



Material dimensions of a chivalric romance: metanarrative and book history in Ortúñez de Calahorra's *Espejo de príncipes y cavalleros* and other *libros de caballerías*

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Abstract

Apart from a specific set of conventions in book design, the so-called “género editorial”, the Castilian chivalric romances from the late 15th to the early 17th c., are a varied genre. The paper takes a look at different ways in which materiality plays a role for the romances, situating them between market strategy and complex literary tradition. Certain approaches, from paratextual keywords (‘mirror’, ‘chronicle’) to metanarrative and metafictional elements (found manuscripts, pseudotranslations, metalepsis) are not only fixed topoi, but vary from text to text. In fact, they are in constant dialogue with recent developments in historiography, as well as other fictional genres. Thus, supernatural sources, contradictory textual evidence, and explanations of the marvelous often combine into a complex discursive strategy that helps explain the continuous popularity of the genre for more than 120 years.

Keywords Chivalric romance · Metanarrative · Materiality · Fictional source texts · Crónicas de Indias

Introduction: the *Espejo de príncipes y cavalleros* and ‘editorial genre’

Diego Ortúñez de Calahorra's *Espejo de príncipes y cavalleros*, first published in 1555, departed from the blueprint of Spanish chivalric romances from the outset. Its title-page featured an elaborate classicist design made up of a decorated woodcut frame with statues, Satyrs and masks surrounding the long title of the book printed in two-colour Roman type.¹ Daniel Eisenberg, who edited the romance in 1975, did

¹ ESPEJO I DE PRINCIPES Y CAVA- I lleros. Enel qual se cuentan los inmorta- l les hechos del Cauallero del Febo, y de su I hermano Rosicler hijos del grande Empe I rador Trebacio. Con las altas caual- lerias, I y muy estraños amores dela muy hermo- l sa y estremada princessa Claridiana, I y de otros altos principes y ca I ualleros. II DIRIGIDO AL MVY IL- I lustre Señor Don Martin Cortes Marques I del

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not fail to point out the volume's contrast to the usual look of the *libros de caballerías* (Eisenberg 1975, p. xxxii). By that point, several dozen romances in more than 160 known editions had been published in Spain (cf. the chronological table of editions in Lucía Megías 2000, pp. 609–618) and most of the title-pages were set in Gothic type and featured a woodcut of a knight, with the text set in two columns on the folio page, a scheme still widely in use long past the point where it reflected late fifteenth-century book design in general (see Rautenberg 2008). In fact, the template became so central to the genre, Spanish scholars coined the term of *género editorial* or “editorial genre”—describing it as an aspect of branding which would alert readers of chivalric romances to the contents of the books.

This dimension of the *libros de caballerías* is comparatively well-studied by now (see Lucía Megías 2000 for the most extensive contribution; Lucía Megías 2004; Trujillo 2011). Indeed, the same template was still around even in the 1580s (Syrový 2019, pp. 366–367), and depending on whether one fully subscribes to the common narrative of the steady decline of the genre in the second half of the sixteenth century, it might at that point be considered a quaint anachronism, a mock-medieval element harking back to the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, while literary tastes had slowly moved on.² Back in 1555, however, a fresh new look was apparently still a valid option for the *Espejo de príncipes y caballeros*, a book that in many other respects stayed very close to its models. The aim of this paper is to contextualise the tendencies of conservatism and innovation within the chivalric romance tradition, and to signal some possible answers to the problem of the boundaries of genre. Two major tendencies of the materiality of the *libros de caballerías* will be of concern. Their outward presentation as text, as well as their internal justification by way of metanarrative strategies.

The materiality of the romances: paratexts

What constitutes a genre, and where its boundaries lie, is largely open to debate. With respect to the *libros de caballerías*, the scholarly discussion during the last 25 years or so brought forth a differentiated picture that has superseded the once common idea of a quasi-monolithic genre (Lucía Megías and Sales Dasí 2008). This does not mean groupings are no longer a concern. Lucía Megías (2004) for instance argued for distinguishing two major paradigms, the idealistic romance and the romance of entertainment, while the latter was to be further differentiated into texts emphasising realism and verisimilitude, and others that predominantly construe fantastic worlds. However, the change in scholarly outlook on the genre made it easier to pursue different lines of inquiry without being incessantly haunted by

Footnote 1 (continued)

Valle, por Diego Ortuñez de Ca l ahorra, natural dela Ciudad l de Nagera. ll Impresso en Caragoça, por l Estean de Nagera. l 1555.<http://mdz-nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:bvb:12-bsb10943839-7>. For a full description of that edition, see Eisenberg 1975, pp. lxiii–lxvi.

