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It's a Good Life, If You're Free from Sin: The Moral and Political Sense of Chivalry in Medieval Castile²

La vida es buena, si eres libre de pecado:
El sentido moral y político de la caballería en la Castilla medieval

Abstract:

This article explores the manner in which the virtues and vices play a part in the representation of the social order in the work of Don Juan Manuel, with a particular emphasis on the *Libro del cavallero et del escudero*, and in reference to the configuration of chivalry in Alfonso X's *Siete partidas* (2P, Title XXI) and Ramon Llull's *Llibre de l'orde de cavalleria*. I discuss how Don Juan Manuel's representation of knighthood and chivalry differs from that of his predecessors, the moral and ethical notions inherent therein, and its relation to conceptions of social order. The discussion concerns the motivations and aims of these diverging conceptions of chivalry and how they are legitimated and justified.

Keywords:

Chivalric ethos; Medieval Social Order; Don Juan Manuel.

Resumen:

Este artículo explora la forma en que los pecados participan en la representación del orden social en la obra de Don Juan Manuel, con un énfasis particular sobre el *Libro del Caballero et del Escudero*, y también en la configuración de la caballería en las *Siete Partidas* de Alfonso el Sabio (Segunda partida, Título XXI) y el *Llibre de l'orde de cavalleria* de Ramon Llull. En este artículo, mi objetivo es entender como la representación del caballero y de la caballería en Don Juan Manuel es diferente a la de sus antecesores, en el sentido de la moral y de la noción ética que es inherente, y cómo esta nueva visión se relaciona con el orden social. El análisis se refiere a los motivos y objetivos de estas concepciones diferentes de la caballería, y cómo los mismos son legitimados y justificados.

Palabras claves:

Ética de la caballería; orden social medieval; don Juan Manuel.

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“El vivir qu'es perdurable
 no se gana con estados
 mundanales,
 ni con vida delectable,
 donde moran los pecados
 infernales;
 mas los buenos religiosos
 gánanlo con oraciones
 e con lloros;
 los caballeros famosos
 con trabajos e aflicciones
 contra moros.”

Jorge Manrique, *Coplas a la muerte de su padre* (c. 1476)³

1. Introduction: Treatises on chivalry in thirteenth-century Iberia

The Iberian thirteenth century witnessed the production of two major texts on chivalry (Martín & Serrano-Piedescas, 1991: 162): the Majorcan philosopher Ramon Llull's (c. 1232-1315) treatise, *Llibre de l'orde de cavalleria* (*Book of the Order of Chivalry*, c. 1274-76), and Title XXI of the second part of the Castilian King Alfonso X's law code *Las siete partidas* (c. 1260). Both of these texts had a great impact on the way chivalry was understood in medieval Iberia and Europe, and on the way future treatises on the subject were crafted –in the latter regard the work of Llull became immensely influential. They have also both received much scholarly attention, Llull in the field of studies on chivalry and knighthood in the European Middle Ages, the *Siete partidas* in Spanish historiography as one of the most fundamental sources for medieval Castilian social life and mores.

A less well-studied exponent of the genre⁴ is the *Libro del cauallero et del escudero* (“Book of the Knight and the Squire”), written by the Castilian magnate Don Juan Manuel (1282-1348) between 1326 and 1328. This work belongs to an early period in his literary career, but marks the beginning of a strong didactic vein in his writings, which came to the fore and dominated his major books, the *Libro de los estados* (*Book of the Estates*, 1330) and the *Libro del conde Lucanor* (*Book of the Count*

³ Jorge Manrique, 1983: 65.

⁴ One might argue that these texts are connected thematically rather than generically, since they can be said to belong to different genres, but they are nevertheless all treatises on chivalry and knighthood.

Lucanor, 1335), widely considered among the masterworks of medieval Castilian prose.

Juan Manuel's treatise was certainly influenced by, if not in complete accordance with, the earlier works by Lull and Alfonso X.⁵ The former was an obligatory reference, while the latter was a close relative of Don Juan Manuel's, one whose historiographical enterprises had stood model to the earliest of the nobleman's own literary achievements, namely the *Crónica abreviada*, and probably his lost *Libro de la cavalleria*, which appears to have been mainly a summary of Title XXI of the *Segunda partida* (Taylor, 1984; Rodríguez-Velasco, 1997: 1337). Critics often mention Juan Manuel's dependence upon those earlier works, while they have far too rarely intended to understand the particular conception of knighthood and chivalry present in the *Libro del cauallero et del escudero*.⁶

This article aims to explore the manner in which the vices and virtues, sins and transgressions play a part in the representation of the social order in the work of Don Juan Manuel, with a particular emphasis put upon the *Libro del cauallero et del escudero*, and in reference to the above mentioned earlier exponents of writing on chivalry and knighthood in medieval Iberia. I will approach the topic by a few specific questions: how does Don Juan Manuel's representation of knighthood and chivalry differ from his predecessors? What is the role of sin and vice in his work, and how does that relate to moral or ethical notions and to conceptions of social order? And lastly, by which means and to what ends are these conceptions of chivalry legitimated and justified?

