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## Eric fighting in Guatemala. Adaptation and proximation of medieval Arthurian literature in Manuel Vázquez Montalbán's *Erec y Enide*

<https://doi.org/10.1515/jias-2023-0005>

**Abstract:** Europe boasts a large number of traditions and cultures which coexist in a relatively small space. However, despite this, different literary motifs and topics have been readapted and transformed into other different traditions. The Arthurian legend is a prime example of this. Whilst it originated in the British Isles, it rapidly expanded throughout the continent in many different cultural manifestations, from poetry to decorative arts, music to drama. The Arthurian legend acquired special importance in France, where Chrétien de Troyes's *Erec et Enide* gave it a courtly touch. The Welsh version of the story, *Geraint ap Erbin*, is less courtly than its French counterpart but keeps elements proper to the Welsh tradition. Thus, the Arthurian legend developed in different cultural traditions throughout the Middle Ages and it is the object of readaptations even today. *Erec et Enide* was recently rewritten and readapted into Spanish as a contemporary story focusing on modern-day problems. Manuel Vázquez Montalbán's *Erec y Enide* is an exceptional example of intercultural practice tailored to a culture (or even cultures) different from the original one in which it was composed. This article analyses the process of transferring and recreating the European medieval time and space of the French and Welsh texts into a Latin-American contemporary context, where brigands and thieves are substituted by henchmen and guerrillas and argues how translation can play a key role in the recreation of the medieval world in a contemporary setting.

**Résumé:** L'Europe possède un grand nombre de traditions et de cultures qui coexistent dans un espace relativement restreint. Cependant, en dépit de cela, différents motifs et sujets littéraires ont été réadaptés et transformés en d'autres traditions. La Légende arthurienne en est un parfait exemple. Alors qu'elle puise ses origines dans les îles britanniques, elle s'est rapidement propagée sur tout le continent dans de nombreuses manifestations culturelles différentes, de la poésie aux arts décoratifs, de la musique au théâtre. La légende arthurienne acquit une importance particulière en France, où *Erec et Enide*, par Chrétien de Troyes, lui donna une nuance raffinée. La version galloise de l'histoire, *Geraint ap Erbin*, est moins raffi-

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née que son équivalent français mais conserve des éléments propres à la tradition galloise. Ainsi, la légende arthurienne s'est développée dans différentes traditions culturelles tout au long du Moyen Âge et fait, même encore aujourd'hui, l'objet de réadaptations. *Erec et Enide* a été récemment réécrit et réadapté en espagnol comme une histoire ancrée dans les problèmes actuels. *Erec y Enide* de Manuel Vázquez Montalbán est un exemple exceptionnel de pratique interculturelle adaptée à une culture (ou même des cultures) différente de celle dans laquelle elle a été composée à l'origine. Cet article analyse le processus de transfert et de recréation du temps et de l'espace médiévaux européens des textes français et gallois dans un contexte latino-américain contemporain, où les brigands et les voleurs sont remplacés par des hommes de main et des guérilleros, et explique comment la traduction peut jouer un rôle clé dans la recréation du monde médiéval dans un cadre contemporain.

**Zusammenfassung:** Europa rühmt sich einer großen Anzahl von Traditionen und Kulturen, die gemeinsam auf relativ engem Raum existieren. Trotz dieser unterschiedlichen literarischen Motive und Themen gibt es auch thematische Gegenstände, die sich anderen Traditionen angepasst haben und dort eingegliedert wurden. Die Artussage ist ein Paradebeispiel dafür. Während sie auf den britischen Inseln entstand, hat sie sich schnell auf dem ganzen europäischen Kontinent in verschiedenen kulturellen Erscheinungsformen von der Poesie über die dekorative Kunst bis hin zur Musik und dem Schauspiel ausgebreitet. Die Artussage wurde besonders wichtig für Frankreich, wo Chrestien von Troyes seinem Werk *Erec und Enide* einen höfischen Hauch verlieh. Die walisische Version der Geschichte, *Geraint ap Erbin* ist weniger höfisch als ihr französisches Gegenstück, enthält aber Elemente, die der walisischen Tradition angehören. Das bedeutet, dass sich die Artussage in verschiedenen kulturellen Traditionen während des Mittelalters entwickelte, and selbst heute Gegenstand von Umformungen ist. *Erec und Enide* wurde vor kurzem im Spanischen umgeschrieben und umgeformt und in die Gegenwart transponiert. Manuel Vázquez Montalbáns *Erec y Enide* ist ein außergewöhnliches Beispiel von interkultureller Praxis, zugeschnitten für eine Kultur (oder sogar Kulturen), die sich von der, für die das Werk ursprünglich gestaltet wurde, unterscheidet. Dieser Beitrag analysiert den Prozess der Übertragung und Neugestaltung von mittelalterlicher Zeit und Raum der französischen und walisischen Texte in einen lateinamerikanischen Gegenwartstext, wo Banditen und Räuber von Guerillakämpfern und Schergen ersetzt werden und legt dar, wie Übersetzung eine Schlüsselrolle in der Neugestaltung der mittelalterlichen Welt in der Gegenwart spielen kann.

**Keywords:** Erec and Enide, Vázquez Montalbán, comparative literature, translation, proximation

## Introduction

Let us start with an obvious remark: Spanish Arthurian literature is not very well-known. Even an all-round reader of Arthurian literature may find it difficult to name a Spanish text dealing with the matter. Maybe *Amadís de Gaula*? Or, perhaps, the references to Arthurian texts in *Don Quixote*? However, Spain and the languages and cultures associated with it boasts a rich array of Arthurian texts. One of the reasons why they are not well known outside Spain, and sometimes even within the country, is that most Spanish readers 'usually enjoy Arthurian legend and myth by means of translations'.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, the truth is that a 'modern Iberian tradition [...] does exist and it is well provided with a good number of excellent writers and outstanding works'.<sup>2</sup> In fact, this good provision extends to the Middle Ages, as the volume *The Arthur of the Iberians* (2015), edited by David Hook, demonstrates, although after the second part of *Don Quixote* (1615), the production of Arthurian texts was eradicated from the Spanish literary canon. Nothing about Arthur and his entourage would be written again until the revival of the nineteenth century, triggered by the translations of Tennyson's poems in Spain and the reception of Wagner's operas.<sup>3</sup>

Any reader who is interested in Arthurian literature in Spain immediately notices something striking: that there is 'a very strong tendency to transport and locate Arthurian characters and motifs in Iberia – a tendency to naturalise them'<sup>4</sup> – and it is interesting to note that this happens both in medieval, traditional texts, but also in contemporary ones. This is the case for Manuel Vázquez Montalbán's *Erec y Enide* (2002), which is the focus of this article, where the writer transposes the adventures that Erec, his Welsh counterpart Geraint, and their wives endured to the Guatemalan rainforest, mainly, but also to Galicia and Barcelona.

