Chivalry, Reading, and Women's Culture in Early Modern Spain

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2. Women’s Literacy in Beatriz Bernal’s Cristalíán de España

The half-century after the publication of Garci Rodríguez de Montalvo's 1508 Amadís de Gaula witnessed a vogue for chivalric romance crafted in its image. Montalvo himself, Ruy Páez de Ribera, Juan Díaz, Feliciano de Silva, and Pedro de Luján explicitly continued Amadís, and in the process they diminished the work’s independent-minded female characters. Even Feliciano de Silva’s ludic sequels celebrated the freedom of men, not women. Beatriz Bernal’s Cristalíán de España, first printed in 1545 in Valladolid, goes against this trend, crafting new female characters who are in some ways more subversive than their models. Though Bernal does not continue the story of Amadís and Oriana, she expands on the tacit promise Amadís de Gaula made to literate women by proposing a more egalitarian division of chivalric labor. In Amadís, the plot is gendered and bifurcated: men fight and women write. However, in Cristalíán de España, characters of both genders write and act. Bernal also expands the number of literate female characters, suggesting that reading and writing women are the rule and not the exception. These women, like their counterparts in Amadís, exercise a conditional agency through their literary practices. Bernal’s literate women draw heavily on available models, not just from Amadís, but also from Montalvo’s sequel Las sergas de Esplandián and other chivalric works, including Tirant lo Blanch and La crónica troyana. Bernal’s allusions to these texts in a sense ‘read’ the women depicted therein, and intertextual borrowings complicate her depictions of women’s literacy. The result is a romance world in which women’s literary practices are both more frequent and more risky than in the source works. Women use reading and writing for good and evil, and their attempts at accomplishing a communicative goal through written texts often fail. Women, however, are primary rather than secondary players in Cristalíán, and the range of roles and functions they undertake speaks to Bernal's egalitarian notion of chivalric romance as a genre.

On the surface, Beatriz Bernal, as a sixteenth-century woman of the bourgeoisie, does not seem a good candidate for chivalric authorship. Yet

1 Chevalier counts 267 editions of romances of chivalry in Spain between 1501 and 1650. Chevalier, Lectura y lectores, 66.
2 Cravens, ‘Feliciano de Silva’, 29; Sales Dasí, ‘Continuaciones’, 118.
despite her gender, Bernal enjoyed relative financial, social, and intellectual independence as well as access to the products of an active print industry. Donatella Gagliardi’s archival work has documented how Bernal moved in literate circles attached to Valladolid’s chancery court. Bernal’s first husband was a relator (‘court reporter’), and her second was an escribano (‘notary’). Both left property to Bernal in their wills, and upon the death of her second husband, Juan Torres de Gatos, Bernal earned income by renting rooms to chancery-connected boarders. Bernal’s only child, Juana de Gatos, received an excellent education under the supervision of her mother and was reputed to know Latin. Though both Bernal and her daughter were involved in financial disputes, the inventory of Juana’s goods indicates that they led fairly comfortable lives. Juana de Gatos’s library inventory, taken in 1588, notes an impressive sixty-one books from various genres. Juana’s library inventory does not mention Amadís, but it does contain La Celestina, copies in print and manuscript of Cristalián, two books by Antonio de Guevara, several books of poetry, and a few volumes in Latin and Italian. Though the library inventory does not show which chivalric works Bernal read, her approach to citation and imitation in Cristalián reveals that she was a sophisticated consumer of Iberian chivalry. Valladolid printed many romances during Bernal’s lifetime, including Tirant lo Blanch (1511, translated into Castilian) and Feliciano de Silva’s Florisel de Niquea (1532); from Bernal’s intertextual references, it seems likely that Bernal read widely in the genre.

Though Bernal eventually succeeded at bringing Cristalián into print, the pressures that kept many women confined to the domestic sphere impacted its literary reputation. Bernal asked for permission to publish Cristalián de España in 1537 but did not secure it until 1545. Though Bernal revealed her

3 Gagliardi, Urdiendo ficciones, 77–88. A preliminary version of the research appears in Gagliardi’s dissertation, “Quid puellae cum armis?” Una aproximación a Doña Beatriz Bernal y a su Cristalián de España.

4 Ibid., 83.

5 Cátedra and Rojo Vega, Bibliotecas y lecturas de mujeres, 31.

6 Gagliardi, Urdiendo ficciones, 90–93.


8 Piera, ‘Minerva’, 74–76.

gender in the liminary material, she remained anonymous until 1587, when Juana de Gatos named her as the author to secure permission to print a new edition. Gatos cited dire financial circumstances as the impetus behind her desire to reprint her mother's work, rendering Bernal, if posthumously, Spain's first female professional writer. Although Cristalián was a modest success in the sixteenth century, accumulating a number of citations in other works as well as a 1558 Italian translation, literary historians through the twentieth century tended to dismiss it. Marcelino Menéndez y Pelayo writes that Cristalían de España only has merit because it was the work of a woman, and many other scholars appear to have agreed that it was, at best, a footnote in literary history.

Though a handful of scholars have written about Bernal in recent years, interest continues to lag behind that in other early modern women writers. One concrete obstacle to the study of Bernal is the availability of her work to specialist and non-specialist readers. Jodi Growitz produced the first modern edition of Cristalián in 2014, covering only the first two books, and as of this writing, books three and four can only be accessed in modern edition through Sidney Park's 1981 dissertation. Neither the Growitz nor the Park edition provides a text of the full romance with a robust critical apparatus. Park's edition takes a modernizing approach, and Growitz's takes a paleographic approach, but neither makes the romance accessible to readers not already steeped in the genre. As a consequence, Bernal might well seem less modern, and perhaps less capable as a writer, to twenty-first-century readers than male authors of the period who have been edited differently. The intersection of gender and genre, moreover, appears to have discouraged many scholars from approaching Bernal at all. Chivalry began to fall out of fashion in the latter half of the sixteenth century in Spain, and Cristalián's length and proliferation of characters and subplots require significant investment on the part of readers. Though interest in Iberian chivalry has increased in recent decades, works thought of as minor, like Cristalián, are often assumed to be of low literary quality. Whitenack suggests that Bernal's
success at fitting in with her genre is part of her reception problem; for Whitenack, there is nothing particularly feminine about Bernal’s writing, and Cristalían is relatively indistinct from other chivalric romances.\(^{15}\) It is also possible to take the opposite view. Menéndez y Pelayo wrote that Cristalían is a labor femenina (‘feminine labor’), by which he implies that it is too feminine and can therefore be dismissed as a curiosity.\(^{16}\)

My view of Cristalían splits the difference between Whitenack and Menéndez y Pelayo’s assessment of its gendered qualities. I agree with Whitenack that nothing about Bernal’s diction, choice of genre, or overarching plot is essentially feminine, as in fact it has proved difficult for critics to identify ‘women’s writing’ in any stable or satisfactory way. Hélène Cixous, exploring the term écriture féminine (‘feminine writing’), argues for an expansive, abstract definition: ‘Woman must write her self: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies—for the same reasons, by the same law, with the same fatal goal. Woman must put herself into the text—as into the world and as into history—by her own movement’.\(^{17}\) Cixous’s formulation would account for a variety of ideological positions among women writers, potentially including those that support existing social norms in addition to flaunting them. Indeed, the feminine perspective Bernal encodes in her writing is often conformist. It is important not to read Bernal as a feminist avant la lettre; rather, she is first and foremost a writer of her century and her genre, if a somewhat unusual one. I follow Elaine Showalter in cautioning that women’s writing should not be expected to be universal or uniform in content or purpose.\(^{18}\) Bernal, however, is clearly thinking through the problem of gender in her writing, albeit within the confines of existing chivalric motif and Golden Age perceptions of femininity.

Bernal pushes at the boundaries of chivalric femininity in subtle rather than overt ways, pondering the intersection of gender and genre as a reader and as an author. Cristalían sifts out, reiterates, and reconsiders many of the stories Iberian chivalry tells about women. Iberian chivalric narratives, especially Amadís, take a relatively egalitarian approach to women’s literacy, allowing women to use reading and writing as a means of egress from the domestic sphere. For the chivalric woman, literacy offers an escape valve within an otherwise male-dominated social system. Bernal physically

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16 Menéndez y Pelayo, Orígenes de la novela, 1: 264.
frees some of her women characters from the domestic sphere, but writing and reading continue in *Cristalión* to serve as proxies for action for two major female chivalric archetypes—the enchantress and the princess.\(^{19}\) However, Bernal issues more caution about women’s literary practices than Montalvo did.

This chapter examines instances of reading and writing associated with women in *Cristalión de España*. These episodes depend heavily on intertextuality, displaying Bernal’s own ingenuity as a reader of other works in her genre. Though Bernal’s many references to literate women reveal an interest in women’s lives and women’s perspectives, these episodes do not advocate the subversion of masculine dominance in any categorical way. Rather, Bernal’s ambivalence about her literate female characters emphasizes the risks as well as the rewards literacy poses to women of the Spanish Golden Age. Authority and power, moreover, are at issue in many of these episodes. Bernal appears to ponder whether women can exercise textual authority or whether, in contrast, the powers of text belong exclusively to men.

