This book has traced the fates of women characters in chivalric romance along an intertextual pathway that reaches from Amadís de Gaula, a work of the late medieval period, through Don Quixote, Spain’s first modern novel. The letter writers and wise women of Amadís and Cristalián de España indicate that in the first half of the sixteenth century, writing and reading, though controversial activities, provide fictionalized women a means of acting on the world by proxy, thereby circumventing conventional restrictions on their behavior. Cristalián de España, published at the beginning of chivalry’s decline in Spain, shows how one specific female reader, Beatriz Bernal, finds in her chosen genre the blueprints for women’s agency and self-expression. Cervantes, writing at the end of Iberian chivalry’s long, slow fall from prominence, recovers many of these same genre tools through his inscribed women readers. Though in Part II Cervantes guides his literate women away from chivalric romance to genres of more prestige, including lyric poetry and the emergent novel, in the world of Don Quixote, chivalry still has an emancipatory role to play for women, serving as a bridge towards the kinds of creative, transformative intertextual practices that writers of the Renaissance celebrated. Throughout this journey, acts of writing and reading have served as an index for women’s self-awareness and drive to act on their own behalf. Though women’s autonomy in early modern fiction is always conditional, it becomes more possible when women characters perform or write texts. Literate female characters have the potential to resist or to decide, and though they sometimes reaffirm an existing social order, they may also work to transform it.

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1 Montero, Historia del rey transparente, 9.
The link among female characters, acts of writing, and chivalric trope outlives the early modern period in Spain. Chivalric romance has undergone periodic resurgence from the seventeenth to the twenty-first century, and some of the woman-friendly features of the genre persist today, especially in genre fiction from Spain and other countries. For just one example, the Lady of the Lake, who makes a cameo appearance in most of the foregoing chapters, is the landmark literate woman of medieval chivalry, and she continues to surface in works of contemporary high fantasy in many linguistic traditions. The priestess Viviane of Marion Zimmer Bradley’s well-known The Mists of Avalon (1983) shows off an American use of the figure, while Ana María Matute’s stern, grandmotherly Dama del Lago of Olvidado Rey Gudú (Forgotten King Gudu, 1996) offers a contemporary Spanish take. This chapter examines a neo-chivalric novel that features yet another Lady of the Lake, a version of the character that exploits the sorceress’s potential as a product of intertextual crossings. Rosa Montero’s 2005 La historia del rey transparente (The Story of the Transparent King) blends chivalric and historical sources in an exploration of a fictionalized medieval woman’s emergent literacy and agency. Even in 2005, at the outset of a new millennium, a medieval and early modern literary form speaks to an author invested in women’s experience. For Rosa Montero, a female knight’s awakening to literary culture is just as important, and just as emotionally affecting, as her experiences in love and combat. Montero’s Leola does not enjoy a happily ever after, but she does succeed at the twin vocations of arms and letters, rendering invalid for the twenty-first century chivalric motifs that silo men and women into archetypal active and passive roles.

For Montero’s novel of the Middle Ages, historical accuracy is less important than establishing contact between Leola and medieval personalities that embody the modernizing features of the era. Montero’s text might be considered neomedieval, following Humberto Eco’s use of the term, as it fuses research on the period in which the novel is set with original material that reflects the author’s own time period and worldview.² La historia del rey transparente ‘reads’ both the past and the present, and the story of Leola and her twin initiation into the worlds of military action and literacy shows that chivalric romance continues, even after the rise of the modern novel, to offer a viable literary format in which to debate gender politics. Leola, Nyneve, and their Cathar allies ultimately fail to resist the pressures that surround them, and in fact, few of Montero’s characters survive to the end of the volume.

² Eco, Travels in Hyper Reality, 61.
Rather than merely placing a modern woman of modern sensibilities in a medieval setting, Montero uses existing medieval and early modern building blocks, many of them from chivalric romance, to craft her female characters and their stories. The result is a work of fantasy built from historical and fictional relics—a medieval novel that, while historically inaccurate, harmonizes with its setting. While Montero’s novel is more progressive on women’s issues than any of the early modern texts I have discussed, its events are not a radical departure from the possibilities of chivalric fiction. Montero, herself a reader of the genre, reinterprets it for a modern, mixed-gender public. Montero is the last in the chain of women readers of chivalry this book has discussed, and fittingly, she is the one whose literary production illustrates most clearly the intimate tie between the reading of romance, the expression of women’s interior lives, and the creation of fictional worlds in which women are free to maneuver.