The article starts by offering a brief section on the author of the novel, Manuel Vázquez Montalbán. Afterwards, the focus is on the comparison of the adventures between Erec and Enide and Geraint and Enid in the medieval European forests, and Pedro and Myriam in the Guatemalan forest. Both the French and the Welsh text are to be understood as two sides of the same coin and their comparison to the Spanish text is vital to understand what sources Vázquez Montalbán used through a study of comparative literature. Finally, it offers a conclusion on the importance

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1 Juan M. Zarandona, 'The Contemporary Return of the Matter of Britain to Iberian Letters (XIXth to XXIst Centuries)', in *The Arthur of the Iberians*, ed. by David Hook (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2015), p. 409.

2 Zarandona, 'The Contemporary Return', p. 408.

3 Zarandona, 'The Contemporary Return', pp. 408–16, 433.

4 Zarandona, 'The Contemporary Return', p. 433.

of the text as a criticism of corrupt governments and their exploitation of the population over whom they preside, something that has changed very little since the feudal system in medieval Europe.

## Manuel Vázquez Montalbán: author, man, and activist

Manuel Vázquez Montalbán was born in Barcelona in 1939, shortly after the end of the bloody Civil War that tore Spain apart between 1936–39 and that Francisco Franco eventually won, starting a thirty-six-year dictatorship. Vázquez Montalbán did not meet his father until he was five, since he was in prison in Barcelona for his support for the Republic and opposition to the Francoist regime. He started his studies of Philology and Journalism in 1956 and was an active member of the anti-Francoist university movement. He joined the then illegal PSUC (the Unified Socialist Party of Catalonia, which defended Marxist ideas). In fact, he and his wife also spent time in prison for their opposition to the regime and he was pardoned, and his sentence reduced, thanks to the mediation of Pope John XXIII. During his time in prison, he wrote his first novel and a collection of poems.

In the 1970s he worked as a university lecturer whilst collaborating with several magazines and newspapers. In this decade he created the character that would make him famous in contemporary Spanish literature. Pepe Carvalho was a complex and contradictory sleuth working in Barcelona. His stories offered Vázquez Montalbán the opportunity to offer sharp criticism of the Spanish political and societal situation of the last three decades of the twentieth century. He also wrote books and articles on his other two passions: gastronomy and his favourite football team, F.C. Barcelona.

On his way back to Spain from Australia and New Zealand, where he had been invited to speak at some conferences, Vázquez Montalbán died at the age of sixty-four from a massive heart attack, which he suffered whilst stopping over in Bangkok. He was actively involved in politics for most of his life and, thus, 'became the voice of the most disadvantaged'<sup>5</sup> in society. He remains one of the most widely read contemporary Spanish authors in Spain and his acute comments on society, his political

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<sup>5</sup> See 'Manuel Vázquez Montalbán', in *Real Academia de la Historia*, <<https://dbe.rah.es/biografias/5025/manuel-vazquez-montalban>> [accessed 20 October 2021]: 'se convirtió en la voz de los más desfavorecidos' (all translations are my own unless otherwise stated).



ideas, and his versatility as an author are clearly reflected in his works. *Erec y Enide*, the last novel published before he died, is an exceptional example of all these characteristics. The publication of this novel 'really surprised many readers',<sup>6</sup> because this focus on the Arthurian legend represents something of an oddity in the career of Vázquez Montalbán. Nonetheless, the author himself commented, in an interview with the Spanish newspaper *El País*,<sup>7</sup> that he had been interested in the topic since he studied for his degree in Philology in Barcelona.

## The text

Prawer's definition of comparative literature as '[a]n examination of literary texts [...] in more than one language, through an investigation of contrast, analogy, provenance and influence'<sup>8</sup> is key to understanding this article. The reasons why people compare texts are varied, as Bassnett points out:

Sometimes the journey begins with a desire to move beyond the boundaries of a single subject area that might appear to be too constraining, at other times a reader may be impelled to follow up what appear to be similarities between texts and authors from different cultural contexts.<sup>9</sup>

This article focuses on the latter definition. Prawer understands comparative literary studies as operating 'across linguistic barriers'<sup>10</sup> and this is the aim of this article, when comparing three texts from three different traditions. Ordeals and odysseys depend on the historic moment when they are written. As Trousson explains, stories become meaningful 'in the amplest context of history: political, social, literary and aesthetic history'.<sup>11</sup> From the swashbuckling French *Erec et Enide* and the Welsh *Geraint ap Erbin*, where the hero is measured against deeds in combat, to the more social, political bias of Montalbán's novel *Erec y Enide*, the three stories exemplify the variations and metamorphoses that a literary text undergoes throughout the times. As Franco Ferrucci pointed out, any myth, and any story, tries to explain the world in a

<sup>6</sup> Zarandona, 'The Contemporary Return', p. 425.

<sup>7</sup> In an interview with Rosa Mora, *El País*, 19 March 2002, which is available online at: <[www.vespito.net/mvm-erec1.html](http://www.vespito.net/mvm-erec1.html)> [accessed 22 September 2021].

<sup>8</sup> Siegbert S. Prawer, *Comparative Literary Studies* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1973), p. 8.

<sup>9</sup> Susan Bassnett, *Comparative Literature. A Critical Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), p. 1.

<sup>10</sup> Prawer, *Comparative Literary Studies*, p. 3.

<sup>11</sup> Raymond Trousson, 'Reflection on Stoffgesichte', in *The Return of Thematic Criticism*, ed. by Werner Sollors (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), p. 292.

narrative that reflects the current moment.<sup>12</sup> Chrétien reflects the ideal of knighthood of the age, while, at the same time, attaches more importance to nobility over kingship, the latter being represented as passive and the former as the social engine. The Welsh story also shows features of this ideal knighthood but, at the same time, retains the usual characteristics of the *Mabinogion* stories and medieval Welsh culture. Montalbán's text echoes the issues of modern society, where the knights errant are substituted by NGO members and where the Guinevere of the story, called Madrona, is not interested in atoning for her sins after an extra-marital relationship, but rather with her being diagnosed with cancer and how to live with it.

Hans Robert Jauss argued that the engine for the parallels and comparisons between classical authors and those of the Medieval and Renaissance periods highlight their aim at leading their societies towards specific aesthetical and moral norms. One of the best examples of this is Chrétien de Troyes, a French author who lived in the twelfth century and who took Arthurian matter and refined and adapted it to French medieval tastes, to the extent that the active, valiant, and brave Arthur of the Welsh texts became a passive, secondary and, at times, pathetic figure, who had to play second fiddle. In Chrétien's texts the focus of the action is invariably on a knight, not on the king, and the titles of his five texts reflect this. His main topics highlight trials, errors, and triumphs of the hero, and pay attention to the relations between love and the social demands of chivalry. His texts offer the development of characters from naiveté to sophistication and from ignorance to understanding. Chrétien had read the classics and, as pointed out by Alastair Minnis and Ian Johnson, he 'was clearly preoccupied with the affinities between courtly ideas and the Platonist poetics of the schools'.<sup>13</sup> This is clearly shown in his first composition, *Erec et Enide*, dating to around 1170, and interestingly the only one bearing a female name in the title. In the prologue to his own text, Chrétien stated that he wanted to take up a basic story 'and fashion it so as to produce a perfectly proportioned and meaningful whole'.<sup>14</sup> In *Erec et Enide*, Chrétien exemplifies the conflict between love and chivalry, with the latter being understood as service to others, the quest for adventure, and the concern for one's reputation.