² Between 1550 and 1602, only thirteen new romances were published, as opposed to 54 in the first half of the century. In terms of editions, the difference was not quite as drastic, with a total of 80 editions in the second half following 151 between 1496 and 1549 (calculated from Lucía Megías 2000, pp. 609–618).

that somewhat troubling structuralist heritage, questions of inclusion or exclusion within the genre. In fact, we seem to be able to fully address that complex issue of European import that is the chivalric romance only in the combination of thematic analysis, motif studies (Cacho Blecua 2002; Marín Pina 2004) and the historical-material dimension, perhaps with emphasis on the ‘editorial genre.’ It does not pose a problem that the design template of the *libros de caballerías* was sometimes used to sell authentically medieval texts as part of the new vogue of romances in the vein of *Amadís de Gaula*, such as the 1512 *Caballero Zifar* (García Álvarez 2015; Cacho Blecua 1999), or that a number of spiritually edifying stories were presented under the same label, starting with the 1552 *Caballero del Sol*, emphasising the religious side of the heroes, and often set in historical battles (Herrán Alonso 2008). These were simply additional aspects of an evolving literary phenomenon that was part textual tradition, part market strategy.

The *Espejo de príncipes y caballeros* itself can help us further circumscribe the area of inquiry by its complex and often contradictory paratextual network of references. The didactic title (*espejo/mirror/speculum*) at first obviously points toward the specific genre of instruction for ideal rulers, popular throughout the Middle Ages. But it was more than that. Already in 1525, a romance called *Espejo de caballerías* had been published in Toledo, in large part a Spanish prosification of Matteo Maria Boiardo’s *Orlando innamorato* and its continuations. The Italian *romanzo cavalleresco* in verse was a new form of courtly, ironic Renaissance literature. If it was about instruction, it was mostly in terms of teaching the ways of the ideal courtier, a kind of “sprezzatura” avant la lettre.³ According to one scholar, the Spanish version changed most of these aspects to reflect Spanish conventions (Gómez-Montero 1992, pp. 225–228), leaving little of the genuine innovations of the Italian tradition that would be so important for Cervantes (Srovy 2013, pp. 131–206). In the *Espejo de príncipes y caballeros*, the Cavallero del Febo himself is at one point addressed as a ‘mirror’ (“que fuesse éste aquel espejo de los cavalleros [sc. Febo] o su hermano Rosicler”; Ortúñez 1975, VI, p. 146), but it is hard to see how Febo should be intended as a model for the reading public rather than for the other knights within the tale. Moreover, in the story, little Italian ‘sprezzatura’ is to be seen. Still, it can be argued that the Italian context is an important one both for the title and the presentation of the volume, including its Renaissance-style title-page.⁴ Then again, in 1562, another Zaragoza edition of the *Espejo* (as well as that of Alcalá de Henares in 1580) reverted to the familiar template, its frontispiece adapted from the 1551 edition of the *Historia de don Hernando de Ávalos*, the Spanish version of Paolo Giovio’s biography of the *condottiero* who died in 1525, an image that also featured

³ The concept was made famous by Baldassarre Castiglione’s *Cortegiano*, first redacted in 1514 and published in 1528.

⁴ There were copies of *Amadís* and other Spanish-language romances printed in Italy in the first half of the sixteenth century, but they hardly ever imitated the Castilian Gothic design (Srovy 2019, p. 367). The translations of *Amadís* into Italian and several original continuations happened after the French *Amadís de Gaule* (first published in 1540) sparked new interest all over Europe, and only began in the 1560s. Bernardo Tasso, Torquato’s father, published a verse *Amadigi* in 1560 as well (see Mastrototaro 2006).

on a number of different romances (Lucía Megías 2000, pp. 177–179). This confusion of genres can't be completely accidental, yet it is impossible to neatly divide the practical dimension (reuse of woodblocks) from the strategic ('false advertising'), and to answer whether readers would have cared much about whether the stories were fact or fiction, or if, on the other hand, they knew exactly how to tell them apart.