Montero’s Feminist Romance of Chivalry

As Sara Fernández Medina observes, Montero hesitates to describe herself as a feminist in interviews, but I join Pilar Nieva and Victoria Rivera-Cordero in noticing Montero’s persistent interest in gender and in the self-actualization of women characters. In her postface to the novel, Montero describes La historia del rey transparente, which sends its protagonists wandering through the courts, debates, and battlefields of twelfth-century France, as a novel of ‘las aventuras y lo fantástico (adventures and the marvelous)’ rather than as a historical novel or as a feminist novel. For me, it is a novel of adventures built on a framework of research in both historical and fictional sources, and the result is more poignant than a strictly historical novel would be, as the author creates coincidences for an artistic purpose. The protagonist, Leola, is a twelfth-century French serf who becomes separated from her father, brother, and fiancé in the aftermath of a battle between local lords. She takes up the armor of a fallen soldier and pretends to be a man in order to keep herself from danger. When she fails in the attempt, the quixotic Pierre (alias San Caballero) rescues her and instructs her in the knight’s altruistic vocation. Leola then partners with Nyneve, an overt figure of the Lady of the Lake, who claims to be a ‘bruja de conocimiento (witch of knowledge)’ and

4 Montero, Historia del rey transparente, 585.
to hail from the magical isle of Avalon. Together the two women become warriors in truth, fighting as mercenaries in a twenty-five-year journey across southern France.

Leola and Nyneve cross paths with several historical figures, including Eleanor of Acquitaine, her daughter Marie de Champagne, writer of Arthurian lais Marie de France, theorist of courtly love Andreus Cappellanus, nun and encyclopedia writer Herrade de Landsberg, and even Héloïse, in the years after her affair with Abelard. Leola reports that chivalric author Chrétien de Troyes, alas, was not with his patron Marie de Champagne at Eleanor’s court at Poitiers, and thus she misses her chance to meet him. The figures Montero collects are roughly from the same century, though their timelines do not intersect as they do in the novel. Montero describes her approach to history as ‘uchronic’, a temporal version of utopian. In Montero’s words, the episodes and personae she selects from medieval French history reflect the ‘protodemocracia y modernidad (protodemocracy and modernity)’ of the Middle Ages which, as Leola and Nyneve find out to their sorrow, would be defeated by the forces of monarchy and Christian hegemony.

My purpose here, however, is not to evaluate La historia del rey transparente’s relationship to history, but rather its argument about women’s literacy, which it develops in part through citations, both direct and indirect, of chivalric romance. Among the sources Montero cites in her postface to the reader, only one is fictional, John Steinbeck’s The Acts of King Arthur and his Noble Knights (1976), based on Sir Thomas Malory’s Le Morte D’Arthur (The Death of Arthur, 1485). Steinbeck’s version of Arthur is an adaptation of an adaptation, a remote echo of the medieval French and English texts Malory reinterpreted for English readers of the fifteenth century. Steinbeck’s adaptation renders Malory in the matter-of-fact language of the mid-twentieth-century United States. The result is an accurate recital of the events from Malory, modernized only in terms of language. Steinbeck buys into the myth of Arthur, and his impact on Montero’s rosy view of Arthurian legend is quite clear. Yet Montero’s novel also owes a hidden debt to Iberian romance and to the ideological project of Amadís de Gaula.

Though Montero does not mention Don Quixote or Amadís de Gaula in her text or in her postface, the description of two characters recalls these early modern works. Pierre or San Caballero (‘Saint Knight’), an elderly

5 Ibid., 61.
6 Ibid., 196.
7 Ibid., 587.
8 Ibid., 586.
gentleman who has left his home to perform deeds of arms on behalf of noble causes, recalls the persona of Don Quixote without the irony or the humor at this character’s expense. The character dies soon after saving Leola from unsavory men on the road, and he and his horse are mummified in a cave that recalls Cervantes’s Cave of Montesinos, where three personae from medieval ballads experience a living death. San Caballero, like Don Quixote during his repast with the goatherds, laments the fallen nature of the world and longs for the return of the Golden Age, which he defines as the age of Arthur. Montero plays the character of Don Quixote in a solemn and serious vein, which is wholly surprising for Spanish literature but in keeping with her project of resurrecting the real and imaginary utopian features of the past.