Theoretically, I am informed by the conviction that these discursive configurations and conceptions were a way not only of commenting upon the social order, but of influencing and changing the social world (Fairclough, 1992). The agents involved were powerful historical agents with political, social, cultural, and economic capital. This process of social change was carried out through discursive constructions of a moralizing character.

2. Chivalry and morality

⁵ Deyermond, 1971: 244 also mentions the *Lucidario* as a notable influence. See also Haro Cortés, 1995.

⁶ Rodríguez-Velasco, 1997: 1337 makes for an interesting, however brief, exception.

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What was chivalry? Scholars disagree on the answer to that question. One meaning is close to knighthood, but might imply either an order or, more vastly, an estate, a social group.⁷ For some, chivalry was a cluster of ideas, notions and ideals that the social and political elite in Western European medieval societies adopted in the eleventh and twelfth centuries to legitimate their dominant position and protect the exclusivity of their rank; a chivalric code, or ethos, if you will. It helped define the nobility in opposition to commoners (Keen, 1984: 1-6). For others, writing on chivalry and the ideas contained therein was mostly a religious or clerical initiative to stifle the violent and destructive tendencies that threatened societal peace and harmony. Others have raised similar propositions, but seen the monarchy as the main instigator of such reform. Of course, chivalry is all of these things, but to different degrees according to which context we study, and as historians we will reach different conclusions depending on what source material we use.

It is exceedingly important, I think, to begin with the assumption that chivalry was a multi-faceted cluster of ideas and notions, which people tried to reinvent and reconstruct according to differing principles and political ambitions. It was part of an ongoing discursive struggle that lasted all through the medieval period, subject to legal stipulations, theoretical and philosophical debate and criticism, as well as didactic writings produced in various social contexts.

American scholar Richard Kaeuper –whose work has partly been aimed at revealing the reality behind the ideals, the dark and violent side of chivalry and knighthood– suggested a simple triadic relationship between *clergie*, *royauté*, and *chevalerie* to represent the focal points of power and authority in medieval society; all of which correspond to a particular stance on the question of social order (Kaeuper, 1999: 36-67). In a way, the three main texts analysed in this article, the works of Ramon Llull, Alfonso X, and Don Juan Manuel, could be seen as representatives of these different forces at hand, though that point is debatable.

If the knighthood consisted of nobles –and the nobility in and of itself is virtuous from birth, which many medieval thinkers argued– how is it that so many writers of the day saw the need to strive towards the reform of the knightly class? Some scholars have underlined the moral perspective in the study of medieval chivalry, which is also in question in this paper. According to José Ángel Agejas, Llull's book, as well as the relevant legal text of Alfonso X the Learned, were part of a construction of chivalry as a moral project. In his essay on Garci-Rodríguez de Montalvo's *Amadís de Gaula* (published 1508), Agejas traces the conception of moral chivalry back to a more distant historical context, the thirteenth century and the books of chivalry of the High Middle Ages. He underscores the particularity of the

⁷ A classic account of chivalry as a code and a social group (knighthood), which came to earn legal status and become hereditary, can be found in Bloch, 1962: 312-321.

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Spanish case,⁸ an attitude that automatically defies attempts at comparison and to which I am myself highly skeptical.⁹ Agejas also argues that the chivalric ideal lasted longer in Spain than elsewhere, since the Catholic Monarchs restructured the institutions of power in a way that maintained feudal principles to a high degree (2009: 72). He points both to the *Reconquista* and to the fact that in Castile non-noble knights, the so-called *caballeros villanos*, were an important group, as factors that make the Spanish case different; the institution of knighthood was understood and lived in a particular manner, according to Agejas (2009: 73). The social reality of knighthood in Castile, which was interpreted differently by Alfonso X and Don Juan Manuel, is a point to which we will be returning below.

In comparison with the heroes of classical Antiquity –Ulysses, Aeneas– the medieval Christian knight is alike and yet unlike. Although sharing many of the ideal virtues and functions, the knight has a different outlook; he places his confidence in the good, in the ability to defeat evil, because he works under the Grace of God. He is defender of a new social and moral order, civil and religious (Agejas, 2009: 74). But the conceptualization of the virtuous aspirations and character of chivalry differs in emphasis among the different theorists of chivalry in the Iberian Middle Ages.

3. Ramon Llull and chivalric reform

Scholars who have examined the phenomenon of chivalry in medieval Europe have to different degrees stressed the importance of writings on the subjects as a way to reform the knightly class and its behavioural patterns. Richard Kaeuper, author of two monographs on the subject, discussed this theme both in *Chivalry and Violence in Medieval Europe* (1999) and in *Holy Warriors* (2009). He has underlined the fact that the communication was not one-sided. Though it is difficult to ascertain to what extent knights took note of the theological and philosophical debates and calls for reform voiced by the clergy, there is evidence that suggests that they were aware of them. And though clerics were often not pleased with the reception of their ideas

⁸ In spite of the fact that he is nevertheless conscious that the Castilian literary production was part of a wider European Arthurian tradition (treating the *matière de Bretagne*); see e.g. Agejas, 2009: 70.

⁹ In my opinion, the isolated analysis of Peninsular literary and historical documents in their own milieu without reference to a wider European cultural context is a modern construction that pervades much academic research and hinders some possibly very fruitful avenues of research. We must begin to consider how very interconnected medieval Europeans were, and that comparisons and *histoires croisée* are needed to break new ground in many research fields related to medieval Iberian texts and societies.