**Reading and Textual Authority**

Bernal’s *proemio* (‘prologue’), the most commented portion of *Cristalión de España*, establishes writing as a masculine activity women can usurp, using literary devices that both establish and diffuse feminine narrative authority.\(^{20}\) In the *proemio*, a fictionalized version of the author finds a manuscript in a crypt and, ‘acuciosa de saber sus secretos (eager to know its secrets)’, reads and translates it for a new public.\(^{21}\) Like many apocryphal manuscripts in the chivalric tradition, Bernal’s imaginary book is ancient and foreign:

\[\text{Hallé que estaba escripto en nuestro comun lenguaje, de letra tan antigua, que ni parescia Española, ni Araviga, ni Griega: Pero toda via cresciento mi desseo, y abraçandome con un poco de trabajo, vi en el muy diversas cosas escriptas, de las quales, como pude, traduxe y saque esta historia, pareciendome de mas subtil estilo que ninguna otra cosa} \]

\(^{19}\) The female characters who escape physical confinement include Minerva, the Amazon-like warrior, and Amplamira, the traveling British princess.


\(^{21}\) Bernal, *Cristalión de España*, 2014, 891.
(I found that it was written in our common language, but in such antique handwriting that it did not appear to be Spanish, Arabic, or Greek. But my desire increased even so, and by embracing a bit of work, I was able to see in it many diverse things written, from which, as I could, I translated and brought out this story, which seemed to me of more subtle style than any other)²²

The device of the apocryphal manuscript gives Bernal’s romance an external provenance, if a transparently fictional one, and provides an excuse for literary activity that goes beyond what is customary for her gender. This moment is emblematic of how Bernal treats feminine authority and literary activity more generally. She hides it behind a masculine façade, mixing subversion with conformity.

Though Bernal nominally pays respect to masculine authority, represented by the male corpse from which she takes the book, the proemio also staked a claim for women in public life. Gagliardi observes that the author-character finds her manuscript in the only public space to which women had access, the church.²³ Yet the author-figure’s actions are less than devout; indeed, Bernal describes the taking of the manuscript as sacrilegio. Gagliardi reads the episode as an echo of the story of Eve, and Montserrat Piera views the author-figure’s defiance and curiosity in terms of Eve and Pandora.²⁴ The proemio represents feminine reading as a secret and dangerous act, but also, as Piera points out, a successful one.²⁵ I would add to these prior readings of the episode that Bernal’s short description of the manuscript find is rich in the diction of emotion. For the author-figure, the taking, reading, and translating of the manuscript is akin to an act of lust. Bernal describes her avatar as acuciosa (‘moved by violent desire’) when she encounters the manuscript, and ‘translating’ it appears to evoke even stronger feeling, as the words deseo (‘desire’) and abraçandome (‘embracing’) indicate.²⁶ Bernal’s proemio thus evinces the same association among women’s writing, emotion, and interiority found in Amadís de Gaula.

The proemio, in fact, shares more with Bernal’s chivalric sources than an association between writing and the emotions. The apocryphal or found manuscript is a habitual trope for Iberian romance, though Bernal uses

²² Ibid.
²³ Gagliardi, Urdiendo ficciones, 127.
²⁶ Bernal, Cristalían de España, 2014, 891.
it a bit differently from any other writer. Bernal might have known the motif from García Rodríguez de Montalvo’s *Amadís de Gaula* or *Las sergas de Esplandían* (1505), Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo’s *Claribalte* (1519), Juan Díaz’s *Lisuarte de Grecia* (1526), Feliciano de Silva’s *Amadís de Grecia* (1530), or a number of other texts. Amadís is probably the immediate source, as like Bernal, Montalvo describes the ancient manuscript as coming from a grave, in his case a *tumba* found under a hermitage in Constantinople, though he describes this finding as an archeological discovery rather than an instance of grave-robbing.

The trope of the found manuscript allows romance authors to blur the line between history and fiction and praise the products of their own invention while seeming to obey the authority of the past. Chivalric authors may also use a fictional encounter with a fictional manuscript to represent their relationship to their own real sources. Montalvo did not buy an ancient Greek manuscript from a Hungarian merchant, as he says in his prologue, but he did work from an existing medieval *Amadís* that had in turn drawn, at some point in its past, on the prose *Lancelot*. Thus, the two-step voyage Montalvo imagines for the manuscript, first from the Greek tomb into the hands of the Hungarian merchant, and then from the merchant to Montalvo, reflects a real two-step process of literary transformation. Montalvo, however, does not use the language of desire to present his false manuscript, speaking only of *trabajo* (‘work’). Other writers used the apocryphal manuscript trope to pretend that sources like Montalvo’s had existed, locating authority as something ancient, past, and unquestionable. In all of its forms, the apocryphal manuscript trope dissembles the process of intertextuality, reinventing the relationship between source text and target text to undermine the authority of the real or alleged source even while paying lip service to it. When sources are fictional, or when their provenance is obscure, the only author-figure left is the one who brought the work into print.

Bernal uses the found manuscript motif to stake a claim in a genre dominated by men. The secretive taking of the text from the crypt distinguishes Bernal from her intertexts; most authors do not represent their acquisition of

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27 Cuesta Torre, ‘Combates interrumpidos’, 564.
29 Ibid.
30 By ‘source text’, I mean a prior text on which a new author draws; by ‘target text’, I mean the final result that shows the evidence of borrowing from the source. I adapt these terms from Susan Bassnett’s work in translation studies, and I find that they apply to the case of intertextual borrowing as well as to translation. See Bassnett, *Translation Studies*, 81.
the manuscript, whether discovered or bought, as criminal or sacrilegious. Bernal, moreover, will give hints later in the text about the identity of the corpse. Bernal's narrator tells us that the wise giant Doroteo wrote the romance; the body in the tomb is probably his. If indeed the corpse is a character from Cristalián, Bernal has stolen only from herself. Though the literary authority appears to be masculine, his gender is only a mask. For me, the taking of the manuscript in the proemio is indicative of how women usurp men in the narrative of Cristalián, both where literacy is concerned and otherwise. They appropriate tools and texts from men and adapt them for women, but the act of doing so is dangerous. The connection to emotion in the episode speaks to the high stakes in Cristalián of undertaking literary activity while female. Literary practices remain transgressive throughout Cristalián, and Bernal is as careful about them as she is about her found manuscript trope. Bernal's female characters use books for purposes good and evil, and though women express their thoughts and feelings in letters, their expressions are more guarded than those of their intertextual models. Literate women, moreover, are often solitary or despised by other characters, condemned to live at the margins of their society.

The plot of Cristalián de España appears, at the superficial level, to be just as male-oriented as that of other romances, but as with the manuscript in the tomb, all is not as it seems. The romance begins with the titular character's father, Lindedel, presenting his boyhood, early adventures, marriage to Cristalina, and the birth of their sons, Cristalián and Luzescanio. In subsequent episodes, Lindedel's sons grow up, undertake quests, and meet their destined brides, Penamundi and Bellaestela, respectively. Women play roles more prominent than usual in chivalric romance throughout the book. Referencing the use of the word sutil in Bernal's proemio, Judith Whitenack terms Bernal's emphasis on women a 'subtle but persistent subtext'.\textsuperscript{31} For Montserrat Piera, Bernal's active female characters, particularly the warrior Minerva, undermine the genre's usual argument about masculinity.\textsuperscript{32} Growitz refers to Bernal's romance as a 'chivalric microcosm that [...] defies gender restrictions by tipping the scales of control'.\textsuperscript{33} Cristalián's first adventure is to rescue the mother for whom he was named, and all the men and women of the family benefit from the patronage of Membrina, an enchantress in the tradition of the Lady of the Lake. A second enchantress, Celina, who protagonizes a gender-reversed Sleeping Beauty plot, aids

\textsuperscript{31} Whitenack, ‘Emphasis Added’, 33.
\textsuperscript{32} Piera, ‘Minerva’, 77.
\textsuperscript{33} Growitz, ‘Introduction’, 18.
Cristalián’s younger brother, Luzescanio, in his adventures. Each of the younger knights has a female associate with whom he experiences no erotic tension. The Amazon-like Minerva accompanies Cristalián on many quests, and Luzescanio encounters British princess Amplamira during a series of maritime adventures. Contrary to the usual proceeding in Iberian romance, both Minerva and Amplamira split off from their male compatriots and protagonize self-contained episodes.34 The romance’s entire cast gathers at the end of the book for Cristalián and Penamundi’s wedding, where a magical whirlwind sweeps them away to new adventures that remain forever untold, as neither Bernal nor anyone else wrote a sequel. With her whirlwind, Bernal defers the heterosexual couplings that end most romances. Such marriages often condemn female characters to submission to their husbands and cause them to lose the conditional subjectivity they had during their youth.

Cristalián evokes reading and writing through landscape, magic, books, and letters, and each of these devices grants practitioners power and authority. The primary expression of magic in Cristalián is the epigraph, which allows magical practitioners to inscribe their desires and perspectives quite literally in the landscape. They use words to create instructions and traps for seekers, and the marvels they craft recall Amadís’s Ínsola Firme (‘Firm Isle’) and the Lancelot’s Douloureuse Garde (‘Dolorous Gard’). The origin of this type of magic is not innate ability but book knowledge. To produce or interpret landscape marvels, magical practitioners seek power in the written word. The enchantresses Membrina and Celina own personal libraries, as does the evil enchantress Drumelia. Knights must also participate in the game of reading. The fairy doncella del gavilán (‘lady with the sparrowhawk’) sets a series of tasks for Cristalián that require reading skill and knowledge of languages. Unlike in Amadís de Gaula, men cannot simply hack and slash their way through chivalric challenges; they have to know the ‘feminine’ skill of manipulating the written word. More mundane letters, meanwhile, allow characters to communicate and make decisions, transmitting feelings or information. Two of the letters cited in the romance come from women, the first from Cristalián’s beloved Penamundi, and the second from a minor character, Libida, queen of Armenia. Both of these letters appear imbedded in motifs of courtly love, and they play with the power the lady holds—or appears to hold—over her knight. The authority women wield through text, however, is always conditional. Though Cristalián contains more authoritative literate women than Amadís de Gaula, female characters pay a greater

34 Gagliardi, Urdiendo ficciones, 206.
price for their literary freedoms than their models, indicating that text, though powerful, is not powerful enough to upend the social order.