To be sure, like many romances before it, the *Espejo de príncipes y caballeros* still talked of courtly love and the countless knightly deeds of, among others, the Caballero del Febo and his brother Rosicler; it talked of exploits, and monsters; and of a Christian war against a heathen Other.⁵ The narration is framed as a translation from the Latin and Greek, as well as a magician's chronicle (more or less) faithfully transcribed from its arcane sources, repeating motives that many of the romance's direct antecedents had already sounded, and which can often be traced back to the extensive thirteenth to fifteenth-century French prose narratives popular all over Europe.⁶ But the *Espejo* is also an ironically metanarrative text, and many older motifs are transformed in order to fit more current demands. We will now turn to these aspects.

Materiality within the romances: metanarrative

Text within text is a type of materiality that comes in at least two guises: A comparatively simple form are letters, or written inscriptions on monuments and objects, e.g. "Ésta es la cueva del sabio Artidón [...]" (Ortúñez 1975, III, p. 42) on the cave of Artidón. These passages are simple not because of a limited functionality, but only because they can and will often be quoted verbatim and in full. Just like in the case of stage plays, written letters can serve to advance the plot, and encountered monuments will have to be explained: what better way for that than an inscription.. In addition, there may be inscriptions on swords, helmets, armour, talismans, and jewellery. Items with magic properties are of course a staple of medieval narrative, and are found in Castilian romances as well. In contrast to architectural inscriptions, their explanation tends to be postponed, though. Feliciano de Silva's continuation of *Amadís, Lisuarte de Grecia* (1514/1525) at one point features a sword-sheath encrusted with rubies spelling something in a foreign language: "Sabed que la vaina tenía unas letras de muy pequeños e menudos rubíes muy bien talladas, pero estavan en lenguaje que no supieron leer hasta de aí algunos días, como adelante se dirá" (De Silva 2002, p. 62 ['You must know that the sheath was encrusted with writing formed of very small and precisely cut rubies, but it was in a language nobody

⁵ This motif is central to the medieval chivalric prose tradition from the fourteenth century onward. It is often forgotten that even in the first parts of the Vulgate-Cycle, or *Lancelot-Graal—Joseph d'Armathie* and *Merlin* :, the objective is to free Britain from Islam with the help of the Holy Grail. Camelot, in this version, is a first-century town with a mosque ("une cité que on apeloit Kamaalot, et c'estoit la plus riche cité que li sarrasin eüssent en la Grant Bretagne" Livre du Graal 2001, p. 475).

⁶ While the extensive manuscript production of these cyclical narratives is well-known (Pickford 1960), we should not forget that their diffusion was increased rather than stopped with the invention of print (Montorsi 2019).

could read for a few days, as will be told shortly’). The foreshadowing may appear rather rough-cut, but it will turn out over the course of the romance that the message is prophetic and not yet meant to be understood (“no cumple agora que las sepáis”; *ibid.*, p. 200). Indeed, its meaning will be revealed only in combination with a similarly undecipherable item, a crown in the possession of princess Onoloria, thereby uniting the knight and his lady on several levels at once.

Foreign writing which nobody can decipher easily lends itself to the building of narrative arcs and will quite literally appear in the strangest of places. Amadís’s son, Esplandián, is born with a double birthmark that eventually turns out to spell his own name as well as that of his future spouse: “vieron que tenía debaxo de la teta derecha unas letras tan blancas como la nieve, y so la teta izquierda siete letras tan coloradas como brasas bivas; pero ni las unas ni las otras supieron leer, ni qué dezían, porque las blancas eran de latín muy oscuro, y las coloradas, en lenguaje griego muy cerrado” (Montalvo 1988, p. 1004 [‘they saw that beneath his right breast were snow-white letters and beneath his left, seven characters the colour of live coal, but they could decipher neither of the two, because the white ones were in very obscure Latin and the coloured ones in very dark Greek’]). It is made clear not long afterwards, that the bright letters in Latin in fact spell out the hero’s own name (“las letras blancas dezían Esplandián, mas las coloradas no las pudo entender, ahunque bien tajadas y fechas eran”; Montalvo 1988, p. 1260). The big reveal about the Greek birthmark, however, comes only in Chap. 177 of *Las Sergas de Esplandián*, Montalvo’s own continuation of *Amadís de Gaula*. At her and Esplandián’s wedding, princess Leonorina produces a book by the magician Urganda la Desconocida, where the mysterious Donzella Encantadora of the prophecy is identified with herself: “mostróme en una hoja dél estas siete letras así coloradas como aquí se muestran, y debaxo dellas su declaración, que por ella leído claro se muestra ser yo la que estas letras señalan” (Montalvo 2003, p. 797 [‘she showed me a page with these same seven letters and beneath them an explanation, which she read aloud, saying that it was I who they indicated’]).⁷ Moreover, what is especially curious about this passage is the metanarrative device of a written book that prefigures the narrative of the story we are reading. It is not the only instance where Montalvo explored the possibilities of metafiction and metanarrative. Perhaps the most striking occurrence takes place in Chaps. 98 and 99 of the *Sergas*, when the writer/narrator tires of his job and wants to abbreviate the tale. He is promptly abducted by Urganda, the magician of the story, who chides him for being unfaithful to what really occurred and forbids him to proceed until further notice. At a later point, she magically leads the narrator to the locations of the romance, introduces him to the characters of the story and offers him the Greek manuscript of Helisabad for consultation, in order to provide him with the means to finish his work (Montalvo 2003, pp. 525–550; see also Watier 2016, pp. 145–147).