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or the level of internalisation of them on the side of the knights, they were sometimes influenced ideologically by members of the knighthood (Kaeuper, 1999: 84-88). Neither should we forget that from within the orders of knighthood there were calls for self-reform. Apparently, at least some knights had a conception of ideal chivalry that they propagated, and there is reason to believe that the ones who engaged with the topic in writing had their own views of which virtues to defend and which vices to attack, based on personal experience (Kaeuper, 1999: 273).

Ramon Llull had personal experience as a knight and secular courtier before becoming involved in religious preaching and conversion (Maíz Chacon, 2005). His autobiography and experiences of worldly sins work as a background to his literary and philosophical activities, which entails a knowledge of the particular audience he aimed his works at, since he used to be part of it (Fallows, 2013:1). The deciding factor that drove Llull and persuaded him of the necessity to write a book on the Order of Chivalry was that he deemed that the knighthood had lost its ideals and good values, and was engaged in conduct and behaviour that led them to worldly sins (Zierer & Messias, 2013: 131). Of course, he was convinced that the moral message –the ethical and spiritual values– he presented had the power to influence people through the diffusion of his writings (Zierer & Messias, 2013: 132-133).

Llull devotes some pages of his *Llibre* to the explication of the mortal sins (Costa, 2004; Costa, 2005).¹⁰ One of the primary objectives of his *Arte*, his all-encompassing conception of thought, was for man to strive towards the attainment of virtues and reject vices (Werneck Nunes & Costa, 2005: 181). His book presents a moral requirement first and foremost in the examination of the prospective knight (Agejas, 2009: 81). Thus, he who wishes to join the Order of Chivalry should be of the right stock (Llull, 2013: 56-61); and this in turn leads Llull to his insistence on lineage as a prerequisite (58). This was also the case since the ideal transmission of the chivalric values was from father to son, from knight to knight (Zierer & Messias, 2013: 137). Werneck Nunes and da Costa point out that when Llull composed his *Llibre*, the knighthood was already a firmly structured social order, associated with hereditary nobility (2005: 190).

The chivalric ethos in Llull's approach is however above all a Christian ideal, similar to the conceptions of Don Juan Manuel, which we will see below. It is directed not only to the reform of conduct in order to protect the social order, but also in order to lead the knights to the salvation of their souls (Zierer & Messias, 2013: 131). Llull emphasised the need for knights and clerics to uphold friendly relationships, since they are the two most honourable offices, and the obligation of the former to be obedient towards the latter (Werneck Nunes & Costa, 2005: 189).

¹⁰ Pardo Pastor 2001 examines the sin of lust in the works of Ramon Llull, seeking its counterparts and origins in books of chivalry and the quest for the divine, as well as the oriental (Indian and Arabic) roots.

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Ricardo da Costa has expounded on Lull's writings in a number of articles, some of them focused on the *Llibre de l'orde de cavalleria* (e.g. Costa, 1997). He characterises Lull's ethics as Aristotelian, a system based on the antithetical relationship between virtues and vices, privileging the virtues (Costa 2001). The knowledge of the moral virtues was in Lull's view necessary for the moral comportment of any Christian, and according to da Costa (2004), the Majorcan philosopher also saw in the awareness and comprehension of the polar opposites of virtues and vices the basis for any harmonious societal existence.

4. Alfonso X and social control

One of the foremost scholars of medieval Castilian chivalry and knighthood, Jesús Rodríguez-Velasco, has proposed a periodisation of ideas of chivalry in Castile, wherein he characterises the period 1250-1350 as a phase of definition (1997: 1335; Rodríguez Velasco, 2006). This phase can itself be divided into two distinct periods, beginning with the foundation, between the years 1250-1325, which includes the legal interventions of Alfonso X in his *Fuero Real*, *Espéculo* and *Siete partidas*, and concluding with a period of corrections, in 1325-1350, which closes through the composition of Don Juan Manuel's *Libro de los estados*, in which he presents a new conception of knighthood, apparently at odds with the *Segunda partida* (Rodríguez-Velasco, 1997: 1335-1338).

In his book *Order and Chivalry*, he characterizes the appearance of a chivalric class in medieval Castile in the following manner, highlighting not only the distorted chronology of Castilian chivalry, but also its particular relationship to the monarchy, as the creation of knights functioned as a royal prerogative:

“Medieval Castile is unique in significant ways. While we can date the creation and configuration of aristocratic chivalry in almost all of Europe at around 1100 [...], Castilian chivalric discourse, particularly texts on the regulation of chivalry, arise between a century and a century and a half later. The aristocratic chivalry of Castile originates in the Cortes of Alfonso VIII of Castile (r. 1158-1214) and that of Alfonso X of Castile and León (r. 1252-1282) and fulfills a specific need – to establish a monarchic political model marked by the jurisdiction and the limitation of nobiliary jurisdiction, whether clerical or secular. Throughout the acquisition of this central monarchic sovereignty, or *imperium*, the creation and regulation of knighthood has a critical role. It is through chivalry that the monarch redefines the nobility that surrounds him. In the new monarchic model, chivalry is configured to create a new sociopolitical identity for the nobility with an innovative angle: it will be

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the king who reserves the right to create this new social category.”
 (Rodríguez-Velasco, 2010: 16-17).