Scholars have been always eager to point out the similarities between Chrétien's *Erec et Enide* and the Welsh tale from *The Mabinogion* 'Geraint ap Erbin'. This tale follows the medieval motif of the Arthurian adventure starting at a specific important date in the Christian calendar:

<sup>12</sup> Franco Ferrucci, 'Il mito', in *Letteratura italiana. Le questioni*, ed. by Alberto Asor Rosa (Turin: Einaudi, 1986), vol. 5, p. 514.

<sup>13</sup> Alastair Minnis and Ian Johnson, eds, *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism. The Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 143.

<sup>14</sup> Minnis and Johnson, *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism*, p. 448.

It was Arthur's custom to hold court at Caerllion ar Wysg, and he held it there continuously for seven Easters and five Christmasses. Once upon a time he held court there at Whitsuntide, for Caerllion was the most accessible place in his territory, by sea and by land.<sup>15</sup>

By way of contrast, Chrétien places the beginning of his adventure on 'Easter day, in springtime, at Cardigan his castle'.<sup>16</sup> There are similarities and differences between the texts: for instance, the hero of the French story engages in conversation with Enide's father, who informs him how he has lost his lands: 'I have spent so much time at war that I have lost all my lands, mortgaged and sold it',<sup>17</sup> whereas in the Welsh short story we learn that he 'had a nephew, a brother's son, and I took possession of his kingdom and my own, and when he came to maturity he laid claim to his kingdom. But I kept his kingdom from him. So what he did was to wage war on me and take everything that was under my control'.<sup>18</sup> The texts go on to show other differences as well: for instance, in Chrétien, it is Enide who eavesdrops on the commentaries about her husband's indolence and preference to stay with her, rather than doing chivalric deeds. By way of contrast, in the Welsh text it is Erbin of Cornwall, Geraint's father, who questions her upon hearing those rumours. Likewise, both Enide and Enid complain and weep next to Erec/Geraint when the hero is sleeping, but whilst Erec presses Enide to tell him, Geraint misinterprets some of his wife's words, which leads him to think that she is unfaithful. In another example that shows a difference between both texts, Erec urges his wife to '[a]rise from here, and put on your most beautiful dress. Have your saddle placed upon your finest palfrey',<sup>19</sup> whilst Geraint tells his wife to 'get dressed, and see to it that your horse is prepared, and bring with you the worst dress you own to go riding'.<sup>20</sup>

More examples of the similarities and differences will be given in the following pages, when comparing some of the adventures collected in these two texts with Manuel Vázquez Montalbán's *Erec y Enide* (2002). This will allow us to draw conclusions on how the remaking of medieval texts can be understood as a way to criticise modern political structures; in what way the classical characters are reflected in the new text; and how the three texts interact amongst them. When examining texts in more than one language, recalling Praver's quote at the beginning of this article, translation becomes essential. Translations have had a key role in the dissemination

15 Sioned Davies, ed. and trans. *The Mabinogion* (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 2008), p. 139.

16 William W. Kibler and Carleton W. Carroll, ed. and trans., *Chrétien de Troyes. Arthurian Romances* (London: Penguin, 1991), p. 37.

17 Kibler and Carroll, *Chrétien de Troyes*, p. 43.

18 Davies, *The Mabinogion*, p. 145.

19 Kibler and Carroll, *Chrétien de Troyes*, p. 69.

20 Davies, *The Mabinogion*, p. 158.

of the story of Erec and Enide as a mediator between previous Arthurian texts and contemporary ones. Vázquez Montalbán learnt about the legend whilst studying at university. To compose this text, he must have made use of the translation that Victoria Cirlot published on Chrétien's text in 1987 and on the *Mabinogion* in 1982, 1986, and 1988.<sup>21</sup> Translations, according to Giuglielmi, are 'an original product that start, no doubt, from a source text and that, nevertheless, marks later its own otherness which has an original and, at the same time, autonomous significance'.<sup>22</sup> Based on that translation by Cirlot, Vázquez Montalbán embarks on a process of adaptation, which involves a re-elaboration based on the demands of the contemporary audience. He is adapting a medieval text and story to a contemporary setting whilst using synchronic and universal motifs. Thus, Vázquez Montalbán creates an 'ethnocentric' adaptation by swapping the medieval world in France for a contemporary setting in Spain (Barcelona and Vigo) and Guatemala. The latter will be the focus of this article. This would fit the definition that Julie Sanders provides for adaptation, as a text that 'signals a relationship with an informing source text either through its title or through more embedded references'.<sup>23</sup> If the title, as Derrida stated, is always a promise, in the case of this Spanish novel, it is the promise of a reinvention of the original tale. The title is an indicator for an Arthurian aficionado. Nonetheless, as Sanders herself argues, 'some works can be adaptations and appropriations at the same time',<sup>24</sup> and in this case, the Spanish text may indicate this dual quality, since this 'frequently effects a more decisive journey away from the informing text into a wholly new cultural product and domain, often through the actions of interpolation and critique'.<sup>25</sup> Vázquez Montalbán argued that 'the myth that literature, arts, mass media have created is, above all, a sign system in itself which the recipient co-creates, not through interpreting it, but through sentimental, emotional or even ideological use'.<sup>26</sup> Thus, this text can be understood both as

21 Carlos A. Sanz Mingo, 'Un texto galés en España: la recepción y traducción de "Culhwch ac Olwen" de los *Mabinogion*', in *De Britania a Britonia*, ed. by Juan M. Zarandona (Berlin: Peter Lang, 2014), pp. 41–67.

22 Maria Giuglielmi, 'La traducción literaria', in *Introducción a la literatura comparada*, ed. by Armando Gnisci (Barcelona: Editorial Crítica, 2002), p. 294. In the original words: 'un producto cultural original que arranca, sin duda, de un texto de partida y que, sin embargo, marca luego su propia *alteridad* portadora de un valor originario y al mismo tiempo de un valor autónomo'.

23 Julie Sanders, *Adaptation and Appropriation* (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 35.

24 See Julie Sanders, 'What is Adaptation?', in *BU Global Shakespeares Seminar*, <<https://globalshakespearesbu.blogspot.com/2014/11/julie-sanders-what-is-adaptation.html>> [accessed 15 September 2021].

25 Sanders, *Adaptation and Appropriation*, p. 35.

26 Originally: 'el mito creado por la literatura, las artes, los medios de comunicación es sobre todo un sistema de señales ensimismado que el receptor termina por cocrear, no mediante la in-

an adaptation and as an appropriation, in the sense that, apart from the title, the relation of Vázquez Montalbán's text with the original texts is very subtle, whilst he re-interprets it through a political and social lens.