Montero’s citation of *Amadís* is more direct but also more limited in its scope. She uses the word *endriago* (‘monster’), which traces its etymology to the part-man, part-animal Endriago from Book III of Montalvo’s *Amadís*, to describe the deformed body of a Cathar dwarf woman. Despite the pejorative term, both Montero and her narrator Leola are sympathetic to the many characters in the novel who suffer physical and mental disabilities. For Raúl Diego Rivera Hernández, Leola’s advocacy on behalf of the marginalized reflects the author’s own ideology. In fact, one of the featured entries in Leola’s dictionary, her magnum opus, is compassion, which she has ample opportunity to practice among her coterie of misfit associates. Montero’s one-word citation of *Amadís* might be accidental, chosen for its proverbial quality and not its pedigree in Iberian romance. However, *Amadís de Gaula*, along with *Don Quixote*, might be part of the fabric of Montero’s perception of the Middle Ages, whether or not she is aware of it.

Both *Amadís* and *Don Quixote* have long been a part of Spanish school and university curricula, and indeed, it would be difficult to avoid *Don Quixote*. Montero’s project, moreover, has much in common with *Amadís de Gaula*. Both rewrite the medieval French Arthurian tradition for later eras, though only Montero interpolates chivalric authors Marie de France and Chrétien de Troyes as minor characters. In their general plotlines, the works are Lancelot-influenced coming-of-age stories featuring a young knight of obscure origin and a benevolent female magician who performs a prophetic, scholarly variety of magic. Both are set outside of Spain, in
Britain and France, respectively, and both discuss Iberian phenomena only through analogy and metaphor. While Montalvo’s *Amadís* might be said to celebrate Fernando and Isabel’s conquest of Granada through its battles between Christians and their giant neighbors, Montero’s novel reinterprets that same event in a tragic light through her sympathy with the Cathars. The Catholic Church’s genocidal effort to eradicate the Cathar heresy was termed a crusade, as was the Reconquest. That Montero’s Leola and Nyneve land on the losing side is no accident. Victoria Rivera-Cordero agrees that Montero uses the Cathar heresy as an analogy for conflicts closer to home, though she points to the events of September 11, 2001, the war in Iraq, and the so-called war on terrorism, which was a frequent subject of Montero’s *El País* articles, as the antecedent for Montero’s vision of religious intolerance in France.¹³

**Women Readers and Writers in Montero**

Montero’s medieval novel takes as its main business the reconsideration of gender archetype and renders literacy an index for women’s agency. Myriam Osorio remarks that both of Leola’s occupations are masculine pursuits in the Middle Ages and interprets Leola’s acts of war and acts of writing through Judith Butler’s theory of gender performativity.¹⁴ In a similar vein, Rivera-Cordero views Leola as a deliberate exception to the medieval norm.¹⁵ In partial disagreement with Osorio and Rivera-Cordero, I would remark that each of Leola and Nyneve’s actions has some medieval or early modern precedent. Rather than being modern women in a medieval world, they are aggregates of the transgressive women, fictional and real, of the past.

Leola, the mercenary and scholar, is an update on the women warriors of the chivalric tradition, including Bernal’s Minerva, Ariosto’s Bradamante, and Spenser’s Britomart. In her rough-and-tumble military life, in which her ambiguous gender presentation attracts both men and women, she also bears some resemblance to the historical Catalina de Erauso (1592–1650). This female soldier, nicknamed the Lieutenant Nun, participated in Spanish campaigns in Perú and Chile and wrote a memoir about her experiences as a means of apology for her crimes against gender roles.¹⁶ Leola shares

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¹³ Rivera-Cordero, “El mundo fue un milagro”, 123.
¹⁴ Osorio, ‘Sexo y género’, no pagination; Butler, ‘Performative Acts and Gender Constitution’.
¹⁵ Rivera-Cordero, “El mundo fue un milagro”, 120.
¹⁶ Erauso, *Lieutenant Nun*. 

her cross-dressing and her zest for fighting with these medieval and early modern women. Her initial quest, moreover, suggests another link to the fictionalized girl warriors of chivalric romance. Leola leaves home to search for Jacques, her peasant betrothed, and the story does not end until she finds him, long after she has stopped looking.

