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ARTHUR'S HEIRS: COMPARING THE NORDIC AND SPANISH TRISTAN

LOS HEREDEROS DE ARTURO: COMPARANDO EL TRISTÁN NÓRDICO E HISPANO

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RESUMEN

Mi investigación le da énfasis a la periferia Europea, investigando las semejanzas y diferencias entre los textos Artúricos sobre Tristán escritos en España y Escandinavia para demostrar cómo cada cultura maneja el material de forma diferente. Dándole énfasis a los contextos sociales y culturales de cada país, analizo como estos textos pertenecen al mismo sistema familiar mientras que mantienen una identidad única.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Literatura Artúrica Española y Escandinava. Tristán. Traductología. Medioevo y la Corte. Estudios Culturales.

ABSTRACT

This study emphasizes the peripheries of Europe, investigating the similarities and differences between the Medieval Arthurian Tristan tales written in Spain and Scandinavia; demonstrating how each culture deals with the material differently. By emphasizing the social and cultural contexts of each country, I analyze how these texts belong to the same Arthurian system while maintaining their own unique identity. Thus, peripheral texts are entrenched in the cultural systems that gave birth to a family of texts: they are the heirs of Arthur.

KEY WORDS: Spanish and Scandinavian Arthurian Literature. Tristan. Translation Theory. Medieval Courtly Culture. Cultural Studies.

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[1] Programa de cooperación cultural entre el Ministerio de Cultura Española y las Universidades de Estados Unidos

The extensive Arthurian corpus differs greatly from culture to culture because each adaptation creatively engages the material, making each text unique while remaining within the Arthurian system. There is not only one Arthurian story, but many stories with a network of similarities and differences. Trying to find an original, common, or universal Arthurian tale is to fundamentally misunderstand the complex phenomenon of Arthur, and practically speaking, to exclude many of the most interesting variations. To fully understand the Arthurian tradition, one must move the Arthurian stories away from a national setting and a Eurocentric point of view. The different adaptations, refractions, translations, and pseudo-translations of Arthurian texts reveal family resemblances that both distinguish and unite the material.

This idea of family resemblances is taken from the work of the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein. In *Philosophical Investigations*, Ludwig Wittgenstein rejects the idea that words, language, and concepts can be defined through one common idea. Instead he describes language as a "complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing"[2]. He uses the idea of family resemblances to explain the plurality of words and concepts. He states: "I can think of no better expression to characterize these similarities than 'family resemblances'; for the various resemblances between members of a family—build, features, colour of eyes, gait, temperament, and so on and so forth—overlap and criss-cross in the same way"[3]. You may have the eyes of your mother and nose of your father, while your sibling has the eyes of your aunt and the nose of your mother, for example. Inspired by his take on the philosophy of language, I move my research away from the scholarly Arthurian tradition that concentrates on searching for an original, and/or a cohesive tale, proposing instead 'family resemblances' between the stories. I also compare texts without emphasizing the canonical "first-tier" Arthurian texts but comparing instead "second-tier" texts with each other. The Spanish and Scandinavian Arthurian materials in particular illustrate the transnational quality of the Arthurian texts. They remind us how these countries had contact with each other without necessarily having France as an intermediary. Moreover, these texts are entrenched in the cultural systems that gave birth to a family of texts: the heirs of Arthur.

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[2] WITTGENSTEIN, L., *Philosophical Investigations: The German text, with an English translation by P.M.S Hacker and Joachim Schulte Revised 4th edition.* Blackwater. Singapore 2009, p. 65

[3] *Ibid.,* p. 66

Scholarly research concerning medieval Arthurian material is extensive, especially regarding the canonical Arthurian texts: Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae* (1136); the twelfth-century romances of Chrétien de Troyes; the romances of Hartmann von Aue (ca.1160-1210), and Wolfram Von Eschenbach (1170-1220), the Tristan tale by Gottfried von Strassburg (1210); the French Vulgate (1215-35) and the Post-Vulgate (between 1230-1240); the anonymous late fourteenth-century *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*; and Thomas Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur*, published in the late fifteenth century. Academic studies of the Arthurian corpus have usually been confined to how these canonical texts relate to each other and how the non-canonical or "second-tier" texts relate them[4]. Scholars have published research anthologies about the Arthurian material encompassing all of Europe[5]. In these anthologies, however, specialized national-language scholars divide the material by country; experts on the Arthurian material of each country research the Arthur of that particular country[6]. They rarely compare the non-canonical texts to each other, even though Arthurian texts show interesting and important differences and similarities across disparate times and places.

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[4] There are critical texts that concentrate on exposing the wide range of Arthurian material available; they are, however, overviews of the material and limited in scope if one is a specialist. See: LACY, N.J. (ed.), *The New Arthurian Encyclopedia.* New York, Garland, 1991; LACY, N.J. (ed.), *Medieval Arthurian Literature: A Guide to Recent Research*. New York, London, 1997; LUPACK, A. (ed.), *The Oxford Guide to Arthurian literature and legend*. Oxford University Press, 2007.

[5] S. LOOMIS, R. (ed.), *Arthurian literature in the Middle Ages: a collaborative history*. Oxford, 1959; LACY, N.J. (ed.), *Medieval Arthurian Literature: A Guide to Recent*

Arthurian manifestations merit a more thorough investigation through the cultures that created them, while keeping the canonical Arthurian texts as background. They also merit new forms of comparisons that do not emphasize the canon. Beginning to address the significant gap in scholarship about Arthurian texts in the peripheries of Europe, I concentrate on the Icelandic *Saga af Tristram ok Ísodd* and the Spanish *Don Tristán de Leonís*[7]; I also briefly refer to the Norwegian *Tristram saga ok Ísönda*r and the Spanish *Don Tristán de Leonís y del rey don Tristán de Leonís el joven, su hijo*[8]. I aim to expose that Arthurian texts are not examples of one-way transfer, but show a relationship between the source and target culture, and between the adaptation and the target culture. And yet, all four texts are considered to be strongly influenced by the French canon. The Norwegian *Tristram saga ok Ísönda*r is preserved in fifteenth and seventeenth-century manuscripts, but the tale was translated from French in 1226. The Icelandic *Saga af Tristram* is preserved in fifteenth century manuscripts but stands as a fourteenth-century refraction of the Norwegian version. *Don Tristán de Leonís* (1501) closely follows earlier fourteenth-century manuscripts, and *Don Tristán de Leonís y del rey don*

Research. New York, 1996; LACY, N.J. (ed.), *A History of Arthurian Scholarship*. Cambridge, 2006.

