

THE TV SHOW *GAME OF THRONES* AS AN EDUCATIONAL AXIS TO TEACH MEDIEVAL  
HISPANIC CULTURES<sup>1</sup>

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In the Spring term 2012, I taught two university courses on the history, literature, and culture of medieval Spain. One was a seminar for master's and doctoral students, entitled *Occupy Spanish Medieval Literature: Subversion and Protest in 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> Century Spain* and focused on the most problematic and subversive pieces of medieval Spanish literature.<sup>2</sup> The other was a survey for undergraduate students, entitled *Women Inside and Outside the Literary Canon of Medieval Spain*; as its title indicates, the latter emphasised the presence/absence of women as authors and agents of cultural life, beyond the historical roles typically considered "feminine".<sup>3</sup> At the risk of using a cliché, I enjoyed teaching these courses enormously and was very satisfied with the final result: both undergraduate and graduate students attained the objectives of the course and they did so with pleasure, judging from the positive evaluations received at the end of the trimester.

Although convinced –then and now– that both courses covered cultural material from the past that was attractive enough to generate interest in today's students, I must recognise that I was defeated by an unexpected competitor. I became aware of my rival upon frequently overhearing my students' impassioned conversations, as I walked behind them to the next class or on the way to the bus stop, about *Game of Thrones*.<sup>4</sup> It was precisely their enthusiasm for the series that generated my interest in what, as a mere viewer, attracted me very little or not at all. I am sorry to break with upset the stereotypes about medievalists, but in my case, even though the period occupies almost all of my time as a professor and investigator, I rarely engage with medieval topics in my free time. I hope the reader will forgive this personal confession, but I must admit that I am not interested in historical novels set in the Middle Ages,<sup>5</sup> or art exhibitions on medieval themes. Indeed, listening to the complete discographies of Bruce Springsteen, Guns 'N Roses, or The Clash give me much more pleasure than any of Jordi Savall's impeccable albums on late medieval and Renaissance songbooks, despite this being one of the primary fields of my research. As far as television series go, *House of Cards*, *The Americans*, and *The Walking Dead* awaken my curiosity much more than *Game of Thrones* or any other historical or literary-themed series. Admitting also that spending

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<sup>1</sup> This article pertains to the research project *Medieval Pop Culture, Social Networks, and Academia: Teaching Spanish Medieval Cultures in the 21<sup>st</sup> century*. All metadata can be accessed online in my research profile at Lancaster University: <[http://www.research.lancs.ac.uk/portal/en/people/oscar-perearodriguez\(6f8b4856-d4a3-4d21-994e-0d1722d10b0a\).html](http://www.research.lancs.ac.uk/portal/en/people/oscar-perearodriguez(6f8b4856-d4a3-4d21-994e-0d1722d10b0a).html)>. I am in debt to my colleague Donna Southard (University of California, Berkeley) and my students Hannah Dean and Bradley Routh (Lancaster University), for their valuable advice and witty suggestions to the English version of this article.

<sup>2</sup> Syllabus can be read and downloaded for free at my personal profile in Humanities Commons: <<http://hcommons.org/deposits/item/hc:13559/>> [2017-05-19].

<sup>3</sup> *Idem*: <<http://hcommons.org/deposits/item/hc:13557/>> [2017-05-19].

<sup>4</sup> From now on, I will refer to the show by the acronym GoT, for this is the more popular hashtag of the TV show in the social network Twitter (#GoT).

<sup>5</sup> But this personal opinion notwithstanding, I recognise how useful these historical novels may be as teaching tools, as showed by Andrés Palma Valenzuela: <<http://www.mecd.gob.es/cultura-mecd/areas-cultura/libro/mc/observatoriolect/redirige/destacados/2017/febrero/autores-letras/novelahistorica-recursoUniversidadGranada.html>> [2017-04-15].

time in front of a TV screen is not my thing, unless it is a basketball game from NBA or ACB.

In spite of all of the above, watching a few episodes of the first season of *Game of Thrones* radically changed my perception, because I realised GoT's great potential for application in the classroom. After all, it has become much more than a television series: it has really conquered a space in the daily life of millions of people as a global phenomenon,<sup>6</sup> whose echoes reach much farther than its original intention.<sup>7</sup>

When this happens, journalists, much quicker to take up critical analysis than academics, usually call it –in a way as hedonistic as it is snobbish– *pop culture*.<sup>8</sup> In this article, I will purposely depart from the postmodern dangers of using the label of *popular culture*,<sup>9</sup> in favor of the more academic term of “transmedia phenomenon”.<sup>10</sup> The latter term emphasises with precision the ability of a cultural product to capture consumers through different platforms, whether interactive or traditional, to such an extent that the product becomes a point of reference for us all, regardless of our original interest in it, or in this case, whether or not we follow the series.<sup>11</sup>

To get a better idea of its massive irruption into aspects of daily life in our society –far beyond GoT's diffusion as a series–, it will suffice to review the great number of blogs on the Internet –some related to the series, others on George R.R. Martin's novels–,<sup>12</sup> and clips that cut episodes into fragments to comment on favorite scenes or offer theories about the past, present, and future of the series.<sup>13</sup> This cultural exchange is, in turn, animated by forums on GoT web sites, themselves operating as transmedia spaces.<sup>14</sup>

On a more academic level, GoT has deserved the analysis of a few colleagues at conferences –as we shall see further on–, and received attention from some scientific bloggers. Among others, I will mention Carlos Lobato at *Naukas.com*, who began a general blog on biology and genetics in GoT,<sup>15</sup> and, later on, posted entertaining genetic

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<sup>6</sup> For a summary of its impact, see Francisco Javier López Rodríguez, “Juego de Tronos. En la nueva era dorada del drama televisivo, o ganas o mueres”, *FRAME*, 10 (2014), pp. 144-149.

<sup>7</sup> See the pioneer monograph coordinated by Lozano Delmar, Irene Raya Bravo & Francisco J. López Rodríguez, *Reyes, espadas, cuervos y dragones. Estudio del fenómeno televisivo «Juego de Tronos»*, Madrid, Fragua, 2013.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Louise D'Arcens & Andrew Lynch, *International Medievalism and Popular Culture*, Amherst NY, Cambria Press, 2014.

<sup>9</sup> See Daniel Bernabé, “Contra el mito de la cultura popular”, *La Marea*, 03.05.2017: <<http://www.lamarea.com/2017/05/03/mito-la-cultura-popular/>> [2017-05-03].

<sup>10</sup> As explained by Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture. Where Old and New Media Collide*, New York, NYU Press, 2008, pp. 25-26.

<sup>11</sup> In-depth and recently analysed by Kavita Mudan Finn, *Fan Phenomena: Game of Thrones*, Bristol, Intellect, 2017.

<sup>12</sup> For academic analysis of Martin's novels, see Jes Battis & Susan Johnston (ed.), *Mastering the Game of Thrones. Essays on George R. R. Martin's 'A Song of Ice and Fire'*, Jefferson, NC., McFarland & Company, 2015.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Ana Isabel Barragán Romero, “Los banderizos de *Juego de Tronos*. Creación de comunidades y producciones discursivas del *fandom*”, in Javier Lozano Delmar, Irene Raya Bravo & Francisco J. López Rodríguez (coord.), *Reyes, espadas, cuervos y dragones. Estudio del fenómeno televisivo «Juego de Tronos»*, Madrid, Fragua, 2013, pp. 453-476.

<sup>14</sup> On GoT specifically, see Mar Guerrero, “Webs televisivas y sus usuarios: un lugar para la narrativa transmedia. Los casos de «Águila Roja» y «Juego de Tronos» en España”, *Comunicación y sociedad*, 21 (2014), pp. 239-267; and Antonio Gómez Aguilar & María Ángeles Martínez García, “La arquitectura transmedia de *Juego de Tronos*”, in Javier Lozano Delmar, Irene Raya Bravo & Francisco J. López Rodríguez (coord.), *Reyes, espadas, cuervos y dragones. Estudio del fenómeno televisivo «Juego de Tronos»*, Madrid, Fragua, 2013, pp. 537-558.

<sup>15</sup> Carlos Lobato (@biogecarlos), “La genética de *Juego de Tronos*” in *Naukas.com* 25.02.2013: <<http://naukas.com/2014/04/07/genetica-de-tronos-daenerys-nudibranquios-y-epistasia/>> [2016-07-23].

problems –*Throne Genetics*– for readers to resolve.<sup>16</sup> Together with this blog, there is an entire online universe that unpacks the many attractive visual features of GoT, from its purely cinematic components,<sup>17</sup> to the effects that this invented past produces in the transmedia culture of the present.

In the article that follows I will purposely avoid venturing too far into the aesthetic aspects of the series,<sup>18</sup> which, without a doubt, deserve a more profound analysis than I can provide in the scope of this paper. Rather, my objective here will be to explain some examples which may be useful to the instructor who would like to incorporate the series into courses on the medieval period. In this regard, the most important aspect to highlight is that the themes that captivated both general viewers and my students were not those invented by Martin or the scriptwriters;<sup>19</sup> on the contrary, the success of the series is based on cultural commonplaces that are present in western civilizations, especially those that share a Greco-Latin substratum. For example, the recently published collection of essays that outlines the relationship between GoT scripts and significant philosophers of history share precisely that ground:<sup>20</sup> teasing out connections between past and present, universal human concerns.<sup>21</sup>

The success of designing a course on medieval history and literature based on a series would there depend on the teacher's capacity to draw on students' emotional connection to an activity they perform outside the classroom, revealing to them –in pedagogical terms– how helpful these personal feelings may be for learning the topics under study.<sup>22</sup> Guided by these ideas and thanks to the enthusiastic support of the chair of my former department and colleagues at the University of California at Riverside, I finally decided to embark upon the design of such a course, using GoT video-clips to bond the themes appearing in the series with the same themes in medieval Hispanic cultures. I taught the first version of the course as a capstone seminar in Fall 2012,<sup>23</sup> just when the second season of GoT was ending and fans were counting the days for the return of their favorite medieval characters in the third season, scheduled for release in

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<sup>16</sup> Carlos Lobato ([@biogecarlos](#)), “Genética de tronos (I). Daenerys, nudibranquios y epistasia” in *Naukas.com* 07.04.2014: <<http://naukas.com/2014/04/07/genetica-de-tronos-daenerys-nudibranquios-y-epistasia/>> [2016-07-23].