⁷ Incidentally, the fact that the seven Greek letters don’t match up with the name of Leonorina is slightly confusing, but serves the plot in some respects, because the reader, too, is kept from identifying her with the prophecy.

Metanarrative actually played a major role in the Spanish romance tradition as a whole (Syrový 2020). In fact, of the 67 extant Castilian *libros de caballerías*, only nine do not indicate any kind of source text, fictional or real. The motif of the discovered manuscript, often combined with a magician-chronicler, is well-studied (Eisenberg 1982, pp. 119–129; Marín Pina 1994; Marín Pina 2004, pp. 898–899; Campos García Rojas 2012; Santoyo 2012), but the use of metanarrative is much more dynamic than that and often demands a second look at what is going on in the story. The degree to which details about these chroniclers and found manuscripts occur in the course of a narrative can vary considerably.

The ironic dimension we find in texts such as Montalvo's was a late development in the chivalric tradition. Various *Graal*-stories had employed extensive metanarrative references to both scribes and authors. Yet, the idea behind these older references, generally speaking, was to hint at a complete and truthful master narrative that could, in theory, be compiled from enough sources in order to make up a complete and comprehensive 'book'. We find this argument behind the *Lancelot-Graal*, attributed to Gautier Map, as well as the cyclical *Tristan en prose*: "Le livre que projette désormais Hélié [the compiler of the *Tristan*], le livre à venir, doit unir dans un même espace textuel, celui du manuscrit, doit conjoindre, organiser, ordonner, tout en y trouvant sa juste place, la grande famille des livres antérieurs" (Baumgartner 1994, p. 128).

This kind of complete knowledge had to be made credible to the reader, and one of the earliest strategies to accomplish that was the idea that the chronicles came directly from a supernaturally informed source. This was most notably the case with Blaise, the chronicler of Merlin's adventures in the thirteenth-century *Roman de Merlin* and the later *Vulgate-Cycle*, a tradition that was very much kept alive in the Spanish romances. The Spanish *Baladro del sabio Merlín* (Burgos 1498), one of the earliest preserved printed editions of chivalric tales in Spain, and a direct translation from French, included several references to Blaise. Around the same time, the magician-chronicler Helisabad made his debut in book three of Montalvo's *Amadís de Gaula*.

At the time of the *Espejo de príncipes y cavalleros*, we still find similar devices. In the *Espejo* itself, there are two sages, Lirgandeo and Artemidoro, who "tenían cargo de escrevir todas las cosas como avían passado" (Ortúñez 1975, VI, p. 219 ['were charged with writing everything down as it had happened']). This, however, becomes clear only in the last few chapters of the romance. Earlier on, the text actually diverges to a great degree from the traditional topos of the source text as supreme authority. Instead, we encounter a gradual multiplication and pluralisation of sources.