[6] Each scholar generally presents the material through her or his own particular research interests, and summarizes the conversations and discussions among the experts of the field in that particular country.

[7] The full title is *Libro del esforçado cauallero don Tristan de leonis y de sus grandes fechos en armas.*

[8] The full title is *Coronica nuevamente enmendada y añadida del buen cavallero don Tristan de Leonis y del rey don Tristan de Leonis el joven, su hijo*.

Tristán de Leonís el joven, su hijo is the most recent edition of the Tristan Spanish tale which includes a section about Tristan's son (1534). Both the Spanish and Scandinavian narratives uphold the chivalric code while injecting an element of instability to courtly and chivalric culture.

Despite the fractured nature of Arthurian texts and research on the so-called second-tier Arthurian texts, the Arthurian material is still analyzed with the assumption that Arthurian texts are cohesive in nature. Scholars compare the material from different countries and epochs to find the potential original source of the materials. Concentrating on Arthurian texts solely to find commonalities and influences has resulted in a limited point of view. Although differences between the source texts and the translations are mentioned, they are not explored in detail, and the cultural systems producing the translations are disregarded. Scholars do not explore how these differences fit within the cultural system that created the text, or how they bring instability and difference to Arthurian literature. Yet, these texts create instability in different ways. For example, the Norwegian *Tristan saga* injects materials from the Celtic Arthur that are not found in the "source" romance[9]. The Icelandic *Saga of Tristan* uses hyperbole and narrative distortion to parody Arthurian Romances[10]. Finally, the story of *Don Tristán de Leonís* critiques the discourse of chivalry by adopting material found in Juan de Flores' proto-feminist romance *Grimalte y Gradissa* (c. 1480-95). These examples support my general perspective, which is that differences between Arthurian narratives—the translations, pseudo-translations, and refractions—can be best understood as part of the different systems that created them.

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[9] KALINKE, M., *King Arthur, north-by-northwest: The "Matière de Bretagne" in Old Norse-Icelandic romances*. Copenhagen, Rehzel, 1981, p. 42.

[10] SCHACH, P., "*The Saga af Tristram ok Isodd.* Summary or Satire?*"*, *Modern Language Quarterly,* 21, 1960, pp. 336-352; SCHANCH, P., "*Tristam saga ok Ýsoddar* as Burlesque", *Scandinavian Studies,* 59, 1987, pp. 86-100.

In *Translation in a Postcolonial Context* (1999), Maria Tymoczko presents several ways to analyze translations. She finds that representing culture, humor, and names "take us to the heart of cultural power in translation, exposing the ways the translators reflect fundamental patterns of difference"[11]. The different Tristan tales examined in this essay incorporate contemporary indigenous material into the tales, making them unique in their own right while still showing connections between both Scandinavian and Spanish cultures. These texts belong in the cultural systems that created them, as well as an Arthurian system. They have overlapping similarities that show them as part of the same family, but they are decidedly different because of the cultures and times that created them. Thus, the international nature of these texts helps us understand differences and similarities between cultures. The Spanish and Scandinavian versions, for example, expose the connections between two seemingly disparate sections of Europe—the north and south peripheries.

The Scandinavian and Spanish tales on Tristan as well as other European versions of the story have many common elements in their plot. Either one or both of Tristan's parents die early in his childhood, he goes to the Kingdom of his uncle (albeit with different names in the different tales), he fights against the oppression created by a knight (usually an Irish Knight), and he falls in love with Isold, who will become the wife of his uncle, because of a love potion, and both Tristan and Isold die. Although the plot follows a pattern that makes it clear that the story is that of Tristan, the specificities of each individual story expose the cultural and historical backgrounds of the texts. An interesting example is the portrayal of Tristan's uncle —King Mórodd in the Icelandic, and King Mares in the Spanish tales— since in the Icelandic version he is portrayed as the accepted and rightful king of all of England, and in the Spanish version he is derided for not following the chivalric and courtly ideals. In the beginning of the Icelandic version, for example, Mórodd becomes King of all of England by two different means. First, he is accepted as the king of England by the men of the court. Second, he beats Plegrus, the champion of King Mórodd's sister, who was trying to conquer England for her. Moreover, the text has several scenes were the mother of Ísolt, Queen Flúrent, offers Ísolt to Tristram as a wife and Tristram refuses because there is a better man for her—namely King Mórodd:

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[11] TYMOCZKO, M., *Translation in a postcolonial context: early Irish literature in English translation.* St. Jerome Publishing, 1999, p. 159.

> *Flúrent dróttning bauð,<Tristram> Ísodd fyrir þat hit mikla þrekvirki, er hann hafði drepit orminn.*
>
> *Tristram svarar. "Ekki vil ek þat," sagði hann, "þvíat ek veit þann manninn, at henna sómir at eiga; en þetta er henna of lágt."*
>
> *Hún frétti, hverr sá væri.*
>
> *Tristram svarar: "Mórodd kóngr, frœndi minn," sagði hann.*
>
> (*Norse Romance: The Tristan Legend*) [12]

The queen believes Tristram is the right man for her daughter because he has shown bravery and might by killing the reptile. Tristram, however, disagrees, and believes the king to be a better man. Although he becomes a passive figure once Tristram enters the tale[13], King Mórodd is described positively. The king, in this version of Tristan, is an honorable man that deserves the kingship of England.

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[12] HILL, Tr. J. (Tr.), "Saga af Tristram ok Ísodd", *Norse Romace: The Tristan Legend*. Cambridge, 1999, p. 274.
"Queen Flúrent offered Ísodd to Tristram in return for his great and daring deed in killing the reptile.
Tristram replied: "I do not want that," he said, "because I know the very man that it is fitting for her to have. But this is too humble for her."
She asked who it was.
Tristram replied: "King Mórod, my kinsman," he said" (275).
I am using the edition edited by M. Kalinke titled *Norse Romance: The Tristan Legend*. This edition has the Icelandic facing the English translation. Peter Jorgersen translated the Norwegian Tristan tale, and Joyce Hill translated the Icelandic version.