**Good Enchantresses**

Most of the literate women in Cristalián are enchantresses, and Montalvo’s Urganda la Desconocida appears to have been a potent influence on Bernal’s use of this character archetype. As the previous chapter discussed, in Amadís de Gaula, Urganda writes letters and uses books of magic to cast spells in the service of the ruling families of Britain and Gaul. In Montalvo’s sequel, Las sergas de Esplandián, Urganda also serves as a literary patroness, offering the author-figure an apocryphal manuscript.²⁵ Bernal’s enchantresses, like Urganda, practice a textual variety of magic, though Bernal emphasizes the reading of books over the writing of letters. The major difference from the world of Amadís is the sheer number of enchanters and enchantresses Bernal imagines; each main character interacts with multiple magicians, both male and female. Bernal’s enchantresses can be either good or evil, and this chapter will deal with them separately, as their literary practices differ.

Both types of enchantresses model some of the practices of feminine authorship Bernal hinted at in the proemio. Judith Whitenack points out that Bernal always refers to enchantresses as sabias (‘wise women’) rather than magas (‘magicians’), which indicates that reading and study are the source of their power.²⁶ Good enchantresses study books, finding prophecies and guidance within. Evil enchantresses read out loud from books, using them to cast offensive spells. Whitenack observes that in Cristalián, magic is not considered evil a priori: ‘We find none of the preaching against enchantments and magic characteristic of several of the earlier and more strictly religious romances, most notably Florisando’.²⁷ Bernal, however, distinguishes her enchantresses by their intentions. Good sabias use their knowledge to help others, while evil sabias use magic to wound or take revenge. Both types, however, prove an awkward fit within the dynastic families that dominate romance plots. Most of Bernal’s magical practitioners are represented as elderly and unmarried. It is unclear in Cristalián whether advanced learning can be compatible, even in exceptional cases, with the

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²⁵ Rodríguez de Montalvo, Las sergas de Esplandián, 548–49.
²⁷ Ibíd., 29–30.
expectation of marriage and motherhood that structures the lives of Iberian chivalric romance’s most privileged women.38

Yet Bernal’s sabias are not immune to family concerns, and they use their magic to create families of choice, composed of themselves as mother figures and their protégés as stand-ins for children. These motherly and grandmotherly personas stand in contrast to the magical seductresses of the Italian tradition. They recall French and Iberian enchantresses in their associations with ruling families and in their substitution for mothers who are lost or missing. In Amadís, as Chapter One described, instances of maternity were often tied to interpolated texts, and in Cristalíán, surrogate mothers interact with texts. Membrina, the first sorceress to appear in Bernal’s romance, recalls Urganda in both her literacy and her sponsorship of one particular chivalric dynasty. She also echoes Urganda’s Arthurian source, the prose Lancelot’s Lady of the Lake, as well as the Muslim enchantress Melía of Las sergas de Esplandián.39 Like Urganda la Desconocida, Membrina lives on a hidden island, specializes in prophecy, travels about in a magical boat, and transforms her appearance through optical illusion. Membrina owns an extensive magical library, as does Montalvo’s Melía, and she echoes the Lady of the Lake in her provisions for the early education of Cristalíán’s father, Lindedel.

Membrina’s presence in the text is authorial in addition to maternal, and her practice of magic mirrors the processes that allow an author to translate or imitate a source work. Membrina, however, takes greater social risks than the author-figure of the proemio. Membrina explicitly desires independence from men: ‘Fue tanto el su saber que jamas quiso tomar marido porque nadie tuuiesse mando ni señorio sobre ella (Such was her knowledge that she always refused to marry so that no one would have dominion or power over her)’.40 For Montserrat Piera, Membrina’s resistance to marriage speaks to Bernal’s perception of the demands of family life as incompatible with a life of study, and for Gagliardi, Membrina rejects men out of pride and, perhaps, out of wisdom.41 As a determinedly single magician, Membrina is an update on Urganda, who has a lover in Amadís de Gaula and marries

38 Gagliardi, Urdiendo ficciones, 204–205.
39 In Las sergas de Esplandián, Melía is a Muslim enchantress who has exiled herself to a cave hidden in a savage landscape. Though her long hair and animal skin clothing indicate a degree of savagery, inside the cave Melía preserves a marvelous library. See Rodríguez de Montalvo, Las sergas de Esplandián, 558.
40 Bernal, Cristalíán de España, 2014, 64.
41 Piera, ‘Minerva’, 82; Gagliardi, Urdiendo ficciones, 204–205.
the magician Alquife in one of the sequels. While Urganda surrenders some of her autonomy when she marries, Membrina refuses to do so.

Though Membrina does not have children of her own, her sponsorship of Lindedel allows her to use her literary practices to influence the next generation. In order to plan Lindedel's first quest, Membrina goes to her library to consult a book by the apocryphal female historian Nicóstrata. Bernal might have read about Nicóstrata in Giovanni Boccaccio's *De Mulieribus Claris* (*The Famous Women*, 1374), Christine de Pizan's *La Cité des Dames* (*City of Ladies*, 1405), Álvaro de Luna's *Libro de las claras e virtuosas mugeres* (*The Book of Famous and Virtuous Women*, 1446), or Antonio de Guevara's *Relox de príncipes* (*The Dial of Princes*, 1529), all of which describe the figure as an emblem of feminine learning. Gagliardi and Marín Pina agree that Guevara is Bernal’s immediate source, as she follows him in characterizing Nicóstrata as a historian of the Trojan War. In Bernal’s treatment of the motif, Nicóstrata’s history reveals the location of Priam’s treasure and tells how its ghostly guardian Troilus may be defeated. Urganda, the Lady of the Lake, and Membrina all choose their protégés’ initiatory quests, but only Membrina draws on explicitly literary knowledge in order to do so. Membrina’s choice of text suggests that Bernal imagines an alternate history written by women that contradicts dominant versions of history written by men.

Nicóstrata, purportedly an eyewitness to events at Troy, writes about the actions of Cassandra, daughter of Priam, crediting her with the scheme to enchant her slain brother and preserve the family wealth. Bernal also writes about another of Priam’s children in the passage, Cassandra’s lovely sister Polyxena, implying that the Trojan women are just as important to history as the men she mentions, Achilles and Hector. Marín Pina points out that Bernal represents Cassandra as a *sabia* comparable to those depicted in *Cristalián*, just as Amadís sequel writer Feliciano de Silva did with Medea. Thanks to Cassandra’s arts, Troilus awaits a worthy champion to release him from living death. Thanks to a chain of three wise women—Cassandra, Nicóstrata, and Membrina—Lindedel has the opportunity to inherit the glories of the past. This tripartite cooperative of female scholars recasts the generational argument of Iberian romance in which sons replace their

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43 Bernal, *Cristalián de España*, 2014, 64.
44 Marín Pina also points out that this episode owes to the *Crónica troyana*. See Marín Pina, ‘Beatriz Bernal’, 291.
fathers. The knight who participates in this adventure is incidental, and the real generational transfer passes from 
\textit{sabia} to 
\textit{sabia}. The episode is important for Linde del’s entire family, as Priam’s treasure and the fame Linde del earns as a champion allow him to rise from obscurity and court the princess of Constantinople. Membrina, without whom the quest would not have occurred, is thus the founder of a new chivalric dynasty.

Celina, a younger \textit{sabia}, plays a similar role in the life of Linde del’s son Luzescanio. She identifies Luzescanio’s initiatory quest in another search through the archives, and like Membrina, she resists marriage in order to preserve her independence. Celina, however, is also the ruler of her kingdom, as her father has died with no other heir. She thus cannot choose Membrina’s path of determined independence. Though she acquiesces when her advisors implore her to take a husband, she rejects a political match, insisting instead on choosing her own marriage partner.\textsuperscript{45} The details of Celina’s marriage plot suggest a possible intertext for the episode, the twelfth-century French \textit{Partonopeus de Blois}, which was loosely translated in Castilian in 1497 as \textit{El conde Partinuplés} and enjoyed considerable popularity in the Iberian Peninsula.\textsuperscript{46} This short romance offers a fable of women’s scholarly achievement along with a story of lust, deception, and marriage. The protagonist, a young fairy named Melior who is also the empress of Constantinople, seeks a worthy husband who will obey her commands. At a young age, Melior displays an extraordinary talent for book learning and magical arts and enough wisdom to know that she should not let her political advisors influence her choice of husband. She identifies a French prince as her ideal partner, secretly brings him to her kingdom at Constantinople, and visits him only at night. The prince must swear never to look upon his future bride, or else she will reject him. This reverse Cupid and Psyche plot ends, unfortunately, in Melior’s humiliation. Partinuplés lights a candle, breaking his word, and Melior sentences him to death. Luckily for Partinuplés, other characters conspire to secure his pardon. Despite her book learning and her will to assert her own point of view, Melior’s fate is to be twice ignored: first, when Partinuplés forgets his promise; and second, when her sister and advisors save him from punishment. Like \textit{Cristalían} itself, the \textit{Partonopeus} romances suggest that scholarly women may have only conditional freedom and that the power they gain through knowledge has a significant opportunity cost. \textit{Partonopeus} was also, via the Castilian translation, the source for Ana Caro’s play \textit{El conde Partinuplés}. This romance

\textsuperscript{45} Gagliardi, \textit{Urdiendo ficciones}, 207.

