

## **The Emergence of Arthurian Literature in Spain as a Response to Governmental and Societal Changes**

Emily Stein  
Department of Modern Languages  
Hamline University  
1536 Hewitt Avenue  
Saint Paul, Minnesota 55105 USA

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Maria Jesús Leal

### **Abstract**

This research looks at two important periods in Spanish politics, specifically the primarily fascist era from 1923 to 1975 and the democratic era from 1975 to the present, two time periods in which several novels that demonstrated themes borrowed from the legend of the British king, Arthur of the late 5<sup>th</sup> and early 6<sup>th</sup> centuries were published. . The Arthurian myth has typically been used to portray a utopian social order, especially in British and American literature, allowing for a critique of those societies. The Spanish versions of the Arthurian tales argue for the development of a Spanish national identity, which would help to overcome the obstacles of the cultural differences between the unique regions and, therefore, aid in uniting the country. These original stories prompt questions about the purpose of a British ruler in Spanish society and the role that Arthur plays in that culture. The research investigates these questions and demonstrates how literature is shaped by its political and cultural contexts. This was done through a close reading of Spanish Arthurian texts from each aforementioned period and a comparison of those texts to the respective historical contexts. We found subtle critiques of the government and governmental institutions in these texts, especially in regards to the role of women, the emphasis of religion, and the use of violence. Some aspects, such as the roles women played in these novels, reflected a significant change in the Spanish society, as women were given more independence after the death of Francisco Franco in 1975. Other aspects, such as the use of religion and characterization of Arthur, reflected constant forces in Spanish society, which remained important despite governmental changes. This shows the direct relationship between literature and a country's history, allowing the literature to be used to learn more about that particular society.

**Keywords:** King Arthur, fascism, Spain

### **1. Introduction**

With a surface level comprehension, texts come across as enjoyable reading material, but when read more closely they show the politics of a culture. Therefore, a thorough examination of original Spanish retellings and interpretations of the Arthurian myth will be performed in order to analyze how the legend fills governmental and societal gaps found in Spain. These gaps have been widened by the long stay of fascism combined with a civil war, and the transition from such fascism to democracy in Spain. Through studying the fascist regime (1923-1977) and the democratic government (1977-present), it will be shown how these myths work to either uphold or critique the Spanish ideals and institutions through commenting on the societies of these eras.

An article by Juan Miguel Zarandona lists texts written by Spanish authors with Arthurian themes, classified in terms of language, type of text, and whether the Arthurian theme is the main focus, a secondary focus, or a translation of an already written text.<sup>1</sup> Zarandona ends this article with conclusions about the role these Spanish texts play in the study of Arthurian literature and their importance in that research. However, there is no study regarding how these texts represent Spanish ideals or politics, or Spain in general. This is an important period to study and to

understand given the volatile political climate of the early to mid-twentieth century and the radical transition of power in the later part of the century. Therefore, this study is important to gaining a greater understanding of the political climate of Spain and the opinions of the public, through the authors, both under fascism and democracy.

This paper will begin with an analysis of the Arthurian myth in general, including questions that arise in the realm of Arthurian research. This will lead into a brief discussion of Spanish history, especially in regards to the development of a common nationality and the lack of a uniform national identity, setting the stage for a section on fascism in Spain, covering the years from 1923 to 1975. This part will also discuss each text, giving a brief description of the plot to be followed by an analysis of each piece. This will be paralleled by a section about democracy, beginning with the history followed by details about each of the texts from this era.

## 2. The Arthurian Myth

There have been numerous versions of the Arthurian legend dating back to the twelfth century. Versions have been reproduced in different languages, and there have been a great number of studies regarding different aspects of the myth. This has resulted in the widespread recognition of Arthur and themes associated with this particular king.

One such aspect of study is the reason for the popularity of the myth. The legend presents more to the reader than just a source of entertainment; it presents an ideal society, which can be molded to mirror the society in which the text was written. Arthur is portrayed as a perfect leader. In many versions of the myth, he is an inspirational military leader. He sticks to his ideals, even when it means punishing his best friend and his wife for their infidelity to him. He represents a utopian society, in which the demise of Camelot represents “the fall of human aspiration toward a perfected society”.<sup>2</sup> This ideal nature lends the myth to be used allegorically seen. Regardless of whether or not Arthur really ever existed, he has become influential in representing this utopian and chivalric society.

An important question regards why this myth is and continues to be so popular. Jennifer Goodman cites four reasons in addition to the utopian inclinations for this popularity, including the nature of Arthur himself, the romance structure, the spiritual dimension, and the psychological drama. Arthur himself, as a British figure, does appeal to the national identity of the British people, but at the same time, is able to transcend national boundaries, making him popular among other nationalities, as in *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, by Mark Twain, an American.<sup>3</sup> The romance structure of the myth adds flexibility, allowing new characters and adventures to be added or old ones modified, allowing the adaptation of the myth to changing societies. In addition, the legend offers a spiritual dimension, representing Arthur as a messiah-like figure. This can be seen in the prophesy of his return in the future. Several versions of the myth claim that although Arthur ultimately died, he will return as a messiah-like figure to save his people. Finally, the psychological dimension adds to the popularity of the legend. The characters are often seen as sharing the same temptations that we ourselves face, as seen in Lancelot and Guinevere's affair. In addition, very few characters are “condemned or idealized beyond recall,”<sup>4</sup> making the characters more relatable. These reasons give some insight as to why this particular myth has remained popular throughout history and continues in its popularity today. Given the array of appealing and human elements in the legend, it is no surprise that the Arthurian legend has been used throughout time as a means of reflecting the society in which it was written. According to Goodman, “our own era's portraits of King Arthur mirror our own faces”.<sup>5</sup>

## 3. Spanish Nationalism And Ideology

Spain, for most of its history, has existed more as a confederation of states than as one cohesive nation, lacking the nationalism that is necessary to create such a unified state. Anthony Smith defines nationalism as “an ideological movement for attaining and maintaining autonomy, unity and identity on behalf of a population deemed by some of its members to constitute an actual or potential ‘nation’.”<sup>6</sup> The difficulties that Spain faced in maintaining this autonomy, unity, and identity, and the resulting nationalism, stemmed not only from geographic differences, but from political struggles as well.