The description of King Mares in the beginning of *Tristán de Leonís* differs greatly from the Icelandic counterpart. Once he becomes King of Cornualla, King Mares, pays tribute to Morlot of Ireland. Mares reacts by accepting the demands, without consulting the men of his court. Pernán, the brother of Mares, disagrees with his actions and tells him to fight Morlot or release the kingship of Cornualla to someone willing to fight: "*Entonces dixo Pernán que si* [Mares] *no quisiese combatirse por defender su tierra e reino, que dexase la corona del reino, que bien habría caballero que la defendiese. Y el rey dixo que no quería e que haría en esto y en todo su voluntad, queriendo él o no*" (*Libro del esforzado caballero don Tristán de Leonís y de sus grandes hechos en armas*)[14]. Mares pays tribute to Morlot, and then, decides to kill his brother in secret to avenge his words. In the very first chapter of the Spanish Tristan, Mares is presented as a tyrant who does not ask his men for counsel, acts according to his will and not according to what is best for his kingdom, and kills those who reproach his actions even if it is his own brother. The portrayal of Mares is very different from that of Mórodd. For example, in the Spanish version, Mares decides to marry Iseo. While in the Icelandic version, Tristram states that Mórodd is a better man, and thus, more deserving of Ísolt, Spanish Mares wants Tristán to die and sends him to get Iseo because Mares believes that he will be killed in the process of asking for her hand. The title of the chapter explains it well: "*De cómo don Tristán se tornó a la corte y pesó al rey Mares con él. Y de cómo le envió a Irlanda por Iseo la brunda, porque lo matasen allá, por cuanto la reina, mujer del rey Languines, lo quería mal porque mató a su hermano Morlot, e la truxo consigo por su buena caballería*" (*Libro del esforzado caballero don Tristán de Leonís y de sus grandes hechos en armas*)[15]. Although both the Icelandic and Spanish versions follow enough of a similar plotline for us to know they are different version of the same tale, the differences in the details, such as the personality of Tristan's uncle and how he ends up with Isold, are strikingly different. The differences are significant because they usually signal the uniqueness of the adaptations, and how they engage their own cultures.

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[13] KALINKE, M., *King Arthur... op. cit.,* pp. 38-43.

[14] ANZOÁTEGUI, I.B. (ed.), *Libro del esforzado caballero don Tristán de Leonís y de sus grandes hechos en armas*. Buenos Aires-México, Espasa-Calpe Argentina, 1943, P. 14. "Then, Pernán said that if Mares did not want to go and fight to defend his land and kingdom, then he should relinquish the Crown of the kingdom, that there would be a knight who would defend it. And the King said he would follow his own will in this, as he does with everything else, whether he likes it or not." All Spanish to English translations are my own.

Despite the differences that mark these versions as unique, there is an international quality to them. Each version finds different ways to integrate the tale to the Arthurian milieu. The Norwegian version adds scenes depicting Arthur similarly to the depictions of Arthur found in Britain[16]. The Icelandic version turns a servant of the Irish court into Kæi, echoing Kai, one of Arthur's knights. Such a change works because both characters have similar attributes[17]. Finally, the Spanish version incorporates several characters of Arthur's court into the tale, including Arthur and Lanzarote. Moroever, embracing an international Arthur has an added benefit; it also exposes the different ways that medieval European cultures came into contact with each other and how the Arthurian tales influenced the literature of the cultures that came in contact with them. In Scandinavia, many elements of the Tristan Saga made their way into the well-known Icelandic sagas such as *Laxdœla saga* and *Grettis saga*[18], and in Spain the Tristan narrative was important because it synthesized the European Arthurian motifs and the Spanish chivalric ideals[19]. Nevertheless, scholars emphasize that these are heavily influenced by the French Arthurian romances[20] and are translations or pseudo translations of the French Arthurian texts. To expose how these texts are appropriated by their respective cultures, I give information on the courts that created or had access to the Arthurian texts and how the specific courtly models impacted the texts. I also compare the Spanish and Scandinavian versions and expose their innovations to the Arthurian milieu.

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[15] ANZOÁTEGUI, I.B. (ed.), *Libro del esforzado caballero don Tristán de Leonís y de sus grandes hechos en armas*. Buenos Aires-México, Espasa-Calpe Argentina, 1943, p. 58. "On how Tristán went back to court and weighted King Mares with himself. And how [Mares] sent him to Ireland for Iseo the blonde so that he would be killed, since the queen, the wife of King Languines, wished him ill because he killed her brother Morlot."

[16] KALINKE, M., *King Arthur... op. cit.,* p. 42.

[17] *Ibid.,* p. 111.

Medieval Arthurian texts had a great reception in Scandinavia since the Norwegian King Hákonarson (1204-1263) commissioned translations of many French Arthurian texts[21]. The first Arthurian text translated was *Saga af Tristram ok Ísönd*, the only complete translation of Thomas' *Tristan*. The introduction tells us that a Brother Robert translated it in 1226. Scholars agree that it is possible that Í*vens saga*, *Parcevals saga*, and *Valvens þáttr* were also translated at the Norwegian court during the same time period[22]. King Hakon was given the throne of Norway in 1217. Unlike previous reigns, however, his was relatively peaceful. He had connections to other courts, such as the English court [23]. He is stated to have commissioned several translations, including *Tristrams saga*. These translations served as entertainment and followed the literary fashions of other European courts[24]. As Rikhardsdottir explains: “Similarly the opulence of [King Hákon’s] court at Bergen, in comparison with prior and other Scandinavian royal sites, as well as the education of his sons bear witness to a predilection for the sophistication evidenced by his English and French neighbors”[25]. The introduction of the *matière de Bretagne* and the *matière de France* into Scandinavia was a product of the connections between the different courts in Europe and their penchant for knightly tales.

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[18] KALINKE, M., *Norse Romance... op. cit.,* p. 25.

[19] CUESTA TORRES, L., "La transmisión textual de Don Tristán de Leonis", *Revista de Literatura Medieval,* V, 1993, pp. 63-69.