It is not love or the search for a man, however, that structures Leola’s life, as in the case of Bradamante, Britomart, and even Cervantes’s Dorotea. Rather, like Bernal’s Minerva, Leola appreciates her freedom for its own sake and undertakes many kinds of aventures. As a young woman, Leola works as a mercenary because she enjoys fighting, and as she ages, she transitions to a more contemplative life. Montero’s representation of Leola’s scholarly vocation owes a debt to the wise women of chivalric romance. Leola begins by learning the alphabet under Nyneve’s tutelage and then becomes a fond reader, first of secular texts, and then of works of theology and philosophy. Upon settling in progressive, Cathar-controlled Albi, she begins teaching children to read and write. Then, inspired by Herrade de Landsberg, she begins to collect words for a highly personal dictionary, one that offers essays on the meanings and uses of words that have become important to her life. While a dictionary might sound detached and quasi-scientific, Leola’s version of the genre is an emotional work, a companion volume for her first-person narration.

Indeed, the novel reads like an autobiography, its structure not so different from that of the narrative Catalina de Erauso wrote under papal command. At each stage in her development, Leola pays attention to emotion, both to her own feelings and those of others. While female characters in the chivalric narratives discussed in this book use writing to express their point of view, including their emotions, Leola uses writing to explain how the acts of writing and studying make her feel. As she first experiences formal schooling under Cathar tutelage at Albi, Leola says to the reader: ‘Lo que yo ahora deseo es aprender, alcanzar cierta sabiduría, elevar mi alma […] Estudio retórica, gramática, teología y lógica (What I desire now is to learn, to achieve a certain level of knowledge, to elevate my soul)’.

One page later, she informs the reader that her position at school has led to a job as a teacher of young boys of the mercantile class: ‘Me gusta este trabajo, disfruto dibujando mi versión del mundo en las cabezas de los niños […] Creo que sería feliz aquí, en mi palacio de sueños y pintura, […] si no fuera por el fragor cada vez más cercano de la guerra’.

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17 Whitenack, ‘Emphasis Added’, 32.
18 Montero, Historia del rey transparente, 329.
enjoy drawing my version of the world in the minds of children [...]. I think I would be happy here, in my palace of dreams and paint, [...] if it were not for the clamor of war that approaches ever closer). Leola's descriptions of life in Albi are marked by scholarly pursuits and by emotion, signaled by the words deseo, disfruto, and feliz. These are the emotions one might expect to find in a chivalric love affair; Montero applies them instead to a woman's achievements in scholarship.

Leola is not content, however, to study passively and to teach the basics of literacy to children. After she meets two women writers, Herrade de Landsberg and Héloïse, during a visit to a convent, Leola decides to write a dictionary. She formulates her project in direct imitation of Herrade's encyclopedic Hortus Deliciarum (Garden of Delights): 'Su pasión por el conocimiento es contagiosa: de repente yo también he tenido la extravagante idea de hacer algún día una enciclopedia, pero escrita en lenguaje popular (Her passion for knowledge is contagious: suddenly I have also had the extravagant idea to make an encyclopedia one day, written in the common language). Again, Leola uses the language of emotion, describing Herrade's pasión. Montero presents here a version of the emotional contamination moralists like Vives attributed to women's literary practices, but in this case, the process is a virtuous one. Leola's choice to imitate Herrade after leafing through Hortus Deliciarum recapitulates the relationship between readership and authorship apparent in other chapters of this book. Leola adapts Herrade's format in a way that makes sense for her life and scholarly process, embracing the vulgar language as a vehicle for the transmission of knowledge, as Bernal did in her proemio. Montero follows the pattern set by other chivalric works in representing narrative authority as something borrowed from intertexts, a transference from past to present via the written word. Here, Leola also begins to resemble the author who wrote the book in which she appears; Montero's postface describes how she found inspiration in historical and chivalric texts, and Leola encounters a similar creative spark through contact with Herrade.