Spanish nationalism was discouraged for various geographical and political reasons since the medieval period. Rather than developing a nationalism that encompassed all of Spain, there was instead peripheral nationalism, or nationalism of Catalans, Basques, and others. This originated with the Iberian Peninsula's (modern-day Spain, Portugal, and Andorra) origins as five distinct kingdoms (Asturias-Leon, Castile, Navarre, Aragon-Catalonia, and Portugal). Castile emerged as the largest, leading to the spread of the Castilian language, or more commonly, Spanish.<sup>7</sup> In *The New Spaniards*, John Hooper cites several reasons for the isolation of one Spanish community from

another. One such reason is the relatively small population of Spain when compared to the large area of the country, which led to the development of many isolated communities, separated by geographical features. Because of Spain's poverty, this issue was not quickly resolved with the development of more proficient means of transportation.<sup>8</sup>

The kingdoms of the Iberian peninsula, excluding Portugal, were united under Ferdinand and Isabel (1478-1479), but found little in common, which discouraging the development of an all-encompassing nationalism.<sup>9</sup> In the years following, Portugal too was added to the unified country. This unification came to an end when the Portuguese and the Catalans rebelled against Madrid because of its "insensitive centralism."<sup>10</sup> This disunity was once again perpetuated by war, in this case, the War of Spanish Succession. While regional division is common to multi-ethnic states, it reached unprecedented proportions in Spain, leading to the major problem of the lack of a single national identity that is still being resolved. This lack of unified nationalism continued up through the long period of fascist rule and civil war during the mid-twentieth century, in which the people experienced much oppression and hardship.

Despite this difficulty in forming a modern sort of nationalism, E. Inman Fox lists several characteristics of a collective unity that had developed in Spain.<sup>11</sup> These characteristics include a sense of independence, a democratic nature, a spiritual nature, duality, and the "popular and realist inclination" of Spaniards. The independence and individualism lead Spaniards to be spontaneous and creative. In addition, as seen in Spain's history, the country boasts a strong background of liberalism, which can be seen in the autonomy of the regions. Because of the long-standing emphasis of Catholicism, religion has become a prominent part of the Spanish identity, especially emphasizing the mystic and the real. Duality refers to the opposing leanings, such as between real and romantic, which can especially be seen in works such as those by Cervantes, especially *Don Quixote*. Finally, the inclinations give way to a carefree sort of attitude.<sup>12</sup> As can be seen, despite facing struggles as far as building a Spanish nationalism, there are some aspects to the Spanish identity that can be generalized to the nation as a whole.

In this study, portrayals of the societal characteristics identified above will be explored in the texts. Where are these characteristics represented in Spanish Arthurian literature?

#### 4. Spain And Fascism

Entering the twentieth century, Spain was under the rule of King Alfonso XIII. This was to change with the coup d'état of Miguel Primo de Rivera in 1923. His dictatorship demonstrated close ties with the Catholic Church, which continued to be the most prominent ideological power of the new government.<sup>13</sup> Primo de Rivera was successful in terms of the economy and society, however eventually began to lose support. Shortly after his resignation in 1930 the first completely developed democratic system in Spain known as the Second Republic was formed.

The new government sought to "create a new Spain by destroying the reactionary influence of the Church and the army, by sweeping away the structure of the latifundia estates and by meeting the autonomy demands of the Basque and Catalan regionalists."<sup>14</sup> The Second Republic, too, began to crumble with the development of two fiercely opposed political sides: the left (Republicans), who insisted on the implementation of social justice, and the right (Nationalists), who feared a popular revolution.<sup>15</sup> Like Primo de Rivera, this government presented many successes, including expanding women's rights, limiting the power of the Church, and reforming the army; however, because it came to power during a global depression and the formation of the two opposed parties, it could not stay in power.<sup>16</sup> Eventually, the two parties came to heads, resulting in a civil war lasting from 1936 to 1939.

This civil war was very bloody. Though both sides were guilty of this extreme killing, historian Paul Preston notes one major difference between the sides: while the Republicans were killing as a result of "uncontrollable elements," the deaths at the hands of the Nationalists were supported by those who "claimed to be fighting in the name of Christian civilization."<sup>17</sup> Both of the sides received foreign aid during the war: the Nationalists from Germany and Italy and the Republicans from the Soviet Union. The government during the war was "ultra-Catholic, Nationalist, and centralist", going so far as to ban regional (such as Basque and Catalan) names from baptisms and local languages completely.<sup>18</sup> Eventually, the Nationalists won the war, resulting in Franco's rise to power.