[20] *Ibid.*; KALINKE, M., *King Arthur... op. cit.*

[21] There are translations of four French Arthurian sagas available: *Tristrams saga, Íven*s *saga* (*Ivain* or *The Knight of the Lion* by Chrétien de Troyes)*, Parcevals saga with Valvens þattr* (*Perceval* or *The Story of the Grail* by Chrétien de Troyes), and *Erex saga* (*Erec et Enide* by Chrétien de Troyes); two *lais*: *Geitarlauf* (*Chevrefueil* by Marie de France)*, Janual* (*Lanval* by Marie de France); and a fabliaux *Möttuls saga* (The lay of the Mantle); *vid.* KALINKE, M., *King Arthur... op. cit.* pp. 7-8.

[22] KALINKE, M, King Arthur… *op. cit*., pp. 5.

Other Arthurian sagas, however, such as *Erex saga*, are more ambivalent since “structurally and stylistically the work deviates from the other literature which we know to have been translated during the thirteenth century in Norway”[26]. Moreover the *matière de Bretagne* and the *matière de France* were originally imported through the Norwegian court. They are, however, mostly available in Icelandic manuscripts, some even centuries removed from the material[27]. There are also Icelandic translations of “The history of the Kings of Britain” (*Breta sögur*), an Icelandic translation of book VII of the *Historia* titled *Merlínús spá*, and an Icelandic refraction of *Tristan and Isold* (*Saga af Tristram ok Ísodd*). Most of the

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[23] HALVORSEN, E. F., *The Norse Version of the Chanson de Roland*. Copenhagen, 1959; RIKHARDSDOTTIR, S., “The Imperial Implications of Medieval Translations. A Comparative Analysis of the Old Norse and Middle English Versions of Marie de Fance’s Lais”, *Studies in Philology,* 105.2, 2008, pp. 144-164.

[24] KALINKE, M., *King Arthur... op. cit.,* pp. 20-45.

[25] RIKHARDSDOTTIR, S., “The Imperial Implications...”, *op. cit.,* p. 148.

[26] KALINKE, M., *King Arthur... op. cit.,* p. 5.

[27] HALVORSEN, E. F., *The Norse Version... op. cit.,* pp. 13-26; KALINKE, M., *King Arthur... op. cit.,* pp. 2-3.

Icelandic Arthurian material is written in prose narrative, following the structure of the Icelandic sagas[28].

The Arthurian material was introduced by the Norwegian court, but most texts available are written in Old-Norse Icelandic. As Kalinke explains: "Ultimately, the Icelanders were responsible for the preservation as well as transmission of Arthurian literature in the North, a foreign import at a time when their own literature was at its height. In the same epoch that the deeds of Gunnar, the poetry of Egill and of Kormakr, and the loves of Gudrun were set down in writing, the North also learned of the magnificence and munificence of Arthur, of the chivalrous deeds of Erec, Yvain, the new room Gawain, and Perceval, as well as of the tragic love of Tristan and Isolt"[29].

The Icelanders preserved the Arthurian material while creating their own literary corpus. The Scandinavian Tristan sagas are good examples of the relationship between translations and refractions within the Scandinavian culture[30]. *Saga af Tristram ok Ísodd* follows a clear pattern of normalizing the text to fit into the historical and social contexts of its place of creation.

Literary evidence also points to innovative links between these two disparate countries. *Saga af Tristram ok Ísodd* is an Icelandic version of the Tristan tale inspired by the Norwegian translation of the French redaction of Thomas' Tristan. In the Scandinavian version of the story, however, there are several important changes. Tristram's father is from Spain,

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[28] BLAISDELL, F. W., KALINKE, M., "Introduction", *Erex Saga and Ívens Saga*. University of Nebraska Press, 1977, pp. x-xi.

[29] KALINKE, M., *King Arthur... op. cit.,* p. 1.

[30] Differences between the Norwegian and Icelandic version of the Tristan saga highlight the significance of the Arthurian texts in Iceland, in that they emphasize the knights and not King Arthur. Similarly, the sagas are about the Icelandic Vikings and not the Norwegian kings. I expand further on this theory in chapter three of my book manuscript.

Tristram is raised in Spain by his foster father[31], and most of the tale is set in Spain, showing that the writer had, at the very least, some knowledge about Spanish culture. Moreover, Tristram fights "heathens" who are connected to Muslims: "Þá mæltu heiðingjar: 'Þetta er fjándi en ekki maðr, er oss gerir svá mikinn skaða, ok hinn helgi Maúmet verði honum reiðr ok lægi hans dramb'…"[32]. The image of the Spanish, as knights fighting against Muslims is a common trope found in Europe, mirroring the historical context of Medieval Spain.

Finally, in the Norwegian version of Tristran and in other versions of the story, Ísodd of the White Hands is a type of doppelganger of Ísodd, who is Tristan's love and the female lead of the story. In *Saga af Tristram ok Ísodd*, however, Ísodd of the White Hands changes into Ísodd svarta, or Ísodd the Dark, from Spain (in Old Norse svarta means dark and refers to her hair and eyes). By changing her name into Ísodd the Dark her Spanish heritage is incorporated while contrasting with the main female character known as Ísodd the Fair. The story shows us that Ísodd the Dark is so named because she is Spanish. At the end of the tale, Tristan dies as the king of Spain. In one of the later Spanish versions of Tristan, while Tristan is not Spanish, his son, *el joven Tristán*, becomes King of Spain and fights against the Moors. While the earlier fourteenth-century versions of the Tristan tale have an English Tristan, these two Spanish and Scandinavian versions create the innovation of a Spanish Tristan, thereby moving away from a French-Anglo origin. Thus, the history of the transmission of the Arthurian texts and its literature show that Scandinavia and Spain, two regions that are not generally studied together because of their physical distance (as they stand for the north and south peripheries of Europe), have indeed a common ground and are aware of each other.

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[31] HILL, J. (Tr), "Saga af Tristram ok Ísodd", *Norse Romace: The Tristan Legend.* Cambridge, 1999, pp. 256-257.

[32] *Ibid.,* pp. 282-283, "Then the heathens said: 'This is a devil, and not a man, because he does us so much harm. May the holy Mahomet (in Old Norse *Maúmet*) be angry with him and humble his pride…'".