<sup>17</sup> To its theoretical analysis, especially focused on the Middle Ages, see the collective monograph directed by Juan Vicente García Mansilla & Áurea Ortiz Villeta, *Del castillo al plató. 50 miradas de cine sobre la Edad Media*, Barcelona, UOC, 2017.

<sup>18</sup> See Mónica Barrientos Bueno, “Fuentes de inspiración visual en *Juego de Tronos*: el referente pictórico”, in Javier Lozano Delmar, Irene Raya Bravo & Francisco J. López Rodríguez (coord.), *Reyes, espadas, cuervos y dragones. Estudio del fenómeno televisivo «Juego de Tronos»*, Madrid, Fragua, 2013, pp. 359-390; and Cristina Pérez de Algaba Chicano, “Escribiendo fantasía en imágenes. Análisis audiovisual de *Juego de Tronos*”, in Javier Lozano Delmar, Irene Raya Bravo & Francisco J. López Rodríguez (coord.), *Reyes, espadas, cuervos y dragones. Estudio del fenómeno televisivo «Juego de Tronos»*, Madrid, Fragua, 2013, pp. 391-422.

<sup>19</sup> Analysed by Francisco Javier López Rodríguez & Juan A. García, “De la novela a la pantalla. La adaptación televisiva de *Juego de Tronos*”, in Javier Lozano Delmar, Irene Raya Bravo & Francisco J. López Rodríguez (coord.), *Reyes, espadas, cuervos y dragones. Estudio del fenómeno televisivo «Juego de Tronos»*, Madrid, Fragua, 2013, pp. 91-114.

<sup>20</sup> Henry Owen Jacoby (ed.), *Game of Thrones and Philosophy: Logic Cuts Deeper than Swords*, Hoboken, John Wiley & Sons, 2012.

<sup>21</sup> Elio M. García & Linda Antonsson, “Foreword”, in Henry Owen Jacoby (ed.), *Game of Thrones and Philosophy: Logic Cuts Deeper than Swords*, Hoboken, John Wiley & Sons, 2012, pp. IX-XII, especially p. XI.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Carl James Grindley, “Teaching the Middle Ages”, in David W. Marshall (ed.), *Mass Market Medieval: Essays on the Middle Ages in Popular Culture*, Jefferson, NC, McFarland & Company, 2007, pp. 140-153, especially p. 149.

<sup>23</sup> This could be read at my personal profile in the Humanities Commons website: <<http://hcommons.org/deposits/item/hc:13561/>> [2017-05-19].

the spring of 2013. The result I achieved was completely unbelievable –a success without precedents. In my fifteen years of university teaching, never had I taught a course with such a resoundingly positive response. And what was most gratifying for me was the fact that the course's academic content found its way into students' conversations outside the classroom. After that trimester, they continued talking about the series, but now they included readings, scenes, and historical Spanish characters and authors that connected Hispanic medieval texts to GoT plots. It is a perfect example of "If you can't beat 'em, join 'em".

Since that fall in 2012, the reaction to the popularity of GoT in the field of higher education has been uneven and, above all, quite ambiguous. In the United States, always more open to debate audiovisual novelties in academic contexts, the GoT phenomenon received attention from a few academics. As far as I know, aside from my course, the first academic space in which this medievalising fiction found a home was at the International Conference of Medieval Studies of Kalamazoo, Michigan, which took place in 2013,<sup>24</sup> one year after my course was taught for the first time. Shortly afterwards, the Department of Film Studies at the University of California at Berkeley offered another course on the series during the summer of 2015,<sup>25</sup> and two professors at Northwestern Illinois University designed a similar course that same year,<sup>26</sup> demonstrating that the growing popularity of GoT had not gone unnoticed in the North American academy.<sup>27</sup> Since then, some colleagues have even announced that we are living a propitious moment for the promotion of such pedagogical tendencies.<sup>28</sup> Indeed, even such a prestigious institution of higher learning as Harvard University has recently incorporated a course on the series, taught by Dr. Sean Gilsdorf and Dr. Racha Kirakosian.<sup>29</sup>

This audiovisual content has been less successful in the stiff-necked British academy, universally recognised for its resistance to change. Besides my course, taught at Lancaster University since 2014,<sup>30</sup> the only mention of the series occurred in the title of a panel presented at the Leeds International Conference on Medieval Studies, held

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<sup>24</sup> "Panel Is Coming: A Game of Thrones Discussion (A Roundtable)", organised by Jason Pitruzzello (University of Houston) and supervised by Shiloh R. Carroll (Middle Tennessee State University). *48<sup>th</sup> International Congress on Medieval Studies*, Kalamazoo, 9-12 May 2013.

<sup>25</sup> Syllabus by Justin Vaccaro can be find here: <<http://filmmedia.berkeley.edu/course-information/2583428-film-genre-game-of-thrones>> [2016-07-23].

<sup>26</sup> Dr. Jeff Chown and Dr. Valerie Garver designed a course entitle *Game of Thrones, Television, and Medieval History*. I have been unable to locate a link for the syllabus, whose existence I know by this article: Tom Parisi, "Power behind the Throne: History, Modern Media Converge in NIU Course on HBO's *Game of Thrones*", published in *Newsroom.niu.edu*, 08.04.2015: <<http://newsroom.niu.edu/2015/04/08/power-behind-the-throne/>> [2016-09-19].

<sup>27</sup> A complete list of U.S. colleges in which courses on GoT were or currently are conveyed can be find at this article by Amanda Bell, "9 Colleges with Actual 'Game of Thrones' Courses", *MTV.com*, 27.10.2015: <<http://www.mtv.com/news/2362741/game-of-thrones-college-courses/>> [2016-09-19].

<sup>28</sup> In words of Jasper Bernes, from Stanford University, "there is a trend in the academy and in the humanities toward offering these sorts of courses". Cf. Jack Martínez, "*Game of Thrones* and the Changing Curriculum in Modern Universities", in *Digital Journal Newsweek.com*, 23.08.2015: <<http://www.newsweek.com/game-thrones-college-class-364628>> [2016-09-23].

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Olivia B. Waxman, "An Exclusive Look Inside Harvard's New *Game of Thrones*-Themed Class", *Time*, 31.05.2017: <<http://time.com/4798917/harvard-game-of-thrones-class/>> [2017-06-01].

<sup>30</sup> The current syllabus was modified a little from its medieval focus in order to include also contemporary Spanish poetry, due to Lancaster University programme requirements. Read it here: <<http://www.lusi.lancaster.ac.uk/CoursesHandbook/ModuleDetails/ModuleDetail?yearId=000117&courseId=017860>> [2016-06-19].

the same year.<sup>31</sup> However, the content did not allude at all to the television series, the reference being reduced to a mere play on words to attract an audience. Aside from this, I have been unable to find any other treatment of the series. Notwithstanding its comfortable landing in the United States, the reader should not be led to think that the popularity of the series has generated a frenzy of academic publications. Current critical analyses center, once again, on the traditional medieval Anglo-Saxon myths, such as King Arthur or Robin Hood.<sup>32</sup> And to point out one example, in a very recent monograph on the topic,<sup>33</sup> there is actually not a single article on GoT, the series most responsible for the growing interest in the medieval period in today's television audience.

When it comes to creating new courses, it is true that often the absence of these themes in the classroom is caused by the enormous obstacle of university bureaucracy. University administrators, instead of looking for solutions that would facilitate curricular innovations, usually do just the opposite, this is, objecting to each one of the solutions proposed by instructors. I will not devote time to describing these experiences, which we have all known and suffered. Despite the *Diktatur des Bürokraten* that currently governs higher education on the five continents, it is only fair to recognise that often the blame falls on us, that is, the collective formed by those who are part of the academic machinery. Just as the networks that appear in GoT, just when the Academy shows an interest in the popularity of the series, it becomes mired in bizarre and oneiric debates. The most surrealistic one of all had to do with a dispute over a nominalist *boutade*: whether or not the series is 'medieval'.<sup>34</sup> It was indeed one of these false polemics quite often fed by the newspapers, especially those published digitally. Sometimes, this type of media detracts from the quality articles of cultural dissemination by including the phrase *Game of Thrones* in the headline, an abominable practice brazenly used to capture the attention of GoT followers, looking for more visits to the site as innocents readers bite the hook of this miserable practice known as *clickbait*.<sup>35</sup> This happened with an excellent article in defense of the often unjust treatment of the Middle Ages in today's media,<sup>36</sup> overshadowed by an inaccurate headline mentioning GoT; just as in another the conclusion –there are reprehensible human characteristics such as racism in GoT, it is because racism does exist in our world today too– is radically different from what the headline proclaims.<sup>37</sup>

Given these difficulties, it is recommendable to avoid incoherent post-modernities that only illustrate the stubborn bizantine ramblings of a portion of the

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<sup>31</sup> "An Empire of Buildings, or Simply a Game of Thrones?", organised by Audrey Thorstad (Bangor University), at the *International Medieval Congress 2014*. Leeds (UK), 8 July 2014.

<sup>32</sup> As it happens in the monograph edited by Helen Young, *The Middle Ages in Popular Culture: Medievalism and Genre*, Amherst NY, Cambria Press, 2015.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Meriem Pagès & Karolyn Kinane (eds.), *The Middle Ages on Television. Critical Essays*, Jefferson, NC, McFarland & Co., 2015. However, there are many references to some characters of GoT, especially to the homosexual love relationship between Renly Baratheon and Loras Tyrell, in an essay published there by Torben R. Gebhardt, "Homosexuality in Television Medievalism", pp. 197-214.

