Representations of Elite Masculinity in Medieval Castilian Narrative

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Representations of Elite Masculinity in Medieval Castilian Narrative

by

Megan Elizabeth Havard

A dissertation presented to the
Graduate School of Arts and Sciences
of Washington University
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree
of Doctor of Philosophy

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# Table of Contents

Acknowledgments ........................................................................................................ iii

Introduction ....................................................................................................................... 1

I. The Heroes of Epic Poetry ............................................................................................ 17

II. Two Exemplary Frame Tales as Mirrors of Nobles ..................................................... 59

III. The Knights Errant of Early Chivalric Fiction .......................................................... 100

IV. Literary Portraiture and Aristocracy in the Fifteenth Century ................................. 145

V. Noblemen Undone in Sentimental Fiction .................................................................. 188

Conclusion ....................................................................................................................... 229

Bibliography .................................................................................................................... 236
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**INTRODUCTION**

In his treatise *España en su historia*, Américo Castro writes: “Castile was built by the exemplary force of certain exceptional men” (239, my translation). Great men have historically garnered greater visibility in the construction of a cultural ethos than their marginalized counterparts. It is precisely for their prominence, their perceived centrality in the discourse of history, that modern revisionist scholars have often disregarded the identity construction of elite men.

If great men built medieval Castile, how did medieval Castile build great men? What values and behaviors characterized the gender identity of noble men in the centuries preceding the so-called Golden Age of Spain? How are these constitutive elements of elite masculinity reflected in and fashioned through literature? The current project endeavors to answer these questions through cultural and textual analysis of a wide range of canonical works, across literary genres and spanning three centuries, in an effort to challenge the intellectual and scholarly processes that too often leave men “above examination” (Fenster x). The study of masculinity must transcend our understanding of the male subject as a fixed point of reference, so that he may be understood as a mutable and multivalent construct in constant negotiation with cultural artifacts.

As a category of analysis, gender represents one of several axes around which social and political relationships are organized. Gender is distinguishable from biological sex, though not entirely divorced from it, as biological difference between the male and female sexes can appear as “the natural justification of the socially constructed difference between the genders” (Bourdieu 11). The gender “role” of each sex—the behaviors and traits that are
considered both typical and desirable (Pleck 10)—affects the lived experience of gender as well as its artistic representation. Masculinity, then, is the set of socially constructed meanings and values imposed upon biologically male persons. The social norms associated with masculinity exist in relation to a given historical and cultural context, and are subject to change. Even within a particular moment in space and time, various masculinities or masculine experiences coexists as gender intersects with other factors such as race, social class, religion, and vocation. Masculinity is not born or given; it is constructed, repeatedly and over a lifetime.

The foundation for Men’s and Masculinities Studies was laid out by social scientists and humanities scholars during the last quarter of the twentieth century, and is deeply indebted to Women’s Studies for providing the foundational for its critical language. Scholars of feminisms and femininities use the term “gender” to refer to their theoretical field to introduce the relational aspect between the sexes, and also perhaps to compensate for their rather exclusive focus on women (Scott 1054). In the interest of lifting up the voices and experiences of the oppressed gender, its counterpart was either essentialized or altogether ignored by most “gender” studies until more recent decades. As recently as 2012, Elizabeth L'Estrange and Alison More observed that "despite the forty years since gender studies began to develop as a discipline with its emphasis on patriarchy and male-female relations, and despite the fact that much traditional scholarship has been written by, for and about men, it is only relatively recently that scholars have addressed masculinity as a concept in itself and men as gendered beings" (6).

Men’s and Masculinities Studies entered the academe as early as the 1970s, with the most influential publications in the humanities emerging in the final decades of the twentieth
century. R. W. Connell’s monograph *Masculinities* (1995) traces the history of Men’s Studies, offers critical language to discuss the plurality of masculine gender expressions and experiences, and helps to firmly establish Men’s and Masculinities Studies as a discrete field of inquiry. Still, the field continues to come under scrutiny. Contrary to a commonly expressed concern, Men’s Studies does not neglect Women’s Studies, but instead offers “a calculated [dialectic] contribution to them” (Lees xv). A focus on masculinities exposes the mechanisms through which masculinity has been filtered and constructed. Others may disregard Masculinities Studies due to an implicit, sub-conscious acceptance of the patriarchal assertion of masculinity’s self-evidence. Pierre Bourdieu observes that “the androcentric vision imposes itself as neutral and has no need to spell itself out in discourses aimed at legitimating it” (9). Judith Butler’s understanding of gender as performance, as something “manufactured through a sustained set of acts,” conceives of the individual as an active participant in constructing her/his own gender, and renders moot the criticism of Masculinities Studies as irrelevant due to man’s general lack of concern with or collaboration in the fashioning of his own masculinity (xv).

In the last few decades, scholars of medieval Europe have made forays into this critical territory in collections such as *Medieval Masculinities: Regarding Men in the Middle Ages* (1994), *Masculinity in Medieval Europe* (1999), *Masculinities and Femininities in the Middle Ages and Renaissance* (2009), and *Gender in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (2013), and in monographs such as Ruth Mazo Karras’s *From Boys to Men: Formations of Masculinity in Late Medieval Europe* (2003), Isabel Davis’s *Writing Masculinity in the Later Middle Ages* (2007), and Derek G. Neal’s *The Masculine Self in Late Medieval England* (2008). These publications represent the commendable efforts of
scholars and editors to incorporate newer analytic categories into medieval European literary and cultural studies, and to offer a corrective to the reductive premises regarding gender that are inherent in so much research into the Middle Ages. Yet, among the collections just listed, only one article addresses the case of the Iberian Peninsula, which will be discussed momentarily. Within the field of Masculinities Studies, medieval Iberia has been largely overlooked. As the default position of the masculine has not been the subject of lengthy inquiry within Medieval Iberian studies, no corrective has been offered to problematize our inherited notions.

What little work has been done on the subject of masculinities in Medieval Iberia has been confined to marginal modes of masculinity. In her article “Representing ‘Other’ Men: Muslims, Jews, and Masculine Ideals in Medieval Castilian Epic and Ballad” included in Medieval Masculinities, Louise Mirrer examines the treatment of non-Christian male figures in the Castilian oral tradition. Mirrer begins with the following assertion:

The literary texts of medieval Castile provide a clear picture of the traits and attitudes considered ideal for men in the society. Aggressive behavior, sexual assertiveness, and menacing speech all figure prominently in these works as characteristics of “real” men. In popular as well as in learned texts, masculinity is proved not through biology, but through force, intimidation, and the use of threatening language. (169)

Her subsequent analysis builds upon a monolithic and incomplete understanding of the Christian nobleman, reducing the essence of his masculinity to verbal and physical aggression.

My project focuses on what R.W. Connell calls hegemonic masculinity, though I will
most often refer to this lived masculine experience as aristocratic or noble. Connell borrows from Antonio Gramsci’s rhetoric on class relations in order to characterize the gender practices meant to legitimize the patriarchy and guarantee the dominant position of certain men (77). The historical and cultural specificity of hegemonic masculinity—that is, the notion that the most prized and convenient gender practices are always configured according to a unique context—makes it a useful category of analysis for medieval Castilian studies, despite the fact that Connell’s account of the history of masculinity altogether ignores the medieval period by situating the initiation of the “modern gender order” in the long sixteenth century (186). Moreover, the concept of hegemonic masculinity must be problematized when applied to the medieval period. The split between clerical and lay gendered values results in the construction of more than one dominant form of masculinity (Stone 18). The two paradigms of hegemonic masculinity in medieval culture were in dialogue, and sometimes at odds, with one another. The present project, therefore, expressly concerns itself with the lay model of elite masculinity.

The particular masculine experience of the Castilian lay elite in the thirteenth through fifteenth centuries, though by no means representative of all medieval masculinities, merits special attention due to the instability of the aristocracy as the kingdoms of the Iberian Peninsula approached early modernity. The imperatives for aristocratic masculinity shifted over the course of the middle ages, a period encompassing several centuries and significant historical events. Mark Breitenberg’s notion that male subjects experience an inherent anxiety within the structures of patriarchy is of great value when applied to the masculine experience of those whose position depends directly upon the favor and support of a monarchic system that, as was the case during the medieval period in Castile, is subject
to instability. While I do not identify a “crisis” of masculinity across the entirety of medieval Castile, I do find the particular lived experience of the aristocratic subject to be problematic and, for that reason, a frequent topic within canonical literature.

As conceptions of nobility and aristocracy shifted significantly throughout the medieval period in Iberia, due to changes in dynasties and to the political system in general, shifts in the economic landscape of Iberia, and other factors, the identity of the medieval nobleman was frequently contested and in flux along both class and gender axes. Who was the medieval Castilian nobleman? What were his salient characteristics, deeds, and obligations? The answers to these questions vary over the thirteenth through fifteenth centuries, often in conjunction with monarchic shifts.

Mar Martínez Góngora signals the inherent fragility of and anxiety regarding the concept of masculinity during the Middle Ages, which produced, among other things, various forms of conduct literature to provide the male reader with a cultural identity (5). To the extent that the written text was revered as a vehicle for sacred truth within medieval society, “reading and the book were invested with an aura of power and authority” (Classen xiii). Exposure to literary discourse, then, had a unique opportunity to shape the thinking and alter the behavior of its receptor. Butler’s argument that the self is knowable through the language also points to the formative capacity of literary works. My dissertation examines discursive representations of lived experiences. The behaviors and qualities highlighted in each chapter are tantamount to the masculinity of literary characters that are meant to serve as exemplars for male readers. Ideal male characters are contrasted with female characters and/or with less laudable male characters, such that the hero’s most salient and desirable qualities are linked to his gender.
The project’s title suggests several limitations of the scope of the present investigation. The included works are written and circulated during the medieval period, more specifically the thirteenth through fifteenth centuries. “Castilian” refers both to the language of composition, that being the Castilian vernacular, and to the geographic provenance of the authors and/or the primary reading public of the works, that being the kingdom of Castile. The corpus of primary texts is restricted to narrative genres, wherein the plot arcs of fictional characters, or fictionalized versions of historical figures, provide rich content for the fashioning of a paradigm of masculinity. The distinction between fictive and historical narrative was blurred, if not altogether inexistent, during the period in question, as will be seen in all but the final chapter. By incorporating various historical and regional elements, authors render their gendered behavioral prescriptions more relatable and translatable for contemporary readers.

In each chapter of the dissertation, I examine a particular literary genre so as to render visible the mechanisms used to fashion a discourse of elite lay masculinity in medieval Castile. Through various means, the works in question attract, among others, elite male readers and provide models, both positive and negative, of aristocratic masculinity. Noble male readers are invited to let the example of male characters within the narrative shape their performance of masculinity. Each genre deploys slightly different mechanisms to provide the reader with a model of hegemonic masculinity: while some works offer a corrective through the depiction of negative example, others lift up the choices and values of a successful male character as a positive example. All of the texts included in the project fall somewhere on a spectrum of didacticism, ranging from the explicitly instructive content of exemplary frame tales to the implicit moral criticism of late medieval depictions of
Chapter One discusses the most foundational literary works of the medieval period in Castile: the epic poems or *cantares de gesta* that helped to lay the groundwork for the discourse of elite masculinity. As some of the earliest examples of vernacular Castilian composition, the poems help give rise to two of modern Spain’s most enduring mythical male figures: Fernán González and El Cid Rodrigo Díaz de Vivar. The earliest and latest of the extant *cantares*—the *Poema de Mio Cid (PMC)* and the *Mocedades de Rodrigo (Mocedades)*, from the beginning and end of the thirteenth century respectively—complement one another in their depiction of El Cid’s youth and adulthood. The only other extant and fully intact *cantar de gesta*, the *Poema de Fernán González (PFG)*, was penned sometime between 1240 and 1271, nearly two and a half centuries after the death of the famed Count Fernán González. The markers of their masculinity are not limited to the obvious physical and verbal aggression that has been noted by previous scholars; rather, both men exhibit a keen understanding of the performative aspects of heroism and leadership, such as persuasive speech, convenient marriage, the negotiation of relationships with monarchs and men under their command, and the management of wealth. El Cid and Fernán González were both extraordinary and imperfect as historical examples. By censoring the rebellious, greedy and imprudent episodes in their lives, medieval poets fashioned them into idealized models of Castilian masculinity rooted in the Christian values of the Reconquest. These heroes are autochthonous to Castile, not foreign as the chivalric heroes discussed in Chapter Three. The epic knight’s journey and identity are tied to a particular place, his homeland; they become part of the genealogy of the kingdom itself and stir the patriotism of male readers for generations.
Chapter Two focuses on two works of Castilian exemplary literature—Calila e Digna and El Conde Lucanor—that boast unique didactic content relevant to the aristocratic male reader. King Alfonso X, by way of his team of translators, and his nephew Don Juan Manuel reveal the unique capacity of the medieval nobleman to be both the recipient and the disseminator of knowledge, and their work anticipate an increased relationship between hegemonic masculinity and learning as the bellicose responsibilities of the aristocracy waned. Exempla function as pedagogical tools designed to shape the minds, as well as the gender identity, of young male leaders. The narrative frame of each work generates a sort of mirror of nobles through the use of courtly characters and situations. From the maintenance of one’s good name and the formation of political alliances, to the detection of deceit and the defense of territory during increasingly uncertain times, these texts proffer class- and gender-specific behavioral prescriptions that inform the masculinity of the noble male reader in medieval Iberia. The former work deploys negative didacticism to offer a portrait of the unsuccessful male courtier. The latter offers a positive didactic model in the person of its framing protagonist, Count Lucanor, who seeks the wise council of Patronio and subsequently benefits from the implementation of his advice.

Chapter Three studies the knights-errant at the center of two Castilian early chivalric novels—the Crónica de Flores y Blancaflor and the Libro del Cavallero Zifar—in which Christian piety, journeys through vast geographic territory, strategic bending of the truth, battle prowess, and diplomacy all emerge as salient characteristics of the Iberian knight. Their offspring inherit a legacy of triumph and potency. Although some scholars characterize early chivalric fiction as immature and transitional, Flores and Zifar represent the literary trends that converged in Iberia to form the beginnings of the chivalric, and
eventually sentimental, artistic strains, while exhibiting characteristics relating to the socio-
political circumstances of Castile around the turn of the thirteenth century. As opposed to
later chivalric fiction, Zifar and Flores depict feats that do not require magic, but rather
faith, making them more accessible examples to contemporary readers who were engaged in
a holy war at home. Exotic elements of the protagonists’ identity are redeemed by their
tremendous Christian devotion. Furthermore, by preceding the boom of chivalric fiction that
occurred toward the end of the medieval period, which opened up the genre to a wider
audience, earlier works speak more directly to a limited, elite audience resembling its noble
protagonists. For the chivalric hero, masculinity is not diminished by movement away from
home, or even the loss of home, but rather strengthened by the efforts taken to restore order
and achieve greatness. The journey is the proving ground, a pilgrimage with masculine
domination and spiritual submission as its endpoint.

Chapter Four examines the historical male figures who appeared in two collections
of literary portraits, a genre appropriated from the Italian tradition by Castilian
historiographers during the second half of the fifteenth century. In Generaciones y
semlanzas and Claros varones de Castilla, men of importance are converted into the stuff
of literature using many of the same discursive tropes and gendered values as in other
artistic genres, such as the condemnation of disloyalty and of physical or moral weakness; as
well as praise for persuasive speech and for accepting wise council. Close reading of these
texts reveals a great deal about the situation of the Castilian nobility towards the end of the
medieval period, particularly its relationship to the crown. Representatives of the monarchy
and of the noble class turned to literary portraiture as a means of negotiating their fraught
relationship. Fernán Pérez de Guzmán, an aristocrat and victim of political discord
occasioned by the Golpe de Tordesillas in the 1420s, pens Generaciones y semblanzas (c. 1450) both to provide the new nobility with a substantiating document and to critique the moral and political failings of the previous generation. Fernando del Pulgar appropriates the collective biographical genre as chronicler to the Catholic Kings in Claros varones de Castilla (c. 1485), a thinly veiled piece of propaganda in favor of the current monarchs and their vision for Castile.

Collections of literary portraits of prominent men indicate that the noble paradigm of masculinity in fifteenth-century Castile did not and could not exist in isolation; rather, it was founded upon genealogical claims and gender- and class-minded associations. These texts straddle the line between fiction and non-fiction, wherein authorial choices respond to the interests of subjects, patrons, and biographers themselves.

Chapter Five focuses on the male protagonists of five well-known fifteenth-century Castilian sentimental novels. Siervo libre de amor (c. 1440) by Juan Rodríguez de Padrón, initiates the genre in Castilian letters and gives the courtly reader a taste for the stylized suffering of the male lover. Tractado de amores de Arnalte y Lucenda (1491) and Cárcel de amor (1492), both by Diego de San Pedro, portray ailing courtly lovers who lose all sense of reason and cause other characters, most of all the object of their affection, misery of the acutest form. Finally, Grisel y Mirabella and Grimate y Gradissa, both penned by Juan de Flores circa 1495, take the genre to its tragic extremes by depicting the discord sown by inconvenient love, in the case of Grisel, and by appropriating characters from one of Boccaccio’s novellas and pairing them with another set of luckless lovers under the pretext of righting past wrongs only to double their misery, in the case of Grimalte. Whether by committing suicide, charging into battle to be killed, or retiring from polite society to
wander madly in the wilderness, the noble male protagonists of these novels come to invariably tragic ends. The noble youths are depicted as suffering, broken, and wholly unreasonable in their lovesickness—in a word, emasculated—until they are unable to fulfill their socio-political duties. I argue that the eroto-maniacal fool of the sentimental variety represents Castile’s anti-hero. The common assumption that sentimental fiction attracted an exclusively female audience does not hold true, as men and ignores the evident concern for the consequences of the pursuit of courtly love by aristocratic primogenitors. Sentimental fiction depicts a love divorced from reason, one that displaces or replaces Christian devotion, does not bind the lovers in marriage or produce offspring, and ultimately leads to the betrayal of one’s family, king, and eventually life itself. The novels offer a didactic message, and also function as mirrors of a certain class of Castilians and their way of life. Male authors at the margins of the Castilian court penned cautionary tales of emasculation and humiliation for the benefit of noble male readers and the kingdom at large during the transition into the early modern period.

Connell observes that social conventions such as marriage and fatherhood “often involve extensive compromises with women rather than naked domination or an uncontested display of authority” (Connell 79). Chapters One and Three portray the crucial accessory role a wife can play in the masculinity of a hero. In epic poetry and in early chivalric fiction, loving partnerships with women are indispensable to the hero’s success and, unlike many same-sex friendships, are not subject to the need for tests of loyalty. However, the exemplary texts discussed in Chapter Two characterize women as untrustworthy and incapable of possessing wisdom to the same degree as men. The collective biographies discussed in Chapter Four largely exclude female figures, but the specter of an authoritarian female
monarch—Queen Isabel—looms large over the literary production at the end of the fifteenth century. Finally, Chapter Five describes the degradation of the protagonist’s masculinity within the Religion of Love that completely subordinates the male lover to his beloved.

Just as the nobleman’s relationships with women affect his gender identity, so too do his relationships with other men. Manliness, particularly for the dominant group, “is an eminently relational notion, constructed in front of and for other men and against femininity” (Bourdieu 53). Masculinity is most certainly the product of a relational construction; however, I would argue, and the ensuing chapters will exemplify, that cooperative relationships between noblemen and their male peers, as well as the supportive relationship formed between a man and his wife, contribute to the formation of medieval Castilian nobleman’s masculinity as much as any antagonistic or competitive interaction.

Jacques Le Goff observes broadly that medieval man must balance an internalized sense of obedience with a growing sense, particularly from the thirteenth century forward, of rebellion and contestation, both political and intellectual (43-44). All of the literary works analyzed in the present project problematize the aristocrat’s relationship to the king, with particular attention paid to themes of obedience, service, trust, and betrayal. As the Castilian monarchy endured dynastic changes and increasingly sought to consolidate power throughout the medieval period, authors often crafted fictionalized depictions of the intriguing connection between kings, queens, and courtiers.

The nobleman’s ties to his peers were no less fraught with conflict as widespread disputes between noble families plagued the Castilian aristocracy. Even as landed aristocrats faced foreign enemies during the so-called War of Reconquest, authors often seem keen to remind noble readers of the benefits of cooperating with one another. So many of the male
characters in medieval Castilian letters seek out the help and advice of male friends, and in turn reward those friends when their assistance has proven beneficial. Across Europe during the medieval period, close relationships between men become integral to chivalric and courtly discourses, and literary representations of same-sex friendships “reach new heights of cultural refinement, esthetic expression, and ethical exemplarity” (González-Casanovas 158). Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s theorization of homosocial relationships, as refers to a predilection for professional and social relationships with members of the same sex without necessarily implying any homoerotic desire, provides some theoretical context for the male-to-male bonds that are highlighted in all five of the chapters; however, the accompanying fear or hatred of homosexuality signaled by Sedgwick as characteristic of homosociality in post-medieval English letters is less evident in the literary works of medieval Castile. With the exception of chivalric and sentimental fiction, the Castilian nobleman’s sexual desire and activity receives little attention in the literary works discussed in the present project. This omission may, in part, be due to the fact that vowed celibate men penned much of the surviving medieval literary canon, meaning that representations of masculinity were filtered by authors who did not engage in sexual activity (Mazo Karras 10).

It is little surprise, then, that the Christian nobleman’s relationship to God is often highlighted in literary works. The medieval male’s relationship to his God places him in the subordinate, submissive role; however, religious devotion does not emasculate the nobleman, for the link between vulnerability and masculinity is a more modern notion (Mazo Karras 6). Rather, God emerges as the ultimate divine ally of the pious aristocrat, whose success is wholly dependent upon God’s will and favor. It is only when a man exhibits moral failings that invite God’s judgment that his masculinity is compromised.
Although the discourse of desire is rarely evoked, Bourdieu’s observation that
manliness “remains indissociable, tacitly at least, from physical virility” still holds true (12),
as a discourse of emasculation appears in each of the literary genres included in this
investigation. References to weakness, impotence, and infirmity are tied to negative
examples of aristocratic masculinity, often conflating the political, medical, religious, and
sexual connotations of those concepts. The protagonists of Chapters One and Three are
rarely characterized as weak, save Fernán González’s ability to exhibit masculine virility in
spite of battle injuries and the temporarily despair of both chivalric heroes due to separation
from their beloved ladies. In Calila e Digna, a courtier may emasculate his enemies or
naysayers via accusations of weakness and infirmity. The authors of Castilian collective
biographies portray flawed male figures, physically and/or politically impotent, to distinct
ends. The sentimental fiction of Chapter Five depicts the absolute depletion of the male
lover’s health and potency due to the effects of inconvenient love.

The idea of a singular or fixed aristocratic masculinity "ignores the self-
consciousness of aristocratic identities which results in nobles picking up and dropping
different traits of aristocratic identity in order to articulate different political messages at
different times" (Dunlop 161-62). The values and behaviors associated with elite masculinity
change over the course of the medieval period. Earlier concern with bellicose pursuits and
religious piety, related in large part to the War of Reconquest, are supplanted by more
leisurely concerns such as studying, letters, political intrigue, and courtly love. The
discussion of early chivalric fiction, which comes at the midpoint of the project, may be
considered transitional in its combination of Christian knighthood, chivalric love, and
courtly intrigue. The project begins with the figures whose effigies still decorate plazas in
modern day Spain, and ends with pathetic, lovesick characters who signify the height of decadence. Not all of the literary representations contradict the inherited perception of the medieval Castilian hegemon as brutish, aggressive, and entitled. They do, however, nuance and add complexity to his portrayal.
I. THE HEROES OF EPIC POETRY

In the center of Burgos, the medieval capital city of Castile, a bronze statue of Rodrigo Díaz de Vivar towers several meters above the heads of tourists. More commonly known as El Cid Campeador, the figure appears mounted atop his famed horse Babieca, whose windswept mane and tail imply his tremendous speed and agility. El Cid is armed for combat, brandishing the sword Tizón won in battle against the pompous King Búcar of Morocco, and sporting a thick, free-flowing beard that reaches his saddle. At the nearby Arco de Santa María, a statue of Count Fernán González, clothed in military regalia, guards the fourteenth-century entrance to the city. The arch depicts the Count as one of the six most influential male figures in the history of Burgos, the others being King Carlos V, Diego Porcelos (the city’s founder), Nuño Rasura and Lain Calvo (the first judges of Castile), and Rodrigo Díaz de Vivar.

The modern monuments to the memory of these historical figures testify to the enduring impression left by Castile’s foundational myths on the collective consciousness of the region. Present-day Spain is a living palimpsest where Rodrigo Díaz de Vivar and Fernán González survive in the hearts and minds of the people as Castile’s founding fathers, and the superior qualities associated with the two figures have shaped the behavior of Spanish men for centuries.

Given that they represent some of the earliest examples of vernacular Castilian composition, and because they gave rise to some of modern Spain's most enduring mythical figures, we will begin our inquiry into paradigms of elite lay masculinity in medieval Castile with its best-known epic poems. The works that will be discussed presently hold value not
only as aesthetic objects, but also as historiographic documents since the poems provide “a
good base for analysis of social conditions and social concerns at the time when the epics
were sung” (Vaquero, “Recurrent Theme” 310).

Epic poetry is classically defined as the dramatic narration in verse of historical
events that concerned persons of importance. In particular, each poem generally revolves
around the deeds of an exceptional protagonist whose purpose is the restoration of the social
order. When these aspects are combined with an obvious musical cadence or other indication
that the narration was meant to be sung, the poem can be deemed a cantar de gesta. Between
the initial historical event and its manifestation in recorded epic poetry, a period of one to
two hundred years tends to lapse, during which time the “gestación de la leyenda”
(“gestation of the legend”) takes place (Alvar and Alvar, “Introduction” 74). Only four
cantares de gesta have survived to present day in their original versified forms: The Poema
de Mio Cid (PMC), the Mocedades de Rodrigo (Mocedades), a small fragment of the
Roncesvalles poem, and the Poema de Fernán González (PFG), whose versification renders
its classification as a cantar de gesta somewhat problematic. Other cantares are known to
have existed but survive today only as reconstructions taken from romances and prose
chronicles of the period.¹

¹ Deyermond includes de Poema de Alfonso XI of the mid-fourteenth century as a fifth extant epic
poem, though admittedly different in many ways from the others traditionally considered within
this corpus (El “Cantar” 12). The lesser-known cantares de gesta explore similar themes of
betrayal, justice, family, loyalty, the relationship between combat and honor, and the impact
women can have on alliances between men. Additionally, the protagonists are portrayed at war
against the Moors, showing that they were involved in more than petty internal conflicts. The only
remaining portion of the poem of Roncesvalles is Charlemagne's lament for the death of a fallen
archbishop. The poem of the Siete Infantes de Lara, prosified in the Estoria de España or Primera
Crónica General commissioned by Alfonso X, is remembered for “la violencia de las pasiones”
(Alvar and Alvar, “Introduction” 177). The Cantar de Sancho II, also now lost, depicted the
promise to maintain the division of the kingdoms that Sancho II made to his dying father, and
subsequently decided to break, for which he was violently punished.
Composed sometime during the first decade of the thirteenth century and preserved in a single manuscript, scholars consider the *PMC* to be the earliest and most intact of the extant *cantares* (Harney, *Epic of the Cid* ix). The *Mocedades*, written some eighty years later during the final decade of the thirteenth century, “tells the fictional story of the passage of a precocious twelve-year-old Rodrigo from a rebellious and destructive killing force of nature to a leader of men in the service of his king” (Bailey 5). The later account of the hero’s earlier years is meant to be complimentary to the earlier *PMC*, functioning as a gloss or prologue to the better-known account of the hero’s adult exploits (Funes xvi). The two texts that narrate the deeds of one of Spain's greatest masculine prototypes serve as bookends to the medieval Castilian epic tradition.

Between 1240 and 1271, nearly two and a half centuries after the death of the title character, the *PFG* was penned in honor of the famed Fernán González, count of Lara, of Burgos, and eventually of all Castilla la Vieja (Keller 1). The extant copy of the *PFG* appears at the end of a fifteenth-century codex containing several sapiential and moralistic works (Alvar and Alvar, “Introduction” 68). Although certainly a piece of epic poetry, many scholars do not consider the *PFG* to be a *cantar de gesta* due to its particular versification: the *mester de clerecia*, a form of *cuaderna via* utilized almost exclusively by clerics during the thirteenth century. Despite its metric distinction, the *PFG* shares more than a few similarities with the Cidian epic cycle.

In the present chapter, I will explore the themes and values associated with elite lay masculinity in the three poems mentioned above. The *PMC*, the *Mocedades*, and the *PFG* all survive in their versified forms, mostly intact, and dedicate the majority of their verses to
narrating the deeds of one heroic figure autochthonous to Castile. It is my belief that, as the War of Reconquest reached its apex, the Castilian reading/listening public craved tales of local Christian heroes. The epic poetry written in the thirteenth century sought, in part, to provide the kingdom with a literary and epic tradition to call its own. Their male protagonists are plucked from the pages of history and converted into the stuff of legends, fighting against Muslim kingdoms for the recovery of the Iberian Peninsula while stirring the hearts of listeners. Unlike the chivalric heroes discussed in Chapter Three, whose regional and racial markers introduce foreign exoticism into the construction of the ideal male, El Cid and Fernán González have deep genealogical ties to Castile’s Christian past and their narrated adventures take place on the Iberian Peninsula. The elite male reader or listener is encouraged, via the positive example of the two heroes, to marry well, to accumulate valuable goods in order to ingratiate himself to the king and to take care of his vassals, to model bravery and fearlessness in his speech and actions, and to craft visual elements of his self-presentation so as to be imposing and memorable. A balance between submission and dominance, especially in his relationship to God and to his king, proves especially fruitful for the noble male.

Although the question of masculinity in the medieval epic is hardly virgin territory, the texts in question have yet to be considered as part of a methodical study of the discourse of masculinity across medieval genres. That their protagonists are exemplary seems to have been understood, implicitly, as part of the fabric of previous studies that have focused on issues such as national or collective identity, violence, politics, and religion. However, the

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2 Although the Libro de Apolonio is another text considered by many to be part of the Castilian epic tradition, and despite the fact that its hero displays several of the qualities of ideal masculinity that are identified in this chapter, I exclude it from my analysis due to the foreign setting and origin of its protagonist.
representation of ideal masculinity during the medieval period was more complex than past
Hispanists would have us believe. As mentioned previously in the introduction, Louise
Mirrer has characterized the discourse of hegemonic masculinity in medieval Castilian epic
poetry as aggressive, assertive, menacing, and threatening (169). Others have observed that,
in epic poetry, physical violence can serve as a constructive force in the establishment of
social order, absorbing the tensions from which it originates and allowing for the emergence
of a more stable political structure (Hernando 19). Although the violent elements mentioned
by Mirrer do indeed form part of the epic tradition, these were not the only defining
characteristics of the genre or its protagonists. The present chapter aims to nuance our
understanding of the heroes of Castilian epic poetry, particularly the markers of their
decidedly masculine gender identities.

As concerns the debate over authorship of the cantares de gesta, I agree with those
who argue that most Castilian epic poems were of popular origin and were later written
down by lettered men, generally clerics.³ It does seem that the clerical poets put pen to paper
with a particular purpose in mind, as evidenced in part by the extent and nature of their
narrative intervention. The poet of the PMC strives for economy in his account, choosing to
skip over details such as the individual stops made by El Cid’s party: “dexarévos las
possadas, non las quiero contar” (183; “I will pass over all the places where he stopped to

³ Ramon Menendez Pidal and fellow “traditionalists” view the cantar de gesta as the product of
troubadours inspired by popular oral culture. Others such as Colin Smith judge these poems to be
the unique and individual creations of their transcribers. “Individualists” like Smith understand the
PMC to be “a wholly new work of the early thirteenth century, by a single learned author who was
not dependent either on an existing epic tradition in Castilian or on earlier vernacular poems about
the Cid” (1). A majority of scholars consider the “Per Abad” mentioned at the close of the PMC to
be the thirteenth-century scribe of the text rather than its original composer. In the end, little is
known about the authors of these works.
rest, having no desire to give a full account of them”; 38). Apparently the poet is operating under the directives of a purpose other than the provision of an exhaustive history, limiting himself to narrating only those exploits that contribute most effectively to the characterization of the hero. Although temporally removed from the narrated events, the poet imbues his narrative with a sense of immediacy, asking the public to “see” the visual cues and “hear” details that will allow the listener to mentally reconstruct the scene. “Quiérovos dezir lo que es más granado” (“I want to tell you something even more amazing”) says the poet to his public before relating the number of saddled horses won in battle against King Yusuf (211; 51).

Similarly, the evocative use of the first person plural in the opening verses of the PFG establishes a rapport between the poet and his implied audience. Later the poet will use second-person singular address to establish proximity with his listener and make his narrative voice, and by extension his content, relatable (76). He also seems to have a particular narrative purpose in mind from which he does not wish to stray: “Tornemos nos al curso, nuestra razon sigamos” (“Let us get back on course, let us continue our story”; 45).

Rodrigo Díaz and Fernán González lived in the so-called “heroic age” in which “history habitually takes on a poetic shape” so as to supply information about the past or present in a stylized, pleasing manner (Menéndez Pidal 420). Epic poems existed in part to preserve history, but also sought to instruct their readers such that they might learn from the past. Through the elevation of positive models of behavior and the condemnation of their

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opposite, contemporary authors were able to convert stories from the annals of history into exemplary tales without resorting to explicit instruction. Certain elements of the poet's fictional embellishments, his selective inclusion and exclusion of particular historical details, make evident the process of fictionalization through which historical figures are fashioned into literary types and, by extension, exemplary models for the reading public.

From Man to Myth

Contemporary scholars judge the historical accuracy of epic poetry by comparing it to other accounts of the heroes’ lives. The Cidian cycle boasts a rich intertextual tradition. Most notably, the chronicles commissioned by Alfonso X contain repeated references to Rodrigo Díaz as an important actor during the Reconquest of the Iberian Peninsula. While some scholars treat the alfonsine chronicles as historically accurate sources, others find that Alfonso X initiated the mythification process by the use of literary tropes and heroic virtues in his description of the historical figure (Lacarra 107). In relation to the PMC, the chronicles provide the unsavory back-story for Rodrigo's exile.

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6 The Song of the Campeador (Carmen Campidoctoris), written in Latin verse sometime after 1080, presents another extant account of Rodrigo Díaz's life believed by many to have been composed during his lifetime. In its opening lines the hero is compared to Paris, Pyrrhus, and Aeneas. The poet then lifts up Rodrigo as a more worthy subject because he is neither “pagan” nor from “extreme antiquity” (Harney, Epic of the Cid 124). The History of Rodrigo (Historia Roderici), a panegyric poem composed in Latin sometime after 1144, purports to chronicle the “great deeds” accomplished by “that noblest and most stalwart of warriors, Rodrigo Diaz” to preserve a record of his ancestry and “the record of the wars won by virtue of his manly valor” (115, my emphasis). From the opening lines of the poem the hero and his deeds are gendered.

7 The three sons of King Ferdinand of León (1017-1065) inherited a system of fractured kingdoms. “When the dust settled,” explains María Rosa Menocal, “it was not Rodrigo Díaz’s sovereign, Sancho, but rather the middle brother, Alfonso, who emerged as the victor” in the struggle for power and control (xii-xiii). Once he assumed the throne, Alfonso did not trust Rodrigo, who had served Sancho while he plotted against his brothers and sister. The relationship between Rodrigo and Alfonso was forever damaged when the former openly questioned the king as to whether or not he had Sancho killed. Though Rodrigo believed Alfonso's denial of any involvement, the king reportedly vowed that, owing to his insolence, Rodrigo would never again be in his good graces.
The historical facts of Rodrigo Díaz’s life as gleaned from chronicles and other accounts—the reason for his exile, the nature of his relationship with King Alfonso, the fate of his wife and daughters—differ substantially from the *PMC*. Despite the fact that he was not beloved by all during his lifetime, the poet's characterization of the hero is overwhelmingly positive: “He is portrayed as a supremely brave warrior, consummate in his martial ability; a clever tactician and astute strategist; a staunch vassal and wise counselor; a shrewd diplomat and inspirational leader of men” (Harney, *Epic of the Cid* xiii). The epithet “El Cid” comes from the Arabic word for lord, *sayyid*, although medieval accounts of his life written in Arabic did not make use of the epithet. In fact, Arab scholars of the time saw Rodrigo largely as “a pitiless mercenary, a cunning opportunist, a ruthless extortionist, [and] a dangerous terrorist” (xiii). We learn from other textual sources that Rodrigo Díaz “was exiled not once but several times, for reasons that, on at least one occasion, clearly had to do with what Alfonso felt was egregious lack of loyalty – the virtue the poem is devoted to establishing and repeatedly praising – and for embezzling the *parias* he had gone to collect for the Castilian king” (Menocal xiv).

Omission, invention, and embellishment are the poet’s tools for fashioning an exemplary figure from imperfect historical material. For example, the poet takes license when articulating El Cid’s relationship to Iberian nobility. On the one hand, he neglects to

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8 In the *PMC*, both strangers and kin call El Cid by his many epithets: “he of the flowing beard,” “he who was born in a lucky hour,” “el Campeador,” “he who girt on his sword in a lucky hour,” and so on (Harney). Only heroes (and the places, animals, and objects closely associated with them) carry epithets. The epic epithet may have been regarded as a “distinctly poetic element,” as few were included in the prosified versions of El Cid’s exploits in Alfonsine chronicles (Powell 82).

9 Within the system of payments of tribute known as *parias* wherein Christian rulers would offer their services as military “protectors” to Muslim rulers of Taifás on the peninsula, there was opportunity for “freelance operators to break away from royal service and to run their own rackets. The most famous of these men was Rodrigo Díaz, *El Cid*” (Barton and Fletcher 3-4). Accusations of embezzlement were likely brought before the king by García Ordoñez and other nobles who opposed Rodrigo.
mention that, as the daughter of Alfonso V of Leon and cousin of Alfonso VI, his wife Jimena is of noble birth. At the poem’s close, his daughters are projected to marry the princes of Navarre and Aragon and ascend into the high nobility, though no such weddings took place. Most notably, the poet remains silent regarding El Cid's extensive collaboration with Muslim troops and his stint as a mercenary for King Mutamin of Zaragoza from 1081 to 1085. The poem straddles the boundary between historical accuracy and fictional beautification, often tending towards the latter.

Accounts of Fernán González’s life and deeds appear in royal chronicles and differ only slightly from his portrayal in the *PFG*. Additionally, a song of the troubadour tradition that told the story of the remarkable Count Fernán González is thought to have circulated orally before the composition of the *PFG*. There is evidence that the song painted a very different portrait of the count (Victorio 13-15). In it, the hero's rebellious nature would have been foregrounded, not unlike that of Rodrigo in the *Mocedades*. More importantly, whereas his religiosity would not have been an essential characteristic in the original song, the count is rendered very pious in the later poem thought to have been written by an Arlantine monk. In the translation of Fernán González from historical reality to epic poetry, his character and life story endure similar alterations such that “[s]urrounding this holy and historic mission is a poorly disguised chaos, while his character is host to contradictions that even his piety cannot explain” (Coates 61). Such deviations from historical fact may be attributed to the political and moral imperatives of the poem (Catalán 113). In addition to the ideological and moral imperatives incumbent on able-bodied Christian men during the medieval period, the poet's “steady attention to the economic aspects of warfare shows that he was actively interested in promoting military values and attracting fighting men to the Reconquest”
Although these texts indeed avail themselves of hagiographic tropes in the elevation of their heroes, and despite the fact that most, if not all, later copistas of the poems were lettered clerics, the poems ultimately depict secular heroes made accessible and attractive to the listener through their connection to the material world of war and politics. By the means available to them, it is likely that poets writing during the ongoing Reconquest sought to appropriate these historical figures for the Christian cause in thirteenth-century Castile.

**Part of a Grander Plan**

The source of the epic hero’s prowess ties into a genealogy of great men, in which he represents either its glorious origin or its celebrated culmination. Though singularly superb, his masculinity is constructed in relation to a larger legacy. As God’s chosen champion, the hero is also bolstered by divine support.

By first narrating the feats of the protagonist’s predecessors who all fought for Castile’s autonomy, the Mocedades has been criticized for breaking with the epic tradition of focusing on the adventures of a singular hero (Bailey 13). In doing so, however, the poet sets up a genealogy of noteworthy Castilians into which the hero will be inserted. The title character of the Mocedades is not introduced until line 368 of the poem. By that point his father and grandfather have been discussed, particularly the wrongs done against them that will be righted by the youth's first deed: killing his father's enemy Count Don Gómez and capturing the count's two sons. When he first appears, the twelve-year-old Rodrigo Díaz is

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10 Joseph O’Callaghan’s reading of the motivations for joining the Reconquest efforts is perhaps more idealistic than Duggan’s: “The opportunity to participate in the holy war in Spain and to obtain religious merit and even entrance into paradise drew many volunteers to the peninsula” (12).
already dying to go into battle, to such an extent that “ya quebrávale el coraçon” (40; “now his heart was bursting”; 75).  

Although the poet of the PMC opens his work in medias res with an undivided focus on El Cid, the poet closes his work with a gesture similar to that of the Mocedades, characterizing the hero as the beginning of an illustrious lineage rather than its culmination. Speaking directly to his public, the poet ends his narrative with the following words: “¡Ved cuál ondra crece al que en buen ora nació / cuando señorases son sus fíjases de Navarra e de Aragón! / Oy los reyes d’España sos parientes son, / a todos alcança ondra por el que en buen ora nació” (315-16; “See how his honor grew, the honor of the man born in a lucky hour! His daughters were now the queens of Navarre and Aragon! And today, all the kings of Spain are his kingsmen, all gaining in honor through the one born in a lucky hour”; 105). The hero has increased his honor not only through deeds of daring but also by the social ascension of his offspring. Accordingly, a genealogy of honor for Spain's royal families is forged as they claim El Cid's legacy and his heroic blood for their own. 

Authenticating his account by invoking an unidentified piece of writing—“Commo el escripto diz” (“As the written account says”; 45)—the poet begins the PFG by describing the Visigoths as brave Christian warriors of whom contemporary Castilians should feel proud. The genealogy of Visigoth kings appears almost biblical in its detailed run-down of who begat whom. Past Christian rulers and their kingdoms are idealized.  

Contrarily, the Moors are portrayed not only as pagan but also as demons capable of all sorts of moral atrocities. An angel advises the Castilians to make Pelayo their king, and so begins the slow

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12 Throughout the poem’s initial sections, the poet insists on “the legitimacy of Gothic rule” and “that his hero was successor to the Goths” (Keller 67).
but steady re-ascent of the Christians. Throughout these sections of the poem, one of the Arlantine's narrative purposes becomes plain: “to show that the course of Spain's history was under the guiding and controlling hand of God” (Keller 25). If Spain is a chosen land favored by God, its redeemer must be as well.\(^\text{13}\) The poem incorporates hagiographic imagery along with military discourse in order “to construe territorial expansion as historical necessity” (Johnston 411). In the fourth section of the *PFG* called “Elogio de España” the gaze narrows from Spain's riches and history to the kingdom of Castile. The Arlantine insists that Castile surpasses all the other Iberian kingdoms because of its people’s steadfast love and fear of their God (79). Once he has sufficiently praised Castile, the poet finally turns his attention to our hero's family. His father, Gonzalo Núñez, was himself the son of one of Castile's most famous *alcaldes* (judges), don Nuño Rasura.\(^\text{14}\) Both Fernán González and El Cid are said to have descended from Castilian *alcaldes*, although such claims have been questioned (Keller 43). Don Fernando, called Fernán when his full name is given according to the practice of the time, is the youngest and best of three brothers.\(^\text{15}\) He becomes Count of Castile when it is “*un pequeño rincon*” (“a small corner”) of little worth (81-82).

Despite the poet’s insistence on his noble heritage, both through immediate family ties and the earlier Christian ancestry, Fernando is hyperbolically proclaimed to be the best of all: “*nunca fue en el mundo otro tal cavallero*” (“there was never in the world another

\(^\text{13}\) Along these lines, Taran Johnston finds that the poet's introduction to the life of Fernán González sets him up as a religious pilgrim: “Where his ancestors . . . suffered loss and exile, he redeems them through piety, victory, and above all, the liberation of Castilla” (405).

\(^\text{14}\) Keller explains that the “tumult in which they lived led the Castilians to take matters into their own hands to solve their own problems themselves . . . they chose 'alcaldes' . . . to exercise governing, fiscal, military and judicial powers” (42).

\(^\text{15}\) As Dean A. Miller explains, “[t]he successful, triumphant last-born appears very frequently in the folktale’s vast narrative corpus, and reasons are easy to point to. Scripture tells us that ‘the last shall be first,’ and popular feeling always cheered on the underdog or the runt of the litter” (101). The eventual wife of El Cid, Jimena, is the youngest and most astute of her siblings, as well.
such knight”; 83). He is described as a deadly enemy of the Moors, called a “carnicero” (“butcher”) in battle (83). Only after this larger-than-life characterization is the public introduced to the hero's humble upbringing high in the mountains in the care of a man who works with carbon. As Victorio explains in a note, no other source describes Fernando's childhood as rustic (83). The poet has “adorned his tale with the telling of the early years by the use of fictional elements which he borrowed from legends, folklore and hagiography” to make the hero's rise to greatness all the more compelling (Keller 52).

High in the mountains, the young Fernando says a prayer on behalf of the downtrodden Castile currently under the thumb of Moorish rule. He wishes for Christ to favor Castile, and to be allowed to fight for and reclaim his rightful place as its leader. Although brave, he is not an “osso bravo” (“angry bear”; 84); Fernando's place is among men of skill and reason. As he descends from the shelter of the mountains, his people rejoice and instantly recognize the legitimacy of his claim to the condado, for “non podien en el mundo mejor señor aver” (“they could not have a greater lord in all the world”; 85).

Early in his career as Count, a lowly friar called Pelayo gives Fernando a place to stay and portends great success for the Christian warrior. Pelayo's prophesy establishes a relationship between the hero and the humble monastery. When Fernando visits Pelayo at the monastery once more, he is visited in a dream by two saints who reaffirm the prophesy that God will grant him victory against Almançor. Still, Fernando and his men are not

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16 Medieval scholars have found substantial archival evidence that Fernán González consigned much of his wealth to Castilian monasteries and parishes during his lifetime. Salvador Martinez believes that this generosity accounts for the existence of a cantar that sings his praises: “[N]o debe cabernos la menor duda de que la creación y la supervivencia del mito del héroe que hizo a Castilla se debe, ante todo y principalmente, a los favores que concedió a las instituciones religiosas. Sus hazañas hubiesen sido olvidadas muy pronto si monjes y escritores interesados en su difusión no se hubieran ocupado de perpetuar su memoria, con la creación del mito del guerrero invencible y modelo ejemplar del cruzado cristiano” (17).
immediately victorious. The battle at Hacinas lasts at least three days. Before the appearance of the apostle Santiago, Fernando was “en fuerte cuita” (“greatly afflicted”) and in this moment he questions God: “yo non te fallesciendo, tu ¿por que me falleciste?” (“as I am not failing you, why are you failing me?”; 143-44). The lord-vassal relationship of mutual obligation is at stake if God does not honor his obligation to support Fernando’s efforts. In answer to Fernando’s prayers, the apostle Santiago appears to him with reassuring words.

With renewed vigor, the Castilians march into battle and defeat Almancor's army. After his victory against Almançor, Fernando gives his fifth of the boon to the monk Pelayo as promised. Fernando shows humility and a submission to God’s will as an ideal vassal. The juxtaposition of dominant and submissive masculine qualities imbues the hero with an inherent balance, hinting at the coveted mesura or deliberateness that will be discussed subsequently.

In the three epic poems discussed here, the heroes are legitimized not only by their belonging to an illustrious line of men, but also by God’s favor. As regards the power exerted by epic heroes, some find that any intervention by supernatural beings may rob the hero of his prowess and “[destroy] the conception of manhood that is central to heroic poetry” (39). For El Cid and Fernan Gonzalez, submission to a divine power bolsters, rather than destroys, their masculinity through the assurance of great feats. Supernatural forces do play a crucial part in the stories of these two men, but their intercession is always ancillary and limited to helping the otherwise capable hero carry out God’s will.

The first words uttered by the hero of the PMC are in prayer: “¡Grado a ti, Señor, Padre que estás en alto! / ¡Esto me ha vuelto mis enemigos malos!” (104; “Thanks be to thee, Lord Father, Thou who art on high! This wrong has been done to me by my wicked
The poet foregrounds El Cid’s religious devotion as well as his wrongful persecution. Although he will be envied, even hated, for his blessings and accomplishments, El Cid does not curse God or lose faith. The opening scene sets up the hero as a suffering martyr who bears his unjust punishment with commendable stoicism. Nonetheless, his submission to divine providence is not absolute, but rather conditioned by the expectation of favor.  

The young Rodrigo of the Mocedades shows sympathy for a leper while traveling, not unlike the famed St. Martin of Tours, by lending him a green cape and sharing a cave with him for shelter (47). The leper turns out to be Saint Lazarus, a messenger from Christ who reassures the young Rodrigo: “cuantas cossas comenzares, arrematarl’ás con tu mano” (48; “anything you undertake, you will be able to finish with your own hands”; 83). Both poetic accounts of El Cid’s deeds show him to be favored by the Christian God and His representatives. The poet of the Mocedades, thought to be from Palencia, was likely inspired by the PFG’s effective combination of epic material and ecclesiastic themes (Deyermond, El “Cantar” 58).  