Saga af Tristram ok Ísodd emphasizes Tristan's adventures away from Isold, and courtly culture behavior is criticized because it is not conducive to honorable conduct. Early in the text, for example, Blenziblý, Tristan's mother, wants to meet the knight who will later become Tristan's father. She and her page, Pollornis, have the following conversation:

> *"Ek hefi sét í dag," sagði hún, "þann mann at ek hefi eigi litit hans jafningja, ok þér satt at segja, þá hefi ek svá mikla ást felt til hans, at ek má fyrir engan mun annat, en nú þegar í stað verð ek at senda þik til fundar við Kalegras, ok bið hann koma til mín, ok seg at ek vil hafa ást hans."*
>
> *Pollornis svarar: "Frú, þú munt vera drukkin, er þér mælit slíka fólsku, þar sem hann hefir gert yðr svá mikinn skaða, at hann hefir drepit Plegrus riddara, vin yðvarn, er fyrir skömmu settuð þér höfðingja yðvars hers. Líz mér hit ráðligra, at ek fara of drepa hann ok fœra [ek þér] höfuð hans; er þa vel hefnt várs manns."* (*Norse Romance: The Tristan Legend*) [33]

Although the page does ask Plegrus to meet Blenziblý, a meeting that is essential to the story, Pollornis clearly reproaches her actions and the courtly system in general. In Viking society, vengeance is extremely important and is one of the main themes in the sagas[34]. Her actions, which do not punish Plegrus but enhance his honor, go against one of the most explicitly significant aspects of Viking culture, yet fit exceedingly well with courtly culture. Moroever, the actions of Blenziblý go against one of the most important literary constructions of female Vikings—to incite the men into action against those that have brought dishonor to the family unit[35]. Pollornis' reaction is not only consistent with that of the Viking culture, but it also reminds Blenziblý of her role as a Viking woman, a role she rejects. Thus, the text shows ambivalence toward the courtly ideals by simultaneously projecting two different reactions—Pollornis, whose sentiments follow those of the Vikings, and Blenziblý, whose sentiments are similar to those in other Tristan tales, those in courtly culture.

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[33] *Ibid.*, p. 248; "I have seen today," she said, "the man whose equal I have never seen, and to tell you the truth, I then fell deeply in love with him that, as a result, now, at this moment, I can act in no other way than to send you to meet Kalegras. Ask him to come to me, and say that I desire to have his love".

Pollornis replied: "Lady, you must be drunk since you say such foolish things, seeing that he has done you so much harm in that he killed the knight Plegrus, your friend, whom not long ago you appointed as commander of your army. It seems a better idea to me that I should go and kill him and bring you his head. Then our man would be properly avenged" p. 249.

In *Rethinking the Arthurian Legend Transmission in the Iberian Peninsula***,** J. Conde de Lindquist traces the possible sources of the Peninsular Arthurian texts[36]. She points out that Vikings traveled from Scandinavia to the Celtic region and from there south to Spain. Using historical facts, she comments on the possibility that Vikings brought the Arthurian material to Spain: "The fact remains, as stated previously, that the Vikings were everywhere in England, Scotland, Ireland, and Normandy, therefore, they were possibly familiar with the Arthurian legend prior to the existence of the French texts of the 13th century and may have transmitted some of their knowledge to the Spanish"[37]. Although she has no definitive proof that the Vikings brought any knowledge of Arthur, she does show that Vikings and Spaniards had contact with each other. Thus, historical evidence points to a possible connection between these two seemingly distant regions of Europe, and their different takes on the Arthurian tradition.

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[34] BYOCK, J., *Viking Age Iceland.* London, 2001, pp. 185-247.

[35] JESCH, J., *Women in the Viking Age,* Woodbidge, 1991.

[36] CONDE LINQUIST, J. de, "Rethinking the Arthurian Legend Transmission in the Iberian Peninsula*", eHumanista: Journal of Medieval Studies* 7, 2006, p. 72-85.

[37] *Ibid.,* p. 77.

Both the Scandinavian and Spanish tales portray ambivalence towards the courtly ideals that are characteristic of the Tristan tales, including the early Norwegian Tristan. Both stories tone down the courtly ideals of the story, especially courtly love, conforming the texts to their own cultures. Both the Spanish and Icelandic tales of Tristan, for example, emphasize his adventures outside of the court over his relationship with Isold. Moroever, the Icelandic Tristan exposes courtly behavior as inappropriate because it goes against their ideals on vengeance, and the Spanish Tristan questions the role of women in courtly literature by adding material from the proto feminist romance *Grimalte y Gradissa* (1495).

Arthurian literature had a great impact on Spanish courtly literature and culture[38]. Spanish texts mention the *matière de Bretagne* as far back as the twelfth century**.** It was, however, the translations, pseudo-translations, and refractions of thirteenth-century French romances—mainly the Vulgate Cycle, the Prose *Tristan*, and the Post-Vulgate *Roman du Graal*—that had the biggest impact on Spain from the early fourteenth century until the sixteenth century. The Spanish Arthurian texts are written in different Spanish and Portuguese languages, mainly Galician-Portuguese, Castilian, Aragonese, and Catalan. The impact on Arthurian texts is most evident in the *Libro del caballero Zifar* (ca. 1300), the oldest Spanish chivalric romance, *Amadís de Gaula* (ca. 1400) which was influenced by the Prose *Lancelot* and *Tristan*, *Tirant lo Blanch* (1490), and Miguel de Cervantes' (1547-1616) famous work *Don Quixote* (1605, 1615) the zenith and collapse of the appropriation of Arthurian material in Spanish courtly culture. *Don Quixote* takes the ideals of Arthurian literature into the realm of insanity, asking whether Arthurian chivalric ideals have a place in Spanish society and concluding that they do not[39]. Nevertheless, Spanish courtly culture already had a complicated relationship with the chivalric ideals before Cervantes' masterpiece, where courtly literature and the ideals of chivalry and courtly love intertwined.

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[38] ENTWISTLE, W. J., *The Arthurian Legend in the Literature of the Spanish Peninsula,* London, Dent, 1925; MALKIEL, Mª R.L. de, "Arthurian Literature in Spain and Portugal", *Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages,* Oxford, Claredon, 1959; SHARRER, H., *A Critical Bibliography of Hispanic Arthurian Material.* Vol. I, *Texts: The Prose Romance Cycles*. London, 1977.