Franco's party, the Nationalists, was not completely fascist, as is often assumed. The party was made up of the Falange (the fascist party), in addition to the Alfonsine and Carlist monarchists, the army, and the Catholic Church.<sup>19</sup> The fascist party (Falange) was founded by José Antonio Primo de Rivera, the son of the former dictator, Miguel Primo de Rivera. José Antonio was fascist, though he did not possess the typical fascist temperament. Stanley Payne attributes this to the influence of his father, who was able to control Spain with relatively little violence.<sup>20</sup> José Antonio was eventually executed during the course of the civil war, but his legacy lived on through the Falange.

Franco looked to the dictatorship of Primo de Rivera in creating his government. In the successes of Primo de Rivera, it was proven that an authoritarian nationalist government could achieve unity, while the failures gave Franco an outline of how not to run a dictatorship.<sup>21</sup> His regime was characterized by internal surveillance, cultural

homogenization, political apathy, Catholic influence, and a patriarchal society.<sup>22</sup> Eventually, the dictatorship began to soften, continuing to weaken until Franco's death in 1975.

#### 4.1 *Tántalo (farsa) (1935)*<sup>23</sup> [*Tantum (Farce)*]

When read with an understanding of the politics of time, the following novel, which features Arthurian themes, exhibits greater political implications than found with a surface level reading. The first text in this selection is *Tántalo (Farsa)*, written by Benjamín Jarnés in 1935, before the start of the Spanish Civil War and under the Second Republic. Much of this novel follows a playwright who has been banned from the theater by his doctor. He had come close to death with the premiere of his last play. However, one theater, run by Arthur and Julio, decides to premiere another of his plays anyways, and the author ends up dying during its debut. There is also another character, Irene, who tries to get Arthur and Julio to show one of her late father's plays. The Arthurian references in this novel are minimal, but present in that the play is about Merlin, who was Arthur's primary advisor. This novel has much significance given the context of the Second Republic, especially in the year right before the civil war, when it was written.

The author, who is not allowed to go to the theater, can be seen as representing the Spanish republic. The author had premiered his play *Penelope*, and had almost died from it. Similarly, the first Spanish Republic came to power in the late nineteenth century, stayed for a short while, and then was pushed out of power. Like the author, the idea of a republic did not completely die, as it came back with the Second Republic. It was scared out of existing, just as the author was scared out of the theater by his near-death experience. When the author came back, he ended up dying in the midst of his glory. Likewise, the Second Republic was soon to die out. The Republic stayed in power until 1939, but the civil war through which it lost power began in 1936. In this way, the novel seems to be predicting the demise of the Second Republic by showing the author's death. In his near death and eventual return resulting in death, the author is representative of a republic in Spain, the first of which was in power in the late nineteenth century, died out, but was resurrected again in the form of the Second Republic, which eventually died out as well.

Going along with the analogy, Irene can be seen as being representative of the monarchists, who fought to restore the monarchy to the throne. Throughout the novel, Irene was mostly ignored, and when she was not ignored, she was laughed at. "Ella vivía con la esperanza de conseguir para su padre un triunfo póstumo" 'She lived with the hope of achieving a posthumous triumph for her father.'<sup>24</sup> The monarch, for a time in Spanish history, had lived in glory, but died out for a time with the dictatorship of Primo de Rivera. She was dedicated to ensuring that her father received the glory that was due to him. There was no way for Jarnés to have known this, but today's readers are aware that the monarchy has returned and is very strong; however, Irene's father cannot return and earn his own glory.

#### 4.2 *El año del cometa y la batalla de los cuatro reyes (1974)*<sup>25</sup> [*The Year of the Comet and the Battle of the Four Kings*]

*El año del cometa con la batalla de los cuatro reyes*, a novel written by Álvaro Cunqueiro, is the story of a dreamer, Paulos. When his city is told of an incoming comet, the citizens begin to notice strange happenings, such as the merging of the dreams of a unicorn and a young girl. The story mainly focuses on a tyrannical king, Asad, who is determined to take control of all cities with a bridge crossing the river. This is recognized by Paulos as being an effect of the comet. In an effort to defeat this king and preserve his town, Paulos enlists the help of three kings: King David, King Arthur, and Julius Caesar. David promises to dream up some help, Arthur pledges to come to the battle, despite his kingdom being completely composed of cardboard, and Caesar vows to send his shadow. The tyrant is defeated, and the city is saved. However, in the end, Paulos stops dreaming, and is killed. As soon as he stopped dreaming, he became "un joven rico y ocioso, como cualquier otro" 'a rich and idle young man, like any other.'<sup>26</sup>

King Asad was portrayed as being powerful. If he wanted all of the towns with bridges, he could get them. He was also used unnecessary violence to get what he wanted. The king himself admits that he does not really know why he wants towns with a bridge, but attributes it to a dream in which he was walking by a river but could not cross it because of the lack of a bridge, claiming that if there had been a one, he would not have had a problem.<sup>27</sup> This book was published in 1974, just one year before the death of Franco, and therefore has important political implications.

King Asad can be seen as being representative of Franco and his system of fascism. Just as Asad is seen as having much power, so Franco was very powerful for a much-extended period. This story opposes the possession of so much power by a single ruler, such as Franco. The defeat of the tyrant predicts the defeat of Franco and Spanish fascism. At this time, Franco was over eighty years old, and had been losing power, and Spaniards could probably see change in the future. Beginning in the 1960s, "the *Dictadura* (hard dictatorship) had become a *Dictablanda* (soft

dictatorship).<sup>28</sup> Just one year later, Franco died and was succeeded by Prince Juan Carlos and a Spanish democracy. At the time of the book's publication, it was obvious that Franco would not be in power much longer. Depicting the defeat of the tyrannical Asad foreshadowed the defeat of Franco and fascism. Also like King Asad, Franco and his administration had no problem with using violence. This can be seen in the approximately 30,000 executions in Spain between the years 1939 and 1945- the years immediately after the civil war.<sup>29</sup> Written in a time of censorship, Cunqueiro's novel speaks out against the government in an indirect way, thus avoiding this control.