The hero’s insertion into a genealogy of great men bolsters his own claim to greatness, and the supposed correlation between his military success and divine providence

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17 Before leaving town, El Cid prays to a statue of Saint Mary. Bargaining with her almost as he will do later with the Jews, he promises to put offerings on her altar and to order masses sung in her name if she will show him favor and help in his military endeavors. Later, it is not the Blessed Virgin but the angel Gabriel who appears to El Cid in a dream, urging him forth and promising him good fortune.

18 Thanks go to Julie Singer for pointing out the parallelism between this scene and one from the hagiography of the fourth-century French soldier and bishop. The clerical poet of the Mocedades would certainly have had knowledge of the French saint’s Vita and so may have deliberately chosen to evoke this image from the life of a patron saint of soldiers. In his commentary, Bailey explains the resonance that the hero’s vision has with the Gospel writer John’s account of when the Disciples of Christ received the Holy Spirit (116).

19 For more on the priorities and influence of a clerical scribe on the PFG, see: Weiss, 143-78.
frames the hero as chosen by God; however, both elements undercut his characterization as a self-made man, one defined by his own deeds. Subsequent sections will address how El Cid and Fernán González walk the line between self-sufficiency and dependence, dominance and submission, isolation and collaboration. While the epic hero submits to the will of God, counting on His favor in return, the hero’s submission to his monarch is much less straightforward.

**Managing Up**

Juan Victorio makes the intriguing assertion that the *PFG* and the *PMC* complement one another in the medieval epic canon: whereas the latter focuses on depicting the perfect vassal, the former attempts to describe an ideal lord (22). Upon closer inspection, however, we find the representation of lords and vassals in each poem to be not so neatly arranged. All three poems call into question the linear relationship of loyalty, indebtedness, and moral and political superiority of traditional feudal relations. Many have observed the relationship between protagonist and king to be fraught with tension and rebellion in Castilian epic poetry.²⁰ The *PFG* includes repeated and “disturbing references to the Count's insolent rejection of regal authority” (Rich 103). The Arlantine poet hopes that Fernando’s treachery “towards the kings of Iberia can be explained in so far as he sets up his own network of feudal relations with God, in the Visigoth tradition” (Coates 58). The submission of both Fernán González and El Cid to their king is half-hearted at best, and often seems to be more of a performance of obedience than genuine deference. They adopt the submissive posturing expected of a vassal, while subtly subverting the dominance of their lord.

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²⁰ For example, see Michael Harney’s analysis of the “negotiated and conditional nature of royal authority” in the *PMC* (*Kinship and Polity* 156).
When in the *Mocedades* the young Rodrigo is called to court to consider a proposed marriage to Jimena, he accepts in part out of obedience to his king; however, in a show of independence he sets the conditions for the betrothal himself, vowing to win five battles before he will Jimena's hand. The youth also negotiates with King Fernando regarding the distribution of his battle winnings. In fact, to say that the hero negotiates with his sovereign is an overstatement, as Rodrigo rejects each one of the king's suggestions (80).

By the time of his banishment, the point at which the *PMC* picks up his story, El Cid is a local celebrity. People emerge from their homes to see him off as he marches into exile. Like his family, townspeople also weep bitterly for his departure, praising him as a “buen vasallo” (“excellent vassal”) who suffers under a less-than-excellent lord (105; 4). Though many wished to give him shelter in their own homes, they could not for fear of incurring *ira regia*. By exiling El Cid and threatening to penalize those who might offer him aid, King Alfonso implies that he finds this particular vassal to be quite a menacing presence. El Cid has won popular approval so completely that his mistreatment at the hands of any man, no matter his social standing, causes the masses to support El Cid and criticize the other. Later, even the Moors of the conquered Alcoçer weep to see El Cid depart. Such exceptional loyalty as narrated by the poet establishes, in turn, an emotional connection between the hero and the contemporary public: “from the start there is no doubt that he is our hero, as we listeners, or readers, are easily welcomed into his first little troop of lucky few, who so possessively, and with such palpable endearment, often call him *mio Cid* – my Cid” (Menocal ix-x).

When the marriage proposal of the Scions of Carrión is brought to El Cid's attention, El Cid considers the offer carefully for at least two reasons: because to act precipitously
could jeopardize all that he has accomplished and does not befit an intelligent leader, and because his king has suggested the match. King Alfonso and El Cid agree to meet, at a place of the king's preference as a sign of respect, to discuss the subject in person. Both men prepare lavish entourages for their journey. Whoever arrives second at the designated place will have the benefit of being received by the other. Although the poet does not specify El Cid's later arrival as intentional, the spectacle he creates upon entering King Alfonso's camp is unmistakable: “como lo comidía el que en buen ora nació, / los inojos e las manos en tierra los fincó, / las yerbas del campo a dientes las tomó. / Llorando de los ojos, tanto avié el gozo mayor; / así sabe dar omildança a Alfonso so señor” (224; “Just as the man born in a lucky hour had planned, he fell to the ground, on hands and knees, and took up the grass of the field between his teeth. Weeping, tears streaming from his eyes, such was the depth of his joy – thus did the Cid perform this act of submission before his lord King Alfonso”; 57). Both entourages bear witness to the extraordinary performance of humility and vassalage by El Cid, and the long-overdue forgiveness it elicits from King Alfonso. Kisses planted on both the hands and mouth of his king seal their renewed friendship.

After some time, the two get down to the business that brought them back together: the possible marriage of the Scions of Carrión to El Cid's daughters. Despite his scruples about the tender age of the girls, as well as the character of the young men, El Cid ultimately acquiesces; nevertheless, at every turn El Cid does not hesitate to implicate King Alfonso as the party bearing responsibility for brokering the match: “vós casades mis fíjases, ca non ge las do yo” (228; “It is you who join my daughters in wedlock, for it is not I who gives them away”; 60). In the intimate conversation between El Cid and his loving family imagined by

21 The poet does not fail to mention the preparations El Cid makes as he leaves Valencia to show the hero's capabilities as a leader during peace times.
the poet, El Cid emphasizes the point further. Earlier, King Alfonso had promised to protect El Cid’s wife and daughters “de fonta e de mal curiallas, e de desonor” when he granted them passage to Valencia (186; “from all shame, harm, or dishonor”; 40). His vow foreshadows not only the impending harm that will come to El Cid’s daughters, but also the king’s inability or unwillingness to take responsibility for their preservation. The king’s culpability in their impending disgrace has been solidly established in the mind of the listener. El Cid manipulates the situation so as to remove the blame from himself. His submission to an imperfect king provides the hero with the opportunity to outshine him without outright mutiny or disloyalty, which would stain his character.

When he comes to court seeking justice for the Outrage of Corpes, El Cid once again is the last to arrive for the proceedings, such that all assembled members of the court bear witness to his magnificent entrance. When El Cid begins to dismount from his horse, the king bids him stay. The king then offers El Cid a preferred seat and says, to the chagrin of those who oppose El Cid, “mejor sodes que nós” (285; “you’re a better man than I”; 87). In spite of King Alfonso’s offer, El Cid pays chooses to sit separately from the king, surrounded by his men. El Cid’s decision to sit with his men reflects, on the one hand, an instinct for self-preservation. In addition to the physical threat posed by the band of men from the Carrión clan, the relationship between El Cid and King Alfonso also remains fraught with tension and distrust. Additionally, to accept King Alfonso’s offer would have positioned El Cid as the recipient of favors in a vertical relationship; instead, the details of his entrance, self-presentation, and positioning all signify his status as a sovereign lord on more equal footing with his king. Spatial elements such as these – where one sits in a room, whether one stands, sits or kneels – are granted particular attention by the poet, as if King
Alfonso collaborates in the fashioning of an image of great social importance for El Cid. The king’s cooperation puts the hero in an ideal position to preserve and even enhance his honor. In the *PFG*, the hero defies the kings of Navarre and of Leon, at times playing them against one another until finally he manages to free Castile from their grasps. Perhaps the most evocative exchange between Fernán González and a monarch involves a hawk, a horse, and don Sancho, the King of Leon. Castile, at the time a mere county, is subject to the rule of the kingdom of Leon. Fernando enters the king’s court riding a magnificent steed and carrying a beautifully plumed hawk. The animals are deemed so far superior to others in the land that the king wants them for himself. The horse’s value is enhanced by the fact that Fernán González took it from Almançor upon the occasion of his defeat (Harvey and Hook 846). Although Fernando attempts to make a gift of them, the king insists on paying: “El rey, de grand sabor de a ellos llevar, / luego dixo al conde que los querie comprar. / ‘Non los vendrie, señor, mas mandes los tomar; / vender non vos los quiero, mas quiero vos los dar.’ / El rey dixo al conde que non los tomaria, / mas açor e cavallo que gelos compraria, / que de aquella moneda mill marcos le daria” (“The king, wanting very much to take them, / later said to the count that he wanted to buy them. / ‘I would not sell them, my lord, but please take them; / I do not wish to sell them, but rather I want to give them to you.’ / The king told the count that he would not take them, / but rather he would buy the hawk and the horse, / that he would give a thousand coins for them”; 149). By refusing to accept the animals as gifts, the king avoids being obliged in friendship to the hero. However, the count profits greatly from the exchange by leveraging the king’s desire for the exceptional animals in order to secure the independence of Castile. King Sancho tarries three years before endeavoring to repay the debt, at which time it becomes clear that, with the accrued interest,
payment in full would be impossible. The scene has been read as an attempt on the part of the Arlantine poet to cover up the hero’s rebellion against his king, highlighting instead Fernán González’s cleverness and patriotism (Salvador Martínez 49). As both the hawk and the war horse relate directly to the hero’s participation in activities associated with elite masculinity—hunting and knighthood—it would seem that, for the right price, the hero is willing to leverage extensions of his own masculinity for profit. In this case, whatever loss to the hero’s manhood is quickly recuperated by way of the enormous service to Castile with which he is credited.

The Price of Leadership

In the economy of war, “booty and fame are inextricably linked” (Duggan 25). The acquisition and distribution of booty—wealth acquired through military intervention—has the capacity to augment the authority of the epic hero. While by and large the composers of the PFG and Mocedades do not grant extensive attention to the hero’s economic gains, the narrative of the PMC is “saturated with the theme of wealth” (Duggan 5). War is El Cid’s business and he is the ultimate tycoon. One scene from the Mocedades indicates how Rodrigo will interpret the threat of war even from a young age. When Germany and France demand that Spain pay them tribute, the hero sees an opportunity for economic gain, saying to the king: “Aún non vos enbia pedir tributo, mas enbiavos dar algo, / mostrarvos he yo aqueste aver ganarlo” (53; “He is not really asking you for tribute; rather he wants to give you riches, I’ll show you how to take his wealth”; 88). Years later, as the family of El Cid joyously surveys the bounty of Valencia in the second canto of the PMC, the scene and mood are shifted to the brooding Morrocan king, Yusuf, who bitterly envies El Cid. Upon
hearing that Yusuf has brought his troops to Valencia to do battle, El Cid does not fear him; rather, he welcomes the prospect of winning another great battle and increasing his daughters’ dowries. Indeed, after defeating his proud opponent, El Cid makes a speech to that end to his family: “A vós me omillo, dueñas, grant prez vos he ganado; / Esto Dios se lo quiso con todos los santos . . . / ¿Ved es el espada sangrienta e sudiento el cavallo? / Con tal cum esto se vencen moros del campo. Rogad al Criador que vos viva algún año, / entraredes en prez e besarán vuestras manos” (209-10; “Most humbly I salute you, ladies. I have won you a great prize, for while you held Valencia, I have prevailed in the field. This has been God’s will, and that of all His saints . . . Do you see the sword, all bloody, and my horse, all covered with sweat? This is how Moors are vanquished in the field. Praying to the Creator to let me live on yet another year or two, you will surely gain in honor, and men will kiss your hands”; 50). Every battle represents an opportunity to increase his own fortune and renown, and promises to elevate the status of his daughters. El Cid’s position as the head of household, the male provider for his female family members, mirrors his commitment to provide for all who serve him.

Rather than the traditional feudal system, the interactions between noble men in the PMC are more accurately characterized as part of a “gift economy,” a system of “moral and economic give-and-take” (Duggan 30). Within such a paradigm, the value of gifts given correlates with the wealth and social status of the giver. In the medieval gift economy, El Cid of the PMC has no literary equal. After his first major victory, El Cid sends thirty saddled horses to King Alfonso and, in doing so, begins to soften the resolve of the king.

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22 Harney calls gift-giving “the principal component in El Cid’s political tool kit” (Polity and Kinship 166), and Menocal insists that El Cid's rise to greatness is “rooted in the virtue of generosity” (xvii).
against the exiled knight.\textsuperscript{23} Alfonso pardons Minaya, giving leave for any man in his kingdom to depart and serve El Cid without fear of retribution, a change of heart that can likely be attributed to a realization that El Cid still serves him as a vassal (at least in the economic sense). Upon defeating King Yusuf, El Cid doubles once more his gift to the Castilian king, sending an entourage of two hundred saddled horses so that “non diga mal el rey Alfonso del que Valencia manda” (213; “King Alfonso will have no cause to speak ill of the man who rules in Valencia”; 52). The king, in turn, orders that El Cid's emissaries “los cuerpos ontradamientre servir e vestir e guarnirvos de todas armas commo vós dixiéredes aquí, / que bien parescedes ante Ruy Díaz mio Cid” (216; “be most honorably attended to and clothed, and outfitted, furthermore, with any weapons and equipment you require. All this so you may look your best before Ruy Díaz, My Cid”; 53). Though a generous gesture, it in no way matches the value of El Cid's gift. King Alfonso may also seek to sway the loyalty of El Cid’s most loyal followers by means of these gifts, but his efforts do not succeed. Throughout the PMC El Cid “is able through the gifts at one and the same time to assert his own integrity, to underscore his faithfulness, to demonstrate that he is worth more as an ally than an enemy . . . and to spread his reputation through a dramatic gesture” (Duggan 35). The king's gifts to El Cid pale in comparison, and the Scions of Carrión are perpetually depicted by the poet as receivers of (undeserved) gifts rather than as givers, further underscoring El Cid's pre-eminence by comparison. The epic hero may achieve dominance over his male counterparts by giving much more than he received, leaving the recipients in his debt.

El Cid also generously compensates the men under his command, a gesture that

\textsuperscript{23} He also sends back gold and silver to have masses sung at Saint Mary's church, and some amount of money for his family. The gifts are listed in this order by the poet, suggesting how they rank in importance to the hero: first his lord, then his God, and finally his family.
binds the men to El Cid as their feudal lord. Once in exile, he immediately begins to consider how he will provide for his company. The one hundred and fifty knights who abandon their homes to follow him are not unlike those who leave everything behind to follow Christ when he begins his ministry. Both Christ and El Cid promise that their followers will be handsomely rewarded for their service; however, unlike Christ, the riches promised by El Cid are of this world, material in nature. Still, El Cid shows himself to be a very compelling and charismatic figure to command the loyalty of so many men and in the face of such costs – that is, temporarily losing the king's favor and being away from home for an indefinite period of time. When El Cid stops in the Miedes mountains on his way out of the kingdom, he counts an undisclosed number of foot-soldiers and three hundred cavalry in his service, “estos cavalleros que l’ sirven a so sabor” (118; “worthy vassals . . . willingly carrying out any command of their lord”; 14).

The king has left the exiled Cid with nothing and, according to the hero, no option but thievery. Taking advantage of his fame and good credit, he approaches a pair of Jewish moneylenders to acquire liquid assets in exchange for chests purportedly filled with booty (which are, in fact, empty). Although dishonest, the ruse is laudable for two reasons. On the one hand, it shows El Cid's dedication to providing for his men, for a good lord would not allow those in his service to starve. The wealth of the entire company also reflects on its leader. On the other hand, the details of the trick—filling the chests to make them heavy, asking the Jews not to look at their contents for one full year to avoid persecution by the king—illustrates the hero's cleverness. El Cid asks Martín Antoliñez to bring the Jews to

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25 Because of the tales they have heard of his military successes, the Jews trust that El Cid is in possession of a tremendous fortune, of which they hope to receive a portion in exchange for their services. Raquel and Vidas agree to keep the chests unopened in part because they suspect that the
the hero's tent. They are made to feel as if they are in the presence of a very important
person and, blinded by his performance of authority, the Jews agree to every one of El Cid's
conditions. After the deal is struck, the parties exchange additional gifts of money and
clothing, thus combining the more traditional gift economy with the less-acceptable practice
of usury.

Once the initial capital is acquired, El Cid vows to earn the rest of his living by
plundering conquered lands. The poet does not intervene in his discourse to condemn said
practice, nor do any of the poem's characters. It seems that thievery is not reprehensible
when perpetrated by Christians against their enemies or those of other faiths. El Cid's
commitment to providing for the men in his service, while admirable, results in a disregard
for the rights and property of other peoples. However, as El Cid is on a holy mission
sanctioned by God as per the angel Gabriel's message, his entitlement to land and goods is
greater than that of any unrighteous enemy.

After their first victory, El Cid awards Minaya la quinta, or one fifth of the loot to
show his gratitude to the brave and loyal soldier. Minaya, in turn, thanks his leader but
refuses the money, saying that to serve under “Ruy Diaz, el lidiador contado” (“the
renowned warrior, Ruy Diaz”) is reward enough (132; 16). In the next lines, El Cid
continues on to a town further away from his native Castile because he does not want to do
battle with King Alfonso. Even in exile and out of favor, the hero continues to respect his
former king's territory. These scenes are layered with overlapping relationships of vassalage,
wherein El Cid emerges as both the ideal vassal and the ideal lord.

Through the giving of estates in Valencia, his vassals feel “el amor de mio Cid”

money contained therein is, in fact, taken from the parias purportedly stolen by El Cid. This
money would be tainted by the ira regia occasioned by El Cid’s alleged betrayal.
In the gift economy, love and appreciation are generally communicated through economic and material means. Following his victory in Valencia, El Cid is able to more than triple his previous offering to King Alfonso. One hundred saddled horses will be the grease on the wheels as El Cid asks an important favor of the king: that his wife and daughters be allowed to leave Castile and join El Cid in Valencia. The campaign for King Alfonso's admiration appears to be won at this point, for when García Ordóñez speaks out against El Cid, the king quickly retorts that “en todas guisas mejor me sirve que vos” (186; “[i]n any event, he serves me better than you do”; 39). The listener now rejoices at the king's recognition of El Cid's value.

As opposed to the king, El Cid is a lord who more readily recognizes the value of a loyal and skilled vassal. When Minaya returns from King Alfonso's court with glad tidings, El Cid kisses him on the mouth and says that as long as Minaya is alive and in his service “bien me irá a mí” (156; “things will go well for me”; 27). By giving Minaya tremendous responsibility, El Cid becomes partially dependent upon Minaya. Their same-sex friendship becomes indispensable to the hero’s success, although it remains clear that theirs is not a relationship of equals. Minaya is employed by El Cid and receives payment for his service. His pride does not prevent him from listening to the sage advice of others such as Minaya on multiple occasions, nor from allowing another to claim a portion of the glory in battle (for example, Bishop Jerome’s request to deal the first blow against King Yusuf).

In exchange for his generosity, El Cid expects to be treated with respect and deference by the men in his employ. Once they have all been handsomely rewarded from the booty taken at Valencia, El Cid recognizes that the threat of desertion is greater than ever. He

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26 Many scholars have characterized Minaya as El Cid’s co-protagonist, the hero’s other half or “contrapunto humano,” a common trope in epic literature (Alvar and Alvar, “Dos notas” 50).
orders that a census be taken of his troops in order to enforce a new decree: any man who wishes to leave El Cid's service must do so properly by kissing his hand, or else be stripped of his possessions and hanged. Although El Cid's decree seems radical, as the men serve under his command voluntarily, the established price of El Cid’s generosity is deemed reasonable both by characters within the narrative as well as the poet. The contemporary reading/listening audience of these poems sees, by virtues of these and other scenes, the possibilities for financial gain during a military campaign as well as the potential for that newly-acquired wealth to be translated into social pre-eminence.

**Strategy, Diplomacy, and Pageantry**

Unlike that of the clerics who contented themselves with immortalizing the deeds of others, the masculinity of Fernán González and El Cid is firmly rooted in the *vita activa*. According to Maurice Bowra, an epic hero is defined by an ethos “realizable only in action, and above all in battle” (Lawrence 39). Rodrigo Díaz and Fernán González are remarkable not only for their sheer physical prowess, but also their ability to, through prudence, perseverance, and cunning, emerge victorious from battle.

Throughout the *PMC*, El Cid shows himself to be a skilled military strategist. In the first canto, he targets the town of Alcoçer because he recognizes that it will be an easy victory. There is a defensible hill outside of the city that provides both a height advantage and a steady supply of water, from which he calculates that he will have a distinct advantage. For fifteen weeks, he and his troops camp on that high hill as a constant visible reminder to the people of the town that they are under siege. When they still refuse to

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27 El Cid again uses a high hill to gain a military advantage near Monreal with similar success. That hill came to be known as the Hill of the Cid (Harney, *Epic of the Cid* 27).
surrender, El Cid lures them out of the castle with a ruse and is victorious. Even when on the
offensive, El Cid is patient and willing to wait for the opportune moment to take action.

The decisive victory causes a neighboring town, Ateca, to send word to the King
Tamin of Valencia, warning him that he stands to lose his territory if he does not come
to their aid. The king sends three thousand Moors to capture El Cid; they manage to surround
the hero's camp for three weeks. Subsequently, El Cid does something intriguing: he solicits
the opinions of his most trusted soldiers. Minaya speaks up, urging the men into combat
although severely outnumbered, and El Cid praises his bravery. Here the hero’s second-in-
command takes on the role of counselor, making El Cid’s an inclusive sort of hegemonic
masculinity that welcomes (or permits, at least) input from selected male figures in his orbit.

The poet of the *PMC* makes plain that El Cid does not fear a fight. However, if he
sees that it will be possible to count on their future loyalty and tribute, El Cid treats his
captives generously with concern for their well being. When the proud Count Raymond
refuses to eat while imprisoned by El Cid, his captor strikes a deal with him: if the Count
ceases his protests and agrees to eat some food, El Cid will free him and two of his
noblemen. El Cid also stipulates that he will not return one bit of the plunder recovered from
the Count and his men. Given these paltry enticements, Count Raymond’s change of heart
seems abrupt: “Si lo fiziéredes, Cid, lo que avedes fablado, / tanto cuanto yo viva seré dent
maravillado” (163; “If you do this, Cid, this thing you’ve promised, as long as I live I’ll
never get over my admiration”; 30). His gratitude and loyalty cheaply bought, Count
Raymond is released to live on as an indebted man. By opting for diplomatic rather than
violent means, El Cid has converted an obstinate enemy into an obedient vassal.

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28 The notion of a man's willingness to listen to good advice as a noble virtue will be developed
further in Chapter Two's analysis of exemplary literature.
Interestingly, the tolerance of the cooperative Other seen in the PMC – the Jewish usurer who provides services in a moment of need, or the Moorish king who willingly pays tribute – is markedly absent in the PFG. The poet's masculine model is based on intolerance, even hatred, of non-Christians. We are told that the hero lets reason and self-control fall to the wayside when in man-to-man combat. Facing the Count of Tolosa, he strikes tremendous fear in his opponent's heart by being visibly full of wrath: “olvidó con la ira mesura e bondat” (“he forgot deliberation and goodness in his rage”; 115).

Neither of the poetic accounts of Rodrigo Díaz's life tells of him being injured in battle. Fernán González, on the other hand, appears “mal ferido” (“badly hurt”) multiple times in the PFG. The poet does not silence the injuries, disappointments, or defeats of the Castilian Count. What distinguishes Fernando is not his invincibility, but rather his resolve to not allow injuries to keep him from fighting. While El Cid’s invincibility in combat gives him a superhuman air, Fernando’s stoicism and resolve in the face of injury makes him not only more relatable, but perhaps also more impressive, to the contemporary male reader.

The visual spectacle of masculinity, crafted by the heroes to inspire awe and fear, is no less impressive. When traveling, El Cid raises his standard high so that onlookers might recognize, adore, and fear him. Along with his beard and horse, El Cid's military standard serves as a visible proclamation of his unique identity and prowess in war. As his fame increases, so too does the visual impact of his standard as an essential part of his persona. The placement of El Cid’s military standard atop the citadel is what signals his men that they have successfully taken Valencia (176).

Aside from his military standard, the poet points time and again to one particular

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29 Despite his portrayal as a fierce warrior, Fernán González’s greatest advantage over his enemies is his capacity to exploit the continuous conflicts between León y Navarra (Salvador Martínez 15).
element of El Cid’s physical appearance that marks his masculine identity: his beard. Facial hair is mentioned roughly as many times in the *PMC* as the eyes, mouth, and feet, despite the fact that a man’s beard is a part of the body not directly associated with “the frequent contexts of combat and salutation” (Bly 16). The thirteenth-century poet often refers to El Cid as “he of the flowing beard.” In the epic tradition, the growth of long hair signals the physical strength as well as handsomeness of the male hero, a certain animalistic virility (akin to a horse’s mane), as well as elevated social status and freedom (Miller 196-97). In the moments following a great victory in battle, El Cid’s perceived virility reaches its zenith. The poet exclaims: “¡Dios, cómo es bien barbado!” (148; “Lord, how full was his beard!”; 24). In the heat of the siege of Valencia, the poet again turns his attention to the hero’s facial hair as El Cid makes, or perhaps renews, a solemn vow regarding the all-important extension of his manhood: “Ya l’ crece la barba e vale allongando; / dixo mio Cid de la su boca atanto: / Por amor del rey Alfonso, que de tierra me á echado, / nin entrarié en ella tigera ni un pelo non avrié tajado, e que fablassen d’esto moros e cristianos” (178; “Now his beard was really growing, getting longer and longer. From his own mouth, My Cid had sworn this oath: For love of King Alfonso, who cast me out from his kingdom, no scissors will cut as much as a single hair from it, and let this be talked about among Moors and Christians alike”; 36-37). As he laments his separation from family, king, and country, El Cid will wear his beard long as a savage and highly visible reminder of his commitment to regain all three. He also hopes that people to talk about his decision, and for word to

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30 In the French epic tradition, tremendous attention is paid to Charlemagne’s long white beard in the *Chanson de Roland* as a symbol of the king’s “virility, dignity and wisdom” (Owen 175). Additionally, in several epic traditions the males of lower social status are made to wear their hair shorn closely to the head or shaved altogether: “El cabello infunde fortaleza, siendo simbolo de libertad (los esclavos llevan la cabeza rapada)” (García de Ochoa 22).

31 Menéndez Pidal reminds us that “[t]o go unshorn as a sign of grief was an old and common
reach Alfonso as part of a larger performance of submission. Later, when El Cid is reunited with the king and entertained as his guest for the day, Alfonso cannot take his eyes off El Cid’s beard “que tan aína l’ creció” (226; “which had grown out to quickly”; 58). Not only the fullness of his beard, but also the rapidity with which it grows, impress the king and all those present.

Although the hero of the Mocedades is not yet in possession of his most impressive physical attribute, the poet does narrate an episode in which Rodrigo pays special attention to the beard of his opponent. In pursuit of an enemy Count during battle, Rodrigo violates the law of sanctuary and follows the man into a church. The brazen youth then “sacólo por las barvas al conde de tras el altar con su mano” (51; “he pulled the count out by the beard from behind the altar with his own hand”; 86).32 Given the emphasis put on El Cid's own facial hair in later accounts and the insistence that no man ever laid a hand on it, the young Rodrigo simultaneously captures and emasculates his enemy by taking hold of his beard.

The Arlantine poet of the PFG largely neglects the physical description of the hero and his military accoutrement and, as a result, leaves him without a particularly noteworthy external marker of his masculine potency. The source of Fernán González’s power to impress is addressed in the next section.

Measured in Word and Deed

As Matthew Bailey explains in The Poetics of Speech in the Medieval Spanish Epic, medieval knights “had to be adept at expressing themselves in speech in order to rule over their fellow men, and there can be no doubt that status is reflected in speech and that good

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32 In the third canto of the PMC when El Cid faces the Carrión clan in court, we learn that this enemy was García Ordoñez himself (vv. 3280-90).
speech coupled with high status sustain power and authority” (47). In each of the epic poems discussed here, the poets include direct speech attributed to the hero. Their speech acts include prayer, commands, threats, the asking and granting of favors, and extended public address. According to calculations, over forty percent of the lines of the *PMC* represent direct speech (Powell 72). Not unlike Mirrer, Dean A. Miller finds the epic to be a literary mode principally characterized by violence, particularly as regards the hero’s speech: “When the hero does speak, his speech has a peculiar – violent – tone. ‘Verbal aggression’ is now a more or less polite and even academic term for the substitution of verbal for physical violence” (230). Further, he observes that speech as a mark of intelligence is generally reserved for the hero’s sidekick (230). As we will see presently, Castilian epic poetry breaks from convention to present its heroes as wise, articulate, and highly persuasive in their oral discourse.

When in the *Mocedades* Rodrigo addresses his nephew Pedro Bermúdez, who will play a larger part in the *PMC*, the hero provides the following advice: “*todo omne de buen logar que quiere sobir a buen estado, / conviene que de lo suyo sea abidado, / que atienda mal e bien sepa el mundo passarlo*” (55; “any well-born man who wants to rise to good station, / best be able to take care of himself, that he face up to difficulties and know well how to overcome the trials of this world”; 91). Though he does believe that noble birth factors in to a man's greatness, he must be self-reliant and wise in addition. Later, when speaking to Minaya Alvar Fáñez in the *PMC*, El Cid commands his men thusly: “*A osadas cored, que por miedo non dexedes nada*” (129; “Ride forth, bold and fearless—overcome everything in your path”; 15). The hero not only models fearless behavior to the men under his command, but also reinforces it orally to very effective ends. The prescriptions, in turn,
are passed on to further generations of Castilian men through the transcription of the poem: “Like the authorial voice, the reported discourse within the poem functions bidirectionally: when the Cid speaks to influence the actions or opinions of other characters, he reaches out to the audience as well” (Montgomery, *Medieval Spanish Epic* 97).

Whereas the *PMC* and *Mocedades* contain only limited references to the weight of the hero’s spoken word, verbal discourse seems to be the hero’s foremost skill and asset in the *PFG*. The poet generally portrays the Castilian men under Fernando's command as cowardly or lazy, too often seeking to excuse themselves from battle. Only their fearless leader, who refuses even to delay a battle when he is badly injured, can stir their passion with his words (111-12). The poet dedicates fifty-one stanzas out of the total seven hundred fifty-two in the poem to the representation of Fernando's direct speech (Keller 74). Fernando uses speech to motivate his men in the moment before a battle, as well as to console them and honor fallen comrades in the wake of each battle.

The poet describes Fernando not only as an effective military leader, but also as a wise man. Adages such as “*un dia que perdemos no l'podremos cobrar*” (“a day lost cannot be regained”) appear in his speeches (112). When the apparition of a fiery serpent in the sky frightens the men, Fernando pontificates on the differences between Christians, who are lead by God, and Muslims, who are lead by the stars and use enchantments to frighten their enemies (131). He reasons that a negromancer from Almançor's camp must have produced the vision. Furthermore, when the king of Leon calls the nobles to court, Fernando proves to be a skillful and convincing diplomat: “*dio les el buen conde mucho de buen consejo*” (“the count gave them much good advice”; 148). Though no account is given of the hero's education, he appears more learned than those who surround him.
When the Castilian troops receive a challenge from the Moorish king Almançor, who vows to defeat the Castilian upstart, one of Fernando's vassals, Gonzalo Díaz, speaks up to say that they should avoid doing battle with the Moors if possible because they may lose. At this, the hero speaks up in absolute opposition to his cowardly comrade: “Dixo [Gonzalo] de lo primero d'escussar el lidiar, / pero non puede omne la muerte escusar; / el omne, pues que sabe que no puede escapar, / deve a la su carne onrada muerte l'dar” (“Gonzalo was the first to excuse himself from the fight, / but man cannot excuse himself from death; / man, knowing that he cannot escape, / should give his flesh an honorable death”; 89). Death in battle is ennobling and avoidance of such a noble death is a disservice to the ‘carne’ of the male body. His stirring speech references those ancestors who were too afraid of death to fight for Castile, and, consequently, lost it to the invading infidels. For Fernando, the fear of death amounts to treason, a betrayal of one's home in its time of need. He also decries how easily they forget the mistakes of their ancestors. As their commander, he bids them to take control of their emotional, fearful reaction and confront the possibility of death with courage: “Esforçad, castellanos, no ayades pavor” (“Be strong, Castilians, do not be afraid”; 91). The speech ends with a promise that a victory for Castile will accrue great honor for all those who fight. Despite being outnumbered, the Christians triumph against Almançor and are rewarded with great riches left behind by the Muslim troops.

When he hears of how the king of Navarre robs and tortures the people of Castile, the poet favorably compares Fernando to an angry lion as he challenges the neighboring king to combat and calls his men (102). As before, their preparations include a moving speech. All who were assembled there could see that Fernando “avia grand pesar” (“was greatly troubled”; 104). He lets some emotion show in his face and words such that it might
also be taken up or mirrored by his men. Stirred emotions will further invest them in the cause for which they fight. Fernando repeatedly asks his men to face their deaths willingly and bravely.\textsuperscript{33} The hero warns that to act as cowards would be “grand villanía,” and again concludes by assuring them that no man can escape death (105). Their morbid themes notwithstanding, Fernando’s speeches never fail to rouse his troops before battle.

Regarding El Cid’s capacity to move others, the first lines of the \textit{PMC} depict its hero “[d]e los sos ojos tan fuertemientre llorando” (103; “[w]eeping bitterly, the tears streaming from his eyes”; 3). Although the first page of the extant manuscript, which presumably announces the circumstances of El Cid's exile, is missing, that would still put the emotionally charged scene very near to the beginning of the poem. The poet gives no indication that El Cid feels shame in his open show of emotion, for it communicates his attachment to king and homeland. Exiled from both, “[s]ospiró mio Cid, ca mucho avié grandes cuidados” (103; “My Cid sighed deeply, for his cares were very great”; 3). When they are parted, both Jimena and El Cid weep bitterly. Their reunion in Valencia proves to be cause for still more weeping. Such demonstrations of strong feeling seem to be appropriate, even laudable, between a knight and a loved one whom he loyally serves. Emotional scenes also ingratiate the hero to the reader. The poet opens his text thusly to stir the sympathies of the readers, such that “from this dramatic and poignant beginning forward there is never any question of where our sympathies lie” (Menocal ix).\textsuperscript{34}

\textsuperscript{33} In reality, every military leader does this implicitly; however, Fernando foregrounds the possibility of death, as if the chance for an honorable death were as great a motivator as the promise of riches or the prospect of doing God's work and defeating evil men. This may relate to the crusader’s vow described by O’Callaghan, which sends soldiers into battle “fortified by the knowledge that their sins would be forgiven and that if they were killed in battle they would be rewarded with eternal life in heaven” (21).

\textsuperscript{34} In addition to creating an empathetic relationship between the reader/listener and the hero, such expressions of intense emotion are, according to Walter Ong, typical of oral cultures whose
Remarkably, in the midst of such emotion, El Cid still manages to speak “bien e tan mesurado” (“clearly, in measured tones”) demonstrating admirable self-control (103; 3). Experiencing and showing intense emotions is not incompatible with the hero's masculinity, provided that the outpouring is measured by reason. According to Colin Smith, El Cid's self-control is “the greatest civic virtue of all” and the reason for his tremendous success (93).

While the younger rendering of El Cid found in the Mocedades does not boast the same level of poise or self-control, there is at least one scene that foreshadows the importance of his mesura as an emerging leader. Upon realizing that his father and uncles have died in battle against the Moors, Rodrigo's face “ovo la color mudado” (“his color changed”) yet he had no time for weeping at that moment (50; 85). Recognizing his importance as a visible leader, he puts on a brave face: “Rodrigo ovo el escudo enbraçado, / por tornar los cristianos, del padre non ovo cuidado” (50; “Rodrigo clasped his shield, to rally the Christians, he showed no concern for his father”; 85). The subordination of “his emotions to expediency and a rational calculation of the greater good” will become the greatest distinguishing factor between El Cid and other epic heroes of the Castilian tradition (Lawrence 46).

While countless scholars praise the poise and mesura of El Cid, Fernán González has been characterized as “a relatively unstable hero: restless, reactionary, and brought at times to the verges of despair” (Coates 54). Nevertheless, the PFG does occasionally demonstrate that Fernando, like El Cid, successfully controls his emotions and speech in order to affect the actions and thoughts of other men.

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35 Intriguingly, Deyermond finds that the similarities between the historical and fictionalized Cid “se extienden al carácter del héroe: su mesura, su destreza mental, su prudencia” (El “Cantar” 24, my emphasis). In other words, Deyermond believes that the hero’s exceptional self-restraint is not an element of literary invention, but rather a characteristic possessed by the historical Rodrigo Díaz.
Behind Every Great Man

Although few would argue that female figures have a dominant role in epic poetry, at least in the medieval Castilian context gender and sex do figure into the action of many epic poems (Deyermond, El “Cantar” 96). Construction of the masculine epic hero requires at least one female counterpart as either his complement or his foil. An effective hero will endeavor to avoid those women who would rather see him fail than succeed. In the Castilian epic cycles, we see that allying oneself with the right sort of woman through marriage is fundamental to the hero’s success. For both Fernán González and El Cid, good wives may actually “support male heroes in their moments of weakness” (Caldin 102).

At the beginning of the PMC, the prayer said by Jimena upon El Cid's departure differs substantially from that of her husband. First, she displays great biblical knowledge by citing many of God's miracles and His repeated ability to keep good men from harm. In lieu of asking for blessings or comforts for herself or her daughters during El Cid's absence, Jimena asks only for her husband’s safe return. In asking God to aid El Cid, Jimena proves to be not only a faithful (in both senses of the word) wife but also an ally who reinforces the hero's own bargaining with the divine.

The Mocedades narrative is, at its core, the story of El Cid’s initiation into adulthood through the subjugation of his less mature ways, in which a “benign, powerful feminine presence is essential” to the process (Montgomery, Medieval Spanish Epic 41). His marriage

36 Deyermond supposes that the importance of female figures “presupone un público más diverso que el casi exclusivamente masculino postulado para la épica de otros países” (El “Cantar” 12).
37 Vera Castro Lingl has identified five female types in epic narrative: “la vengativa, la adultera y/o lujuriosa, la esposa fiel, la maternal y la pasiva” (70). In other words, within the context of an epic journey a woman can “act as goal of the quest, as assistant in the quest, or as enemy” (Miller 168-69).
to Jimena will be a crucial civilizing force in the hero's journey. In order to settle the enmity between Rodrigo Díaz and her family, Jimena, the youngest daughter of Count Don Gómez, offers herself in marriage to her family’s enemy, appearing before the king to propose the match herself. The *Mocedades* ends with the hero’s wedding after his victory at Palencia, marking both the fulfillment of Rodrigo’s vow and his rite of passage into adulthood (Hook and Long 66-67).

Like the younger Rodrigo, Fernán González lacks a marital partner until late in the poem and, consequently, he is susceptible to the machinations of the Queen of Leon. She promises to give him her niece for a bride, but in actuality intends to have him locked in prison. Held captive by King García, Fernando utilizes his powers of speech to convince the princess Doña Sancha to work for his release. He secures her help by making her fall in love with him; nevertheless, the maiden negotiates shrewdly with the hero as regards the conditions for his release: “Si vos luego agora d' aquí salir queredes, / pleito e omenaje en mi mano faredes / que por dueña en el mundo a mi non dexaredes, / conmigo bendiciones e misa prederedes. / Si esto non fazedes, en la cárcel morredes” (“If you ever wish to leave here, / you will pay me the tribute and homage / of never leaving me for any lady in the world, / with me you will say blessings and mass. / If you do not do this, you will die in prison”; 159-60). While her words do appear coercive, Fernando stands to benefit greatly from Sancha’s proposal, in both the short and long terms. Fernando’s submission to Sancha’s threatening proposal will, in the end, allow the hero to secure his county’s independence.

Soon thereafter, we learn that Fernando has chosen a brave woman indeed to be his wife. When a lascivious archpriest encounters the fugitive couple in the mountains and tries

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38 As an orphan, she was left to her own devices to preserve her own honor and propose her own marriage, a highly uncommon practice (See: Lacarra 50-52).
to have his way with Sancha, she subdues him with her bare hands until Fernando comes to
her defense.\footnote{Victorio suggests that she is able to put him in a sort of submission hold (162n655c).} Here, as with the liberation of Fernando from prison, Sancha displays an
“active and physical manifestation of her loyalty to the Count and to Castile” (Hazburn 30).
The Count has chosen a worthy mate, a fact that his men instantly recognize by kissing her
hand and referring to her as their “señora” upon their safe return (166) She proves to be
Fernando’s match once more when she manages to convince the Castilians to release her
brother King García of Navarre from prison after he is captured in battle. She speaks with
“\textit{pocas palabras e muy buena razon}” (“few words and very good reasoning”) explaining
that she should be granted this favor because she freed their lord (170). When Fernando is
taken prisoner a second time, he escapes by way of a clever ruse requiring the complicity of
his wife. Sancha enters Fernando’s cell dressed in loose-fitting pilgrim’s clothing, which her
husband dons the following morning in order to escape in disguise. On the one hand, Sancha
appears agentic and dominant as the purveyor of the plan, while her husband dons gender-
bending clothing (Coates 75).\footnote{Weiss reads the scene differently: “As the hero’s adoption of female disguise suggests, the feminine operates as a powerful symbol of unpredictability. . . . women’s symbolic roles in this particular epic are determined in part by the need to locate some logical and transcendental authority at the centre of the feudal order and to gender that authority as masculine” (177).} Although Sancha has entered the cell wearing the clothing, a
pilgrim’s tunic is rather gender-neutral, which may explain why Sancha selected it for this
very purpose. Perhaps as important as the scene’s gender crossing is the element of \textit{class}
crossing, as the Count of Castile disguises himself as a humble pilgrim so as not to draw
attention. Fernando’s willingness to temporarily set aside both his masculinity and his
nobility in order to free himself ultimately re-establishes the gender order. To have remained
in prison would have represented a greater affront to the count’s masculinity. Both escapes
from prison would not have been possible without the cleverness and cooperation of Sancha.
All told, the lady’s high social standing combined with her astuteness makes Fernando’s marriage to her one of the best political decisions of his career.

Although El Cid’s wife, Jimena, is also a member of the *alta nobleza*, neither the *PMC* nor the *Mocedades* depicts their union as a deliberate choice made by the hero for reasons of political convenience, perhaps in the interest of presenting El Cid as a self-made man. Nevertheless, her ability to civilize and then partner with the hero is important to the construction of his masculine profile. Both Jimena and Sancha match their husbands in good judgment and in fortitude of character. All three poems “confirm that to be a complete man, the hero needs the support of a woman of noble spirit” (Montgomery, *Medieval Spanish Epic* 54). Although sexual desire between the married couples is not explicitly discussed in the poems, the fact that their marriages bear children indicates the sexual potency of the heroes. The epic hero needs a noble wife to redeem him, to support him as he faces the inevitable trials associated with epic heroism, and to provide him with children who carry on his legacy.

**Conclusion**

In 1964, Luis Guarner begins his critical introduction to the *Cantar de Mio Cid* with the following line: “Of all the myths that the genius of our literature gave to the universal tradition, El Cid is, without a doubt, the most transcendant, since this time the hero is only a fictional entity, but also the very sublimation of our historical reality, from which he ascends to become the representative figure of an entire community” (xv, my translation). He goes on to call El Cid the most universal hero of Spain. In his 1929 treatise *The Cid and his Spain*, Ramón Menéndez Pidal praises El Cid's heroism as not only exemplary in the
Spanish national context, but on a universal scale: “The historic life of the hero . . . will always demand of us that daily, humble, and anonymous heroism that is the only sure foundation of a nation's greatness and without which the most resplendent deeds are unavailing” (446). Such hyperbolic treatment of Rodrigo Díaz as historical-turned-literary hero began with the first retellings of his life’s story. Fernán González has been similarly treated, from the thirteenth century to the present day, as the hope and salvation of a nation. The extensive genealogical and historical information presented in the first one hundred and fifty verses of the PFG serve as a narrative frame, linking the deeds of Fernán González to the fate of Castile. Literary representations of these men supplant and surpass their historical reality. They are mythologized, made neater and tidier by poets, and fashioned into literary representations so as to be inspirational and instructive to readers/listeners. Both men face great personal adversity, yet bring greatness to themselves, their families, and to Castile.

While the epic model of masculinity in Castile does incorporate virtues associated with warriorhood, it also boasts other qualities that make the epic hero “an appropriate hero for a society whose affairs are conducted largely off the battlefield” (Menocal xvi). As opposed to medieval historians, poets “showed a keener insight” into the non-warrior elements of the heroic figure (Menéndez Pidal 438). It is a masculinity predicated on more than physicality, aggression, or an inherited claim of nobility; rather, it is painstakingly constructed through acts of piety, generosity, prudence, political savvy, prudent marriage,

In her article “The Poema de Mio Cid and the Canon of the Spanish Epic,” Mercedes Vaquero finds the PMC to be anomalous among the other iterations of the epic genre in medieval Peninsular literature. Its use as the canonical measuring stick for all epic poetry leads to a distortion of the canon (210). She posits that the Song of Sancho II was more popular and in circulation for a longer period of time than the PMC. Vaquero laments the “bias that the canonicty of the PMC has caused when studying the epic: those epic texts that do not present El Cid as a submissive vassal, that is all except the PMC, are a derivation” (222). While this phenomenon may indeed lead to a distortion of historical fact, it also points to the discursive power that literature can exercise on culture, history, and even on patterns of future reading.
and dominion over his own emotions. El Cid boasts at least three additional qualities: his tremendous accumulation of wealth, his ability to attain justice through civic channels, and his ever-laudable mesura. Meanwhile, Fernán González counts on his remarkable capacity to influence others through speech. The given characteristics were first idealized by troubadour poets and later solidified by clerical scribes who produced the extant versions of the cantares de gesta.

Rodrigo Díaz de Vivar and Count Fernán González began as historical figures, extraordinary in their achievements, yet in many ways imperfect. By censoring the rebellious, greedy, and imprudent episodes in their lives, talented medieval poets fashioned them into what contemporary society craved: idealized models of masculinity, autochthonous to Castile and rooted in the Christian values of the Reconquest. The epic cycles discussed in the present chapter teach male readers/listeners, in particular those who would hold positions of influence, that although legendary performance in battle is not always possible, the modeling of the heroes’ remaining virtues could help any noble man achieve a measure of El Cid’s or Fernán González’s greatness. The epic is “above all an exemplary genre, holding up models for imitation” (Duggan 20).
II. TWO EXEMPLARY FRAME TALES AS MIRRORS OF NOBLES

Throughout the medieval period, a dizzying number of exemplary texts were written in, or translated into, Castilian vernacular, their purpose to enlighten those who came into contact with their content. Characterized as brief, didactic texts, exempla communicate some beneficial truth. Sacred or profane, Eastern or Western, exempla can be derived from fables, stories, popular legends, or historical anecdotes. What assembles such myriad source material together under a common generic label is the question of intention: to transmit, persuasively, a moral or religious teaching, propose a precept or norm, or modify the behavior of the reader or listener (Cándano Fierro, “La literatura” 232-33).

As the obligation to learn does not affect all men in the same measure (Lacarra, Cuentística 119), a considerable cluster of medieval exempla targets a particular subsection of the reading public: men destined to hold sway over others. Being the bearers of additional responsibility and honor, lords and princes require an education above and beyond the general call to moral goodness shared by all men. They face greater challenges—the need to preserve one’s position and provide for one’s vassals—and are called to higher exemplarity as leaders. The espejo de principes or “mirror of princes” is one class of literary text that rises to the task of meeting the unique educational needs of a particular class of male reader. As the name suggests, a mirror of princes aims to educate the royal reader by allegorically reflecting his duties and the qualities required to perform them well, just as the monarch in turn serves as an exemplar of goodness for his people.42

42 The emergence of conduct manuals for princes, spanning the European continent from the thirteenth century onward, relates to the changing organization of monarchical governments as well as increased rigidity in the scholastic system (Lacarra, “Estudio” 58). Earlier medieval mirrors of princes were written by mendicant friars and privileged Biblical over classical examples (Pérez
While there is considerable overlap between the obligations of a monarch and of an aristocrat (e.g., the management of one’s land holdings and provision for one’s vassals), the fact that the aristocrat occupies a slightly lower rung on the social ladder means that he must manage an additional vertical relationship: that with the prince or king to whom he pledges loyalty and upon whom he depends for his social position and for certain honors. In the interest of addressing the formation of aristocratic gender identity, the present analysis will examine two collections of exemplary tales whose narrative frames situate the reader in a courtly milieu and whose framing protagonists are (or closely resemble) lords seeking wisdom: *Calila e Digna* (1251) and *El Conde Lucanor* (1335). These texts circulated in the vernacular Castilian, as opposed to Latin, making the assimilation of their wisdom less laborious and more enjoyable. Each collection offers teachings tailored to the affairs and obligations of aristocratic readers, resulting in a sort of *espejo de nobles* or “mirror of nobles.” Furthermore, both texts address a chiefly male readership (by casting female characters and readers as undesirable allies, due to either a lack of wisdom or disloyalty) and

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43 The monarch also has a more complex relationship with the law, both divine and human, than the nobleman. For more on this point, see Haro Cortés 7-9.

44 The *Libro del caballero Zifar*, another well-known work from the fourteenth century, also boasts exemplary elements and embedded tales that contribute to the fashioning of aristocratic masculinity in medieval Iberia. This unique medieval text situted somewhere between the hagiographic, exemplary and chivalric traditions will be discussed in great detail in the next chapter.

45 Although some readers belonging to the lay elite had the ability to read Latin, the density of the classical texts often studied was not designed to delight or entertain. One of the first and most influential exemplary texts in medieval Castile, *Disciplina Clericalis* (12th century), transmits mostly Christian wisdom in Latin and, as indicated in its title and prelude, aims to educate wise or lettered men, as opposed to men of high birth.