An interesting example of the impact of Arthurian literature on Spanish aristocracy and how a king's real act was motivated by literary tropes occurs in 1434. With the consent of Juan II of Castile, a knight named Suero de Quiñones and nine of his friends would not allow other knights to cross over a bridge as a tribute to his love, causing injury and even death in the process. Rodríguez de Lena describes the event in the *Libro del passo honroso* (1434), returning the episode into a literary realm. Thus, in the Spanish courtly culture, the ideals of chivalry were important and had great impact in the literary constructions of the men of the court, including the king.

The Spanish courtly ideals were intertwined with ideas of chivalry and knighthood. To be a courtier was to be a knight, and a knight was closely linked to the Arthurian romances: "Throughout Christian Spain and Portugal, Arthurian literature served as an exemplar for aristocratic society, prompting the mimicry of Arthurian tourneys and jousts, even molding the behavior of individuals"[40]. The king himself was expected to be the best knight since he was at the top of the hierarchy. Indeed, there is no better example of the complicated relationship between Arthurian literature and courtly culture than the life and literary construction on King Juan II of Castile (1405-54), who as we have already seen, used literary tropes to make decisions for the court. In the *Cancionero de Baena* (c. 1445) there are several *dezires* dedicated to the birth of Juan II of Castille, which expose the qualities the boy should have as a grown man. He was expected to be strong, just, generous, good looking, and a warrior—the very definition of an Arthurian knight[41]. Knightly virtues were intricately connected to how the court portrayed itself and the politics of the court[42]. The king and his knights had to keep order at the court and protect the different social systems attached to the monarchy. Thus, the attributes that the king and the court were supposed to have were part of a system that provided protection to the general populace. The portrayal of the king as knight in literary texts had political and cultural connotations; 'Books of Chivalry' and 'mirror for princes,' for example, were related genres at the time, and were connected to systems of governance[43]. Thus, there was a connection between the knights and the government—to be a good knight was to be a good ruler. Nevertheless, such attributes of knighthood are not found in the literature about King Juan II, who is portrayed as a man of letters. As Fernando Gómez Redondo explains: *"Pérez de Guzmán no silencia las extraordinarias cualidades intelectivas de este monarca y su notable pericia al conocimiento de artes y ciencias; sin embargo, esas virtudes destacan aún más el principal de sus defectos: la ineptitud absoluta para gobernar el reino y su falta de voluntad para asumir sus obligaciones; con ironía, señala el poco provecho que había sacado este rey de las estorias a que era tan inclinado a leer"*[44].

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[39] I believe that Don Quixote exemplifies a literary encounter between ideas of chivalry, literature, and culture that began earlier in Spanish history, and which can be explored through the relationship between King Juan II of Castille (1405-1454) and his Grand-master Álvaro de Luna (1390-1453). Although more information will be mentioned in this paper, I plan to make a more in depth analysis in a later article.

[40] SHARRER, H., "Spanish and Portuguese Arthurian Literature", *The Arthurian Encyclopedia,* New York, 1986, pp. 516-521; p. 520.

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[41] An example is the dezir 229 which says: "1. Primogénito es nasçido/ al muy alto Rey d'España;/ déle Dios graçia estraña/ por que sea muy complido,/ *en la fe fortaleçido, / e mantenga bien justicia;/ non la maengüe por cobdiçia,*/ otrosí nin por olvido. 2. Paresca al grant Çipión/ en esfuerzo e ardidaza,/ rezidumbre e fortaleza/ aya más que ovo Sansón/ e iguale con Salomón/ en saber e en cordura,/ *traspasse de fermosura/ al muy fermoso Absalón.* 3. *Sea siempre vençedor/ en batallas e en guerras,*/ conquiste mayores tierras/ que Alixandre, el grant señor;/ sea muy largo dador,/ otrosí muy verdadero./ Non crea muy de ligero,/ de buenos sea onrador" (277, Bold emphasis mine). "1. The first-born is begotten/ to the greatest King of Spain/ let us thank the Lord highly/ so that he has good attributes,/ *that he is strong in his faith,/ and that he maintains justice;/ that he is not distracted by greed,*/ nor distracted by forgetfulness. 2. Let him be like the great Çipión/ in his courage and fury,/ and vigor and strength/ let him have more than Sansón/ and the same with Salomón/ in his knowledge and good sense,/ *that his beauty surpasses/ the very beautiful Absalón. 3. Let him always be a winner/ in battles and wars,*/ that he conquers more lands/ than Alixandre the great;/ let him be a great giver,/ and true to his word./ Let him not trust too quickly,/ and honorable to the good."; Dutton, B. (ed), *Cancionero de Baena*, Visor, 2000, p. 277

[42] Boase, R., *The troubadour revival: a study os social change and traditionalism in late medieval Spain*, London, 1978.

I am inclined to say these *estorias* are the 'books of Chivalry' and of 'mirror princes' that Maurice Keen describes. Juan II is portrayed as a man that reads the books of chivalry, but, unlike what was expected of him, he does not act like the knights within the texts[45]. I argue that the literary construction of Juan II, which expresses the sentiment that being a knight was not the same as reading about knights, and that chivalric ideals had political connotations in the Castilian court, points to the tendency in Spanish Arthurian literature to exalt the knights and not necessarily the king.

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[43] Keen states: "We re-encounter repeatedly in them the same account of the origins of knighthood that we found in Ramon Lull. Over and over again chivalry is associated, as in his books, with the art of government: indeed, it becomes clear that 'books of chivalry' and 'mirror for princes' are associated genres of writing"; *vid.,* KEEN, M., *Chivalry*. New Haves and London, 1984, p. 16.

[44] "Pérez de Guzmán exposes the extraordinary intellectual qualities of this monarch and his apparent skill at learning arts and sciences; nevertheless, these virtues exalt even more the greatest of his defects: his absolute ineptitude to govern the kingdom and his lack of will to assume his responsibilities; ironically, it shows the little benefit the king got from the *estorias* that he was so inclined to read" GÓMEZ REDONDO, F., *Historia de la prosa Medieval Castellana: los orígenes del humanismo, el marco cultural de Enrique III y Juan II*. Madrid, 2002, p. 2451.