\textsuperscript{46} Monzó, ‘\textit{Partinuplés}’, 409; Luna, ‘\textit{Introducción}’, 28.
about the impossibility of reconciling feminine learning with the demands of marriage was compelling enough to inspire at least two women in early modern Spain to create their own versions.

Celina’s story adapts the nature of Melior’s learning while leaving behind the French romance’s most notorious feature, the ‘invisible mistress’ motif that featured frank depictions of sexuality.47 Perhaps ironically, by removing the humorous scenes of adolescent sexual exploration that made both Partonopeus and its translation scandalous, Bernal also ensures a happier fate for Celina. Bernal’s episode resembles the language of the translated Partinuplés in its description of Celina’s education and search for an appropriate husband. From an early age, Bernal’s Celina shows aptitude for learning: ‘Esta princesa fue muy aficiónada a aprender la[s] artes y como el rey barciano su padre la amase tanto hizo venir a su reyno grandes maestros para que su hija fuese enseñada. Esta fermosa princesa aprendió tanto que passó en su saber a todos los maestros (This princess was very fond of learning the arts, and as King Barciano her father loved her so much, he brought great masters to his kingdom so that his daughter could be instructed. This beautiful princess learned so much that she surpassed all the masters in her knowledge).’48 Both Celina and Melior of the translated romance are child prodigies who quickly outpace their tutors, and each learns unspecified ‘arts’. The ‘arts’ in question are likely magical arts, but they could also be the liberal arts. In the French version of the romance, Melior specifies that she has learned sorcery, the seven liberal arts, and medicine, though this extended description did not make it into the 1497 translation.49 In both Bernal and the translated Partinuplés, the learned princess’s father dies, leaving the kingdom in her hands at a young age. The princess’s advisors, with the implied consent of the people, attempt to force her to marry. The Melior character of the Castilian translation stalls her tutors by sending letters all over the world looking for a good match. Celina buys time by considering her problem in the library:

La reyna estuuo quinze dias que jamas hizo sino mirar y reboluer en sus libros & a la fin ella supo por sus artes que en la deuisa del valle fermoso estaua encantado vn cauallero llamado Sonabal de fenusa rey de la diserta a marauilla muy preciado cauallero: ella tuuo mucha voluntad de lo auer por marido: pero no sabia como lo librar de aquel encantamento:

47 De Armas, Invisible Mistress, 19.
48 Bernal, Cristalión de España, 2014, 525.
49 Collet and Joris, Partonopeus de Blois, ll. 4579–83.
y tornando a reboluer sus libros hallo que no podia ser libre sino fuesse por la mano del segundo hijo del valiente & muy esforçado emperador lindedel de trapisonda.

(The queen spent fifteen days doing nothing but looking at and leafing through her books, and at the end she discovered by her arts that in the kingdom of Valle Fermoso there was an enchanted knight named Sonabal de Fenusa, King of Diserta, who was marvelously well regarded. She had a great desire to take him for her husband, but she did not know how to free him from that enchantment. Going back to her books, she found that he could not be freed except by the hand of the second son of the most valiant and brave emperor Lindedel of Trebizond.)

Like Membrina, Celina uses her research skill to identify a worthy quest, but this adventure makes a more personal reflection on women’s literary talents than the treasure-dive in the tomb of Troilus. The description emphasizes Celina’s desire (‘tuvo mucha voluntad’) without suggesting concupiscence, and it allows an enchantress to marry, seemingly without disturbing either her study or her rule. Celina is unusual among the sabias of Cristalián in that she does not appear to give up her literary study, her agency, or her chance at forming a family, at least not during the episode as Bernal presents it to readers.

Celina, moreover, is one of the few female characters in Iberian romance to rescue a male character. The King of Diserta was enchanted into a seeming death many years ago by Darsia the enchantress, now a shriveled, bitter old woman. Darsia had wished to marry him, and he refused. He was unable to outmaneuver her magic, and she buried his still-living body in a glass coffin surrounded by magical guardians. Celina and her future husband are both prisoners constrained by the threat of an unwelcome marriage, and the fairy tale-like resolution of the episode frees both characters from submitting to a sexual partner not of their choosing. Once he regains consciousness, the King of Diserta falls in love with Celina without any prompting, magical or otherwise—he is simply impressed by her beauty. Celina’s research earns her a grateful and good-natured partner, though not a particularly capable fighter. Perhaps by assigning her one of the book’s most helpless knights, Bernal means to suggest that the enchantress will retain a measure of independence. Indeed, Celina’s plan works out much better than Melior’s gambit from the source romance, which compromised the latter’s chastity. What is more, Bernal uses this episode to rewrite Membrina’s greatest sin,

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50 Bernal, Cristalián de España, 2014, 526.
stealing the infant Lindedel from his mother, in a positive way. Celina knows that the young Luzescanio must help her, but she does not abduct him to make sure he is under her control. He comes to the adventure on his own, and Celina assists him without intruding on his free will.

Evil Enchantresses

Membrina and Celina both use their powers for good, and Celina is able to reconcile the conflicting requirements of marriage, politics, and the pursuit of knowledge. However, in Bernal's romance, not all women who practice literary magic do so with good intentions. Indeed, Bernal expresses her greatest degree of ambivalence about women's learning and its consequences through the corrupt reading practices of evil sabias. Evil magic poses a greater threat to gender norms than good magic, as it has an offensive, public orientation instead of a private, knowledge-based one. It also validates fears about the consequences of women's education. The evil enchantresses fall prey to anger and jealousy, and their arcane knowledge allows them to attack others. Bernal's magical practitioners tend to be less sexualized than the seductive sorceresses of Italian chivalry, including Ariosto's Alcina and Tasso's Armida, but they still reflect a negative view of feminine learning. Their targets are often other women, and in harming the young, they seek to prevent the generational transfer of power from woman to woman and sabia to sabia.

Danalia, the first of the evil enchantresses to surface in Cristalián, is an elderly single woman of considerable power who crafts a large-scale enchantment to take revenge on a younger woman. Though Danalia, like Membrina and Celina, refused to marry so that she could pursue a life of study, she has a nephew for whom she serves as patroness. This nephew dies of grief when Penamundi, the princess of Persia, rejects him. In response, Danalia drowns Persia's capital city, Larenta, in a magical lake and situates a dragon as its guardian. Like other marvels in the chivalric tradition, beginning with the prose Lancelot's Douloureuse Garde and including Amadís's Ínsola Firme, the ruined city of Larenta contains epigraphs that tell seekers how to solve its puzzles. Bernal favors such magical epigraphs, using them to an even greater extent at the arches of flame that are crafted by the male enchanter Dioneo.

Although landscape epigraphs are not the exclusive creation of female magicians, they imply that the business of enchanting, for women as well as men, is a literary one. Amadís and Las sergas de Esplandián contain
precedents for landscape writing by a female enchanter. In those romances, the luckless, unattractive *doncella encantadora* (‘enchanting damsel’ or ‘damsel enchantress’), left epigraphs leading to her treasure after she committed suicide.\(^{51}\) For adventurers, these epigraphs offer a test of literacy; knights must read the instructions to earn a reward. Such magical epigraphs are curiously self-defeating, as the downfall of the enchanter often occurs as soon as characters read and follow the instructions. Even good enchantments like those at Ínsola Firme can be brought to an end by successful reading, interpretation, and completion of the assigned task. For female enchanters, moreover, there is a gendered dimension to the threat of being read. A female magician may express her rage and grief using her literacy, but because men share the use of the tool, her attempt to punish her enemies fails. For Bernal’s female enchanters, writing serves as a proxy for direct action, but as with the female letter writers and enchanters of *Amadís*, using writing in this way does not guarantee the accomplishment of one’s goals.

Danalia’s epigraphs at Larenta explain the relationships among magical objects and guide knights through a maze of challenges. The words draw victims into the marvel, where they become trapped if they cannot meet the enchantment’s conditions. The first epigraph, which appears graven on a monument by the lake, explains that the knight who grasps the enchanted sword suspended over the water will be granted entry to the castle below. This initial challenge recalls the Arthurian motif of the sword in the stone:

\[\text{Junto al lago estaua vn padron en cima del qual auia vna grande ymage de Cobre y tenia en sus manos vn letrero que dezia assi: aquel bien auenturado cauallero que la fermosa espada en su poder vuiere sea cierto que dara Cima a la grande auentura de larenta: y la su alta caualleria passara a todos quantos oy en el mundo son.} \]

(By the lake there was a column upon which there was a large statue in copper which had in its hands a sign that read: the fortunate knight who will have this beautiful sword in his power will surely complete the great adventure of Larenta: and his great chivalric prowess will surpass that of all who are in the world today.)\(^{52}\)

The enchantment suspends those who fail next to a copper column with an inscription that reveals their names. Most who try the marvel, including the girl warrior Minerva, meet this ignominious fate. The self-engraving

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\(^{52}\) Bernal, *Cristalían de España*, 2014, 372.
plaque works the same way the *padrones* or columns do at *Amadís*'s Ínsola Firme, and both are made of copper, which suggests that Bernal has *Amadís* in mind as an intertext for the episode. The fact that the marvel at Larenta is reserved for the best knight in the world echoes Ínsola Firme's test of knightly prowess at the Cámara Defendida (‘Forbidden Chamber’), which compels men to fight invisible opponents and emblazons their names upon shields where they yield.53 One major difference here is that Bernal allows both men and women to try the test of military might; even in its small details, Bernal's world is more egalitarian than that of *Amadís*.