46 No such genre has been alluded to by previous scholars. I have playfully coined this term to refer to the capacity of certain texts to reflect certain truths and imperatives aimed specifically at the aristocracy. As is the case for *Calila e Digna*, a text may be read both as a mirror of princes and as a mirror of nobles; that is, various segments of one text may appeal to distinct reading publics.
tailor their content accordingly.\footnote{On the other hand, the authors of early chivalric fiction, which will be discussed in the next chapter, frame the beloved lady as a crucial and worthy ally of the knight for her discretion and fidelity. Furthermore, the bond between a knight and his beloved is characterized as a superior sort of friendship wherein tests of loyalty become necessary.} Just as exempla function as pedagogical tools designed to shape the minds of young leaders, their sense of morality and social mores, so too do exempla shape their gender identity.

Though not the only exemplary texts to emerge from medieval Castile with didactic implications for the aristocracy, *Calila e Digna* and *El Conde Lucanor* are the purest examples of what might be called *espejo de nobles* due to the construction of their narrative frames, which function as mirrors. Many exemplary works of the medieval period take the form of the frame tale, a collection of stories and examples set within an overarching literary backdrop where characters double as narrators. More than a vessel for the didactic message, the frame “is ultimately the *raison d’être* for the composition of the work in the first instance – the meaning which the author both intentionally, and to some degree unintentionally, wished to convey” (Burke 264). Neither peripheral nor accessory, the frame constitutes the very foundation of the narrative (Biglieri 106).\footnote{The moral or ethical doctrine teaching that the author wishes to communicate precedes the composition of the text and determines its content: “de acuerdo con la lógica del género didáctico . . . el ejemplo y el discurso no se encaminan hacia, sino, al contrario, se despliegan desde la doctrina que los condiciona y determina de antemano” (“in accordance with the logic of the didactic genre . . . the example and the discourse do not come toward, but, rather, are deployed from the doctrine that conditions and determines them beforehand”; Biglieri 53).} Ideally, the principal narration directs the insertion of stories, while the stories affect the action of the frame. The author also orients public interpretation of each story by way of the frame, in the hopes that the reader arrives at the intended meaning.\footnote{By constructing a narrative frame the storyteller aims to “evitar la dispersión semántica, de controlar la interpretación y de imponer, en la medida de lo posible, una sola lectura ‘correcta’” (“avoid semantic dispersion, control the interpretation and impose, to whatever extent possible, a single ‘correct’ reading”; Biglieri 112).} If the frame in any way resembles the experience of the reader, it allows the reader to establish a more immediate and direct relationship with the didactic
content (92). Narrative frames also help to indicate which readers will find the collection most useful. From the maintenance of one’s good name and the formation of political alliances, to sniffing out deceit during increasingly uncertain times, Calila e Digna and El Conde Lucanor proffer class- and gender-specific behavioral prescriptions that inform and reflect the gender identity of the noble male reader in medieval Castile. The former work deploys negative didacticism to offer a portrait of the unsuccessful male courtier, while the latter opts for positive didacticism that implies, without revealing explicitly, that all ends well for Count Lucanor because he, unlike Digna, allows the educational content to inform his behavior.

**Betrayal at the King’s Door: Calila e Digna**

Originally composed in Sanscrit around the 3rd century A.D., the ancient exemplary frame tale known in many literary traditions as the Panchatantra was translated into Persian in the 6th century by Berzebuey, then rendered in Arabic by Ibn al-Muqaffa around the year 750 (Burton 29). The Panchatantra has been heralded as “patrimonio de todas las razas y de todas las épocas” (“patrimony of all races and all epochs”; Keller and Linker xv). Translated into more than forty languages, few of the world’s literary traditions lack a version of the Panchatantra. It is considered the most read book in history after the Bible (Cacho Blecua and Lacarra 9). Calila e Digna is a Castilian adaptation of this widely

50 A number of un-framed collections of examples emerged during the medieval period, such as El libro de los ejemplos por a.b.c., whose contents were used primarily by preachers to add interest to their sermons. The growing use of *exempla* by preachers contributes, writes Lacarra, to the circulation of so many compilations as the medieval period advances (“Estudio” 34). It follows that the didactic message of these collections was often religious in nature, and addressed general concerns for all of mankind rather than the specific responsibilities of a particular class or subsection of the population.

51 As such, the Castilian translation of Calila e Digna had little circulation outside of Iberia (Lacarra, “Estudio” 52).
disseminated text. It forms part of “un largo y fructífero proceso de captación de la cultura islámica iniciado por los cristianos ya desde el siglo X” (“a long and fruitful process of capture of the Islamic culture initiated by Christians in the tenth century”; Lacarra, “Estudio” 14). King Alfonso X ushers in with his reign (1252-1284) a period of previously unparalleled production of vernacular prose in Castile, as bellicose concerns give way to a more cultured and studious society. Alfonso X seeks to “bestow upon Castile a unique cultural patrimony” whereby Castilian might become a language of administrative, scientific and artistic import (Wacks 86). In addition to the king’s linguistic objective, the rex litteratus commissions the translation of numerous works into the vernacular to expand the wisdom and understanding of his people.52 The translation into Castilian of many texts of Islamic origin formed part of the Christian colonial enterprise of the Iberian Reconquest, whereby the appropriation of foreign wisdom was treated as the intellectual spoils of war (Wacks 148).

Not long before ascending the throne, Alfonso X orders the Arabic version of *Calila e Digna* translated into Castilian in 1251.53 Each linguistic adaptation of the text remains true to the original didactic undertaking, that being the instruction of princes and courtiers by means of animal fables (Lacarra, “Estudio” 15). The “open storytelling tradition” of the

52 Though he employed a team of experts to complete these translations, most scholars nonetheless praise Alfonso X as the intellectual driving force of the undertaking: “the work of each of the Alphonsine *auctores* (authors), *ayuntadores* (researchers), *componeedores* (compilers), *trasladadores* (translators), and *capituladores* (those who divided the work into chapters) gives us an account of an illustrated production of works in which various ideological systems are submitted to continuous comparison in order to adjust them to a specific political and cultural plan. This is why we may ascribe to the Learned King a precise consciousness of authorship, bound to the authority that he wanted to project as *rex litteratus or decus Hesperie*” (Gómez Redondo 594).

53 Keller and Linker choose the spelling “Digna” for the jackal’s name, insisting that the replacement of the “g” with an “m” does not reflect the orthography in the two oldest manuscripts (xxxvi). For more on the debate regarding the date of composition of the Castilian translation, see Cacho Blecua and Lacarra 18-19, and Keller and Linker xxi-xxii. *Calila* was treated as a compendium of wisdom by Alfonsoine translators, as the method employed for its translation was the same as that for scientific works (Lacarra, *Cuentística* 33).
frame tale—the fact that stories within the larger frame can be added, subtracted or amended, as suits the contemporary author—makes it adaptable to most any historical moment (Menocal 484). Given Alfonso X’s dedication to philosophy, science and other lofty fields of inquiry, his commission of a text that appears entertaining at first blush points to its underlying didactic and practical content.54 Calila e Digna reflects the meditations of a soon-to-be king on the key players he will encounter at court, on how he and his courtiers should interact in that environment.55 As mentioned in an earlier note, a text such as Calila e Digna may be read as a mirror of princes, a mirror of nobles, or both. My analysis will focus on a particular portion of the collection that speaks to the gendered moral and political imperatives for aristocratic readers.

Though the ethical content of Eastern exempla was considered “profane,” the tremendous variety of moral teachings they offered allowed for their assimilation into the Christian tradition (Lacarra, “Estudio” 14). Considered more recreational than doctrinal, Calila e Digna “loa una manera de vivir que nada tiene que ver con motivos religiosos: es una manera práctica que conduce al placer y al goce sano del mundo” (“praises a way of living that has nothing to do with religious motives: it is a practical way that leads to pleasure and to healthy enjoyment of the world”; Keller and Linker xvi). To achieve happiness, one must wisely apply his abilities, communicate with friends and, above all,  

54 The word exemplum also signifies a copy, imitation, reproduction or translation of a previous resource, and emerges when a previous artifact is deemed worthy of reproduction by a contemporary artist or scholar and relevant for the present-day public (Cándano Fierro, “La literatura” 230; Gómez Redondo 585).

55 Many scholars contend that King Alfonso X’s pursuit of knowledge came at the expense of his monarchic duties, as he “was, above all, an educator” (Salvador Martínez 71). Sure enough, during his reign King Alfonso X would encounter tremendous resistance from the aristocracy of the Iberian kingdoms. Over time he restricted and eliminated many of the nobility’s privileges following several rebellions against the king’s legislative activities in his final decades on the throne. Understandably, Juan Manuel disagreed with him on this matter (544). For more on the nobles’ rebellion during the reign of Alfonso X, see Salvador Martínez, 294-333.
make good use of his intelligence (xvii). The universally palatable moral doctrine that drives the collection, combined with the absence of historical or social signposts to indicate a particular setting, makes possible Calila e Digna’s circulation and use as a teaching tool in Christian-held Iberian territories.

The intricate narrative style of Calila e Digna, often referred to as the caja china or Chinese box, embeds stories within stories and frames within frames, making it more complex than later exemplary collections (Cacho Blecua and Lacarra 33).56 “Este libro es llamado de Calila et Digna” (“This book is called Calila and Digna”), begins the first chapter, though the reader will not understand the title of the book until he reaches the third chapter where the two jackals make their first appearance (122). The medieval manuscript boasts an introduction from its Arabic translator, followed by a second introduction and expository chapter from an earlier translator called Berzebuey, all of which will be discussed momentarily. Finally, the overarching frame emerges: a nameless king asks his philosopher to tell him a story of two good friends led to enmity and perdition by a liar (122).57 After some narrative meandering that provides minimal insight into the frame characters, the philosopher finally introduces the lion, king of the animals, and the two jackals who will form a second narrative frame around Chapters Three and Four only.58 Most of the animal

56 Margaret Parker reads the “digressions” from the main narrative as “relevant” on an abstract level (20). For David A. Wacks, “the nested structure [of Calila] is part of the play of reading, a way simultaneously to engage and reward the reader by keeping him slightly in the dark” (146). I agree with both suppositions, and also suspect that the layering of frame and introductions stems from the multiple translations and transmission of the text across cultural, linguistic, and temporal frontiers.

57 The king does not indicate that the inquiry relates to his present circumstances in any way (i.e., whether he himself has been or fears being the victim of a similar situation), providing little context for the example to follow. Cacho Blecua and Lacarra call the narrators in Calila “narradores sin historia” (32); however, the paltry information that is provided about them—position, career, gender—conditions the reader’s interpretation of the material.

58 First, the philosopher tells the story of a rich man whose lazy sons leave a bull, Sençeba, to die instead of taking him to market. Sençeba finds himself in a meadow that, in turn, is the site of
protagonists in this frame-within-a-frame tell stories to one another in order to support their arguments; however, the interpolated examples do not consistently affect the thoughts or actions of the listeners.\textsuperscript{59} The frame-within-a-frame itself becomes the most compelling exemplary tale whose plot and outcome is likely to influence the reader. The espejo de nobles—the portion of the didactic message imbued with practical relevance for aristocratic readers—is embedded within the overarching collection.\textsuperscript{60} These two chapters of Calila e Digna offer examples—these being mostly negative—for the management of key homosocial relationships at court.

The introduction from Ibn Al-Muqaffa’, present in only one of the two extant medieval manuscripts, describes the pursuit of knowledge as universal across language barriers.\textsuperscript{61} The text is meant for the education of adolescent male readers, “\textit{quando el moço oviere hedat et su entendimiento complido}” (“when a young man is of sufficient age and understanding”; 90).\textsuperscript{62} He compares wisdom to a material treasure to be passed down from elders when a young man comes of age, a particularly apt metaphor for readers of high birth who hope to inherit land holdings or other assets from their forbears. The Arabic translator proceeds to tell five examples, each encouraging the reader to use his acquired wisdom to

\begin{itemize}
\item another story: a man who once found himself in that place was chased by a wolf into a river, rescued by men in the village only to be crushed by a wall, the idea being that a man cannot escape his fate. After the tale of the doomed man, the animal protagonists of courtly allegory finally begin to interact with one another.
\end{itemize}

\textsuperscript{59} The structure of Calila e Digna, and tragic ends to which the characters who ignore their companions’ good advice come, serves to “emphasize the point that ‘scholarship’ must be converted into prudent action, guided by practical wisdom and noble intentions in order to be of any value” (Parker 31).

\textsuperscript{60} After these chapters, the narrative returns to the larger frame of the king and advisor, the former seeking new advice and the latter telling new stories that do not involve the jackals.

\textsuperscript{61} Ibn al-Muqaffa’, translator of Calila into Arabic, was an intellectual on the outskirts of noble society who demonstrated an interest in political intrigue while serving as a secretary to high nobles in Iran. For more on Ibn al-Muqaffa’, see Lacarra, \textit{Cuentística} 13-14.

\textsuperscript{62} All quoted material from Calila e Digna is taken from Cacho Blecua and Lacarra’s edition (Castalia, 1987); the translations are my own.
good ends. According to Ibn Al-Muqaffa’, these examples and the entirety of the text are meant not only to transmit knowledge but also to alter the behavior of readers. Knowledge is a tree and good works are its fruit, writes the translator, and “aquel que sopiere la cosa et non usare de su saber non le aprovechará” (“he who knows something and does not use his knowledge will not benefit from it”; 93). The introduction, therefore, both alludes to the target audience—noble, wealthy readers—and implores readers to integrate the treatise’s teachings into their thoughts and actions.

Chapter One of Calila e Digna offers another introduction, in this case that of Berzebuey, the text’s original translator. As personal philosopher to King Sirechuel of Persia, Berzebuey is sent on a mission to India to collect the plants and herbs said to produce a medicine that can revive the dead (99-100). The wise man spends over a year concocting herbal remedies without success. When Berzebuey confesses to his Indian hosts that he is embarrassed to return to his king empty handed, they reply that the best medicine is “el saber” (101). Thus Berzebuey sets himself to translating many sapiential texts into Persian, one of these being Calila e Digna.

The second chapter gives a brief biography of Berzebuey, particularly his educational journey. The reader learns that his father was a warrior and his mother was the daughter of doctors of science; Berzebuey, therefore, is born with both arms and letters in his blood, making him naturally inclined for greatness. Berzebuey identifies four conditions or objectives for which men strive: “deleites o fama o riqueza o galardón del otro siglo” (“delights or fame or riches or recognition in another century”; 104). Being unable to attain all four, the last of these—posthumous fame—is most desirable. Berzebuey claims to have translated the text for this reason, in addition to the benefit that listeners and readers may
derive from it. Berzebuey emerges as an idealized representation not only of the good
councilor, but also of the reader himself, being a man who actively seeks wisdom in spite of
challenges. Following in the footsteps of Berzebuey and Ibn Al-Muqaffa’, Alfonso X
recognizes the didactic value of the ancient text and commissions its translation into the
vernacular tongue of his people for their collective gain.

Though its stated purpose is the transmission of wisdom to kings and princes, *Calila
e Digna* also contains valuable teachings for other aristocratic readers via the thoughts and
behavior of Calila and Digna. Being the title characters of the Castilian version, it follows
that their actions drive the plot, and their debates transmit some of the text’s richest
sapiential content. Cacho Blecua and Lacarra acknowledge a wider intended readership for
*Calila e Digna* in their introduction: “it cannot be confirmed that regal conduct is the
exclusive preoccupation of the book. In reality a model is proposed, valid for all, but
especially for those who live at court” (46, my translation). *Calila e Digna* does,
nonetheless, draw a correlation between gender and one’s worthiness of wisdom, as the
author deems women incapable of keeping secrets or giving good advice (Cacho Blecua and
Lacarra 28). This misogynist assumption, coupled with the narrative’s scarce representations
of female figures (and the depiction of those few as either untrustworthy or in purely
supporting roles, i.e., as wife or mother), appeals almost exclusively to a male reading
public.

As their story opens, Calila and Digna notice that the lion appears frightened of the
bull Sençeba; when Digna wonders aloud about it, Calila admonishes him to mind his own
business. Despite Calila’s attempt to convince Digna with an example, the latter insists that
they should involve themselves in the situation in order to gain access to the king: “*Et por
“And with luck having come near him at that point I will receive some distinction or some honor, and I will obtain what I require”; 128). Digna outlines how he will serve the king, given the chance: he will generally let the king do as he pleases, unless the king plans to do something harmful, in which case he would “fazerlo ia entender el mal que oviese lo más manso que yo pudiese” (“I would let him know the possible misfortune as meekly as I could”; 129). The ambitious Digna seems keenly aware of the performative aspects of his loyalty to the king; in particular, he must be meek so as not to threaten or upstage the lion’s authority and masculine prowess.

Whereas Digna is unsatisfied with his present circumstances, Calila believes that every man should content himself with his natural lot: “cada un omne a su medida et a su prez” (“each man to his own part and fame”; 127). Being nobler and wealthier than Calila, Digna is also more ambitious regarding his relationship with the king. Digna compares the effort required to maintain a noble status to that of holding a boulder over one’s head without allowing it to fall (127). When Calila first warns Digna that proximity to the king can be dangerous, Digna counters that one must face danger in order to realize one’s desires (130). A long exchange of examples ensues between the two brothers, in which neither manages to change the other’s position.

When Digna first meets the king, the jackal’s genealogical information is given as part of his introduction. The king recalls having known Digna’s father, and this simple association awards him access to the king (131). Digna soon becomes a purveyor of

Later, Digna softens the rhetoric of his ambitions: “Yo no quiero demandar mayor honra de la que avia, nin mayor lugar del que tenia, mas quiero buscar arte para tornar en mi dignidad” (“I do not wish to demand more honor than I already had, not higher place than I had, but I wish to find a way to return to my dignity”; 141).
knowledge to the king, collapsing the roles of courtier and councilor. The lion king then admits to fearing the braying of Sençebe the bull, and Digna warns him that to fear what one cannot see is a sign of “flaqueza” (“weakness” 134). With this, the first of many digs at another character’s masculinity, Digna sets off to investigate the source of the strange noise.

As described by Digna, the strange newcomer is likely, despite his girth, to be ruled by the indigenous king. The jackal’s plan to provide his king with a new tribute backfires when the bull and the lion become close friends, leaving Digna on the outside once more. Digna “ovo ende grande enbidia” (“was then very jealous”) of their friendship and begins to dream up a way to come between them (137). Even though Calila sees no potential harm in the bull’s friendship with the lion, Digna resolves to have Sençebe killed. Though the bull is larger and stronger than the jackal, Digna informs his brother that “todas las cosas non se fazen por fuerça, et algunt flaco llegó con su faldrimiento et con sus artes et con su enseñamiento a lo que non pueden fazer muchos fuertes et muchos valientes” (“not all things are accomplished by force, and some weakling achieved with deceit and artistry and teachings what many strong and valiant men could not”; 142). Willing to call himself “weak” and his rival “strong” and “valiant,” Digna nonetheless recognizes that his cunning can overcome the physical might of any opponent.

To drive a wedge between the lion and his new confidant, Digna falsely accuses

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64 While Digna is away investigating the origin of the noise, the lion meditates on the potential for counterfeit in his interactions with the jackal, who might harbor resentments for suffering a rather undignified existence: “tanto fue despreciado et desdennado a mi puerta et olvidado, et seméjame que tenía mala voluntad, et esto [le] fize engañarme” (“he was so disregarded and disdained at my door and forgotten, and it seems to me that he had evil intent, and this led him to deceive me”; 136). The king’s astute observation regarding the possible ulterior motives of councilors and courtiers, and the condemnation of his cowardice, demonstrates that Calila is as much a mirror of princes as it is a mirror of nobles.
Sençeba of speaking ill of the king. The jackal delivers an emotional performance when he approaches the lion looking “triste et marrido” (“sad and afflicted”) before speaking of Sençeba’s treason (148). Allegedly, Sençeba had a conversation with several prominent vassals in which the bull called the king “flaco” (“weak”; 148). Rather than put explicitly traitorous words in the mouth of his enemy, it is sufficient for Digna to suggest that Sençeba has insulted the strength of the king—and perhaps also his sexual prowess—in front of respected members of the community in order to ruin the nascent friendship. In three consecutive scenes, Digna evokes the language of weakness (“flaco” or “flaqueza”) in order to manipulate other characters. Digna manipulates the king into action by suggesting that others might think him weak, then calls himself physically weak, and finally accuses Sençeba of having called the king weak. References to weakness serve the jackal’s purposes on the short term, resulting in the disintegration of the friendship between the lion and the bull. The power of a discourse that questions the masculinity of the speaker and his interlocutors may successfully break homosocial bonds, which in the longer term does not benefit Digna in his relationships at court.

At first, the lion does not believe the jackal’s accusation (150). Digna warns the lion against the threat of the “omne vil desconocido” (“unknown, base man”) when, in truth, the lion has more to fear from disgruntled native subjects such as the jackal himself (151). Having planted seeds of doubt in the king’s mind, Digna encourages the king to kill Sençeba. Simultaneously, Digna causes Sençeba to question his relationship with the king by claiming to have overheard the lion’s plans to slay the bull and share the large kill with his company (155). Being a wise courtier, Sençeba sees that the only thing that could have turned the king against him would be the words of a false councilor. Nevertheless, Sençeba
wonders if he has offended the king somehow. In an effort to serve the king well, the bull only gave contradictory advice in private and with the king’s own good in mind. Sençeba has striven to serve the king as best he could and, thus, represents the ideal courtier by way of allegory, standing in stark contrast to Digna. Loyalty and equanimity rule Sençeba’s actions: “yo non mostrare al león enemistad nin me camiaré de comme estava con él, nin en celado nin en paladin, fasta que vea de lo que me yo temo” (“I will not show enmity to the lion nor change how I act with him, neither in private nor in public, until I see what it is I fear”; 167).

Ultimately, however, Digna’s plan to turn the two friends against one another succeeds, resulting the death of the bull by the hand of the king at the end of Chapter Three. Immediately regretting his fatal attack on his friend Sençeba, Chapter Four opens as the king begins to mourn and wonder how it all came to pass. Meanwhile, a leopard in the king’s service goes to Calila and Digna’s house at night and proceeds to surreptitiously listen in on a conversation between Calila, who condemns his brother’s lies, and Digna, who regrets his actions but hopes to avoid suffering any consequences: “Ya acaesió lo que se non puede enmendar, pues non acuites a mí et a ti, et guisa como esta cosa non le caya al león en corazón, ca a mi pesa mucho de lo que fize, mas la cobdiçía et la embidia me forçaron en ello” (“What has already happened cannot be undone, so do not afflict me or yourself, and perhaps this thing will not be heavy on the lion’s heart, because what I have done weighs heavily on me, but covetousness and envy made me do it”; 180).

In a timeless example of courtly gossip, the leopard runs to tell the king’s mother of the overheard confession. The lioness, in turn, sees her son looking very sad and encourages him to investigate further whether or not he killed Sençeba without reason, referencing
murmurings from an anonymous informant. The lion is adamant that a loyal vassal should not keep secrets from his king, but rather reveal them and receive “perfecto galardón por ello” (“perfect reward for it”; 181). The king calls a meeting of “los mejores de su mesnada” (“the best of his company”) among whom Digna is counted (182). When Digna feigns ignorance as to the reason for the king’s sadness, the lioness retorts: “non es sinon porque te ha dexado sano et salvo fasta oy” (“it is only because he has left you safe and sound until now”; 183). Though the jackal has now gained entry into the king’s inner circle, the deceitful means he employed to do so will cost him dearly. Digna continues to insist that Sençeba meant to harm the king, and even offers a self-imposed sentence if the authorities find him to be guilty: “Et yo, si culpado fuese, fuiría por la tierra . . . et non aturaría a la puerta del rey” (“And I, if I were guilty, would flee from the land . . . and would not go near the king’s door”; 183). The ambitious jackal often speaks of being near the king’s door as a great honor, a liminal space that allows access to the king. The metaphor of the door implies a spatial division between differing degrees of political influence, as well as a metaphoric collapse between physical and affective proximity in the formation of homosocial bonds.

Digna begs others to disbelieve what he knows to be true: that he has lied to the king. Digna asks to be treated as innocent until proven guilty, though Sençeba was not afforded the same courtesy. He also paints himself as the consummate self-sacrificing vassal: “Et si yo çiento almas toviese et sopiese qu’el rey tenía por bien que se perdiessen, yo le sería franco dellas” (“And if I had a hundred souls and I learned that the king thought it best that I should lose them, I would freely give them up for him”; 185). The jackal’s bravado convinces no one, therefore the king orders that Digna be shackled and jailed until a “pesquisa” (“investigation”) can determine his guilt or innocence (187). In prison, irons and
a guard restricts Digna’s movements, stripping the social climber of his freedom and reducing him to physical passivity.65

When called before the lion and his sheriff, the reader sees that Digna’s hubris has not been diminished by his prison sentence. Defiant, the jackal dares anyone to prove his guilt: “¿Por qué estás todos tartaleando? Diga cada uno de vos lo que sabe, et si yo malfecior fuese, plazerme a que calláse” (“Why are you all stuttering? Let each one of you say what you know, and if I am guilty, I wish you would all shut up”; 192). The implication that the king and his council are fumbling, stuttering fools is an affront to the governing capacities of his judges, and the jackal’s brazen attempt to silence them further challenges their authority. The correlation between clear, persuasive speech and masculinity, as discussed in Chapter One, makes Digna’s comment an affront to their masculinity as well. On the other hand, Digna’s command of spoken discourse is undermined by his tremendous arrogance.66

When a cozinero speaks up against Digna, the jackal issues a series of stinging insults: “A ti lo digo, ca ayúntanse en ti todas malas tachas; ca eres potroso et as el mal del figo, et eres tiñoso, et as albarraz en las piernas; onde non deves llegar a la puerta del rey” (“I tell you, that all bad defects are found in you; you have a hernia and hemorrhoids, and you are sick with parasites, and you have leprosy on your legs; therefore you should not go near the king’s door”; 195). The accuser’s health, appearance and general cleanliness are called into question by Digna, whose evocative insults paint a picture of manifold

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65 The assumed connection between masculinity and activity reflects a long-held gender perception that carried over even into the twentieth century by theorists such as Freud who “flirted with an essentialist definition [of masculinity] when he equated masculinity with activity in contrast to female passivity – though he came to see that equation as oversimplified” (Connell 68).
66 The negative effect of arrogance and vanity on aristocratic masculinity resurfaces in Examples V and VI of El Conde Lucanor, discussed in the next section.
infirmities, some with outward signs and some with rather intimate implications. The cook, humiliated and emasculated, is silenced. The jackal’s manipulation of speech acts, from insults to storytelling to flattery, is a potent skill, but cannot compensate for the instability of his alliances or his immoral behavior.

Soon enough, Digna becomes the recipient of shaming and reproach, first from his brother and then from his king. Upon seeing his brother imprisoned, Calila laments: “Ya llegado ha tu fazienda a tal lugar” (“Now your estate has come to such a place”; 188). The space to which Calila refers is not only the jail cell, but also the lowly state of an outcast, and his brother must leave before anyone sees him to avoid being found guilty by association. Sadly, Calila’s sadness related to Digna’s fate, and the possible consequences for both of them, is such that Calila falls dead upon returning home. When Digna hears of Calila’s death, he bemoans the loss of his one and only “puro amigo” (“pure friend”; 196).

Eventually, the king sentences Digna to a “mala muerte” (“bad death”) by starvation in his jail cell (200). Being so concerned with the elevation of his social position, Digna suffers a terrible reversal of fortune. His body is confined, shamed and ultimately destroyed as punishment for his transgression against the laws that govern same-sex friendship. The tragic end to which Digna comes provides a negative example to noble male readers. Digna’s ambition for greater authority has foolishly risked what influence he already possessed, warns Calila: “[E]l omne de buen seso non cata a la dignidad que ha ganada nin a la nobleza a que es pujado” (“The man of sound mind does not risk the dignity he has won or the nobility to which he is called”; 169). Calila’s most evocative condemnation is of his brother’s two faces and two tongues (174). Being a man divided unto himself by

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67 References to starvation as a death sentence in the Middle Ages are scarce. Rather, starvation is often framed as an unfortunate side effect of extended incarceration. For more on medieval punitive practices, see Kellaway.
competing loyalties, Digna’s manhood is also divided by half. One scheme has forever marked Digna’s character: “feziste a tu señor traición . . . et non ay dubda que otro tal non fagas a otri. Ca el amor non ha en ti do more nin lugar do esté” (“you betrayed your lord . . . and there is no doubt that you will not do the same to another. Because love does not have a home in you or a place to be”; 176). Digna’s incapacity to “love” leaves him incapable of maintaining valuable homosocial bonds with peers and with his king.

The animal protagonists of the *espejo de nobles* allegorically represent different types one might encounter at court. The lion, an apex predator, figures as a king whose wits do not match his might, inducing him to seek guidance. Although the teeth and claws of the majestic lion give the appearance of ferocity, he fears the heft of the bull. The bull, in turn, toils away as a beast of burden yoked to his master, yet has the capacity to crush or gore a smaller animal. Sençeba represents the aristocracy on the whole who, due to their numbers and influence, strike fear into the heart of the monarch. The bull, being slow, also embodies the well-meaning but credulous courtier who is outsmarted and undone by the cunning of another player, the jackal.68 A smaller and less handsome mammal, the jackal scavenges for food and survives on the scraps of kills from apex predators, just as a courtier depends upon his king for favor, honors, titles and the like. In Islamic tradition, the jackal is associated with cowardice, impurity, and is “generally regarded as a pariah” (Wacks 125).69 Digna, the ambitious jackal, exposes the dangers of being overly desirous for proximity to powerful figures, especially when said proximity is achieved through trickery. Even Calila’s model of noble behavior is tainted by weakness, that is, an inability to take action in the face of corruption. He suffers the consequences of his association with a disloyal social climber, just

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68 Wacks aptly reminds us of the bull or ox’s long-established association with ritual slaughter (124).
69 In Islamic sources, “the symbolic values suggested by texts portraying animals are, by and large, analogous to those in the Christian tradition” (Wacks 111).
as many Castilian noblemen lived and died by the company they kept.

The narrative frame of Calila e Digna makes it “a very useful handbook of court relationships, focused on the ones held between the king and his ministers or advisors” (Gómez Redondo 585), yet not one of the animal protagonists emerges as a purely positive example for the aristocratic male reader. If friendship consists of knowing or discerning another man’s true nature, exemplary literature teaches the reader to recognize the signs of true, and false, friends (Lacarra, Cuentística 143). As a “mirror of nobles,” Calila e Digna reflects undesirable conduct between male courtiers and its negative consequences: emasculation, exile, and death.

Exemplarity “segund el estado”: El Conde Lucanor

Less than a century after the composition of Calila e Digna, King Alfonso X’s nephew would continue to contemplate the duties and concerns of aristocrats and, in doing so, make an illustrious contribution to the Castilian exemplary tradition. El Conde Lucanor has been hailed as “la cristalización perfecta de la suma de tradiciones didácticas y narrativas” of centuries past (“the perfect crystallization of the sum of didactic and narrative traditions”; Lacarra, “Estudio” 66), drawing from the numerous Islamic, Jewish, and Christian sources at his disposal. The creative genius of its author, don Juan Manuel, stems from his ability to “[make] gentlemen, cavalleros, of those dispersed, anonymous, and ‘ethnic’ collections” (Menocal 476). Unlike Calila e Digna, in which a select few chapters

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Juan Manuel avails himself of many of the same foreign exempla that inspired his uncle, including some that Alfonso X had translated into Castilian. The nephew, however, does not limit himself to copying or translation, but rather allows himself to freely create using the inherited material as a foundation (Lacarra, “Estudio” 67). Though Juan Manuel does not explicitly cite his sources, neither do I believe that he endeavors to “ocultar sus modelos y fuentes con . . . maña and artificio” (“to hide his models and sources with ploys and artifice”; Orduna 119). Either he treated
contain an embedded frametale with direct relevance for the aristocratic male reader, Juan Manuel produces a fully realized espejo de nobles in the story of Count Lucanor and his advisor Patronio. The structure of Book I of El Conde Lucanor consists of a highly formulaic series of dialogues between a nobleman, Count Lucanor, and his councilor Patronio. In each chapter, the count relates a particular matter currently concerning him and asks for Patronio’s advice, who in turn narrates a relevant example.

The narrative construction of El Conde Lucanor is more “clear-cut, repetitive, and closed” than that of Calila e Digna (Wacks 145), yet the beginning of each tale—the Count’s predicament—is often vague. At times the narrator even employs reported speech, such as in the beginning of the second example when Count Lucanor provides a hazy account of the feeling that he will be criticized by others no matter what decision he takes on a specific issue. Lucanor provides the details of the situations to Patronio, but Juan Manuel keeps them from the reader: “E díxole quál era el fecho, e él rogol quell consejase lo que entendía que devia fazer sobre ello” (“And he told him what was the matter, and he begged him to advise him what he thought he should do about it”; 85). Such ambiguity allows the reader to fill in the informational gap, imagining details relating to his own particular reality.

The prologue dedicates the text to “los omnes . . . en este mundo” (“the men . . . in

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71 The present analysis only addresses Book I of El Conde Lucanor, as its approximately fifty examples maintain the consejero-aconsejado narrative frame in its fullest integrity. While only two of the extant medieval manuscripts include books II-V, all of them contain the first fifty exempla (De Looze, Manuscript 6). Evidence also suggests that Juan Manuel originally intended for Book I to stand alone (Flory 88).

72 The analogous structure of each example in Book I of El Conde Lucanor involves a “vertical overlay” of the interpolated story onto the predicament of Count Lucanor (De Looze, Manuscript 93). Additionally, the analogy extends beyond the text and into the reader’s life, adding another vertical stratum. Juan Manuel’s writing “push[es] . . . the reader to do the hermeneutic work of conceptualizing matters in terms of analogy” to make the teachings personally applicable, though he offers the reader considerable help in the form of Patronio’s commentary and conclusions (143).
“E sería maravilla si de qualquier cosa que acaezca a qualquier omne, non fallare en este libro su semejança que acaesçió a otro” (“And it would be a miracle of anything that might happen to any man, one could not find in this book a similar thing that happened to another”; 71). Though a reference to the “men” of the world could plausibly refer to humankind in general, readers soon realize that Juan Manuel has constructed a collection of exempla addressing the obligations of men, more specifically men of noble birth. The author hopes that the reader will behave in a way that befits his honor, property, and status (71). As women in medieval Iberia had very little to do with the acquisition of wealth, territorial defense, political alliances, or other matters taken up in the collection, they would find its teachings mostly irrelevant to their lives (i.e., not useful). The inquiries of the framing protagonist as well as the subject matter of the interpolated stories in El Conde Lucanor speak to the concerns of men of a very particular era and social station:

The teachings of El Conde Lucanor are tailor-made for the Spanish aristocrat. The book warns him against mediocrity, idleness, complacency, stupidity, gullibility; it sets out to teach him discretion and discrimination, his duty to himself, his country, his God; it urges him to be a caballero de Dios—and because of this it is something of a period-piece. The social and geographical limitations of El Conde Lucanor are severe—it is a compendium for the Spanish fourteenth-century nobleman.

(MacPherson 37)

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73 All quoted material from El Conde Lucanor is taken from Sotelo’s edition (Cátedra, 2009); the translations are my own.

74 With the exception of Examples XXVII and XXXV that address power relations between a man and his wife in a marriage, the reader finds few female characters in El Conde Lucanor. Both for Juan Manuel and for the author of Calila, a gentleman’s interactions with women seem to be of little concern, making these texts unique in comparison with those discussed in this project’s other chapters.
The narrative framework thus limits the universal applicability of the examples by means of the social status, gender, and geographic location of the framing characters (Lacarra, “Estudio” 70). Just as Berzebuey models the act of reception for the readers of Calila e Digna, Count Lucanor represents Juan Manuel’s model reader who seeks advice, performs the learned role and is therefore successful (Diz 173).

In the first-person prologue of El Conde Lucanor, Juan Manuel describes his pedagogical methodology. Although all men are made different by God, particularly in the tasks set before them, the author observes that they share one essential trait: men make better use of lessons that bring them enjoyment (73). Accordingly, Juan Manuel will endeavor to make the didactic content of his collection more pleasing for the reader. As most men do not appreciate subtlety (“a muchos omnes las cosas sotiles non les caben en los entendimientos” [74]) and must be taught using simplified and agreeable messages, the author’s promise to deliver a sweetened educational text indicates his low estimation of the public’s intellectual prowess. The statement also suggests that, in his capacity to make such a general observation and adjust his message accordingly, the author possesses a superior intellect.

After the author has established the intellectual distance between himself and the

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75 Contemporary gender theorists might applaud Juan Manuel’s acknowledgment of the existence of multiple and distinct lived experiences among his reading public. Though his method of presentation may appeal to many sorts of men, his message contributes to the construction of a very particular sort of masculinity constrained by socio-economic status, religion and geography.

76 To drive the point home, Juan Manuel employs a medical analogy: “E esto fiz segund la manera que fazen los físicos, que quando quieren fazer alguma malizina que aproveche al figado, por razón que naturalmente el figado se paga de las cosas dulçes, mezclan con aquella melezina . . . açucar o miel o alguma cosa dulçe” (“And I did this according to the way of physicians, that when they wish to make a medicine for the liver, because the liver prefers sweet things, they mix with that medicine . . . sugar or honey or some sweet thing”; 74). Just as the liver responds best to sugary medicines, the author will sweeten his discourse in order to cure the reader of what ails him: ignorance.
reader, he introduces himself and expresses his intentions for composing the collection: “Por 
ende, yo don Johan, fijo del infante don Manuel, adelantado mayor de la frontera e del 
regno de Murcia, fiz este libro compuesto de las más apuestas palabras que yo pude, e entre 
las palabras entremetí algunos exiemplos de que se podrían aprovechar los que los oyeren” 
(“To that end, I don Juan, son of prince Manuel, major in the vanguard of the border and of 
the kingdom of Murcia, made this book comprised of the most suitable words that I could, 
and between the words I inserted some examples from which those who hear them may 
benefit”; 74). The author wishes to draw a logical connection between his socio-political 
prominence and his literary vocation, the composition of exempla for the benefit of those 
who hear it. His familial ties to the reigning monarch and his involvement with the military 
efforts to retake the south of Spain authorize Juan Manuel to write such a collection; yet, in 
his insistence that he has chosen his words as best he could, the author recognizes that his 
prominence does not excuse him from the obligation of expressing himself carefully.

The councilor’s (false) modesty also makes its first appearance in the opening 
example: “Señor conde Lucanor—dixo Patronio—, vien entiendo que el mio consejo non 
vos faze grant mengua, pero vuestra voluntad es que vos diga lo que en esto entiendo, e vos 
conseje sobre ello, fazerlo he luego” (“Count Lucanor—said Patronio—,well do I 
understand that you are not in great need of my advice, but your wish is that I tell you what I 
know about this, and advise you about it, so I will do that”; 78). Patronio’s humility makes 
him seem a more trustworthy councilor, apparently devoid of arrogance or personal 
motivations that might cloud his judgment, which in turn commends Lucanor’s wise 
decision to confide in the humble wise man. In addition to his modesty, Patronio may be 
trusted by Lucanor because they are not peers; the councilor has little to gain from
dishonesty, but everything to lose if his lord finds him unreliable and no longer requires his services. Despite the framing protagonist’s repeated acceptance of the advice of his councilor in each chapter, distrust of others is nonetheless integral to the didactic content of *El Conde Lucanor* given that so many of the examples, including the very first, deal with dishonesty and tests of loyalty. In the book’s first example, a friend decides to test Count Lucanor’s loyalty and the count nearly fails because he takes the situation at face value, rather than considering the friend’s possible ulterior motives. The story addresses trust and fealty, contains a condemnation of greed, and stresses the detection of possible hidden agendas. As it opens the collection, the example sets the tone and the expectations of the readers, addressing one issue in particular that will be repeated time and again in the remaining examples: the importance of same-sex friendships between prominent men. The male aristocrat’s social standing, and masculinity itself, depends upon the formation of strategic alliances with influential male peers; for this reason, he must select and maintain such relationships with careful consideration.

In Example XLVII, Juan Manuel offers his version of an exemplary tale that also appears in *Disciplina clericalis*, the *Libro del Caballero Zifar* and other medieval collections: the story of the son who learns the measure of true friendship from his father. Lucanor, like the young man in the story, believes that he has many friends who would lay down their lives for him. Good friends are the best thing in the world, confirms Patronio, but he warns that true friendship is rare: “cierto seet que algunos son buenos amigos, mas muchos, por ventura los más, son amigos de la ventura, que, assí commo la ventura corre,

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77 James F. Burke finds that the frame warns readers to be careful in their dealings, lest they experience a “dramatic reversal of role” (i.e., loss of position, honor, etc.) (271).
78 For an in-depth comparison of the various Iberian retellings of the example, see Scholberg’s article “A Half-Friend and a Friend and a Half.”
“assí son ellos amigos” (“it is true that some are good friends, but many, perchance the majority, are friends by chance, that, just as chance comes and goes, so too do they as friends”; 274). To discern between true friends and fair-weather friends, the good man devises a test for the son’s ten supposed friends whereby the son pretends to have killed a man and, carrying with him a slaughtered pig in a sack, will go to each friend’s house seeking help to conceal the body. None of the son’s friends will lend him a hand, while the father’s one “medio amigo” (“half friend”) does offer his assistance (273). Later, when the good man’s son is later accused of having killed a man in earnest, the half-friend even sacrifices the life of his own son by inducing him to take the fall. Notably, Patronio does not explicitly suggest that Lucanor should strive to be the sort of friend who would lay down the life of his only heir in order to help a friend; instead, he teaches Lucanor to identify those who would do so for him. Count Lucanor, an influential and wealthy nobleman, is depicted more readily as the recipient of loyalty rather than its provider. In this way Lucanor subtly exerts dominance over his peers, tipping the scales of same-sex friendships in his favor.

While true, self-sacrificial friendships might be rare in the universe of the El Conde Lucanor, disputes between land-holding noblemen are certainly not. For instance, when in Example VI Count Lucanor hears murmurs that several of his neighbors conspire against him, Patronio advises him to take action to protect himself before it is too late. To illustrate his point, Patronio tells the story of the swallow who tried to warn the other birds that they should eat the flax seeds before they germinated and their stalks could be made into nets to catch them. When the others do not heed the warning of the wiser swallow, he sees that the best option for self-preservation is to give himself over to the man and come under his protection as a house pet. Analogously, if Lucanor cannot remove the potential threat before
it becomes overwhelming, then his next best option is to ally himself with a prospective enemy. A wise man, then, might better serve his interests by surrendering some of his autonomy to a benevolent ruler, rather than allying himself with fools; however, to do so he must set aside his class-related vanity.

Similarly, Lucanor speaks to Patronio in Example IX of his neighbor whom he considers to be his enemy, and of a still greater enemy who threatens them both. The two men stand a chance of defeating their common adversary if they can set their differences aside and cooperate. The protagonists of the example then told by Patronio are not far removed from Lucanor himself, being two Castilian knights who live under one roof and serve prince Enrique. Unable to provide for their horses, the knights resolve to sacrifice their steeds to the lion of the King of Tunez. The horses, who once greatly disliked one another, work together to escape the lion’s jaws. When the horses’ greatest concern was sharing a stable, they bickered over limited resources (space, food, etc.); yet, when faced with an exotic and deadly enemy, they learned that it is better to suffer one’s neighbor than to be bullied by a foreigner. The horses, being indigenous animals to Iberia and revered across many cultures, exemplify the sort of alliance that would befit Lucanor and his neighbor as they face a more exotic adversary of north African origin.

Oddly enough, Patronio offers somewhat contradictory advice in Example XXXIX about the swallows and sparrows, suggesting that one should deal with the closer and weaker enemy first. The reader then realizes that Example IX could have ended with one horse pushing the other towards the lion, temporarily saving himself and sating the beast’s hunger, rather than with the formation of an alliance. Thus El Conde Lucanor offers more than one strategy that a nobleman may employ to protect his interests or confront an enemy,
leaving it to the reader to discern which tactic is right for each situation. A successful man will demonstrate flexibility and a willingness to revise previous assumptions in order to choose the best course of action.\footnote{The correlation between political flexibility and aristocratic masculinity is discussed further in Chapter Four.}

Even though a nobleman’s alliances may shift to suit his present needs, the religious and patriotic components of his masculinity must not waver. Example III begins with a contemplative Count Lucanor advanced in age and thinking back on the wars he has seen and taken part in, fearing for the eternal fate of his soul (91). He asks Patronio for ways to remain in God’s good graces that befit his station ("segund el estado que yo tengo"); 91). Patronio proceeds to tell the story of a hermit who is initially disappointed to learn that his eternal companion in heaven will be King Richalte (Richard the Lion Heart) of England. The hermit has dedicated his entire solitary, unsullied life to God, while the king has lived among the people and likely sinned. However, the king’s bravery in battle against the Moors in the Crusades inspired not only his own soldiers but also the other Christian kings present that day, making King Richalte the hermit’s equal in holy service. Because of his status and his birth place, God has positioned Count Lucanor to serve the Christian cause by fighting the Moors in Iberia: “pues Dios vos pobló en tierra quel podades servir contra los moros, tan bien por mar como por tierra, fazet vuestro poder porque seades seguro de lo que dexades en vuestra tierra” ("since God put you in a land where you can serve against the Moors, by sea and by land, do what you can so that you can be sure of what you leave behind in your land”; 95). Rather than retire in contemplation and prayer, the count should continue his good works as a “cavallero de Dios” (“knight of God”; 96). The line of comparison between King Richalte, Count Lucanor and Juan Manuel’s aristocratic
contemporaries is unmistakable. The author extols the virtues of serving God by soldiering in a crusade against non-Christians, while the Reconquest rages in his homeland. The inclusion of names, toponyms, and specific battles lends verisimilitude to the examples of *El Conde Lucanor* and stirs the patriotism of the Iberian reader.

Example XV also discusses behavior befitting a gentleman vis-à-vis his actions in battle against the religious Other. When Count Lucanor finds himself in a temporary peace with one of his enemies, a powerful king, he cannot stop worrying when the next blow may come and if he should take action. Patronio tells his lord the story of don Lorenço Suárez, again plucking an example from his lord’s own regional history. Of the three best Christian knights to participate in the siege of Seville, Patronio only recalls two names—Lorenço Suárez Gallinato and García Pérez de Vargas—while the name of the third knight escapes him (133). Whereas his colleagues charge the enemy army precipitously because they cannot endure the tension and fear induced by the standoff, Lorenço receives the king’s highest praise, and Patronio’s, for waiting until the enemy strikes first. Not coincidentally, the name of the first knight to move against his enemy (i.e., the most cowardly among them) has not endured in Patronio’s memory.

A holy war against the Moors provides an opportunity for a gentleman to distinguish himself. Those soldiers who bravely endure and are not overcome with fear are the ones remembered by name. It is seen as unholy to be the aggressor or instigator, and to suffer fear is nobler than to act precipitously. The second line of the example’s moral couplet—“*ca siempre vence quien sabe sufrir*” (“because he who knows how to suffer always wins”)—links patience not only to dignity but also to success (137). Juan Manuel proposes a model of warrior masculinity predicated on patience and self-control, rather than belligerent or
haphazard aggression. In the universe of *El Conde Lucanor*, neither fate nor divine providence can be blamed for a man’s lot in life; the responsibility for his success or failure rests squarely on his own shoulders (Diz 81).

No longer a young man, and seeing all that he has already accomplished, Count Lucanor admits to his advisor at the start of Example XVI that he would like to dedicate his remaining days to sport and relaxation. Patronio answers with the tale of what the famed Fernán González said to his relative Muñó Laínez when the latter suggested that González had accomplished enough and that he should spend the rest of his days enjoying himself. González tells his companion that, were he to “dexar de defender la tierra” (“cease to defend the land”) and instead spend his time in leisure activities, his name would die with his body (139). However, if González continues to strive for justice and for fame, his name will live on after his death. Juan Manuel evokes the name of Fernán González once more in Example XXXVII in order to spur the count to continue fighting even though a previous battle has left him exhausted, as it is a lord’s duty at every turn to secure his own position and that of his vassals. Count Lucanor, and the medieval Iberian aristocracy in general, aspires to be as revered as González, a great hero of the Reconquest. If idleness (*folgura*) will bring obscurity and is considered unsuitable behavior for a legendary figure, the noble male reader should likewise reject indolence in favor of the *vita activa*. Juan Manuel filters this and other normative masculine ideals through one or more narrative voices (in this case, those of Patronio and Fernán González) for added emphasis and authority.

As an intriguing contrast to the example of King Richard, Example XL tells of a seneschal whose soul is condemned to Hell, despite the fact that he ordered charitable
dispositions to be made after his death. Aside from Patronio’s explanation that the
seneschal’s intentions were not noble, he also points out that the man had not given to
charity during his lifetime. Had he served as a visible example of piety, as King Richalte did,
the seneschal might have received the gift of salvation. Example XL reveals the crucial
performative aspect of piety, as well as the merits of public generosity.

Where financial responsibility is concerned, Juan Manuel shows himself to be
conservative by steering readers toward tried and true methods of fortune seeking. When a
stranger approaches Count Lucanor with a scheme to earn ten times whatever money he
invests, Patronio demonstrates in Example XX that trusting in money schemes is as foolish
as a king who believes the promises of an unknown, self-proclaimed alchemist. In the
example, a common swindler manages to hoodwink a king who is blinded by his own
hunger for a quick buck. A nobleman should earn and expand his fortune not with tricks but
rather via traditional methods and by exercising patience. Patronio’s condemnation of
laziness and over-eagerness extends beyond the military realm into the economic, once
again implying an essential association between masculinity and vigor.