[45] I cannot help but see similarities between the construction of Juan II and that of Don Quijote.

Politics and chivalry are also connected to the literary descriptions of the grand-master (condestable) Álvaro de Luna, who is described as a great knight. In *Laberinto de fortuna* (1444), Juan de Mena describes the grand-master in love with providence and riding his horse over fortune. In the text he rejects fortune, he is generous, restrained, and a warrior. The very attributes wished on the King on his birth are now used to describe Álvaro. The fact that he was also a writer was not emphasized in the text[46]. Álvaro de Luna was described as a great knight, and later became the embodiment of chivalry[47]. His literary construction as a knight helped defend his position as the favorite of Juan II and justified his political influence because he was chivalrous.

The relationship between Álvaro de Luna and King Juan II shows the complicated relationship of chivalry and literary values of the Castilian court. Although the literary system of the court described them as opposites, the partnership of John II of Castile and Álvaro de Luna was necessary in the court. In *John II of Castile and the grand master Alvaro de Luna*, Didier T. Jean states: "By means of the affection he was able to arouse in the king, but also through his own political ability, he became practically sovereign ruler of Castile. The secret of his success was perhaps the fact that although he may have betrayed everyone else, he remained faithful to the king. After all, the king's support was the only right Don

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[46] Álvaro de Luna, for example, wrote *Libro de las claras y virtuosas mujeres* (first half of the fifteenth century).

[47] GÓMEZ REDONDO, F., *Historia de la prosa... op. cit.,* T. III, p. 2202; As Fernando Gómez Redondo explains: "El triunfal regreso de don Álvaro del destierro de Ayllón, en 1428, marca un hito en la construcción del imaginario caballeresco de la corte; la corrección de la *Crónica de don Álvaro* tuvo que ordenarse en ese momento; pero, además, el de Luna procuró promover una nueva caballería en torno a su figura…", "The triumphant comeback of don Álvaro from exile in Ayllón, in 1428, becomes a milestone in the imagined construction of chivalry on the court; a correction to the *Crónica de don Álvaro* was ordered at that very moment; moreover, Álvaro sought to promote a new form of chivalry based on his figure…".

Alvaro had to hold the government and to confront the opposing nobility, who, despite their greediness and lust for power, respected the symbol of the crown. Yet, without Don Alvaro's cunning, the weakling king would have been a plaything among the battling nobles. John II had the title to the crown, Don Alvaro the ability to rule"[48].

Jean romanticizes the relationship between these two men, but also makes it clear that they needed each other. Juan II needed the expertise of Álvaro, and Álvaro needed the support of the King. In fact, once the king removed his support, Álvaro was executed, and the court did not recover from the loss of his skills. The fact remains that Álvaro was described as a great knight and he gained honor and prestige because he followed the chivalric code of conduct, and King Juan II was described as a bad ruler because he did not. Chivalry was exalted in the literature of the court over kingship itself, even if in reality no one would cross the king, not even Álvaro de Luna. Moreover, the very literature that expressed chivalry as the highest form of praise and that was used to critique the king was the very stuff that the king used to escape his responsibilities as king. *Tristán de Leonís* follows the same literary trend as that found in the court of Juan II by having Tristán be described as a better knight and man than King Mares.

The Spanish Arthurian material, especially the Spanish Tristan, highlights chivalric values. The ideals of chivalry, however, did not need to be embodied by the king. In *Don Tristán de Leonís*, King Mares is described as beneath Tristán. In "*De cómo Tristán llegó a Cornualla e cómo la dueña del lago del Espina le envió a decir que se fuese a ver con ella*" King Mares realizes that the woman he is interested in, la dueña del lago de la Espina, has sent a message to Tristán[49]. King Mares speaks to the messenger and the following conversation occurs: "*El rey dixo: 'Enano, sabe que yo quiero tanto de bien a ésta que no puedo ver ni oír a otra dueña, salvo a ella. E agora veo que ando engañado con ella e que ella escogió lo peor'. '¿Cómo?, dixo el enano, ¿escogió lo peor? ¿Cómo? ¿Vos no sabéis que Tristán es el mejor caballero del mundo?*'[50]. The next chapter, "*De cómo el rey se combatió con Tristán de Leonís*," or how the king fought with Tristán from Leonís, makes sure to describe how Tristán beats the king in combat without realizing who he had just attacked. Mares secretly waits for Tristán so that he can kill him during the night. When the king's *escudero*, or squire, realizes this, he says: "*¿Cómo, señor, recaudador sois vos fecho de aquella vuestra tierra, que salteáis los caballeros que buscan sus aventuras? Por Buena fe, señor, que descortesía facéis. E las gentes que lo supieren a mal vos lo contrarán. E deshace mucho en vuestro honor*" (49-50) [51]. Right after this conversation, King Mares is beaten by Tristán. Thus, King Mares is described as a man who does not follow the chivalric and courtly ideals of the court, while Tristán, his nephew and vassal, is described as the best knight in the world, an example of the chivalric and courtly ideals. Kingship is praised through characters such as Tristán and Arthur, but King Mares is criticized because he failed to follow chivalric conduct.

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[48] DIDIER, J. T., *John II of Castile and the grand master Alvaro de Luna*. Madrid, 1978, p. 12.

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[49] ANZOÁTEGUI, I.B. (ed.), *Libro del esforzado caballero don Tristán de Leonís y de sus grandes hechos en armas*. Buenos Aires-México, Espasa-Calpe Argentina, 1943, p. 48. She had arranged a meeting with Tristan for that night. She also told him to take his weapons in case he met anyone during the night.

[50] *Ibid.*, P. 48. "The king said: Dwarf, you know that I love her so much I cannot see nor listen to another dame, but her. And now I see that she is deceiving me and has chosen the worst.' 'What?' Said the Dwarf, 'She chose the worst? How? Don't you know that Tristán is the best knight in the world?'"

[51] *Ibid.*, P. 49-50. How, my lord, can you collect from the land you own, when you jump upon the knights that are looking for adventure? Upon my lord, sir, what discourtesy are you doing. And if people knew they would find it a bad thing. And it does away with your honor".