One particularly interesting aspect of this novel is the cardboard kingdom of King Arthur. The first impression that the reader gets of Arthur is that he is whiney and complaining. He does not behave like the all-powerful king that we imagine him to be, instead he behaves rather childishly. Even before meeting Arthur, however, Paulos learns that the entire kingdom is made of cardboard, even the horses. The original plan for the horses involved using electronics to make them able to neigh, stamp their feet, and appear to be breathing. However, this did not happen because of the poverty of the kingdom.<sup>30</sup> This depiction of Camelot shows the obsolescence of that ideal society. Arthurian civilization is commonly viewed as a utopia, showing a yearning or nostalgia for the past society in place of the current. This novel breaks that paradise. Camelot is not seen as a utopia, but rather a decrepit and poor town. There is no going back to that perfect Arthurian time. Thus, the nostalgia for the time is undermined, showing Camelot not as a perfect, just, and chivalric society, but rather, a disaster. To the people of Spain, this represents the inability to go back to the past. The past was no better than the present, so no matter how bad the present, the people need to work to improve the society, just as Paulos took the initiative to request the help of the three rulers.

In addition to the political implications, this novel offers a spiritual dimension, adhering to the Christian principles of Arthur and the Catholic ideologies of Spain. Before the novel begins, there is a quote from the book of Genesis. Later in the novel Biblical king David asks him how they had saved their ancestors from the flood, to which Paulos responded with a variation of the Noah story, also from the book of Genesis. Also in this exchange, when David asked him how many gods he and his city worship, Paulos responded that they only recognize one God, who is all-powerful and the creator of heaven and earth.<sup>31</sup> These biblical references show the influence that the Catholic Church had on the Spanish society during Franco's rule. Each of these references would be easily recognized by the readers of the time. The Church under this regime sought to create a program of "moral regeneration" through the abolition of lay schools and the control over moral issues, such as contraception, divorce, and abortion.<sup>32</sup>

The death of Paulos also offers greater implications. Paulos dies as soon as he leaves his fantasy, dream world. Through his dreams, he went on many adventures and took advantage of many different experiences. After having seen the pleasure of the fantasy, his death shows the readers a "crude reality."<sup>33</sup> His death also demonstrates the life of the people in Spain. For them, it might have been better to live in a fantasy world, such as that of Paulos; however, his death showed the grim reality of life.

#### 4.3 "Merlín en Carmarthen" (1970)<sup>34</sup> ["Merlin in Carmarthen"]

Cunqueiro continues to make significant political statements in this essay. The essay is about Merlin's oak tree, found in Carmarthen, Wales. There is such an oak tree, believed to have been planted in the seventeenth century by an ancestor of the former United States president John Adams. It was poisoned in the early nineteenth century, with remnants today residing in St. Peter's Civic Hall and in the County Museum in Abergwili.<sup>35</sup> The essay focuses on the debate between the Carmarthen city council and the minister of transportation about whether to pull up the oak tree. The council brought up the point that Merlin had prophesied that if the tree was ever removed, that death and destruction would be brought upon Carmarthen and the world to which the minister argued that there was already death and destruction in the world. For the most part, the councilmen were in favor of keeping the tree where it was.

The whole essay satirizes the emphasis on tradition in Spanish society under Franco. The councilmen, who wanted to keep the tree around for the sake of tradition and superstition, represent Franco's Nationalists, who sought to preserve traditional values in the society. By creating a traditionalist argument over something as trivial as this tree, Cunqueiro is mocking the traditionalist values of the Nationalists. Taking this even further, the narrator denies the triviality of the matter in the final sentence of the essay, claiming that he was happy that the Vatican newspaper was worried about the matter, "que no es trivial" 'which is not trivial.'<sup>36</sup>

### 5. Spain And Democracy

With Franco's death, Spain began the surprisingly peaceful transition to a democratic parliamentary monarchy, headed by King Juan Carlos I. In coming to power, Juan Carlos sought "to overcome the divisions of the Civil War

and seek social reconciliation.”<sup>37</sup> Unlike in the years from 1923-1975, the following period was not dictated so much by linear changes, but rather by a series of forces.

Perhaps the most important of these forces is regional nationalism, as this has persisted throughout time. One reason for the resurgence of this peripheral nationalism could be that Franco’s extreme nationalism led to an association of centralism with repression.<sup>38</sup> Like before, the Catalans and the Basques were fighting for this autonomy, but so were many of the other Spanish regions. The Constitution of 1978 set up a process that allows regions to earn their autonomy, through which the Basques and the Catalans were granted the highest possible level of autonomy and the Basque Country and Navarre were granted unique privileges. One principle of this decentralism, however, dictated that the “regional autonomy must not undermine the unity of Spain.”<sup>39</sup> Today, there are seventeen autonomous communities in Spain. The government in Madrid must work to arbitrate between “the demands that press on the state from the now institutionalized autonomous regions” and the “national” institutions that remain, such as the church and the army.<sup>40</sup> Unfortunately, extreme regionalism still persists, as seen through terrorism by nationalist groups, most prominently the ETA (Basque Homeland and Freedom). This terrorist group emerged in the late 50s, during the dictatorship.<sup>41</sup> Extreme nationalism, such as this example, continues into the twenty-first century, making regional nationalism a continuing problem to be dealt with by the Spanish government.