Example V arises from Lucanor’s doubts when a man approaches the count with a
possible business venture. Before going into the details of the deal, the man offers copious
flattery: “avía en mí muchos cumplimientos de onrra e de poder e de muchas vondades”
(“he gave me many compliments of honor and of power and of many good qualities”; 100).
The savvy businessman names exactly those qualities most praised by the noble class, thus
feeding Count Lucanor’s ego. Patronio constructs a cautionary tale from the story of a fox
who flattered a crow’s singing voice, inducing the crow to drop the piece of cheese he had
been carrying in his beak. As the crow is considered to be a clever creature, the example
suggests that vanity, rather than stupidity, may trip up an ego-driven creature. Neither is the
crow unworthy of praise; however, the excessiveness of the fox’s flattery should have
aroused the crow’s suspicions. Patronio urges Lucanor to know himself, to be a fair judge of
his own merits, so that when another man credits him with “mayor poder e mayor onra o
más vondades de quanto vos sabedes que es la verdat” (“more power and more honor and
more good qualities than you know to be true”), Lucanor may know that this man means to
deceive him (103). Just as the crow lost his meal, so too might Lucanor be parted from his
fortune if he allows vanity—a form of moral weakness related to the fall from grace in
Christian discourse—to cloud his judgment.

The collection contains a number of examples dealing with food. While having
equal to eat is not a concern for Castilian aristocrats, in exemplary literature food comes to
metaphorically represent money, power, energy and other limited resources coveted by the
reader, as primal and as necessary to a nobleman as his daily bread. Example XXIII, for
instance, likens the noble reader to some of the planet’s tiniest creatures, ants, in their
obligation to continuously provide for their future survival. Even though the count is
advanced in age and has amassed a great deal of wealth, Patronio urges Lucanor to avoid
complacency in the maintenance of his estate, just as the hardworking ant finds sustenance
and maintains his home throughout the year. Count Lucanor must continue to invest in his
future standing and good name as befits a nobleman: “non es buena razón para ningún
omne, e mayormente para los que an de mantener grand estado e governar a muchos, en
querer siempre comer de lo ganado” (“it is not wise for any man, and especially for those
who need to maintain a great estate and govern many people, to always eat from what has
Diz reads the seeds in Example XX as a representation of the vassals who both nourish and threaten the existence of the aristocracy (119-20).

In Example XII, Patronio goes so far as to position the count as a potential meal when the nobleman seeks advice regarding the management of his many land holdings. As his lands are geographically scattered and not all well protected, many men advise Lucanor to concentrate his efforts on his safest and closest lands. In response, Patronio tells the story of a fox who outsmarted a fearful chicken. The chicken initially escapes the fox’s grasp by climbing a tree, but when the fox begins to shake and bite the tree—neither of which truly threatens the tree’s integrity—the chicken flees its position and is captured. Unlike other fables protagonized by animals, in this case Juan Manuel includes no dialogue between the beast and the bird; rather, he allows the action to speak for itself. Lest he be compared to a lowly chicken, a dim-witted bird best known for providing sustenance, Lucanor must be logical and avoid decision-making based in fear or other emotions.

Before telling the story, Patronio begins by cautioning his lord that not all advice is worth following. Patronio even wishes that he could excuse himself from answering the count’s query, given the delicacy of the situation: “este consejo, en que ay muchas dubdas e muchos periglos, plazerme ia de corazon si pudiese escusar de non lo dar” (“this advice, in which there are many doubts and dangers, it would please my heart if I could excuse myself from giving it”; 124). More than a show of modesty, Patronio’s paradoxical preamble indicates the weighty nature of the matter at hand. Being a prominent aristocrat, not unlike the author himself, Count Lucanor has the privilege and burden of protecting his many

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81 Although some medieval women did participate in the financial management of a household or estate, as land titles were generally held by men and passed on to other men, these examples speak to matters principally concerning men. For more on women’s engagement in late medieval economic practices, see *Women and Wealth in Late Medieval Europe* (2010).
lands. A man in his position must be brave: “E vos, señor conde Lucanor, a menester que, pues tan grandes fechos avedes a pasar e vos avedes de partir a ello, que nunca tomedes miedo sin razón . . . e puñad siempre en defender e en amparar los lugares más postrimeros de la vuestra tierra” (“And you, Count Lucanor, since you will accomplish many great deeds and you must face them, you must never be afraid without reason . . . and always endeavor to defend and to support the furthest places of your land”; 125).

A call to territorial defense has clear implications for Christian landholders during the ongoing War of Reconquest in Iberia. The examples of the ant and of the chicken are not only linked by a common didactic theme—the management of one’s estate—but also by a common danger for Lucanor should he ignore Patronio’s advice, as both examples threaten the masculinity of the nobleman. As is the case for the lion in Calila e Digna, others interpret irrational fear as weakness. A member of the landed gentry who cannot do what is necessary to maintain his holdings is emasculated, dehumanized, and lowered to the rank of an ant or a chicken.

Regarding the accumulation of liquid assets, it is, Patronio explains, a lord’s duty to accumulate enough wealth to provide for his vassals and maintain his station: “como quier que a los grandes señores vos cumple de aver algún tesoro para muchas cosas e señaladamente porque non dexedes, por mengua de aver, de fazer lo que vos cumplier” (“like any great man it befits you to have treasure for many things and particularly so that you do not cease, for lack of means, to do what you must”; 130). By the same token, an overzealous pursuit of riches could lead to negligence of one’s estate or one’s people. Wealth, though a necessary accessory to noble life, should not be a nobleman’s primary

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82 For more on the relationship between medieval household management and political power, see The Medieval Household in Christian Europe, c. 850-1550, pp. 11-128.
focus. In other words, Patronio encourages Lucanor to strive for balance.83

Two of the collection’s examples distill the characterization of exemplary masculinity by depicting a paternal figure who must select, from among a pool of candidates, the young man who will occupy the coveted position as head of household. Example XXIV describes how Lucanor, and the medieval reader, may judge the character of a young man just as the Muslim king who wishes to test his three sons in order to determine which will rule upon his death. The older sons allow servants to do the bidding of the king—dressing him and preparing his horse—while simply supervising. The youngest son, on the other hand, shows tremendous initiative by dressing the king himself and preparing the horse perfectly, as well as respect for his betters by kneeling at his father’s feet upon entering his bedchamber “con la reverencia que devía” (“with the reverence that was owed”; 168). Furthermore, when the king sends him out to observe the kingdom and its people, the son makes astute, critical observations. The youngest son balances submission to his lord with an independence of thought that marks him as the most qualified candidate to succeed his father. In his willingness to speak up when his brothers fell silent, “[t]he younger son unknowingly proves that he possesses the proper adequation of words and deeds, one of the classic attributes of a hero” (De Looze, Manuscript 165). Yet again, the effective deployment of verbal communication enhances the influence of the hegemonic male. The indications of greatness described in Example XXIV apply to a man at any age. Whether young or old, we may know a man by his actions, a reflection of his inner qualities (“las señales de dentro”), rather than external elements such as handsomeness, bodily proportions, or even signs of general health (166). The masculine qualities praised in

83 The financial equilibrium lauded here by Patronio, as well as his call to patience in Example XV, is not entirely unlike the mesura of the epic hero discussed in Chapter One.
Example XXIV—discernment, respect, and personal initiative—are to Patronio’s mind common across cultural boundaries, as he finds the tale of a Muslim king relevant to the query of a Christian Spanish aristocrat.

Significantly placed at the halfway point of the collection, Example XXV tells the story of how the Sultan of Babylonia, Saladin, advised his captive, the Count of Provence, regarding the choosing of a son-in-law. When the count goes off to the Crusades with his men, as any man in his position should, he is taken prisoner by the sultan. Happily, the sultan recognizes his captive’s good qualities and high social standing, such that he treats the count more like a trusted councilor than a prisoner. After many years in captivity, the count’s daughter comes of age and must be married. When the count must choose a suitor based on descriptions given in letters from his wife, the sultan’s advice could not be simpler: “el mio consejo es éste: que casedes vuestra fija con omne” (“my advice to you is this: that you marry your daughter to a man”; 173). The count seeks no further clarification, but rather jumps to implement the sultan’s advice, thus implying that he and the sultan share the same notion of essential manhood. The ideal of masculinity they share is exemplified in the selected son-in-law who combines moral goodness with a deep sense of loyalty. The count instructs the countess to write to him of their behaviors and character, rather than their wealth or position; subsequently, he finds fault with all of the eligible bachelors save one who has not a single “mala tacha” (“bad stain”) in his character (174). Indeed, the count has judged wisely, for the chosen son-in-law immediately sets out to free him from captivity. He travels to Saladin’s home, earns his trust and comes to stay in his household, all the while carefully avoiding any form of reverence or service, in a show of extreme loyalty to his father-in-law. Eventually the son-in-law overpowers Saladin while hunting, revealing his
true identity and intentions. Saladin rejoices at his own good judgment; both the sultan and
the count praise “el entendimiento e el esfuerço e la lealtad del yerno” (“the understanding
and the strength and the loyalty of the son-in-law”; 177). Patronio praises Saladin alongside
the son-in-law for his ability to give good advice and to recognize greatness in other men.
Saladín, the Count of Provence, and son-in-law apparently share the conviction that true or
essential masculinity is rooted in loyalty to one’s clan.

Scholars read Example XXI as mise en abîme of the entire work due in part to its
resonance with Juan Manuel’s prologue. Count Lucanor is charged with raising the child of
a deceased relative, whom he comes to love as he would his own son; as such, he worries as
a father would that the child’s youth will betray him “porque la moçedat engañan muchas
vezes a los moços e non les deixa fazer todo lo que les cumpliría más” (“because youth often
deceives young men and does not allow them to do what would best serve them”; 154).
Patronio tells his lord the story of a young king who, upon reaching the age of fifteen, ceases
to heed the sound advice of his personal philosopher. The philosopher must trick the young
king into accepting his council by pretending to understand a conversation between two
crows who lament the sad state of affairs within the kingdom due to the king’s negligence.
The success of the philosopher’s scheme supports Patronio’s claim that it is better to tell
stories and speak pleasantly, rather than to chastise, when dealing with young (or
headstrong) men: “non a tan buen amigo en el mundo commo el que castiga el moço porque
non faga su daño, mas ellos non lo toman assi, sinon por la peor manera” (“there is no
better friend in the world than he who castigates a young man so that he does not bring
himself harm, but they do not take it that way, but rather in the worst way”; 157).

The example suggests that highborn men often respond negatively to direct criticism,
even when provided with the best intentions, due to arrogance. A prideful response to criticism reveals an emotional sensitivity on the part of the male figure that may impede the acquisition of knowledge. The question of age is secondary to the argument for adjusting one’s manner of presentation to indulge the male reader’s fragile ego. Men of all ages are naturally simple-minded and learn best through pleasing words, as suggested in Juan Manuel’s prologue. Example XXI likens the foolish young king not only to Lucanor’s adopted son but also to Lucanor himself, and it condones dishonesty on the part of the well-intentioned councilor, inviting the reader to question the reliability of Patronio’s guidance.\(^8^4\) The question then becomes: Has Juan Manuel successfully communicated a useful didactic message to his reading public—his peers—without triggering a prideful rejection of the text for its condescension?

Despite his standing as one of Castile’s literary giants, don Juan Manuel’s life was nonetheless “\textit{una constante lucha}” (“a constant struggle”) that left little time for writing (Sotelo 22). As the grandson of King Fernando III, cousin of King Sancho IV, and uncle of King Fernando IV, Juan Manuel was inextricably linked with the royal family of Castile and its politics. After his adolescent education in the heart of Christian-dominated territory, Juan Manuel goes to live in Murcia, a city only recent reconquered by Christians, where he comes into contact with Islamic culture and philosophical teachings. Eventually Juan Manuel quarrels with King Alfonso XI who had reneged on his promise to marry the nobleman’s daughter in 1327.\(^8^5\) Finished in 1335, \textit{El Conde Lucanor} was written at the height of Juan

\(^8^4\) For more on the recursive significance of Example XXI as \textit{mise en abîme}, see Palafox (74-78) and De Looze, \textit{Manuscript} (148-58).

\(^8^5\) The nobleman declares war on his king and, “following the script, seeks an alliance with the King of Granada . . . But the letters seeking the treacherous alliance fall into the hands of spies and are brought to Alfonso who (no doubt having heard the story of the Cid) decided it was best to patch things up with Don Juan Manuel” (Menocal 477).
Manuel’s conflict with Alfonso XI. The anonymous, communal nature of the exemplary discourse allows Juan Manuel to offer veiled criticism of his most powerful enemies (Palafox 64), and present an autobiographical justification to his peers and to future generations (Biglieri 186).  

Scholars characterize the first half of the fourteenth century as one of the most confusing periods in the history of Castile, setting “un panorama sombrío y confuso” (“a somber and confusing panorama”) as the backdrop for Juan Manuel’s works (Diz 75).  

*El Conde Lucanor* emerges during a period of extraordinary political and social unrest in which Castilla experienced the erosion of its social institutions, increased urbanization, the emergence of the middle class, and a growing dependency on a monied economy, all of which had a profound impact on the aristocracy’s role in society, especially during the second decade of the fourteenth century. In response to this crisis, many scholars argue that Juan Manuel’s tales evoke the tradition and authority of estate ideology in order to promote social stability, and the identity of the aristocracy within that society during a time of social and political destabilization. (Burgoyne 50)  

The troubled times (“el tiempo turbio”) of the fourteenth century dominate the world view of Juan Manuel, making caution and wisdom the orders of the day (Diz 169). The noble author feels the call to edify those around him, which inspires his fundamentally didactic

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86 Pedro Henríquez Ureña describes don Juan Manuel as a man not always on the side of justice, yet entirely representative of his historical moment: “Es hombre del siglo XIV: personifica el momento de transformación de Europa, en que la sociedad caballeresca de la Edad Media principia a convertirse en la sociedad burguesa de los tiempos modernos” (He is a 14th-century man: he personifies the moment of European transformation, in which the chivalric society of the Middle Ages begins to be converted into the bourgeois society of modern times”; 7).  
87 For more on the social and political issues that plagued 14th-century Castile, see Valdeón Baruque (181).
authorial vocation (Armijo 223).\textsuperscript{88} The tension and uncertainty of his lifetime drive Juan Manuel to clarify the boundaries not only of his social class, but also of masculinity, such that his examples are infused with gender normative prescriptions for male readers.

*El Conde Lucanor*, by virtue of its narrative frame and inserted examples, “comprises a useful manual of conduct, the sort of book that could easily accompany an aristocrat and serve as a point of reference to guide his conduct” (De Looze, *Manuscript* 97). The five extant medieval manuscripts of *El Conde Lucanor*, as well as the print edition from 1575, indicate its considerable popularity and circulation. With the publication of a second print edition of *El Conde Lucanor* in Madrid in 1642, Juan Manuel’s norms for aristocratic masculinity exercised a continued influence on Iberian readers and intellectuals for centuries after its completion (Burgoyne 10).

**Conclusion**

Beyond its entertainment or educational value, the *exemplum* is more broadly a discursive strategy used to defend a particular set of beliefs (Dunn 53; Palafox 18). *Exempla* draw their authority from the literary and moral traditions to which they belong, and they acquire an almost magical power due to popular medieval belief in their “*fuerza didáctica*” (“didactic force”; Lacarra, “Estudio” 9). Writers of exemplary texts often exhibit self-awareness in their concern for public reception, as the literary example makes the implicit promise that its content will be beneficial to the reader or listener (Palafox 25). Using exemplary discourse and allegory to construct literary mirrors for male courtiers, both *Calila e Digna* and *El Conde Lucanor* participate in the fashioning of aristocratic masculinity in

\textsuperscript{88} Although his own prologues suggest a very prolific literary career, only half a dozen of Juan Manuel’s literary works other than *El Conde Lucanor* survive today (Lacarra, “Introduction” 16).
medieval Iberia. Each work identifies its target readers by means of a framing narrative and
prescribes a set of normative behaviors and values. The collections also make ample use of
beast fables. The use of animal protagonists renders the didactic content less threatening for
the human reading public, while also drawing on the medieval fascination with bestiaries
and the symbolic meaning assigned to each animal. As a man’s morality is “relative to the
social order in which he lives” (Parker 90), the didactic content of both texts primarily
addresses how the aristocratic male can best safeguard and uphold his privileged position.
*Calila* depicts one of its title characters as primarily a noble purveyor of (bad) advice,
ultimately found to be untrustworthy because he stands to gain from deception. The title
character of *Lucanor*, however, is exclusively as recipient of (good) advice, a nobleman who
may trust his advisor Patronio because of the latter’s humility.

Hegemonic masculinity at the medieval Castilian court is not fashioned in isolation,
but rather is built upon a foundation of homosocial relationships; dishonestly within those
relationships begets a fall from grace as well as one’s emasculation, exaggerated in *Calila e
Digna* as the loss of life itself. Arrogance emerges as another moral pitfall for the aristocratic
male, hazardous for its capacity to blind a man to the truth. Both texts contrast outward signs
with inner qualities (e.g., the enormous but tame bull, the young but wise prince), and both
collections grant more weight to a man’s moral character than to his appearance, age, or
physical strength. *El Conde Lucanor*, an autochthonous Iberian collection, addresses
additional concerns such as wealth management and territorial defense that are uniquely
applicable during a period of economic crisis, social turmoil and holy war. In both cases,
negative examples threaten the masculinity of the noble reader through various forms of
emasculcation.
Whereas R. W. Connell observes a split between practices of dominance and “technical expertise” in the 20th century, the emergence of mirrors of princes and other exemplary texts in medieval Europe indicates that more primitive models of masculine dominance incorporated, even required, the possession of practical knowledge (193-94). Though the figure of the sabio or philosopher is often depicted alongside a prince or courtier as his councilor, highborn men manage to collapse the roles of nobleman and pedagogue as the medieval period progresses. King Alfonso X, known as The Wise, and his nephew don Juan Manuel, reveal the unique capacity of an influential man to be both the recipient and the disseminator of knowledge. As two of the most influential medieval Castilian scholars, Alfonso X and Juan Manuel anticipated an increased relationship between hegemonic masculinity and learning as the bellicose responsibilities of the aristocracy waned.

Both collections embrace foreign sources of wisdom, finding points of commonality and usefulness for medieval Castilian readers. The model of masculinity offered in early chivalric fiction, which is the subject of the next chapter, also makes use of the exotic to construct a meaningful model for the courtly male reader in thirteenth-century Castile.
Many historians of the medieval period correlate the rise of knighthood and chivalry in Iberia with the Christian impetus to reclaim the peninsula from Muslim invaders, suggesting that the chivalric ethic may have been born more intrinsically of the Christian ethos of service and self-sacrifice. On the other hand, knights were “the privileged practitioners of violence in their society” and they “cherished as a defining privilege this right to violence in any matter touching their prickly sense of honour” (Kaeuper 8, 130).

Widespread practices of violence, organized within influential institutions of peace, give birth to medieval knighthood. In medieval Castilian writing on knighthood, both practical and fictive, its relationship to Christian piety is unmistakable and fundamental.

An initial opposition between landed aristocrats and the warriors who defended them was followed by a progressive integration of these categories around the twelfth century as the chivalric ethic grew in general esteem and the potential for fame and wealth afforded by participating in a military campaign became evident (Morsel 138). Although the word “caballero” initially referred to a soldier on horseback, it soon came to signify a set of behaviors and an elevated social status. Nevertheless, the developmental arc between separation and integration of the two categories cannot be so neatly traced. Alfonso X inextricably links knighthood with nobility in the Siete Partidas, while his nephew Juan Manuel opens up the category of “defenders” to include knights who are not and will never

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89 For more theories of knighthood’s inception in Iberia, see the introductory section of Order and Chivalry by Jesús D. Rodríguez-Velasco, and also José María Viña Liste’s Textos medievales de caballerías (18-20). There are those who wholly reject such an explanation, such as Franco Cardini asserts: “No one believes anymore in the theory of a chivalry born ‘naturally’ during the thirteenth century, from the necessity to counteract the rapid incursions of the Arabs in Spain” (87, my translation).
be part of the noble class, but who fight capably on horseback in defense of territorial
borders (Heusch 18-19). Still, in most cases knighthood came to be “the crystallized form of
the recognized function of the aristocracy” (140, my translation). The aristocrat-warriors
both adjudicate and put into practice the chivalric value system (García de Ochoa 20).

The expansion of the chivalric novel in Iberia coincides with the aforementioned rise
in knighthood. The theoretical knowledge of chivalry, acquired from largely anonymous
literary models, is reinforced by an infusion of knights from other Christian lands,
particularly France and England, who travel to Iberia to help in the fight against infidels
(Thomas 26). Knights, both literary and historical, were meant to operate with generosity,
honesty, and piety, to protect the defenseless, and to surrender to a beloved lady so as to
humanize and soften their bellicose activity (Viña Liste 25-26). Chivalry constituted its own
ideological code, a series of behaviors and obligations that absorbed many elements of
Christian doctrine without duplicating or replacing it (Heusch 17).90 Originally brought to
courtly audiences by clerical authors, chivalric romances not only describe knighthood but
also provide a theoretical blueprint for “how knighthood may be used productively”
(Rodríguez-Velasco, Order 7).91

On the whole more prescriptive than descriptive, chivalric romances “advance ideals
for what chivalry should become . . . more often than they mirror an ideal already
transformed into social reality” (Kaeuper 33). Chivalric fiction was, by and large, read
collectively in aristocratic and courtly social circles wherein listeners not only enjoyed the

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90 The Christian ethic put forth in most works of chivalric literature “is explicitly lay and frequently
folkloric” (Cardini 93, my translation).
91 Rodríguez-Velasco continues: “each chivalric text advances a theory on knighthood, on its role in
the social, political, and moral universe—and on the path to salvation. Chivalry is theory, and
that’s why the embedding of a pedagogical fable within the chivalry fable is of absolute essence”
(Order 9).
adventurous tales but also absorbed the model behavior described therein (Ramos 25). Chivalric literature, then, is akin in many respects to exemplary literature, only deploying a more extended narrative structure and targeting a narrower audience.

Though by no means the only chivalric texts to emerge from or circulate throughout medieval Iberia, the *Crónica de Flores y Blancaflor* and the *Libro del Cavallero Zifar* represent two of the earliest chivalric romances and correspond to literary trends that converged in Iberia to form the beginnings of the chivalric (and eventually sentimental) artistic strains: one, an autochthonous creation set in exotic lands and starring a dark-skinned knight who nonetheless embodies Christian ideals; the other, a translation of a story set in Iberia of the fictional grandparents of Charlemagne and the suppliers of Christianity to the realm.92 *Flores* and *Zifar* validate the Iberian contribution to and influence on the larger European chivalric tradition, often overshadowed by translations of foreign chivalric cycles that saturated the Iberian market, particularly after the advent of the printing press. In the pan-European chivalric tradition, full of translations and reworkings, *Flores* and *Zifar* adhere to the most salient and cherished generic tropes while also exhibiting uniquely Iberian qualities.

The Cavallero Zifar strives to recuperate his royal lineage in the face of financial hardship and adverse fortune, journeying over land and sea and accomplishing extraordinary feats in battle. Prince Flores overcomes familial objections and religious difference to be reunited with his childhood sweetheart, the daughter of a Christian captive and heir to the

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92 Some scholars would categorize the story of Flores and Blancaflor as part of a chivalric subgenre, the “brief chivalric narrative,” characterized by its concentration on the deeds of one hero, the inclusion of folkloric and magical elements, as well as moral elements related to the Christian faith, and most importantly a greater degree of linearity and uniformity of action as compared to longer chivalric novels (Baranda and Infantes 9-10). Indeed, the novel’s relative brevity sets it apart from the *Libro del Cavallero Zifar*, but does not hamper its adherence to the same theoretical ideals and themes as more drawn out works and cycles.
Holy Roman Empire. Their union will move the Islamic prince to convert to Christianity and form the (fictional) genealogical foundation of Charlemagne’s family.

The historical context of the two texts, that being the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, shapes the depiction of the chivalric hero so as to reflect the most desirable qualities for the noble male reader. The literary school that coincided with the reign of Sancho IV and the minorities of Fernando IV and Alfonso XI, known as the escuela catedralicia of Toledo, sought to curb what they deemed the purely imaginative tendencies of previous literary production, so as to offer morally or politically practical content. Many of the works to emerge during this period reflect the tremendous nobiliary unrest that plagued the monarchy until the middle of the fourteenth century under King Alfonso XI (Gómez Redondo, Historia 1226). Authors associated with the escuela catedralicia of Toledo often depict ideal behavior for aristocrats, emphasizing obedience and the possibility of social advancement for those who act virtuously.

Flores and Zifar demonstrate ethical integrity and a profound sense of duty to their beloved ladies, to God, and to the landed aristocrat or monarch whom they serve. The careful management of information, along with the complicity of key allies, distinguishes the knight and constitutes part of his psychological and political performance. Each knight forges alliances with peers and monarchs, for without allies he cannot accomplish his task. The hero rewards his allies, particularly with titles and material gifts, such that wealth becomes essential to the hero’s triumph. Each hero moves through space seeking reunion with loved ones after forced separation. A sense of greater purpose, relating to the theme of

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93 For more on literary production of this period and the escuela catedralicia of Toledo, see Orduna, and also Gómez Redondo, Historia 1225-1339.
94 However, both knights must bend or conceal the truth in service of their mission. As truth is considered a chivalric virtue and lying a sin, the ideal knight must find a way to hide the truth without uttering patently false words (Martín Romero 505).
reunion and the larger purpose of the restoration of order, roots his masculinity not to a particular place but rather to space and his movement through it. Displacement is essential to his mission as the proving ground for his honor, while settling down is framed as the reward for success. For Flores and Zifar, the knight’s movement through space in pursuit of reunion with loved ones resembles a pilgrimage and corresponds to an internal spiritual journey in search of his own true identity (González, “Dos modelos” 13). The initial cause for the journey gives way to the larger narrative purpose of masculine independence and self-actualization.

The authors provide scarce physical descriptions of the knights, save references to their strength and to their ethnicity. Flores hails from Muslim-held southern Spain, while Zifar’s ancestors come from India and are explicitly characterized as darker-skinned. The exotic origins of the heroes imbue the narratives with an air of fantasy for a Castilian reading public, while the protagonists’ religious sameness—whether proclaimed throughout the narrative or achieved through conversion—reassures readers of the texts’ appropriateness and relevance.95

Scholars widely accept that the story of Flores and Blancaflor, Charlemagne’s fictional grandparents, originated in a twelfth-century French poem that likely made its way into Iberia towards the end of the thirteenth century (García Melero 7; Correa 10). The list of vernacular variants of the love story of Flores and Blancaflor includes at least two medieval French versions, an interpolated version contained within a copy of the Estoria de España, a

95 Amelia García-Valdecasas finds that sympathetic treatment of Islamic characters figures prominently in many medieval literary texts, particularly as the kings of Granada posed less of an actual threat and began to form alliances with Christian monarchs (116). Though her observation might hold true in the Libro del Cavallero Zifar, in both the earlier Crónica de Flores y Blancaflor and the later Historia men from Al-Andalus are cast in a negative light, and Muslim women are rarely even granted names.
summary in the *Gran conquista de Ultramar*, Giovanni Boccaccio’s *Filocolo* (1335), and the Spanish romance *Historia de los dos enamorados Flores y Blancaflor* printed in 1512. The account appearing within the *Estoria de España*, referred to as the *Crónica de Flores y Blancaflor* as opposed to the later *Historia*, was uncovered by José Gómez Pérez in the Madrid National Library in 1963 (Grieve, “Flores” 77). Thanks to Gómez Pérez’s discovery, contemporary scholars have access to the version of the story that was most likely known and in circulation in Iberia during the medieval period.96

The manuscript copy of the *Estoria* containing the *Crónica* dates from the reign of King Sancho IV (r. 1284-1295) (Arbesú 25). The thirteenth-century *Crónica* “situates the love story within a believable—indeed, historical—context” relating to the immediate socio-political reality of religious conflicts on the Iberian Peninsula (Grieve, *Floire* 132). References to a uniquely Iberian reality—the pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela, and the practice of Christian submission to Islamic rulers for several centuries—links the tale to the reality, contemporary or recently past, of medieval readers of the Castilian vernacular, and enhances the story’s utility as an example of the redemptive and miraculous power of the Christian faith. By interpolating the love story of Flores and Blancaflor among chapters of the *Estoria de España* that address the Muslim conquest of the Iberian Peninsula, the historical and fictional plot lines blend together and move toward a single goal: “the Christianization of Spain” (Arbesú 30). Due to its limited circulation and dense content, the

96 Patricia Grieve recounts: “Critics suspected that there must have been a Spanish version of the love story earlier than the sixteenth century, but no one could prove it until the late 1950s, when José Gómez Pérez discovered a manuscript in Madrid’s Biblioteca Nacional” that revealed a version of the legend of Flores and Blancaflor within the chapters of the *Primera Crónica General* that address the Islamic Kings of southern Spain (*Floire* 22). According to Gómez Pérez, “the incorporation of the love story, Flores y Blancaflor, into the chapters of the *PCG* probably occurred in the late thirteenth or early fourteenth century, when the practice of incorporating epic material into historiography was prevalent,” though the story likely circulated a century or two earlier (28).
Crónica also attracts a more privileged audience who may form social, political, and moral judgments of the work (Gómez Redondo, Historia 1589).⁹⁷

Most contemporary anthologies of medieval chivalric prose reproduce the sixteenth-century Historia, despite its date of publication, which implies negligible alterations to the story between the thirteenth and sixteenth century versions. While the plot does remain mostly intact, numerous details, from national toponyms to the introduction or omission of entire scenes, make the later Historia remarkably distinct from the thirteenth-century Crónica.⁹⁸ Of particular importance to the present analysis are Flores’s relationships with two monarchic figures: his own father, and the king who holds his beloved captive. As opposed to the more open rebellion depicted in the Historia, Flores favors loyalty and deference to the two kings in the Crónica, a more fitting depiction of an ideal nobleman during a time when the Castilian monarchy sought to quell the political turbulence of the aristocracy.

Most scholars refer to the Libro del Cavallero Zifar, of which two medieval manuscript copies survive, as Castile’s first fully realized autochthonous chivalric novel from Iberia. Zifar is widely thought to have been written at the turn of the fourteenth century due to the mention of a particular event—the movement of a cardinal’s body from Rome to Toledo—that took place in the year 1300. Chronologically, then, the Libro del Cavallero Zifar would have been composed only a few decades after the Crónica de Flores y Blancaflor, situated halfway between the prose of Alfonso X and that of Don Juan Manuel.

Many scholars credit Ferrán Martínez, archdeacon of Madrid at the turn of the fourteenth century, as the author of Zifar. This attribution is based on the cage-like headgear worn by the main character, which is depicted on the cover of the manuscript copy of Zifar. Furthermore, the hero’s eventual conversion to Christianity and ascension to the throne in Rome alludes to the ambition of King Alfonso X to become Holy Roman Emperor (Grieve, “Flores” 80).

⁹⁷ Furthermore, the hero’s eventual conversion to Christianity and ascension to the throne in Rome alludes to the ambition of King Alfonso X to become Holy Roman Emperor (Grieve, “Flores” 80).
⁹⁸ Many versions refer to Flores and his father as Kings of Spain, despite the incongruence of said designation with historical reality of the Iberian Peninsula’s many separate kingdoms during most of the medieval period.
century, with either the composition or the redaction of Zifar. He had a more than sufficient education and access to an extensive library thanks to his association with the royal family and the escuela catedralicia of Toledo. Zifar embodies the implicit promise of the socio-political contract between knights and their sovereign lords, whereby a member of the lower nobility might rise through the ranks by providing loyal service. The Libro de Cavallero Zifar has been characterized as uniquely demonstrative of the literary production in the court of Sancho IV for its conceptualization of religious chivalry and its depiction of unique solutions to the tensions that arise between the aristocracy and the monarchy (Gómez Redondo, Historia 1375).

At the outset, the narrator expounds on the story’s ascendance, purpose, and reception: “E porque este libro nunca aparesció escrito en este lenguaje fasta agora, nin lo vieron los omes nin lo oyeron, cuydaron algunos que non fueran verdaderas las cosas que se y contienen, nin ay provecho en ellas” (“Because this book never appeared written in this language until now, men neither saw nor heard it, [and so] some believed that the things contained within it were not true, nor that they were of value”; 74). The reference to a previous version of a text, or the ecdotic motif, supports the content presented by the current narrator by giving the narrative an air of realism and historicity (García Rojas 119). The allusion also appeals to the medieval reader’s desire to glean useful and applicable wisdom, as opposed to pure entertainment, from a text (Tarzibachi 25). Though readers may doubt the veracity, and thus the utility, of the story, the narrator urges them to look for “el fruto ascondido dentro” (“the fruit hidden within”) that being the elements of the story that might prove beneficial to the reader (74). Here the composer evokes the common medieval trope

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99 For more on the debate regarding the authorship of Zifar, see Gómez Redondo, Historia 1357-59, and also Walker 15-19.
of linking the text’s usefulness to the reader’s intention: “el que bien se quiere leer e catar e entender lo que se contiene en este libro, sacara ende buenos castigos e buenos enxiemplos” (“he who truly wishes to read and see and understand what is contained in this book, will take from it good advice and good examples”; 74). The concern with the text’s didactic utility responds to the author’s intention to both entertain and enlighten his reading public.

The Flower Knight: Crónica de Flores y Blancaflor

Prince Flores, heir to the throne in Muslim-held Andalusia, falls in love with the daughter of Christian pilgrims and becomes a pilgrim himself to retrieve her, finding his own salvation in the process. The love of Flores for Blancaflor begins at the moment of their birth and drives the protagonist’s actions through the entirety of the narrative. Chivalric love, as depicted in tales such as the Crónica de Flores y Blancaflor, is pure insofar as the lovers are faithful to one another, but it is not without a significant erotic component. The chivalric conceptualization of love differs significantly from courtly love by combining the idealization of the beloved with the possibility of consummation without loss of interest (Correa 81). Flores displays excellence in battle as well as in intellectual pursuits such as chess; however, when parental interferences separate Flores from his beloved Blancaflor, the hero realizes that he cannot achieve his goal alone, particularly in a foreign place. Rather, Flores’s success depends on others, particularly their willingness to lie on his behalf. He deploys wealth to secure the friendship or cooperation of these key figures. It is divine grace, nevertheless, that proves most instrumental in the reunion and deliverance of the prince and his beloved, which eventually leads Flores to convert to Christianity. Flores metonymically represents part of a larger plan for the Christian redemption of the Iberian
Peninsula.

Unlike the later Historia, which begins from the perspective of Christian characters, the Crónica de Flores y Blancaflor begins with the story of the hero’s Muslim parents. This narrative framing makes sense, given the interpolation of the Crónica within the historiographical account of the Muslim kings on the Iberian Peninsula. A political dispute between the Christian rulers of Galicia and Portugal and King Fines, an Islamic king on the Iberian Peninsula, results in the capture of a pregnant French woman, the widowed Countess Berta, on her way to Santiago de Compostela. King Fines’s men kill Berta’s father and most of his company, but they decide to make a gift of Berta to their king because of her beauty and nobility. Although most of the characters are the product of literary invention, the situation described in the novel—the system of parias or tribute paid by Christians to Muslim rulers, the pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela, and the taking of prisoners—is historically sound and relatable to the thirteenth-century reader.

Berta travels to Fines’s court in Almería to live as a captive servant of the queen. After some time, the two women grow to love and respect one another, particularly as they realize that they are both pregnant. Born on the same day—Palm Sunday, according to most

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100 The Historia begins from the perspective of Blancaflor’s parents. Micer Persio, a wealthy nobleman from Rome, falls in love with Topacia, the beautiful and graceful niece of the Duke of Milan (15). During the first four years of her marriage to Micer Persio, Topacia is unable to conceive a child. Micer Persio decides that, should they be blessed with a child, they will pay tribute to God by making a pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela. Indeed, not long thereafter the couple conceives a child and, as promised, sets off toward northwest Iberia without the aid of any servants. The couple finds the journey arduous since “eran personas delicadas” (“they were delicate people”; 26). The narrator interjects “ya podeis ver lo que sentirian” (“you all can see how they would feel”), not only evoking the mental picture of the two walking for days on end in the extreme heat, but also suggesting that the readers are themselves delicate persons of means (26).

101 The narrator clarifies that the Islamic Queen and her French captive came to understand each other by learning the other’s language (52). Small details such as their anticipated communicative barrier “attest to the quest for veracity, for historicity, for realistic truth instead of a simple moral truth through an exemplary story” (Grieve, Floire 8).
versions—the queen’s son and Berta’s daughter are instantly bonded by circumstance and by the mutual affection of their mothers. The Countess serves as wet nurse to both children, raising them as brother and sister until they reach ten years of age. The ingestion of Christian breast milk prefigures Flores’s conversion to Christianity further on in the story (53).

The young Prince Flores begins to study with a wise man called Gaydon (57). Eventually the king and queen allow Blancaflor to study with them as well, for without her company the prince “non podia aprender ninguna cosa” (“could not learn a thing”; 57). In this case, separation is detrimental to the hero’s noble education. 102 Until their eighteenth birthdays the two study side-by-side, exchanging amorous poetry in Latin and loving one another “naturalmente como omne a muger” (“naturally as husband and wife”; 57). The lovers achieve sexual union early and without suspense, so it will not fuel the hero’s quest (unlike the sixteenth-century version). Fearing that his relationship with Blancaflor might ruin Flores’s chances for a suitable marriage, the king and queen conspire to separate the lovers. They convince Flores to travel to the home of Duke Joyas and Lady Sevilla, his aunt, and to leave Blancaflor behind for a time. Flores’s arrival in Montor is celebrated with parties and other would-be pleasant distractions, though none of these cheers the prince’s spirits: “Flores non auie sabor de si . . . todo el dia non fazia al synon llorar y cuidar” (“Flores was not himself . . . all day he did nothing but cry and worry”; 59). After twenty

102 If, as the heir to his kingdom, Flores’s education in matters of law and governance is indispensable, and Flores cannot learn while separated from Blancaflor, Blancaflor becomes indispensable to the kingdom. On this point the medieval version varies substantially from the sixteenth-century Historia, in which the young prince loves his Christian counterpart to distraction, such that the tutor finds it impossible to teach him anything. According to the king in the Historia, Blancaflor’s presence threatens to “destruir nuestra Ley . . . [y] destruir nuestro Estado” (“destroy our Law . . . [and] our State”; 33). In spite of their separation, the prince remains completely “vencido” (“defeated”) by his love for Blancaflor (35).
days pass and Blancaflor has yet to come to Montor, Flores proceeds to faint and regain consciousness several times over, repeatedly referencing his own desire to perish if he cannot be reunited with his beloved. A lack of enjoyment of leisure activities and swooning are common symptoms of lovesickness, while separation from the object of one’s desire and distraction are meant to be its cure. The irrepressible nature of Flores’s lovesickness moves the action of the story. As his altered state persists, Flores nonetheless lucidly fears for Blancaflor’s safety and he suspects his mother’s hand in their separation (63). The hero’s attendant Gandifer writes to the king and queen of their son’s precarious health. In response, the king’s plan to kill Blancaflor (and subsequently Flores’s love for her) is amended by his more calculating queen who suggests they sell her to foreign merchants, thus removing her from their court without the moral stain of murder (64).

The king of Babylon hears tell of the lovely Blancaflor and purchases her for his harem. After Blancaflor’s departure and before Flores’s return from Montor, the king commissions the artists of the court to fashion a monument Blancaflor that reads “Aqui yaze Blancaflor, que murio enamorada de su señor Flores” (“Here lies Blancaflor, who died in...”)

103 The Historia adds a crucial intermediate step in the king’s plan to do away with Blancaflor. With the help of the King’s seneschal, Blancaflor is framed for an attempt on the King’s life. He imprisons the girl and sentences her to be burned to death. Before their separation, Blancaflor had given Flores a magical ring whose stone will lose its color if she finds herself “en alguna tribulación” (“in some sort of tribulation”; 36). When the King places Blancaflor under arrest, the ring makes Flores aware that something has gone horribly wrong for her. Flores makes haste for his father’s kingdom and, without identifying himself, he vows to defend Blancaflor “con la ayuda de Dios” (“with the help of God”; 42). Flores exploits the legal option available to him—a bellicose challenge—to save his beloved. He challenges the seneschal who had falsely accused Blancaflor of treason to a duel. The knights of the king’s court believe that the unidentified knight is within his rights, and also characterize the suit brought against the girl as “falsa y mentirosa” (“false and deceitful”; 43). The unpopular, obliquely criticized actions of the father will be set right by the son. Though Flores and the seneschal appear to be well matched, Flores defeats the king’s man due to his youth and strength. During the match the opponent begs for mercy, asks to take a break to rest, and eventually is removed from the field by his godfather (45). Flores neither yields nor shows signs of fatigue. In his first episode of daring do, the hero’s chivalric prowess is both functional in the progression of the plot and indicative of his nobility.
love with her lord Flores”), such that Flores will believe her to be dead rather than missing (67). The prospect of her death causes Flores to faint once more and to wish for his own death. The hero cries out in lamentation: “¡Señora! ¿A quien dire mis poridades o que fare de vos, la cosa que en el mundo mas amaua a mas deseaua ver?” (“My lady! With whom will I share my secrets and what will I do about you, the thing in this world that I most loved and most wanted to see?”; 69). The hero mourns the loss of the object of desire, as well as the loss of a trusted confidant. (The beloved lady as trusted councilor is also a feature of Zifar.) In order to prevent their son’s suicide, the king and queen resolve to tell Flores the truth about having sold Blancaflor. When Flores asks leave of his parents in order to rescue the lady, the king addresses the difficulties associated with locating Blancaflor given the nature of those he will encounter away from home: “E los reyes e los grandes señores que somos por consejo fazemos mal a veces, e mas seyendo tu de la hedat que eres, e ençima andar por tierras agenas” (“Kings and great lords who seek advice do the wrong thing sometimes, and especially at your age, and moreover while in strange lands”; 72). King Fines suggests that even the noblest knight, who is otherwise quite capable and self-reliant, depends upon the help of locals in order to navigate the foreign space. The careful selection of allies, and their absolute necessity to the hero, is a theme that runs throughout both novels. In reply, Flores resolves to take his tutor Gaydon and his attendant Gandifer with him.

Seeing his son’s resolve, King Fines provides many knights, ships, and riches to facilitate his journey. The queen, in turn, gives her son a magical ring that will protect him from any unnatural death. The ring also promises to ingratiate the wearer to every man he

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104 The sixteenth-century Flores condemns and rejects his parents for their cruelty towards Blancaflor more vehemently than the thirteenth-century hero. Rather than exhibiting moral superiority, forgiving his parents despite their immorality and betrayal, Flores turns away from them, calling his father “mi enemigo mortal” (“my mortal enemy”; 52), in a first crucial step towards Christianity.
meets: “mientra lo troxeres contigo nunca fallaras omne a quien non ganes por amigo”
(“while you have it you will not find any man who will not become your friend”; 73).
Curiously, in the Crónica it is not the ring that forges Flores’s friendships or saves him from harm, but rather his own generosity and chivalric feats.

Upon their arrival in Babylon, Flores and his attendants learn that the local king, the man who has purchased Blancaflor, is at war with the King of Egypt. By offering his help to the King of Babylon, making explicit mention of his royal lineage but none whatsoever of his love for Blancaflor, Flores hopes to gain leverage for his greater mission. The King welcomes the aid offered by Prince Flores and his men. When at the Babylonian court, “a todas las preguntas que el rey fazie, el ynfante respondiale mansamente e muy bien, de guisa que el rey fue muy pagado del e entendio en el que podrie ser omne bueno” (“to all of the questions the king asked, the prince responded meekly and well, such that the king was very pleased with him and thought him to be a good man”; 76). The knight’s meekness not only corresponds to his social position relative to the king, but also behooves the hero whose later survival will depend on the king’s goodwill.

The King of Babylon is captured by a band of Egyptian knights following a series of false letters and strategic moves, but Flores swiftly comes to his aid: “quando el Ynfante Flores los vio, fue luego ferir muy de rezio, e ellos en el comienço punaron de se defender, mas quando sopieron que el Ynfante Flores era, fuyeron e dexaron al rey” (“when Prince Flores saw them, he went in to cause them great harm, and in the beginning they tried to defend themselves, but when they saw that it was Prince Flores, they fled and left the king”; 80). Here the reader observes the hero’s battle prowess as well as the fear his royal name inspires. Not long after the altercation, Flores accompanies the king to Cairo on a diplomatic
mission where he and the King of Egypt make peace. Military service gives way to diplomatic service, as will be seen in the *Libro del Cavallero Zifar* as well.

As he grows closer in friendship and service to the king, Flores briefly considers abandoning his mission to rescue Blancaflor. He persists, in the end, as much for love as for duty’s sake: “*Non podrie ser que tornase sin ella a mi tierra . . . Ca si lo yo bien siguiese como lo he comenzado, bien fio por Dios que lo acabara, e non pertenesçe a fi de rey nin a omne de grand logar que quando tales fechos comiença develos de seguir fasta que los acabe*” (I could not return to my kingdom without her . . . For if I continue as I have started, I trust by God that I will finish, and it does not befit the son of a king or a man of great standing that when he has begun something he should not see it through to the end”; 82-83). It is incumbent on Flores, as a highborn man, to complete the task he has begun. To surrender due to adverse circumstances would show weakness unbecoming of a great man, another notion that will reappear in *Zifar*.105

While in Babylon, Flores stays in the home of an honorable courtier called Daytes. In order to be successful in his task, Flores must secure the aid of Daytes and his wife, to whom he gives copious gifts “*a tanto fasta que despues le prometieron ellos que farien quanto mandase*” (“so that afterwards they promised to do whatever he commanded”; 84). Here and elsewhere in the story, the hero will leverage his personal wealth in order to gain the friendship of key figures. They tell him of the tower in which the king holds Blancaflor captive, and of its guard who greatly enjoys playing chess.106 For every game Flores wins,

105 Francisco J. Hernández explains: “In the classic definition of *magnificentia*, the consummation of a worthy project is as important (if not more) as its worthiness” (“Meaning” 96).
106 The narrator of the *Historia* describes the tower in which the Admiral holds Blancaflor to be tall, jeweled, and guarded by five hundred men day and night. In most chivalric novels, the description of a scene’s setting is minimal and provided in service of the action (Duran 151). The narrator of *Flores* rarely describes physical settings, with the exception of the tower in which the Admiral
they instruct him to lose two or three, so as to make the experience gratifying for the guard. The chess game can be viewed as another challenge in the hero’s quest, an intellectual rather than armed tournament, and a demonstration of wit (Grieve, Floire 68). By cautioning the hero to let the other man win more games than he loses, the hosts rightly assume that the hero’s prowess on the battlefield matches his skill at chess. Here it is also assumed that winning or losing at chess is tied to a man’s ego. The hero willingly shows weakness so as not to intimidate a necessary ally.107

Flores further ingratiates himself to the guard by providing generous gifts. Having bought the captain’s loyalty as he did that of his hosts, Flores reveals that he wishes to speak with one of the ladies held captive in the tower. Fearful of the Admiral’s wrath, yet indebted to Flores, the captain devises a plan: on the following Sunday (which happens to be Palm Sunday, the lovers’ shared birthday), the captain will conceal Flores in a large flower arrangement to be delivered to the ladies’ rooms. At last the significance of the hero’s name is revealed. Flowers, his namesake, will serve as the vehicle for his reunion with Blancaflor. Flowers also signify “renewal, sexuality, beauty” and health, all desirable associations for a young male hero (Grieve, Floire 93).108 When Gloris, Blancaflor’s Christian handmaiden, discovers Flores within the bouquet, she suspects that the young man is her lady’s long-lost love and conceals him from the others. Local allies, both male and female, are crucial in the provision of information and personal assistance. The gender of the ally appears to be inconsequential; rather, the hero looks to his ability to earn the person’s loyalty through the

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107 In the Historia the foreign prince handily bests the captain in game after game of chess. Flores soothes his opponent’s ego with a financial gift and is invited to return the next day.
108 The association between men and flowers might also be explained by the author’s familiarity with Greek legends of antiquity in which young men are turned into flowers (Wentersdorf 94-95).
provision of gifts or service. However, Flores neglects to share his plans with Gaydon and Gandifer, his advisors from home, perhaps because of their loyalty to Flores’s father, King Fines, who opposes the prince’s devotion to Blancaflor.

As a token of commitment, Flores gives Blancaflor the ring that had been given to him by his mother the queen. The lovers then spend nine days uninterrupted and concealed in Blancaflor’s chambers, enjoying a sort of honeymoon before the king discovers them. The enraged king’s first instinct is to kill his betrothed and the foreign prince for their betrayal, but God intervenes by softening his heart, conjuring the memory of Flores’s loyal service against the Egyptians. The king also marvels at the young man’s ingenuity for having gained access to the tower (95).

The King of Babylonia calls several neighboring kings to his court in order to seek their council regarding the prince’s actions “porque el es omne de grand logar e los omnes non oviesen de que travar porque yo mandava matar tal omne sin justicia manifiesta” (“because he is a man of high standing and so that men do not complain that I had him killed without absolute justice”; 100). Given that he came to Babylon under the guise of providing service to the king, only to engage in a relationship with the king’s intended wife, Flores is accused of treason. The prince’s honor is thus called into question and hangs on the verdict that will be delivered by a jury of his peers, that is, fellow members of the ruling class.

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109 The reunion scene of the Historia is more sexually charged, for the lovers were separated at a younger age and had not yet consummated their love. Flores wishes to make love to Blancaflor before they escape. The lady capitulates, provided that Flores agrees to convert to Christianity, though no formal exchange of vows or rings takes place. Flores achieves not only geographic reunion with his beloved, but sexual union as well.