## Vázquez Montalbán's text

Manuel Vázquez Montalbán's *Erec y Enide* retells the story of three members of the same family through alternating narratives, employing a similar technique to the *conjointure* that Chrétien used in his works, where a main story is alternated with different secondary stories which come together in the end. Vázquez Montalbán considered the medieval French story as the perfect model to write about love. When he was younger, this story had such an impact on him that he wrote a poem with the same name of Chrétien's first novel.<sup>27</sup> Forty years afterwards, he wrote his own novel in order to offer a modern take on the motif of human relations: for him, the challenge was 'to read the legend of *Erec and Enide* in a contemporary setting and give it an individual and/or social use'.<sup>28</sup> In this readaptation, Julio Matesanz, the equivalent to King Arthur in the novel, and a renowned Spanish Arthurian expert, is giving a lecture to commemorate his retirement. The topic of his speech is, precisely, Chrétien's *Erec et Enide*. His wife, Madrona Mistral de Pàmies, the Guinevere of the text, hails from the upper class in Barcelona. Both of them had to bring up his nephew, Pedro (Erec), when Pedro's father, Madrona's brother, died in a car crash. Pedro studies medicine and, after meeting Myriam (Enide) in a department store when she is being struck by a dwarf, they decide to go to Central America to volunteer for *Médecins Sans Frontières*. Both Madrona and Julio speak in the first person and outline an acute portrayal of each other in monologues which recall past glories, and which somehow reflect the end of something: for Julio, the end of his career, as he is retiring, and the end of the affair he has been having with a British

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terpretación, sino mediante la utilización sentimental, emocional o incluso ideológica'. See Quim Aranda, 'Erec y Enide de Vázquez Montalbán', in *Vespito.net*, <<https://www.vespito.net/mvm/erec4.html>> [accessed 16 September 2021].

27 As Tito Ros asserts, 'The effect of that Arthurian legend on Vázquez Montalbán was manifested in a poem written in 1963 with the title "Erec y Enide", included in the poetic compilation *Una educación sentimental*'. See Tito Ros, 'Las relaciones de pareja en clave de leyenda artúrica', *El Mundo*, 19 March 2002, which is available online at: <<https://www.vespito.net/mvm/erec3.html>> [accessed 16 September 2021].

28 Original text: 'leer en clave contemporánea la leyenda de *Erec y Enide* y darle una utilidad "individual y/o social"'. See Quim Aranda, 'Una leyenda política y vital', in *Vespito.net*, <<https://www.vespito.net/mvm/erec4.html>> [accessed 16 September 2021].

colleague over several conferences; for Madrona, probably the end of her life, since she has been diagnosed with cancer. A third person, an omniscient narrator, deals with the story of Pedro and Myriam in the Guatemalan forest – although there are also examples of streams of consciousness involving these characters. The story starts just days before Christmas, in another subtle reference to the setting of Arthurian texts. While Julio is in Galicia enjoying the celebrations for his retirement, Madrona busies herself in Barcelona making the last-minute preparations for the Christmas festival, echoing the Guinevere of Arthurian texts where the whole court meets on special dates. She hopes that Pedro and Myriam will be able to return to Barcelona to have a family gathering. They are currently trying to help the indigenous Guatemalan people who are being subjugated by powerful local figures and their henchmen. This reflects the author's stance about the political and societal situation of that region. In an interview published shortly after the publication of his novel, Vázquez Montalbán said that he was horrified to have discovered in a report on the Guatemala Civil War (1960–96) that 98% of the atrocities were committed by paramilitary combatants and (army) soldiers, and the remaining 2% by the guerrillas.<sup>29</sup> These atrocities are reflected in his book, where they are experienced and endured by Pedro and Myriam and their collaborators: Iriondo and Blázquez, two Jesuit priests who are supporters of the Liberation Theology movement; Flor Silvestre, an indigenous Guatemalan Indian who studied midwifery at university; and Diderot, an indigenous Peruvian who had studied medicine. Mentions of local henchmen and their various operations are not uncommon in the story: 'San Lucas, a colonial city which had gone downhill, had no other singular plush building than a church dedicated to Justo and Pastor with the stone celebrating the murder of priest Reyes Estévez at the hands of don Liborio's hitmen'.<sup>30</sup>

A close look at the story of Pedro and Myriam in Vázquez Montalbán's novel will show how strongly and faithfully the plot follows the adventures of the Welsh and French texts. According to Fokkema, comparative literature 'deals with texts, communication-situations and codes in various literatures'.<sup>31</sup> It is this 'supranational' aspect in which the analysis of these three versions of the story lies. Nonetheless, these three diverse cultures and two different historical times show some concomitances. This is done through a revision of the story, the motif of which is obvious:

<sup>29</sup> Interview with Rosa Mora, *El País* (cited in n. 7 above).

<sup>30</sup> Manuel Vázquez Montalbán, *Erec y Enide* (Barcelona, Mondadori, 2002), p. 74: 'San Lucas, una ciudad colonial a lo barato, que no tenía otro edificio suntuario singular que la iglesia dedicada a Justo y Pastor con la lápida testimonio del asesinato del párroco Reyes Estévez a manos de los sicarios de don Liborio'.

<sup>31</sup> Douwe Fokkema, 'Comparative Literature and the New Paradigm', *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature*, 9.1 (1982), 1–28 (p. 3).

'the movement of "proximation" brings it closer to the audience's frame of reference in temporal, geographic or social terms'.<sup>32</sup> The concept of 'proximation' was first coined by Gérard Genette and it indicates a revision of the cultural relocation of a text to bring it into greater proximity to the cultural and temporal contexts of the receiving audience. It may also imply a change in nationality which is 'generally a side of more encompassing diegetic transpositions'.<sup>33</sup> This diegetic transposition is a 'proximation': 'the hypertext transposes the diegesis of its hypotext to bring it up to date and closer to its audience'.<sup>34</sup> Diegetic transposition always works when moving from the remote to the proximate. Nonetheless, Vázquez Montalbán's text also makes use of modernisation, a kind of transposition which usually entails pragmatic transformations: in this case, the Middle Ages' bandits of the forests in the French and Welsh texts become anti-government guerrillas. Genette suggested that the 'contract of transposition is of course in the title'<sup>35</sup> and this is what any reader knowledgeable of the Arthurian lore immediately understands with this book: the title is an indicator, even when it does not actually refer to any of the characters in the book. However, Julio Matesanz clearly makes this connection and reference to the names at the end of the novel, as will be seen later.

## The adventures in the three texts

In this section, a comparison of some of the adventures in the medieval Welsh, French, and contemporary Spanish texts will be made to illustrate the ideas of proximation and modernisation mentioned in the previous section.

The first adventure open to comparison is that in which Geraint and Erec have to face a group of thieves. The Welsh text relates how four knights want to share whatever of value Geraint and Enid may have, and one of them even suggests taking the woman, but Geraint kills the four of them. In Chrétien's text, Erec and Enide are met by three knights who 'lived by robbery [...] and all the three of them wore armour'.<sup>36</sup> The thieves also talk amongst themselves of how to split the valuables that Erec and Enid have on them, but there is no mention of attacking Enide or taking her by force. However, these thieves have a similar fate as those in the Welsh

<sup>32</sup> Julie Sanders, *Adaptation and Appropriation* (London: Routledge: 2006), p. 21

<sup>33</sup> Gerard Genette, *Palimpsest: Literature in the Second Degree* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), p. 303.

<sup>34</sup> Genette, *Palimpsest*, p. 304.