In addition to this nationalism, the Spanish government has also been hit by crippling economic problems, making the economy a major focal point of the democracy. The largest reasons for these economic concerns were a global depression and the stress of meeting the terms of the Maastricht Treaty, signed in 1992, through which Spain would be able to use the Euro nationally. The treaty set strict terms, regulating interest rates, inflation, and other similar institutions.<sup>42</sup> These national constraints created other problems, such as rising unemployment. Spain also has strict regulations for qualification for unemployment benefits, with only half of the unemployed receiving such benefits.<sup>43</sup> Inflation soared, reaching 26.4 percent in 1977.<sup>44</sup> In order to help alleviate the economic problems, the government passed a tax reform intended to get more people (including the King) to pay taxes, not just the people who had nothing to give, as under Franco. This reform included unifying the taxation system, making evasion an offence, and creating a progressive fiscal system.<sup>45</sup> Similar to the issue of regional nationalism, the economy is a force that has been driving much government action since the beginning of the twentieth century.

In addition to the measures taken to alleviate the forces of the problems of regional nationalism and economic struggles, the government has passed several significant reforms, especially under the Partido Socialista Obrero Español (PSOE)—the Spanish Socialist Workers’ Party and one of the two major parties in modern Spanish politics. One significant area of reform was in the education system. In 1990, the PSOE passed a law, the *Ley de Ordenación General del Sistema Educativo* (LOGSE; the General Organization of the Educational System, Act), which requires students to stay in school until they are sixteen years old, at which point they can choose to leave school, go on to vocational training, or continue in their formal schooling.<sup>46</sup> The PSOE also made great reforms in the army, significantly lowering the number of officers. The officer corps had previously been very large and very old. The standards to become an officer were raised, and those who did not earn a posting were given the option of retiring on full salary (Hooper 199). Finally, the PSOE addressed women and the family, providing support for victims of domestic abuse, giving a basis for gender education, and creating a quite liberal divorce law.<sup>47</sup> These successes helped to counteract the struggles that were being faced by the government at the time.

### 5.1 *El rey Arturo cabalga de nuevo, más o menos* (1998)<sup>48</sup> [*King Arthur Ridden Anew, More or Less*]

*El rey Arturo cabalga de nuevo, más o menos* is a novel written by Miguel Ángel Moleón Viana, which recounts the quest of King Arthur to find a magic cauldron. When reached, the magic cauldron will grant him and his companions their greatest wishes. The novel retells his adventures as he fights enemies and faces several obstacles impeding his progress. He is accompanied by a posse of fellow adventurers, each of whom contributes something to the company, including Merlin, a new knight, and his jester. Despite being written for a young audience, this book offers greater implications for its older readers when read in light of the society in which it was written.

One aspect of importance involves the dubbing of a new knight by Arthur toward the beginning of the quest. This would not be that strange, except that the knight is a young woman named Carmina. She carries Arthur’s sword, Excalibur, and uses it to protect him. She is first described as being about ten years old— a shepherdess of geese. In the previous texts, women played no more a role than as background characters. They are mentioned, but really make no difference to the plot. Carmina, on the other hand is arguably the most important character to the novel.

In comparison, the society under Franco was very patriarchal. Women were expected to play the part of the traditional married woman— devoted to her family and her home, resigning herself to the life of a housewife.<sup>49</sup> This

was to change with the evolution of government. By the middle of the 1980s, women could keep any property that was brought into a marriage, hold a job, make investment, and much more.<sup>50</sup> In fact, by the academic year of 1987-1988, women surpassed men in university enrollment.<sup>51</sup> The role of women was completely changed through the transition of government, providing women with much greater freedom than previously afforded.

Likewise, Spain's changing role for women is reflected in Carmina's role in this novel. Carmina was the only female accompanying the group and the only one who had a just cause. Angriote, the giant titan who they must fight, says "Quien tiene una causa justa nunca se cae" 'Whoever has a just cause never falls.'<sup>52</sup> All in the group fall except for Carmina, proving that she is the only one of the group with a worthy cause. In the end, everyone receives their wishes from the cauldron, and all receive something to their benefit, except for Carmina, who makes a wish to benefit her grandparents. She was the only one with a selfless desire. Carmina, is the heroine- the first female hero encountered in the selection of literature used in this study. She did a good portion of the fighting of the group and was the most selfless of them all, demonstrating strength and sensitivity of women in the changing society.

Another significant aspect of this novel is the characterization of Arthur. He is not characterized as the powerful king that we would like him to be; rather he is seen as "decrepit."<sup>53</sup> Like Cunqueiro's Arthur, the Arthur of this novel is always complaining and whining. This Arthur does not even fight his own battles. As in *El año del cometa y la batalla de los cuatro reyes*, this novel serves to undermine the nostalgia felt for medieval Camelot. Susan Aronstein claims that "the romance of the medieval has historically provided Western culture with the site of a lost ideal and a past to which the modern must return in order to ensure its future."<sup>54</sup> Like this allegation, modern society often feels a longing for this past, dreaming of a more simplistic time, but a time of justice and chivalry. Especially following the rule of an oppressive rule, Spaniards could be longing for a just king like the Breton, Arthur. However, texts, such as this one, work to undermine this longing and nostalgia. There is no perfect society to which the people can return. Instead, we must work to better the society we live in, as seen in the improvements in women's rights in Spain, and the reforms to the education system and the army officer corps, and much more. Camelot is over-idealized and unrealistic, as seen through Arthur's weakness and inability to live up to his common reputation.