In its incipit, the *Espejo* had simply proclaimed it was "aora nuevamente traduzido de latín en romance" (Ortúñez 1975, I, p. 23 ['now newly translated from Latin to Romance']), a detail still in keeping with *Amadís* and other early *libros de caballerías*. After some time, however, we learn that the tale is partly based on "las antiguas y más verdaderas corónicas de los asirios" (I, p. 116 ['the old and most truthful chronicles of the Assyrians']), and that there is also an eyewitness, a "sabio Lirgandeo, que todo por sus ojos lo mirava" (I, p. 209 ['Lirgandeo the Wise who had seen everything with his own eyes']). Later on, the text directly addresses possible

doubts on the part of the reader concerning the veracity of the story (II, p. 286), and at another instance, an episode appears doubtful even to the narrator. The scene in itself is rather simple: A king jumps into a fount after his friend disappears in it. But his motive remains unclear. One source, Artemidoro, argues that the king bravely tried to save his friend and may have been killed in the act (“este espantable y hazañoso hecho pone el sabio Artemidoro deste rey”), while “el sabio Lirgandeo dize que el rey tenía alguna noticia desta maravillosa fuente” (‘Lirgandeo the Wise says that the king had some knowledge of the marvellous fount’), that is, the king knew there was magic involved and his friend had not perished. “Como quiera que ello fuesse” (‘Whichever way it may have been’), adds the narrator, “fue un hecho digno de memoria” (III, p. 175 [‘it was a fact worth remembering’]). The progressive destabilisation of the narrative’s truthfulness is quite deliberate.

Things get even more confused when a third brother to Febo and Rosicler, Claramante, is briefly introduced, “de quien se haze gran cuenta y mención en la segunda parte desta historia” (IV, p. 162 [‘of whom much will be told in the second part of this history’]). The announcement of a second part of the story is in itself major news, but Claramante doesn’t actually figure as a character at all, and he is only mentioned to expose another contradiction in the source texts: Artemidoro insists the boy was born at the time his father, the emperor, was in the “reino de Lidia” (‘kingdom of Lydia’). However, “parece que discordia en esto el sabio Lirgandeo, porque no cuenta cosa del infante hasta que las grandes batallas del emperador Alicandro de Tartaria y el emperador Trebacio de Grecia fueron acabadas” (IV, p. 163 [‘it seems that Lirgandeo the Wise disagrees, because he tells nothing of the Infant until after the great battles between Emperor Alicandro of Tartary and Emperor Trebacio of Greece were over’]). Not content this time to point out the contradiction, the narrator hazards a guess as to its origin: “Yo creo que la causa desto deve ser que como el sabio Lirgandeo no lo vio hasta que vino en Grecia, que dexó de contar dél hasta que todas las batallas fueron acabadas [...] que aun en este tiempo estuviera este infante harto niño y pequeño” (ibid. [‘I believe the reason for not speaking of him until after the battles must be that Lirgandeo the Wise never saw him before he came to Greece, because even at that time the Infant was small and very much a child’]). What does it mean that a sixteenth-century writer of a chivalric romance invents contradictory sources, which he then tries to resolve by way of reasoning? A few passages may further illustrate the issue. The role of Artemidoro is not always clear; sometimes he is the writer, sometimes the compiler of the source text (“Dize el sabio Artemidoro, que fue el que recopiló los hechos del Cavallero del Febo en esta parte [...]; IV, p. 278), especially since he himself doesn’t see fit to tell the story of Febo, as we are explicitly informed: “él avía dexado de escrevirlos porque otro grande sabio que los sabía mejor que no él tenía cargo de escrevir todo lo que tocava al Cavallero del Febo” (V, p. 80 [‘he had stopped writing them down because another great wise man, more knowledgeable than him, was charged with writing down everything relating to the Cavallero del Febo’]). Apart from the two main chroniclers, there are other unspecified sources alluded to in the text. At one point, we are told that more background information about a magic potion made from the “Fuento del Olvido que hizo Merlino en lo más alto del monte Olimpo” (‘Fount of Oblivion that Merlin put on the summit of Mount Olympus’) is necessary, “porque

algunos historiadores nuevos han situado esta maravillosa fuente en otra parte” (VI, p. 228 [‘because some recent historiographers located this marvellous fount elsewhere’]); this problem, too, is specifically announced to be resolved in the second part of the story, which Ortúñez never wrote.⁸