Leola's dictionary also serves to articulate Montero's awareness of the dangers writing poses to a medieval woman. All the words Leola presents to the reader have to do with emotion, and most of the definitions reflect frustration, anxiety, and dread, even if the word being defined usually has a positive connotation. Leola's first definition is esperanza ('hope'), which she describes as a 'pequeña luz que se enciende en la oscuridad del miedo

19 Ibid., 330.
20 Ibid., 405–406.
y la derrota (small light that burns in the darkness of fear and defeat)’. Leola also defines hope, for herself and perhaps for other women, as the act of writing: ‘He empezado a coleccionar palabras para la enciclopedia que quizá algún día escribiré. Lo cual es, en sí mismo, un perfecto ejemplo de esperanza (I have begun to collect words for the encyclopedia which perhaps one day I will write. Which is, in itself, a perfect example of hope)’. Other prominent entries, sorrow (pesadumbre) and compassion, describe responses to suffering, either Leola’s own or that of others. Leola’s dictionary, in fact, mostly serves to explain the character’s emotions to the reader, and it tracks the slow defeat of the Cathars and the end of Leola’s independence. The dictionary is less a writing project meant for public consumption than an exploration of interior psychology. In a novel that contains much action, narrated by a woman less outwardly sentimental than Oriana, Luscinda, or even Altisidora, this sort of dictionary might surprise the reader. However, it reveals Montero’s understanding of her chivalric and historical source texts as genres in which women’s emotional lives are important and should be explored through writing. The dictionary also marks the limits of literacy’s emancipatory potential for the medieval woman. It will never be finished, as Leola’s enemies find her too quickly, and it has no inscribed readers within the volume.

Indeed, as Montero’s novel draws to a close, male-dominated social structures conspire to silence all women. Leola wonders from time to time if she will be burned for heresy for cross-dressing or for associating with Cathars, and everywhere the titular story of the Transparent King haunts her. This fable brings disaster to all those who hear or recite it, and Montero reveals it to the reader piece by piece, including the fullest version only in an appendix. Even this text is not complete; perhaps Montero wishes to save her reader from the calamity that follows any time a person reaches the end of the story. The fable, moreover, reveals itself in Montero’s appendix to be about language as a form of resistance. The Transparent King of the title, who, as Rivera-Cordero points out, is known for suppressing his critics, faces a dragon and must answer a riddle: ‘Cuando tú me nombras, ya no estoy (When you name me, I am no longer there)’. The answer to this riddle is silence, and Montero signifies it in the text by cutting off mid-sentence and ending the book with a blank page. The work’s open ending, which requires the reader to supply the answer, resists literary convention, just as

21 Ibid., 416.
22 Ibid.
23 Ibid., 581; Rivera-Cordero, “El mundo fue un milagro”, 123.
Leola resisted the strictures of her society through her writing. Leola never hears the full riddle, but her ignorance does not save her from defeat. As the forces of the Catholic Church close in on her, she lives the riddle's worst consequences, and her death ensures her silence.

The riddle has a second, more optimistic function, however, as its cooperative nature draws Montero and her extradiegetic reader into a partnership that parallels in some measure the extraordinary female friendship that provides much of the joy in the novel. Leola's literary activities and, indeed, the frequent discussion of literature and writing in Montero's novel, owe much to Nyneve, a figure of the wise woman who resembles the chivalric sorceresses depicted in this book. Montero's Nyneve is a hybrid figure, inspired by Malory and Steinbeck's character by the same name, the Lady of the Lake, and, humorously, Sancho Panza. Montero introduces Nyneve in a sylvan setting that seems alive with magic. Caught in the branches of a tree like the *infantina* ('little princess') of the medieval Spanish ballad, she asks Leola to free her. Nyneve claims that the Vieja de la Fuente ('Old Lady of the Fountain') trapped her with magic, but the crone, waiting nearby, claims that Nyneve has merely ensnared herself while climbing. Later, Nyneve impresses a group of townspeople by seeming to read their minds; she refuses to tell a wide-eyed Leola whether she has performed an act of divination or whether she has a local informant in her employ. Nyneve's magic, which she alternately affirms and disavows, remains a point of ambiguity throughout the book.

Nyneve, like the Lady of the Lake, takes charge of her protégée's initiation into the life of a knight. She adopts the guise of Nyne, squire to Leola, and her stocky figure, comical appearance, and common-sense advice recall Sancho Panza. Nyneve guides Leola to a master swordsman, named Roland in yet another echo of chivalric romance, who teaches her to overcome the inherent challenges of fighting against men. Leola learns to use her speed and lightness to her advantage, and when she is ready, Nyneve takes her to her first tournament and provides advice on managing her equipment and reading her opponents. After the tournament, Leola becomes more independent from Nyneve, but the two maintain their companionship, setting up household after household together. In masculine dress, Nyneve fights alongside Leola, and in feminine dress, she serves Leola and her rotating household as a healer, in further connection to the Lady of the Lake. As they put down roots in Cathar territory, Nyneve begins painting murals of Avalon, her alleged homeland, on the wall of every dwelling, a humble
ekphrasis that recalls the more ornate decorations characters encounter in the palaces of chivalric romance.