## 5.2 *El rapto del santo grial, o el caballero de la verde oliva* (1984)<sup>55</sup> [*The Rapture of the Holy Grail, or the Olive Green Knight*]

This novel is focused on the quest to claim the Holy Grail, which is being held in a castle by one hundred maidens. Arthur chooses to send three knights on the quest, each by a different route. The chosen knights are Lancelot, Perceval, and the daughter of a knight who is too old to go questing. In addition, he sends the knight Pelinor to impede the others from completing the mission. The mission results in death for all of the knights.

One significant aspect in this novel, as in *El rey Arturo cabalga de nuevo, más o menos*, is the role that women play. Again, we see a woman being knighted by King Arthur. This took a little more persuasion by the woman; however, she was able to prove her bravery and strength to him and earn her place on the mission. When the girl volunteers to go in her father's place, King Arthur tells her that "sin duda has perdido el juicio" 'without a doubt, you have gone mad.'<sup>56</sup> Arthur argues that she cannot go on the quest because she does not have a hairy chest, but does have long braids. These arguments are completely based on physical attributes, to which the young girl argues that it does not matter what is under the armor- she is just as capable as the other knights of going on the quest.

This argument reflects Spanish society at the time of the book's publication. For the most part women were barred from many aspects of society under Franco, such as holding a job and owning property, just because of their gender. The restrictions had nothing to do with what the individual women were actually capable of doing, but rather a general stereotype. With the reacquisition of the monarchy, however, more progressive measures were being implemented, recognizing capabilities of women beyond their fertility. This is reflected in the surprising argument between the young woman and King Arthur, with her arguing based on her abilities and Arthur arguing based on her appearance. Her abilities won out, just as the abilities of women eventually did in Spain. This represents a huge change from what women experienced under Franco's traditionalist government.

In addition to this portrayal of women, Díaz-Mas also makes an important statement about the use of violence in modern society. Arthur and his knights really glorify violence, as explicitly portrayed in several quotes by Arthur, including "El sacrificio de unos hombres a manos de otros es el motor que mueve nuestro mundo" 'The sacrifice of men at the hands of others is the motor that moves the world.'<sup>57</sup> Arthur argues against Pelinor's plea for peace, claiming "no está el mundo preparado para la paz" 'the world is not prepared for peace.'<sup>58</sup> The whole conversation between Arthur and Pelinor is satirical of the violence that is glorified by modern society.

Our society tends to romanticize war, which is also reflected in the values seen in the Arthurian legend. It is not just Arthur who holds this point-of-view. Both Lancelot and Perceval independently select someone to play the part

of their adversaries. A fellow knight points out that not just a few times “un héroe ha alcanzado la gloria gracias a un traidor” ‘a hero has achieved glory thanks to a traitor.’<sup>59</sup> This gets ironic when all three of the knights on the quest are killed because of this glorification of war, and the need for an opponent. Catherine Bellver claims that “some of the humor in the novel derives from its implied ridicule of the ironic political advantages of war.”<sup>60</sup> This undermines our glorification of war, and makes us laugh at our own values.

### 5.3 “Merlín Misionero” (1980)<sup>61</sup> (“Missionary Merlin”)

Cunqueiro is the only selected author whose writing spanned both time periods. In this essay, published after Franco’s death, Merlin becomes a theologian and uses his magic to try to convert the Jewish people to Christianity. To do this, he implores the help of the Virgin Mary by asking that the rabbi’s first-born child be born with its head on backwards. This happens, but the Jewish people still do not convert. All that came out of the “miracle” was the mutation of an innocent child, thus taking an interesting perspective on religion and Christian supremacy.

Being a short text, the main observation is focused on religion. The essay condemns Christian supremacy. Though it was written after the government change, Cunqueiro nevertheless lived through Franco’s rule and thus experienced the religious oppression found in the society. Spaniards today still largely identify with Catholicism, but are not necessarily practicing Catholics. Catholicism, the only religion allowed in Francoist Spain, was given power over public morality, regulating abortions, education, and other institutions<sup>62</sup>. The Catholic Church has supreme authority over the society in Franco’s Spain. Cunqueiro was referring back to this time in his essay in which Merlin tried to impose Christianity on the Jewish people just as Franco tried to impose Catholicism on the Spanish people. Also, the specific use of the first-born son seems in some ways to parallel the instance of the deaths of first-born sons in the Bible. This instance was in Exodus as the final plague upon the Egyptians as the Israelites tried to escape from Egypt. The Angel of Death took the lives of the First-born sons of the Egyptians in the night, sparing the lives of the sons of the Israelites. Both of these show harm coming to young boys for the sake of religion. One difference lies in the outcome. Whereas in the Bible, the people escaped, thus achieving what had been wanted in the deaths of so many young people, in the essay, the final objective of converting the people was not achieved. The mutation was in vain. All in all, this essay seems to show the supremacy of Christianity in Spanish society during a time in which Catholicism was in decline, thus undermining this supremacy, and in way, mocking it.