Don Tristán de Leonís also shows a shift in the portrayal of women in the text. Although, for the most part, the text follows fourteenth-century manuscripts of the story, the editor incorporated passages of Juan de Flores' romance *Grimalte y Gradissa* (1495), a *novella sentimental* that critiques the discourse of chivalry. Of interest to this paper is that the editor chose to incorporate the tomb scene of Fiometa in the tomb scene of Tristán and Iseo[52]. In "Espacio y alienación en *Grimalte* y *Gradissa* de Juan de Flores", Rina Walthaus explains why the death of Fiometa symbolizes the alienation of the main characters and distances the story from that of the 'libros de caballería'[53]. She states: "El rechazo definitivo de Pánfilo origina el suicidio de Fiometa, por el cual ésta será condenada a las llamas eternas del infierno. Para Grimalte significa el fracaso definitivo de sus intentos. Mientras en los libros de caballerías el héroe suele partir de la corte (por ejemplo, artúrica) para, después de realizar las aventuras de su *quete* en otras partes del mundo, volver en triunfo a ella y reintegrarse en su propio mundo, en *Grimalte* y *Gradissa* no hay tal triunfo, ni vuelta con reintegración"[54].

Grimalte y Gradissa critiques the ideals of courtly culture and exposes its dangers by highlighting the negative aspects of courtly culture—that women like Fiometa endure eternal damnation[55]. In *Don Tristán de Leonís*, for example, Belisenda kills herself because Tristán will not marry her[56]. Her tomb has the following inscription: "*Aquí yace Belisenda, Fija del rey Feremondo, la cual se mató por amores de Tristán de Leonís*"[57]. The fact that Belisenda is not considered important becomes clear by the action of those around her, who are more preoccupied with Tristan than her. The title of the section, "*De comó tuvieron a don Tristán para cortar la cabeza, porque no quería amar a Belisenda, hija del rey Feromondo*"[58], is especially telling because it focuses on Tristán, and Belisenda's death is only significant because it aggrandizes his stature. In stark contrast to *Grimalte y Gradissa*, *Tristán de Leonís* does not emphasize the rejection of Belisenda by Tristán or her eternal damnation.

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[52] In "Juan de Flores y Tristán de Leonis," Pamela Waley states: "The 1501 *Tristán de Leonís* in fact borrows largely from Flores' *Grimalte y Gradissa, c*ontaining seven lengthy passages from it. Some of these are quoted without alteration — the tomb of Tristán and Iseo's an exact repetition of the description of part of that of Fiometa, and the final verse of Grimalte becomes the song of a love-sick knight — but the other are altered, usually with care, to fit their new context" (XXV).

[53] WALTHAUS, R., "Espacio y alienación en *Grimalte* y *Gradissa* de Juan de Flores", *Scriptura,* 13, 1997, p. 5-18.

[54] WALTHAUS, R., "Espacio y alienación..." *op. cit.,* p. 14, "The complete rejection from Pánfilo instigates the suicide of Fiometa, for which she will spend eternity in the fiery pit of hell. For Grimalte it means the complete failure of his attempts. While in the books of Chivalry the hero usually leaves his court (for example the Arthurian court) so that after he finishes the adventures of his quest in other parts of the world, he comes back triumphantly to the court, and is reintegrated into his own world. In *Grimalte y Gradissa* there is neither success nor integration".

The addition of Fiometa's tomb scene at the end of the texts expresses a different and new ideology. Perhaps, to include the same description in the tomb of Tristán and Iseo as that of Fiometa is to highlight the tragedies of their deaths. The incorporation of material from *Grimalte y Gradissa* in the Tristán tale points to the fact that these tales, although based on earlier material, are still influenced by the era that created them. This fusion between the Arthurian texts and the *novelas sentimentales* (Sharrer) shows how the Arthurian material engaged fifteenth-century Spanish culture.

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[55] In "*De cómo tuvieron a don Tristán para cortar la cabeza, porque no quería amar a Belisenda, hija del rey Feremondo*" Belisenda kills herself because Tristan does not love her. Her suicide is in stark contrast to that of Fiometa. While Fiometa's suicide emphasizes her eternal damnation and leads to the imposed exile of Pánfilo from the whole of society, Belisenda's death serves to glorify Tristan who is forever engraved in her tomb.

[56] *Ibid.*, P. 29.

[57] *Ibid.*, P. 24. "Here lies Belisenda, daughter of King Feromondo, who killed herself because she loved Tristán de Leonís".

[58] *Ibid.*, P. 24. "How they held Tristán to cut his head off because he did not want to love Belisenda, daughter of King Feromondo".

The Tristan tales from both Spain and Scandinavia demonstrate ambivalence toward the courtly culture that supposedly engendered them. As I have argued, these stories overlap in several ways—certain plot elements, interaction between their cultures, and ambivalence to courtly culture—but they also show differences that make the texts unique. For example, their methods of questioning the courtly setting are very different. On the one hand, the courtly setting in *Saga af Tristram ok Ísodd* is questioned directly, partly because the Viking society that created the text differed greatly from that of courtly culture. It was only in the great Scandinavian courts, such as that of the Norwegians, that such matters would have been important, and indeed, most translations of the Arthurian Romances were commissioned in Norway and, even then, still had points of contention with several of the ideals of courtly culture. *Saga af Tristram ok Ísodd*, however, was written by an Icelander who belonged to a place where there was no king and no courtly setting making a direct critique of the courtly setting possible. On the other hand, the courtly culture in *Don Tristán de Leonís* is questioned indirectly, partly because a new genre was created and because the chivalric ideals were emphasized over courtly love. Being a good knight was more important than the rank held. King Mares did not follow the chivalric code and was described as a tyrant. Tristan was a vassal of King Mares, but because he followed the chivalric conduct, he was described as better than the king. Being a good knight had precedence over your position.

By analyzing the Arthurian texts through the cultures that translated and adapted them, with an emphasis on the similarities and differences of the Arthurian texts, one can better understand the choices in the tale that make it unique while having "family resemblances" with the other versions.

Primary texts

Coronica nuevamente enmendada y añadida del buen caballero don Tristán de Leonís y del rey don Tristán de Leonís el joven, su hijo. Sevilla, Domenico de Robertis, 1534.

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