Some scholars have examined Alfonso's legal productions in order to understand the manner in which these stipulated a new social order. Rodríguez-Velasco in particular has been prolific in examining the juridical formulation of chivalry in the text produced at the behest of the Learned King (1993: 2006).

“The main idea is that in the thirteenth century, chivalric discourse is, above all, a discourse of the growing political power of the monarchy, a political theory in which the king seizes the political and juridical core of power. Chivalry constitutes one of the politico-juridical forms by which the nobility might be subjected to the central jurisdiction and it implies the construction of a social class that is furnished with systems of horizontal solidarity. [...] The theory of knighthood developed in the *Partidas* entails reorganization of nobility and of new forms of subjection to the king. These new forms of subjection are based squarely on the incorporation of the idea of natural bonds: the knight, vested by the king, acquires an indissoluble natural bond with him [...]” (Rodríguez-Velasco, 2010: 29).

Scholars disagree on whether the twenty-second title of the *Segunda partida* is representative of Alfonso's early absolutist vision, or is instead the result of a noble reaction to Alfonso's initiatives, which establishes their privileges as knights (Gómez Redondo, 1998: 559). A particularly lucid article by Gladys Lizabe Savastano makes a convincing case for the former alternative (Lizabe Savastano, 1993).

In Title XXI of the *Segunda partida*, knights are explicitly equated with nobles, a noteworthy fact since the particular social landscape of Castile included many non-noble knights, the *caballeros villanos* and *concejiles*¹¹ – but the text does not mention them. Of course, Alfonso wrote (or rather oversaw the writing of) this title knowing full well that his realm was one where many knights were not of noble origin, but urban knights of a commoner's background. Nonetheless, he insists that knights are nobles. That the gap between reality and ideal is great in this case could not be more obvious. Yet we must try to understand why such an approach was useful to this king. Alfonso was interested in defining and creating a *courtly*, noble knighthood, loyal to the king. This courtliness would be expressed by moderation, in speech and in gestures. In the emphasis on courtly values, the Alfonsine text is actually echoed by Ramon Llull.¹²

¹¹ See Gerbet, 1997, for the social formation of the nobility in Castile. For the legal dimension of knighthood, see Pérez Martín, 2001.

¹² See e.g. Llull, 2013: III.19, VI.17, VI.21.

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Georges Martin has analysed the twenty-first title of the *Segunda partida* as a monarchic initiative to control the violence perpetrated by the knightly class in thirteenth-century Castile. The gist of his article is that Alfonso was very much concerned with the suppression of rebellious tendencies within the nobility, and by equating chivalry with nobility the control of the knightly violence becomes a suppression of noble uprisings (Martin, 2004: 223-225). Rodríguez-Velasco, for his part, has revealed that the conception of knighthood in the *Segunda partida* is particularly innovative in its approach to the social ties that are created by the investiture ceremony (1997: 1335-1337). In Title XXI, Law 14, concerning the oath that the newly invested knight swears, it is stipulated that the investiture establishes bonds of *naturalaleza* between the new knight and the one who invests him; that is, a social bond of a high order in the Alfonsine conception is created, which obliges the new knight to act in the manner of a vassal (Martin, 2004: 230-232).

Title XXI, Law 11, establishes the knighthood as a lay order, invested with notions of Christian belief, but not religious in any institutional manner. Knighthood can only be granted by persons who have previously received knighthood, and thus clerics are left out of this ritual completely (Martin, 2004: 228). This text also proposes a particular morality for the knighthood, based on the Aristotelian cardinal virtues, and the systematization of exemplary reading as a model for teaching prospective knights their office (Agejas, 2009: 78). The above-mentioned oath required the knight to swear their willingness, if necessary, to die for their (Christian) law, their natural lord, and their land. It was part of an ethic where loyalty was valued very highly, completely in line with Alfonso's monarchical politics, but also inspired by Aristotle's *Politics* and Roman law, suggesting the idea of a "*pro comunal*", a common good, but within the structure of a trifunctional society, where the *defensores* had important duties to fulfil (Martin, 2004: 223-225). Gladys Lizabe Savastano demonstrates how Alfonso rather than sacralising knighthood presented the lack of loyalty on the part of a knight as more than a moral fault, as a theological transgression, thereby relating the sacral figure of the king to the divine (1993: 395).

According to Alfonso, the four major virtues are: prudence, fortitude, moderation and justice. All men who strive to do good should seek to embody these virtues, and this is more important for the members of the *ordo* of the *defensores* than for any others, since they defend all other estates:

“Bondades son llamadas las buenas costumbres que los hombres tienen naturalmente en sí, a las que llaman en latín virtudes; y entre todas son cuatro las mayores; así como cordura y fortaleza y mesura y justicia. Y comoquiera que todo hombre que tenga voluntad de ser bueno debe esforzarse por tenerlas, [...] no hay ninguno a quien convenga más que a los defensores, porque ellos han de defender la iglesia y los reyes y a todos los otros.” (SP, XXI, 6).