## 6. Conclusion

Three themes showed prominent reflections of Spanish society through the twentieth century, making appearances in several of the texts. These main topics are the role of women, the prevalence of religion, and the characterization of Arthur and the government, including the use of violence. While other significant observations were made, these seemed to be the most valuable, given their pervasiveness in several of the texts and their relation to Spanish history.

A change was seen in the literature in regards to the role of women. In the first three texts, women played minimal roles, acting as background characters. They had little to do with the plot and played more passive roles. However, the two novels of the post-Franco era both feature women being knighted and going on quests. This is indicative of the change in the role of women in Spanish society. It has already been mentioned that the role of women changed significantly with the change of government, giving women a much greater amount of freedom. The change that is seen in the literature is representative of this change and showing of the importance that it had in Spain.

In addition to revealing a trend regarding the role of women, the selected literature shows a generalization of the use of religion. The first novel, written during Franco’s rule, showed several significant allusions to the Bible and religion, two of which connected greatly to the plot of the book. The essay written after Franco’s rule also showed major religious themes. All of the other texts made references to Christian people or ideas, which were not necessarily vital to the plot. It was expected that there would be an obvious change, similar to the change seen in the role of women, in the use of religion in the texts. During the period of fascism, religion would be quite prevalent through the texts, and after that period, it would not be so. However, there was not such simple pattern. This goes to show the importance that religion has held over time. While not all of the texts necessarily showed the stress of religion in a positive light, the allusions to Christian principles show that these references are recognizable by the Spanish audience. Therefore, while there is not common trend in the incorporation of religion, its use, even if minimal, shows that it is still an important part of the Spanish identity and a recognizable aspect to Spanish readers.

There is a more distinct similarity between the texts regarding the characterization of Arthur. For the most part, in the texts that mention Arthur, he is characterized as being old, decrepit, and complaining. He does not represent the



ideal leader that we imagine him to be, nor does he appear to the head of the utopia that we long for. Also, the texts demonstrate Arthur's use of excessive violence through the fighting of his knights. This violence is not the result of a just cause as is typically thought of with Arthur, rather, it is the result of selfish desires- bridges for a king to cross, a cauldron to grant selfish desires, and the Holy Grail for militaristic honor. Overall, Arthur is portrayed in a negative light, undermining the nostalgia that is typically felt for the Arthurian society.

Altogether, this study has shown the ideals that are important to Spanish society and some principles that have changed over time, such as the role of women, and also the principles that have remained constant, such as the prevalence of religion. Ultimately, while showing these changes, this study has undermined the nostalgia for the Arthurian society in order to reflect the reality of living in that Spanish society, rather than creating a false and idealized image. It portrays the society by both those who could and could not speak out against the government.

## 7. Endnotes

---

1 Juan Miguel Zarandona, "From Avalon to Iberia: The Contemporary Literary Returns of King Arthur in the Languages of Spain," *From Avalon to Iberia: An Arthuriana/Camelot Project Bibliography*, accessed June 5, 2013.

2 Ibid., 113

3 Goodman, *The Legend of Arthur*, 113-14.

4 Jane Gilbert, "Arthurian Ethics," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Arthurian Legend*, eds. Elizabeth Archibald and Ad Putter (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 154.

5 Goodman, *The Legend of Arthur*, 91.

6 Anthony D. Smith, *National Identity* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1991), 73.

7 Stanley G. Payne, *Fascism in Spain, 1923-1977* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1999), 3-4.

8 John Hooper, *The New Spaniards* (London: Penguin, 2006), 219.

9 Payne, *Fascism in Spain*, 4.

10 Hooper, *The New Spaniards*, 226.

11 Inman E. Fox, "Spain as Castile: Nationalism and National Identity," in *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Spanish Culture*, ed. David T. Gies (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 21-26.

12 Ibid., 33-34.

13 Payne, *Fascism in Spain*, 31.

14 Paul Preston, *The Spanish Civil War, 1936-39* (Chicago, Ill: Dorsey Press, 1986), 20.

15 Simon Barton, *A History of Spain* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan: 2003), 210.

16 Barton, *A History of Spain*, 211.

17 Preston, *The Spanish Civil War*, 62.

18 Preston, *The Spanish Civil War*, 108.

19 Hooper, *The New Spaniards*, 11.

20 Payne, *Fascism in Spain*, 150.

21 Payne, *Fascism in Spain*, 39.

22 Barton, *A History of Spain*, 232-33.

23 Benjamín Jarnés, *Tántalo: Farsa* (Madrid: Signo, 1935).

24 Jarnés, *Tántalo: Farsa*, 188.

25 Álvaro Cunqueiro, *El Año del Cometa con la Batalla de los Cuatro Reyes* (Barcelona: Ediciones Destino, 1974).

26 Ibid., 237.

27 Ibid., 208-10

28 Kenneth Maxwell and Steven L. Spiegel, *The New Spain: From Isolation to Influence* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations Press, 1994), 5.

Maxwell and Spiegel 5

29 Barton, *A History of Spain*, 231.

30 Cunqueiro, *El Año del Cometa*, 183.

31 Cunqueiro, *El Año del Cometa*, 173.

32 Barton, *A History of Spain*, 233.

33 Michael D. Thomas, "[review of] *El Año del Cometa con la Batalla de los Cuatro Reyes*," *Hispania* 53, no. 4 (1976): 959-60, doi: 10.2307/340233.

34 Álvaro Cunqueiro, "Merlín en Carmarthen," in *Viajes Imaginarios y Reales*, ed. Cunqueiro (Tusquets, 1986), 289-91.