Once Cristalián grasps the sword, he enters the castle, where another epigraph guides him toward the dragon: ‘Si tu cauallero venturoso que la rica espada ganaste esta grande & muy espantosa auentura quisieres acabar sepas que la tu entrada a de ser por aqui (If you, fortunate knight who won the sword, wish to complete this great and terrifying adventure, you should know that the entry is through here)’.54 This magical signpost resembles the written clues Lancelot follows inside Douloureuse Garde after defeating the military challenges in the courtyard.55 Habituated readers of chivalry might expect a battle with the dragon, but all Cristalián must do is read it. The dragon opens its mouth, and an emerald lizard emerges, inscribed with a second message in gold letters telling Cristalián to walk down the dragon’s throat.56 Cristalián can read the Latin script because he spent the first eleven years of his life studying ‘todas las lenguas del mundo (all the languages of the world)’.57 Even though Cristalián dedicates little of his adult life to scholarship, he had an advantageous education as a child that outmatches even Celina’s. Perhaps Bernal means to indicate that even though her world contains many literate women, men still have easier access to literary culture. There is a sense in this marvel that Cristalián beats Danalia at her own game, which might be understood as the interpretation of arcane language and symbols. Had Cristalián not been able to read Latin, he might have killed the dragon and lost his chance to free Penamundi. The linguistic ability needed to complete this marvel points back to the moment in the proemio when the author-figure ‘translated’ an apocryphal manuscript; Bernal appears to have a particular appreciation for language skill.

57 Ibid., I: 190–91.
Once inside the dragon’s throat, Cristalián finds himself in a field, where he battles a beast named Babilonica. The monster is a relatively conventional two-headed ‘hechura del Diablo (work of the devil), and Bernal does not develop the battle with it in detail.\(^{58}\) The next challenge, however, shows more authorial care and introduces the trope of symbolic reading. A series of winsome damsels dressed in symbolic colors present themselves, each holding an apple that matches the color of her dress in a likely reference to temptation in the Garden of Eden.\(^{59}\) Bernal specifies the meaning of each damsel’s color: green is for hope (esperanza), brown for struggle (trabajo), blue for jealousy (celos), yellow for hopelessness (desesperación), red for happiness (alegría). These damsels represent the emotions Cristalián has experienced on his journey toward Penamundi, but they also offer an additional test of reading: Cristalián must choose the real Penamundi from the parade of illusions. The princess, the most beautiful woman in the world, is dressed in the least beautiful color, black for sadness (tristura). Danalia has frozen her in a posture of mourning for the fallen nephew. The color black represents not just Penamundi’s sadness at being trapped, or her regret at the inadvertent role she played in a man’s death, but the grief that drove Danalia to create the marvel. Danalia exteriorizes her own emotion by imposing it visually on Penamundi.

The colorful damsels sequence is one of many instances in Cristalián that require the reading of symbols. There is no antecedent for this motif in Amadís de Gaula, but Feliciano de Silva’s Amadís de Grecia (1530) predates Cristalián de España and contains a similar set of allegorical women. In an interlude in which Silva pays homage to his wife, Gracia Fe, two symbolic damsels, Esperanza and Desesperación, accompany the author-figure. These are also the names of Bernal’s green and yellow ladies.\(^{60}\) Another reference point for the episode can be found in Tirant lo Blanch. When Tirant first encounters Princess Carmesina, she is clad in black garments and lying on a black bed, mourning for her brother.\(^{61}\) Her pose is similar to that of the enchanted Penamundi. Danalia’s marvel thus has an intertextual complexity that shows off Bernal’s own skill at combinatory, creative reading. This sabia’s magic, however, comes to nothing because a man can read and understand it. Cristalián, moreover,

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58 Ibid., 382.
60 Silva, Choronica del muy valiente y esforçado principe y cavallero de la ardiente espada Amadís de Grecia, 94v.
61 Martorell and de Galba, Tirant Lo Blanch, 188.
has the power to undo an old woman’s aggression against a younger, weaker woman. Danalia’s ire must have been based at least in part on generational resentment. Penamundi is her opposite in age and social status, and she is in many ways more conventional than the enchantress. Perhaps the defeat of Danalia is also Bernal’s way of punishing—or cautioning—exceptional women.

Cristalián’s most whimsical adventure, the defeat of the evil fairies of the Hondos Valles (‘Deep Valleys’), also involves a generational conflict among women, this time among a family of fairy enchantresses. Cristalián meets an enigmatic young fairy, the doncella del gavilán (‘lady with the sparrowhawk’) on the road and agrees to help her defeat her seven aunts. These aunts, jealous of the young woman’s beauty, kidnapped her seven years ago, and she has been serving as apprentice to the youngest. The seven aging hadas have a favorite spell, the transformation of humans into animals, which ranks third behind prophecy and architectural enchantments in frequency of magic types in Cristalián. According to the apprentice, the hadas are able to work their magic ‘por su gran saber (because of their great knowledge’), implying that book learning plays a role in their spellcasting. In each of the seven fairies’ personal homesteads, Cristalián meets characters who have been trapped by the evil women, usually through animal metamorphosis. The first fairy sends man-sized fish (her transformed relatives) to fight him ineffectually with swords, and another fairy has transformed a pair of star-crossed lovers into talking deer. More interesting for the purposes of this book, however, is the test of reading comprehension Cristalián faces at the home of the last fairy. For the final test, the doncella del gavilán herself, disguised with a veil, offers Cristalián a richly decorated book:

Parescio ante el vna Donzella con vn antifaz en el rostro: y ante el cauallero del leon puso vna rica Mesa: y puesta que fue la cubrio de vn paño de oro: y encima del puso vn libro todo guarnido de piedras y perlas de de mucho valor: la donzella le abrio y estaua todo escripto con letras de oro (There appeared before him a damsel with a veil over her face. Before the Knight of the Lion she placed a rich table, which she covered with a golden cloth. On top she placed a book decorated with precious stones and pearls. The damsel opened it for him, and he saw that it was written in letters of gold)  

63 Ibid., 490–91.
The fairy damsel here plays the role of librarian, literary patroness, or muse. The book appears to belong to her, as it is she who presents and handles it. The jewels, pearls, and gold indicate that the book is an item of value, perhaps even magical in some way. Considering the setting, it could even be the volume the seventh *hada* used to teach her niece magic.

The test that involves this book has metafictional overtones. The damsel explains that illusions will taunt Cristalián, and that he must keep reading despite them: ‘Si a qual quiera destas siete cosas por ventura tu alçasses la cabeça dexando de leer en este Libro que ante ti tienes: luego los tus Dias seran fenescidos (If by chance you raise your head on account of any of these seven things, ceasing to read the book that you have before you, your days will then be finished)’. Cristalián must trust in the word of a woman as well as the words on the page. The distractions include a series of chivalric motifs: war, violence against a woman, water, fire, arrows, monsters, and a beautiful damsel asking a favor. They index the masculine business of knighthood, and dealing with these threats would be much more ordinary for a knight than either reading a book or serving an enchantress. The test possibly speaks to the powers of literary illusion, or to the dangers of novelistic distraction. The damsel controls the literary activity: she knows what is in the book and what the distractions will contain. Cristalián must remain passive throughout the episode, even when the chivalric code of conduct would demand action. Even as a reader he is passive; the text does not reveal what the book says by having Cristalián read aloud. In contrast to Danalia’s enchantments, where Cristalián’s education outmatched the enchantress’s arts and showed him how to take action, here a man engages in a relationship to literature that is servile at best. This test, moreover, was not a strictly necessary part of the quest to liberate the Hondos Valles. At its conclusion, the *doncella del gavilán* reveals that the last fairy was already on her deathbed. The *doncella del gavilán*, who had heretofore seemed to be a good enchantress, seems to have improvised the final test for her own reasons. Perhaps she uses the magical book to show Cristalián that she is no longer a victim of her aunts, but if that were the case, why would she threaten Cristalián’s life? Perhaps Bernal means to suggest that the young damsel will someday outmatch her aunts as an evil sorceress. Cristalián has freed the young fairy from her duties, leaving her free to indulge in the corruption that appears to overtake most enchantresses as they age.

A third evil, elderly enchantress, the *sabia* Drumelia, uses books as weapons even more directly than the *doncella del gavilán*. Drumelia, like

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64 Ibid., 491.
Membrina, predicts the future based on what she reads. She learns from her books that Cristalián’s family will cause her pain, and she seeks revenge against them in advance. Drumelia’s library, however, is quite different from Membrina’s. In order to work her power, she uses five libricos (‘small books’) from which she reads spells aloud. This is the only instance in Cristalián that reads like a modern depiction of wizardry; when Drumelia chants, architectural enchantments and animal transformations occur. The fact that Drumelia must read out loud from the books to cast her spells rather than simply learning from them hints that the books have intrinsic powers. They are perhaps even inherently evil and thus the source of Drumelia’s corruption. Roger Chartier comments that medieval and early modern authors often describe the use of magical books in the ‘language of diabolical possession’.65 In this case, Drumelia possesses the books rather than the other way around, but perhaps they have seductive qualities that have drawn her in.

The reader first encounters Drumelia’s magic when Candebia, a lovely young huntress, arrives at court with a sword imbedded in her skull. Candebia declares that the sabia Drumelia has punished her this way for indulging in the vicio (‘vice’) of hunting, and that only the best knight in the world can save her life. This episode thus features the punishment of a younger woman by an older woman on account of her supposed shortcomings. Candebia is a sympathetic character, and she entices several members of Cristalián’s family to follow her out into the wilderness. On the road, an elderly damsel, who will turn out to be Drumelia, appears and offers the party delicious-looking fruit. Upon eating it, they turn into birds.