<sup>35</sup> Genette, *Palimpsest*, p. 306.

<sup>36</sup> Kibler and Carroll, *Chrétien de Troyes*, p. 71.

text, and 'Erec need fear these three no more: one he had killed, another wounded, and dealt with the third leaving him unhorsed and on foot'.<sup>37</sup> In the contemporary text, Pedro and his friends are surrounded by some drunk mercenaries in the improvised hospital they have set up: Pedro tells the two Jesuits to leave with the women while Diderot and himself follow them a few minutes later. When the first group are met by three armed thieves, a scared Myriam runs back to the jungle they had just left behind. There Pedro and Diderot ambush and strip the thieves off their clothes, in a twisted irony from the medieval texts, where the thieves are the ones who want to dispose the hero and his wife of their possessions: 'This is a good place for us to take the two horses over there and the armour and the woman too [...] And we will get those easily as far as that solitary downcast, melancholy, listless knight is concerned'.<sup>38</sup> The settings of these three adventures are, nonetheless, similar, as they take place within natural surroundings. Despite the similarity in the setting, the group of assailants have changed from medieval thieves to modern guerrilla mercenaries, who were very active in the region in the second half of the twentieth century. The link to these medieval characters is clearly made when Diderot describes them as 'ladrones', or thieves, as the two medieval texts also call them.

In the second adventure, Geraint and Enid meet three knights 'fully equipped with horses, and wearing full-length armour, as did their horses',<sup>39</sup> but, as in the previous adventure, Geraint kills them easily. In the French text, Erec fights against five knights, one of whom clearly states that he 'would have the lady or die in the attempt',<sup>40</sup> but he dies along with three more of the knights, while Erec spares the fifth knight's life as he concedes defeat when he 'threw down his shield and lance and let himself fall to the ground'.<sup>41</sup> Meanwhile, in the Spanish text, Pedro and his friends arrive at the small town of San Lucas just as most of the population is leaving after a cholera epidemic has broken out.<sup>42</sup> They go to the small church to find some information when, suddenly, they hear someone shouting outside: 'You two darling Jesuits, get out! Iriondo and Blázquez, motherfuckers, the devil himself speaks through you!'.<sup>43</sup> The words come from the leader of a group of five broth-

37 Kibler and Carroll, *Chrétien de Troyes*, p. 73.

38 Davies, *The Mabinogion*, p. 159.

39 Davies, *The Mabinogion*, p. 160.

40 Kibler and Carroll, *Chrétien de Troyes*, p. 73.

41 Kibler and Carroll, *Chrétien de Troyes*, p. 75.

42 Although there are several cities in Guatemala bearing the name of San Lucas, the one Vázquez Montalbán refers to is very probably San Lucas Tolimán, the one closest to the airport from where Pedro and Myriam fly back to Spain at the end.

43 Vázquez Montalbán, *Erec y Enide*, p. 77: '¡Que salgan los curitas! ¡Iriondo y Blázquez, hijos de la gran puta, por su boca habla el diablo!'.



ers called 'Los Camaleones', coyotes or smugglers who created a cult called 'Los Cinco Hijos de Dios Colorado' ('The five sons of Red God'). When the priests come out, one of the coyotes shoots at the two Jesuits while Pedro is trying to negotiate with their boss: 'the revolver shot four times and Iriondo and Blázquez fell to the ground trying to stop the excess of blood pouring through the rags of their flesh and shirts with their hands [...] [Flor Silvestre] [...] kneeled by the Jesuits and tried to keep them alive, her hands covered with blood'.<sup>44</sup> This is a clear reference to the murders committed at the Central American University (UCA in the Spanish acronym), where eight people, amongst them several Jesuits, were shot dead on 16 November 1989. The El Salvador army thought that the Jesuits were too left-wing, and that they supported the Salvadoran guerrillas, the Marxist group Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front, which was at war with the government between 1979 and 1992. The army, which had created a junta to control the country, accused the UCA of being a refuge for terrorists and, as a result, initiated a cruel and bloody Civil War. One of the victims of that war was Archbishop Óscar Romero, killed by a member of the army for defending the poor and needy in the country. In the Spanish text, Blázquez and Iriondo accused the five coyotes of conning innocent people and brought them to justice successfully. The link is heightened when the leader of the *Camaleones*, talking with Pedro, says that his family have enjoyed a great reputation even from the time of the Conquest, always being 'God-fearing and at the country's service in every combat against the guerrillas in the last fifty years'.<sup>45</sup> Pedro, Myriam, and Diderot manage to escape, only to meet a group of armed people who kill the five coyotes and urge the three of them to go with them. The leader of the group is the henchman of another local guerrilla leader, called Don Liborio, to whose headquarters the three volunteers are brought. They are moved to the backyard, which is the place where Liborio's hitmen execute people: 'Have a look at the blood stains [...] and see that all windows are sealed. No one lives here; here is where they kill'.<sup>46</sup> In this second case, the three Welsh knights and the five knights in the French text are substituted by the less heroic figures of five smugglers, who coerce and con poor people desperate for a better

<sup>44</sup> Vázquez Montalbán, *Erec y Enide*, p. 78: 'El revólver sonó cuatro veces e Iriondo y Blázquez se encogieron y cayeron al suelo dando manotazos con los que trataban de contener la sangre excesiva que les salía por los jirones de la piel y la camisa. [...] [Flor Silvestre] [...] se arrodilló junto a los jesuitas tratando de ayudarles a contener la vida con sus manos ensangrentadas'.

<sup>45</sup> Vázquez Montalbán, *Erec y Enide*, p. 78: 'temerosos de Dios y servidores de la patria en todos los combates contra la guerrilla de los últimos cincuenta años'.

<sup>46</sup> Vázquez Montalbán, *Erec y Enide*, p. 136: 'Fijaos en las manchas de sangre [...] y que todas las ventanas están selladas. Aquí no vive nadie, aquí solo se mata'.

life and mercilessly kill two religious men – the latter having attempted, much like Archbishop Romero, to defend the rights of the people whom these smugglers had defrauded.

The next adventure in both medieval texts deals with the advance of a nobleman toward the heroine of the story. Even though there is no exact parallel of this chapter within the Spanish text, it serves Vázquez Montalbán in two ways: firstly, to pave the way to introduce the Guatemalan equivalent of one of the most positive characters in the Welsh and French texts: King Guivret or Y Brenin Bychan ('the Little King' in Welsh); secondly, to introduce another criticism of the genocides performed by certain governments in the region. In the Welsh text, Dun Earl is beguiled by Enid, who stops his advances by pretending to be interested in him and asking him to come back for her the following day. That same night, Geraint and Enid leave the town pursued by the earl's men, but Geraint kills them all and spares the earl's life after he begs for mercy. Likewise, French Enide pretends to have an interest in Count Galoain, but informs her husband of the count's advances and both leave the town, followed by the count's men. The first man to attack Erec is the earl's senechal whom Erec kills. Erec then attacks the count himself whom Erec strikes 'with such violence [...] that he thrust more than a yard of his lance into the count's side, knocking him unconscious from his horse'.<sup>47</sup> The rest of the count's men stop to look after him, promising, however, to hunt and kill Erec, to which the count replies: 'to all of you [...] so bold as to dare go a step further [...] I behaved rashly and disloyally, treacherously and madly. Never was there a better knight born of woman than this one; never will he suffer ill on my account, if I can prevent it'.<sup>48</sup> In the Spanish text, after being taken to Don Liborio's place, Diderot, Pedro, and Myriam escape from prison by making a rope with the stripes of Pedro's and Diderot's trousers. The three of them sense that the region is on the brink of civil war, which makes Pedro wonder if the military is preparing a coup d'état. Diderot rejects this idea, arguing that the problem which has created this war-like situation lies with the documents drafted by a Spanish UN observer about the genocide that the government carried out in the country between 1981 and 1983 'with the intention of eradicating what he supposed to be the foundations of a guerrilla faction'.<sup>49</sup> This genocide took place in Guatemala against the native Maya population between 1981 and 1983, during the Guatemalan Civil War that lasted twenty-three years (1960–83). It was in the north-western department of Quiché where the army's activities were more vig-