35 Eleri James, trans., "History of the Old Oak," *Carmarthen Journal*, 2012.

36 Cunqueiro, "Merlín en Carmarthen," 291.

37 Barton, *A History of Spain*, 243.

38 Hooper, *The New Spaniards*, 35.

39 Maxwell and Spiegel, *The New Spain*, 75.

- 
- 40 Maxwell and Spiegel, *The New Spain*, 20.  
 41 Barton, *A History of Spain*, 241.  
 42 Maxwell and Spiegel, *The New Spain*, 50-51.  
 43 Hooper, *The New Spaniards*, 298.  
 44 Barton, *A History of Spain*, 245.  
 45 Hooper, *The New Spaniards*, 204-05.  
 46 Ibid., 314.  
 47 Ibid., 139-141.  
 48 Miguel Ángel Moleón Viana, *El Rey Arturo Cabalga de Nuevo, Más o Menos* (Madrid: Ediciones SM, 1998).  
 49 Barton, *A History of Spain*, 232.  
 50 Ortiz-Griffin and Griffin, *Spain and Portugal Today*, 69.  
 51 Hooper, *The New Spaniards*, 127.  
 52 Moleón Viana, *El Rey Arturo*, 132.  
 53 Ibid., 134.  
 54 Susan L. Aronstein, *Hollywood Knights: Arthurian Cinema and the Politics of Nostalgia* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 11.  
 55 Pamela Díaz-Más, *El Rapto del Santo Grial, o el Caballero de la Verde Oliva* (Barcelona: Anagrama, 1984).  
 56 Ibid., 14.  
 57 Ibid., 21.  
 58 Ibid., 22.  
 59 Díaz-Mas, *El Rapto del Santo Grial*, 29.  
 60 Catherine G. Bellver, "Humor and Resistance to Meaning in El Rapto del Santo Grial," in *Romantic Review* 87, no. 1 (1996): 145-55.  
 61 Álvaro Cunqueiro, "Merlin Misionero," in *Viajes Imaginarios y Reales*, ed. Cunqueiro (Barcelona: Tusquets, 1986), 116-17.  
 62 Barton, *A History of Spain*, 233.

## 8. Bibliography

- Aronstein, Susan L. *Hollywood Knights: Arthurian Cinema and the Politics of Nostalgia*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005. Print.
- Barton, Simon. *A History of Spain*. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003. Print.
- Bellver, Catherine G. "Humor and Resistance to Meaning in El Rapto Del Santo Grial." *Romantic Review*. 87.1 (1996): 145-155. Print.
- Cunqueiro, Álvaro. *El Año Del Cometa Con La Batalla De Los Cuatro Reyes*. Barcelona: Ediciones Destino, 1974. Print.
- . "Merlin en Carmarthen." 1979. *Viajes imaginarios y reales*. Ed. Cunqueiro. Barcelona: Tusquets, 1986. 289-291. Print.
- . "Merlin Misionero." 1980. *Viajes imaginarios y reales*. Ed. Cunqueiro. Barcelona: Tusquets, 1986. 116-119. Print.
- Díaz, Más P. *El Rapto Del Santo Grial, O, El Caballero De La Verde Oliva*. Barcelona: Anagrama, 1984. Print.
- Fox, E. Inman. "Spain as Castile: Nationalism and National Identity." *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Spanish Culture*. Ed. David T. Gies. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999. 21-36. Print.
- Gilbert, Jane. "Arthurian ethics." *The Cambridge Companion to the Arthurian Legend*. Eds. Elizabeth Archibald and Ad Putter. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009. 154-170. Print.
- Goodman, Jennifer R. *The Legend of Arthur in British and American Literature*. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1988. Print.
- Hooper, John. *The New Spaniards*. London: Penguin, 2006. Print.
- James, Eleri, trans. "History of the Old Oak." *Carmarthen Journal*. Carmarthen Town Council. 2012. Web. 30 July 2013.
- Jarnés, Benjamín. *Tántalo: Farsa*. Madrid: Signo, 1935. Print.
- Maxwell, Kenneth, and Steven L. Spiegel. *The New Spain: From Isolation to Influence*. New York: Council on Foreign Relations Press, 1994. Print.
- Moleón, Viana M. A, and Constantino Gatagán. *El Rey Arturo Cabalga De Nuevo, Más O Menos*. Madrid: Ediciones SM, 1998. Print.
- Ortiz, Griffin J, and William D. Griffin. *Spain and Portugal Today*. New York: Peter Lang, 2003. Print.
- Payne, Stanley G. *Fascism in Spain, 1923-1977*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1999. Print.

- 
- . *Spain: A Unique History*. Madison, Wis: University of Wisconsin Press, 2011. Print.
- Preston, Paul. *The Spanish Civil War, 1936-39*. Chicago, Ill: Dorsey Press, 1986. Print.
- Smith, Anthony D. *National Identity*. Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1991. Print.
- Thomas, Michael D. "[review Of] El Año Del Cometa Con La Batalla De Los Cuatro Reyes." *Hispania*. 59.4 (1976): 959-960. *Arts and Sciences III*. Web. 20 June 2013.
- White, T. H. *The Once and Future King*. New York: Putnam, 1958. Print.
- Zarandona, Juan M. "From Avalon to Iberia: The Contemporary Literary Returns of King Arthur in the Languages of Spain." *From Avalon to Iberia: An Arthuriana/Camelot Project Bibliography*. N.p., February 2003. Web. 5 June 2013.