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As Martin has shown in his commentary, Alfonso's representation of chivalry is innovative insofar as it puts a particular emphasis on the intellectual virtues, as imagined by Aristotle, (2001: Book 6); it proposes an intellectual ethic as guiding principle (Martin, 2004: 223; Rodríguez Velasco, 1993: 68). Agejas also emphasises the fact that the Alfonsine text underlines the necessity of cultivating intelligence and good judgment to achieve the understanding that could guide one's will towards the right and just actions (2009: 79). Through a ritual cleansing and penance, a corporeal and a spiritual purity are achieved for the knight, who begs God to forgive him his sins (SP, XXI, 13).

The text also presupposes that the king is the one best suited to choose which texts are fitting for the knights to read and hear, in order to be affected by the exemplary deeds of arms of good knights who had lived in the past and to find inspiration to follow them (SP, XXI, 20; Beck, 2011). The *Siete partidas* clearly stated that the king was head and soul of the body politic (which represented the kingdom), and all members should aid and obey him. This was a policy that downplayed the role of the nobility, forcing them to cede some of their rights and privileges, and thereby weakened their legal position (Grabowska, 2006: 18-19), and it is within this context we must later turn to Don Juan Manuel's work.

Alfonso showed great generosity and gratitude towards soldiers and lower nobility who participated in the *Reconquista*. This created a greater number of landed gentry, who would later turn against the king's policies promulgated in the law code, because it favoured the king at their expense. The conflicts between the nobility and the king included the king's own family, and his son in turn inherited the problems his father had faced. Sancho IV and his grandson Alfonso XI suffered many attempts by the nobility to further their power. Although theory pronounced the sovereignty of the king, in practice it was clearly contested. Juan Manuel wrote all his works during this problematic period, when the Castilian state government was centralised at the expense of previously quite independent fiefdoms (Grabowska, 2006: 19-21). This centralisation of power at the hands of Alfonso X *el Sabio* is well-understood as a political phenomenon, one which raised great protests among the high nobility, but seldom has the attempt to bridge this gap between king and nobles by way of chivalric invention been expressed as succinctly as by Rodríguez-Velasco:

“The monarch retains a privilege that destabilizes all theological concepts concerning nobility, and that, consequently, revolutionizes social organization: upon creating knights, the king creates nobles, thereby reformulating the category that defines the exercise of *imperium*. The monarchical strategy is much more subtle when it establishes a form of chivalric creation that is not aimed at the individual, but the collective. Therefore, the king does not appoint knights in order to recognize

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specific individuals, but rather to delineate a system of association that operates as an institution.” (Rodríguez-Velasco, 2010: 230).

We may add that in Alfonso's conception, the worst sins are those perpetrated against one's lord, such as fleeing battle and treason, which would lead to loss of life for the culprit. This enhances the argument that Alfonso was engaged in constructing a hierarchical view of knighthood in which the king as supreme overlord was the ruling thought. The idea present in Title XXI of the *Segunda partida* that there are three estates with different functions may have been borrowed from elsewhere in medieval Europe, but perhaps Alfonso was more astute than most in subsuming this idea into his own politico-cultural project (see Márquez Villanueva, 2004) and the Castilian realities, wherein he intended to propose a structure that clearly pointed towards centralised royal power.

5. Don Juan Manuel and the noble order

The Castilian nobleman and author Don Juan Manuel has been a constant in scholarship on the fourteenth century in Castile. The influential Juan Manueline scholar Andrés Giménez Soler regarded him as the most representative figure of Castile and the entire Peninsula in the fourteenth century, and thought him essential as a starting point for any study on Iberia in that century (1932: vi). Meanwhile, such a giant in the field as Fernando Gómez Redondo, in his all-encompassing history of medieval Castilian prose, regards Juan Manuel more as a representative of the preceding century, the thirteenth (which ended when he was just nineteen years of age), since he sees the nobleman's work as foreshadowed by developments during the reigns of Fernando III, Alfonso X, and Sancho IV. Gómez Redondo argues that Juan Manuel modeled his thought and his literary techniques on developments in the court context of these reigns, of his grandfather, uncle, and cousin, from which he inherited his political vision, cultural conception, and religious and moral values respectively (Gómez Redondo, 1998: 1093). I would argue that Don Juan Manuel was more innovative in his thought than such a statement would make us believe.¹³

In several of his works,¹⁴ Don Juan Manuel is engaged in the explication of the social orders, and preoccupied with chivalry and knighthood in particular.¹⁵ His

¹³ Montoya Martínez, 1997 and Funes, 2000 explore some important connections between the works of Alfonso X and Don Juan Manuel.

¹⁴ Most explicitly in the *Libro de los estados* and the *Libro infinito*, but also very prominently in *El conde Lucanor*.

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writing was mainly didactic in nature, and often took the form of dialogues between two discussants. *El libro del cauallero et del escudero* (cf. Gómez Redondo, 1998: 1110-1115; Taylor, 2000) mostly takes the form of answers given by an old knight to questions posed by a new knight. The themes range from the order of chivalry to questions of angels, Heaven and Hell, man and beasts, the elements and the planets.