<sup>34</sup> Philippa Byrne, "Why Medievalists Should Stop Talking About *Game of Thrones*." *The Conversation* 15.06.2016. <<http://theconversation.com/why-medievalists-should-stop-talking-about-game-of-thrones-61044>> [2016-07-23].

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Hernán Restrepo, "Clickbait: por qué está mal", *Ética segura. Red de ética y periodismo*, 2016: <<http://eticasegura.fnpi.org/2016/04/05/clickbait-esta-mal/>> [2017-04-15].

<sup>36</sup> Ana Rodríguez, "La Edad Media no fue como cuentan en *Juego de Tronos*" in *El País*, 12.04.2017: <[http://cultura.elpais.com/cultura/2017/04/12/actualidad/1492014207\\_352187.html](http://cultura.elpais.com/cultura/2017/04/12/actualidad/1492014207_352187.html)> [2017-04-15].

<sup>37</sup> Helen Young, "Game of Thrones' Racism Problem", *Publicmedievalist.com* 21.07.2017: <<http://www.publicmedievalist.com/game-thrones-racism-problem/>> [2017-07-22].

academy, devoted at all costs to being their –our– own worst enemies.<sup>38</sup> Thus, for our purposes here –more propaedeutic than some donnish leaders of the pack are capable of enduring–, it will be more useful to assume that GoT is medieval,<sup>39</sup> as 99% of the audience would surely agree after viewing only a few minutes of the series.<sup>40</sup>

Nonetheless, it will be necessary to explain the importance of remaining conscious of GoT's nature as fiction,<sup>41</sup> and therefore, everything in it is allowable, including the indiscriminate mix of historical eras which, even though they seem realistic,<sup>42</sup> can make some medievalists furrow their brow, surprised by the most imaginative aspects of the series. Thus, perhaps it will be difficult to digest a plot that involves believing in the White Walkers, beings who are capable of returning to life after death.<sup>43</sup> Nor is it easy to accept the simultaneous existence in medieval times of an intense polytheism and an incipient monotheism, represented by R'hllor, Lord of Light,<sup>44</sup> and the social and philosophical consequences derived from these spiritual battles.<sup>45</sup> It is true that these two aspects of the series do not coincide with the social, economic, and scientific evolution of the Middle Ages in the West,<sup>46</sup> but other elements, easily identifiable as medieval, offer enough commonalities for us to meet the basic objective of designing a course like this: once captured the interest outside of the

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<sup>38</sup> Spirit guiding the accurate response to the article mentioned above, written by James Palmer, "Medievalists Should Talk About *Game of Thrones*", *Merovingian World* 17.06.2016: <<http://merovingianworld.wordpress.com/2016/06/17/medievalists-should-talk-about-game-of-thrones/>> [2017-04-15].

<sup>39</sup> Further information on medieval historic influences in Martin's novels can be found at the monographic volume "The Medieval World of George R.R. Martin", in *The Medieval Magazine* 64.2 (2016): <<http://www.joomag.com/en/newsstand/the-medieval-magazine-no64/0017631001460728208>> [2016-04-19].

<sup>40</sup> On this sterile debate, see Shiloh Carroll, "Rewriting the Fantasy Archetype. George R. R. Martin, Neomedievalist Fantasy, and the Quest for Realism", in Helen Young (ed.), *Fantasy and Science-fiction Medievalisms: From Isaac Asimov to A Game of Thrones*, Amherst-New York, Victoria Press, 2015, pp. 34-43.

<sup>40</sup> On this sterile debate, see Shiloh Carroll, "Rewriting the Fantasy Archetype. George R. R. Martin, Neomedievalist Fantasy, and the Quest for Realism", in Helen Young (ed.), *Fantasy and Science-fiction Medievalisms: From Isaac Asimov to A Game of Thrones*, Amherst-New York, Victoria Press, 2015, pp. 34-43.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Irene Raya Bravo & Pedro José García García, "El camino hacia *Juego de Tronos*. Nuevas tendencias en la fantasía cinematográfica y televisiva del nuevo milenio", in Javier Lozano Delmar, Irene Raya Bravo & Francisco J. López Rodríguez (coord.), *Reyes, espadas, cuervos y dragones. Estudio del fenómeno televisivo «Juego de Tronos»*, Madrid, Fragua, 2013, pp. 33-60.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Irene Raya Bravo, "*Juego de Tronos*, una fantasía realista", in Javier Lozano Delmar, Irene Raya Bravo & Francisco J. López Rodríguez (coord.), *Reyes, espadas, cuervos y dragones. Estudio del fenómeno televisivo «Juego de Tronos»*, Madrid, Fragua, 2013, pp. 145-170.

<sup>43</sup> It is still useful the classic study on these credences by Howard R. Patch, *The Other World According to Descriptions in Medieval Literature*, Harvard, University Press, 1950, especially pp. 80-81.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Valerie Estelle Frankel, *Mythology in 'Game of Thrones'*, Williamsburg, Thought & Expression Co., 2010, pp. 112-125; and María del Mar Rubio Hernández, "Religión y mito en *Juego de Tronos*", in Javier Lozano Delmar, Irene Raya Bravo & Francisco J. López Rodríguez (coord.), *Reyes, espadas, cuervos y dragones. Estudio del fenómeno televisivo «Juego de Tronos»*, Madrid, Fragua, 2013, pp. 171-200.

<sup>45</sup> Treated by Jaron Daniel Schoone, "Why Is the World So Full of Injustice? Gods and the Problem of Evil", in Henry Owen Jacoby (ed.), *Game of Thrones and Philosophy: Logic Cuts Deeper than Swords*, Hoboken, John Wiley & Sons, 2012, pp. 154-167.

<sup>46</sup> Some recent archaeological findings might modify the traditional assessment on the lack of afterlife fears during the European Middle Ages. See Alyxandra Mattison, "Archaeological Finds Prove That Fear of the Walking Dead Was Very Real to Medieval Minds", *The Conversation. Arts + Culture* 11.04.17: <<http://theconversation.com/archaeological-finds-prove-that-fear-of-the-walking-dead-was-very-real-to-medieval-minds-76068>> [2017-04-16].

college halls, we can use it in our favour –in favour of the students really– in the classroom.<sup>47</sup>

Due to these circumstances, in considering which events of the Medieval past may be included within the course materials, it is obvious that we are on uncertain terrain. Simple logic would indicate that with the necessary knowledge of history and the help of historiographic tools available to instructors, it is not difficult to relate any current event to similar events in the past. For example, the recent activity of the Femen group, with its polemic feminist demands made through the active empowerment of exhibiting their nude bodies can be compared to Godgyfu of Mercia, the legendary Lady Godiva, whose daring horsebackride in the nude –more or less–<sup>48</sup> through the streets of medieval Coventry had a praiseworthy objective: that her husband, Count Leofric, should come to reason and lower taxes on the already afflicted peasants of his estate. It is also a simple matter to establish an analogy with figures living in today's world, such as Edward Snowden or Chelsea Manning and, for example, Doña Marina la Malinche, translator and interpreter for Hernán Cortés, during the harshest years of the Spanish presence in America.<sup>49</sup> All of these figures share the feature of being considered heroes by some and traitors by others. For all of the above reasons, the essence of designing a course grounded on a series of fiction is locating the theme on which the scene is based that we want to highlight and, later, finding its equivalent in medieval Hispanic culture. The following lines will offer several of the analogies I have been using in the classroom since 2012 and continue to use today.

## 1.- From Gothic Kings to Chubby Kings

Since the initial moments of the TV show one can find scenes which are susceptible to links with the Spanish Middle Ages. The second episode of the first season (SE01 EP02) recreates one of the most complicated aspects of medieval life to show on the small screen: the majesty of the entrance of the kings in the cities, or as in this case, in the castle of Lord Stark, Guardian of the North.<sup>50</sup> The sequence begins with a succession of low angle and high angle shots, a narrative resource used to show the attitude of submission owed to the visiting monarch, and the grip of the monarchy as a depository of power.<sup>51</sup> In the moment of the protocol summit, in which the two great men finally see each other face to face, the dialogue that takes place between the king and his vassal varies from ceremonially sumptuous to the comical.<sup>52</sup> The king, Robert Baratheon, recriminates the Lord of Winterfell for having gained weight with a sonorous 'You've gotten fat!'. The loyal comrade in arms of the king's youth glances at

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<sup>47</sup> As maintained by William D. Paden, "I Learned It at the Movies: Teaching Medieval Film", in Richard Utz & Jesse G. Swan, *Postmodern Medievalisms*, Cambridge, D.S. Brewer, 2004, pp. 79-98

<sup>48</sup> Difference between 'being naked' in the Middle Ages and nowadays is explained by Daniel Donoghue, *Lady Godiva: A Literary History of the Legend*, Oxford, Blackwell Publishing, 2003, pp. 28-30.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. Otilia Meza, *La Malinche, Malinalli Tenepal: la gran calumniada*, México, Edamex, 1994.

<sup>50</sup> Further information on this topic in Medieval Castile can be found in Rosana de Andrés Díaz, "Las entradas reales castellanas en los siglos XIV y XV según las crónicas de la época", *En la España Medieval* 4 (1984), pp. 47-62.

<sup>51</sup> See Don Fallis, "It Is a Great Crime to Lie to a King", in Henry Owen Jacoby (ed.), *Game of Thrones and Philosophy: Logic Cuts Deeper than Swords*, Hoboken, John Wiley & Sons, 2012, pp. 19-32.