Part of the solution to this problem, I venture, has to do with more recent developments in historiography and its relation to the question of truth in storytelling. The debate, of course, goes back to Plato and Aristotle, but the ongoing discussion in the sixteenth century constantly resorted to obfuscation (intentional or not) concerning the historical truthfulness of fiction in general, and was usually framed in terms of the verisimilitude of fictional ‘histories’.⁹ It is well-known that although the word ‘historia’ was semantically ambivalent in Spanish, there were also efforts to differentiate between ‘historias verdaderas’ and ‘historias fingidas’, especially in the theoretical discourse of prefaces and prologues, despite there not being any strict delimitation between fiction and historiography. Montalvo had already given the topic considerable thought in his *prólogo* to *Amadís de Gaula*: There are some stories, he writes, which truly happened (“en efecto de verdad passados”), and others not based “sobre algún cimientto de verdad, mas ni sobre el rastro della. Estos son los que compusieron las historias fengidas [sic] en que se hallan las cosas admirables fuera de la orden de la natura” (Montalvo 1988, p. 223 [‘on any foundation of truth, nor even at the correct site of it. It is they who composed these false histories where we find admirable things outside of the natural order’]). In other words, for Montalvo, the idea of verisimilitude was still the basic analytical category for truthfulness.¹⁰ He lacked a rigid critical historical method. By the mid-sixteenth century, however, recent developments in historiography, in particular the Humanists’ philological work and source criticism (*Quellenkritik*) need to be taken into account. In origin an Italian phenomenon, it quickly left its mark on Spanish thought and literature.¹¹ Spanish Humanists like Pedro Mexía and Antonio de Nebrija put these concepts, as well as those of Erasmus of Rotterdam and other philosophers, into practice, and the Italian texts themselves widely circulated among the Spanish elites (Cuart 1995; Andrés-Gallego 2003).

Returning to the *Espejo de príncipes y caballeros*, one of the most salient points is that its proliferation of sources paradoxically strengthens the fictional text’s proximity to methods of contemporary historiographical and political discourse, precisely because it reflects a differentiated approach to history. Simultaneously, however, it

⁸ It was Pedro de la Sierra who took up the opportunity 25 years later, in 1580 (Campos García Rojas 2002).

⁹ A great number of non-chivalric fictions at the time, from the picaresque novels to texts such as Pérez de Hita’s *Guerras civiles de Granada* (1595), also employ tropes like found manuscripts and pseudo-translations.

¹⁰ For a look at strategies of fifteenth-century historiographers to turn their sources into coherent narrations, see Conde (2000).

¹¹ Suffice it to name a few important impulses: Lorenzo Valla’s commentary on the Donation of Constantine; the philological work on the classics in the Aldine editions of Greek and Latin texts (Manuzio 1975); and the historiographical writings of Guicciardini, Machiavelli and others (Gilbert 1984, pp. 201–269).

also serves a destabilising purpose regarding the truthfulness of the tale, which readers must have suspected to be fictional from paratextual elements, book design, or hearsay. The text thus maintains an equilibrium of the undecidable, much like in the earlier romances, while the new kind of ambivalence reacts to a new audience with a different sensibility for verisimilitude.¹² Further passages from the romance underscore this tendency. Nowhere is this more apparent than when the narrator starts to literally quote the two chroniclers, Lirgandeo and Artemidoro. The discrepancies eventually point toward a general and quite extensive reworking of the supposed pre-text. This starts as a rather subdued effect in chapter fifteen of the *Libro tercero*, with a comment on Febo's strength: "En esto veo yo—dize el sabio Lirgandeo:, que este cavallero tuvo las mayores fuerças que hombre humano antes ni después dél nunca tuvo. [...]" (V, p. 181 ['From this I can tell—says Lirgandeo the Wise—that the knight had more strength than any human man before or after him']). The closer we get to the book's ending, however, the more extensive this kind of quotation becomes. Eventually, before the central battle between the two emperors, the narrator comes to doubt his own powers as a writer: "Viendo, pues, yo que la obra buela ya tan alta, y que mi pequeño juicio no basta a seguirla, tenía determinado de hazer punto en el capítulo pasado, y dexar este trabajo a otro que tenga el ingenio más que yo agudo y descanso." (VI, p. 90 ['Because I could see that my work flies so high that my understanding is too small to follow it, I was determined to finish it with the last chapter, leaving the task to someone with a more acute and composed mind']). He knows this excuse will not do, however, and he therefore proposes to translate literally from the original sources:

sacándolo de entre muy grandes volúmenes de los originales del sabio Artimidoro; el qual, ayudado del sabio Lirgandeo y del espíritu mágico, dexó escrito todo lo que se sigue, en la siguiente manera:

Quando fue llegado aquel nubloso y triste día en que fue hecha la sangrienta y general batalla que puso fin a la expedición en la nueva Roma, prodigios grandes y señales espantosas fueron vistas, que en los magnánimos coraçones de los fortísimos guerreros bastaran a poner espanto, porque los cielos y la tierra hizieron tanto sentimiento que verdaderamente parecía ser llegado el fin del mundo. (VI, p. 92 ['taken from the large volumes of the original of Artimidoro the Wise, who, with the help of Lirgandeo the Wise and the magic spirit, left to us in writing everything that follows, in such a manner: | When that overcast and sad day had arrived, on which the blood-soaked general battle took place, putting an end to the expedition to the New Rome, there were seen prodigious miracles and frightful signs, which sufficed to put fear in the noble hearts of the strongest warriors, because the heavens and the earth provoked such excitement that truthfully it seemed that what had arrived was the end of the world']).

¹² This can be argued to parallel a central characteristic of picaresque novels, often presented as autobiographical narratives. See Rötzer (2009).

The story continues in this elevated epic manner for several pages until it tacitly reverts to the less circumstantial narrative style used before. Indirectly, of course, this subverts the assumption that the text had faithfully followed the content of the supposed source text. In a similar manner, Esteban Corbera's *Febo el Troyano* (1576) repeatedly refers to a set of magician-chroniclers (Claridoro, Rinaqueo, Orismeno) who later also appear as characters in the narrative. From the outset, we are expected to trust their authority, according to tradition, but as the tale continues, they increasingly contradict one another. When their writing is quoted verbatim, Corbera unmistakably parodies the ampollosity of traditional rhetoric which stands in contrast to his own comparatively pared-down and direct style.¹³ Even more than with Ortúñez, this kind of treatment anticipates some of the paradoxical references to Cide Hamete Benengeli in *Don Quixote*.

Despite Montalvo's irony in *Amadís de Gaula* and the *Sergas de Esplandián*, this pluralisation-effect is a development which can be observed mostly in the second half of the sixteenth century. By contrast, in *Lisuarte de Grecia*, for example, "el gran sabio Alquife" was still an all-knowing wise man to whom nothing was hidden ("ninguna cosa le era encubierta"; De Silva 2002, p. 69). He is announced in the incipit as the original author of the text ("La corónica [...] según que la escribió el gran sabio en las Mágicas Alquife"; p. 6), and even though Alquife draws upon yet another source, the even more complete "profecias de Apolidón" (p. 199), he is deemed completely trustworthy. As Alquife himself explains to the knights Lisuarte and Perión: "tomo dende aquí cargo de escrebir todas las cosas que por vós passaren e han p[a]ssado [...] Pero tanto os sé dezir que después que sean escritas, que pasarán más de mil años que sean escondidas" (p. 199 ['from here on, I will take charge of writing down everything that happens to you. But I can tell you that after being written down, it will all be hidden for more than a thousand years']). His chronicle, he says, will be rediscovered only after a certain time. This is a meta-fictional twist that strongly suggests we are reading the book Alquife wrote, which explains why nobody had even heard of the stories of Lisuarte before. But significantly, none of this alters the status of the chronicler's authority.

Contemporary aspects of the *libros de caballerías*

By 1555, a genuine belief in magician-chroniclers appears to have given way to new expectations regarding verisimilitude. The explanation given so may be only partial, but further aspects can be integrated into our analysis. The marvellous in particular is not only closely connected with romance, but also with the *Crónicas de Indias*, the narratives about the New World, published from the 1520s on (Serna

¹³ For instance: "Si las excelencias del príncipe Febo avemos de escribir con el ornamento y magestad que sus virtudes en toda la elemental región se estendieron, avemos de ponerle deidad con los dioses y negar su naturaleza acerca de los hombres. ¡Ó, Hércules! ¡Y quién tuviera la lengua y elocuencia de Demóstenes, con la excelencia del verso de Homero, para poder sufrir mis faltas en las sobras de lo que no se puede aun pensar que en virtudes el príncipe Alfebo tuvo sobre todos los que antes y después d'él fueron! [...]" (Corbera 2005, p. 170).