Close to the beginning of the work, the old knight explains what knighthood is. He says it is the most honourable of the lay estates, since it is concerned with the defense of all other orders, echoing the *Segunda partida*:

“[...] la caualleria es mas noble et mas onrado estado que todos los otros. Ca los caualleros son para defender et defienden a los otros, et los otros deuen pechar et mantener a ellos. Et otrosi por que desta orden et deste estado son los reys et los grandes sennores; et este estado non puede aver ninguno por si, sy otri non gelo da, et por esto es commo manera de sacramento.” (Juan Manuel [hereafter JM], 1982: 44).

Juan Manuel calls chivalry both an estate and an order. He motivates its supremacy with various explanations: knights defend all others, and thereby this estate ensures the security of the social order *per se*; it is the order to which the kings and magnates belong; and it is a manner of sacrament, since it cannot be given by anyone who is not a part of it himself.¹⁶

In an article dealing with the evolution of Alfonso X's vision of chivalry in the legal treatises, Jesús Rodríguez-Velasco mentions the work of Don Juan Manuel and Ramon Llull as exponents of a more typical European view of knighthood. He underscores the moral features of chivalry as an innovative aspect of the *Siete partidas* (Rodríguez-Velasco, 1993: 73-74). In this sense, a real comparison of the configuration of knighthood in Don Juan Manuel with his predecessors has been neglected. In conjunction with the intellectual affinities of the Alfonsine chivalric ideal, the virtue prudence or discretion, in Juan Manuel's own words *seso* (and not, as in the *SP cordura*), the ability to make reasoned judgments, is the most important faculty of the knight, which is demonstrated in various ways (JM, 1982: 48).

It is known that Juan Manuel was well-versed in his uncle, Alfonso X's, writings, and there are some indications that the *Libro del cauallero et del escudero* was

¹⁵ Fernando Gómez Redondo offers a comprehensive presentation of Don Juan Manuel's works and their place within his confrontation with the Castilian monarchy, particularly Alfonso XI, in the first volume of his monumental *Historia de la prosa medieval castellana*, 1998: 1093-1204.

¹⁶ A very interesting detail in connection to this last point is that Don Juan Manuel spends a great deal of time explaining in his last work, the *Libro de las armas* or *Libro de las tres razones*, why he and his successors have the right to dub knights without being knights themselves.

composed with the twenty-first title of the *Segunda partida* fresh in mind. Both of them mention the work of Vegetius,¹⁷ author of the *Epitoma rei militaris*, as an important authority. Perhaps this is the source for the idea that *vergüenza* (shame, or the sense of shame) is one of the most essential characteristics of a knight. *Vergüenza* is mentioned briefly in Title XXI (SP, XXI, 2) –basically in a literal translation of Vegetius (2001: 8)– but becomes greatly emphasised by Juan Manuel in his *Libro*. The concept also appears in several of his other works (Carreño, 1977). An astute analysis is offered in Juan Manuel Cacho Bleuca's article of this concept in a wider survey of Castilian literary texts (Cacho Bleuca, 2000). The Alfonsine text contains the following passage:

“[...] tuvieron por bien los sabedores de estas cosas que buscasen hombres para esto que hubiesen naturalmente en sí vergüenza. Y sobre esto dijo un sabio que tenía por nombre Vejecio, que habló de la orden de caballería, que la vergüenza veda al caballero que no huya de la batalla, y por esto ella le hace ser vencedor. [...] Y por esto sobre todas las otras cosas miraron que fuesen hombres de buen linaje, porque se guardesen de hacer cosa por la que pudiesen caer en vergüenza.” (SP, XXI, 2).

For Alfonso, the essential importance of shame lies in its ability to hinder knights in fleeing from battle, and thereby betraying their lords and duties. In Juan Manuel, we find the following statement, identifying *vergüenza* as the mother of all virtues:

“La vergüenza, otrosi, cunple mucho al cauallero mas que otra cosa ninguna; et tanto le cunple que yo diria que valdra mas al cauallero auer en si vergüença et non auer otra manera ninguna buena, que auer todas las buenas maneras et non auer vergüença; [...] la vergüença es la cosa por que omne dexa de fazer todas las cosas que non deue fazer, et le faze fazer todo lo que deue. Et por ende, *la madre et la cabeça de todas las vndades es la vergüença.*” (JM, 1982: 49, my emphasis).

There is a great difference here in that Alfonso's text underscores the importance of loyalty, to the king, whereas this virtue is not as present in Juan Manuel. When the concept of loyalty occurs in the *Libro del cauallero et del escudero*, it is rather a horizontal ideal, connected to the function of counseling, more than an obligation a vassal should fulfil in order to safeguard his lord.

For Juan Manuel, the most important aspect of a righteous life –pointed out in this early work as in several of his later ones– is that each and every person should live according to his or her estate. It is particularly present in Chapter XXXVIII, “*Commo el cauallero anciano responde al cauallero nouel que cosa es el omne*” (JM, 1982: 77-85), in which Don Juan Manuel explains that the most important thing for man to

¹⁷ Publius Flavius Vegetius Renatus (late fourth century AD).

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know is how to act according to his estate –and the worst fault he can betray is to strive towards an estate to which he does not belong (78-79). A lot of Juan Manuel's writing engages with the question of how to live a righteous life, what is the best manner in which to live –each according to his order and estate– to attain salvation and the grace of God, in this life as much as in the next. In this, we would not be wrong to identify a Dominican influence (Ruiz, 1989: 21-24; Adams, 2007).