110 The author of the Historia omits the lovers’ trial entirely. Blancaflor’s captor discovers the lovers in bed together and decides that they should be burned alive. It is the magical ring, rather than the hero’s cunning, that saves the lovers.
The prince’s two attendants, men who accompanied him from home yet were excluded from the rescue plan, jump to defend their lord. Gandifer kneels before the king and speaks on behalf of the prince, reminding those present of the service Flores rendered to the king in a time of great need. Gandifer also praises the royal house of Almeria and threatens to fight, with the backing of his entire army, any who wish to harm Flores. Then, Gaydon proceeds to kneel and speak before the foreign kings, delivering a less threatening though no less potent defense of Flores. The wise man offers a compelling legal argument: If the three manner of treason are killing one’s lord, storming his castle, or sleeping with his wife, Flores has committed no treason as Blancaflor was not yet wed to the king. Gaydon also warns that if the king acts out of vengeance rather than justice, he has more to fear than the prince’s army: “Dios tomará su venganza de vos” (“God will take vengeance on you”; 103).

One by one, the foreign monarchs advise the irate King of Babylon to spare the couple, moved to pity by the visual spectacle of the lovers’ youth and beauty as they are paraded into court for sentencing. The king then asks Flores to explain himself. The prince retells how he came to love Blancaflor, then implores: “sea la vuestra merced e la vuestra mesura que si algunt poco de servizio vos yo fiz, que non se vos escaezca” (“let it be your will and your wisdom that if I ever did you any small service, that you would not forget it”; 108). Flores asks for the king to spare Blancaflor’s life, in essence buying her life with his service. The trial scene in the Crónica allows Flores to demonstrate a hero’s wit, “the ability to argue judiciously, rationally and intelligently” (Grieve, Floire 82). Admiral Tençer, a visiting courtier, argues that the service rendered to the king by Flores outweighs the gravity of his offense. He also advocates for the prince’s pardon due to his youth and foreign origin,
presumably two excuses for poor judgment or a misunderstanding of how to provide proper and loyal service to a king (109). Their arguments successfully change the king’s mind, thus providing the reader with a nobleman’s recipe for salvation: the provision of valuable service and the avoidance of explicitly treasonous acts.

Flores, Blancaflor, and their entire company remain at court in Babylon to celebrate the wedding of the king to Gloris, another Christian captive and Blancaflor’s former handmaiden.111 Flores resolves to return to his father’s kingdom after three months, at which point the King of Babylon equips the hero with a fleet of ships and ample supplies. While at sea, the lovers’ ship encounters a terrible storm and they must seek refuge on an island inhabited by Augustinian monks.112 Blancaflor seizes the opportunity to speak to Flores about her religious convictions: “bien devie de entender que quantos peligros passaran el a ella fasta que vinieran a aquella ysla que non fuera por al sinon porque Jesucristo querie que fuesen cristianos” (“they should understand that whatever dangers they endured before coming to the island were not for nothing but rather because Jesus Christ wanted them to become Christians”; 116). She frames the hero’s journey and suffering along the way as part of a divine plan. Flores is moved to agree with Blancaflor because of the influence of consuming the breast milk of a Christian wet nurse, Blancaflor’s mother Berta, when he was a baby, as well as the appearance of Saint Augustine himself in the prince’s dream.113 Before

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111 The marriage of the King of Babylon to another Christian captive leaves the unresolved possibility that the king might be moved to religious conversion just as Flores is later in the narrative. However, the king is not said to have consumed the breast milk of a Christian nursemaid, which the author portrays as the other contributing factor to Flores’s conversion.

112 Due to the storm’s vicious winds, in the Historia the sailors must cut down the ship’s mast (67). The image of the rudderless ship may allude to the hero’s emasculation before he can be reborn and built back up by God (Grieve, Floire 101).

113 In the sixteenth-century Historia, after being stranded on the island for some time, Flores comes to view his current state as punishment for past sins and heathenism: “Señora mía: Ya sabeis en cuántos trabajos somos puestos por nuestros pecados. Yo creo que la vuestra Ley es la buena y
long the prince asks the monks to baptize him, while the majority of his crew remains committed to Islam. Over a period of three months, the sailors’ food stores are depleted, and as the monks only share their goods with those who have converted to Christianity, the rest of the company comes to the brink of starvation. The prior delivers a sermon promising relief from suffering and a safe passage home to those who accept Jesus Christ as their lord. Eagerly seeking a solution, all of Flores’s men are baptized on that day, save Gaydon, who refuses to convert out of desperation. The well-fed company departs with favorable winds, is reunited with the rest of their fleet, and arrives safely in Almeria thanks to God’s grace.¹¹⁴

Soon, Flores succeeds King Fines and becomes king of Andalucia and the Algarve, the southern and western portions of the Iberian Peninsula (122). Historical fact and fantasy merge in the description of his ascension to the throne: “besaron la mano al Rey Flores syete mill cavalleros de alavares e bien mill e quinientos cristianos que fueran en el Andaluzia e en el Algarbe bien dende el tiempo que fuera vençido el Rey Rodrigo, quando perdieron los cristianos la tierra, asi como la Estoria de los godos lo cuenta” (“seven thousand knights on horseback kissed the hand of King Flores as well as one thousand and five hundred Christians who lived in Andalucia and the Algarve since the time King Rodrigo was defeated, as the Estoria de los godos tells”; 122). Only after his father’s death, “quando el Rey Flores vio que estava bien apoderado del reyno e que non avie contrario ninguno”

verdadera” (“My lady: You already know what hardships we endure for our sins. I believe that your Law is the good and true one”; 68). In this case, the author credits Flores’s own wisdom, rather than the words of his beloved or the consumption of the breast milk of a Christian, with his conversion.

¹¹⁴ During the last leg of the couple’s journey home in the Historia, they make a stop in Cartagena where Flores writes a letter to his parents. If they wish for him to return to Spain, they must convert to Christianity. Emotional manipulation and a threat to the line of succession leads to the forcible conversion of a royal family. Flores transitions from obeying his parents, to disobedience for love of Blancaflor, to complete rejection of their authority and the delivery of an ultimatum of conversion. In six months’ time “fue la mayor parte de España convertida a la fe de Cristo” (“the better part of Spain was converted to the Christian faith”; 70).
(“when King Flores saw that he had complete control of the kingdom and had no enemies”),
does the hero reveal his conversion to Christianity and marriage to Blancaflor (124). The
narrator describes the Christian inhabitants as overjoyed to discover the faith of their new
king, as they indeed might have been if a king such as Flores had actually ruled the southern
and western parts of the Peninsula. In the sixteenth-century version of the story Flores defies
his parents and demands their conversion, while in the medieval *Crónica* the story of his
conversion and how it affects his reign is more respectful of authority figures and operant
systems.

The hero’s quest does not end after the recuperation of his beloved, or his
conversion, or even his ascension to the throne. King Flores retrofits the mosques in the
kingdom to become churches, and sends word of his conversion to the Pope in Rome. He
then clashes with Muslim communities in northern Africa and conquers a large territory in
fewer than two years (134). His daughter, called Berta after her grandmother, marries the
king of France, thus forming an alliance with a prominent Christian kingdom. Unfortunately,
as the rule of the fictional King Flores only lasts eighteen years, his lands come under
Muslim rule once more. The hero’s conversion does not turn the tides evermore in Iberia’s
religious conflict, as depicted in the later *Historia*.115

Born on the same day, raised in the same home, and miraculously resembling one
another despite their lack of blood relation, the love between Flores and Blancaflor serves as
a metaphor for the Christian and Islamic communities on the Peninsula.116 Although the
narrative voice casts the Islamic community at large in a negative light, the ideal male figure

115 By his marriage to Blancaflor, Flores comes to reign as Emperor in Rome, leaving his son
Gordion as King of Spain. In Rome, the lovers “vivieron muy virtuosamente, y fueron muy amados
de todos sus vasallos, y aumentaron la fe de Cristo” (“they lived very virtuously, and they were
very loved by all their vassals, and they grew the Christian faith”; 72).
116 For the same reasons, the love between Flores and Blancaflor has an unsettling whisper of incest.
who boasts traits revered within the Christian community—loyalty, wisdom, piety, courage, and determination—is redeemed by his love for a Christian woman. The inborn commonalities of the lovers, and their respective communities, create a space for reconciliation and salvation. The knight of flowers becomes a knight of God.

The Knight of God: *Libro del Cavallero Zifar*

During the reign of Sancho IV, for whom achieving peace with and dominion over noble clans was a constant struggle (Gómez Redondo, “El Zifar” 108), a literary hero emerges to embody the obedience and righteousness of an ideal nobleman: El Cavallero Zifar. He avails himself of diplomatic solutions wherever possible, although his skill in battle wins him a great deal more renown. Just as material wealth and its deployment played an essential role in the completion of Flores’s mission, so too will Zifar strive for economic gain as part of his journey of self-improvement. Loyal friendships also figure prominently in Zifar’s narrative, so much so that his main ally comes to be called the *Cavallero Amigo* or Friend Knight. Furthermore, an alliance with a good, trustworthy woman helps to bolster the masculinity of chivalric hero. Zifar’s first wife collaborates as an instrumental accomplice in his ascension, from her initial disappearance to her later silence and discretion. His second wife provides Zifar with access to a throne, thus allowing him to redeem the tarnished legacy of his royal ancestors. Both of the protagonist’s marriages privilege friendship and political convenience over sexual union or passion, making them less erotically charged than Flores’s relationship with Blancaflor. By suffering trials and tribulations, and by trusting in divine providence, he earns the epithet Knight of God. As opposed to the circular journey of Flores, who begins and ends his life in the royal family of the same kingdom, Zifar’s
spiritual and physical journey is more linear as he rises through the social strata in order to rule in a foreign land. By his many deeds, Zifar transitions from knight to king, and from king to wise man, at which point his two sons become the recipient of their father’s advice and take his place as the narrative’s chivalric heroes.

In the first chapter following the prologue, the narrator introduces the knight’s wife and children by name and reveals that God will move the family’s fortune from worse to much better, yet the narrative voice discloses little about the text’s protagonist and namesake. The narrator elects not to foreground the hero himself, but rather his circumstances and the arc of his story, making the tale more relatable and universal. The initial description of the hero’s character, social status, and abilities appears in the second chapter:

[Est]e Cavallero Zifar fue buen cavallero de armas a de muy sano consejo a quien gelo demandava, e de grant justiçia . . . e de grant esfuerço, non se mudando nin orgullesçiendo por las buenas andanças de armas . . . E siempre dezia verdat e non mentira quando alguna demanda le fazian, e esto fazia con buen seso natural que Dios posiera en el. (75)

The Cavallero Zifar was a good knight at arms and gave very wise counsel to whoever demanded it, and he was very just . . . and very forceful, neither changing nor becoming prideful due to his success in battle . . . And he always told the truth and did not lie whenever he was consulted, and he did this with the good sense that God gave him.

The protagonist appears to be a model gentleman, without flaw or vice (although the reader will later observe the hero’s willingness to lie by omission). Both capable and humble,
morally virtuous yet active, he makes full use of his God-given talents and wisdom.

The narrator writes that, “segunt se falla por las estorias antiguas” (“as is found in the ancient stories”), Cavallero Zifar is descended from King Tared who was king of “la India primera, que poblaron los gentiles . . . la que comarca con la tierra de los negros” (“the first India, populated by the gentiles . . . that which abuts the land of the Africans”; 95). Zifar’s ancestors are “omes de grant mesura e de buen seso . . . mas que a muchos blancos” (“men of greater consideration and better sense . . . than many white men”; 97). The observation implies a correlation between skin color and inborn intellect, such that Zifar’s ancestors, being darker-skinned, surpass the expectations associated with their appearance and were unusual for boasting many positive qualities associated with lighter-skinned men. The remark alludes to the contemporary reality of the author and the reading public, who might have balked at an ethnically foreign but otherwise relatable and exemplary Christian hero. In the description of the hero’s lineage, harkening back to figures from the Old Testament, the narrator provides a reductive, essentializing assessment of the known world’s major communities, associating each with a single quality.117 As Zifar demonstrates all of the exemplary qualities associated with the various communities of men, he may be read as a citizen of the world, a consummate knight errant whose mobility and liminality allow him to incorporate the salient positive qualities of many communities.

Though he may be without fault, the hero is nonetheless cursed: his horse never lives more than ten days.118 As a man is not a knight without a horse, the king supplies Zifar—one

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117 According to the narrator, Chinese men are the most obedient, Turkish men are the strongest, Persians are the largest and most powerful (a characterization that may refer to individual men or their community), Christians are the bravest and most accomplished knights, and Indian men are the most learned (96-97).

118 Several scholars associate Zifar’s bad luck with horses to an inherited family curse, which will be discussed further on. Marta Ana Diz, however, offers another explanation: “Cifar suffers a disgrace
of his best knights—with horse after horse while at war, until some jealous men speak to the
king regarding the enormous cost of maintaining Zifar in his service. Not unlike El Cid,
false and jealous councilors conspire against Zifar. This one knight brings more honor to the
king than one hundred knights, but five hundred knights could be maintained for the same
cost. Before revealing the outcome of the king’s cost-benefit analysis, the narrator pauses to
cautions the “grant señor” (“great lord”) in the reading public against heeding bad advice
and undervaluing an exceptional asset such as Zifar (76). The narrator’s aside assumes that
an imagined reader will face a similar situation and may avoid the fictional king’s mistake
by interpreting the story didactically. The council persuades the foolish king to no longer
send Zifar into battle, citing the financial burden.

In the following years, the king enters into disputes with several of his neighbors and
loses them all because thousands of men in his service are less capable than Zifar. The king’s
land holdings diminish and he regrets his folly, but for pride will not admit his error and call
Zifar back. The story opens, essentially, with a demonstration of the hero’s value, his
instrumentality in the maintenance and defense of a kingdom. Yet, for the king’s near-
sightedness and pride, Zifar endures unemployment while his family lives in poverty.

Having been spurned by the king, Zifar delivers a long prayer to God, a conveniently
expository narrative device that demonstrates the hero’s reasoning, faith in God, and clean
conscience. The prayer also alludes to his future plans: “yre con lo que començe cabo
adelante, e non dexe mi proposito començado” (“I will go ahead with what I have begun,
and I will not leave my objective unfinished”; 79). Zifar feels called to do something

that affects him precisely in the most vital aspect of his profession, and he bears it with exemplary
humility and patience. Read in the context of the medieval Christian ethic, the death of the horses,
an arbitrary and unexplained occurrence, constitutes the metaphoric and superlative expression of a
commonplace, not literary but rather moral-didactic” (“Motivo” 9, my translation).
extraordinary, a *demanda* (“mission”) that, if not pursued, would constitute a waste of the singular talents God has bestowed upon him (92). Zifar’s wife Grima, whom he loves more than himself (79), emerges early in the story as the hero’s confidant and advisor. When she overhears his prayer—which indicates to the reader that the prayer was delivered aloud, adding a theatrical element to the hero’s piety—she reminds her husband that he should not undertake any great task without seeking trustworthy counsel. Though he wishes to unburden himself to a trusted friend, he believes that a friend’s trustworthiness cannot be known until it is tested.

To demonstrate his ideal of friendship, Zifar tells his wife two examples: that of the half friend, discussed in the previous chapter, and an example of two friends willing to sacrifice everything for one another. Within the second example, the narrator employs a list as a memory tool to describe man’s three most pitiable conditions: the poor man who must beg from the stingy rich man, the wise man who must follow a dim-witted man, and a sane man who must live in a lawless land. In a sense, Zifar suffers from all three conditions under his current sovereign. His eventual triumph in spite of these circumstances provides the most compelling exemplary content of the text as to how a knight must act even while in the service of a less-than-ideal lord.

After recounting the two exemplary tales, Zifar eventually reasons that his wife, being superior to most women, can be trusted with the hero’s long-kept secret. The hero frames marriage to Grima as a friendship, rather than a purely economic or legal contract; however, the spousal relationship transcends traditional friendship, as the husband does not feel the need to test his wife before confiding in her. When Zifar was a young man, his

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119 The protagonist of the first example tells the second interpolated example to his son, deploying the *caja china* narrative technique.
grandfather revealed that they were descended from a king who had been deposed from the throne due to some unnamed evil or depravity. The family’s rightful place would not be restored until a family member could, by his extreme goodness, undo or counteract the harm caused by the ancestor. According to Zifar’s grandfather, one’s fate, as determined by lineage, can be changed by extraordinary goodness or evil: “con grant fuerça de maldat se desfaze [un rey] e con grant fuerça de bondat e de buenas costumbres se faze” (“with great force of evil a king is undone and with great strength of goodness and good habits one is made”; 93). Upon hearing the story of his family’s lineage, Zifar resolves to improve his fortune and reclaim his birthright, interpreting his grandfather’s words as a prophesy.

As envious naysayers impede Zifar’s ascendance in their current home, the hero resolves to travel with his family to a new kingdom where they, as strangers, can build a new life and achieve social ascendance through their goodness alone. Quite unlike the conflict between the title character and the king of Great Britain in Amadis de Gaula, Zifar does not rebel against the king of Tarta, but rather chooses to depart from the kingdom. Zifar cites received wisdom to support the decision to move: “ca dize el bierbo antigo: ‘Quien se muda, Dios le ayuda’” (“as the old refrain says: ‘God helps those who move’”; 94).

Although the hero has absorbed wisdom from the oral tradition, rather than through reading or formal study, his ability to apply the acquired knowledge to his present circumstances echoes an important element of noble masculinity discussed in the previous chapter.

Zifar, Grima, and their two sons set off on horseback. After ten days, the hero’s horse dies. Grima weeps and offers to let her husband ride the surviving horse while she walks. He refuses: “seria cosa desaguisada e muy syn razon yr yo de cavallo e vos de pie; ca segunt natura e razon mejor puede el varon sofrir el afan del camino que non la muger” (“it would
be a foolish and very unreasonable thing for me to go on horseback and you on foot; for
according to nature and reason a man can better endure the toils of the journey than a
woman”; 98).

They stop to hear mass and pray in Galapia, where they subsequently seek
permission to stay the night. An armed knight turns them away without pity or cause. If
Zifar does not leave the village immediately, the knight threatens: “matare a vos e levare a
la vuestra dueña e farre della a mi talante” (“I will kill you and I will take your lady and do
with her as I please”; 99). The threat of sexual violence against his wife does not spur the
hero to rage. Rather, Zifar shows restraint while the armed knight continues to antagonize
him without reason:

E quando el cavallero [Zifar] oyo estas palabras tan fuertes, pesole el coraçon e
dixole: “Çertas sy vos cavallero sodes non faredes mal a outro fidalgo syn lo desafiar,
mayormente non vos faziendo tuerto.” “Commo,” dixo el otro, “cuydades escapar
por cavallero, seyendo rapas desta dueña? Sy cavallero sodes, sobit en ese cavallo
de esa dueña, e defendetla.”

And when Zifar heard such forceful words, it weighed heavy on his heart and he
said: “If you are indeed a knight you would not do harm to another gentleman
without challenging him, especially if he has done you no harm.” “How,” said the
other, “do you intend to pass for a knight, if this lady is taken from you? If you are a
knight, mount that lady’s horse and defend her.” (99-100)

Each man calls the other’s knighthood into question. Zifar attempts to draw the unknown
knight’s attention to his dishonorable breach of the chivalric code. In turn, the other knight
references the presence of the lady, Grima, and ties Zifar’s behavior toward her to his
knighthood. Zifar is challenged to the duel with such “forceful” words that, were he to refuse, his manhood and knighthood would be called into question. Nevertheless, Zifar prefers a diplomatic solution, begging the armed knight to stand down one final time before the joust. Zifar’s attempts at peaceful resolution are met with mocking: “Por palabras me queredes detener?” (“You wish to detain me with words?”; 100). Zifar swiftly kills the armed knight and appropriates his horse. The armed knight was, we later learn, the nephew of a neighboring count as well as the intended second husband of the widowed Lady Grima of Galapia (though she had refused the marriage). José Manuel Lucía Megías proposes that the most characteristic difference between Zifar and other chivalric novels is the variety of solutions to battles, with particular attention paid to the bloody details of an opponent’s death or injury (“Dos caballeros” 448). However, in this scene, one of the reader’s first observations of Zifar in combat, the narrator devotes more than three hundred words to the conversation preceding the fight and fewer than fifty to the duel itself. The violent encounter is downplayed so that the reader may marvel at the hero’s diplomacy and composure in the face of insult.120

The Lady of Galapia calls the mysterious newcomer to her home. A knight in her service asks “Amigo, sodes fidalgo?” (“Friend, are you a gentleman?”), to which Zifar replies in the affirmative (101). The family is given leave to stay in the village, provided that Zifar employs his skills to protect its inhabitants as homage. He agrees to do so as long as his work conforms to his chivalric ideals and falls within the purview of knighthood: “non me queria poner a cosa que non sopiese nin pudiese fazer un cavallero” (“I do not wish to involve myself in matters that a knight cannot or knows not how to do”; 105).

120 For more on the battle scenes in the text, see: Marta Ana Diz, “El mundo de las armas en el Libro del Caballero Cifar.”
When three thousand men on horseback surround the village, Zifar does not intervene until called to do so by the lady whom he serves. He impresses all of the men in the lady’s service with his restraint and wisdom. His host even remarks: “tengo que seríades mejor para predicador que non para lidiador” (“I believe that you would make a better preacher than a fighter”; 107). Lady Grima puts the men of the village under Zifar’s command, at which point Zifar asks to borrow some armor and weapons to use in defense of the village. Lady Grima offers to make him a gift of her late husband’s equipment, but Zifar only agrees to borrow them, “ca heredamiento es de vuestro fijo” (“as they are the inheritance of your son”; 109). The hero’s respect for chivalric and social protocols is absolute, even in the face of personal economic hardship.

Among the more than two hundred men who follow Zifar into battle, the hero stands out: “muy bien sabia endereçar sus guarniciones. E entre todos los otros parescía bien armado e muy fermoso e muy valiente” (“he knew very well how to arrange his armor, and among all of them he appeared well armed and very handsome and very brave”; 110). The hero looks the part in the battlefield, where the appearance of capability and its proof through action seem equally necessary and noteworthy. Zifar surveys the field, identifies a weakness in his foe’s defenses, and gathers intelligence by speaking with a local knight who provides vital information about a neighboring lord. The lord is a worthy and richly outfitted adversary who opposed the villagers lead by Zifar. Before battle, the two knights exchange words: “‘E quien eres tu, ‘dixo el señor de la hueste, ‘que atanto te atreves?’ ‘Certas,’ dixo el Cavallero Zifar, ‘agora lo veredes’” (“‘And who are you,’ said the neighboring lord, ‘who is so daring?’ ‘Indeed,’ said Cavallero Zifar, ‘presently you will see’”; 115). Rather than give his name to the neighboring lord, Zifar prefers to be known by his deeds. Zifar unseats the
opposing lord from his horse and gravely wounds him on his side, while the villagers take his son prisoner.

Before long, the neighboring lord changes his position and regrets taking up arms against the Lady of the village who had not earned his enmity. He asks the identity of the man who injured him, wishing to honor him rather than seek revenge, “ca bien vos digo que nunca cavallero vy que tan apuestamente cavalgase nin tan apoderado” (“as I surely tell you that I never saw a knight who so capably or so powerfully rode”; 117). For Zifar, physical aggression functions as a mechanism of diplomacy. For his military service, Zifar has also earned the respect of an older knight in Galapia: “dixo un cavallero antiguo, ‘juro verdad a Dios . . . que non creo que mejor cavallero sea en todo el mundo en armas e en todas buenas costumbres que este cavallero’” (“the elderly knight said, ‘I swear to God . . . that I do not believe that there is a better knight at arms and in all good habits than this knight in all the world’”; 120). The man speculates that Zifar must be of illustrious origins based on his military skill. Battle prowess, then, functions both diplomatically and as evidence of one’s lineage. The Lady of Galapia rewards Zifar handsomely for his good work, such that his wife and sons eat, drink, and live well (121). The hero serves as the lady’s councilor as she considers the marriage proposal of the neighboring lord’s captive son, and also as her ambassador as he calls a truce with the lord’s knights so that the marriage contract might be negotiated.¹²¹ Thus, military service has the capacity to establish diplomatic ties, confirm one’s noble lineage, and provide a gateway to courtly service.

One of the village’s most powerful and respected men offers his two daughters in matrimony to Zifar’s sons. The offer is made based on very limited information, only Zifar’s

¹²¹ For Margarita Lliteras, military service rendered in defense of a lady or damsel in distress is more essential to the chivalric structure than marriage or passionate love (62-63).
performance in battle against the Count’s son and his subsequent behavior before the Lady of Galapia, yet it is sufficient for a prominent community member to offer his most prized possessions—his daughters—to the stranger in a gesture that would forever link their families. The man says: “Cavallero estráño, yo non se qui vos sodes, mas por quanto yo entiendo en vos, creo que sodes de buen logar e de buen entendimiento” (“Foreign knight, I do not know who you are, but from what I understand of you, I believe that you are from a good place and of good understanding”; 105). Zifar hesitates to accept the offer, unsure if he wants to be permanently tied to Galapia or this family. As the local man rightly notes, Zifar comes from great origins and has the ambition to match. The people of Galapia invite Zifar to remain there, but he graciously refuses for the sake of grander plans. As parting gifts, Zifar receives a horse and substantial financial compensation from the lady (134). The hero leaves Galapia with much more prestige and wealth than when he arrived.

During the next phase of their journey, the family stops to rest in an idyllic meadow near the seaside town of Mella. The locus amoenus soon turns nightmarish as a lioness absconds with the older son and the younger son loses his way in the city (135-36). Both parents grieve the loss—“pesoles muy de coraçon” (“it weighed heavily on their hearts”; 136)—but Grima exhibits symptoms of hysteria. Grima wishes to leave the site of these hardships in the hope that their lot will improve, having come to the conclusion that fortune and geographic space are somehow linked. Zifar asks Grima: “Commo . . . por salir de un regno e yrnos a otro, cuydades fuyr del poder de Dios?” (“How . . . by leaving one kingdom and going to another, do you intend to flee from the power of God?”; 137). The male protagonist calls attention to the irrationality of the female character’s emotional reaction, while simultaneously demonstrating the virtues of stoicism and resignation to God’s will.
The narrator implies an association between these virtues and masculinity via the contrast between Zifar’s reaction and that of his wife.

Unlike his wife, Zifar does not associate a particular geographic space with success; rather, he recognizes that he will be subject to God’s will on land, at sea, and wherever he may go. Zifar is open to being moved, both spiritually and physically, as God wills. Transience is essential to the hero’s success, until he has reclaimed his royal lineage and secured a stable and sufficiently elevated social position. Nonetheless, to please his wife and to seek out greater opportunities, Zifar arranges for them to travel by boat to the kingdom of Orbin where they will be subject to a just king. The ship cannot hold its crew, Grima, and Zifar, so the wife agrees to go ahead while Zifar waits for the ship to return and fetch him. Soon, Zifar learns that the sailors have deceived him, carrying away his wife with no intention of returning for him. Grima’s beauty and presence on the ship induce the men aboard to take up arms and fight one another for her favor. While she cowers below deck and prays for protection, the sailors all kill one another, leaving the ship unmanned. Jesus appears to Grima in the form of a child and steers the ship safely to the city of Galan in the kingdom of Orbin. When a man boards the ship and inquires about the identity of its miraculous passenger, Grima bristles: “‘E vos sodes cavallero?’, dixo ella. ‘Certas,’ dixo el, ‘non’” (“And are you a gentleman?” she asked. ‘Indeed,’ he said, ‘I am not.’”; 145). At this she refuses to answer his questions “[p]orque non es vuestro de lo saber agora quien so yo” (“because it is not your place to know now who I am”; 145). Only a knight or nobleman can be trusted with important information and has a right to possess it. She does tell her story in

122 Zifar’s journey resembles a pilgrimage, perhaps done as penance for the unnamed sin of his ancestor King Tared (Hernández, “Alegoría” 14).
123 The lovers of Flores also find themselves in need of transport aboard a sea vessel with limited space for passengers, but their proposed solution differs from Zifar’s and does not result in their separation.
full to the king when he comes aboard the ship.

Back on land and separated from his family, the hero delivers a long monologic prayer in which he emphasizes God’s absolute power and supremacy, as well as the grace bestowed upon those who serve him (139). Zifar’s prayer pleases God so much that he sends a heavenly voice with promises of “muchas plazeres e muchas alegrias e muchas onrras” (“many pleasures and many joys and many honors”) in the future, as well as an implied reunion with his wife and sons (139). The voice confirms the hero’s belief in God’s plan, wherein present trials will lead to future blessings. The knight then comes upon a hermitage where he may take shelter and rest. Soon a ribaldo or vagabond learns of his presence there and desires to test the sanity and wisdom of the hermit’s guest (151).

Characterized by scholars as a gracioso and a precursor to Sancho Panza, the vagabond’s most significant role in the narrative is as the hero’s councilor and emissary (Piccus 29). However, before coming into the knight’s service, the vagabond assesses his character. The vagabond will say discouraging things, and if Zifar suffers his comments with patience, it will prove his sanity. In the face of the vagabond’s disparaging remarks, such as “pobre eres” (“you are poor”) or “muchos tuertos has de resçibir” (“you will encounter many difficulties”) or “nunca seras poderoso” (“you will never be powerful”), Zifar reaffirms the power of his faith in God, through whom all things are possible (155). When asked why he does not weep for the loss of his wife and sons, Zifar replies: “Que ome es . . . quien llora muerte de los mortales? Ca que pro tiene el llorar, en que aquello por que llora non se puede cobrar?” (“What man . . . cries over the death of mortals? For what benefit does crying have, when the cause of the crying cannot be remedied?”; 156). According to Zifar, it

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124 Hermits are “the chivalric cleric of choice,” mirroring the exceptional knight’s own independence (Kaeuper 57).
only behooves a man to show negative emotion or lament his situation when it may bring some possible benefit.  

The exchange between the bizarre vagabond and the hero relates to the larger didactic intentions of the text. Recall the description of Zifar as a man “de grant mesura e de buen seso” (“of great prudence and good sense”; 97). The author positions the hero as a wise man who educates the homeless man, as a microcosm of the relationship between the author and the reading public, while simultaneously proving Zifar’s steadfastness. Zifar demonstrates no fear of his uncertain future or his eventual death. Despite the vagabond’s determination to frighten or upset the knight, Zifar remains unruffled. The vagabond asks about the knight’s future aspirations, in response to which Zifar describes his plans to become a great lord “non faziendo tuerto a ninguno” (“without doing anyone wrong”; 160). Having tested the hero’s sanity and heard his future plans, the vagabond agrees to guide Zifar to Menton and serve as his squire.

The vagabond leaves the service of a dishonest and unworthy man, a fisherman who refuses to pay out his full wages, and becomes the squire of a great knight (163). His collaboration with a poor but promising knight will come to benefit the vagabond. Meanwhile, Zifar, being unfamiliar with the area, puts himself in the hands of a lowborn stranger. Willing first to follow so that one day he may lead, the hero’s decision to trust the vagabond is rewarded on the first night of their journey when he saves Zifar from a violent attack (164). In return, Zifar comes to his companion’s aid when he is framed for robbery.

Alliances and reciprocity in same-sex alliances provide mutual benefits to men who trust

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125 The hero demonstrates classic Stoicism, whose philosophical themes and topics had been largely “accepted and assimilated by Christian writers” by the beginning of the medieval period (Verbeke 5).

126 Before their departure, the hermit has a dream vision of Zifar in a tall tower wearing a crown, providing a visual echo of the hero’s social ascendance (161).
Zifar’s journey to Menton is not glamorous. Feeling ashamed to enter a town without a horse, Zifar sends his companion to produce food and supplies. Later, a pack of wolves attacks them, one beast even disarming Zifar, leaving the vagabond to scare them away with fire. Once they have arrived in Menton, the men learn that the town has been surrounded by troops from Ester. In order for Zifar to gain entry into the city, so he may proceed with his plan to marry the princess, he must first don his companion’s ragged clothing and pretend to be a mad man thus seeming harmless to the siege forces. The role play represents another in the string of debasing experiences that position the hero to begin his social climb. Ironically, so as to appear insane, Zifar insists that he is the king of Menton, a fantastical claim that will soon enough become true.  

Once inside, Zifar seeks out the steward and offers his knightly services, which the battle-weary leader eagerly welcomes (175). The opposing forces have already slain two counts by the time of Zifar’s arrival, so the men of Menton hesitate to engage in further direct combat. Zifar volunteers to fight and is sent into battle, armed with borrowed gear and the king’s blessing. Soon the son of the king of Ester greets Zifar with brash words: “dixole el fijo del rey: ‘Cavallero, mal consejo ouistes en vos querer atrevre a lidiar conmigo. Creo mejor fizierades en vos fincar en vuestra posada.’ ‘Non me metades miedo,’ dixo el cavallero, ‘mas de quanto yo me tengo, e fazet lo que avedes a fazer’” (“said the son of the King: ‘Sir, you got some bad advice in daring to fight me. I think you would have been better off staying home.’ ‘Do not inspire more fear,’ said the knight, ‘than I have already, and do what you will’”; 176). Rather than threatening his opponent, or even denying his fear of a  

127 The wolf attack, the need to forage for food, and entering the city without a horse all threaten to emasculate the hero. Having a submissive male figure on hand to do some of the dirty work helps to keep his masculinity intact.
well-armed opponent, Zifar prefers to begin fighting and let his actions speak for
themselves. The prince’s defeat and death are swift, leaving Zifar free to appropriate his
horse. He then faces the nephew and other son of the king of Ester in a two-on-one
encounter. After a lengthy exchange of baiting and insults to Zifar’s nobility, Zifar bests
them both.\textsuperscript{128} To overthrow the king of Ester, Zifar calls for an offensive plan, offering
military advice to the steward. The five hundred men who serve under Zifar’s command
successfully defeat the enemy and find more riches than they can carry (189).

As news of the newcomer’s victory travels, Zifar has become a person of interest to
the princess of Menton, who “\textit{avia grant sabor de lo ver}” (“had a great desire to see him”; 177). Despite the hundreds of skilled warriors who collaborated on the victory, both the
princess and the soldiers give complete credit to Zifar for the victory. For his tremendous
achievements in Menton, the hero is officially given the name \textit{Cavallero de Dios} or Knight
of God, though the narrator has referred to the hero by this name for some time prior. Such
high praise calls the attention of the son of a count who had intentions of marrying the
princess. He cautions the king against giving his daughter in marriage to a man of unknown
origins. Concerned for his honor and that of the kingdom, the king calls Zifar into the
palace.

\begin{quote}
\textit{“Cavallero de Dios, ruegovos . . . que me digades ante todos aquestos sy sodes fijo
dalgo o non.” \textit{Verdad vos digo, señor,” dijo el Cavallero de Dios, \textit{“que so fijo
dalgo e fijo de dueña e de cavallero lindo.” \textit{Venides,” dijo el rey, \textit{“de sangre
real?” Callo el cavallero e non respuso. \textit{Non ayades verguença,” dijo el rey,
\textit{“deztio.” Dixo el cavallero: “Señor, verguença grande seria a ninguno en dezir que
}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{128} The description of the second prince is quite graphic. Zifar removes his helmet and head
coverings in order to crush his skull by blows, providing a slow and gruesome death (181).
venia de sangre de reyes andando asy pobre como yo ando; ca sy lo fuese, abiltaria e desonrraria a sy.”

“Knight of God, I beg you . . . to say in front of all gathered here if you are of noble birth or not.” “I tell you truly, sir,” said the Knight of God, “that I am of noble birth and the son of a lady and of a goodly knight. “Do you come,” said the king, “from royal blood?” The knight fell silent and did not respond. “Do not be ashamed,” said the king, “but speak.” The knight said: “Sir, it would be very shameful for anyone to admit that he came from the blood of kings while living meagerly as I do; for if it were true, he would debase and dishonor himself.” (192)

In spite of his knighthood and noble lineage, poverty—and the shame associated with it—drives Zifar from his native land, keeps him from doing such things as entering a town without a horse, and even leads him to deny his royal birth. When asked what has brought the knight and his family to Galapia, Zifar cites the tremendous financial hardship that had befallen them at home, and the subsequent shame they felt living among their relatives (103). Zifar’s actions indicate, decisively for some, his nobility and worth, but others request verbal avowal of his lineage as confirmation. He readily claims to be of noble birth and a knight, but refuses to lay claim to his royal lineage due to his current sad state (and perhaps also due to the unnamed infamy associated with his royal ancestors to which Zifar’s grandfather alluded). If financial hardship befalls a knight, some of the guilt or shame for the fact shifts to the lord who is responsible for compensating his loyal servant. If, however, a king falls on hard financial times, the fact carries greater disgrace. Despite the courtier’s initial doubts, the narrator reports that not a soul objected to Zifar’s union with the princess, and that everyone in the kingdom accepted him as their king upon the death of his father-in-
law (194).

The reader may have forgotten during these adventures, thanks to the narrator’s silence on the subject, that Zifar remains joined in marriage to Grima. For all the talk of the hero’s piety, the narrator does not criticize his second marriage as sinful, perhaps because its instrumentality in the hero’s social ascension supplants the moral concerns it raises. The weight of his continued obligation to Grima dawns on Zifar after his marriage to the princess. To avoid the consummation of the second marriage, Zifar misleads the princess, saying that he must observe several years of chastity as penitence for a grave sin. Zifar’s allusion to a sin is not altogether insincere, as the marriage could be characterized as bigamous, and his sustained chastity is meant as penance to “wipe out the sin” of entering into the politically motivated second marriage (Walker 81). In truth, the narrator reveals his intention to be “por atender algunt tiempo por saber de su muger sy era muerta o biva” (“to be alert for some time to learn if his wife was dead or alive”; 197). Conveniently, the princess seems pleased to wait, apparently unconcerned with the legal and religious ramifications of an unconsummated and childless royal marriage.129 The narrator makes no mention of questions, from the queen or those in the kingdom, regarding Zifar’s sexual potency or manhood, despite his abstention from sexual relations. In an act of divine intervention, just before the appointed period of Zifar’s chastity lapses, the queen falls ill and dies. Thus, the hero is never obliged to commit the sin of adultery and may reveal to the kingdom the true identity of his first wife and two sons (252). This truth, and the kingdom’s easy acceptance of it, settles the issue of succession left unresolved by Zifar’s childless

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129 Many chivalric novels are based on the folkloric commonplace of matrimonial tests, in which the hero passes a bellicose trial in order to marry the princess or heir. These marriages are not necessarily born of a passionate desire or love, but rather serve as the reward paid for an act of service, and attest to the heroes’ ability and worth.
marriage to the queen.

Grima, meanwhile, hears tell of the accomplishments of the so-called Knight of God and, suspecting him to be her estranged husband, she departs for Menton. During the sea voyage she learns of how her husband has conducted himself during their separation: his abstention from sexual relations with his queen (which, it seems, is public knowledge), his generally saintly behavior, and his dedication to reading and learning (201). Upon her arrival in Menton, Grima recognizes her husband despite the tremendous growth of his beard, which, as in the Poema de Mio Cid, signals metonymically the hero’s masculinity and particularly his battle prowess. Its growth during the couple’s separation signifies the improvement of Zifar’s circumstances. Grima’s presence in Menton obliges Zifar to lie by omission once more, this time to his second wife and to the royal court.

The narrator then shifts to the story of the two sons, as the reader learns that they have been raised together in comfort by a local burgess and his wife, “los mayores e mas ricos e mas poderosos de la villa” (“the greatest and wealthiest and most powerful in the village”) and given a well-rounded noble education (140). The narrator emphasizes the handsomeness of the boys, drawing a physiognomic connection between physical beauty and nobility. The young men show such promise and natural skill that their adoptive parents send them to Menton to become knights.\textsuperscript{130} Garfin and Roboan benefit greatly from the family’s trials and separation. Before being separated from their birth parents, the boys survived on Zifar’s meager means. Their adoptive parents, a wealthy couple, provided the

\textsuperscript{130} Garfin and Roboan come to stay in the very hospital dedicated to the care of noblemen established by their mother in Menton. Grima and her sons piece together their past and come to recognize their blood relation. Overcome with joy, the mother sleeps in the bed with her long-lost sons. They are discovered together in the morning and Grima is threatened with death by fire before Zifar intervenes on her behalf, having realized the identities of the young men. Theirs is an awkward family reunion, hampered by the secret they must all keep due to Zifar’s second marriage.
boys with greater educational opportunities and the means for advancement. The natural
grace and talents supplied by Zifar and Grima, combined with the resources supplied by
their surrogate parents, position the boys to become great knights.¹³¹ Zifar rewards Garfin
and Roboan, whom he eventually recognizes to be his sons, with titles and land.¹³²

Other men in Zifar’s orbit also profit from his social climb. A good lord rewards the
men in his service: “Certas mucho se deven esforçar señores en dar buen galardon a
aquellos que lo mereçen” (“Indeed lords should endeavor to handsomely reward those who
deserve it”; 223). Zifar makes a sizable financial donation to the hermit who took him in
during a time of need. The vagabond, a man from the humblest of beginnings, becomes a
knight known as the Cavallero Amigo or Friend Knight (215). Zifar’s sons and former travel
companion become the kingdom’s most effective defenders. Once Garfin and Roboan are
knighted in Menton, they take their father’s place in the narrative as the ever-victorious
battle heroes.

Roboan expresses interest in setting off to unknown lands in search of “honrra e
pres” (“honor and wealth”; 258). Whereas Zifar’s departure from his home was motivated
by adverse circumstances, his younger son seeks adventure and glory abroad because he is
unlikely to inherit his father’s throne. Both father and son are moved to knight errantry not
by ideals of justice but rather by concrete human dilemmas (Diz, “Motivo” 10). At first
blush, Zifar wishes to detain Roboan, but then agrees to let him go on the condition that

¹³¹ The reader does not bear witness to Zifar’s upbringing or training in combat. The narrator begins
Zifar’s story in medias res, but remedies the omission by referencing the chivalric education of his
sons.
¹³² While the sons benefit from their father’s second marriage, Grima enjoys far fewer advantages:
unable to live with her husband, her consolation is the success of her sons and the establishment of
a charitable hospital. In the Libro del Cavallero Zifar, to be the lady of a great knight implies a
period of significant sacrifice and disappointment, for the good of one’s children and husband. The
narrator makes no direct allusion to Grima’s sacrifices or difficulties.
before he departs, he will listen his father’s advice and words of wisdom “bien asy como maestro que quiere mostrar a escolares” (“just as a master who wishes to enlighten students”; 260). Zifar accrues valuable knowledge through experience and is transformed from a recipient of wise counsel to a dispenser of the same. He also transitions from an obedient knight to an honorable king, and his sons will follow a similar trajectory. Garfin and Roboan benefit not only from their father’s superlative genetic material and his heightened social position, but also from his accumulated wisdom.

The narrative shifts significantly to become a mirror of princes, the *Castigos del Rey de Menton*, in which Zifar tells his sons many examples for their benefit. The didactic portion of the text relates to the adventure narratives by appearing at the end of Zifar’s journey as a reflection or distillation of what he has learned, and by preceding Roboan’s parallel experiences as the roadmap to his success. Throughout the explicitly didactic segment the reader is still “reminded of the world of men and action” through the content of many of the examples (Walker 119). Despite their legitimate relationship to the rest of the text, the *Castigos*, in both form and function, do form a parenthesis within the traditional chivalric narrative, which is the primary concern of the present analysis. Although the formal unity, or lack thereof, of the work has been extensively debated, the recurrence of several key themes, stylistic elements, and characters throughout *Zifar* supports the reading of the text as a unified whole despite its narrative segmentation and shifts. The thematic thread of success or bettering oneself, central both to the structure and to the content, ties the segments together (González, *Reino lejano* 91). The final section of *Zifar* follows Roboan,

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133 Kenneth Scholberg also notes that “[t]he last section of the work, while paralleling the first part, represents an advance in skill in that it greatly eliminates secondary activities and concentrates more fully on one character [Roboan]. The result is a more closely knit structure” (124).

134 For more on the defense of *Zifar*’s structural unity, see Walker 71-142.
the younger of Zifar’s sons, and the Cavallero Amigo on a series of adventures as they augment their fortune and social position. The reader witnesses Roboan’s childhood, education, knighthood, marriage, fatherhood, and ascension to the throne as emperor of a fictional locus amoenus. The arc of his chivalric journey, then, is more complete than that of his father. Roboan emerges as the culmination and perfection of the masculine model of his father, the proof of Zifar’s didactic message and “his ancestral didactic continuity” (Rodríguez-Velasco, “Esfuerço” 662, my translation).

Within chivalric literature, knighthood is often treated as an inherited state, as a knight should be born of a legitimate marriage, one or both parents being of noble blood. Ideally, an inborn predisposition is coupled with a nurturing education in the art of war in the home of a wealthy lord (García de Ochoa 100-01). As fathers, both Flores and Zifar produce superlative heirs and leave them in a better financial, political, and spiritual position than they themselves inherited. Together, the chivalric narratives of Flores, Zifar, and Roboan “transcend the telling and the enjoying of the story . . . to signify another ‘story’,” that of the male reader’s own possible salvation and social ascension through the practice of virtue (Hernández, “Meaning” 89-90).

Conclusion

At the turn of the thirteenth century, a knight errant is in many respects a pilgrim, whose sense of local belonging is supplanted by an unwavering sense of duty. Unlike sentimental fiction of the later medieval period, wherein the action advances toward the initial union—that is, the fulfillment of carnal desire—, the action in chivalric fiction
advances toward a geographic reunion and reliably happy resolution.Both Flores and Zifar endure lengthy separations from their beloved ladies. While Flores, aware that Blancaflor still lives, strives to find and rescue her, Zifar uses the time of separation to improve his own situation, with the hope that Grima will find her way back to him of her own accord.

Zifar and Flores do not face supernatural foes, as opposed to the heroes of other well-known chivalric cycles, but rather the power of adverse fortune, which they overcome with the help of God’s intervention. The dearth of magical elements in favor of miraculous intercessions corresponds with the Christian discourse and responds to the historical reality of the readers of chivalric fiction in Iberia, although realistic elements are given hyperbolic treatment to delight and entertain the reader (Toledano Molina 1076). Zifar and Flores idealize achievements and feats that do not require magic, but rather faith, making them more accessible examples to contemporary readers who were engaged in a holy war at home. For both knights, the completion of a protracted journey contributes directly to the achievement of their goals. Many of the main characters are pilgrims, embarking on spiritual as well as geographic journeys, and the texts themselves journey across time, space, and various literary genres in order to enlighten and entertain readers (Grieve, Floire 11).

Furthermore, the narrators of Zifar and Flores characterize God as approving of

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135 Regarding their depiction of love and courtship, chivalric novels share several identifying qualities: the narration of adventures external to the central love story, the happy resolution of said love story, and the possibility of opening innumerable parentheses in the love story in order to insert additional adventures, thus expanding the narrative and delaying the lovers’ reunion (Durán 177-78). The theme of separation and an adventurous journey toward reunion also encapsulates “the spirit of a Byzantine novel” (Correa 38, my translation).

136 Jacques Le Goff identifies three forms of supernatural elements in medieval literature: mirabilis, the generally marvelous and inexplicable; magicus, the intervention of persons or beings with supernatural powers; and miraculosus, related to the influence of the divine and, thus, with Christian miracles (cited in Duce García 191). Composers of earlier Castilian chivalric fiction tend to favor the third form of supernatural intervention.
knightly conduct and as providing his daring servants with favor and aid, giving the impression that their violent acts serve to advance a divine plan. Though both Flores and Zifar are indeed rewarded for the skilled practice of violence, they demonstrate restraint and a combination of violent with non-violent diplomatic means of conflict resolution, an unexpected trait given the essentializing treatment that chivalric heroes often receive by scholars such as Richard W. Kaeuper. The knights also take care in the strategic revelation of key information, and exhibit keen sense of duty related to class and lineage.

Whereas the fantastical and inventive chivalric novels of the later middle ages “were used as a means of escape, in a moment when the ideals of humanity were in crisis” (García Melero 7, my translation), in earlier chivalric texts, particularly in Iberia where Christian and Islamic kingdoms fought for supremacy, more accessible stories spoke to contemporary noble readers, encouraging them in their religious convictions and defense of righteousness. The theme of self-improvement in spite of adversity resonates with noble male readers in Castile, particularly during centuries of political shifts that created opportunities for social advancement through diplomatic alliances and military service.

A reliance on others to achieve goals is one of the salient markers of the masculinity of Flores and Zifar. The early chivalric knight achieves dominance, but not without forming and nurturing key relationships. The masculine model provided by collective biographers more than a century later echoes the importance of relationships and connectivity in the construction of elite masculinity in the fifteenth-century Castilian court.
IV. LITERARY PORTRAITURE AND ARISTOCRACY IN THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY

Fernán Pérez de Guzmán and Fernando del Pulgar, two Castilian authors acquainted with one another but separated in age and in service to the court by several decades, are best known to literary scholars for their collections of *semblanzas*, short biographical and genealogical sketches of the most prominent persons in fifteenth-century Castile. The emergence of the two collections and the similarities between them point to the mounting instability within the noble class during the fifteenth century. It became necessary not only to name those men who comprised the kingdom’s true elite, but also to describe categorically their genealogical ascendance and personal traits. Both collections strive to legitimate the inclusion of certain figures (and specific characteristics exhibited by the same) and the exclusion of others in the variable definition of elite masculinity. Whether by their corruption or their perfection, the royal and noble figures portrayed come to metonymically represent Castile itself as judged by the authors. The differences between the two collections are the result of disparate political circumstances and each author’s personal motivations. Nevertheless, the adoption of this unique literary model at this particular moment in Castile’s history indicates, among other things, the shifting sands on which the institution of nobility stood.