<sup>52</sup> As analysed by Araceli Gómez Rodríguez, "Juegos de poder. Poniente como espejo político del mundo real", en Javier Lozano Delmar, Irene Raya Bravo y Francisco J. López Rodríguez (coord.), *Reyes, espadas, cuervos y dragones. Estudio del fenómeno televisivo «Juego de Tronos»*, Madrid, Fragua, 2013, pp. 275-302.

the rotund monarch –much more overweight than him– before joining with him, amid sonorous laughter, in a brotherly embrace.

Although this humorous moment could be seen as a mere narrative anecdote, the scene is key, although humorous, to explain the essence of the most well-known medieval sport: tournaments. In fact, the wargames –or *diversiones aparatosas*, as Jovellanos baptised them– were essential for maintaining the soldiers' physical fitness, a matter of great importance in those times in which their feudal mission was to assure the defence of the whole population.<sup>53</sup> Thus, on the occasions that the knights carried a little extra weight, it was a more than obvious symbol of peace: as the friendly talk between King Robert Baratheon and his friend Ned Stark suggests, they must have been in much better shape when they were both young warriors, fighting in the rebellion against Aerys II Targaryen, nicknamed *The Mad King*.<sup>54</sup>

When the scene was shown in class, I put my students to work on a similar dialogue starring none other than one of the most famous Spanish monarchs: Ferdinand II of Aragón and V of Castile, that is, the Catholic King. We owe our knowledge of this event to Andrés Bernáldez, nicknamed *el Cura de los Palacios*, author of a famous chronicle of the Catholic Monarchs' reign. According to Bernáldez, the scene took place in the Remesal interview, during the summer of 1506, the moment in which Ferdinand the Catholic and the new Castilian King, Philip of Habsburg, met each other in person for the first time:

Y viéronse en lunes, quince días de julio, entre Sanabria y Esturianos, en un llano, en unos barbechos, en un robleal ralo [...] Venía el rey don Felipe en una mula baya muy hermosa y muy jaezada, y traía una capa francesa encima del sayo, toda de brocado. Iba el rey don Fernando en un caballo alazán claro, muy singular, y un capuz negro vestido. Las trompetas y bastardas, y chirimías y sacabuches, y dulzainas e instrumentos y músicas de ambos reyes eran tantas, y hacían tan grandes solemnidades y melodías, que no parecía sino gloria celestial. Y llegados el uno al otro a las cortesías, [...] se abrazaron, y estuvieron allí un gran rato los reyes.<sup>55</sup>

Bernaldez's description situates us in the same type of scene seen in *Game of Thrones*, a royal entry. In addition, it is as if Robert Baratheon is transformed into the Catholic King, for he himself jokes about the physical state of some opulent nobles to whom he is saluting, the same knights who, a few years before, were his soldiers in the military campaigns against the Muslims of Granada:

Motejó el rey don Fernando al conde de Benavente, yéndole a besar la mano, lo abrazó y le dijo:  
— Conde, ¿cómo os habéis hecho gordo?  
Él respondió que andando con el tiempo. Y eso mismo, al duque de Nájera dijo ciertas palabras. Y dijo al comendador mayor, don Garcilaso:  
— ¿Y aun tú, García, también?  
Y él respondió:

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<sup>53</sup> Cf. Gaspar Melchor de Jovellanos, *Memoria sobre espectáculos y diversiones públicas / Informe sobre la Ley Agraria*, ed. Guillermo Carnero, Madrid, 1997, pp. 128-129.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. Chad William Timm, "Stop the Madness! Knowledge, Power, and Insanity in *A Song of Ice and Fire*", in Henry Owen Jacoby (ed.), *Game of Thrones and Philosophy: Logic Cuts Deeper than Swords*, Hoboken, John Wiley & Sons, 2012, pp. 264-277.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. Andrés Bernáldez, *Memorias del reinado de los Reyes Católicos*, ed. Manuel Gómez-Moreno Martínez & Juan de Mata Carriazo Arroquia, Madrid, Real Academia de la Historia, 1962, p. 498.



— Doy la fe a vuestra alteza que todos venimos así.<sup>56</sup>

As I said, this was a complete surprise to the students: it was not just Robert Baratheon and Ned Stark who made brash comments to each other about those extra kilos due to military inactivity; but even a person of Ferdinand the Catholic's historical importance did just the same. In fact, the scene in *GoT*, although fictitious, is much more useful for the comprehension of what the narrated anecdote signified at that time in history that, without going very far, the representation of this scene in the recent movie entitled *La corona partida*.<sup>57</sup> In the Spanish film, the already mentioned Remesal interview between Philip I and Ferdinand the Catholic is also recreated, making the latter utter the words that the chronicler Bernáldez has put in his mouth in order to mock the weight of the Castilian noblemen, the same ones who had accompanied him to the Granada war before and who now appear a bit more solid in their armour. The only problem in this film is that the actors who are accused of gaining weight are actually not fat; in fact, they are frankly skinny. Similarly, the actor who plays the Catholic King makes a kind of grimace that looks like a smile. On the contrary then, to the ornamental figures and cheerful laughter of the two *Game of Thrones* characters, who appear to be representing the Remesal interview adjusting the context much more to its historic reality, despite being an audiovisual fiction with nothing to do with Spanish history.<sup>58</sup>

It is clear to me that the witty joke of Ferdinand of Aragón to 'de-tense' a very compromised situation – a peace interview, to which they were all armed to the teeth<sup>59</sup> has been absolutely misunderstood by the screenwriters of *La corona partida*. Thus, the anecdote stays in limbo, as is so frequent in the qualitatively deficient treatment of Isabel of Castile and Ferdinand of Aragón in the television shows and films about them. In general, the age of the Catholic Monarchs, although it has enjoyed a resurgence of interest on the part of the Seventh Art in the last few years, has suffered fiasco after fiasco in its representation, in which the vain, vacuous, and the superficial prevail, especially the most 'soap opera' ingredients as possible, leaving aside any deeper exploration of topics.<sup>60</sup>

## 2 – Bloody Weddings and Fundamental Betrayals

Let us return to *Game of Thrones* to analyse one of the most famous episodes (SE03EP09): *The Rains of Castamere*, in which we find what has been considered one of the most intense moments of the series, known as the 'Red Wedding'. Here, a dark and devious nobleman named Walder Frey, secretly united with the Lannisters and with

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<sup>56</sup> Bernáldez, *Memorias...*, pp. 498-499.

<sup>57</sup> Directed by Jordi Frades in 2016: <<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt4634422/>> [2016-11-21].

<sup>58</sup> According to Prof. Garver, "*Game of Thrones* does not claim to be an accurate representation of history, but it ends up conveying some aspects of the Middle Ages [...] far better than do other popular sources that purport to be historically accurate" (cf. Parisi, *art. cit.*)

<sup>59</sup> One of the Parliamentary representatives called to an assembly in Burgos, around the same year, bitterly complained on the fact that "todos los señores que están en la corte están acompañados de gentes de armas y usan de algunas formas que parecen más para la guerra y la revuelta de la corte que para sosiego del reino". Cf. José Manuel Carretero Zamora, "Representación política y procesos de legitimación", in *Orígenes de la monarquía hispánica: propaganda y legitimación*, ca. 1400-1520, dir. José Manuel Nieto Soria, Madrid, Dykinson, 1999, pp. 177-205 (quoted text, p. 189, n. 29).

<sup>60</sup> A collection of lame excuses on this matter provided by one of the scriptwriters of the TV show *Isabel* was reproduced on their study by Juan Francisco Jiménez Alcázar y Mercedes Abad Merino, "El pasado como producto de consumo en los medios de ocio", en Juan Francisco Jiménez Alcázar, Íñigo Mugueta Moreno y Gerardo Fabián Rodríguez (coord.), *Historia y videojuegos: el impacto de los nuevos medios de ocio sobre el conocimiento histórico*, Murcia, Compobell, 2016, pp. 9-30 (p. 20).

the help of another traitor lineage, the Boltons, assassinates not only Robb Stark, the King of the North, but also his wife Talisa –who, for greater dramatic tension, is pregnant–, and also his mother Catelyn Tully-Stark. This horrible slaughter takes place during the wedding banquet celebrating the union between Edmure Tully –Robb Stark’s maternal uncle– and Roslin Frey, daughter of the sinister host. Once again, we can find here a commonplace throughout the history of the European Middle Ages: the infamy of not respecting hospitality when attending a wedding where rival families are present to settle a score.<sup>61</sup>

The author of the saga, George R.R. Martin has acknowledged that he drew inspiration for what is undoubtedly one of the peak moments of his narrative from two well-known episodes of Scotland’s history.<sup>62</sup> The first one, occurred in Edinburgh during 1440, is called *The Black Dinner*, in which members of the Douglas family were executed by a rival clan, the Crichtons, after being invited to dinner in the presence of the boy-king James II Stewart.<sup>63</sup> The second example is not medieval, for it took place in 1692, but it was equally obnoxious: the Glencoe massacre, in which a new Scottish clan, the Campbells, did not respect the hospitality codes and stabbed some members of the MacDonalds, a rival clan, who had shared a meal with them under the illusion of friendship.<sup>64</sup>

Once the coordinates have been set up, it is very simple to relate the Red Wedding to Spanish medieval history and literature, where such dramas are lavishly played out, together with the interesting addition that has come to us through different cultural traditions. Through the Western way, we cannot forget the ‘bodas y tornabodas’ of Ruy Vázquez with Doña Lambra, in which one of the most important legends of medieval Castilian imagery was born: the legend of the *Siete Infantes de Lara*.<sup>65</sup> As it happens in both GoT and Scottish history, the origin of the myth lies in the enmity of two rival clans in Asturias, the Salas and the Laras,<sup>66</sup> which legend has amplified and diluted through the mists of historicity so much that it is hard to tell where truth ends and legend begins.<sup>67</sup> However, the transit of these materials from popular ballads towards historiographical works, especially *Primera Crónica General* and of *Crónica de 1344*,<sup>68</sup> guarantees us that, at least during the Late Hispanic Middle Ages, the story was considered to be true.