In the *Libro del cauallero et del escudero*, he underscores that if we listen to each person according to his or her will, we will get as many different answers as to what is the greatest pleasure in this life, and equally as many as to what is the greatest sorrow. But if we listen to reason, the only possible answer is that the greatest pleasure one can feel is when one understands that one is free from sin, because then you are in God's grace.

“Mas el mayor plazer que omne con razon puede et deue auer es quando entiende que esta sin pecado, por que esta en la gracia de Dios, et esta sin reçelo que non ha cosa que le enbargue para le fazer Dios merçed conplida. Ca, fijo, uos deuedes saber que asi commo Dios es conplido, sienpre querra a los omnes fazer merçed conplida mente; et lo que dexa de les fazer non es sinon por enbargo de pecados o de malas obras que los omnes ponen entre Dios et ellos; pus el que sabe que non a este enbargo, tan alegre deuia seer que ningun pesar non deuia sentir.” (JM, 1982: 51).

In elucidating what Hell is, the old knight explains to the new knight that since knights are often so busy with the dangerous and toilsome mission they have, they lack the time to understand matters of theology profoundly. Therefore, it is their duty to have complete faith in the Holy Church and to do as professed by the clerics and to strive to do the deeds expected of a good Christian (JM, 1982: 65). What follows from this description is a difference in the notion of the intellectual knight, which is so prominent in Alfonso's juridical construction; in Juan Manuel's conception, a knight was not required to read the Scripture and other texts, since in questions of faith they should trust the representatives of the Church. This view was certainly more inclusive and could incorporate a greater part of the actual social group of knighthood, in all its variety.

If we compare Juan Manuel's work with that of Ramon Llull and Alfonso X, there are differences as to whether the knighthood is mainly related to the Church or the monarchy, or represented as an independent institution. In the *Libro de los estados*, Don Juan Manuel does mention the *caballeros villanos* as part of the order of the *defensores*, and this is important. He does not stress, as Alfonso did, the ties between the King and his knighthood, but regards the knights solely on their own terms.

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Regarding sins, the old knight claims that there are few or even none who never sin against the Lord, because human nature is weak, and sins come in so many guises, and the world and the Devil and the flesh and the will are deceitful (JM, 1982: 84). Yet man can repent, since he is an animal with reason. Reason and will here stand one against the other, and by reason sin may be avoided or repented.¹⁸ To some extent, then, we can see the influence of the Alfonsine juridical doctrine in Juan Manuel's work also when it comes to ethical tendencies.

So, whereas the juridical tracts penned under the auspices of Alfonso X can be seen as constructive products of the overall politico-cultural projects of the Learned King,¹⁹ mainly serving Alfonso's political endeavours and underpinned by his ideological motivations, we are justified in asking whether this was also true for the works of Juan Manuel, that a configuration of chivalry meant to legitimise a conception of the social order and its diffusion. Writing on French medieval history writing, Gabrielle Spiegel stated that:

“[...] few works of history were directed at audiences not already gained to the causes they upheld. In that sense, the chronicle functioned more as a codification and ratification of the values, principles, and social aspirations of those it served than as the instigator of an innovative polemic.” (Spiegel, 1993: 221).

Are we to see Juan Manuel's writing as a codification of values that were commonly held within the social group to which he belonged, that is, the *ricos hombres*? Or is it an equally conceivable notion that Juan Manuel was actively trying to legitimise his own view of the moral and political sense of chivalry, motivated by a discursive lack that he identified, and with the clear ambition of influencing the direction of the discourse on chivalry? As (at times) one of the most influential statesmen of his day and age, Juan Manuel would have been sure to be heeded by many of his peers, and it is doubtful whether he would use this possible influence to state the already obvious. Considering the fact that Juan Manuel and Alfonso X were in fact so closely connected by kinship and in literary interests, the very fact that their visions of chivalry diverge to a high degree speaks to the innovative nature of Juan Manuel's work.

Juan Manuel's aim was surely not only to transmit the knowledge inherent in the authorities, but to a great degree to transmit his own experience. Diego Catalán, writing on the *Cronica abreviada* and Don Juan Manuel's perspective on the literary and generic models of his uncle Alfonso, explains that the nobleman presented an

¹⁸ This opposition between reason and will is evidenced in other works of this period, such as the *Libro del canallero Zifar* and the *Castigos de Sancho IV*.

¹⁹ See Márquez Villanueva 2004, particularly pp. 25-40.

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awareness of uses and practice as sources for writing, besides written authorities (1977: 50-51). Such was his approach to learning and scholarship. There are some striking similarities between Ramon Llull and Don Juan Manuel in their essential attitude towards writing and systematizing knowledge. Here, too, we see an important strain of Dominican thought (Ruiz, 1989: 23-24; Sánchez, 1986).