Whereas chronicles dedicated to the history of kingdoms, of families and of individuals had been written by commission for centuries, the compilation of numerous short biographies of men from different families and of differing ranks, sharing only their homeland and some measure of cultural significance, into one volume was a new phenomenon to Castilian letters. Literary portraiture emerged toward the end of the
medieval period as part of the effort of Humanist historians across the European continent to tell the stories of particular individuals as opposed to only larger entities (Pérez Priego, *Literatura* 191). Caught somewhere between the iconic, “momentary nature of portraiture” and the “more sprawling and developed aspects” of traditional biographical writing (West 50-51), a literary portrait attempts to evoke the presence, by means of the written word, of persons who do not appear before the eyes of the reader.

The tradition of literary portraiture as inherited from historians of antiquity dictates fixed schemes of description and the predominance of positive, rather than negative, depictions (Pérez Priego, “Introduction” 35). Beyond the description of physical attributes, the literary portraits that emerge in fifteenth-century Castile outline the subject’s character, values, deeds and, most importantly, his lineage. Finally, the subject of every *semblanza* within the collections—with one exception, which will be discussed later in this chapter—boasts one essential characteristic: maleness. That is, each literary portrait describes a great Castilian man. One additional marker of nobility remains constant across both texts: inclusion. That is, to appear at all in the collection is just as significant as the content or tone of the portrait itself. Were these men to be excluded from the collection, their claims to nobility could be called into question at a later date, or forgotten altogether. In this way both texts serve the interests of those portrayed—or, more accurately, of those related to them given that the subjects of the *semblanzas* were always deceased—as a register of

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137 In the visual arts, the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries saw the “rebirth” of portraiture as well as the professionalization of European portrait painting (Woodall 1; West 14). During the Renaissance portraiture “became central to noble culture” in its capacity to convey the sitter’s genealogy and his worthiness “of love, honour, respect and authority” (Woodall 3).

138 Shearer West explains that, although “portraiture as a genre is historically tied to the idea of mimesis, or likeness” (12), portraits also reflect “the imagination of the artist, the perceived social role of the sitter, and the qualities of the sitter that raise him or her above the occasion of the moment” (24). As such, artistic portraiture often becomes “less about likeness and more about the typical, the conventional, or the ideal” (24).
claims to nobility. Furthermore, the texts point to a collective construction of gender identity. The sort of masculinity portrayed in Generaciones y semblanzas (c. 1450) and Claros varones de Castilla (c. 1485) is based primarily on a sense of belonging, both to a particular family and to a larger class of families; for this reason the portraits are collected and published together within a unifying narrative frame. Each man’s claim of socio-political importance is strengthened by his association with the other figures in the collection.

 Neither Generaciones nor Claros varones was a best seller. Nonetheless, evidence indicates that these texts were of significance to the contemporary noble class of Castile, and whatever moralizing messages contained therein were directed at this narrow but essential contingency. Both Pérez de Guzmán and Pulgar recognize “the edifying value of biographies,” harnessing it in the fifteenth century as had been done since antiquity (Clavería 498, my translation). An ousted nobleman condemns immorality, weakness, and disloyalty, while offering praise for knowledge of the art of governance in Generaciones; a servant of the crown applauds morality, adaptability, and loyalty to the current monarchs in Claros varones.

The Men Behind the Portraits

As the nephew of Chancellor Pero López de Ayala, uncle of the Marqués de Santillana Íñigo López de Mendoza, and himself the third Lord of Batres, Fernán Pérez de Guzmán was a primogenitor in one of Castile’s most prominent aristocratic and literary

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139 It is “difficult to map the early reception of Generaciones y semblanzas,” says Folger, given that just two manuscripts survive from the second half of fifteenth century (Memory 29). Vicenç Beltran traces the transmission of the text in at least eight additional extant publications from later centuries. Numerous printed and manuscript copies of Claros varones de Castilla from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries have also survived, indicating a respectable contemporary reception (Pérez Priego, “Introduction” 61-64.)
families. Born between 1377 and 1379, Pérez de Guzmán represents the small constituency of secular, intellectual elite typical of the fifteenth century who lived through the political turbulence of the Trastámara dynasty (Vaquero 6). Active in both political disputes and literary circles, Pérez de Guzmán achieved the coveted balance between the sword and the pen.

Having been raised in large part in the home of his uncle, Pero López de Ayala, it seems only fitting that Pérez de Guzmán would also serve the crown for a time as a diplomat and intellectual. He began his contact with the Castilian court through his uncle the Chancellor during the reign of Enrique III and accompanied his uncle on a diplomatic mission to the papal court at Avignon in 1394-95 (Folger, Memory 27). The budding diplomat might have enjoyed a long and fruitful career at court were it not for his “political vision, his uneasy and critical spirit, his nonconformity in the face of tyranny and abuse” (Diez Garretas and Diego Lobejón 11, my translation).

Pérez de Guzmán sided with the Prince of Aragon against the young King Juan II of Castile and his advisor Álvaro de Luna in the Golpe de Tordesillas of 1420. After years of violent encounters and a series of negotiations, Prince Enrique of Aragon was obliged to

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140 Pérez de Guzmán’s political position in the court was not without its benefits, for it allowed him greater prestige, substantial financial compensation, access to the monarch and the potential to influence royal decisions that would affect him and those in his circle (García Vera, “Poder” 226).  
141 When King Enrique III died, his heir Juan II was only two years old, making it necessary for the Prince of Aragon don Fernando of Antequera and the widowed Queen Catalina of Lancaster to govern in his stead. When Fernán Pérez de Guzmán had occasion to meet the Aragonese prince, he was, like so many other noblemen, struck by his tremendous ability as a regent (Diez Garretas and Diego Lobejón 16). In 1419 when Juan II was declared mayor de edad at the age of fourteen, he leaned heavily on his favorite don Álvaro de Luna for guidance. The Castilian king’s fondness for, and deference to, the Constable incited the Prince of Aragon to lead a group of noblemen against him with the purpose of liberating the impressionable monarch from the power of those who, in his estimation, did not have the best interests of the kingdom in mind (16-17). Thus begins the Golpe de Tordesillas in 1420.
accept the authority of Álvaro de Luna and call off his troops.\textsuperscript{142} Even though Pérez de Guzmán then declared loyalty to King Juan II and his advisors following the Prince’s capitulation, it was too little and too late. In February of 1432, Fernán Pérez de Guzmán is arrested in Zamora, accused of conspiracy against the king. Like several of his family members, Fernán Pérez de Guzmán suffers political persecution as well as the attempted requisition of his wealth and estate. Following an eight-month stint in prison, the Lord of Batres retires to his rural estate and makes no further direct intervention into the political affairs of the Castilian court.

Though by all accounts Álvaro de Luna did not officially banish Pérez de Guzmán from court, neither does one suspect that the author’s isolation in Batres was completely voluntary given the numerous complaints expressed in his works.\textsuperscript{143} From 1432 until his death in 1460, the noble author lives as a man divided; though his body is condemned to live some eighty kilometers from the royal court, Pérez de Guzmán’s mind remains firmly in Toledo.\textsuperscript{144}

A victim of Castile’s political discord under King Juan II, Pérez de Guzmán spent the last twenty-eight years of his life in exile. Those nearly three decades would be the most prolific years of his literary career. With an understanding of the potential of literature to

\textsuperscript{142} After the events at Tordesillas Pérez de Guzmán is mentioned in \textit{Cronica de Juan II} at the side of the prince. Folger describes how in 1421 he “negotiated Enrique’s disputed possession of the \textit{marquesado} of Villena twice without success, and acted as ‘mensajero del infante don Enrique’ to Álvaro de Luna” until 1429 when “now as royal ambassador, we find him together with the Infantes de Aragon, who had withdrawn to Albuquerque after their failed invasion of Castile” (\textit{Memory} 27-28).

\textsuperscript{143} In his \textit{Requesta} to the Marqués de Santillana, for example, Pérez de Guzmán refers to the “enojoso açidente” that occasioned his forced retirement from court (Diez Garretas and Diego Lobejón 21).

\textsuperscript{144} The village of Batres is located on the Guadarrama river approximately eighty kilometers from Madrid. Folger finds a description from 1579 that “mentions a village of 65 inhabitants in a swampy, fever-stricken area” (\textit{Memory 27n26}).
influence social realities, the noble *letrado* sought to write himself back into Castile’s inner circle by fashioning a web of intellectual exchange. In time he would honor his noble contemporaries by penning *Generaciones y semblanzas* (c. 1450). A collection of thirty-four literary portraits of some of Castile’s most prominent figures of the early fifteenth century, the text provided the precariously positioned *nobleza nueva*—those who had been granted new titles of nobility by members of the Trastámara dynasty following their contested ascension to the throne in the late fourteenth century—with a genealogical register to legitimize their socio-political and legal claims. Such a gesture is ultimately self-serving for Pérez de Guzmán, as his own kin appear in the collection. While on the one hand the portraits establish each family’s aristocratic genealogy, the largely disparaging portrayal of each subject’s moral character could prove damaging to those same families, making the literary portrait an ambivalent instrument of nobiliary authentication. In some of his lengthier poetic texts as well as in the prose work for which he is most recognized in modern scholarship, Pérez de Guzmán bridges the gap between his rural estate and the royal court in order to carve out a position of moral and historical authority before his death during the final months of 1460.

Just as Pérez de Guzmán (forcibly) retires from life at court, Fernando del Pulgar is born some time before 1430 during the reign of Juan II. The son of a scribe from Toledo, it seems certain that Pulgar was among the Peninsula’s many religious converts from Judaism to Christianity. Pulgar’s conversion was sincere by most accounts, though he did not shy away from criticizing acts perpetrated by the Inquisition in epistles to prominent figures of the time. Despite a willingness to express his own opinion and intervene in polemical matters, Pulgar did not achieve prominence for his personal politics; rather, he made a place
for himself in the Castilian court as a translator, ambassador, secretary, and chronicler during the reigns of three successive Castilian monarchs.

Educated in the courts of Juan II and Enrique IV, the chronicler came to be held in high esteem and was privy to the political secrets of the later king’s court. Enrique IV sent Pulgar as ambassador to the court on visits to Louis XI of France and later to Rome in 1473 (Blecua 64). Pulgar entered Queen Isabel’s service by default as an inherited member of her late uncle’s court. Toward the end of the 1470s, Pulgar retired from the court to live privately in Toledo. While some speculate that his departure stemmed from a negative reaction to the crown’s involvement in the Inquisition (Pérez Priego, “Introduction” 15), others cite a rumor that Pulgar had spoken ill of Queen Isabel, which caused him to fall out of favor (Weissberger 93). In either case, his retirement would be short-lived. After another prominent chronicler, Alfonso de Palencia, publicly disagreed with Isabel concerning the future role of Prince Juan during the Cortes held in Toledo in 1480 (86), Pulgar was invited by the Queen to serve once more as court chronicler, at which point he became, in a manner of speaking, her pen.

While acting as royal chronicler to the Catholic Kings, Pulgar composed an inventory of the kingdom’s most noble men that he titles *Claros varones de Castilla* (or *Libro de los claros varones de Castilla*). First printed in 1486 in Toledo (though likely written many years before its publication), Pulgar’s text brings together twenty-four literary portraits, all of Castilian men who are recently deceased and were personally known by Pulgar (Blecua 70). The parallels between *Claros varones* and *Generaciones* are undeniable. The only Castilian writer to whom Pulgar refers by name is his literary predecessor, Fernán Pérez de Guzmán, and the title of the later text was likely borrowed from Pérez de Guzmán’s
poem *Loores de los claros varones de España*. On two separate occasions, Pulgar mentions the “noble cavallero” (“noble gentleman”) who first attempted to create for Castile a catalogue of “*algunos* claros varones . . . *brevemente* en prosa” (“*Some* distinguished men . . . *briefly* in prose” 72, my emphasis). By implying that the earlier collection of *semblanzas* was noteworthy but incomplete, Pulgar points out a perceived gap that his text will fill.

Numerous scholars have noted the laudatory tone and quality of Pulgar’s *retratos* and the fact that all of the men portrayed therein come from families who support Queen Isabel’s claim to the throne. Composed during the height of the Castilian war with the kingdom of Granada, Tate and Folger suppose that the text emerged as part of a “propaganda campaign” by the Catholic Kings, “an appeal to the loyalty and the virtuosity of the descendants of the illustrious men included in Pulgar’s work” (Folger, *Memory* 198). As compared to his concurrent *Crónica de los reyes católicos*, in which Pulgar strives to be up to date and thorough, the careful selection of anecdotes and examples collected in *Claros varones* has a more persuasive intention.

The political climate of the Castilian court changed drastically in the decades that separate the work of Fernán Pérez de Guzmán from that of Fernando de Pulgar. During Pérez de Guzmán’s final years, Castile emerged from the reign of the young Juan II only to come under the rule of Enrique IV, known as The Impotent. By the time of Pulgar’s death sometime after 1490, the kingdom is in the capable hands of Ferdinand and Isabel. Whereas the work of Pérez de Guzmán defends the interests of those noblemen struggling against the

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145 It is believed that Pulgar had occasion to meet Pérez de Guzmán when he was a young man serving in the court of Juan II (Pérez Priego, “Introduction” 12).
146 All quoted material from *Claros varones de Castilla* is taken from the edition overseen by Miguel Ángel Pérez Priego (Cátedra, 2007). The English translations are my own.
corruption and instability of the mid-century Castilian aristocracy and monarchy, Pulgar appropriates his predecessor’s literary model for the interests of the crown itself. It is intriguing that both the new nobility and the monarchy turn to literary portraiture as a means of negotiating their fraught relationship.

Scholars have noted the ambiguous or changing concept of lineage throughout the Middle Ages. While judicial and legislative sources define lineage quite strictly, literary sources such as chronicles and memoires lend more fluidity to its meaning (Sánchez Saus 39). The present chapter concerns itself with the second group of texts that expands the definition of lineage beyond blood relation to mean also a “community of affects and interests, receptacle of a family past without which the medieval man could not conceive of himself” (39, my translation). Among the trappings of noble lineages are the coat of arms, the house (solar), the family name and nobiliary title(s) (40). These essential elements are used both to define and to sustain a lineage. If one purpose of a collection of literary portraits is to register the names, houses and titles of those included, the semblanza of a nobleman also merits treatment as a demonstration of lineage. (In fact, by incorporating all those components mentioned by Sánchez Saus, perhaps a semblanza is the ultimate demonstration of lineage.) One crucial aspect separates a literary portrait from the other revelations of nobility: while names, heraldry, homes, and titles may be enjoyed during a man’s lifetime, a semblanza can only be generated after his death, and as such benefits the surviving family members more than its subject.

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Sánchez Saus even finds lineage to be a fundamental stabilizing agent of individual psychology and a means of effectively directing the lives and energies of men (40). While a lineage provides its affiliates with economic, social and even psychological advantages, it simultaneously restricts their aspirations (40).
The titles of the two collections give some indication of their content. *Generaciones y semblanzas* ("Generations and Semblances") describes, as is to be expected, the lineage and physical appearance of certain individuals. The title given to Pérez de Guzmán’s prose work does not, however, identify which individuals are to be the subject of his portraits, nor that the author will also include commentary on each individual’s deeds and moral character. *Claros varones de Castilla*, the title of Pulgar’s collection, more clearly articulates the social standing of those to be portrayed (claros meaning illustrious or distinguished), their gender (varones meaning men or gentlemen) and their kingdom of origin. Still, Pulgar’s title fails to stipulate what sort of information the reader should hope to learn about these distinguished Castilian noblemen. When considered in conjunction, the use of plural forms in both titles indicates that the markers of identity and of class described within will be of a collective nature.

Neither text claims to be a registro, that is, an exhaustive or official register, and the criteria for inclusion differ substantially between the two collections. When Pérez de Guzmán writes *Generaciones y semblanzas* (c. 1450), the monarchy is still relatively weak and the nobility is strong, though in flux (García Vera, “Poder” 226). Himself a casualty of political discord, the author of *Generaciones y semblanzas* “perceives the status of emerging Grandes de España as being threatened by royal negligence, the corruption of ‘authentic(ating)’ institutionalized chronicles and a deficient knowledge about the origin of noble lineages” (Folger, Memory 13). Pérez de Guzmán strives to preserve knowledge of noble lineage in the hopes that in the future others will not suffer as he has.

When Pulgar writes, the monarchy is more centralized and stronger than ever, leaving the high nobility more insecure and dependent upon their favor. Authored by a loyal
servant of Queen Isabel and her interests, *Claros varones de Castilla* (1486) invites readers “to consider patterns of loyalty to the crown in the past” such that they might come to support the present monarchs, particularly in their costly and precarious campaign against the last remaining Moorish stronghold in the Iberian Peninsula (Tate, “Introduction” xxi). Just as the War for Granada serves, in part, to unify and to occupy temporarily the powerful noble families under the banner of “peace between Christian princes in order to freely devote themselves to war against the infidel” (Menéndez Pidal 50, my translation), *Claros varones* placates the noble families of Castile who saw their traditional influence shrinking under the rule of the Catholic Kings (Pérez Priego, “Introduction” 42).¹⁴⁸

**Fernán Pérez de Guzmán’s *Generaciones y semblanzas***

Although Fernán Pérez de Guzmán is said to be the initiator of the collective biographical genre within Spanish historiohraphy, his uncle Pero López de Ayala was arguably the first author of Castilian *semblanzas* (Blecua 12).¹⁴⁹ The Chancellor, an esteemed chronicler, provided his nephew with an influential model of literary portraiture. López de Ayala frequently added a literary *semblanza* of the deceased king to the end of his royal chronicles. Framed in such a way, the portrait retrospectively serves to “establish the chronicles’ narrative closure, recapitulate in epigrammatic form the affairs of the respective reign, and commemorate the deceased by means of a literary epigraph” (Folger, *Memory* 50-51). Since his *semblanzas* appeared following extensive narrative accounts, López de Ayala did not provide as much genealogical data as his nephew would (90).

¹⁴⁸ For more on the relationship between the nobility and the Catholic Kings as it pertains to the War for Granada, see Menéndez Pidal or Edwards.
¹⁴⁹ Benito Sanchez Alonso mentions even earlier examples of collective biographical writing in Iberia, though these differed from the work of López de Ayala and Pérez de Guzmán in scope and presentation (272-74).
Pérez de Guzmán names someone other than his uncle as the principal source of inspiration for Generaciones: “Yo tomé esta invención de Guido de Columna, aquel que trasladó la historia Troyana de Griego en Latin” (“I took this invention from Guido de Columna, he who transcribed the Historia troyana from Greek to Latin”; 4). The format of a collection of biographical sketches unconnected by a narrative frame could have been inspired by Guido’s Historia, or from any number of classical models. Surprisingly, other biographic collections written in Latin in the fourteenth century—those of Giovanni Boccaccio, Francesco Petrarca and others—are not mentioned by Pérez de Guzmán as literary influences. Whatever his sources of inspiration, Pérez de Guzmán departs from previous practice by refusing to “fictionally [hitch] the new nobility to prestigious forebears” (Folger, Memory 130). Limiting himself only to the data provided by testimonial evidence, he traces each gentleman’s lineage back no more than two generations. (This is not to say that later historiographers would not use Generaciones as a jumping-off point to do precisely that.)

The prologue to Generaciones has been characterized by Robert Tate as the first Castilian treatise concerning the nature of history and the obligations of an historian (“Prologue” xv). Pérez de Guzmán begins by condemning those who would fill their chronicles with marvelously exaggerated tales for the sake of piquing reader interest, resulting in a sort of unpardonable slander against the noblest houses of the kingdom. As

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150 All quoted material from Generaciones y semblanzas is taken from Robert Tate’s critical edition (London: Tamesis, 1965). The translations from Spanish to English are my own.
151 For more on classical examples of collective biographies, see Sánchez Alonso 33-39.
152 For example, the more than one hundred surviving codices of Boccaccio’s De mulieribus claris (Famous Women) indicate that “it was among the most popular works in the last age of the manuscript book” (Brown xii).
153 Derek C. Carr argues that Enrique de Villena’s prologue and glosses in his translation of the Aeneid, which predates Generaciones by more than twenty years, address many of the same issues raised by Pérez de Guzmán in is prologue and thus calls into question Tate’s oft-cited claim.
opposed to those “hombres de poca vergüenza” (“men of little shame”; 1), Pérez de Guzmán promises to complete his task as historian and chronicler “bien y derechamente” (“well and correctly”; 2). To accomplish this, he will do three things: first, he will wisely apply his knowledge of rhetoric in order to give the historiographic text “hermoso e alto estilo” (“beautiful and high style”; 2); second, he will write with the authority accorded to him as a living witness to the life and character of every figure described within the text; lastly, he will not write the semblanza of any living king, prince or aristocrat, so that he may feel free to describe them truthfully without fear of punishment.

Pérez de Guzmán goes on to describe how the legend of every great man, comprised of his accomplishments and virtues for which he is worthy of eternal admiration, so crucially depends on the work of chroniclers and historians: “¿qué fruto reportarían de tantos trabajos, haciendo tan virtuosos abtos e tan útiles a la república, si la fama fuese a ellos negada e atribuida a los negligentes e viles, segunt el albedrío de los tales, non estoriadores, mas trufadores?” (“what fruit would they obtain from their many deeds, committing such virtuous and such useful acts for the republic, if their fame were to be withheld and attributed to negligent and vile men, according to the will of some, not historians, but rather tricksters?”; 3). The author presents himself as a serious historian who sees grave consequences for the great houses of Castile if their stories are to be told by flatterers or amateurs. The prologue, therefore, exhibits a marked preoccupation with the problems facing Castile at the time and the real consequences that a properly- (or poorly-) written chronicle can have for those involved (Coy 9). In the “unusually and disproportionately long” prologue to Generaciones, Pérez de Guzmán exposes “current abuses and the lack of a reliable chronicle for the epoch of Juan II” (Folger, Memory 53, 59).
The reader is left with the expectation that Pérez de Guzmán will remedy this lamentable breach.154

Scholars date the composition of the majority of the semblanzas around 1450, with the exception of the last two chapters, which would have been added roughly five years later (Blecua 11; Diez Garretas and Diego Lobejón 44). The compilation of Generaciones is situated squarely within the period of the author’s exile from court; thus the reader must assume that Pérez de Guzmán “relied largely on his memory” (Folger, Memory 55). His memory remains remarkably well intact as evidenced by his ability to recount intimate details about the men in question. Furthermore, by insisting that he will only write of men whom he knew personally, the author implies a close proximity to the court. The evocation of these figures “institutes a memorial community which is temporally and spatially dissociated yet presentist,” allowing the author to bridge space and time (115).

As to the question of why Pérez de Guzmán constructs literary portraits that included information regarding a man’s character and physical appearance (as opposed to a simpler list of names, lineages and titles), Folger attributes the choice to the science of mnemonics, the construction of a visual image as a technique to enhance memory (“Writing”), as well as a desire to effect “interpellation, producing subjects who imaginarily identify with the nobility’s values, habitus and codes of behavior” (“Noble subjects” 1). As a vehicle for establishing genealogical memory, the semblanzas create mental images meant to endure in the minds of readers. The titles, privileges and general good reputation of noble subjects must be recorded in order to preserve the families’ claims to nobility and its subsequent privileges. By including members of his own family in the registry, Pérez de Guzmán

154 Though the author claims in his prologue that genealogical recording was in short supply, he was not the only author of the early 1400s who wrote about the lineage of Castile’s noble families. For more on contemporary Iberian historiographers, see: Folger, Memory 116-37.
himself benefits from the text. Furthermore, if the intention of the text is for the reader to pay close attention to and identify with the subject’s values and behaviors, he will also likely take those details to be examples—both positive and negative—for his own life; the text, therefore, takes on a moralizing quality.

Still, Pérez de Guzmán’s gathering of physical and biographic details in the semblanzas has been described as “messy” and failing to outline “coherent moralizing characterizations” (Folger, Memory 89). Most portraits refer to the subject’s general bodily proportions, focusing primarily on the man’s facial features, hair and complexion. The only physical attribute consistently addressed is each man’s height, relating to his perceived physical prowess and, thus, masculinity. Pérez de Guzmán also tends to make reference to the subject’s speaking voice, a practice that will later be repeated by Pulgar. In a comparison of the semblanzas of Generaciones to those of the earlier Islamic historiographic tradition, Harriet Goldberg finds them to be similar in their adherence to “the eyewitness … ensures at the very least an appearance of verisimilitude” yet different in their ultimate purpose (326). Whereas Arabic writers rendered literary portraits as “candid, photographic, totally visual perceptions” of the subjects, Goldberg supposes by the scarcity of physical detail that Pérez de Guzmán’s aim is more “instructive” than descriptive (325, 324).

Pérez de Guzmán portrays only high-born individuals in his collection; eleven of the twenty families that were later officially given the title of Grande de España by Carlos V appear in Generaciones (Folger, “Writing” 318). Despite the eminence of those depicted, the semblanzas are not all flattering. In describing the flaws as well as the virtues of his subjects, Pérez de Guzmán lends a greater sense of realism to his account. Moral failings such as an inclination to drink or excessive love of women take a back seat to more
egregious defects: weakness, disloyalty and covetousness of power. Recurring images of weakness, both physical and moral, cast a negative light on so many of the portraits in Generaciones, feminizing the portrayal of noble men. While recognizing the inherent and ubiquitous nature of vice in human nature and acknowledging that socio-political success is not built on virtue alone (Folger, Memory 84), his writing does appear to condemn moral corruption and to call his readers to a higher standard of goodness.

Indeed, in the portraits of Juan II and Álvaro de Luna we see the semblanza’s power to vilify the political enemies of the author. After giving a compulsory description of King Juan II’s virtues, the author writes: “Pero como quier que de todas estas graças oviese razonable parte, de aquellas que verdaderamente son virtudes e que a todo omne, e principalmente a los reyes, son necesarias, fue muy defetuoso” (“But even having a reasonable portion of all these graces, in those that truly are most important and that to any man, and principally to kings, are necessary, he was very lacking”; 39). Pérez de Guzmán goes on to criticize the late king’s ineptitude in the art of governance. Apart from his covetousness, lust, and vindictive nature, Juan II is denounced for his complete surrender to the influence of Álvaro de Luna. To the Constable of Castile, in turn, is dedicated a lengthy and scathing condemnation of his political opportunism, excessive ambition and the far-reaching effects of his actions. The semblanza even contains a pointed critique of those who supported Álvaro de Luna and benefitted from his corruption:

No callaré aquí nin pasaré so silencio esta razón, que quanto quier que la principal e la original cabsa de los daños de España fuese la remisa e negligente condición del rey y la cobdiça e ambiçión excesiva del condestable, pero en este caso non es de perdonar la cobdiça de los grandes cavalleros que por creçer e avançar sus estados
e rentas, proponiendo la conciencia e el amor de la patria por ganar, ellos dieron lugar a ello. E non dubdo que les plazia tener tal rey, por que en el tiempo turbado e desordenado, en el río vuelto fuesen ellos ricos pescadores. . . . la final entención suya era aver e poser su lugar, non con zelo nin amor de la república.

I will not be quiet here nor will I pass silently over this point, that while the principal and original cause of the damages of Spain was the reluctant and negligent condition of the king and the greed and excessive ambition of the constable, but in this case the greed of the great gentlemen is not to be pardoned who in order to grow and advance their estates and rents, abandoning their consciences and the love of their homeland for profit, allowed it to take place. And I do not doubt that they were pleased to have such a king, because in that troubled and disordered time, like in a turbulent river, they could take advantage to end up like rich fishermen . . . their main objective being to better their standing, not caring or showing any love for the republic. (47)

For Pérez de Guzmán, Juan II and Álvaro de Luna are not the only guilty parties. The author paints an entire swath of the Castilian aristocracy as unpatriotic, even traitorous. It seems that the author is carried away by bitterness in this final semblanza, as evidenced by his repeated departure from the subject of the portrait as well as the repetitive nature of his criticism. Together, these men all exemplify what men in power ought not to do. As the portrait of Álvaro de Luna closes the collection, the characterizations and criticisms contained therein function as a summary of Generaciones and provide its final flourish (López Estrada 328).

Many scholars read Generaciones as the cynical musings of a bitter, slighted man who writes “in isolation at the end of a long and agitated life” (Folger, Memory 201). Pérez
de Guzmán does frequently contemplate the decadence of his time by highlighting the vilest qualities of those portrayed. For Geraldine Nichols, Pérez de Guzmán was “a pessimist who saw little that was good. He chose examples stressing what one should not do rather than those worthy of emulation” (344). She even posits that the author had more success in portraying “the distressing state of the time” than the character and lineage of individuals (342). Nichols’s observations do not hold true in at least one case: the portrait of Fernando de Antequera, which will be discussed momentarily.

Without the influence of an official patron, the selection of subjects for his semblanzas is entirely in the hands of the author. The order of presentation of the semblanzas roughly positions the most important figures towards the beginning of the text, with the obvious exception of the last two semblanzas of Juan II and Álvaro de Luna that were added following their deaths. That the portraits vary greatly in length, from a few lines to several pages, gives the collection a rather uneven appearance. First billing is granted to Enrique III, known as El Doliente or The Infirm, as the monarch under whom Pérez de Guzmán began his career of political service. Although Enrique III suffered from a physical weakness (flaqueza) that kept him from showing much personal strength in battle, the author praises the king for his “discripción para conocer e elegir buenas personas para el su consejo, lo qual non es pequeña virtud para el prínçipe” (“discretion for knowing and electing good people for his council, which is no small virtue for a prince”; 6). Evidently, the virtue of selecting one’s counsel with wisdom and discretion is not at all small, for it offsets the depiction of flaqueza normally considered to be a deplorable defect by the author.

The portrait of Enrique III is followed by that of his widow, Queen Catalina of Lancaster. The account of her life and person is highly conspicuous not only in its extreme
brevity, but more importantly given the gender of its subject as it is the only literary portrait of a woman to appear in the collection. To mitigate her remarkable inclusion, Pérez de Guzmán calls attention to dubious markers of her gender. the only *semblanza* of a woman in the entire collection. He tells that, in her shape and gait, “*tanto parescía onbre como muger*” (“she looked as manly as she did womanly”; 9). By stripping the queen of her physical femininity, the author mollifies some of the concern occasioned by her high rank. It is within the same paragraph that the author characterizes the queen as an honest, generous and magnificent person, though one too easily ruled by advisors, a fault that Pérez de Guzmán deems “*común de los reyes*” (“common among kings”; 9). Interestingly, the author is willing not only to include a woman in his collection, but even to portray her alongside past kings, all so that he can reinforce the same criticism that will surface in the portrait of Juan II: any monarch who allows himself, or herself, to be steered by false counselors is unfit to lead Castile.

The third *semblanza* is that of don Fernando de Antequera, Prince of Aragon, a man who had earned Pérez de Guzmán’s loyalty and respect decades prior. The author paints don Fernando as the consummate gentleman and statesman. Pérez de Guzmán commends the life of don Fernando to his reader as a “¡Claro enxenplo e noble dotrina en que todos los prinçipes que son en subjeçion e señorío de reyes en que como en un espejo se deven mirar!” (“Clear example and noble doctrine in which all princes who are in subjection and dominion of kings should look as in a mirror!”; 10). Given that it was his loyalty to this figure that earned Pérez de Guzmán his exile from the Castilian court, his glowing portrayal of the monarch works, in part, as a self-serving apologetic gesture in defense of his political alliance with an exemplary prince. Whereas other *semblanzas* display a mixture of positive
and negative attributes, here Pérez de Guzmán defends Fernando against attacks on his character made by others: “Algunos quisieron a este infante notarle de cobdiça . . . Pero a estos tales está bien presta la respuesta: ca, segunt la espirençia lo ha mostrado cada uno de los grandes que alcançan poder e privança, toma para sí quanto puede de dignidades, ofiçios e vasallos” (“Some wanted to charge prince with covetousness . . . But to these charges the answer is ready: because, as experience has shown, every great man who achieves power and position takes for himself as many ranks, offices, and vassals as he can”; 12). In addition to excusing any misbehavior on Fernando’s part as common practice, Pérez de Guzmán suppresses several unsavory details of the prince’s life and career in order to exalt him (Echegaray). Whereas Pérez de Guzmán freely references the ill health of Enrique III, Juan II and Catalina of Lancaster in their portraits, he largely silences the health issues of Fernando of Antequera, presumably due to the popular notion that, as the head of the body politic, a monarch’s illness would spread metaphorically throughout the kingdom (Echegaray 57). Given the author’s commitment to objectivity and veracity as expressed in the prologue, his willingness to “[fashion] the literary image of the ideal king by omitting the deficiencies” in the case of Fernando de Antequera is highly ironic. Perhaps, then, impartiality and verisimilitude are not Pérez de Guzmán’s primary goals in the writing of Generaciones. Robert Folger describes the text’s purpose in this way:

Pérez de Guzmán conceived of a mnemonic “registro” of important families, a “memorial” which claims noble titles, prerogatives, offices and status. His sources are exclusively “estorias auténticas” . . . reliable informants and, particularly, his own experiences and memories. Thus he became an auctor for future genealogists. As seminal texts for the histories of noble families his semblanzas could be prolonged
by the generations to come and be projected back into a foundational, mythic past.

*(Memory 13)*

The long-held characterization of *Generaciones* as a mnemonic register of important families ignores the ambiguous ends to which these literary portraits, some of them quite derogatory in their content, might have been used by future generations. That the portraits vary greatly in length, from a few lines to several pages, also indicates that the author’s primary concern is something other than composing a well-ordered catalogue. “Remarkably,” Folger concludes, “Pérez de Guzmán is accepted as an authority” (*Memory* 31). This “remarkable” consequence was, conceivably, one of the author’s chief aspirations. *Generaciones* sets up Pérez de Guzmán as an authority on Castilian history and its aristocracy, thus claiming a sort of classical *auctoritas* and affording an active role to an otherwise removed figure. Though *Generaciones* was by no means a best-seller, there is evidence that Pérez de Guzmán’s collection came to be seen as a legitimate supporting document in the courts of Enrique III and Juan II (Folger, *Memory* 31). Copies of *Generaciones* were later transmitted to curious historians as well as to noble families wishing to know more about their history and ancestors. Each of these curious or self-serving souls availed himself of Pérez de Guzmán’s text, placing it and its author at the center of the question.

**The Lesser Works of Pérez de Guzmán**

In addition to his foray into historiographic prose, Pérez de Guzmán was considered an accomplished poet both before and after his exile. Prior to his retirement from political life in 1432, the Lord of Batres demonstrates a predilection for exploring through poetry
those issues and concerns that would follow him into exile, including old age, death, justice, fortune, free will, and the current political climate (Diez Garretas and Diego Lobejón 35). Pérez de Guzmán’s first poetic compositions figure among those of the famed Cancionero de Baena (Blecua 10). Pérez de Guzmán’s later work, composed in Batres during his final decades, provides an intriguing echo of the values espoused in the literary portraits at the center of the present chapter. This section will examine two lengthy poems—“Diversos vicios y virtudes” and “Loores de los claros varones de Castilla”—that position the author as a judge of morality, nobility, and masculinity, as does Generaciones.

The numerous surviving manuscripts of Diversos virtudes y vicios from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries indicate the text’s considerable popularity. The didactic poem is thought to have been written well after the author’s unfortunate dealings with Álvaro de Luna and over the span of several years between 1449 and 1454. The poem’s nearly five hundred stanzas tutor the reader in three central competencies: governance of an estate, governance of a kingdom and self-governance. As all of these activities are associated primarily with the male gender, the poet’s advice is likely directed at male readers. The poem has been described as a mirror meant to reflect the vices of Castilian society, principally directed at the governing class (Diez Garretas and Diego Lobejón 55). Evident even from its title, the text aims to provide moral instruction to its reader, delving into all manner of issues—political, ethical, intellectual and religious—and addressing even the highest-born subjects (56).

Throughout the nine stanzas that constitute the poem’s prologue, Pérez de Guzmán sings the praises of his friend Alvar García de Santa María, the gentleman and friend to

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155 Blecua goes on to tell us that his earlier love poems give way to philosophical musings that will surface in his Coplas a la muerte de don Diego Hurtado, the Setecientas and the Coronación de las Quatro Virtudes” (10).
whom the poet dedicates his work. (By appealing to a respected male reader at the poem’s opening, the poet directs his work to the same reading public as Generaciones.) The fourth stanza explains one of the author’s motivations for writing:

\[
Avido \ tal \ presupuesto,
\]

\[
es \ así, \ muy \ buen \ amigo,
\]

\[
como \ el \ Señor \ me \ es \ testigo,
\]

\[
que \ yo, \ en \ afecçión \ puesto,
\]

\[
porque \ turbado \ & \ molesto
\]

\[
non \ incura \ en \ algunt \ viçio,
\]

\[
ocupo \ el \ tienpo \ en \ oficio,
\]

\[
non \ famoso \ mas \ honesto.
\]

Having this purpose, it is thus, very good friend, as God is my witness, that I, set in affection, being perturbed and bothered should not enter into vice, I occupy the time in humble yet honest trade.

The poet worries that inactivity may lead to vice, and so he means to employ himself with honest, though not necessarily illustrious, work. (These lines are more likely a show of false modesty than an indication of a true aversion to fame.) A dedication to letters serves as a sort of armor against the moral and intellectual perils of idleness (Velasco 1139). Later, the seventh stanza reveals another of the author’s intentions:

\[
E \ porque \ sin \ compañía
\]

\[
non \ ay \ alegre \ posesión,
\]

\[
pensé \ comunicación
\]

\[
aver \ en \ esta \ obra \ mía
\]
convusco, de quien confía

mi coraçon non engañado

que seré certificado

si es tibia, caliente o fría.

And because without company there is no happy possession, I thought to communicate in this work of mine with you, to whom I entrust my not deceived heart, so that I can be certain if the work is warm, hot or cold.

Loneliness and isolation threaten the happiness (and social position) of the poet. Through literature, he will commune with other noblemen such as his friend Alvar García de Santa María. From his place of exile, Pérez de Guzmán seeks not only to enseñar deleitando (“teach while delighting”) but also to associate with a certain class of men and form homosocial bonds that will be important to his status as well as his sanity. Furthermore, due to his exile and his advanced age, the coveted balance between arms and letters is no longer possible for Pérez de Guzmán. His days as a man of action, one who uses his body and his sword to intervene in political disputes, are behind him. Now he must resign himself to using his pen to craft artistic commentary on matters of state.

The remaining stanzas of the poem offer all sorts of sage advice to gentlemen and leaders, each stanza with its own subtitle to help the reader navigate the text. The poetic voice advocates for a definition of true nobility that also takes learned behaviors and practices into account (Diez Garretas and Diego Lobejón 59). Subsequent stanzas (417-424) turn to the subject of Spain’s history and her past kings:

¡O provincia infortunada

muy digna de reprehensión,
tú más que otra nación
d’aquestos viços tocada
eres y contaminada;
discordia en tus naturales
& de príncipes reales
sin justicia administrada!
Las causas y ocasiones
Por que sienpre mal oviste
Fueron, provincia muy triste,
intrínsecas divisiones
& negligencia de reyes
que no ussan de las leyes
en penas nin en galardones.

Oh unfortunate province most deserving of reprehension, you more than other nations touched by these vices and are contaminated; there is discord between your natives and royal princes, who do not administer justice! The causes and occasions for which you always suffered were, very sad province, intrinsic divisions and the negligence of kings who did not make use of laws, either in penalties or in rewards.

Here Pérez de Guzmán displays remarkable rhetorical ingenuity: by directing his words at Spain herself through apostrophe, he deflects attention away from his pointed criticism of past kings. If a kingdom’s successes and failures are the direct responsibility of its governor, and the poet’s characterization of Spain’s current state is tremendously dire, then previous kings have not stewarded the kingdom well. Pérez de Guzmán particularly criticizes past
kings’ negligence in administering the law. Their poor leadership has corrupted the natural
goodness of Spain. The poet wishes only the best for his motherland and he recounts her
woes with pain.

Further on, the stanza titled “De rey virtuoso y pueblo obediente” (470) echoes the
association between the monarch’s actions and the fate of the kingdom:

Quando el rey es virtuoso
y los pueblos obedientes
tales plantas y simientes
fazen reino glorioso;
la primera, dezir osso,
baste si la otra fallesce,
que nunca el pueblo obedesc
al rey qu’es defectuoso.

When the king is virtuous and the people are obedient, such plants and soil make a
glorious kingdom; the first, I dare to say, suffices if the other fails, for the people
never obey a king who is defective.

The final couplet appears rather boldly to explain a subject’s disobedience when faced with
a “defective” king. Pérez de Guzmán obliquely justifies his own past behavior and that of
family members and friends who oppose(d) Álvaro de Luna. The poet also claims to have
history and human nature on his side, as the people “never” obey a corrupted monarch.

Loores de los claros varones de España, another lengthy laudatory poem, was also a
product of Pérez de Guzmán’s many years in Batres. He dedicates the poem to his nephew
don Fernán Gómez de Guzmán, Comendador Mayor de Calatrava (271). Pérez de Guzmán
begins the *Loores* with his characterization of Castile’s tradition, or lack thereof, of recording its greatness:

Non quedó España callada

E muda en las istorias

Por defectos de vitorias

Nin de virtudes menguada,

Mas por que no fue dotada

De tan alto pregonero

Como fue Grecia de Omero

En la famosa Iliada.

Tanto son más ensalzados

Los varones excelentes,

Quanto de los diligentes

Sabios fueron más notados;

E tanto más obligados

Somos a los cronistas,

Quanto a las sus conquistas

Nos fazen más avisados.

Spain did not remain quiet and mute in the histories for lack of victories nor for diminished virtues, but rather because she was not gifted with such a high crier as was Greece with Homer in the famous Iliad. So much more highly extolled are excellent men whereby the diligent and wise men are more noted; And so much more obliged are we to the chroniclers where conquests are made known to us by them.
Just as in his prologue to Generaciones y semblanzas, here Pérez de Guzmán defends the need for a text that enumerates the deeds of Spain’s great men, to show that his native kingdom is not at all lacking as compared to those that already boast such texts. All that the Spanish lacked was a chronicler to do the job properly. A community suffers if it cannot count on capable men to record the deeds of its most valiant sons for the benefit of future generations (Velasco 1137). As the rhyme pair “cronistas” and “conquistas” suggests, the role of the chronicler in recording and telling history is equal in importance to that of the great men who make history. As a consequence, the poet adopts a nationalistic, socially-invested posture as the mouthpiece of his homeland and its people (1138).

By referring to chroniclers who have come before, the author freely cites received wisdom in order to “[insert] himself into the native historiographical traditions . . . and in so doing . . . [consolidate] an authorial identity, a role in political life denied him by events” (Weiss 103). Pérez de Guzmán’s self-aggrandizement is simultaneously underscored and muted by this incorporation into a collective tradition.156 Writing poetry while in exile “allows him to cultivate the image of a man striving after an ocio virtuoso, which in turn enabled him to take part in the active life as it were by proxy” (Weiss 100). As opposed to the unbecoming idleness to which the poet refers in Diversos vicios y virtudes, this ocio virtuoso whereby the noblemen occupies himself with intellectual pursuits is both gender- and class-appropriate.

While in exile, Pérez de Guzmán does not resign himself to inactivity or isolation from the world around him. Through epistolary exchange with his friends and family at

156 As such Pérez de Guzmán plays upon “the expectations of contemporary prologues, in which personal comments were frequent, he clothes his personal bitterness in an anonymous and aphoristic form without appearing to usurp too large a measure of moral authority” (Weiss 101).
court, he manages to stay abreast of the latest socio-political happenings and cultural novelties (Diez Garretas and Diego Lobejón 36). During this time he dedicated a number of literary works to friends and family members of high standing, nurturing important relationships and skirting the isolation that his exile might have otherwise imposed.\footnote{Pérez de Guzmán dedicated \textit{Coronación de las quatro virtudes cardinales} to his nephew the Marqués de Santillana, and to another nephew, Fernán Gómez de Guzmán, comendador mayor de Calatrava, he devotes \textit{Loores de los claros carones de España} (Diez Garretas and Diego Lobejón 36).}

Pérez de Guzmán’s concern in \textit{Generaciones} for the fair distribution of fame and good opinion, independent of inheritance or noble blood, as well as his denunciation of corruption, are in keeping with the line of reasoning expressed in his poetic works (Pérez Priego, \textit{Literatura} 192). The collective works of Pérez de Guzmán paint the portrait of a noble man of letters who, having been spurned by his enemies at court, industriously seeks to subvert the peripheral position to which he has been relegated. He will continue to engage in the intellectual \textit{vita activa} by defending and historicizing Castile’s greatness, and by cultivating friendships with distinguished men through literary exchange.

\textbf{Fernando del Pulgar’s \textit{Claros varones de Castilla} and Lesser Works}

Though by no means does Fernando del Pulgar introduce literary portraiture into Castilian letters, in his day he serves as an accomplished and respected chronicler who strives to perfect the genre (Domínguez Bordona xvii), and also employs the emerging art of the \textit{semblanza} to new ends. As Robert Folger puts it, Pulgar “vampirizes the authority of Pérez de Guzmán” (“Noble Subjects” 42), borrowing from his predecessor not only the title \textit{Claros varones de Castilla} but also the literary format that would forever unite the two
Pulgar figures in a long line of Peninsular chroniclers. For centuries, these servants of the court recorded history, provided commentary and supplied an apologetic narrative for the actions of the monarchy. The continuity of the practice of chronicle writing represented each monarch’s stability and in some sense “authorized” their rule (Folger, Memory 180). Pérez Priego notes that the reign of the Catholic Kings saw a sharp increase in the production of historiographical texts (“Introduction” 18). Throughout the fifteenth century the figure of the court chronicler garnered increasing political clout and rhetorical license (18). With “a keen appreciation for the propagandistic value of historiographic discourse,” Queen Isabel carefully selected her court historians and she “greatly enhanced the prestige of the post, primarily by increasing and regularizing its salary” (Weissberger 71).

In his preference for a beautified, artful presentation of didactic lessons taken from history, as opposed to an account that privileges realism or objectivity, Pulgar departs from

158 Pulgar would not be the last to “vampirize” or (mis)appropriate Pérez de Guzmán’s work. Generaciones y semblanzas was published in 1512 in Valladolid as an addendum to the translation of Giovanni Colonna’s Mare historiarum.158 Under the title Mar de istorias, Cristóbal de Santisteban touted Generaciones as a purported third part of the chronicle and attributed the entire work to Pérez de Guzmán (Folger, Memory 34). Though the misattribution may be due to simple human error on the part of Santisteban, Folger speculates that his misreading may have been intentional: “Since Pérez de Guzmán was held in such high esteem among his contemporaries – we know of three editions of his Setecientas before 1512 . . . and five more by 1564 . . . – a work of his would have appeared eminently suitable” (Folger, Memory 43). However, the brevity of Generaciones made it less suitable for publication as a stand-alone text. By “[p]assign off Generaciones y semblanzas as the third part of Mar de istorias and attributing this textual construct in prestigious folio format to Fernán Pérez de Guzmán, Santisteban could foist an impressive work by a famous author on his intended patron” (43-44). Later, Galindez de Carvajal would add Generaciones to his edition of the Crónica del señor rey Juan II (Blecua 10). The final pages of the Crónica are dedicated to the “Generaciones, semblanzas, e obras” of the king, his father and the notable gentlemen who surrounded them. If the body of the chronicle narrates the action, then the semblanzas appears to name and describe its cast of principle actors. This, at least, was the reasoning of the editors, and had indeed been the practice of chroniclers such as Pero López de Ayala. (It was, however, a bizarre choice given the description of King Juan II supplied by Pérez de Guzmán.) These posthumous borrowings led scholars to mistake Pérez de Guzmán as the author of the two texts for centuries.
the preceding historiographic tradition in Castile (Pérez Priego, “Introduction” 28). Blecua’s praise for the greater sense of setting and more extensive narration in Pulgar’s portraits, as compared to those of Pérez de Guzmán, is echoed by Nichols’ praise for what she calls a more Renaissance style of narration, achieved through the inclusion of anecdote, dramatics elements such as direct speech, and even humor (71; 344). Pulgar fashions exempla out of historical elements and does not shy away from using rhetorical devices to persuade readers (Pérez Priego, “Introduction” 30). Pulgar’s intentions for Claros varones are made clear toward the end of his prologue:

Yo, muy exçelente Reina y señora, . . . movido con aquel amor de mi tierra que los otros ovieron de la suya, me dispuse a escrivir de algunos claros varones, perlados y cavalleros, naturales de los vuestros reinos, que yo conosçi e communiqué . . . E por ende brevemente, con la ayuda de Dios, escreviré los linajes e condiciones de cada uno e algunos notables fechos que fizieron, de los quales se puede bien creer que en autoridad de personas e en ornamento de virtudes e en las abilidades que tovieron, así en ciencia como en armas, no fueron menos excelentes que aquellos griegos e romanos e franceses que tanto son loados en sus escripturas.

I, most excellent Queen and lady, . . . moved by that love of my homeland that others have felt for theirs, disposed myself to write about some distinguished gentlemen, prelates and knights, natives of your kingdoms, whom I knew and with whom I communicated . . . And thus briefly, with God’s help, I will write the lineages and conditions of each one and some of their notable deeds, from which it can be believed that in authority of people and in ornamentation of virtues and in abilities, as much in science as in arms, they were no less excellent than those Greeks and
Romans and French who are so praised in writing. (73)

With this, Pulgar specifies the subjects of his portraits (Castilian knights, gentlemen and clerics whom Pulgar knew personally), their content (brief accounts of their lineage, virtues and abilities) and his motivation for writing (to prove the excellence of Castile, the author’s homeland). Though not in every case the highest-born Castilians, the chosen subjects of Pulgar’s twenty-four semblanzas are, to the author’s mind, the most perfect examples of the kingdom’s greatness and merit.