The legend establishes that during the wedding between Ruy Vázquez and Doña Lambra, it took place the most popular game in medieval Castile based upon chivalric

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<sup>61</sup> On hospitality in medieval Castile, see Nilda Guglielmi, *Marginalidad en la Edad Media*, Buenos Aires, Biblos, 1998, pp. 70-72.

<sup>62</sup> Dan Casey, “George R.R. Martin Explains the Red Wedding’s Historical Roots”, *Nerdist Online Magazine* 05.06.2013: <<http://nerdist.com/george-r-r-martin-explains-the-red-weddings-historical-roots/>> [2016-11-21].

<sup>63</sup> Cf. Michael Brown, *The Black Douglases: War and Lordship in Late Medieval Scotland, 1300-1455*, East Linton, Tuckwell Press, 1998, pp. 261-264.

<sup>64</sup> Cf. John Prebble, *Glencoe: The Story of the Massacre*, London, Penguin Books, 1968.

<sup>65</sup> Cf. Ramón Menéndez Pidal, *La leyenda de los Infantes de Lara*, Madrid, Gredos, 1971, especialmente pp. 302-312.

<sup>66</sup> Cf. José Manuel Pedrosa, “Los siete infantes de Salas: leyenda, épica, romance y lírica reconsiderados a la luz de fórmulas y metros”, *Memorabilia* 16 (2014), pp. 86-130.

<sup>67</sup> Cf. Eukene Lacarra Lanz, “Sobre la historicidad de la leyenda de los *Siete Infantes de Lara*”, in Barry Taylor y Geoffrey West (eds.), *Historicist Essays on Hispano-Medieval Narrative in Memory of Roger M. Walker*, London, Maney Publishing for the Modern Humanities Research Association, 2005, pp. 201-227. In addition, issue 36 of *Cahiers d’études hispaniques médiévales* (2013) is a critical cluster on this legend.

<sup>68</sup> Cf. Menéndez Pidal, *La leyenda...*, p. 304.

skills:<sup>69</sup> the *bohordos*.<sup>70</sup> It was because of that game when the confrontation arose, as declaimed in the *romance*:

– Doña Lambra con fantasía	grandes tablados armara.
Allí salió un cavallero	de los de Córdoba la llana,
cavallero en un cavallo	y en la su mano una vara.
Arremete su cavallo	al tablado la tirara,
diziendo: - «Amad, señoras	cada cual como es amada,
que más vale un cavallero	de los de Córdoba la llana,
más vale que cuatro ni cinco	de los de la flor de Lara». <sup>71</sup>

The tragedy unravelled when Gonzalo González, the youngest of the Lara's *infantes* wanted to prove to Doña Lambra and the rest of attendants that they were wrong, showing in turn how good *bohordadores* the brothers were. But this action was considered bluster by Doña Lambra, who declared herself dishonoured. Her husband, Ruy Vázquez, took revenge delivering the father of the *infantes*, Gonzalo Gustioz, to the Moorish enemy, the ferocious Almanzor, whilst his seven children were killed in an ambush. In time, an eighth son, Mudarra, begotten by Gonzalo Gustioz in his brief stage at a Muslim prison, will end up avenging his brothers by capturing Ruy Vázquez without forgetting that 'la trayción [...] que él fiso fue començada [...] en Burgos, quando él casó con Doña Lambra'.<sup>72</sup> In addition, the fact that in the GoT episode a mysterious melody, entitled *The Rains of Castamere*, was performed as a prelude to betrayal by the musicians who enliven the wedding is a magnificent thread to work on the legend of Lara's Seven *Infantes* in class, emphasising once again how these same events made their way from ballads and oral literature to the narrative texts,<sup>73</sup> and through them to the historiography itself.<sup>74</sup>

Nevertheless, the nobiliary and dynastic quarrels in the formation of Castilian feudal territories during the Middle Ages are not the only theme that can be studied in relation to the sequence of GoT's Red Wedding. Coming not from an Eastern but at least an Eastern-like cultural prism, we must remember a similar confrontation in the complicated world of fifteenth-century Muslim Granada.<sup>75</sup> We have here the same constituent dramatic elements: two opposing sides, Sigríes and Banu Sarrach – hispanicised in Zegríes and Abencerrajes–, and a beautiful lady, the gorgeous Jarifa, in a

<sup>69</sup> Cf. Óscar Perea Rodríguez, "Bofordar en el siglo XIII castellano: entre el entrenamiento militar y el espectáculo caballeresco", in Manuel González Jiménez (ed.), *El mundo urbano en la Castilla del siglo XIII*, Sevilla, Fundación El Monte-Ayuntamiento de Ciudad Real, 2006, 2, pp. 247-255, especially pp. 251-252.

<sup>70</sup> Cf. María del Mar Agudo Romeo, "Notas en torno a un juego medieval: los bohordos", *Aragón en la Edad Media. Homenaje a la Profesora Emérita María Luisa Ledesma Rubio*, 10-11 (1993), pp. 17-29.

<sup>71</sup> Text reproduced from Giuseppe Di Stéfano, *El romancero*, Madrid, Narcea, 1973, pp. 245-246.

<sup>72</sup> Cf. Menéndez Pidal, *La leyenda...*, p. 312.

<sup>73</sup> As expressed by Thomas A. Lathrop, *The Legend of the Siete Infantes de Lara (refundición toledana de la Crónica de 1344 version)*, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1972, pp. 15-16.

<sup>74</sup> Cf. Fernando Gómez Redondo, "Fórmulas juglarescas en la historiografía romance de los siglos XIII y XIV", *La Corónica*, 15 (1986-87), pp. 225-239.

<sup>75</sup> Cf. Miguel Ángel Ladero Quesada, *La guerra de Granada, 1482-1491*, Granada, Diputación de Granada, 2001, pp. 15-19.

Romeo-Julietesque tragedy that involved them all.<sup>76</sup> The historic novel by Ginés Pérez de Hita was published for the first time in 1595,<sup>77</sup> deafening of the universal fame of the legend that leads us again to a clear parallel we can take advantage of to use in our Literature and History classes.<sup>78</sup>

Betrayal, in fact, is a recurring element in Martin's narrative and, of course, around which are built some of the most brilliant episodes of GoT. I do not think I am mistaken if I take for granted that any viewer of the series will agree that in narrative terms, the turning point of the first season was undoubtedly the betrayal of the character nicknamed *Littlefinger*, Lord Petyr Baelish, to Ned Stark, who was perhaps too much of an idealist always faithful to his principles.<sup>79</sup> Such perfidiousness ends with the lord of Winterfell beheaded in one of the most shocking scenes ever transmitted on the small screen. As usual, Martin and the writers' merit is to choose the theme of betrayal as the thread of the plot, as betrayals are essential to the creation of identity myths of all Western civilization.<sup>80</sup> The most famous precedent is, as many readers will recall, the murder of Cylon ordered by the later reviled and banished lineage of Alcmaeonids, in the incipient democracy of Athens.<sup>81</sup> It can be equally found in famous events of the past such as the Trojan War, the violent death of Remus at the hands of his brother Romulus, and in general, in any mythical foundation, especially those that aim to cement any form of national identity.<sup>82</sup>

The list of texts and events in medieval Spain that could be used here is quite long. I designed for this course a brief historical and literary analysis of some works centered on the legendary betrayal of Julián, count of Tarifa, and it proved to be profitable for the students. As is well known, the noble count Julián decided to avenge the honor of his daughter Florinda –also known as La Cava–,<sup>83</sup> because she was raped by King Rodrigo, the last Visigoth monarch of Spain. Apart from deepening the misogynist conception of these medieval legends,<sup>84</sup> the different parts of the story, from rape to revenge and the consequent loss of Spain,<sup>85</sup> establish the coordinates of the Muslim invasion of the Iberian Peninsula in 711 as punishment for King Rodrigo's

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<sup>76</sup> Analysed by Joaquín Gimeno Casaldueiro, "El Abencerraje y la hermosa Jarifa: composición y significado", in his book *La creación literaria de la Edad Media y del Renacimiento. Su forma y su significado*, Madrid, José Porrúa Turanzas, 1977, pp. 83-112.

<sup>77</sup> Cf. María Soledad Carrasco Urgoiti, "Apuntes sobre el mito de los Abencerrajes y sus versiones literarias", *Miscelánea de Estudios Árabes y Hebreos, Sección Árabe-Islam* 47 (1998), pp. 65-88.

<sup>78</sup> See Tomoko Mimura, "La causa morisca en *Guerras civiles de Granada*: un estudio comparativo entre la primera y segunda parte", *Anales del Seminario de Historia de la Filosofía*, 23 (2006), pp. 165-180.

<sup>79</sup> Cf. David Hahn, "The Death of Lord Stark: The Perils of Idealism", in Henry Owen Jacoby (ed.), *Game of Thrones and Philosophy: Logic Cuts Deeper than Swords*, Hoboken, John Wiley & Sons, 2012, pp. 75-86.

<sup>80</sup> Cf. Nachman Ben-Yehuda, *Betrayals and Treason: Violations of Trust and Loyalty*, Boulder, Co., Westview Press, 2001, pp. 11-12.

<sup>81</sup> Cf. Philip Brook Manville, *The Origins of Citizenship in Ancient Athens*, Princeton, University Press, 1997, pp. 73-78.

<sup>82</sup> Cf. Geraldine Coates, *Treacherous Foundations. Betrayal and Collective Identity in Early Spanish Epic, Chronicle, and Drama*, Woodbridge-Rochester, Boydell & Brewer, 2009, especially pp. 19-37.

<sup>83</sup> Cf. Marjorie Ratcliffe, "Víctima histórica y víctima literaria: La Cava Florinda", in her book *Mujeres épicas españolas: silencios, olvidos e ideologías*, Woodbridge-Rochester, Tamesis, 2011, pp. 17-62.

<sup>84</sup> Cf. Elizabeth Drayson, *The King and the Whore: King Roderick and La Cava*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.