The whole family, however, has not yet undergone avian metamorphosis, and in order to trap the stragglers, Drumelia takes her magic books on the road:

Dize la hystoria que como aquella reyna & principe & infanta y toda su compañia fueron presos y encantados que lugo ella puso por obra su dañado pensamiento: & tomando cinco libricos pequeños sola en su palaren no lleuando en su compañia sino vn escudero tomo su camino para el imperio de trapisonda
(The story says that once the queen and prince and princess and all their company were imprisoned and enchanted, she then put into practice her evil plan: and taking five small books with her, alone on her palfrey, not

65 Chartier, Author’s Hand, 67.
taking any other company except a squire, she took the road toward the empire of Trebizond).\textsuperscript{66}

One by one, Danalia enchants the rest of the main characters, including Cristalián’s grandparents, his friends at the royal court of Romania, and Cristalián himself. Finally, Drumelia chants an extended spell to build a wall of fire around the Romanian royal family: ‘Anduuo en torno dellos por espacio de tres horas rezando en sus libros & haziendo sus signos & conjuros (She walked around them for three hours praying over her books and making signs and conjurations)’\textsuperscript{67} The reference to fire has a hellish dimension, and this episode suggests that Cristalián’s many architectural enchantments might have been constructed through the out-loud reading of a spell.

Drumelia uses another trick to cause pain to Penamundi. She sends a messenger to Persia to tell Penamundi that Cristalián has died, when in fact he has merely turned into a bird. The messenger girl pretends to be the niece of the enchanter and apocryphal manuscript writer Doroteo, and her message borrows that purported writer’s authority. Drumelia fails to account, however, for Doroteo’s own communication network. Doroteo’s daughter, Belsael, who serves as his representative in many episodes, appears at court and reveals that the previous message was a ruse:

Serenissimo emperador de persia el sabio doroteo mi padre revolviendo sus libros por el su gran saber supo como Drumelia la encantadora vino a la vuestra corte por os hazer saber como el principe don cristalian era muerto (Most serene emperor of Persia, the wise Doroteo my father, upon consulting his books with his great knowledge, found out that Drumelia the enchantress came to your court to tell you that the prince Don Cristalián had died)\textsuperscript{68}

Belsael reveals that Cristalián is enchanted, not dead. Her father, Doroteo, sends yet another message, this time by letter (\textit{pargamino}), to Luzescanio, Cristalián’s still-free younger brother, and provides directions to Monte Despoblada (‘Uninhabited Mountain’), where his relatives are imprisoned. Doroteo has outsmarted Drumelia at the enchanter’s art. His books contain better information than hers do, and his messenger

\textsuperscript{66} Bernal, Cristalián de España, 2014, 634.
\textsuperscript{67} Ibid., 647.
\textsuperscript{68} Ibid., 679.
is more credible. Once again, Bernal suggests that men can beat women at the literary game.

Though Drumelia underestimates the knowledge-based arts of a rival male enchanter, Doroteo is not the root cause of her misfortune. In this episode, Bernal highlights the risks of magic, and perhaps reading itself. The prophecy that inspired Drumelia’s preventative measures proves to be self-fulfilling. Drumelia would never have suffered at Luzescanio’s hands had she not provoked him to ire by attacking every member of his family. As Luzescanio rides toward the castle where his family is imprisoned, Drumelia’s amigo (‘lover’) feels honor-bound to challenge the young knight. The old man is swiftly killed, giving Drumelia in the last act of her story a real reason to hate the family against whom she has committed so many wrongs. In her grief, she returns to her library to search out new magic:

Sabed que ella se fue a su castillo y en el no se detuvo sino solo vn día quanto a gran prissa anduvo mirando sus libros y hallo por su gran saber que el infante luzescanio lleuaua su derecho camino a la montaña despoblada por librar a todos lo que allí encantados estauan: ella procuro de hazer tales encantamentos por donde el infante no pudiesse entrar en la montaña

(Know that she went to her castle and that she did not delay even one day in her hurry to search through her books. She found through her great knowledge that the prince Luzescanio was taking the direct road to the Uninhabited Mountain to liberate all those enchanted therein. She took care to make enchantments that would keep the prince from entering the mountain)69

Once again, Drumelia’s spells fail to achieve their goal. The episode makes clear that the magical arts, especially prophecy, pose a danger to those who practice them. Drumelia had no reason to take revenge against the family; rather, she created the situation in which one of them would cause her pain. Here, Bernal suggests that active uses of the enchantress’s core power can easily turn to evil. Sabias are supposed to know and to influence, not to practice offensive magic. Bernal grants female practitioners of literary magic a certain degree of agency and independence, but when they overstep the boundaries of a female magician’s passive, sponsorial role, grave misfortune is the result.

69 Ibid., 689.
Letter Writers

Bernal’s female letter writers manifest same kind of conditional agency as the female magicians. Letters potentially modeled after those in *Amadís de Gaula* and *Tirant lo Blanch* play a role in two of the love stories of *Cristalíán*, and the intertextual dimensions of the letter episodes suggest that Bernal took great care with the articulation of this trope. The episode shows off Bernal’s perspicacity as a reader of her own genre and her acute awareness of the dangers letter writing, fictional or non-fictional, posed for women. Bernal’s view of the female letter writer remains ambivalent. While the letters allow women a nominal expression of their own desires and perspectives, in one case, the exchange is so formulaic as to be meaningless, and in the other, the male recipient simply ignores the female writer’s request.

In both cases, the letter exchange is two-sided but initiated by men and involves a single pair of letters. The two missives from men recall the tropes of courtly love. Each male correspondent expresses suffering on account of love and asks for a reward. The replies are more interesting, as they offer the reader two different responses to this request, one of which reflects the ideal posture for a courtly lady: pleased acceptance of the knight’s suit. The other expresses only anger and irritation. The writer who acquiesces to the request, aptly named Libida, has little role to play in *Cristalíán* except as a bland object of desire. Penamundi, who turns down the request, presents a more interesting case. I read Penamundi’s anger as a citation of Oriana’s letter to *Amadís*. For me, the refusal by letter is Bernal’s most significant attempt in the volume to lend dimension to Penamundi, who lives an otherwise conventional, circumspect existence within the confines of her royal chambers. The implied command of Penamundi’s letter—‘go away’—hints that the princess attempts to exercise agency through the written word. As with the enchantresses, however, gendered constraints on Penamundi’s behavior and emotional expression ensure that her words will not be obeyed.

Maria Aguilar Perdomo describes Oriana’s letter to Amadís as the origin point for imitations in many other works. Female correspondents echo Oriana’s anger, while men’s responses mirror Amadís’s despair. In Aguilar’s understanding of the motif, women are overcome by unreasonable jealousy, and their response is to demand the exile of their lovers, just as Guinevere and Oriana did.70 The recipients of these letters experience a love-madness

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70 Aguilar Perdomo, ‘La penitencia de amor caballeresca’, 129.
that threatens both their own lives and the well-being of others.\footnote{Ibid., 126.} The narrative situation in which Cristalián and Penamundi write their letters, however, bears only superficial similarity to the conflicts between Lancelot and Guinevere and Amadís and Oriana. Bernal has her heroine write a letter of anger and dismissal to Cristalián even though he has given Penamundi no cause for jealousy. Bernal’s use of Oriana’s angry letter shows her ability to interpret chivalric trope against the grain, creating new meanings from old motifs. Bernal combines citations from Amadís de Gaula, Tirant lo Blanch, and Las sergas de Esplandián, re-inscribing Oriana’s anger into an argument that emphasizes female authority.

Cristalián and Penamundi exchange letters after he frees her from Danalia’s enchantment. At their initial meeting, Cristalián promises to visit again soon, but the adventure with the fairies at the Hondos Valles delays him. Cristalián’s tardiness offends Penamundi, and by the time he returns, she no longer wishes to see him. Penamundi and Cristalián must negotiate his visit by letter because the Persian princess, like Oriana, lives in a sheltered domestic circle comprised of women. Throughout Cristalián, the hero demonstrates a puzzling disinclination to pay a public visit to the emperor’s court, preferring instead to communicate directly with Penamundi. Minerva, Cristalián’s friend and secretaria (‘secret-keeper’), becomes their go-between, facilitating an exchange of gifts and letters.\footnote{Bernal, Cristalián de España, 2014, 519.}

During Cristalián’s first stay at Larenta, Minerva accepts a diamond from Penamundi as a pledge of favor and relays Penamundi’s desire to know Cristalián’s name and parentage. This polite request has an antecedent in the Las sergas de Esplandián. As with Cristalián and Penamundi, Esplandián and Leonorina, his destined bride, do not engage in private conversation until late in the volume. Leonorina requests, via messenger, that Esplandián pay her a visit.\footnote{Rodríguez de Montalvo, Las sergas de Esplandián, 304.} Like Penamundi, Leonorina sends a token as a proof of the message’s authenticity. The messenger in Las sergas de Esplandián is a platonic female companion of the hero, the damsel Carmela; Minerva’s friendship with Cristalián recalls this figure. Esplandián delays his meeting with Leonorina for various reasons, and she expresses her displeasure to Carmela and her anger to her father’s court.\footnote{Ibid., 342, 461.} Leonorina, however, writes no letters; as Montalvo’s exemplar of feminine propriety, she restricts herself to reading. Yet literacy continues to be important, even in the Sergas. Spiller
observes that ‘an act of reading’ unites Leonorina and Esplandián. When the time finally arrives to meet, Esplandián hides himself in a coffer with twin inscriptions in Latin and Greek. Leonorina reads them, understands that Esplandián has hidden himself inside, and has the box moved to her chamber, which finally allows the two to converse.