Nyneve’s paintings offer a visual counterpoint for Leola’s dictionary. Like Leola’s definitions, Nyneve’s visions of her real or imaginary island draw specifically on the emotions. When she creates the first one at Albi, Nyneve remarks to Leola: ‘¿No percibes su fuerza? La mera contemplación de esta pintura produce calma y gozo (Can you not perceive its strength? The mere contemplation of this painting produces calm and delight)’.25 Leola agrees: ‘Los trampantojos de Nyneve me endulzan el ánimo (Nyneve’s illusions sweeten my mood)’.26 Yet, as with the dictionary, the emotions Nyneve paints slide into despair. Her final painting of Avalon, created in the tower where both women die, reflects her view of the world as an ‘isla de infelicidad (island of unhappiness)’ in which she is trapped, separated from the infinite *gozo* (‘delight’) of Avalon.27 Nyneve’s paintings offer what William Reddy terms an ‘emotional refuge’, a ritual of resistance against social and emotional norms.28 However, as with other escape valves, the paintings are at best a temporary bulwark against disaster.

Nyneve’s Avalon, real or imagined, is also key to understanding this character as a product of intertextuality. Nyneve claims to be immortal and to know Arthur, Guinevere, Lancelot, and Gawain personally.29 As with Nyneve’s magic, Montero maintains a studied ambiguity over Nyneve’s true nature. It is plausible that the character is, indeed, an Arthurian persona, but doubt creeps in early in the novel, when Nyneve teaches Leola to read with Wace’s twelfth-century *Roman de Brut*. The references to chivalric reading suggest perhaps that Nyneve knows Arthur and his knights only through their representations in books.30 Nyneve explains to Leola, however, that she and Viviana, the Lady of the Lake, are one and the same, and that she has been falsely accused of deceiving and entrapping Merlin.31 Leola at first accepts this account at face value, but years later, she begins to doubt her friend, reasoning that Nyneve might have fashioned her biography in this way to wield greater influence over her naive protegée.

Nyneve is a product of reading, both intradiegetic and extradiegetic. Montero has clearly shaped her in consultation with sources, and Nyneve has

25 Ibid., 328.
26 Ibid.
27 Ibid., 560.
30 Ibid., 70.
31 Ibid., 106.
quite possibly remade herself through her own reading. Nyneve and Leola are both inscribed readers of the Arthurian tradition, though not of Montero’s precise source, as it is much more modern than the twelfth-century setting of the novel. Montero’s Arthurian references draw on Steinbeck’s *The Acts of Arthur*, and to understand Nyneve, it will be useful to examine Steinbeck’s use of the character by that name. In Steinbeck’s retelling of Malory, the Lady of the Lake and Nyneve are distinct characters. Nyneve is a damsel of the Lady of the Lake who uses Merlin for his magical teachings and then seals him into a cave for all eternity. She repents of her actions as she grows older, and her final mention in the Steinbeck novel has her consoling Sir Pelleas—magically—for his unrequited love and then spending the rest of her life at his side. Steinbeck’s Nyneve is a decidedly minor character who embodies many of the negative aspects of chivalric women’s reputation. She is deceptive, superficial, cruel, and initially indifferent to the suffering of others. She does earn a degree of redemption through her love for Sir Pelleas, which Steinbeck does not develop in detail.

Montero reforms Steinbeck’s figure, making her both more emotionally compelling and more tragic. Montero does not choose a rosy, heteronormative finale for her Lady of the Lake. While Leola adds compassion and happiness to her dictionary, Nyneve creates what she terms a magic potion to transport her to the Avalon she has painted in her last mural. Leola, still undecided as to whether Nyneve is a true enchantress, tries in vain to stop Nyneve from ending her life. Nyneve takes the potion, and a grief-stricken Leola places Nyneve’s inert body, which she calls a cáscara (‘shell’) or espejismo (‘illusion’) into the river, hoping that it will thereby reach Avalon. The burial by water recalls, perhaps by accident, Elisena and Darioleta’s placement of the infant Amadís in the ark in the early chapters of *Amadís de Gaula*. Leola’s final act is to take the rest of the potion for herself, and the last lines of Leola’s narration trace her imaginary transportation into the painting, where she believes she sees a young, smiling Nyneve. For Rivera-Cordero, Avalon ‘symbolizes a utopia for women as well as the place of survival and creation’. Avalon is, after all, where the Lady of the Lake takes the mortally wounded Arthur after Salisbury. It bears remembering, however, that Arthur does not enjoy eternal life in Avalon, but rather a state of stasis that resembles death more than life.