Unlike Pérez de Guzmán who writes Generaciones in defense of the claims of the nobleza nueva and as a criticism of political corruption, Pulgar addresses the heirs of the century’s earlier political struggles “at a point in Castilian history when the most important families had succeeded in securing their privileges, titles and possessions” (Folger, Memory 200). If we agree that there was not, at this point, such a pressing need to create a register of Castile’s aristocracy in the face of royal corruption, the publication of the collection certainly relates to Pulgar’s most influential patrons, the Catholic Kings. Pulgar may be a true patriot, convinced that the current rulers of his homeland are divinely ordained and believing whole-heartedly in the political vision of the Catholic Kings. Furthermore, the Catholic Kings perceive a need to “draw together all the sharply differing factions of the past two reigns, even to the extent of diminishing responsibility for divisive action” as Castile faces the final years of its crusade to conquer the last remaining strongholds of Al-Andalus (Tate, “Introduction” li). Pulgar urges all the kingdom’s noblemen to cease to sow discord and collaborate in the glorification of Castile, following the example of those men portrayed in Claros varones who profited from their cooperation with the crown. Whereas Pérez de Guzmán means to show the royal court’s corruption, Pulgar highlights its strength.
Unlike Pérez de Guzmán, Pulgar does not include a single semblanza of a female figure in his collection; however, the presence of one woman looms large over the entire work: Queen Isabel, the author’s patroness. The text points to the anxiety among Isabelline chroniclers to gender Castile as masculine as it rests in the hands of an authoritarian female monarch. Queen Isabel herself is often rhetorically masculinized by historiographers of the era (Weissberger 82). Boccaccio’s De mulieribus is translated into Spanish in 1494 as Mujeres ilustres, such that contemporaries might be able to better contextualize their powerful female monarch. The prologue of Pulgar’s text is dedicated to Queen Isabel, as well as a narrative interlude and a concluding section. These sections have several purposes: to book-end the semblanzas and divide them into two groups (the first depicting the king and lay noblemen, the second depicting high-born and notable clerics), to mention the names of other important figures who for whatever reason did not merit individual semblanzas, to ingratiate the author to his patroness through flattery, and to insert his work into the greater pro-Castilian nationalistic project.159

The purposes of the razonamientos mentioned above relate to the relationship the author means to establish with his readership, his patroness, and his kingdom. As the author’s patroness, Queen Isabel was shown drafts of Pulgar’s works in progress. One might question, then, just how much authorial license Pulgar was able to exercise. Then again, he was also adept at the humanist strategy of “cultivating subordination” (Weissberger 94). Pulgar’s submission to censorial checks as an act of obedience may have been more

159 As to the first purpose of the razonamientos, the division of laymen from religious officials is intriguing. Perhaps by separating the men in this way, Pulgar means to communicate that different virtues and qualities are detected (and expected) from the two groups. Then again, the expectation to live virtuously is equally distributed across both groups. Though clerics may not produce heirs through marriage, their occupation of high-ranking offices nevertheless brings prestige to a noble family and affords them the opportunity to influence the political life of a kingdom.
performative than sincere. At the same time, Isabel demonstrated her power to send him away and bring him back based as it pleased her, as alluded to earlier in the present chapter. Beyond his significant use of the first person singular in the prologue to *Claros varones*, the strongest argument for Pulgar’s own inalienable and robust authorial voice comes from his lesser works, principally his personal correspondence and his glosses to the *Coplas de Mingo Revulgo*.

Although Pulgar earned his living as the hired pen of others, when reading his lesser works it becomes apparent that the man had his own opinions and the will to express them. His collected letters are directed to a wide range of prominent figures, religious officials, aristocrats and even monarchs, as well as a few anonymous addressees; in them, Pulgar often presumes to give advice on a variety of topics. As in the case of *Claros varones*, the only female addressee to appear among Pulgar’s letters is Queen Isabel.

To the Archbishop of Toledo, Pulgar directs a bold, sermonic epistle in which the imperative mood abounds. The letter, written in 1475, chastises the cleric’s apparent support for the claim of Alonso of Portugal to the throne of Castile. Citing numerous biblical examples, Pulgar pleads with his reader to set aside divisive and disloyal politics: “Dexad ya, señor, de ser causa de escándalos e sangres . . . Contagioso y muy irregular enxemplo toman ya los otros perlados desta nuestra España, veyendo a vos el principal de todas las armas e divisiones” (“Cease, lord, to be the cause of scandal and bloodshed . . . The other prelates take the contagious and highly irregular example of Spain, seeing you as the leader of all the armed disagreements and divisions”; *Letras* 19). The Archbishop’s actions are unchristian, a perversion of his habit and of his religion, and they reflect poorly on the entire kingdom. The following year, Pulgar writes to the Bishop of Osma to defend the actions of
Queen Isabel in her administration of justice, such that the Bishop might be well informed before passing judgment, or else keep quiet (27). Also in defense of the queen, Pulgar presumes to write to the King of Portugal in 1475 to advise him against hostile action in Castile. After having considered this all-important political matter, Pulgar thought simply to provide the king with his own thoughts: “acordé escribir a vuestra alteza mi parecer” (“I decided to write to your highness with my opinion”; 39). Among the reasons for the king to accept his niece’s claim to the throne, Pulgar cites the people’s love for her, “de lo cual no pequeña estima se debe hacer, porque la voz del pueblo es voz divina, a repugnar lo divino es querer con flaca vista vencer los fuertes rayos del sol” (“which should not be held in low esteem, because the voice of the people is divine, and to repudiate the divine is to wish with poor vision to conquer the sun’s strong rays”; 43). By associating Queen Isabel, the sun, and invincible strength in the same line of reasoning, the author constructs a highly evocative and poetic warning to those who would oppose her. Pulgar closes the letter with a word of caution that the king’s counselors may be more concerned with pleasing him than offering the best advice (48).

In his *Coplas de Mingo Revulgo* and glosses of the same, Pulgar authors and subsequently explains a conversation in verse between a prophetic pastor call Gil Arribato and another pastor called Mingo Revulgo, who describes the woes of the community called Revulgo due to its minister’s moral corruption. The prologue to the *glosas*, addressed to the Count of Haro, Constable of Castile, explains that the author’s purpose is to incite readers “a bien vivir” (“to live righteously”; 159). Just as the stomach craves new and delicious dishes to sate the appetite, explains Pulgar, so too does the human mind require new and entertaining explanations of how to achieve eternal salvation. Pulgar, then, presumes to
provide this essential instruction to his readers while employing the delightful bucolic mode. Moreover, to the extent that the *Coplas* are an allegorical contemplation of the political tensions in Castile in the 1460s, Pulgar reveals in his poetry and glosses an inclination to comment on delicate political matters (Pontón). In his lesser works, Pulgar thus positions himself as a provider of sage—and often unsolicited—advice to the kingdom’s most prominent men and women, as a poet and moralist driven by Christian values, and as the reader’s tutor with a greater understanding of justice and morality than some of the kingdom’s greatest men as well as a genuine concern for the greater good.160

Given this, if *Claros varones* seems to accommodate the political motives of the Catholic Kings, it difficult to discern whether Pulgar was a willing and faithful supporter of their cause, or rather a glorified ghostwriter. The Isabelline agenda and profound sense of patriotism that appear to guide *Claros varones* may have been genuine on the part of the author (Pérez Priego, “Introduction” 42), although we should not discount the possible personal advantages to Pulgar in penning a flattering collection as he carefully positions himself at court. Pulgar pens *Claros varones* as a tribute to those who had supported Isabel’s campaign of succession, and to convince other members of his reading public that loyalty to the current monarchs behooves them. The irony of the use of this particular literary form to these ends is remarkable. *Claros varones* “co-opts *Generaciones*, a texts written as a tactical (and potentially subversive) intervention against the hegemonic discourse of official historiography, for the strategic project of shaping docile noble subjects” (Folger, “Noble

160 Aside from his openly political correspondence, Pulgar also authors epistles of a more personal nature. As the War of Granada begins in 1482, the royal chronicler writes to his queen to reassure her that Castile’s cause is just and divine; he also takes this opportunity to encourage Isabel in her study of Latin (57-59). Even more curious is his letter to Doctor Francisco Nuñes on the subject of the “*males que asoman con la vejez*” (“maladies that emerge in old age”), at once an erudite dialogue with the writings of Cicero, and the grumblings of an elderly man plagued by a chronic pain in his side (3).
Despite the obvious similarities between *Claros varones* and the earlier *Generaciones y semblanzas*, Pulgar nevertheless departs from Pérez de Guzmán’s model in several ways. While the later text gives comparable attention to each man’s heritage, the transmission of titles and goods, less consideration is given to physical descriptions. Rather than representing particular, unusual, or distinguishing attributes of the men in question, Pulgar takes a physiognomic approach by presenting prototypes that correspond to the moral and social condition the author means to evoke (Pérez Priego, *Literatura* 194; Clavería 495). He does frequently describe a man’s manner of speech (as does Pérez de Guzmán), seen as a marker of nobility and courtesy (Pérez Priego, “Introduction” 48).

In his *semblanzas*, whose subjects at times resemble male saints in their perfection, Pulgar emphasizes four cardinal virtues: prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance (Pérez Priego, “Introduction” 46). Most of the men portrayed display all four key virtues in some measure. The author does occasionally describe vices such as lust, rage and covetousness, but these are largely overshadowed—even excused by—each man’s ultimate goodness.

Some suppose that the near-perfection of the *semblanzas* demonstrates a concern and respect for the living relatives of those he describes (Domínguez Bordona xxii). Others attribute the sycophantic nature of the portraits to the political motivations of the Catholic Kings.

By no means does Pulgar narrate every great deed or accomplishment of his subjects;

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161 Pérez Priego explains: “All of this responds to a physiognomic perspective . . . in which one does not attempt to evoke a particular physical appearance but rather to sketch a brief portrait whose features conform to the character and condition of the type” (*Literatura* 194, my translation). Following the suetonian tradition, Pulgar believed in a relationship between one’s physical characteristics and one’s character (Pérez Priego, “Introduction” 45).

162 As demonstrated in the foundational epic poems of medieval Castile, discussed in Chapter 1, the ability to speak well and persuasively was an essential element of a man’s capacity to gain the respect and loyalty of other men.
rather, he carefully selects particular anecdotes and episodes from their lives in order to fashion models of excellence. Tate observes three main patterns in the first section of the text: “Castilian nobles who outstrip well-known Romans in moral and political ability”, “politically successful careers, of a much lower moral standard, transformed by final renunciation of secular motives”, and finally “perseverance despite obstacles” (“Introduction” xxxiv). Not entirely unlike Pérez de Guzmán, Pulgar urges elite male readers to cultivate classical political savvy while also operating within moral boundaries, and remain resolute in the face of difficulties. Pulgar’s rhetorical flair and talent for anecdotal narration compensate for the collection’s otherwise monotonous, formulaic content.

To Enrique IV is dedicated the first and the lengthiest literary portrait. He was the half-brother and predecessor of the author’s patroness, and also the king who gave Pulgar his start in court. Enrique IV is granted top billing because he was naturally, by virtue of his position, “en el miradero de todos” (“in view by all”; 80). Whatever the king does will serve as an example, either positive or negative, to his subjects and for generations to come. Pulgar does not omit the king’s many mistakes, shortcomings, or misfortunes of the Castilian king known as The Impotent. Castile suffered unrest and fell into disarray because the king “en la ejecución de las particulares e necesarias, algunas vezes era flaco, porque ocupava su pensamiento en aquellos deleites de que estaba acostumbrado, los cuales impidien el oficio de la prudencia” (“in the execution of particularities and necessities, sometimes he was weak, because he occupied his thoughts with those delights to which he was accustomed, which impeded the use of prudence”; 80-81). According to Pulgar, the king suffered in accordance with his flaws, and his dear reader may expect the same divine justice: “E nuestro Señor . . . algunas vezes permite males en las tierras generalmente para
And our Lord . . . sometimes permits suffering in the world generally so that each person may be punished particularly according to the measure of their error”; 86). The divine retribution for King Enrique IV’s errors caused suffering in the whole of the kingdom. His unconsummated marriage produced no heirs, leaving Isabella to succeed him. The first semblanza of the collection implicitly frames the current monarchs as restorers of order, drawing a stark comparison between past and present. The king’s positive qualities may have been carried through the bloodline to his half-sister, while the queen, and any interested reader, may avoid his moral and political failings by studying and learning from his negative example. Pulgar distills the legacy of Enrique IV in order to provide a didactic benefit for future Castilian leaders.

Portraits such as that of Iñigo López de Mendoza, Marqués de Santillana, more accurately reflect the tone and content of the remaining portraits. Well-known today for his literary contributions to the Castilian canon, the marquis had, according to Pulgar, achieved the coveted balance between the pen and the sword, all the while avoiding “sin grand pena” (“with little difficulty”) all forms of sin (113). The gentleman’s standards for himself matched those to which he held others: “Era muy celoso de las cosas que a varón pertenecía hacer e tan reprehensor de las flaquezas que veía en algunos hombres” (“He was zealous regarding the things that a man must do and a great reprimander of the weaknesses that he saw in other men”; 110). López de Mendoza is not only perfect in his own manhood, but a judge of others as well. Pulgar closes the semblanza by listing the accomplishments and titles of the subject’s six sons.

The inclusion of a semblanza of don Juan Pacheco, Master of the Order of Santiago,
is curious given Pulgar’s apparently high moral standard and Pacheco’s fraught relationship with Queen Isabel. Then again, Pacheco’s *semblanza* contains an important lesson for the reader by embodying the desirable quality of mutability, that is the ability to adapt to a changing political climate. After narrating the gentleman’s political missteps and personal vices, Pulgar shifts toward the conclusion of his portrait:

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E \text{ porque ninguno es bien corregido si puramente no es arrepentido, conociendo este cavallero aver desviado del camino que devía seguir, no solamente tornó a él, mas aun trabajó de amansar quanto pudo las voluntades alteradas de los cavalleros e perlados que aquella división querían continuar. E tornó en gracia del rey don Enríque, el qual le perdonó e fizo grandes Mercedes de villas e logares e otras grandes rentas, e confió dél toda la governación de sus reinos. E dende en adelante governó absolutamente e con mayor esención e libertad que primero solía governar.}
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And because no man is well corrected if he be not purely repentant, knowing this gentleman to have strayed from the path that he should have followed, he not only returned to it, but even worked to smooth as much as he could the altered will of those knights and prelates who wished to continue in that division. And he returned to the king don Enrique’s graces, who pardoned him and gave him great rewards of towns and places and other large rents, and he entrusted to him all the governance of his kingdoms. And from then on he governed absolutely and with greater immunity and liberty than he had previously. (126-27)

Pacheco is praised for shifting his allegiance and that of the men under his influence. In doing so, the reformed nobleman enjoyed more favor from his generous king than ever

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163 For more on Don Juan Pacheco, see Nancy F. Marino’s *Don Juan Pacheco: Wealth and Power in Late Medieval Spain.*
before. Pulgar constructs a persuasive appeal to those readers who have not yet fully endorsed the reign of the current monarchs, suggesting that they may be handsomely rewarded upon coming into the fold. To achieve Pacheco’s same measure of favor, the reader must not only display loyalty and repent of their previous treason, but also possess sufficient charisma to compel other men to follow the same path. Additionally, Pacheco’s story reveals positive elements in the character of King Enrique IV: generosity, forgiveness and compassion.

Scholars have called Pulgar a man of great political honesty (Blecua 65), one who demonstrated such moral dignity that any personal ambition was negligible (Domínguez Bordona xi). However, Pulgar was also at the mercy of his royal patroness, negotiating his own position at court and aiming to please the Queen with his written works. While serving as royal chronicler and secretary to a most formidable female monarch, Pulgar enters into intellectual dialogue—directly and indirectly—with prominent male interlocutors and encourages them to act rightly, which often means falling in line with the monarchy Pulgar so dutifully serves.

Conclusion

Mercedes Vaquero describes the emergence of an “intellectual nobiliary class” during the fifteenth century of which Fernán Pérez de Guzmán is a prime example (7, my translation). These men foment literary production not only as patrons, but also as translators, transcribers and critical readers. Julian Weiss notes that the fifteenth-century, particularly the reign of Juan II, is marked as “a period characterized by confident and self-assertive aristocrats and letrados keen to exploit their writing as a medium for constructing
images of social power” (98). Pérez de Guzmán represents said class of self-fashioning aristocrats in his use of literary works to assert personal and collective interests. Even though the lord of Batres would have “little success in the politics of his lifetime” (Folger, Memory 28), the slighted nobleman exploits the capacity of art to persuade, to enlighten and to affect a union of minds. Some forty years later, the written works of Pulgar target the same company of intellectual and politically savvy noblemen whose allegiance is coveted by the Catholic Kings. Whether we consider Pulgar to be a social-climbing converso or a devoted servant of the crown, he harnesses the persuasive and moralizing power of historiography for the benefit of his patroness. Intriguingly, the political careers of Fernán Pérez de Guzmán and Fernando del Pulgar draw opposing arcs. As the former moves from prominence into exile, the latter ascends from the status of humble but lettered converso to become the royal chronicler of the Catholic Kings. Pérez de Guzmán and Pulgar are remembered by historians and literary scholars for their work in recording of the deeds of others; neither author achieved the same level of greatness or prominence as the subjects of his writing. They were recognized in their day not as models of noble masculinity, but rather as its heralds and its judges.

Folger quips that even “a cursory look” at the contents of Generaciones shows it to be a text concerned with male subjects, both those described in the semblanzas and those who make up the intended reading public (“Noble Subjects” 32). The same is true of Claros varones four decades later. A particular breed of masculinity is held up as ideal, as representative of Castile’s greatness, as the kingdom entered its golden age. Using both positive and negative examples, the two authors promote a masculine model that values loyalty, turns its back on corruption, and strives for the good of the kingdom. Both authors
also advocate for an adaptive model of masculinity, able to shift and reevaluate political allegiances according to current circumstances. Pérez de Guzmán justifies rebellion as an appropriate behavior when it constitutes a rejection of corruption, while Pulgar praises mutability as it pertains to championing the current regime. Unlike the constancy praised in previous centuries, their praise of adaptability may be tied to Renaissance concept of *sprezzatura*, Castiglione’s imperative that the male courtier must respond to each given context with grace and an air of effortlessness. Unfortunately, the male courtiers depicted in Castilian sentimental fiction from the latter half of the fifteenth century, discussed in the next chapter, exhibit a lamentable entrenchment that jeopardizes their masculinity entirely.
V. NOBLEMEN UNDONE IN SENTIMENTAL FICTION

The sentimental novel has been called the only unique form of prose fiction to emerge from Castilian letters in the fifteenth century, as well as the most important of the narrative genres during that time in terms of both quantity and quality (Rohland de Langbehn 44). The Castilian sentimental novel is a veritable gold mine of literary and cultural analysis of late medieval Iberia. Characterization of the genre – its most fitting name, the delineation of its body of texts, and the factors that determine said corpus – has preoccupied scholars for more than a century. Flourishing within a period of no more than one hundred years and representing a cluster of fewer than thirty works, the novels nonetheless differ from one another significantly in form, character configuration, and narrative voice. Authors become narrators, narrators become lovers, lovers become go-betweens; characters are even appropriated from foreign texts and given new life by peninsular authors. Protagonists move between actual and allegorical spaces, interacting with characters of both types. Formally, the sentimental novel is a collage of narrative prose, poetry, debates, and epistles that has complicated scholarly efforts aiming to compartmentalize these works. Nevertheless, one thing is certainly true: sentimental novels were some of the Iberian Peninsula’s first best sellers.

Diego de San Pedro’s Cárcel de amor (1492) was, by all accounts, a runaway success, first in Spain and later across the European continent. Printed both by itself and in combined editions with other works, the text had been printed at least twenty-five times in its original language and over twenty times in translation to six languages by the end of the 16th century.

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164 For an excellent summary of the problems surrounding the characterization of sentimental fiction in medieval Iberia, see: Cortijo Ocaña 7-18.
sixteenth century (Whinnom, “Introduction”; Varela). The commercial success of his earlier
*Tractado de amores de Arnalte y Lucenda* may have, in fact, induced San Pedro to write
*Cárcel de amor* (Weissberger, “Authors” 62). Juan de Flores’s *Grisel y Mirabella* (1495)
garnered similar international acclaim, as evidenced in part by the existence of more than fifty copies in circulation a century after its composition (64).

Marcelino Menéndez y Pelayo was perhaps the first scholar to note the striking similarities between the sentimental novel (which he called the *novela erótica-sentimental*) and the chivalric novel, the main difference being that the sentimental novel privileges the description of the characters’ feelings and interior lives over external action (3-4). For its similarity to chivalric fiction, scholars such as Barbara Weissberger contend that sentimental fiction does not constitute a separate literary genre, but rather that chivalric and sentimental texts are inscribed within a shared generic category. Indeed, on the Iberian Peninsula production of sentimental fiction is contemporaneous with that of the chivalric novel and, as Escudero Martínez notes, both genres enjoyed comparable popularity with the reading public, as demonstrated by the circulation of numerous original editions, continuations, and translations (15). Perhaps the plots of sentimental novels are simply “those of the *libros de caballerías* given tragic endings” (Waley, “Introduction” xxvii). The tragic endings to which the protagonists come are, indeed, an element signaled by most scholars as one of the key identifying components of sentimental fiction. Where chivalric heroes might succeed, sentimental heroes—if we can even call them that—fail miserably, unable to reconcile devotion to their lady with societal obligations. Whether by committing suicide, charging into battle to be killed, or retiring from polite society to wander madly in the wilderness, these unsuccessful lovers provide little in the way of service to their families or kingdoms.
Theirs is a world of systematic frustration (Rohland de Langbehn, *La unidad genérica* 88). The stark contrast between sentimental and chivalric male protagonists is, to my mind, one of the strongest arguments for the treatment of the two literary modalities as related but not interchangable.

Taking into account the elements of parody and irony identified previously by scholars, I propose a reading of these texts that recognizes not only their playfulness, but also their potential for social engagement. To read sentimental fiction as a parody of courtly love is also to read it as a critique of the same. Of particular interest to the current investigation are the moralizing imperatives communicated to noble male readers of sentimental novels. This is not to say that the Castilian sentimental novel does not also communicate moralizing imperatives to other groups within the reading public. However, if the poetry and literature of courtly love narrates “essentially a man’s conception of love” (Dronke 9), it does behoove the contemporary critical reader to consider the commentary on noble male behavior offered by these novels written by, narrated by, and starring men. Learned authors at the margins of the Castilian court, disturbed by the damaging effects of courtly love on male aristocrats and the kingdom at large, compose works of sentimental fiction as a pleasing yet moralizing tool for the benefit of courtly readers. Noble male protagonists in pursuit of an impossible love are rendered unreasonable, infirm, treasonous,

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165 In 2005, Dorothy Severin argued for a new reading of the genre as “defined by one overarching concept – parody of the religion of love” wherein the practice of courtly love is as much a religion as it is a game “in which the tenets of Christianity are reversed into a world-upside-down” (13, 20). She finds “seeds of parody” in *Siervo* as well as “parodic elements” in *Cárcel de amor* (8). Ivy Corfis has also noted the parodic and ironic nature of the genre, to the extent that its reader “is aware of the irony since what should transpire does not. Friends should not be treacherous – but they are. The innocent should not be punished – but they are incarcerated or killed. . . . Violence accompanies passion and perverts the joy of love into pain and sorrow” (164).

166 Linda Hutcheon observes that artistic parody ranges from “a playful, genial mockery” to “serious criticism” (15). The present chapter approaches the latter pole of the parodic spectrum, where parody implies an element of disapproval or condemnation of the parodied subject.
For the sake of concision, the present chapter will restrict its analysis to five novels at the core of the Castilian sentimental fiction corpus: *Siervo libre de amor*, by Juan Rodríguez de Padrón; *Tratado de amores de Arnalte y Lucenda* and *Cárcel de amor*, both by Diego de San Pedro; and *Grisel y Mirabella* and *Grimate y Gradissa*, both by Juan de Flores. These five novels represent roughly one quarter of the texts listed in Whinnom’s seminal 1983 critical bibliography of Castilian sentimental fiction. Among the many similarities shared by the novels that emerge during the second half of the fifteenth century is the perpetual failure in love and eventual demise of their male protagonists. Repeated representations of failed masculinity provide commentary on the contemporary nobility’s culture of idleness and the operant system of gender relations that promised negative consequences for young noblemen.

The final decades of the fifteenth century saw notable political unrest, first under the rule of an impotent king and later under that of a formidable female monarch, as well as anxiety surrounding religious conversion and blood statutes, all culminating in the establishment of the Holy Office of the Inquisition for the Purity of the Faith in 1477.¹⁶⁷ The War of the Reconquest was also coming to an official, if not actual, end, marked by the fall of Granada in 1492. The moral and philosophical anxieties provoked by such institutional processes are reflected in the period’s artistic and literary production (Cvitanovic 19).

The second half of the fifteenth century also saw the emergence of the so-called “leisure class”, comprised of aristocratic sons and daughters who inherit their parents’ hard-

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¹⁶⁷ Michael Gerli describes the very end of the fifteenth century as “a period in Iberian, but especially Castilian, life of acute crisis and vertiginous human change. The events of the social and political panorama of the second half of the fifteenth century . . . produced nothing short of a series of tectonic shifts in the civic and psychic landscape of Castile” (*Celestina* 8).
fought fortunes.\textsuperscript{168} Whereas the previous generation had worked tirelessly to obtain wealth and a high social position, their sons and daughters enjoy the spoils and inherit hard fought patrimonies with little or no personal effort (Maravall 38). As the aristocracy becomes less involved in military matters, their energy turns to subsidiary forms of leisure: tournaments, hunting, and even the pursuit of love. For the leisure class, love becomes “a delightful and painful sport” (164, my translation). Not only were noble youths more apt to suffer from lovesickness due to the combination of wealth and inactivity, but the experience of melancholic love even “became another mark of precedence, like wealth and leisure themselves” (Wack 61). One’s participation in the game of love became an indispensable element of the performance of noble masculinity at court. The game might not have presented a problem, had the particular brand of love-sport practiced by the leisure class not been so detrimental to the players. Furthermore, it was a love that did not fit neatly with institutional and societal interests: “The sacrament of marriage did not appear on courtly love’s horizon, and if the institution of marriage did, it usually did so as an obstacle to achieving the most elegant, exquisite height of romantic passion” (Gerli 20). Indeed, Andreas Capellanus famously warned, “if the parties concerned marry, love is violently put to flight” (156). The works of fiction that flourished during the second half of the fifteenth century reflect the transformations and concerns experienced by contemporary society. The unfavorable, feminizing depiction of noblemen in sentimental novels may be born out of genuine concern for the moral well-being of the individual reader and the court in general.

\textsuperscript{168} In this context, Maravall defines leisure as “[el] pasar el tiempo sin hacer ningun trabajo orientado a la produccion de bienes materiales” (34); however, to my mind it also implies a certain carelessness or nonchalance as regards one’s social and personal responsibilities.
Authors and Readers at Court

The authors of sentimental fiction in Castile were, in a sense, the cultural attachés of the Castilian court. Their art depicted love affairs between courtiers and was intended for a courtly reading public. The three authors in question lived and served at court for a time, yet remained somewhat on its margins as servants to, rather than members of, the aristocracy. Their liminal place at court provides a balance between proximity and distance and affects the content and tone of their moral imperatives.

Juan Rodríguez de Padrón, author of *Siervo libre de amor*, was born into the lower nobility of Galicia. He worked as a page in the court of Castilian King Juan II and spent many years in the service of the future Cardinal Cervantes, prelate to the king. While traveling in the service of Cardinal Cervantes, Rodríguez de Padrón lived in relative comfort, traveled abroad, and enjoyed personal relationships with several influential men of the era, including Gonzalo de Medina and Eneas Silvio Piccolomini of Italy, considered to be a founding father of the sentimental novel (Hernández Alonso 21). Several scholars suppose that the inspiration for *Siervo* was derived from a personal experience of love and loss while the young Rodríguez de Padrón lived at court. Nevertheless, after many years spent on the edge of the aristocratic sphere, the Galician nobleman opted for a life of religious contemplation as a Franciscan friar (Lida de Malkiel, “Vida y obras” 314-15). It seems that something about courtly life, perhaps its lack of moral imperatives, turned him off.

The poet Juan de Flores was a courtier of good social standing during the reign of the

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169 Hernández Alonso questions long-standing assumptions surrounding Rodríguez de Padrón’s role at the court of Juan II: “Aunque se ha repetido insistentemente que estuvo como paje en la corte de Juan II, esto no parece verosímil, ni queda el menor rastro documental sobre dicho supuesto. Lo cual no obsta para sospechar que mantuvo contacto con la corte, muy probablemente a través del cardenal Cervantes, a cuyo servicio estuvo” (21).
Catholic Kings. Beginning in 1476, Flores served as the royal chronicler, which positioned him as a first-hand witness to courtly society. Meanwhile, his association with the University of Salamanca suggests the author’s knowledge of contemporary scholarly works and debates (Gwara, “Observations” 245). Though not a member of the aristocracy, Flores was a well-educated man whose talents earned him a place at the royal court. The intellectual exercise of historical writing invites reflection on the past and a comparison with the present, which may lead to criticism of the latter.

Those who have attempted to piece together the biography of Diego de San Pedro agree, despite their different assumptions and conclusions, on paucity and uncertainty of the few historical records at our disposal. Investigators have relied on the biographical information provided in his literary works, especially his prologues, as an additional—though not entirely reliable—source of information about the mysterious author. Most investigators concur that Diego de San Pedro lived during the second half of the fifteenth century, that he was alive in 1501, and that he composed his works no earlier than the 1470s, although these were not published until the final decade of the fifteenth century. Some scholars speak with a greater degree of certainty of the author’s involvement with and service to the upper echelon of Spanish society:

We know for certain that he was a servant of the Count of Urueña, Juan Téllez Girón, an influential knight in the court of Enrique IV and a maester of Calatrava. Years later, he was introduced into the Isabelline literary circle, as several of his works are dedicated to the queen and her ladies. He probably participated in the War of

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170 See Joseph Gwara’s article “The Identity of Juan de Flores” or Carmen Parrilla García’s critical introduction to *Grimalte y Gradissa* for more recent studies concerning the difficult task of determining whether the Juan de Flores who composed prose fiction also worked as a functionary for the Isabeline court and as rector for the University of Salamanca.
Granada, where he came to know Diego Fernández de Córdoba, leader of the
Donceles, to whom he dedicates Cárcel de amor. (Pérez Priego 231, my translation)
The dedication of his novels to members of the high nobility and royalty indicates
considerable proximity to the Castilian elite; nonetheless, San Pedro was not born with a
title of nobility and, like the other two authors, he only moved within the courtly milieu as a
servant.

A majority of scholars uphold that the intended public of the fifteenth-century
sentimental novel belongs, like its protagonists, to the highest social stratum. The noble
reader, eager to see his deeds celebrated, gives works of sentimental and chivalric fiction a
warm reception at court (Cvitanovic 17; Hernández Alonso 13-14). The setting of Rodríguez
de Padrón’s Siervo reflects the milieu of the high nobility, its cast of characters consisting of
kings, princes, nobles, and not a single common person. Likewise, every character in San
Pedro’s two novels is of noble birth, with the exception of the page in the Tractado. San
Pedro’s novels were “written for the great aristocracy, the warrior-poets of the court of
Isabella” (Whinnom, “Introduction” xi).171 Juan de Flores overtly targets the Isabeline court
in his novels, while simultaneously attracting a more intellectual readership by incorporating
legal issues and greater intertextual play into his novels. As a writer of romances, Juan de
Flores “had more, although by no means total, freedom to question” the same monarchical
and courtly practices he was charged with legitimizing as the official chronicler
(Weissberger, Isabel Rules 179).

I categorically reject the notion that sentimental fiction was written for and read by
an exclusively female public. More than one scholar has questioned the assumed female

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171 The novels’ dedicatory sections, and outright flattery of the Queen in the Tractado, reveal that San
Pedro “sought royal recognition for his literary efforts” and kept Isabel’s court very much in mind
as he composed his novels (Weissberger, Isabel Rules 162-63).
readership of the sentimental novel. Gerli imagines a reading public for the sentimental fiction of Iberia that is “not circumscribed by gender” while Von de Walde Moheno insists simply that men were also consumers of sentimental novels (“Toward a Poetics” 481; “Novela sentimental” 57). Noble men shared the same interest in amorous themes as their female counterparts, as evidenced by the presence of such topoi in the cancionero poetry and chivalric novels, not to mention their active participation in the creation of the genre. Readings and dramatic representations of sentimental works likely figured among the forms of entertainment enjoyed at court by both men and women. It stands to reason, therefore, that male patrons and readers at court formed part of the imagined public to which fifteenth-century authors direct their works.

Gonzalo de Medina, the man to whom Siervo libre de amor is dedicated, was a man of letters and, as Antonio Prieto reminds us, the addressee necessarily influences the formulation of the work (43). The novel as “extended epistolary monologue” boasts an aristocratic male addressee who, in turn, stands for the greater courtly public for whom the work is written (Brownlee 89). As the poet names himself as narrator and dedicates the work to his friend at court, the story becomes one exchanged between noble men who share “únimo y claro amor” (“intimate and pure love”; 67). While San Pedro’s earlier novel Arnalte y Lucenda is dedicated to Queen Isabel and her ladies, Cárcel de amor is dedicated to Diego Fernández de Córdoval, seventh Alcalde de los Donceles, and to “otros cavalleros cortesanos” (“other courtly knights”; 79). The sentimental genre, then, consists of male

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172 Juan Rodríguez de Padrón’s interest in Castile’s aristocracy is also revealed in a contemporaneous work, Cadira de onor (c. 1441), a text exploring the origins of some noble families and their heralds (Hernández Alonso 37; Pérez Priego 224).

173 All quoted material from Siervo libre de amor comes from the 1986 edition prepared for publication by Antonio Prieto. The English translations are my own.

174 All quoted material from Cárcel de amor comes from the 1971 edition prepared for publication by
authors addressing a courtly audience that certainly included male readers.

All three of these authors involved themselves somehow in courtly life and kept in close contact with the social elite, even as they maintained some objective distance from the center of the courtly milieu, its inhabitants, and its values. The hierarchical differential between the author and his reading public provides the critical distance necessary to observe and comment upon the consequences of aristocratic leisure activities such as the pursuit of courtly love. However, the proximity of the author, a submissive courtly servant, to his reading public may explain the entertaining and veiled nature of the didactic content.

Juan Rodríguez de Padrón’s *Siervo libre de amor* (c. 1440) is generally recognized as the first significant Iberian iteration of the sentimental genre. The narrator describes himself as a “*temeroso amador*” (“fearful lover”), subject to a love that induces fear and shame rather than bravery or vigor (67). He admits that “*el seso, firmado consejo de mis cinco sentidos*” (“the brain, firm council of my five senses”) no longer rules his behavior now that he has fallen in love (69). Then *Discreción*, an allegorical personification of the lover’s inner voice of reason, chastises the lover’s abandonment of his sanity. The lover decides that there is no remedy for his suffering but to write a letter to his beloved, the verses of which employ repeated images of slavery: he calls himself an obedient servant, though she has put his heart in shackles (73-74). Later *Entendimiento*, another allegorical figure, speaks to the narrator of the madness and eventual death that await the lover who gives himself over to despair. Frustrated by his refusal to listen to reason, these allegorical

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Keith Whinnom. The English translations are my own. The Donceles were “a troop of light cavalry composed solely of young gentlemen who enjoyed certain special privileges” (Whinnom, *San Pedro* 25).

175 The present section provides a brief summary of each of the five novels, tracing its plot arc with particular attention to the actions taken by the enamored male protagonist. In subsequent sections, several common themes related to the moralizing imperatives for male readers will be flushed out in greater detail.
figures eventually abandon the narrator.

It is in the midst of his own suffering that the narrator interpolates an adaptation of Eneas Silvio Piccolomini’s *Historia muy verdadera de dos amantes*. Unlike the narrator and his beloved, Ardanlier and Liessa share a mutual and passionate love that culminates in their running away together “ardiendo en fuego venéreo” (“burning with venereal fire”; 84). Although Ardanlier is “el más valiente y glorioso cavallero que a la sazon bivía” (“the most valiant and glorious knight alive at that time”) and beloved in the courts of monarchs across the European continent, his love story ends tragically (85). The hero’s father, King Creos, pursues the clandestine lovers and proceeds to murder young Liessa, blaming the lady for his son’s pursuit of glory and adventure. Liessa begs for her own life and for the life of his unborn grandchild, whom she carries inside her; nevertheless, the king stabs the heroine through the abdomen, killing both mother and child. Upon discovering the dead body of his beloved, Ardanlier stabs himself with his sword to be reunited with Liessa in death, but not before writing a letter to the princess Yrena of France who will then declare King Creos to be her capital enemy because of his offense against the pair of young lovers. The heavy-handed Christian rhetoric of the lovers’ shared tombstone names the sin of “bien amar” as the cause of the lovers’ demise. The narrator closes the interpolated story and ends his text the way he began it, as a well-born and bred man who has lost everything—good fortune, personal autonomy, happiness, sanity—to love. Rodríguez de Padrón leaves the reader with an open ending, unaware of the final outcome for the love-stricken narrator. The complete abandonment of reason, which permeates the narrative frame as well as the

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176 Written originally in Latin, the first known translation of Piccolomini’s text into Spanish was published in 1495 in Salamanca (Amezúa 1). Scholars find 27 editions of the text from the 15th century, translated into at least 5 languages other than Latin.

177 At the novel’s close a large ship manned by Sindéresis, another personification of human reason, approaches shore and inquires after the hero’s adventures in love.
interpolated love story, does not bode well for the narrator. The novel charts an innovative course through waters yet-to-be explored by Iberian writers of fiction, though literary exploration of the sort would not peak until the final decades of the century.

Diego de San Pedro penned two of the most widely read and studied sentimental novels, Tractado de amores de Arnalte e Lucenda and Cárcel de Amor, published in 1491 and 1492 respectively.\(^\text{178}\) The aristocratic male protagonist of each novel falls in love with a woman of higher social standing, courts his beloved unabatedly, and is ultimately undone by the cunning of a male rival—or perhaps more accurately by his own overzealous pursuit of a galardón which puts his lady in a precarious social position.

In the Tractado, the narrator or autor tells the reader the story of how Arnalte falls in love with Lucenda at her father’s funeral and goes absolutely mad with love for her. Just when Arnalte finally receives the galardón from his lady, in this case permission to kiss her hand, the hero leaves on a hunting trip. Upon his return he will discover that his confidant, Elierso, has taken Lucenda as his own wife in Arnalte's absence. The gentlemen exchange accusations and insults in a series of letters, wherein Elierso delivers a significant attack on the hero’s dignity: “digo que me espanto cómo consentir puedes que la fuerza de tu esfuerço de tan grand flaqueza este sojuzgad[a]. Tú, que de las cosas más peligrosas eres vencedor, ¿cómo puedes de una muger ser vencido?” (“I say that it shocks me that you allow the force of your strength to be subjected to such weakness. How can you, defeator of the most dangerous things, be defeated by a woman?”; 189).\(^\text{179}\) The rival asserts that, by falling so

\(^{178}\) Although the works were published within a year of one another, “scholars have established that Arnalte was actually written years prior to its appearance in print . . . and that many years intervened before San Pedro composed Cárcel” (Weissberger, “Authors” 62). In 1907 Menéndez Pelayo referred to the Tractado as a trial run for the later Cárcel de amor, the latter novel boasting “an obvious increase in thematic complexity” (Brownlee 145).

\(^{179}\) All quoted material from the Tractado de amores de Arnalte y Lucenda comes from the 1995
madly in love, the hero’s masculine prowess is called into question. According to Elierso, passionate love leads to emasculation. The two men fight one another in a duel supervised by the King himself. When Elierso refuses to admit any wrongdoing he is slain by Arnalte. Although Arnalte has prevailed over his traitorous friend, the newly widowed Lucenda will still not have him; instead, the lady retires to a convent. Arnalte, in turn, resolves to withdraw into the mountains for the rest of his days. Though a skilled sportsman and knight, Arnalte turns out to be “a defective courtly lover” for his weakness against Lucenda’s charms and his inability to earn her love (Severin 9).

While Keith Whinnom does indeed call Arnalte a “luckless lover” (San Pedro 62), he regards Leriano of Cárce de amor to be “no more and no less than the perfect lover and perfect knight” (“Introduction” xxi). Yet, even a cursory summary of the novel reveals Leriano’s purported perfection to be highly questionable. Leriano endangers the life and honor of his beloved, Laureola, and when his pathetic attempts at emotional blackmail fail, Leriano commits suicide by poisoning himself. Not unlike the other sentimental protagonists, he abandons reasons in pursuit of inconvenient love. Most egregious of all are Leriano’s dishonor of his noble family and the hero’s treasonous acts against his own king.

The reader once again will hear the story from the perspective of El Auctor, both narrator and character, who encounters a strange figure while traveling. Covered in hair and bearing a savage visage, the figure asks El Auctor to follow him away from the beaten path.

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180 After their lengthy written exchange, Elierso accuses Arnalte of being a man of words rather than deeds (“tú para el dezir y yo para el fazer nascimos” [210]). Given that the novelist is himself a man of letters and words, Elierso’s assertion is quite curious. It calls to mind the 17th-century Tuscan proverb Fatti maschii, parole femine (manly deeds, womanly words) (Parker). The proverb points to a centuries-old masculine anxiety concerning inactivity, whereby the act of writing was considered more passive on the spectrum of possible masculine behaviors.
and to help a suffering man who resides in the Prison of Love.\footnote{When the narrator finally asks the identity of the strange figure, he identifies himself as Desire who, though not a gentleman by nature, has always been surrounded by “honores de buena criança” (“men of good breeding”), thus suggesting that those most often affected by lovesickness are noblemen (82).} Once inside the allegorical structure, the imprisoned man is able to speak directly to El Auctor. He identifies himself as Leriano, son of the Duke and Duchess of Macedonia (88). Though an influential nobleman, Leriano was unable to prevent one fatal eventuality: his falling in love with Laureola, daughter of the reigning King Gaulo. He recognizes that this is a “\textit{pensamiento que yo deviera antes huir que buscar}” (“thought that I should have avoided rather than embraced”);\footnote{Leriano is condemned to the prison by four figures: Understanding, Reason, Memory and Volition, the last of whom keeps the key to his cell. Every component of the prison – its walls, furniture, entrances, exits and guards – is of Leriano’s making. Such details suggest the protagonists’s complete responsibility for his current predicament.} Having acted in clear disobedience of his reason, he has chosen Love and thus lives with(in) its penalties.

When Leriano endeavors to establish contact with Laureola with the help of El Auctor, his go-between, a jealous rival named Persio fills the King’s head with lies regarding an ongoing affair between Leriano and Laureola, resulting in the latter’s imprisonment.\footnote{The weepy, lovesick protagonist convinces El Auctor, who is our narrator, to act as his go-between. In order to gain access to Laureola, El Auctor travels to her father’s court in Macedonia. Remarkably, El Auctor is able to gain social acceptance in the Macedonian royal court by simply observing and imitating its male courtiers. His success implies that nobility, regardless of the geographic setting, is little more than a set of behaviors that can be replicated by any man.} The rival Persio also delivers some pointed criticism of the protagonist’s behavior. By endlessly pursuing the princess, the noble youth has brought shame to his lineage: “\textit{mal te has aprovechado de la linpieza que heredaste; tus mayores te mostraron hacer bondad y tu aprendiste obrar traicion; sus huesos se levantarían contra ti si supiesen como ensuciaste por tal error sus nobles obras}” (“you have squandered the pure blood that you inherited; your elders taught you to do good and you learned to sow treason; their bones would rise up...
against you if they knew how you have sullied their noble acts by your error”; 114). From the mouth of a lying adversary comes an important truth about the lover: by engaging in vain flirtations and inappropriate crushes, the young nobleman is a negligent servant to his family, king and country.

While El Auctor devises several diplomatic avenues to pursue, Leriano jumps to a violent and harebrained plan: a full-on war against Laureola’s father, his king, to rescue his beloved. After years of fighting, Laureola’s innocence is revealed to the king, she is pardoned, and all should be well. Leriano continues to pursue an unyielding Laureola. Unlike his chivalric correlative, not even by securing the lady’s freedom from captivity can Leriano overcome her indifference or the social impediments to their relationship.

Upon reading a final letter of refusal from his beloved, Leriano surrenders completely to death. Tearing Laureola’s letters into small pieces, the hero adds them to a glass of water and ingests the concoction to cause his death. Unrequited loves becomes a poison that pollutes the nobleman’s sense of duty to his king and family, until the toxic substance is incorporated into his very being and brings about his demise. Both of Diego de San Pedro’s leading men lose everything: their loves, their minds, and their position of privilege in society.

In 1495, two more novels of similar thematic and formal composition hit the presses on the Iberian Peninsula, both by Juan de Flores: Grisel y Mirabella and Grimalte y Gradissa.\textsuperscript{184} In the first, the princess Mirabella is so enchanting that her father, the king of

\textsuperscript{184} Despite their publication in 1495, numerous scholars have posited that the novels were written years, even decades, before their publication. Gwara supposes that Grisel y Mirabella was in circulation before 1475 with Grimalte y Gradissa coming to light approximately ten years later (qtd. in Cortijo Ocaña 141). In part, Grimalte y Gradissa is also thought to be the later of the two novels as it “represents an advance in technical accomplishment and suggests greater experience in constructing and writing a novel than is shown in Grisel” (Waley xxi). For more on the various
Scotland, locks her in a tower to keep the young men of the court from killing one another in battle, as so many have already done, in hopes of winning the favor of the princess. Flores’s portrayal of the lovers’ destructive passion may be a condemnation of the fighting of duels, which became illegal by decree of the Catholic Kings in 1480 (von der Walde Moheno, *Amor e ilegalidad* 82n). Even Andreas Capellanus condemns love because its pursuit “regularly leads men to deadly, inescapable warfare” (196). Desire for the lovely young woman ends lives as well as friendships between noblemen, as seen in the debate between Grisel and the *otro cavallero*, from which Grisel emerges victorious.

When Mirabella is found to return Grisel’s love and to have acquiesced to his amorous designs, the two are brought to trial under the fictitious *Ley de Escocia* wherein the party responsible for the affair must die by fire while the accomplice lives in exile (Brownlee 202). Flores narrates the *combate de generosidad* between the two lovers wherein each attempts to save the other by accepting full responsibility for their tryst and, thus, proving their love through self-sacrifice. Ultimately the lovers’ fate will be determined by a debate between representatives of each sex, Torrellas and Braçayda. 185 Torrellas is found to have won the debate, although the narrator gives no specific reason for his victory, and Mirabella is sentenced to death by incineration. It is interesting that in this case it is the female lover, generally thought to be the more passive recipient of amorous attention, who is

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185 Neither Braçayda nor Torrellas is an original creation of Juan de Flores. Braçayda, the beautiful and wise woman originally appearing in a popular legend from Troy, figured in works by the Marqués de Santillana, Gómez Manrique and even Rodríguez de Padrón as a shrewd defender of womenkind (von der Walde Moheno, *Amor e ilegalidad* 125-26). Meanwhile, the figure of Torrellas is appropriated from more contemporary culture as a fictionalized version of the historical Catalonian misogynist poet Pere Torroella (Pedro Torrellas) of the mid-fifteenth century (127).
found to be the responsible party, rather than her active male pursuer.\footnote{Although fabricated by Flores, laws similar to the \textit{Ley de Escocia} did exist during his time that condemned sexual impropriety (Matulka). The “difficulty of causal analysis” of lovesickness as noted by Gerard of Berry and other medieval scholars makes the possibility of assigning guilt a challenging task, given the nature of the offense (Wack 56).}

In a final, desperate attempt to save Mirabella, Grisel commits suicide: “\textit{en fuego de bivas llamas se lanzó sin temor}” (“he threw himself into the live flames without fear”; 361).\footnote{All quoted material from \textit{Grisel y Mirabella} comes from the 1931 edition prepared for publication by Barbara Matulka. The English translations are my own.} The figurative fire of love that has spurred on Grisel’s actions throughout the narrative becomes the tool that will also bring about his physical demise. Mirabella’s death is no less poignant. After being condemned by her own father when she is found guilty under the \textit{Ley de Escocia} and denied clemency, she throws herself into a pit of lions, bringing a gruesome end to her suffering.

Between the debate of the two enamored gentlemen, the \textit{combate de generosidad} of the lovers, the argument between the King and Queen of Scotland, and the battle of the sexes between Torrellas and Bracayda, debates occupy roughly three-quarters of the novel. The sheer quantity of disagreement, debate, and legalese in the novel may relate to the university culture with which Juan de Flores was familiar. Perhaps even the most enlightened minds cannot overcome the destructive power of love once it has taken root.

Juan de Flores’s later \textit{Grimalte y Gradissa} weaves the lovers from Boccaccio’s \textit{Elegia di madonna Fiammetta} into the story of another pair of ill-fated lovers. The \textit{Elegia} was likely written in the 1340s, approximately a century and a half before Flores penned his novels, and was one of Italy’s most influential works of sentimental fiction to be circulated in Spain.\footnote{The action begins when Grimalte gives Gradissa a copy of Boccaccio’s \textit{novella} as a gift. “Gradissa’s incitement by \textit{Fiametta},” writes Weissberger, “like Alonso Quijano’s by \textit{Amadis} and its congeners, radically alters her own life and the lives of those around her” (“Authors” 70).} Gradissa implicates the man who loves her in a literary fantasy by asking him to serve as go-between and reunite the estranged Boccaccian lovers. Grimalte accepts the
assignment dutifully with the hope that his successful completion of the mission will in turn secure the affection of his beloved; he is even willing to die for the cause to which Gradissa has called him: “el padecer en presencia vuestra o morir absente, todo me parece serviros, y de la manera que lo quereys, lo quiero” (“suffering in your presence or dying away from you, it all seems in service of you, and however you want it, so shall it be”; 8).  

