several book-length works. The Iberian material, in particular, would benefit from an edition similar to the *Arthur of the Welsh*, *The Arthur of the Germans*, *The Arthur of the English*, *The Arthur of the French*, *The Arthur of the North*, and *The Arthur of Medieval Latin Literature*, all of which are part of the Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages Series available through the University of Wales Press.<sup>245</sup> At least three additional collections are needed: Arthur of the Iberian Peninsula, Arthur of the Mediterranean, and Arthur of Italy. These new studies could discuss the southern peripheries of Europe and a study of the Mediterranean Arthur could also include materials in Arabic.

This dissertation concentrates on Arthurian texts from the peripheral cultures that interacted throughout the Irish Sea and the Atlantic littoral. This body of scholarly works would also benefit from research on other peripheral Arthurian texts, such as texts written in Italian. Additional research examining the print culture that brought these texts into

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245. See Rachel Bromwich et al. (1995); W H Jackson and Silvia Ranawake (2000); W R. J. Barron (2001); Glyn S. Burgess and Karen Pratt (2006); Marianne E. Kalinke (2011); and Siân Echard (2011).

existence is also needed. There is a considerable amount of interesting work remaining to be done on the Arthurs of the peripheries of Europe and their inherent multicultural connections.

Medieval Arthurian literature is a product of the multicultural interactions that shaped medieval Europe. My analysis remaps the circulation of Medieval Arthurian literature to demonstrate the Pan-European nature of Medieval European culture. I highlight that Arthurian literature was not only transmitted from Britain through France to the rest of Europe, but was instead produced and read through a Pan-European network. In medieval Europe there were actually no centers or peripheries, but a host of transcultural interactions that merit further study.



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