<sup>47</sup> Kibler and Carroll, *Chrétien de Troyes*, p. 81.

<sup>48</sup> Kibler and Carroll, *Chrétien de Troyes*, p. 82.

<sup>49</sup> Vázquez Montalbán, *Erec y Enide*, p. 139: 'con el fin de extirpar las que suponía raíces de la guerrilla revolucionaria'.

orous in the year 1982. Four municipalities (Acul, Chel, Chisis, and Ilom) witnessed multiple killings and murders of the natives by members of the army. The departments of San Marcos and Baja Verapaz were also the settings of frequent attacks by the army, who massacred many natives in the area. The genocide of the native Maya only came to a halt when the government and prominent businesspeople realised that the indigenous people were a cheap source of labour.

Diderot jokes about that document, as he describes it as ‘a 3400-page report which joins the heap of literature published on state terrorism which in Latin America is now more voluminous than the imaginative power of magical realism’.<sup>50</sup> This example shows that retelling the story or re-narrating an event is one of the most successful ways of rewriting as ‘a process of cultural remembrance’.<sup>51</sup> Rewriting, as in the case of Vázquez Montalbán’s text, recollects a past narration to create what Mieke Bal has termed ‘helpful memories’.<sup>52</sup> The text collects these helpful memories in the denouncement of some political activities in Latin America, not only those by various governments but also by international organisations as well, as Diderot claims. Although in the French texts, for instance, Chrétien’s task was not to criticise the feudal system as such, the criticism included in the Spanish text echoes and mirrors the injustices of that European medieval system transposed to twentieth-century Central America.

Similar to the Welsh text, where Geraint and Enid decide to go into the forest after fleeing Dun Earl, Pedro and his friends enter the rainforest. This motif introduces the reader to another adventure which runs parallel to those of King Guivret the Short in Chrétien’s text and the Welsh Y Brenin Bychan. The three NGO members get on a bus which is stopped by a military barricade set up by the men of the so-called ‘Rey Gabriel el Pequeño’ (King Gabriel the Short). Gabriel invites Pedro and his two companions to get in one of his jeeps, but some minutes later he tells Diderot to leave the vehicle and gives him some money. Immediately, he explains to Pedro and Myriam that ‘[Don Liborio has] given a warning description of the three of you and now there are just two of you’.<sup>53</sup> Gabriel takes them to his place, which,

50 Vázquez Montalbán, *Erec y Enide*, p. 139: ‘un informe de tres mil cuatrocientas páginas que se une a la ristra de literatura del terrorismo de Estado que en América Latina ha superado paulatinamente la hegemonía imaginativa del realismo mágico’.

51 Liedeke Plate and H. G. Els Rose, ‘Rewriting, a Literary Concept for the Study of Cultural Memory: Towards a Transhistorical Approach to Cultural Remembrance’, *Neophilologus*, 97 (2013), 611–25 (p. 612).

52 Mieke Bal, Jonathan Crewe, and Leo Spitzer, eds, *Acts of Memory: Cultural Recall in the Present* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1991), p. xiii.

53 Vázquez Montalbán, *Erec y Enide*, p. 147: ‘[Don Liborio ha] dado una descripción de ustedes tres y ahora son dos’.

to some extent, reminds us of a medieval castle: 'a house [...] not as striking as don Liborio's, but also with strong battlements and with watchtowers where silhouettes with weapons were moving'.<sup>54</sup> Pedro and Myriam escape in one of Gabriel's jeeps, in a reinvention of one of the best-known chapters of the medieval story, but with a twist: in the Welsh and French texts the hero fights against Y Brenin Bychan or Guivret and the latter has to surrender, promising to help and serve the hero. Furthermore, in the Welsh text, Y Brenin Bychan decides to accompany Geraint and Enid in their adventures. On the contrary, in Vázquez Montalbán's text, Diderot, who has been the hero's companion so far, is left behind, and from then on, Pedro and Myriam will have to face problems on their own. This makes their adventures much closer to those of the medieval texts, where the hero and the heroine are on their own in most of the adventures. This also offers a change of perspective and includes a further element of tension, for, as we already know, in a previous monologue by Madrona, she has bought them the tickets to fly to Barcelona for Christmas. The reader then wonders if they will succeed on their own. The use of language in Vázquez Montalbán's text also helps to create this anxiety, with adjectives such as 'fragile' or verbs such as 'despair'. This tension is further heightened by finishing the chapter on a cliff-hanger, where Pedro is left unconscious.

Back on the main road, they hear a woman screaming and asking for help, in a reinvention of the typical medieval motif of the lady in distress, which also appears in the other two medieval texts. Two men described as 'hombrones' (big men) are hitting a woman and her husband. Vázquez Montalbán is trying to make the original texts fit logically within the contemporary world; in the medieval tales both heroes are fighting against giants 'larger than three men'.<sup>55</sup> Those 'hombrones' in the Spanish text are members of the paramilitary police: 'They are taking my husband! The paramilitaries are taking my husband! They'll kill him. He's practically dead!'.<sup>56</sup> Pedro attacks the two 'cyclopes', as Vázquez Montalbán describes them, but they hit him on his head, leaving him unconscious. The paramilitaries take the other man into a van, whilst his wife runs after them, and Myriam tries to revive Pedro. This is, again, a close adaptation of the original texts, but with another twist: in both medieval texts the hero kills the giants and faints out of exhaustion while riding on his horse, making his wife think that he is dead; conversely, in the Spanish text, Pedro is actually beaten by the paramilitaries and left unconscious. However, the outcome

54 Vázquez Montalbán, *Erec y Enide*, p. 150: 'una mansión [...] no tan contundente como la de don Liborio pero también almenada y con torres de vigilancia donde se movían siluetas armadas'.