<sup>85</sup> All texts can be read in Di Stéfano, *op. cit.*, pp. 223-232.

perfidy which also caused the loss of Spain's first national identity built in the Middle Ages.<sup>86</sup> But, obviously, it is only one example among the many that could have worked. As far as betrayal is concerned, historical reality is infinitely superior to any fiction. Thus, I am sure that my colleagues will be able to make even much better choices, in accordance to their academic objectives.

### 3.- The Dangerous Life of a Medieval Minstrel

In recent years, TV series and films set in the Middle Ages have tended to focus on the more musical and literary aspects. Most readers will agree that few, if any, elements are better able to convey the atmosphere of the age than music.<sup>87</sup> Even though the results achieved by both film and television industries have been somewhat unsatisfactory,<sup>88</sup> one must recognise that in GoT music serves as a link between the different storylines. In addition, it is essential in the impact that some of its most iconic scenes have had, such as the aforementioned Red Wedding, which is based upon the precisely balanced music which accompanies the action on screen.

Thanks to the recent releases of series and films set in the Middle Ages both on the small and big screens, justice has been done towards the minstrels, bards, troubadours, poets, and, generally speaking, to anyone who can be identified by any other title along with the composers, reciters, and lyric singers in medieval times.<sup>89</sup> They all played an essential role in the sharing of culture, a role that is sometimes difficult to explain to students.<sup>90</sup> In to the poetry of Castilian *cancioneros*, one idea that I always attempt to convey in my classes is precisely that although much of the lyric of the late Middle Ages and early Renaissance is studied today as literature, in fact the enormous volume of songbooks that we have conserved would indicate that such a great impact achieved by *cancionero* poetry was similar to the popularity music has today;<sup>91</sup> otherwise, it is difficult to explain its high popularity back then.<sup>92</sup>

In GoT, as it corresponds to a series framed in medieval times, we can see a minstrel named Marillion. In principle, he seems to play an anecdotal role, but later has his little moment of glory... if you can call that to his last –so far– shocking appearance. The first time we see him (S01E04) he finds himself in one of the typical areas of his craft, a tavern, where he offers his services to Lady Catelyn Stark and her companion, Sir Rodrik Cassell. This happens shortly before the chapter concludes with another scene: the allies of the Stark lineage present in the same tavern, offering the feudal

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<sup>86</sup> Cf. Elizabeth B. Davis, *Myth and Identity in the Epic of Imperial Spain*, Columbia, University of Missouri Press, 2000, pp. 176-177.

<sup>87</sup> Cf. John Haines, *Music in Films on the Middle Ages: Authenticity vs. Fantasy*, New York, Routledge, 2013, p. 14.

<sup>88</sup> I briefly dealt with this in my blog: “Música en las series históricas: ¿adorno de rigor prescindible?” *Harto de tanta porfía...* 17/10/2013: <<http://opr71.blogspot.com.es/2013/10/musica-en-las-series-historicas-adorno.html>> [2017-01-19].

<sup>89</sup> Cf. Eukene Lacarra Lanz, “Espectáculos de la voz y la palabra. Juglares y afines”, in Andrés Amorós & José Manuel Díez Borque (coord.), *Historia de los espectáculos en España*, Madrid, Castalia, 1999, pp. 405-418.

<sup>90</sup> A quite useful first approach to this topic, especially for non-Hispanic students, can be found in José Manuel Herrero Massari, *Juglares y trovadores*, Madrid, Akal, 1999.

<sup>91</sup> Cf. Ana M. Gómez-Bravo, “*Dezir canciones: The Question of Genre in Fifteenth-Century Castilian Cancionero Poetry*”, in William D. Paden (ed.), *Medieval Lyric: Genres in Historical Context*, Chicago, University Press, 2000, pp. 158-189.

<sup>92</sup> For further explanation of these numbers, see Óscar Perea Rodríguez, “Pedro I y la propaganda antipetrista en la génesis y el éxito de la poesía cancioneril castellana (I)”, *La Corónica*, 45.2 (2017): 109-132 (117-119).

*auxilium* owed to their liege –Lady Catelyn in this case–,<sup>93</sup> imprisoned Tyrion Lannister under the accusation of engineering the accident that left Bran Stark, son of lady Catelyn and Nedd Stark, badly hurt. In this first scene, the bard Marillion does not sing, but only shows the precariousness of his craft: he offers his art to anyone, some and others, even if they are enemies –such as the Stark and the Lannister–, in exchange for a few coins or food and drink, if such were the will of the listener. As it is obvious for any medievalist after reading these lines, the last *topos* given form by Marillion, that of the joy of minstrel-like begging –as coined by Menéndez Pidal–,<sup>94</sup> immediately recalls that “vaso de bon vino” that Gonzalo de Berceo believed he deserved for having composed his poetry in “román paladino”.<sup>95</sup>

In the following episode (S01E05), the appearance of Marillion shows us another fundamental aspect of the medieval poets: their double capacity to be both witnesses and narrators of important events of their times. The scene places Tyrion Lannister, hooded and bound, being led on horseback by Lady Stark and her military retinue, to the place where he would be judged by the serious accusations made against him. As the warriors sharpen their weapons and prepare to face the dangerous days that await them by escorting such an illustrious prisoner, Marillion offers a playful contrast. He is depicted tuning his stringed musical instrument, with which he rehearses the lyrics of a song inspired by the Events that he has just witnessed, namely the capture of Tyrion Lannister, who is contemptuously referred to as ‘dwarf’.<sup>96</sup> A sudden attack by the wild tribes of the mountains interrupts the musical tuning of the troubadour, who is hit by a stone sent by a sling at the beginning of a small skirmish. Perhaps this is a joke of the writers based on the well-known custom that made the theatrical spectators likely to throw vegetables at the artists if their performance was not to their liking.<sup>97</sup>

If on that occasion the minstrel was only struck for having dared to be a faithful witness of what he had just seen, the next time we see him enter the scene (S01E10) is to attend his personal tragedy. The starting point is the event presiding over the resolution of the end of the first season: the death of King Robert Baratheon, after an unfortunate hunting accident in which he was mortally wounded by a wild boar.<sup>98</sup> Leaving aside the chain of betrayals and deaths that follow, in the scene of concern here we see Marillion, sitting in the middle of the great room of the Iron Throne, singing a song while playing his musical instrument. Later on, the camera shows the new king, Joffrey Baratheon, successor of whom everyone believes his father –although the

<sup>93</sup> Cf. Julio Valdeón Baruque, “Sobre el feudalismo. Treinta años después”, in Esteban Sarasa Sánchez & Eliseo Serrano Martín (coord.), *Estudios sobre señorío y feudalismo: homenaje a Julio Valdeón*, Zaragoza, Institución «Fernando el Católico», 2010, pp. 9-25.

<sup>94</sup> Cf. Ramón Menéndez Pidal, *Poesía juglaresca y juglares. Aspectos de la historia literaria y cultural de España*, Madrid, Espasa-Calpe, 1962, p. 11.

<sup>95</sup> Cf. Gonzalo de Berceo, *La vida de Santo Domingo de Silos*, ed. Brian Dutton, London, Tamesis Books Limited, 1978, p. 35. I am not convinced at all that this is a plain and simple allusion to Eucharist. I rather believe it is a word game mixing both religious and social drinking habits in order to create a fun connivance between Berceo and his audience. Cf. Juan Gutiérrez Cuadrado, “El vaso de vino de Berceo (*Santo Domingo*, 2d)”, in José Antonio Bartol Hernández *et al.* (ed.), *Estudios filológicos en homenaje a Eugenio de Bustos Tovar*, Salamanca, Ediciones de la Universidad, 1992, I, pp. 423-432.

<sup>96</sup> Lyrics are as follows: “On that eve, / the captive Imp / downwards from his horse did limp: / no more would he preen and primp / in garb of red and gold”.

<sup>97</sup> It was a well-established custom in the 16th and 17th c., and possibly decades before as well. Cf. Ramón Morales, “Glosario de alusiones a vegetales en las obras completas de Cervantes”, *Anales Cervantinos*, 37 (2005), pp. 267-295, especially pp. 287-288.

<sup>98</sup> Cf. María Isabel Montoya, “La caza en el medioevo peninsular”, *Tonos. Revista electrónica de estudios filológicos*, 6 (2003): <<http://www.um.es/tonosdigital/znum6/portada/Cazamur.htm>> [2017-04-21].

audience already knows that this is not true—, listening attentively to the song that our minstrel composed on the occasion of the death of the previous monarch and that, apparently, he also sang in a tavern to entertain the common people:

The boar's great tusks, they boded ill,  
for good King Robert's health;  
and the beast was every bit as fat  
as Robert was himself.  
But our brave King cried: 'Do your worst!  
I'll have your ugly head!  
You're nowhere near as murderous as  
the lion in my bed!'  
King Robert lost his battle  
and he failed his final test:  
the lion ripped his balls off  
and the boar did all the rest.

Although the perfidious Joffrey applauds pretending to have enjoyed this song, and although Marillion solemnly swears not to sing it again in public, the poor troubadour will pay dearly for his daring. The reason is quite evident: it is impossible to forgive having composed a burlesque poem about the death of the king and blaming the death of Robert Baratheon to the queen mother, Cersei Lannister—hailed as 'the lion', for such an animal is the heraldic symbol of her lineage. Thus, all the tension in the scene turns into a tragedy when, after a few seconds of enthusiastic applause, the sadistic young monarch, in front of a queen mother—who does nothing to stop her son's cruelty—, asks the minstrel whether he would rather keep his tongue or his hands. Marillion responded innocently on how every man needs his hands, but King Joffrey immediately orders the executioner, Sir Ilyn Payne, to cut Marillion's tongue out with a hunting knife in the crowded court, as a public punishment for the offence committed.