Cristalíán, like Esplandián, is slow to fulfill the lady’s request and uses intermediaries to communicate. He returns to Larenta still in disguise, having refused to reveal his identity to either the emperor or Penamundi. At this point, the romance enters a phase that recalls the Iberian sentimental novel. Cristalíán writes a letter and first plans to send the note by his squire, which would incur a significant risk of discovery since his squire is well known to the court. Minerva, ‘que muy sesuda era (who was very intelligent)’, suggests that Cristalíán use her as a more secure intermediary. Minerva then addresses an envelope to Sandalia, Penamundi’s lady-in-waiting, and encloses Cristalíán’s letter. Her own squire takes the message to Sandalia, who passes the note to Penamundi.

As in Amadís and Diego de San Pedro’s sentimental novels, the narration remains focalized on the messenger as Penamundi reads the message, and Sandalia reveals to the reader the recipient’s emotions. Penamundi appears to blush: ‘En las señales de su rostro bien entendio la infanta que con la letra no le auia pesado (The princess [Sandalia] understood by the signs of her face that the letter had not troubled her)’. The text of Cristalíán’s letter follows the medieval ars dictaminis structure, with the expected greeting and expressions of courtesy. Its narratio tells of Cristalíán’s gratitude for the favor Penamundi has shown him and declares him to be her servant. There is no specific request, but Cristalíán awaits further instructions: ‘Pues vuestra imperial persona me manda lo que yo dexar de hazer no pudiera andando siempre en el vuestro seruicio (It would be impossible for your imperial majesty to command me to do something that I would not do, as I walk always in your service)’. The erotic content of the letter is implied, not stated; Cristalíán hopes to be asked to perform a task that intensifies his connection to Penamundi. Penamundi’s irritable reply might come as a surprise to a reader unaccustomed to Amadís or to the sentimental tradition in Spain. Though her face seems to reveal positive emotions, Penamundi

75 Spiller, Reading, 115.
76 Bernal, Cristalíán de España, 2014, 521.
77 Ibid., 557.
78 Ibid., 558.
expresses displeasure, annoyance, and even anger once she realizes that Cristalián’s letter failed to answer her request and reveal his true name.

Penamundi’s reply is similar in structure to Oriana’s angry letter. Both writers follow *ars dictaminis*, with minimal *narratio* and a *petitio* that dismisses the recipient. The writers place their accusations in the spot where, according to *ars dictaminis*, the *captatio benevolentiae* or flattering recitation of the hierarchical relationship between sender and receiver should occur. Penamundi writes:

Penamundi princesa de persia a ti el cauallero del leon: tan dichoso en auenturas como esforçado en batallas: salud a tu inuencible persona dessea. estando muy descuydada del cuydado que tu al presente tienes [...] me dieron vna letra tuya y en ninguna Cosa satisfies a mi Desseo: y pues que assi es: yo quiero responder a lo que en ella me escriues.

(Penamundi the princess of Persia writes to you, Knight of the Lion, who are as lucky in your adventures as you are brave in battle. She wishes good health to your invincible person but is quite unconcerned about the concern you have at present [...]. They gave me a letter from you which in no respect satisfies my desire, and since things are thus, I wish to respond to what you wrote to me therein.)

Penamundi’s declaration of herself as *descuydada* or unconcerned over Cristalián’s request occurs in the same point in Oriana’s letter at which the latter names herself as ‘desdichada y menguada de ventura (unhappy and unfortunate)’. Though Penamundi lacks Oriana’s passion, she uses an adjective with a negative connotation. Also like Oriana, she refers to herself in third person, as if to separate herself from her emotions.

Cristalián has committed no real or imagined offense, but as the mere existence of letters from men can compromise women’s reputations in both the chivalric and sentimental traditions, Penamundi’s caution is perhaps justified. Yet the circumspect option would have been to make no written reply at all, following the example of Montalvo’s Leonorina. Certainly, her inclusion of her own name is highly dangerous. Cristalián’s letter implies a request for favor, which is even more dangerous, but Penamundi’s stated reason for refusing is that she does not know Cristalián’s heritage, not that offering her favor would be unchaste. The issue of parentage in this scene recalls *Amadís de Gaula*. Oriana and Amadis do not begin their romantic

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79 Ibid., 561.
relationship until the identity of Amadís's parents has been discovered. When they meet at the window at Lisuarte’s palace in imitation of Guinevere and Lancelot, their first topic of conversation is Amadís’s family. Oriana congratulates him on learning his origins and being received into the family of his father and mother. Amadís then asks Oriana for her favor with the sexually charged word *merced*, which she refuses on account of propriety. Yet, as with Penamundi’s letter, the fact that Oriana entertains the conversation hints that the prospect might not be wholly unappealing.

Penamundi’s written rejection of Cristalián, however, is much stronger than Oriana’s half-hearted rebuff of Amadís during the window scene. Instead, it channels the stronger language of Oriana’s angry letter, provoked by the rumor that Amadís was unfaithful. Like Oriana, Penamundi contrasts past favor with current disapproval:

_A los grandes seruicios que de tu persona tengo rescebidos tuue por bien de hazer te en algo contento. E sey cierto que este me falta y faltara hasta saber si en la genealogia de donde vienes ay merescimiento para que de las mercedes de mi a ti hechas enteramente seas capaz: y no quiero importunar te mas; pues tu voluntad es encubrir te. Tenga te dios con su mano para que tu bien auenturada fama vaya siempre a delante._

(On account of the great services I received from your person I found it appropriate to make you in some ways content. But be clear that I now lack and will always lack this goodwill toward you until I know that you are fully capable of receiving favors from me by virtue of the genealogy from which you come. I do not wish to importune you any further as you wish to hide your origins. Let God take you into his hand so that your fortunate fame may ever increase.)

Penamundi uses the word *merced* here, though Cristalián did not, making her letter a match for the erotic context of Oriana’s letter to Amadís. Though Penamundi praises Cristalián’s reputation, this part of the letter is in fact a rejection, analogous to Oriana’s ‘no parescáis ante mí ni en parte donde yo sea (do not appear before me or in any place that I am)’. Penamundi does not offer Cristalián the chance to respond, just as Oriana commanded her messenger Durín to accept no reply from Amadís.

81 Ibid., I: 383.
82 Bernal, _Cristalián de España_, 2014, 561.
83 Rodríguez de Montalvo, _Amadís de Gaula_, I: 677.
The letter diverges from Oriana's with its conclusion, which expresses a wish for Cristalián's good fortune rather than stating the writer's mortal despair. If Penamundi is truly angry at Cristalián at this moment and not just pretending to be so, the feeling is weak. However, the next scene featuring the two characters gives Penamundi both sufficient provocation for anger and the freedom to express it. As Marín Pina observes, in order to bring the lovers together, Bernal adapts the trope from *Las sergas de Esplandián* in which Esplandián conceals himself inside a carved trunk.84 Bernal echoes this artifice with one important difference: Cristalián secures no permission from Penamundi before having himself transported to her chamber.

Cristalián has recourse to an object similar to Esplandián’s coffer, a hollow, golden statue of a giantess taken from the treasury at the Hondos Valles. The statue was made for observation: there is space for a person to stand or sit inside, and the eyes are transparent. Cristalián has it placed in Penamundi’s bedroom, and when the two are alone, he emerges from the statue and repeats the request of his letter. Penamundi, offended that he would risk her reputation in such a way, responds with anger, forcing him to confess his parentage.85 The next moments distill the emotions present in Oriana’s letter and Amadís’s physical and verbal responses to it. Cristalián kisses Penamundi, angering her further. After Penamundi rejects him, Cristalián tries to kill himself, and Penamundi stops him. While this setup might lead the reader to expect a sexual liaison analogous to those of *Amadís* or perhaps even *Tirant lo Blanch*, Bernal follows the more circumspect model of *Las sergas de Esplandián* in the resolution of the episode. Penamundi talks with Cristalián into the night, but with Minerva’s help, she locks him in her closet (*retrete*) when it is time to sleep. Fortunately, Cristalián also took from the treasury a magical plate and cup that provide food and water, so although he is quite lonely, he does not suffer hunger or thirst.86

Montserrat Piera and Jodi Shearn have suggested that the letter exchange episode and especially Minerva’s role as a messenger recall the nocturnal liaison of Tirant and Carmesina in *Tirant lo Blanch*, which the damsel Plaerdemivida mediated.87 *Tirant* might well have been a secondary model for the letters between Cristalián and Penamundi. In my opinion, Bernal prefers *Amadís* as a model for the composition strategy of the letters, but *Tirant* informs the communicative situation. In *Tirant*, the knight sends and

84 Marín Pina, ‘Beatriz Bernal’, 300.
86 Ibid., 597–98.
receives a letter while residing in the outskirts of the city, and the female letter writer expresses her negative opinion of his behavior. However, the similarities largely end there, as the letters in Tirant do not adhere to *ars dictaminis* or refrain from expressions of sexuality. The letters between Tirant and Carmesina connect the diction of the body to emotion, as those of *Amadís* did, but they employ a lesser degree of circumlocution. If a third party had read Oriana’s letter, they would not know the full extent of the writer’s sexual transgressions, while a person who read Carmesina’s would have little doubt about what had happened in her bedroom.