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33 Ibid., 151–52.
35 Rivera-Cordero, “El mundo fue un milagro”, 125.
Though some critics, including Rivera Hernández, affirm the reality of Nyneve's magic, I prefer to view Nyneve as a verisimilar though exceptional woman and Avalon as a metaphor. If Nyneve’s and Leola’s lives do end in a suicide pact, there is ample literary precedent. The tragedy of the novel’s end recalls Tristan and Iseult, the primitive Amadís, and Ovid’s ‘Pyramus and Thisbe’, with one major difference: the two people who cannot live without each other are women, not entangled romantically but rather close friends and co-conspirators in a cultural rebellion. The image of female cooperation unto death, for me, cements the novel's feminism. Though Leola and Nyneve do not survive the siege of their tower, they never come under the dominion of men or Christian hegemony.

Leola, moreover, understands her life to have been a success and not a failure. As she reminds herself in the last chapter, her journey as a knight and a scholar has taken her far from her peasant origins, and she has lived a life more in accordance with her wishes and talents than she could have otherwise hoped to do. Montero’s La historia del rey transparente expands upon the promises Amadís de Gaula and other romances of chivalry made to female readers—granting female characters self-sufficiency and self-actualization through both literacy and public life. Perhaps Cervantes’s Dorotea would have enjoyed going into the mercenary business, or perhaps Oriana might have excelled at teaching children to read, had they been part of Montero’s romance world. Rosa Montero, whether or not her work references Amadís in any concrete way, shows that the tropes of chivalric romance can still, in the twenty-first century, provide a vehicle for narratives about the intellectual and physical emancipation of women. Perhaps Amadís’s final afterlife is to disappear into the tapestry of the neomedieval, its shadowy presence a reminder that chivalric romance has not just recently become allied with feminism; the building blocks for feminist readings of chivalry were always there.

**Chivalry is Dead, Long Live Chivalry**

Throughout this book, Amadís has served as the emblem of the durability of chivalric fiction, whether in the form of citation, imitation, or distant literary memory. The primitive Amadís has no clear origin, and the literary relevance of Montalvo’s Amadís de Gaula has no clear end. Amadís has been

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37 Montero, Historia del rey transparente, 568.
rewritten for many purposes in many cultural moments, not all of which have been chronicled in these pages. In the Spain of the Catholic Kings, Amadís celebrated the spirit of an emerging nation and the values of its aristocracy. Importantly for this book, Amadís showed its early Castilian readers that women could use reading and writing to circumvent traditional restrictions on their behavior. For Beatriz Bernal, Amadís became an authority she could appropriate and use as a mask for her own narrative voice. For Cervantes, Amadís spoke to the past, but also to the future, primarily through the story it could tell about how readers reacted to the democratizing forces of print.

As this book has shown, women are key to the afterlives of Amadís and other early modern romances. Women were part of the readership for Amadís from the time of its first circulation, and as Bernal and Montero illustrate, the romance of chivalry became a genre in which women could write their own imaginary pasts, presents, and futures. Though men, of course, could see visions of their ideal selves in romances of chivalry, this book has suggested that there is a link between the inscribed female readers of chivalry—the literate women depicted within the texts—and the real readers in the world outside who responded to their activities. Amadís de Gaula and the works that draw inspiration from it embolden literate women, showing them that they are as much a part of the audience for fiction as men. Even the most recent visions of chivalric romance, like Rosa Montero’s, dramatize the struggle between men and women over narrative authority. Yet there are few enduring victories, even in neomedieval novels, for chivalry’s female characters. While chivalric romance offers a format for the development the authorial powers of women, both within the narratives and outside them, it also serves as a reminder that there is distance left to travel, whether in the early modern world or ours.