55 Davies, *The Mabinogion*, p. 172.

56 Vázquez Montalbán, *Erec y Enide*, p. 154: '¡Se llevan a mi marido! ¡Los paras se llevan a mi marido! Lo van a matar; ¡Ya casi lo han matado!'.

is the same, since this state of unconsciousness, which Geraint, Erec, and Pedro all fall into, brings in one of the most sinister and negative characters in the story: Earl Limwris in the Welsh text, the count Limors in the French text, and Dr Limours in the Spanish novel. Dr Limours is described as a sort of Bluebeard: '[s]ome day they'll dig up the garden in this mausoleum and will find the corpses of all the women he killed after seducing them. He's been doing this for thirty years, whilst pretending to be a doctor'.<sup>57</sup> Limours takes Pedro and Myriam in his old Cadillac and drives them to his place. Myriam finds it strange, since she thought that they were going to a hospital: 'Such a long trip would worsen his condition. In my clinic I can prepare him for the journey [to the capital]',<sup>58</sup> explains Limours. The 'doctor', similar to his French and Welsh counterparts, praises the beauty of Myriam: 'You are a very, very beautiful lady and your own body, like gardenias in contact with the environment, will find its reasons to survive',<sup>59</sup> a comparison that Myriam finds difficult to understand. This language, which Vázquez Montalbán may be using to imitate the exaggerated dialogues in Latin America soap-operas, presents a striking contrast with the indelicate vocabulary Limours and his henchmen will use later. In both the Welsh and the French texts, the count and the earl also praise the damsel's beauty, but whilst the French count leans towards being more persuasive, the Welsh earl is more demanding: 'I have a good earldom; you shall have it in your possession, together with me', he says. 'And now be happy and contented'.<sup>60</sup>

In the Spanish text, after arriving at the doctor's place, Limours convinces Myriam to rest. Although she is firstly reluctant, she gives in and eventually falls asleep. When she wakes up, she finds that she has been locked in. When she tries to break free, Limours and his two bodyguards enter the room and try to abuse her, but she manages to escape and takes refuge in a stock room where Pedro lies unconscious. On hearing her scream, he wakes up and they both try to resist the attacks of the three men on the other side of the door. Limours and his men are using rude language and sexual terms in order to scare them, whilst Pedro tries to rationally analyse the situation. Still in shock, he weighs up the idea of attacking both Limours and his men, uncertain whether or not what he is experiencing is actually really happening – the unlikeliness of the entire scene even prompts

57 Vázquez Montalbán, *Erec y Enide*, p. 219: 'Algún día excavarán el jardín de este mausoleo y encontrarán los cadáveres de todas las mujeres que mató después de seducirlas. Lleva treinta años haciendo lo mismo y dando el pego como si fuera médico'.

58 Vázquez Montalbán, *Erec y Enide*, p. 156: 'un viaje tan largo [a la capital] podría perjudicar aún más al herido, y en mi clínica puedo adecuarle para el trayecto'.

59 Vázquez Montalbán, *Erec y Enide*, p. 156: 'usted es una mujer muy bonita, muy bonita, y su propio cuerpo, como las gardenias, en contacto con el medio encontrará motivos para sobrevivir'.

60 Davies, *The Mabinogion*, p. 173.



him to draw parallels to the possibility of the World Trade Centre collapsing, or an American airliner crashing into the Pentagon. His sense of doubt, and the use of adverbs of possibility/impossibility, reflect Pedro's uncertain mental state after the ordeal he has endured – and the mention of the 9/11 attacks serve to trigger a sense of irony within the reader, who may begin to think that even the impossible might be possible here.

The use of language in this chapter differs in the three texts. Earl Limwris uses lots of imperatives, trying to persuade Enide to marry him. In the French text, Count Limors, who also insists on marrying her, uses fewer imperatives but resorts to physical violence when she does not want to eat: 'And the count struck her on her face; she cried out, and the barons around the count rebuked him'.<sup>61</sup> Both texts offer a comic effect when, upon hearing their wives' cries, Erec and Geraint wake up and kill the count and the earl, whilst all the men present run away thinking he is a devil. By way of contrast, the Latin American Dr Limours uses rude and intimidating language full of sexual terms. Besides imperatives, he uses threats and foul language: 'I am going to blow up the door and we are going to screw your woman [...] and you will not go into a deep, but into an absolute coma forever'.<sup>62</sup> Both Pedro and Myriam think that the root of all these misadventures lies in the hatred that these headmen feel for the NGOs and the volunteers: 'We've come to discredit their absolute power, to give an identity to those socially marginalised. For them, even the doctors are undermining the established order'.<sup>63</sup> Thus, these acts connect with the murders and assassinations carried out by the regular armies of the different governments in order to preserve their own power over a suppressed population.

In a twist to the tense events experienced so far, both at a personal and a societal level, Gabriel the Short comes to rescue them and takes them in his van to San Lucas. He explains to them why he has saved them:

[Y]ou are lucky that I am in my month of good deeds, when each week I take on a different persona to help someone. The remaining eleven months, I get as rich as I can, but every week in December I interpret my own Christmas tale. This week I am dressed as the marshal of a hypothetical army, half Bolivarian, half Maoist, for Bolivar and Chairman Mao are my role models in history.<sup>64</sup>

<sup>61</sup> Kibler and Carroll, *Chrétien de Troyes*, p. 96.

<sup>62</sup> Vázquez Montalbán, 215: 'Voy a volar la puerta, nos vamos a coger los tres a su señora [...] y usted va a entrar para siempre en un coma no profundo sino absoluto'.

<sup>63</sup> Vázquez Montalbán, 217: 'Hemos venido a recortarles el poder absoluto, a dar identidad a los vencidos sociales. Para ellos somos agentes subversivos, incluso los sanitarios'.

<sup>64</sup> Vázquez Montalbán, *Erec y Enide*, p. 229: 'han tenido la suerte de que yo viva mi mes de las buenas obras, en el que cada semana asumo una personalidad diferente para ayudar a alguien. Los once meses restantes del año me enriquezco todo lo que puedo, pero en diciembre interpreto mi



His speech praises the importance of family, and he mentions that some of his children are studying in China and some others in Germany: 'they are the two countries with the brightest future after the Latin-American demographic bomb has destroyed the power of the USA, rather than the bombs of the fanatics of Allah'.<sup>65</sup> This remark foresees the wave of anti-Latin-American feeling that would soon permeate US society with the ideas expressed by former President Donald Trump, which still remain a bone of contention to this day. When arriving at San Lucas, Pedro and Myriam learn that their aunt Madrona has bought them two first-class tickets to fly back to Barcelona in time for Christmas, which the family usually spend in a country house whose name is *La Alegría de la Corte*, another tribute to the Arthurian legend, after Lancelot's castle *The Joyous Guard*.

Both the Welsh and French texts have another adventure, that of the hedge of mist, which Vázquez Montalbán does not directly include in his novel, perhaps because this motif is the most difficult to logically reconcile with a modern-day setting. Nonetheless, Julio draws a parallel between himself and Mabroagrain, the knight whom Erec fights and frees from the curse of the hedge of mist, when he states: 'I feel liberated from my role, as Mabroagrain was freed from the captivity of his garden when Erec beat him in combat, as if Pedro was an Erec without him knowing it'.<sup>66</sup> This brings a note of irony to the end of the novel since we, as readers, know that Pedro's ordeals in Guatemala have been similar to those of Erec and Geraint and they make a hero of him. The adventures that Pedro and Myriam experienced are plausible because we know about the troubles and social unrest which that region has endured in the second half of the twentieth century; for instance, throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the activities of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation in the Mexican state of Chiapas, bordering Guatemala, paralysed the different governments and split the population of the countries. Thus, even when their adventures are extraordinary in a sense, they cannot be said to be truly unbelievable either.