Tirant’s letter to Carmesina references the episode in which the servant Plaerdemivida helps him invade Carmesina’s bedchamber and grope her during the night. The motif might have been a reference point for Bernal, as Plaerdemivida hides Tirant in a trunk with an opening that permits observation, as the statue of the giantess in Bernal does. However, Plaerdemivida is decidedly a go-between and not a chaperone, and unlike Minerva, she encourages Tirant in behavior that, while it falls short of sexual intercourse, imperils Carmesina’s chastity. Carmesina screams when she discovers a man in her bed, and in the confusion that follows, Tirant jumps out a window and breaks his leg.

The letter exchange occurs during Tirant’s convalescence. The first missive, from Tirant to Carmesina, does not apologize for his bad behavior, but rather expresses satisfaction at the fact that his broken leg has moved his lady to pity.88 Plaerdemivida, naturally, has kept him informed of his lady’s mental state. Carmesina replies to the letter, expressing her displeasure at the liberties Tirant took but rebuking him only gently:

> I feared to take pen in hand, for while writing with friendship, I felt obliged to show my indignation. Though my grief has redoubled, I shall bear it patiently all my life, knowing that such cruelty and love were never seen together. This thought alone forces me to reply: to make you see that your hands, which learned a new trade and pitilessly seized pleasure, now deserve no pardon from the lady you have wronged [...] So great was my distress that I cried out ‘Jesus, Jesus, Jesus!’ thus confessing my grief [...] he who errs deserves no pardon, and your punishment will be such that you will think no more of me, nor I of you.89

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89 Ibid., 390.
The letter is a rejection notice, which brings it into line semantically with Oriana and Penamundi’s letters. However, its composition strategy differs from those letters in two ways. The *ars dictaminis* formulary is not the model for this composition, as there is no salutation or hierarchical language to situate writer and recipient. Carmesina, moreover, is less given to metaphor, circumlocution, or politeness than Oriana or Penamundi. Carmesina mentions ‘hands’, not to represent metaphorically her emotional grief, but in literal reference to the groping she suffered. Moreover, she hints that the ire the letter expresses is feigned: she feels ‘obliged’ to seem angry, and she writes in ‘friendship’.

Another message from Carmesina to Tirant, which occurs long after any veneer of ire at the clumsy groping has faded, reveals that Carmesina is indeed a very different correspondent from Oriana and Penamundi. Carmesina sends the second letter to Tirant while he is out on chivalric errand to tell him that she misses him and to request that he return. Her frank sexual diction would be unthinkable in the world of *Amadís* or *Cristalíán*: ‘I would pace about the room, saying: “Tirant sat here, he held me here, here he kissed me, here we lay together naked [...] may such thoughts ease with your coming, which will end my woes’.

This letter likewise contains no greeting or polite hierarchical language. For me, Penamundi’s letters bear a closer relationship to the *ars dictaminis*-inspired letters of *Amadís*, which express emotion but refer to a messenger for details. When Penamundi and Oriana reference sexual matters, they do so through circumlocution, and they spend most of the letter’s length on hierarchy and the command. Though *Tirant* might well have influenced the global architecture of Cristalíán and Penamundi’s love affair, particularly his illicit sojourn in her chamber, Carmesina does not appear to be Penamundi’s primary correspondence model.

The question remains of why Penamundi would write at all. If she wishes to ignore Cristalíán, the most efficient way would be to do so completely, without sending a note. In my mind, her letter shares with Carmesina’s and Oriana’s its role in asserting her power over the male recipient. This secret communicative goal is much more important to Penamundi than the letter’s actual request, which is weak. Yet unlike Oriana, Penamundi has little power to move Cristalíán by letter. Instead of raving or lamenting his fate, Cristalíán simply devises a way to speak to the princess. Penamundi’s letter has a nearly null effect. The provocation was slight, the reunion between the characters has lower stakes, and the knight is granted his initial request (his lady’s favor), though in a chaste manner. No wars or future monarchs have their origin point in the immediate aftermath of this letter exchange. However, during the
in-person meeting brought on by the letter, Penamundi succeeds in imposing her will on Cristalián. He must accept her boundaries and spend the night in the closet. Though Cristalián ends before the couple can undertake a joint rule, Bernal perhaps hints with the resolution of the letter episode that their relationship is more egalitarian than most pairings on the courtly love model.

Indeed, Penamundi’s relative power over Cristalián becomes more evident when her letter is compared to the only other cited letter from a woman in Cristalián de España, the placid message from Libida to her new admirer Dismael. The character Dismael features in Cristalián’s most salacious plots; he climbs into one damsel’s window and forces her into a sexual relationship, and when she suddenly dies, he transfers his allegiance to Libida. After a brief acquaintance with Libida, Dismael leaves on chivalric adventure, as Cristalián did shortly after he met Penamundi. Dismael writes a rather obsequious letter apologizing for a long absence from his beloved. Instead of replying in anger as Penamundi did, Libida soothes her knight’s feelings:

Libida, reina de Armenia, a ti Dismael de la Roca, Príncipe de Macedonia, salud y victoria contra tus enemigos desea [...] recibo mucho placer en saber que gastas tu tiempo en mi servicio. Yo te ruego tengas por bien, cuando para ello lugar tuvieres, de visitar este reino (Libida, the queen of Armenia, wishes health and victory against your enemies to you, Dismael de la Roca, Prince of Macedonia [...]. I take pleasure in knowing that you spend your time in my service. I pray that you will find it in your heart to visit this kingdom when you have time) 91

Libida and Dismael have little need to communicate, as there appears to be no conflict in their relationship. It is puzzling, indeed, that Bernal should have included letters from them at all, except as a counterpoint for the letters of Cristalián and Penamundi. Through this conventional, dull pair of letters, Bernal shows what correspondence between a man and an acquiescent courtly lady would look like. Libida requests that Dismael visit in polite and contingent terms, and he can feel free to ignore her if he likes. Libida uses the ars dictaminis structure at its most respectful; though Dismael is her knight, she presents herself as his equal or even inferior. This passivity on the part of the lady of courtly love reflects the behavior E. Jane Burns described as the ideal for women in such partnerships in medieval French literature. 92 Penamundi’s letter takes greater risks and is

92 Burns, ‘Courtly Love’, 34.
more forceful in expressing her point of view. Even though her lover does not obey her command, Penamundi nonetheless attempts to use writing to make a decision about her erotic life.

The question remains of whether Bernal ultimately supports the agency of female characters as expressed through the practice of reading and writing. The resolutions of the episodes I have discussed tend to be ambivalent, and, debatably, all reading and writing women in Cristalián experience some measure of punishment for their efforts. Membrina succeeds in promoting the fortunes of Linde del and his family, but once Linde del builds his empire, he neglects his aging patroness. Celina's story ends in a marriage to the partner of her choice, but it is unclear whether she maintains her autonomy within that marriage. The evil sabias reap the punishment poetic justice holds out for them. The sole exception among that group, the lady with the sparrowhawk, will perhaps take an apprentice someday, mistreat her, and learn firsthand the fate of women whose reach exceeds their grasp. Penamundi and Libida succeed, at least in part, in their attempts at communication; Cristalián reveals his name to Penamundi and becomes more frequent in his visits, and Dismael remains dedicated to his bland paramour. Both letter-writing couples are ready to marry at the end of the volume, when an unexpected calamity that is perhaps a saving grace interrupts them.

At the collective wedding ceremony at the end of the volume meant to unite all the characters of the romance in neat pairs, a whirlwind sweeps the characters to a new fairy adventure. Bernal's final deus ex machina denies some characters a long-awaited pleasure but saves others from having to fulfill promises they did not make willingly. For just one example, Cristalián promised Minerva to the Duke of Fonteguerra, her greatest enemy. The apocalyptic ending of Cristalián returns to the double bind that embitters the lives of the work's female practitioners of magic. Women's agency is contingent, and women largely possess it when they are single, either when they are young objects of desire, capable of inspiring a man's obedience, or if they reject the most privileged life path for women—marriage and motherhood—and resign themselves to isolation. The whirlwind refuses to choose between these options for some of Cristalián's major players, infinitely deferring the question of how and whether women can rule their own lives.

Bernal's own story suggests that the question of women's literacy remained fraught with conflict in mid-sixteenth century Valladolid, even for a woman who slipped through many of the cracks in the patriarchal system. Bernal had access to learning and reading, and from a variety of contemporary options, some of which would have been more circumspect,
she chose the romance of chivalry as a vehicle for a narrative that imagines female characters as numerous and important. Bernal combines the most exceptional episodes about women from her reading materials to create a relatively gender-neutral world in which female characters frequently go on adventure. However, she also replicates some of the constraints that ruled the lives of Golden Age women; none of her literate women escape their stories unscathed. Indeed, some of the punishments these women endure are worse than those imagined by Montalvo and other chivalric writers, who attacked female characters more directly with misogynist language.

Bernal’s doubled message, of women’s power and the limits to that power, might well be directed at female readers. In the *proemio*, the author-figure walks through the church in the company of other un-named women. These silent figures might also be the author’s companions throughout her narrative, which she directs in a conversational tone to readers of unspecified gender. The sheer number and variety of Bernal’s female characters suggest that she always has women in mind, and the fact that so many of them read and write hints at a link to the extradiegetic woman reader. If Bernal’s romance is, at least in part, written for women, then it offers them a message of both hope and caution. Women have physical and intellectual strength, but they still must play by a set of rules more constricting than those articulated for men. However, submission to men is not inevitable; it can be infinitely deferred, both by scholarly practice and by fairy magic. Though *Cristalián* is not a work of pure, counter-factual fantasy, it does suggest a form of incremental progress for chivalric women, including chivalry’s women readers.