2000). Formally, these narratives in turn relied on tales of adventures familiar to the *conquistadores*, the *libros de caballerías* among them.¹⁴ A number of these texts regularly emphasise the marvellous while insisting on its essential truthfulness.¹⁵ As the case of *Rosián de Castilla* shows, these stories then fed back into the narratives of purportedly medieval knights. In this 1579 romance, the hero at one point crosses a body of water “*que parecía brazo de mar, la qual se llamaua Lethe*” (Romero de Cepeda 1979, p. 122 [‘which looked like a sea arm and was called Lethe’]). What at first glance appears to be a classical journey to the underworld or *katabasis*, turns out to be something quite different: on the other side of the sea, Rosián meets the leader of the “Nueuo Reyno” dressed in feathers and gold, who recognizes the knight as the legitimate king of his people, “Hijo del Sol, Descubridor de las Cosas” (*ibid.*, p. 123 [‘Son of the Sun, Discoverer of All Things’]). By 1579, of course, the new colonial Empire, too, could be considered from a plurality of perspectives. Different texts belonging to the genre of the *Crónicas de Indias* highlighted either the ‘heroic quest’ of the discovery or the cruelty of the whole enterprise. The latter view was put forth most prominently in the *Brevísima relación de a destrucción de las Indias* by Bartolomé de Las Casas (1552), widely spread throughout Europe. It was the culmination of a series of interventions by Las Casas in order to put a stop to the cruelties of the colonial power in the New World (Serna 2000, p. 87).

These are only a few indications as to the contexts of the romances, but they show that what was particularly ‘Medieval’ about the genre may traditionally have been overemphasised to the detriment of other, highly contemporary aspects. Differences within the genre are to be found at the paratextual and metanarrative level, rather than being primarily thematic or motivic in nature, and extend also to the ‘knowledge of the texts’. Geographical references, for instance, range from the mythological to the scientifically precise, with some romances proposing a “visión del orbe, más amplia y a veces más moderna, que en certa medida refleja las curiosidades propias de la mentalidad renacentista” (Roubaud 1999, p. 69 [‘vision of the world that was more expansive and at times more modern, and to a degree reflective of the curiosity of the Renaissance mindset’]). The same is true for military details. Michael Murrin has shown that Ludovico Ariosto and Torquato Tasso relied on detailed maps as well as the structures of actual fortifications for their epic poems (Murrin 1994, pp. 79–113), being quite up to date in their technological descriptions. The genre of the *libros de caballerías*, particularly in the second half of the sixteenth century, must therefore be considered as an ever evolving part of a dynamic literary field, reflecting much broader contexts both through narrative and outward presentation, the materiality within the text and on the outside of the books.

Their widespread influence in particular puts them front and centre of an important and wide-ranging discourse. The diffusion of the romances in the Spanish-speaking world—and, by way of translations, in the rest of Europe—was enormous.

¹⁴ Tropes from the romances in the *Crónicas de Indias* were analyzed as early as Ida Rodríguez Prampolini’s 1948 study *Amadises de America* (Rodríguez Prampolini 1979) and repeatedly afterwards.

¹⁵ “Todas las cosas que han aecido en las Indias, desde su maravilloso descubrimiento [...] han sido tan admirables y tan no creíbles en todo género a quien no las vido [...]” (Las Casas 1982, p. 69).

The 220 extant editions of the 67 romances must have circulated in at least 200,000 copies, perhaps much more. Several lost editions are indicated in the literature on the subject, and we know of print runs of 1,000 copies for the comparatively unsuccessful, and never reprinted *Arderique* in 1517 as well as *Valerían de Hungría* in 1540 (Berger 1987, pp. 472–473; 481–482; see also Syrový 2018, p. 233). Generally speaking, the editions were probably not affordable to any but the upper classes, to members of which a number of volumes were dedicated (see Eisenberg 1982, pp. 111–118 for a full list). Data from the library catalogue of Fernando Colón (ibid., p. 99) reveal prices ranging from 95 maravedíes for the aforementioned *Arderique*, a slim volume of just over 107 folios, to 260 maravedíes for *Tirante el Blanco*. Despite the rather uniform appearance of in-folio-volumes with Gothic type set in double-columns, there are also a few editions that were less carefully made, and probably sold at a cheaper price. Those volumes appeared without illustrations, on cheaper paper and set with visibly used type, as specified by Lucía Megías and Sales Dasí (2008, pp. 65–66). Arguably, too, there may be a bias in that library copies tend to be of a higher quality. Nevertheless, the romances did address a varied audience and circulated orally as well (ibid., pp. 33–41), with readings happening in inns at night, for example, to entertain groups of people, as readers of *Don Quixote* may have already guessed.

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