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propio cuento de Navidad, cada semana. Esta voy vestido de mariscal de un posible ejército mitad bolivariano, mitad maoísta, porque Bolívar y Mao son mis modelos históricos'.

65 Vázquez Montalbán, *Erec y Enide*, p. 229: 'son los dos países del futuro cuando la bomba demográfica latinoamericana destruya la hegemonía de los Estados Unidos mucho más que las bombas de los fanáticos de Alá'.

66 Vázquez Montalbán, *Erec y Enide*, p. 243: 'me he sentido liberado de mi papel, como Mabroagrain se vio liberado de la esclavitud del jardín cuando le venció Erec, como si Pedro hubiera actuado como Erec sin saberlo'.



## Conclusion

The Arthurian legend is a pan-European motif which has become universal thanks to the rewritings and adaptations of it into different languages and cultures throughout the world. Nonetheless, beyond this pan-Europeanism and universality, the legend is a topic easy to adapt to different purposes, as Vázquez Montalbán's text shows: adaptations go beyond national frontiers, as they also encapsulate linguistic and ideological changes, and changes in time period and historical setting. The arbitrariness of the European feudalism of the Middle Ages still finds parallels in some contemporary societies, and the bandits and assailants of the medieval roads have become corrupt politicians and drug dealers. The myth and the story change or are adapted, but the original meaning still remains. In all three stories discussed here the main topic is 'the relationship between prowess and love, between social duties and private desires, between men and women'.<sup>67</sup> In the Spanish version, the text helps to exemplify the conflicts between love and obligation, but whilst in the medieval texts the search for adventures is the way to improve the knight's reputation, in the contemporary version it means their survival. This rewriting of the legend, as Lefevre pointed out, 'plays an important part in the development of literary systems: [...] rewritings are evidence of reception'.<sup>68</sup> Rewriting can be an adaptation of what is foreign in time or in place. It could be argued that without the translations of those foreign medieval Arthurian texts in the 1980s, such as that by Victoria Cirlot which Vázquez Montalbán mentions in his own text, the author may not have produced such a clever adaptation of the story in the twenty-first century.

If, as Benedetto Croce argued, comparing literature is an almost unavoidable exercise, this comparison is valid whether it is with literature produced within the same nation, or in different nations sharing the same language, or between different cultures, as applied in this study. Comparing texts from different cultures promotes 'awareness of national traditions other than your own, openness to works written in other countries and other languages, traffic and exchange between the various literatures'.<sup>69</sup> Comparative literature has become global, and this globality can thus be applied to the story of Erec and Enid: from its European origins to this adaptation in the Guatemalan forests, the story has been adapted to fit within contemporary parameters. Vázquez Montalbán's novel follows the trend of modern

<sup>67</sup> Roberta L. Krueger, 'Chrétien de Troyes and the Invention of Arthurian Courtly Fiction', in *A Companion to Arthurian Literature*, ed. by Helen Fulton (Oxford: Blackwell, 2009), p. 164.

<sup>68</sup> André Lefevre, *Translation, Rewriting and the Manipulation of Literary Fame* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), p. xii.

<sup>69</sup> Praver, *Comparative Literary Studies*, p. 4.



stories which have been adapted from previous texts and whose main challenge is to adjust those classical stories to fit the contemporary world while giving them an individual or social usefulness at the same time. Nevertheless, Vázquez Montalbán does not want to offer a direct modern adaptation of the tale. This is obvious in the omission of some of the motifs that appear in the medieval texts, such as the adventure of the hedge of mist. In his novel, Vázquez Montalbán also renovates and universalises a text initially ascribed to Western European culture, in order to make it go beyond these boundaries and to prove that the problems and issues of the past are still visible in the present by introducing a critique of politics and corruption in some Latin American countries. This allows Vázquez Montalbán to create a parallel between these governments and European feudal society, as argued above.

The translation of texts rejuvenates, revitalises, and renews literature, to paraphrase Giuglielmi,<sup>70</sup> and it is thanks to these translations in the 1980s, as demonstrated above, that there has been a growth in the interest of medievalism in Spain: whilst Paloma Díaz-Mas's *El rapto del Santo Grial* (1983) does not directly draw upon translated sources, other texts such as *Olvidado rey Gudú* (1996) by Ana María Matute, Soledad Puértolas's *La rosa de plata* (1999), or this novel by Vázquez Montalbán are clearly the result of previous translations. The development of novels with medieval subject matter increased in Spain in the 1980s, 'either as a reconstruction of the past, or as a more or less free narrative, or as a projection of the past ages on our present'.<sup>71</sup> However, Vázquez Montalbán still goes beyond this by adapting a medieval story to the contemporary world in order to show that humankind's mistakes are repeated throughout history. This act of rewriting proves the story of Erec and Enide to be, in a sense, 'timeless' and 'spaceless' (different historical age, different geographical setting) through a process of translation and modification, which are central components in the composition of this text. Medieval worries such as winning a contest, hunting down a stag, or proving one's prowess are here substituted by contemporary issues ranging from politics to NGOs, to survival, or to health issues. The reputation of the medieval knight finds its parallel here in the academic reputation of Professor Julio Matesanz, Pedro's uncle. Erec and Enide's happiness is somewhat transposed into the fact that Pedro and Myriam will become parents, despite the former's first lukewarm reaction to hearing this news. Guinevere's loneliness finds its answer in Madrona's isolation: she, like the queen, has to find a lover but, unlike her, she seems not to be in love with him; she just needs him

70 Maria Giuglielmi, 'La traducción literaria', p. 316.

71 Felipe Pedraza Jiménez and Milagros Rodríguez Cáceres, *Las épocas de la literatura española* (Barcelona: Ariel, 2009), p. 388: 'bien como una reconstrucción del pasado, bien como fabulación más o menos libre, bien como proyección de las edades pretéritas sobre nuestro presente'.



to avoid feeling lonely. Whilst it has been argued that Vázquez Montalbán's text can be understood as a declaration 'in favour of feelings, communication, and love',<sup>72</sup> the influence of the text goes beyond these three areas, as it is also an acute criticism of politics, politicians, and, above all, corruption in governments. Pedro and Myriam ally with the indigenous population against government henchmen, trying to help these people win their freedom.

Vázquez Montalbán's text adapts the Arthurian legend, both politically and in vital terms, to the contemporary world, with an emphasis on showing universal, timeless human feelings: hope and despair; strength and weakness; love and loneliness. Whilst Erec, Geraint, Enide, and Enid face giants, thieves, lecherous counts, and dwarfs in European woods and forests, Pedro and Myriam must face paramilitaries, headmen, henchmen and hitmen, guerrillas, drug dealers, and corrupt governments in the Guatemalan rainforest. The medieval knight has become, indeed, a modern NGO volunteer.

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<sup>72</sup> Zarandona, 'The Contemporary Return', p. 426.