As befits the generic model, Grimalte’s efforts fail on all counts. Pamphilo scorns Fiometa now that he has gotten what he wanted from her. Fiometa dies, heartbroken. Pamphilo has a change of heart when he hears of Fiometa’s death and banishes himself to the wilderness for the rest of his days, thus stripping his noble family of its only heir. Grimalte returns to Gradissa a complete failure and, with all his hopes dashed, is left to wander alongside the loveless Pamphilo in a hellish, dantesque wasteland. 

Pamphilo, the fictional Italian lover appropriated by Flores, “is full of scorn for the constant lover” as represented by the pathetic Castilian protagonist (Waley, “Introduction” xxxii). The integration of characters from Boccaccio’s novella, and the equally miserable fates of both lovers, ridicules the roots of a genre that continues to condemn its male protagonists to pathetic ends. Pamela Waley has called Grimalte a sort of chivalric anti-hero or proto-Quijote (“Introduction” lii, xxiv). The voluntary self-exile of the male protagonists demonstrates for the reader the isolating and uncivilizing force of courtly love. The sentimental fiction of Juan de Flores presents a world in which the possibility of a happy, fruitful love is annihilated, either debated to death or mocked via intertextual cameos.

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189 All quoted material from Grimalte y Gradissa comes from the 1971 edition prepared for publication by Pamela Waley. The English translations are my own.
Inborn Suffering and Outward Madness

The degradation of the male figure within works of sentimental fiction is rendered visible by the inevitable and graphic breakdown of his suffering body. The discourse of courtly love treats amorous passion as an ailment that afflicts the mind, soul and body of the person in its grips. Lovers’ bodies appear greatly altered, weak, useless, even lifeless. Suffering is an inevitable component of the discourse of courtly love, often followed by death. 190 Andreas Capellanus’s twelfth-century treatise, *The Art of Courtly Love*, paints a contradictory picture of love and its effects on mankind. On the one hand, love is “a certain inborn suffering” coupled with external signs as “men’s bodies are weakened” (28, 199). On the other hand, through his suffering and devotion the lover will be positively transformed: “Love causes a rough and uncouth man to be distinguished for his handsomeness; it can endow a man even of the humblest birth with nobility of character” (31). 191 Regrettably, the ennobling effects of love as listed by Capellanus are noticeably missing from the sentimental fiction of fifteenth-century Castile. Other than constancy in service to their beloved, readers find little virtue in the male protagonists.

The protagonists are in the grips of crippling obsessions and melancholy that lead to passivity rather than action (Martínez Escudero 40). Said passivity represents a departure from the type of masculine model put forth in the chivalric novel, where the hero’s love for his lady is no less keenly felt. In the literary leap from chivalric to sentimental fiction, “the

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190 Whinnom proposes the following sequence: “If love is irresistible; if unrequited love (or unassuageable desire) entails suffering of the most acute nature, which even the medical writers acknowledged could in some cases be fatal; and if the essence of true love is constancy, so that it is unchanging and unchangeable, then it follows that if the lady will not or cannot offer any kind of consolation or relief, the lover is doomed to endure the agony until he dies” (“Introduction” xvi).

191 Capellanus’s text has been interpreted in two very distinct ways over the years: as a treatise in support of courtly love and a source for understanding its governing principles, or as an ironic and humorous condemnation of the same (Monson). Similarly polarized readings of the sentimental novel could also be undertaken.
knight’s traditional energy and initiative have leached away, leaving him indecisive, even immobile” (Sears 272). Indeed, repeated references to the *flaqueza* of the love-stricken male courtiers allude to their incapability to perform all manner of expected duties. The male lover’s “helplessness and inarticulateness seem those of an infant,” calling into question his status as a capable and self-sufficient adult (Wack 64). Most of all, the symptoms of lovesickness threaten traditional gender roles and feminize the male lover by reducing him to a state of “helplessness and vulnerability” (65).

The complete abandonment of human reason also characterizes the victims of lovesickness. Capellanus warned medieval readers of this consequence: “in a wise man wisdom loses its function if he loves” (199). Noblemen pursue, even embrace, a love(sickness) that suppresses rational thinking and exists on the margins of human reason. Love and dementia were often conflated in both medieval and popular discourse (Whinnom, “Introducción” 27). As seen in other chapters of the current study, the ability to reason and to heed sound advice were two integral components of noble masculinity in medieval Castile. Though other characters endeavor to reason with the enamored protagonists, their wise counsel does not move the lover to choose a more constructive course of action. If the male protagonist of the sentimental novel chooses a course of action that forsakes his sanity, he also forsakes, in part, his claim to nobility itself. Additionally, as has been argued in previous chapters, aristocratic masculinity has at its core strong homosocial relationships, same-sex alliances based on loyalty and mutual advantage. If lovesickness isolates the male courtier from his peers, it threatens his masculinity.

Rubio Balaguer complains that in the sentimental tradition characters live in constant monologue (qtd. in Whinnom, “Introducción” 46). As seen in the case of Arnalte’s soliloquy
in which he refers to himself in the second person, such isolated thought patterns look suspiciously like the rants of a lunatic: “¡O cativo de ti, que cansado de vivir y nunca de desear estás! ¡O qué grande desdicha en nascido ser fue la tuya! Veo que poco a poco te apocas, y veo que tu deseo al cabo de ha [de] acabar” (“Oh captive of yourself, how tired of living but never of desiring you are! Oh what great misfortune was yours in being born! I see that little by little you become littler, and I see that your desire will end you in the end”;
176). Of all of Diego de San Pedro’s novels, the Tractado de Arnalte e Lucenda most clearly depicts the self-reflective solitude of the characters (Ruiz Casanova 176). Where external voices of reason endeavor to intervene, the protagonists often avoid or remain unchanged by their attempts at dialogue.

As they lose their grip on human reason, courtly lovers are wont to “metamorphose into wildmen in dark, deserted forests” where light—both that of the sun and that of reason—does not penetrate (Corfis 160). The transformation from civilized, noble man to wild man following a crushing defeat is a commonplace in medieval lore (Bernheimer 14). The transformation occurred after the knight had been defeated, often by love, at which point he embraces a life of “bestial self-fulfillment, directed by instinct rather than volition, and devoid of all those acquired tastes and patterns of behavior which are part of our adjustment to civilization” (4). Although the courtly lovers described in Castilian sentimental fiction do not generally display the animalistic physical characteristics associated with the figure of the wild man, they do conform to some of the behavioral patterns identified by scholars. 192 If a wild man is marked by self-indulgence and a break from societal norms, every male protagonist of sentimental fiction would qualify as such.

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192 For more on the image of the wild man in Iberian sentimental fiction, see Deyermond’s article “El hombre salvaje en la novela sentimental.”
Love, it seems, untames the noble man. The experience leaves him unable to re-assimilate and, for that reason, he chooses to remove himself somehow from society. His wildness is neither desirable nor admirable; the medieval literary wild man “embodies a negative ideal in all its harshness” (Bernheimer 4).

The narrator of Cárcel tells readers of how “los firmes enamorados lo más dudoso y contrario creen más aína, y lo que más desean tienen por menos cierto” (“those firmly in love find the most doubtful and contrary things to be the furthest from the truth, and that which they desire they find most truthful”; 124). The lover’s vision is completely compromised such that he sees only what he wishes to see. In the Tractado Elierso urges Arnalte to reclaim his sound judgment by rejecting his debilitating affection for Lucenda: “Con tu seso suelta tu fee; con la razón desata tu daño; con tu saber a ti te liberta” (“With your mind let loose your devotion; with your reason release your injury; with your knowledge free yourself”; 189). In the Castilian sentimental novel, loss of reason is either the almost exclusive territory of the male lover, or else his loss of reason is more noteworthy because of male gender norms. Ironically, Leriano alludes in a letter to Laureola’s lack of sense or reason because of her sex: “no seas como las otras mugeres que de pequeñas causas reciben grandes temores; si la condición mugeril te causare miedo, tu discreción te dé fortaleza” (“do not be like other women who become very afraid over little things; if your womanly condition causes you fear, let your discretion give you strength”; 126). In his altered mental state, he does not recognize that she, in fact, is the one who still has her wits about her. Likewise, Pamphilo explains in Grimalte y Gradissa how love and its consummation affects the judgment of each sex differently: “Todas ellas, antes que se vienen al querer de los hombres que las requeiren, están en su entera discreción, y entonces
los hombres la pierden; y después ya de vencidas, pierden su buen iuyzio, quando ellos lo ganan” (“All of the ladies, before succumbing to the love of the men who call on them, are in their right minds, when men lose their good sense; and once they succumb, ladies lose their good judgment, just as men regain theirs”; 29). For the male protagonist of Grisel y Mirabella, the exchange of reason for love is one of the elements that provokes the ensuing violence and destruction (von der Walde Moheno, Amor e ilegalidad 80).

The sentimental hero engages in submissive posturing, likely because he believes, though foolishly, that the performance of submission will lead to the fulfillment of his desire: sexual union with the beloved lady. As the title of Rodríguez de Padrón’s text suggests, courtly love implies an element of servitude. Falling in love strips a man of his good fortune as well as his autonomy, and alters the lover to such an extent that, in the end, he barely recognizes himself: “¿Pensays que me conoçia? / Par Dios, no me conoçi: / tan turbado me senty / del semblante que traya” (“Do you believe that I recognized myself? / By God, I did not know myself: / I was so disturbed / by my own appearance”; 109). As he wanders through the wilderness, nature reflects and even appears to respond to the narrator’s altered state. Animal and plant life, “en tal mudança de su propio ser” (“so changed from their natural state”), are contaminated by the lover’s acute suffering (77). The narrator compares the experience of being in love to a treacherous journey, after which the lover descends into “solitaria e dolorosa contemplación” (“solitary and painful contemplation”) as he moves through “la escura selva de mis pensamientos” (“the dark forest of my thoughts”; 76).¹⁹³ The lover wanders the forest yelling and moaning like a mad man:

¹⁹³ His desperation becomes a literal pathway, a “descendiente via” (“descending way”) that the narrator follows (77). This “second Aeneas”, as Entendimiento calls the narrator, “intends to journey to the Elysian Fields—meaning death by suicide,” electing a “profoundly un-Christian” course of action (Brownlee 92).
“culpava a mis cinco sentidos que andauan en torno de mi, dando los fuertes gemidos, y no proveyan a mi desconsuelo” (“I cursed my five senses that beseiged me, moaning loudly, and did not provide me with any comfort”; 82). Displaced from his seat of power, the court, the lover suffers spacial and emotional turmoil. The male hero’s descent into a wild landscape while in the throes of love(sickness) will be echoed by Diego de San Pedro in his Tractado and by Juan de Flores in Grimalte y Gradissa.194

Arnalte of San Pedro’s Tractado shows considerable contempt for traditional masculine stoicism. Before the close of the Tractado, the lover’s sister Belisa endeavors to wrest him from his madness, reasoning that a man of such noble lineage should not waste his life among beasts and rocks that cannot praise his great deeds (234). Despite Belisa’s best effort to talk sense to Arnalte, he shows great pride in his suffering: “de mis congoxas no te congoxes; antes te ufana y alegra, viendo que tienes hermano que en la fuerza de su esfuerço tanto mal puede sufrir” (“do not lament my lamentations; rather be proud and glad, seeing that your brother who by the force of his strength can endure such suffering”; 185). As in Siervo, Arnalte’s behavior invites twenty-first century readers to compare him to Cardenio of Don Quijote, an intertextual relationship well documented by Severin (“Arnalte as Subtext”).

The hero of Cárcel de amor, meanwhile, seems to be past the point of redemption from the very beginning of the novel. Although an earlier letter from the heroine temporarily restores Leriano’s happiness and health, it is as if the lover suffers from a bottomless need for further affirmation. Unashamed to exaggerate his own suffering as Laureola continually

194 There are at least two additional examples of this phenomenon within the Iberian sentimental corpus. The male protagonist of the Satira de felice e infelice vida by the Condestable de Portugal wanders through a wild landscape for a time (Waley xv). The anonymous Triste deleytación also ends by describing the lover’s wanderings through a Dantesque nightmarish landscape.
refuses to return his affections, Leriano calls himself “el más sin ventura de los más desaventurados” (“the most unfortunate of all the most unfortunate souls”) for loving a woman of whom he could never be found deserving (151).

When El Auctor finally gains a private audience with Laureola, he appeals to her feminine virtues of generosity and pity, as well as the honor of “los grandes honbres” (“the great men”) among whom he counts Leriano (94). El Auctor subsequently provides a dizzying inventory of Leriano’s points of suffering: “dolor le atormenta, pasion le persigue, desesperança le destruye, muerte le amenaza, pena le [e] secuta, pensamiento le desvela, deseo le atribula, tristeza le condena, fe no le salva; supe del que de todo esto tú eres causa” (“pain torments him, passion pursues him, despair destroys him, death threatens him, pain slays him, thoughts keep him awake, desire makes him miserable, sadness condemns him, faith does not save him; I learned that you are the cause of all of this”; 95). The list is meant to overwhelm Laureola and to cause her feelings of guilt for the lover’s condition. Numerous references to death are made during the first interview and subsequent letters, all to suggest that if she refuses Leriano, Laureola makes herself an executioner. Letters and go-betweens flit about while the lover languishes in his rooms, placing his very life in the hands of another to become the passive victim of his beloved’s rejection. Faced with an unyielding lady and having lost the will to live, Leriano pursues the only possible end for the suffering protagonist of a sentimental novel: death.

Both El Auctor and Laureola beg Leriano to come to his senses. El Auctor tells him: “suplicote que te esfuerces tu seso lo que enflaquece tu pasion” (“I beg you to strengthen your mind that has been weakened by passion”; 105). Later, Laureola encourages the gentleman to remedy himself by virtue of his strength and wisdom (153). El Auctor even
storms the Prison of Love with allegorical troops—the figures of Esperança, Descanso, Plazer, Alegria, and Holganza, all the supposed cures for lovesickness—to no avail. Leriano refuses to listen to reason, relishing in the anguish that will lead to his death. His slow, steady march towards suicide is encouraged as reasonable, natural, and even laudable by El Auctor: “dixele que ni se esforçase, ni se alegrase, ni recibiese consuelo, pues tanta razón havía para que deviese morir . . . Ni culpava su flaqueza, ni avergonçava su desfallecimento” (“I told him not even to try, nor to take heart, nor to be consoled, for he had such reason to want to die . . . I neither condemned his weakness, nor shamed his dying”; 154). His decision to die does, however, baffle his mother: “te veo morir y no veo la razón de tu muerte; tú en edad para bevir; tú temeroso de Dios; tú amador de la virtud; tú enemigo del vicio; tú amigo de amigos; tú amado de los tuyos” (“I see you dying and I do not see the reason for your death; you with life left to live; you fearful of God; you lover of virtue; you enemy of vice; you friend of friends; you beloved by your people”; 173). Sadly, Leriano is too distraught to be touched by his mother’s entreaties or to see himself as deserving of life itself. The hero’s willful ingestion of a concoction made from the torn letters of his lady at the end of Cárcel has been read as a suicide; yet, if the hero is “in the grip of his passion and ultimately surrenders to a force he is incapable of mastering,” his death may be more accurately attributed to mental illness than an agentic desire to die (Folger, Escape 85).

Though the lover Grisel also meets death within the pages of Flores’s earlier

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195 Leriano’s extreme sadness is so contagious that even his go-between is overcome with emotion when Laureola ends their contact: “salíme del palacio con un nudo en la garganta. . . y salido de la ciudad, como me vi solo, tan fuertemente comence a llorar que de dar bozes no me podía contener” (“I left the palace with a knot in my throat . . . and upon leaving the city, when I was alone, I started to cry so hard that I could not stop wailing”; 154). El Auctor displays several signs of lovesickness himself as if experiencing sympathy pains.
sentimental novel, his suicide quite different from that of Leriano its intention and dynamic mode of implementation. He throws himself into the fire not as an act of desperation, but rather as an active attempt to save the life of the woman he loves. The fact that he does not succeed is a reflection on the injustice of the king’s actions rather than the hero’s efficacy. However, if sentimental masculinity is salvaged by Grisel’s brave deed, it is soon destroyed during the ensuing debate by Torrellas’s sudden profession of love for Braçayda and his subsequent torture and murder at the hands of the Queen and her ladies. Both men, having sought the love of a woman, ultimately subject their bodies to hideous tortures and horrible deaths.

Flores manages to ratchet up the level of masculine suffering and submission even further in Grimalte and Gradissa. The hero submits completely to his lady’s will, even if it be that he die while completing his task. Before departing on his journey to reunite the fictional Italian lovers, Grimalte reminds Gradissa of his sacrifice and of her promise: “Me tiene vuestro cativo, / Recuerde vuestra membrança / Las angustias en que bivo; // Y el galardón prometido / De mi sperada victoria, / Que no lo robe el olvido / De vuestra clara memoria. // Esforsareys la salud / De mi, que triste me voe, / Compliendo vuestra virtud / Los gozos de mi desseo” (“You hold me captive, / Let your memory record / The anguish in which I live; // And the promised prize / Of my anticipated victory, / Do not let forgetfulness steal it / From your clear memory. // You strengthen my health / I, who sadly go, / Fulfilling by your honor / The joys of my desire”; 9). In just a few stanzas, Flores evokes scores of themes associated with sentimental and courtly love: the lover’s constancy, servitude, sadness, and suffering; the promise of a galardón, granted in recognition of the service rendered, that will cure the lover of what ails him; and the delicate balance between a lady’s
honor and a gentleman’s desires. Each of these tenets, and several others, will be mocked within the pages of the novel by characters who have become disenchanted with the ways of courtly love. Grimalte, the novel’s comically naive anti-hero, falls utterly short of his chivalric aspirations, failing even to die for his lady as was initially pledged. When Grimalte finally resolves to suffer in the wilderness alongside Pamphilo, the former finds the latter in a truly altered state. Flores resurreets Boccaccio’s lover not to redeem him, but rather to drag him down into a dehumanizing pit. In addition to his “troglodyte” appearance, the Italian lover has sworn a vow of silence as penitence for his cruelty towards Fiometa (Brownlee 186). As the two men descend into a state of mutual misery, and the author’s degradation of the noble lover is doubled. At least it can be said that Flores’s Pamphilo, by vowing silence, regains control over his mouth in order to observe the courtly lover’s crucial vow of secrecy.

The lack of self-control exhibited by the lovers in question undeniably includes their loose lips. The importance of secrecy to the discourse of courtly love cannot be overstated (Whinnom, “Introducción” 36). The need for confidentiality is born out of social pressure put on noble ladies for the preservation of their honor. Indeed, when Laureola finally responds to Leriano in a letter, she begs that he will not advertise the galardón or its contents for fear of public opinion (Cárce 110). Although described by Whinnom as “the perfect lover and perfect knight,” Leriano breaks the lover’s vow of secrecy by confiding in his friend Persio and telling him of his affection for Laureola. Arnalte acts with similar contempt for the rules of courtly love when he divulges the name of his beloved in conversation with Elierso. Having broken this cardinal rule, the lovers expose themselves and their beloved ladies to the machinations of jealous rivals. Ultimately, the male narrator of Siervo, the protagonists of the Tractado and Cárce, and the female protagonist/narrator
of *Grimalte* (who purports to be Fiometa herself) all break the courtly lover’s oath of secrecy by asking that their stories be recorded and repeated. Self-control not only distinguished man from beast, but also sets the nobility apart from the every man. By losing control of their mouths, courtly lovers jeopardize their social standing, particularly male lovers who are meant to display self-control and stoicism.

The medical authorities of the medieval period tended to agree, at least, on three principal courses of treatment for erotomania or lovesickness: coupling with the object of one’s affection, satisfaction of one’s sexual appetite with an alternative partner, or distraction of the lover with other activities (Whinnom, “Introduction” 14). For Ardanlier and Grisel, the physical act of love does little to diminish their desire. The other three lovers, being denied the first treatment option by each respective *belle dame sans merci*, refuse the second and third remedies; it is no surprise, then, that their lovesickness progresses past the point of curative measures. Instead, these protagonists subscribe to the notion that suffering for love ennobles the lover and serves as proof of his self-control: “Precisely because the lover is tortured by passion and desire, his restraint in curbing his baser appetites is the ultimate proof of his rationality and masculinity” (Folger, “Cárceles” 620). Such an exaltation of restraint (with the exception of the lover’s mouth) contradicts the prescriptions of contemporary medical discourse and leads to the lover’s ultimate demise. Furthermore, it frustrates the reproductive capabilities of young, healthy primogenitors whose noble families need legitimate heirs to maintain their lines of succession. Unlike the heroes of chivalric novels whose ability to propagate their family lines (and also their literary continuations) was extraordinary, sentimental heroes remove themselves from the breeding pool by dramatic means, leaving their parents empty handed. The mental and physical symptoms of
lovesickness render the body of the nobleman impotent, and pose a threat to hegemonic masculinity within the normative gender hierarchy.

**Noble Lovers and Royal Parents**

Every chapter of the present study has examined the delicate and indispensible connection between the nobleman and his sovereign, stressing the aristocratic male’s need to leverage the relationship to his advantage. In the case of the sentimental novel, the noble protagonists repeatedly incur their king’s wrath and opposition rather than support. Three of the five novels examined in the current chapter depict a male sovereign who represents an obstacle to the happy union of the lovers. Given the aristocratic milieu of the story lines, the aristocratic affiliation of the intended reading public, and each author’s proximity to and involvement in courtly life, the intervention of sovereign figures in the novels is not altogether surprising. Nevertheless, there are striking parallels in the way these figures intervene in the action of the novels. Each fictional king refuses to accept the sound advice of those around him. Their cruel and imprudent actions result, directly or indirectly, in the death of their own (often only) child. It also bears mentioning that in each case the author juxtaposes the actions of the fictional King with those of a sympathetic and reasonable Queen or Princess. The fault may lie with the monarchy, or with the discourse of courtly love that causes such situations to arise in the first place. To the extent that a king’s actions seem unreasonable or cruel towards the lovers, his behavior can be excused by virtue of the fact that he interfaces with an unreasonable system of beliefs and practices. Crimes committed by the literary monarch may be attributed to the delinquent courtier who has introduced chaos into the relationship between lord and vassal.
Rodríguez de Padrón penned *Siervo* during the reign of King Juan II, an impotent sovereign dominated by his ambitious handler Álvaro de Luna, while *Cárcel* and *Grisel* were published at the height of the reign of an authoritative and wise female monarch. Overall, authors of sentimental fiction in Iberia awarded their fictional sovereign figures tremendous influence over the success (or failure) of a romantic venture in their court, particularly when it involves one of their own offspring. When noble gentlemen are unable to gain the sovereign’s backing, or when their amorous designs fly in the face of royal business, their enterprise is doomed. The juxtaposition of unwise, unfeeling Kings and compassionate, righteous Queens in the later novels may well be related to the new direction of Castile’s monarchy, a subtle defense of the authority of Queen Isabel.

In *Siervo*, it is King Creos who, acting on rage and misinformation, kills his son’s beloved Liessa and his unborn grandchild. Their death induces Ardanlier to take his own life, leaving the King with no heir and a legacy of brutality. King Gaulo of *Cárcel* acts with similar cruelty and imprudence, nearly condemning his daughter to death based on false accusations and depriving the gallant Leriano of the duel victory against his traitorous friend. Finally, in *Grisel y Mirabella* the King of Scotland’s decision to condemn his daughter to die under the *Ley de Escocia* destroys the entire royal family.

The first novel in the sequence, *Siervo libre de amor*, also happens to be the only story in which the male lover is the child of a monarch and of higher social standing than his beloved. The lovers of *Siervo*’s interpolated “Estoria de dos amadores” run away together in order to evade the disapproval of the lady’s noble mother and the gentleman’s royal father, King Creos of Mondoya. When, after seven years, Ardanlier’s father the King decides to sniff out the lovers, he travels for several more years before stumbling upon their secret
palace in Galicia (88). Liessa is the first to encounter the furious king who shouts even as she throws herself at his feet: “¡Traydora Lyessa, adversaria de mi! Demandas merçedal que enbiudaste de un solo hijo . . . ¡Demandas merçed! Rrey soy; no te la puedo negar; mas dize el verbo antigo: ‘Merçed es al rey vengarse de su enemigo’” (“Traitorous Lyessa, my adversary! You demand mercy of the man whom you have robbed of his only son . . . You ask for mercy! I am the king; I cannot deny it to you; but as the old saying goes: ‘Mercy for a king is vengeance against his enemy’”; 89). To have run away with his only son and heir is an unpardonable offense, according to the “widowed” father. He will seek vengeance, a right granted to him by his title and by ancient popular wisdom, against the party whom he judges guilty: Liessa.196 Despite his justifications for a crime of passion, Ardanlier now considers the King to be “su capital enemigo” (“his capital enemy”; 93). Ardanlier will write to princess Yrena of France who will, for love of the fallen couple, declare the cruel King to be her capital enemy. Thus King Creos incurs not only personal but also political woes as a result of a son’s clandestine relationship and, more precisely, a father’s cruel inability to accept it.

Fifty years later, the fictional King of Cárce18el de amor perpetuates the archetype of the merciless royal father. When the hero Leriano finally faces Persio—the double-crossing friend who has occasioned Laureola’s wrongful imprisonment—in a duel, the latter’s kin intervene when it becomes clear that Leriano is near to victory by asking the king to “echar el bastón,” that is, interrupt the duel and pass judgment on the matter (117).197 The King

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196 King Creos is driven to the barbarity of killing his would-be daughter-in-law “as a result of the lovers’ narcissism. Ardanlier is not merely his only son, but a world-renowned knight who has disappeared for a period of seven years, totally ignoring his responsibilities to the kingdom” (Brownlee 98).

197 The King also presides over Arnalte’s duel against Elierso in the Tractado, but here the sovereign figure does not intervene to deprive the protagonist of an opportunity to restore his honor.
does this and finds in favor of Persio. Upon the king’s ruling, “Leriano de tan grande
agracio con mucha razón se sintió” (“with reason Leriano felt gravely offended”; 118). The
King’s action appears dishonorable in its deviation from “the royal mandate to act nobly
(impartially) in determining and upholding justice” (Brownlee 167). Leriano recognizes that
it is the king who has ripped victory from his hands. It will also be the responsibility of the
sovereign to restore order: “Suplicote que por juizio me satisfagas la honra que por mis
manos me quitaste” (“by your judgement I beg that you satisfy my honor that was taken by
your hands”; 120). The hero’s appeal, however, falls on deaf ears. With Laureola imprisoned
and his own honor sullied, Leriano begins to scheme.

During a debate regarding Laureola’s sentence, the king gives a speech on the virtue
of laws and respecting them. The king does appear saddened by the fact that he cannot free
Laureola under the law if a witness to her innocence cannot be produced. The king’s actions
are characterized as imprudent by the cardinal, the queen, and finally by his daughter, the
one who suffers for his misplaced credulity. The situation is highly inconvenient for all
parties. To the extent that courtly love is incompatible with the law, it is also incompatible
with the monarch as the law’s enforcer. The courtly lover does his king a tremendous
disservice for putting him in such an impossible position.

In a written plea for mercy, Laureola also recognizes that God will be the ultimate
judge of her guilt or innocence: “tú serás llamado padre cruel y yo sere dicha hija
innocente, que pues Dios es justo, el aclarará mi verdad” (“you will be called a cruel father
and I will be called an innocent daughter, because God is just, he will uphold my truth”; 139).
The lady positions the King’s judgement in opposition to that of the almighty,
infallible God. Neither the king nor God has put Laureola in this position, but rather the man
who loved her obsessively and solicited, by his actions, her downfall.

When none of these entreaties succeeds in changing the King’s mind, Leriano and El Auctor join forces with Galio (Laureola’s uncle) to free her from prison. Leriano has many loyal and capable men in his service, from whom he selects a captain and one hundred men to kill Persio for his treachery (141). In the meantime, Leriano leads the rest of his men in storming the prison, and their bloody attack leaves innumerable dead guards in its wake (142). Together with his military prowess and capacity for large-scale physical violence, Leriano echoes yet another characteristic of the epic and chivalric masculinity discussed in previous chapters: the manipulation of public address to command other men. As they battle their king for Laureola’s freedom, Leriano delivers a moving battle speech to his band of soldiers, reminding them that the battlefield is where his honor and theirs will be decided (146-47). Not unlike the epic poetic depiction of Fernán González, this protagonist gains influence via his command of rhetoric and oratory skills. Though a skilled knight, commander, and leader, Leriano leverages his talents and his homosocial ties to a disloyal and dishonorable end: making war against his own sovereign.

The noble lover not only defies his rightful feudal lord, but he also causes the death of many men of high social standing in the battle over Laureola: “el rey mandó apartar el combate con perdida de mucha parte de sus caballeros, en especial de los mancebos cortesanos, que siempre buscan el peligro por gloria. Leriano . . . no menos perdió muchos hombres principales” (“the king ordered them to retreat after having lost a large portion of their knights, especially young courtiers, who always seek out danger for glory. Leriano . . . lost just as many principal men”; 145). The image of tremendous loss of noble life occasioned by young love will recur a few short years later in Flores’s Grisel y Mirabella,
when so many of the kingdom’s eligible young noblemen battle one another to the death for
the lovely maiden’s hand. 198

As does the King in Càrcel, the King of Scotland intervenes in Grisel y Mirabella as
both father to the beloved and the executor of legal justice. The King’s incestuous desires, as
identified by several scholars, lead him to lock Mirabella up in a tower—an unmistakable
phallic symbol—rather than make use of her economic and political value as the only
daughter by giving her in marriage to a political ally. Numerous young suitors vie for
Mirabella’s hand to no avail, for she was so beloved by her father “*que a ninguno delos*
[pretendientes] ya dichos la queria dar. Y así mismo en su tierra non havia tan grande
senyor a quien la diesse: salvo a grande mengua suya” (“he did not wish to give her to any
of the suitors. He would not even give her to a great lord from his own land: it would be a
great loss for him”; 334). When her relationship with Grisel has been discovered and
Torrellas has argued for Mirabella’s guilt, the King condemns his own daughter to death
under the *Ley de Escocia*. However, Mirabella does not die as the law prescribes (by fire),
but instead by throwing herself into a pit of lions, a symbol of royal authority (Brownlee
206).

The Queen finds her husband’s decision to execute Mirabella so repugnant that she
promises that her daughter’s death will also mean the end of their marriage (359). Flores
fashions a strong female monarch that fights injustice and even seeks vengeance, as
evidenced by the torture and death of Torrellas—the misogynist responsible in part for her
daughter’s death—at the hands of the Queen and her ladies-in-waiting. Weissberger, Van

198 Although Leriano does not manage to overpower the King in battle, he does eventually capture
one of the false accusers who is tortured until he recants his previous false statements against
Laureola (148). Given the new evidence, the King finally absolves Laureola and Leriano of their
guilt. Still, the situation remains unresolved as seen in the king’s declaration that Leriano may not
reenter the court (or see Laureola) until he has made peace with Persio’s kin (148).
Beysterveldt, and Rohland de Langbehn find the discourse of Flores’s fiction to be (proto)feminist, although Rohland de Langbehn labels this society of female empowerment as unnatural, literally “un mundo al revés” (“Un mundo”). Perhaps the discourse of courtly love, in which the male lover submits to and is dominated by the will of his beloved lady, only allows for the favorable depiction of a female monarch.

**Female Agency and Moral Policing**

Readers of sentimental fiction anticipate the heroine’s capitulation to desire—her own, that of the hero, or both—as a commonplace of the genre (Brownlee 166). In his *Sermón*, San Pedro argues that women should “remediár” (“remedy”) their lovers, or else be found guilty of four mortal sins: pride, avarice, rage, and sloth (Whinnom, “Introducción” 42). Medical, religious, and legal discourses all conflate to cast the beloved lady as doctor-redeemer-pardoner if she grants the *galardón*, and malpractitioner-sinner-executioner if she does not. On the other hand, saying “no” was the socially acceptable and normative response for the medieval female subject in heterosexual romantic situations: “[t]he paradigm of heterosexual romance is made up of an active masculine desire that seeks to overwhelm feminine resistance” (Sylvester 73). Rather than resorting to sexual coercion or violence, those male protagonists analyzed in the present chapter who are initially unable to win their ladies’ affection either use emotional bullying to achieve their ends or are left unsatisfied. Either way, the initial active role of the male lover as pursuer is transferred to his beloved as the decision-maker; he submits to her, just as she submits to higher judgment, societal or religious.

In Flores’s *Grimalte y Gradissa*, Pamphilo also admonishes Fiometa for pursuing an
end that will bring dishonour to her own legacy as well as that of her family: “Si tu con el amor demasiado te plaze perder honor, los otros no lo quieren. Pero que, bien es que seas liberal en aquello que a ti solamente te toca, mas que tu hagas mercedes de la honor de muchos es grande agravio, por cierto” (“If for love you are all too pleased to lose your honor, others do not wish it so. Yet, it is right for you to be liberal with that which concerns only you, but for you to take liberties with the honor of many is a great offense, certainly”; 21). Despite the ways in which she has been put upon by the speaker and others, the responsibility still lies with the lady whether to preserve or to sacrifice her honor.

Laureola of Cárcel de amor provides a case study for the lady who readily assumes the dominant position offered to her by her pursuer. When approached by El Auctor, Laureola responds “conforme a la virtud que [tiene]” (“in accordance with her virtue”) and proves to be a fierce defender of her personal honor (96). Were he not a foreigner, she would have El Auctor killed on the spot for his insolence. She urges him to abandon his foolish mission and threatens him again with death before departing. During their second encounter, El Auctor urges the lady to write to Leriano, saying that God will bless her if she does (102). As astute as she is indignant, Laureola goes to the heart of her predicament: “Si pudiese remediar su mal sin amanzillar mi honrra, no con menos afición que tu lo pides yo lo haría; mas ya tu conosces cuanto las mugeres deven ser obligadas a su fama más que a su vida” (“If I could remedy your ailment without trampling my honor, with as much affection as you I would do it; but you already know how obliged women are to preserve their reputation even more than their own lives”; 103).

Despite the go-between’s very unwelcome meddling, Laureola refuses to grant Leriano any galardón over the course of several solicitations, citing the preservation of her
honor as the reason. El Auctor eventually tricks Laureola into accepting Leriano’s second letter by placing an innocuous piece of mail on top of it to disguise the contents. Leriano chastises Laureola in the letter, saying “[p]or cierto tú eres tu enemiga” (“you are certainly your own enemy”; 107). The lover’s severe words move her, particularly his threat of suicide, and she is finally stirred to write back. However, she is quick to clarify that her letter does not signify any reciprocity of his feelings: “más te escribo por redemir tu vida que por satisfazer tu deseo; mas, triste de mí, que este descargo solamente aprovecha para conplir comigo; porque si deste pecado fuese acusada no tengo otro testigo para salvarme sino mi intención” (“I write to you to redeem your life rather than to satisfy your desire; but, sadly, this charge only take advantage of me; because if I were accused of this sin I would have no witness to save me other than my intentions”; 109). The sin of which she writes is the guilt placed upon her for Leriano’s suffering and thoughts of death. The letter, she hopes, will serve as her defense from his accusation, and as her exit from a situation that could have put her honor in jeopardy. In the end, Laureola frees herself from an unwanted admirer’s incessant demands by calling his bluff and not intervening to prevent his suicide.

The entreaties of El Auctor and Leriano, both written and verbal, are meant to soften the Laureola’s resolve via the power of rhetoric; however, the conventions of the literary genre dictate that their efforts must fail, because to attain the desired object would render it undesirable. Beyond frustrated with Leriano’s persistence and accusations, Laureola writes a final letter to redirect his allegation of desiring the other’s demise: “Cuando estava presa salvaste mi vida, y agora que estó libre quieres condenalla” (“When I was imprisoned you saved my life, and now that I am free you wish to condemn it”; 153).

Waley finds the “articulate” and uniquely “human” heroine of San Pedro’s second
novel to be a great improvement on his earlier *Tractado* ("Love and Honour" 261). The case has also been made for the political symbolism of San Pedro’s female protagonist as a “manifestation of the gender anxiety provoked, as Barbara Weissberger has recently shown, by the absolutist reign of Isabel in Castile. In a world haunted by misjudgment and passion, she has proven to be perfectly rational; that is, having a 'masculine' mind, poised to rule, like Queen Isabel, over passion-ridden, emasculated noblemen” (Folger, “Cárceles” 633).

Laureola models by example the moral fortitude to which both male and female courtiers of Isabeiline Castile are called. “Immune to the power of courtly persuasion and male prowess” (623), Laureola emasculates Leriano and, by proxy, shames untoward or dishonorable male readers and reminds them that not all women will yield to their demands.

**Pleasing Admonitions and the Leisure Class**

Tentative critical attention has been drawn to the possible didactic purposes of the Castilian sentimental novel. In his critical introduction to *Cárcel de amor*, Jose Francisco Ruiz Casanova writes: “It could be said that the San Pedro’s purpose is didactic, that he seeks a moral lesson or to propose a warning whose example is the story of the lovers. It could be said that said lesson is evident, above all, in the ending of the novels” (50, my translation). Though his use of the imperfect subjunctive casts doubt on the statement, the multiple voices within the novels that plead with the young noblemen to abandon the path of impossible love are difficult to ignore.

Flores is likewise described as a “rigorist and moralist” who manages to enseñar *deleitando* (teach while delighting), echoing in his novels the discourse employed in

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199 Ruiz Casanova goes on to say that the novels offer much more than a simple didactic message, that they are rich mirrors of a historical moment, a certain class of Castilians and their way of life (50).
contemporaneous sermons (Varela 38). As young people increasingly undermine traditional norms regarding sex and marriage, Flores and his contemporaries find their moral degradation and lack of self-control concerning (von der Walde Moheno, *Amor e ilegalidad* 107). Such a world pits men against women, as well as men and men, and causes discord and chaos to radiate out from lovers into the entire social order. To be sure, the corpus of fifteenth-century sentimental fiction boasts a remarkable preponderance of violence:

Grimalte, Panfilo, and Arnalte literally become wild men as a result of their total alienation from society and its language; Lyessa is brutally murdered by King Croes as is Torrellas by the incensed females who first mutilate and perhaps even cannibalize his body. Grisel, Mirabella, Leriano and Ardanlier all graphically commit suicide. Only Fiammetta appears to die in a rather nonviolent manner. (Brownlee 211)

As a cultural phenomenon of the later fifteenth century, the sentimental novel is born out of and renders visible the concerns of the Spanish lettered elite of that time. Most critical literature to date approaches these novels as vehicles of entertainment for noble ladies, as thematically complementary to the chivalric novel though more appealing to the female reader for the exaggerated, even maudlin, emphasis given to protagonists’ emotions and inner lives. Not only is the association between sentimental content and an exclusively female audience derived from the false correlation between emotional narrative and female readership, but also it ignores the evident concern for the consequences of the pursuit of courtly love that pervades these novels and furnishes them with a critical component. For the learned authors who penned sentimental novels, one needs “to recognize how profoundly disturbing the ‘feminization’ of love . . . was to intellectuals and clerics, university men
whose sense of self was rooted in ontological, intellectual, social, and legal superiority to women” (Wack 73). Sentimental fiction can be read as a meditation on, and an indictment of, the effects of courtly love on young noble men, by showing the tragic ends of those who pursue a love divorced from reason, one that dis- or replaces Christian devotion, does not bind the lovers in marriage or produce offspring, and ultimately leads to the betrayal of one’s family, king, and eventually life itself. Although the novels are situated at court, populated with courtly characters, and depict scenes of courtly love, by the end of each novel the male protagonists is rendered either uncivilized or dead, removed in either case from the initial courtly frame. The lovesick down-and-outers of the sentimental variety represent Castile’s anti-heroes, providing a cautionary tale for male readers at the dawn of the early modern period.
CONCLUSION

The present project has aimed to call into question many inherited notions about medieval Castilian masculinity, particularly regarding the gendered identity of the aristocratic male. If “Medieval Europe was a man’s world,” as Ruth Mazo Karras supposes in the opening line of her monograph (1), then it behooves scholars of the medieval world to take a closer look at how social categories such as gender shaped medieval man. His position was fraught with unease, subject to shifting imperatives, and his adaptability was crucial.

Following the Islamic invasion and occupation of the peninsula, and preceding the contact with the New World at the turn of the sixteenth century, the Castilian worldview was in flux as Christian communities simultaneously fought for dominion and incorporated elements of cultures with which they came into contact. Iberian vernacular linguistic conventions were forged during this period, and romance literatures slowly stepped out of the shadow of the Latin literary tradition. The political and ideological cohesion sought after by the Catholic Kings toward the end of the fifteenth century brought the so-called “Middle” Ages to a close. The intervening centuries laid the foundation for a discourse of elite masculinity that, until now, has received very little critical attention.

Negligence of or resistance to masculinities studies continues to privilege the male figure by implying that his gender is self-evident and that the gender of others is defined in relation to his unmoving, uncomplicated gender identity. Contemporary scholars have the opportunity to appropriate the language and tools of gender studies in order to more fully comprehend the medieval subject and his lived experience. The usefulness of hegemonic
masculinity as an analytical concept, according to John Tosh, is the treatment of patriarchy as “something more than a blunt instrument in men’s history” (20). We may dismantle the monolith of medieval Castilian masculinity by critically examining the gender construction of the hegemon, “othering” him in order to better understand him. When I began my dissertation research several years ago, I was truly shocked to find that, of the many innovative Hispanomudevil literary scholars currently active in the field, not one had seen fit to examine the construction or representation of hegemonic masculinity. The present project endeavors to help fill this gap in the field, so that Medieval Iberian studies will have a place at the metaphoric Masculinities Studies table.

Rethinking the values and behaviors associated with hegemonic masculinity in the Middle Ages can inform our investigation into other concurrent gender experiences. Chapter One, for example, offers a counterpoint to Louise Mirrer’s characterization of relations between various groups of men in the cantares de gesta. Those engaged in Early Modern studies, who have more readily embraced Masculinities Studies, may also benefit from the present study to the extent that their conclusions regarding sixteenth and seventeenth century masculinity are built on assumptions regarding gender in the Middle Ages. Overall, I hope that the present project will facilitate dialogue with scholars dedicated to other historical periods, geographic regions, or fields of study in which Masculinities Studies has a more active presence.

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I had originally intended for my dissertation to address gender politics at court in fifteenth and sixteenth century Castilian sentimental novels. Not long into my investigations, however, I realized that far more basic work regarding our understanding of medieval
masculinity as it relates to the aristocracy, which would lay the foundation for the project I had in mind, had not yet been done. I decided to shift my focus for the time being, propelled by both necessity and curiosity.

Previous scholars have read these works as courtly entertainment primarily targeting female readers, or at most as satirical in their treatment of the religion of love. I would advocate for the expansion of our scholarly understanding of sentimental fiction, to explore the moralizing elements therein. Male authors, often university educated and situated at the periphery of the royal court, find aristocratic behavior to be frivolous and pen sentimental novels as an implicit criticism of the late medieval culture of leisure. Sentimental fictions paint a particularly grim portrait of their aristocratic male protagonists—for, indeed, all of the protagonists belong to the noble class—as lacking reason, delinquent in their socio-political duties, weakened and utterly demoralized in pursuit of inconvenient love. The discourse of feminization that we begin to see in the fifteenth century, associated with the leisure class, is discursively linked to Spain’s decadence in the seventeenth century, the notion being that the empire had fallen to pieces for having allegedly emasculated itself (Cartagena Calderón 9).

In the future, I hope to expand the discussion of moral and gender prescriptions for male readers of sentimental fiction through analysis of additional novels, particularly those from the early sixteenth century. Also, I plan to expand the analysis to include a discussion of the larger gender implications of the genre, for indeed male courtiers were not the genre’s only readers, nor were male courtiers the only characters to suffer a negative portrayal within the works. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s theory of gender asymmetry created by erotic triangles could also shed much needed light on the Castilian sentimental novel, in which one
lady often comes between two gentlemen, and/or the male go-between takes on a highly visible and influential role in the plot. The “suspension of power relations” within the experience of love, as referred to by Pierre Bourdieu, offers a rich backdrop for problematizing traditional gender identities in late medieval and early modern Iberian courtly culture (110).

Furthermore, there is much to be said about the representation of aristocratic males in medieval Castilian poetry. With the exception of epic cantares de gesta, analysis of poetic works has not been included in the present study in the interest of a cohesive discussion of narrative texts, and also due to time constraints. In future article-length projects, I hope to investigate the representation of aristocratic masculinity in additional poetic texts. In Coplas a la muerte de su padre (c. 1477) Jorge Manrique lifts up a unique masculine model on the occasion of his father’s death. The eulogy connects the legacy of the gentleman’s father to that of various influential courtiers and monarchs, engendering a complex relationship between genealogy—both familial and political—and masculinity. Pedro López de Ayala’s Rimado de Palacio from the late fourteenth century displays deep pessimism regarding courtly life and high society, highlighting the moral failings of courtiers much in the same way as the poetic compositions of his nephew, Fernán Pérez de Guzmán. I believe that a comparison between the poetic works of López de Ayala and Pérez de Guzmán’s works discussed in Chapter Four might prove quite fruitful. One could also explore the ways in which genre affects each author’s capacity for social commentary, that is, a comparison of the implicit and explicit gendered prescriptions offered in the historiographic and poetic modes. It would also be interesting to explore the relationship between López de Ayala’s cynical poetic depiction of Castilian society at the end of the fourteenth century and the
prose representations of a similar cast of characters offered in the sentimental fiction of the late fifteenth century.

In relation to the dissertation, I believe that it would be fruitful to tease out the relationship between clothing and masculinity in medieval Castilian letters. Both Fernán González and Arnalte of San Pedro’s *Tractado* cross-dress, though to different ends, while El Cid and Cavallero Zifar also demonstrate a preoccupation with styles of dress. Across several centuries and literary genres, male protagonists manipulate the visual representation of their gender via styles of dress and grooming.

It would also be very interesting to compare the two earlier chivalric novels discussed in Chapter Three and the later, more widely read novels from the early modern period to ascertain to what extent chivalric gender prescriptions change over time. In the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, when the *Crónica de Flores y Blancaflor* and *Libro del Cavallero Zifar* came onto the literary scene, the reading public for chivalric fiction was “not large” (Burke 1), but rather limited to privileged circles. The intended readers more closely resembled the fictional protagonists, such that readers were more apt to find practical implications for their lives at court in the masculine models of exemplary fictional knights such as Flores and Zifar. The rise in popularity of chivalric fiction toward the end of the medieval period and well into the sixteenth century, evidenced in part by copious extant manuscripts of later texts, indicates an opening up of the genre’s reading public (Ramos 26). No longer exclusively enjoyed within restricted, privileged circles, chivalric tales and their gender prescriptions reached “a new kind of public, whose preoccupation with status and with the display of wealth has lost much of its symbolic political value, acquiring instead cultural currency among the bourgeois and urban social groups” (Binotti 109). Regarding
medieval knights and the chivalric ethic, Jesús D. Rodriguez-Velasco posits “[t]here has probably never been, in all of history, a social class more susceptible to the creation of models through artistic and literary media. One would be tempted to say, in fact, that its existence is, fundamentally, literary” (“Esfuerço” 680, my translation). I would argue that chivalric literature was appealing not only for its entertaining, escapist qualities, but also for its reflection of, if not lived reality, then lived values and concerns.

Finally, I plan to explore several scenes in the Poema de Mio Cid that were left out of Chapter One because they had no parallel in the epic depiction of Fernán González. The interaction of El Cid with his cowardly and scheming sons-in-law, the Scions of Carrion, which occupies nearly half of the poem, is mostly pure poetic invention. I would argue that the poet devises and adds several of these scenes as a means to heighten the masculinity of the hero by way of comparison by repeatedly sissifying these particular opponents, the class of men who occasioned his initial exile and who continuously scheme against him out of envy. From the scene of the escaped lion, in which El Cid pacifies the beast while the young men cower in fear, to the injustice done to the hero’s daughters and the unique, perhaps unexpected, avenues for retribution selected by El Cid. The charge of menosvaler, which had been leveled against El Cid, is transferred to the two young noblemen with all of its class and gender implications. The Scions of Carrion represent perfectly effeminate foils to El Cid’s hyper-masculinity.

The present endeavor represents the first book-length project to address long-held notions about hegemonic masculinity in medieval Iberia. That said, the value of a scholarly project is not determined simply by its originality, by the identification of a previously unturned stone. The project must contribute something of value to a larger critical
conversation. A more nuanced understanding of gender within a given socio-political and historical context, and of its representation in cultural artifacts, provides new answers to previous questions or proposes an entirely new set of questions. Although medieval Europeans had inherited images of ideal behavior for men and women from the classical world (Hadley 17), they continued to actively (re)construct gender identities according to present circumstances. Masculinity in the Middle Ages may seem “relatively straightforward” at first blush, as many contemporary conceptualizations of masculine valor, courtesy, and dominance are drawn from the medieval era (Mazo Karras 2). Nonetheless, on the subject of aristocratic masculinity in medieval Iberian letters, so much remains to be said. The present compendium does not seek to be a comprehensive or authoritative account of the representation of aristocratic masculinity in the medieval Castilian literary canon; rather, it is meant to begin a much-needed conversation within the field of Hispano-medievalism, so as to nuance our understanding of Castilian hegemonic masculinity through its representation in canonical literary works. I look forward to digging deeper as Men’s and Masculinities Studies continue to develop, and as Medieval Studies continues to embrace newer analytical approaches to literary criticism.
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