“The objective of nobility should be to ‘conserve’ what are traditionally conceived to be inherited and hence legitimate estates and privileges,” writes Anthony N. Zahareas in the preface to James Grabowska’s study of the rhetoric of power in Juan Manuel’s *Conde Lucanor* (Grabowska, 2006: ii). Grabowska’s book outlines a distinctly conservative ideology of hegemony and power, based on the experiences of Spanish feudal nobility, which propagated the use of power towards self-interest and the maintenance of privileges (ibid.). The rhetoric, which was oriented towards producing effects such as changes of attitude, is conservative insofar as it defends customs, institutions and doctrines because they are traditional, and therefore represents them as legitimate (2006: viii).

Grabowska’s understanding is that the material that Don Juan Manuel used to formulate his rhetoric of power had a certain cultural background, which may or may not have fit the view of the author or of the high nobility in general. They betray values and ideas about the world and society, corresponding to dominant ideologies. They were therefore adapted to the specific ideology propagated in the work at hand (Grabowska, 2006: 12-13). Don Juan Manuel shared the ideology of power practiced by the monarchy, states Grabowska (2006: 38).

“Juan Manuel chose to represent himself as an exemplary nobleman, in effect, saw himself without peer as a high nobleman. It is this clear awareness of the coherent conflict between the high nobility and monarchy that emerges in his work. His texts privilege and emphasize noble codes of behavior as well as reiterating the feudal belief in the “static” organization of civil society [...]” (Grabowska, 2006: 21).

If the *Conde Lucanor*, as an expression of a conservative rhetoric of power, was meant as an instruction manual for lower or newly knighted nobility, as James Grabowska has argued (2006: 43-46), how are we to interpret the *Libro del caballero et del escudero*? Analysing the *Libro de los estados* of the same author, María Cecilia Ruiz argues that:

“La descripción que hace don Juan Manuel de la sociedad constituye ya de por sí una posición política que justifica el sistema establecido, en oposición a otras visiones del mundo que estaban gestándose en la Baja Edad Media [...] Don Juan Manuel es portavoz de la visión del mundo a la que, como apología de su poder, se aferran las clases más altas de la sociedad. Pero es también a otro nivel donde el *Libro de los estados* manifiesta su carácter político. El libro es un vehículo concreto del que

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se sirve el autor con la finalidad práctica de asegurar sus intereses personales [...]” (Ruiz, 1989: 44-45).

In an estate society, the stability of which depended upon social rigidity and the fulfilment by each member of the duties that befell him, perhaps the only way to maintain the hierarchy and *status quo* was to educate those who entered the nobility as to their rights and duties. The education of a nobleman was aimed at teaching him the codes of conduct proper to his estate, and to defend the rights of the nobility. Those who had not inherited but otherwise gained entry into the nobility needed to learn the correct attitudes and conduct, and for these reasons the works of Don Juan Manuel could fill a dire need (Grabowska, 2006: 43).

However, nobiliar ideology was not all conservative and traditionalist; the high nobility, like the monarchy, had to respond to new social circumstances and cultural changes. Don Juan Manuel tried to change the conception of chivalry not to return to traditional practice, but to propose a new model for knighthood, albeit within a strictly hierarchical social order.

6. Conclusions

Don Juan Manuel's conception of social order is different to that of the fundamental theorists of chivalry in the Iberian thirteenth-century in that the knight's path to virtue and avoidance of transgression comes completely from within. Juan Manuel proposes a self-regulating chivalry, more autonomous than in any other conception of knighthood. By leaving out the question of loyalty towards the king (and representing the king as a knight among others) which is so pronounced in the *Segunda partida*, the nobleman is presenting another view of the role of knighthood in society. But he is not directly opposed to Alfonso. Don Juan Manuel inherited some notions from his royal uncle that he developed further in his own right, chief among them the concept of an intellectual morality as the guiding principle for the knighthood of his day.

Whereas the twenty-second title of the *Segunda partida* mostly upheld loyalty as a prime measure of virtue, Don Juan Manuel described the path to virtue more in terms of an inner quest, and emphasised the importance of seeking good counsel with your confessor (JM, 1982: 83).

But Juan Manuel's outright confrontations with the monarchy and defense of the noble estate was yet some years in the future when he wrote the *Libro del caballero et del escudero*. This work does show a more religious attitude than the work of his

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uncle, and it is concerned more with the theological meaning of knighthood and how it serves to further one's position as regards the next life, than to propose a lay conception of knighthood. Yet the reference to theology is a legitimating tool in itself, appropriating a Christian knighthood on the part of the nobility, which could garner other proponents than the conception presented in the *Siete partidas*.

We may conclude that in this early work, Juan Manuel had not yet become the fierce critic of the Castilian monarchy and stout defender of noble privilege that he would become later in life. What is really at stake here is showing that all knights, everyone who belonged to the *ordo* of the *defensores*, had within them the ability to make good judgments and lead a good life, free from sin, no matter their level of education or learning. And in doing so, Juan Manuel opened up the possibility for a different connection between the high nobility and the non-noble or recently dubbed knights, a vertical relationship that Alfonso X would have tried hard not to allow to grow.

The most important difference between King Alfonso X and Don Juan Manuel, in terms of social ordering, is that the former sought to create a unitary order of knights, subordinated to the king, whereas the latter sought to impose a strict division between estates and an organisation of society into a hierarchy. This shines through in their treatises on chivalry, not least when it comes to the representation of virtues and vices.

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