Perhaps we might think that this is an exaggerated scene, the result of the ingenuity of writers imbued in the current trend of crude television realism in the treatment of the Middle Ages that has been baptised as 'dirty medievalism'.<sup>99</sup> This would be a grave error. There are many medieval Spanish texts and documents that allow us to establish not only relevant comparisons between historical reality and television fiction, but also to specify that the scene is very appropriate to show the real danger faced by those authors who dared to compose verses against the Crown or to question the politics of the monarchy.

For all these reasons, the minstrel's representation in GoT fits quite well with the reality of the troubadours in medieval times, perhaps only matched by that of the little-known film *The Castilian* (1963),<sup>100</sup> a story in cinemascope of the legends about Fernán González, first Count of Castile. In this uneven and *sui generis* film, which shares a lot of the quaint features of 'B' movies, Frankie Avalon—a teen idol in the United States at the time— gives shape to the vicissitudes faced by a minstrel who goes by the name Jerifán.<sup>101</sup> He performs various songs with a pleasant Spanish tone but with some very

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<sup>99</sup> Cf. Andrew B. R. Elliott, "«Our Minds Are in the Gutter, But Some of Us are Watching Starz...» Sex, Violence, and Dirty Medievalism", in Helen Victoria Young (ed.), *Fantasy and Science-fiction Medievalisms: From Isaac Asimov to A Game of Thrones*, Amherst-New York, Victoria Press, 2015, pp. 54-63.

<sup>100</sup> *The Castilian*: <<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0056646/>> [2017-04-21].

<sup>101</sup> Cf. Alberto Escalante Varona, "La transmisión cinematográfica de la leyenda de Fernán González: *El valle de las espadas*, de Javier Setó", *Cuadernos de Aleph*, 9 (2017), pp. 33-60.

poor lyrics, to be generous. What unites the picturesque Jerifán with the daring Marillion in fiction is an incontestable historical reality: the absence of personal security once they had first-hand experience of a capital event lived by the society at large. Their profession forced them to use these famous events in their compositions in order to appeal to their audience; after all, being a minstrel was based on the frenetic activity of adapting to the constant changes of taste of the audience to which they owed their support.<sup>102</sup> However the risk was quite evident, especially if the protagonists of those events, whether direct or indirect, did not agree with the literary version of the facts narrated, as it happens with the vengeful Joffrey Baratheon and the poor faint, first metaphorical and later literally, Marillion.

Scenes similar to those in the set in the Hall of the Iron Throne, although not generally part of teaching plans or even higher education, are well known to scholars in the Middle Ages. To provide only two examples, I will first mention a poet, named Hernando de Ribera, who accompanied the armies of the Catholic Monarchs in the campaigns of Granada with the aim of writing a chronicle in verse of what was foreseen to be a glorious military victory over the Muslim kingdom.<sup>103</sup> One of the most striking instances at the beginning of the war was the siege of the fortress of Tájara –present-day Huétor-Tájar, Granada–, in which Enrique Enríquez –maternal uncle of Ferdinand the Catholic– was wounded while carrying out his role as head majordomo.<sup>104</sup> It seems that the verses written by Ribera to describe the event were not to the liking of the nobility, as they did not sufficiently emphasise the bravery that the royal servant had shown during the skirmish. According to the chronicler Bernáldez, the despised Enríquez did not shake his hand in punishing the daring poet, for he “imbió por la coronica, que estaba en un monasterio, y casi por la fuerza la sacó y quitó todo lo que quiso”.<sup>105</sup> The fact that no manuscript nor printed version of Ribera’s chronicle has been preserved is a good proof of the zeal with which the Catholic King’s uncle took to erase the affront. This was not the only case of this: we know several more chroniclers and authors of the fifteenth century who saw their works dismissed and were forced to modify them.<sup>106</sup>

The absence of biographical data on Hernando de Ribera prevents us from certifying that he suffered a fate similar to that of Marillion after this incident. However, only a few years later, during the time of the Granada War, we do know a case in which the composers of a poem ended up much worse than our bard of GoT. I am talking of the so-called *Coplas del Tabefe*,<sup>107</sup> composed in 1490 in Jerez de la Frontera.<sup>108</sup> Through this poem, engraved with a slight satirical patina and additions from pastoralist literature,<sup>109</sup> its authors criticised the excessive economic expenditure in the military

<sup>102</sup> Menéndez Pidal, *Poesía juglaresca y juglares*, p. 245.

<sup>103</sup> Cf. Alan Deyermond, “La historiografía Trastámara: ¿una cuarentena de obras perdidas?”, in *Estudios en homenaje a don Claudio Sánchez-Albornoz en sus 90 años*, Buenos Aires, Facultad de Filosofía y Letras-Instituto de Historia, 1986, IV, pp. 161-194 (pp. 181-182).

<sup>104</sup> Cf. Óscar Perea Rodríguez, *Estudio biográfico sobre los poetas del “Cancionero general”*, Madrid, CSIC, 2007, pp. 176-178.

<sup>105</sup> Cf. Bernáldez, *Memorias*, p. 537.

<sup>106</sup> Cf. Óscar Perea Rodríguez, “Quebrantar la jura de mis abuelos: los conversos en los cancioneros castellanos del tardío medievo (1454-1504)”, *La Corónica*, 40.1 (2011), pp. 183-226, especially pp. 205-210.

<sup>107</sup> ID 0206 in Dutton’s classification of medieval Spanish *cancionero* poetry, unanimously followed by the academy. Cf. Brian Dutton, *El cancionero castellano del siglo XV (c. 1360-1520)*, Salamanca, Ediciones de la Universidad, 1990-91, II, p. 243.

<sup>108</sup> Cf. Manuel Ferrer-Chivite, “Sobre las coplas llamadas ‘del Tabefe’, su autor y sus avatares”, *Scriptura (=Letradura. Estudios de literatura medieval)*, 13 (1997), pp. 151-172.

<sup>109</sup> Cf. Paola Elia, “Le ‘Coplas del tabefe’ una satira del XV secolo spagnolo”, *Studi e Ricerche*, 2 (1983), pp. 137-183.



campaigns against the Muslims and, consequently, the hardships that the Andalusian councils faced to supply the troops operating in the area,<sup>110</sup> as can be read in the following excerpt:

Abre, abre las orejas.  
escucha, escucha, pastor;  
di, ¿no oyes el clamor  
que te hacen tus ovejas?  
Sus voces suben al cielo  
quejando su desconsuelo,  
que las trasquilas a engaño  
tantas veces cada año  
que nunca las cubre el pelo.

Tienes tres trasquiladeros,  
cada cual con su tijera,  
y dejas tales los cueros  
que el ganado desespera;  
y después que has trasquilado  
alquilas todo el ganado  
a peladores que van,  
y si les ladra algún can,  
arrójasle tú el cayado [...]

Has sacado tanta lana  
que si dieras buena maña  
hubieras hecho una manta  
que cubrieras toda España;  
mas como lo has repelado,  
el viento te lo ha llevado,  
que no era tu intención  
dirigida a salvación  
ni a provecho del ganado [...]

Es tan grande tu codicia  
que no hay cosa que te harte,  
mas venga de cualquier parte,  
bien ganado o con malicia,  
que todo cabe en tu seno,  
lo mal ganado y lo bueno,  
trasquilado o repelado,  
mal ganado o bien ganado,  
que sea tuyo o ajeno [...]

Si dices que fue tu empresa  
por servicio de tu ley  
y por aumentar tu grey  
y acrecentar tu dehesa,  
y que lo que has trasquilado  
ha sido bien empleado,

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<sup>110</sup> On these financial problems, see Manuel González Jiménez, “La guerra en su vertiente andaluza: participación de las ciudades, villas y señoríos andaluces”, in Miguel Ángel Ladero Quesada (ed.), *La incorporación de Granada a la Corona de Castilla*, Granada, Sociedad Estatal de Conmemoraciones Culturales, 1993, pp. 651-674.

pues que allanaste las sierras,  
 ¿para qué quieres las tierras,  
 si destruyes el ganado?<sup>111</sup>

The students on my course had to analyse the fictitious poem composed by Marillion, which the Lannisters found so offensive, and the *Coplas del Tabefe*, which have arrived to us quite late –not by chance– in relation to the date of its composition.<sup>112</sup> Apart from verifying the metaphorical uses of animals and,<sup>113</sup> above all, the well-known figurative representation of the king as the good shepherd of his flock<sup>114</sup> –so important for the formulation of medieval theories of power–,<sup>115</sup> what surprised the students again was the timelessness of the criticism conveyed by this poem. The group analysis in the seminars emphasised that, in the first stanza there is a complaint that the king does not listen to the petitions of the common people, especially with regard to the high taxes they pay to sustain the wars; in the second, the complaints refer to the misuse of those taxes; in the third, they refer to the greed of the rulers over the common wealth; and finally, a quasi-pacifist plea about the meaninglessness of all wars. One must simply take a look at the headlines of any newspaper today to see the striking similarities between the current-day concerns and those of a poem composed five hundred years ago.

In addition, students emphasised the absence of causticity and indecency regarding *Coplas del tabefe*, on the contrary that we have just seen in the lyrics composed by Marillion. Due to this fact, I was given the opportunity to explain how Hispanic medieval literatures were largely enriched by these ingredients, especially those Galician minstrels who turned into an art “la difamación por medio de canciones”:<sup>116</sup> the literary genre called *cantigas de escarnio y maldizer*.<sup>117</sup> In regard to Castilian *cancioneros*, I made a short survey of protest poetry,<sup>118</sup> a somewhat polemic label,<sup>119</sup> despite the fact that it achieved enormous popularity during the entire 15<sup>th</sup> century. We first analysed *Coplas de la Panadera* (Dutton ID 1945), composed during the reign of John II shortly afterwards the first battle of Olmedo in 1445;<sup>120</sup> and, of course, both *Coplas de Mingo Revulgo* (Dutton ID 2024) and *Coplas del Provincial*

<sup>111</sup> I take the poem’s text, a selection of stanzas 1, 2, 4, and 14, from my own edition at “*Quebrantar la jura de mis abuelos*”, pp. 207-208.

<sup>112</sup> All materials witnesses of this text (Texid 10476) can be found at *PhiloBiblon-BETA: Bibliografía Española de Textos Antiguos*, database and research project directed by Charles Faulhaber: <[http://bancroft.berkeley.edu/philobiblon/index\\_es.html](http://bancroft.berkeley.edu/philobiblon/index_es.html)> [2017-02-23].

<sup>113</sup> Cf. Lúcia Martín Pascual, *La tradición animalística en la literatura catalana medieval*, Valencia, Conselleria de Cultura, Educació i Ciència-Instituto de Cultura Juan Gil-Albert, 1996, pp. 18-21.

<sup>114</sup> See Javier Irigoyen García, *The Spanish Arcadia: Sheep Herding, Pastoral Discourse, and Ethnicity in Early Modern Spain*, Toronto, Toronto Iberic, 2014, pp. 14-17.

<sup>115</sup> Cf. José Luis Villacañas, “Esferas de acción y sistema filosófico. El carácter imprescindible de la metáfora”, *Daimon: Revista de Filosofía*, 24 (2001), pp. 111-126.

<sup>116</sup> Cf. Menéndez Pidal, *Poesía juglaresca y juglares*, p. 160.

<sup>117</sup> See the classic study by Manuel Rodrigues Lapa, *Cantigas d’escarnio e de mal dizer dos cancioneiros medievais galego-portugueses*, Lisboa, João Sá da Costa, 1995. More focused on the connection with the Castilian literary tradition is the work by Juan Paredes Núñez, *Las cantigas de escarnio y maldecir de Alfonso X: problemas de interpretación y crítica textual*, London, Queen Mary University, 2000.

<sup>118</sup> Cf. Julio Rodríguez Puértolas, *Poesía de protesta en la Edad Media castellana: Historia y antología*, Madrid, Gredos, 1968.

<sup>119</sup> Cf. Otavio Di Camillo, “¿Existe una literatura de oposición en la España de fines de la Edad Media?”, en Adeline Rucquoi (dir.), *Génèse médiévale de l’Espagne moderne. Du refus à la revolte: les resistances*, Nice, Université de Nice, 1991, pp. 145-169.

<sup>120</sup> Cf. Guglielmi, *op. cit.*, pp. 443-456.

(Dutton ID 4119). These two were written against Henry IV and widely disseminated during his reign with the clear objective of undermining the king's authority. This political manoeuvre was quite useful to his sister, the future Catholic Queen Isabella in her aspirations to the Castilian throne.<sup>121</sup> The tone of *Coplas del tabefe* proves to be quite analogous to that of *Coplas de Mingo Revulgo*;<sup>122</sup> on the other hand, *Coplas del Provincial* perhaps have more similarities with those from GoT, especially with regard to the impropriety and explicit sexual innuendoes.

Nevertheless, if we are unable to find obscenities in the poetry written during the Catholic Monarchs' reign like those seen in both Marillion's song and *Coplas del Provincial* it is for one reason only: Isabella and Ferdinand were absolutely determined to fiercely punish any troubadour who dared to criticise –even minimally– their government's policies. In fact, the authors of *Coplas del tabefe* are a perfect example on how implacable the execution of justice was in 15<sup>th</sup>-century-Castile in order to censure this sort of poetry. It is no surprise, therefore, that radical measures taken by the Queen of Castile and the King of Aragon against these authors shocked some students, especially because *Coplas del tabefe* is clearly a much more naïve protest than the one recited in GoT, as we are about to see.

In order to calibrate the historical background in which *Coplas del tabefe* were composed, let us recall another barely known text written in this period with similar parameters: the *Consejos que dio el fraile Sanzones*.<sup>123</sup> This consists of a discreet memorial, with many controversial issues regarding spirituality, in which Queen Isabella is advised on how to approach the economic problems that the Andalusian villages faced as suppliers for the military involved in the Granada War.<sup>124</sup> Perhaps to avoid any initial rejection, the text is structured as a plea, being thus respectful and obedient to the dedicatee, something logical considering its author was a monk of the royal court.<sup>125</sup> Even so, any petition, whether in verse or prose, too adventurous to go beyond reasonable limits,<sup>126</sup> was automatically turned into an absolute danger for their authors, because the Castilian laws specifically protected victims of slanders.<sup>127</sup> If jokes were made for members of the high social class, such as a nobleman, a bishop, or a member of the royal family, the risk for the poets was even higher, as much as they tried to protect themselves by recurring to anonymity.<sup>128</sup>

<sup>121</sup> Cf. Óscar Perea Rodríguez, “Enrique IV en la poesía de cancionero: algún *afán* ignorado entre las *mil congoxas* conocidas”, *Cancionero general*, 3 (2005), pp. 33-71.

<sup>122</sup> Cf. Devid Paolini, “Los antecedentes bucólicos de las *Coplas de Mingo Revulgo*”, *La Corónica*, 38.1 (2009), pp. 231-246.

<sup>123</sup> Recently edited by Rafael G. Peinado Santaella, “Consejos que dio el fraile Sanzones a la reina Isabel I sobre cómo financiar la guerra de Granada (¿1482?)”, *Revista del Centro de Estudios Históricos del Reino de Granada*, 27 (2015), pp. 197-203.

<sup>124</sup> Cf. Tarsicio de Azcona, *Estudio crítico de su vida y de su reinado*, Madrid, BAC, 1993, pp. 662-665.

<sup>125</sup> I do not believe the author is fr. Alonso de Burgos, bishop of Córdoba between 1476 and 1482, as Peinado Santaella argues (art. cit., p. 197). I do suspect that ‘Sanzones’ is actually fr. Juan de Sanzoles, monk of the Trinity Order born in Burgos, who served as a chaplain in the Catholic Monarchs' court during the last decades of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. I am currently preparing a forthcoming paper on his identity.

<sup>126</sup> Limits established in another text, a blend of prose and poetry, which I analysed a few years ago. Cf. Óscar Perea Rodríguez, “La utopía política en la literatura castellana del siglo XV: el *Libro de los Pensamientos Variables* (BNM, ms. 6642)”, *eHumanista. Journal of Iberian Studies*, 2 (2002), pp. 23-62.

<sup>127</sup> Further explanation on how Common Laws (*fueros*) used to punish songs with smear contents can be found in Guglielmi, *op. cit.*, pp. 456-457.

<sup>128</sup> Cf. Vicenç Beltrán, “Anonymity and Opaque Attributions in Late-Medieval Poetic Compilations”, *Scriptorium*, 58 (2004), pp. 26-47.

Returning to *Coplas del tabefe*, the immediate action taken to stop their spread was made without remorse because they feared that an important detail which had played in their favor during the civil war against Henry IV and his heiress, Juana la Beltraneja,<sup>129</sup> could be turned against them. The Catholic Monarchs were absolutely aware of how the quick diffusion of critiques and burlesques in verse could harm their stability as rulers, for, as another troubadour better explained, poems like these “se asientan mejor e duran más en la memoria que las prosas”.<sup>130</sup> Poetical mockery, as Isabella and Ferdinand knew quite well, was always a powerful political weapon,<sup>131</sup> reason why the incident related with *Coplas del tabefe* was not the first time in which they reacted with supersonic speed instructing actions of literary censorship in order to protect their interests. Among other examples, I would like to underscore a document issued in Burgos in 1492, that has been preserved in the Municipal Archive of this city. In this document, Isabella and Ferdinand declared having received news of a handful of inhabitants of the city who “con dañado ánimo e intención fazen coplas e dicen cantares e otras palabras desonestas públicamente”, because of the forthcoming arrival to Burgos of the Holy Inquisition Court. As a result, the Catholic Monarchs instructed the *corregidor* in Burgos that “si alguno o algunos las fiziere o dixere [...] los fagades punir e castigar segund debáis de derecho”,<sup>132</sup> this is, punishing both the composition and diffusion of these burlesques.

The final stage of this policy of extreme censorship occurred in 1502, when, by means of a *Pragmática Sanción* the Crown obtained the total control of the printing industry in Castile.<sup>133</sup> It is therefore quite clear that Isabella and Ferdinand’s iron fist in regard to censorship is responsible for the fact that, even though there was a large amount of brilliant literature written during their reign,<sup>134</sup> it cannot be seriously taken into account with respect to the social and cultural history of those times. The reason is very simple: because by doing that, we would be granting the category of historiographic data to just pure propaganda in favor of their political project.<sup>135</sup> Thus, however incredible it might seem, among the ties that bind the Catholic Monarchs with the fictional king of the Seven Kingdoms, the bloodthirsty Joffrey Baratheon, the cruelty they showed in judging their courtly minstrels is clearly one, as we shall see.

Those accused of having composed *Coplas del tabefe* were members of the urban oligarchy of an Andalusian village, Jerez de la Frontera: a public notary named Bartolomé de Ayala; a bachelor whose surname was Trujillo; and an alderman of the city council, Hernando de Vera. The moment in which the very first echoes of gossip and laughter provoked by *Coplas del tabefe* arrived to the monarchs’ attention, Ayala and Trujillo were put into custody, judged immediately, and declared guilty of high

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<sup>129</sup> Cf. Luis Suárez Fernández, *Claves históricas en el reinado de Fernando e Isabel*, Madrid, Real Academia de la Historia, 1998, pp. 60-61.

<sup>130</sup> I am referring to Gómez Manrique, who expressed this idea on the prologue in prose previous to his successful *Regimiento de Príncipes* (Dutton ID 1872). Cf. Gómez Manrique, *Cancionero*, ed. Antonio Paz y Melia, Madrid, Imprenta de A. Pérez Durrull, 1885, II, p. 167.

<sup>131</sup> As defined by Kenneth R. Scholberg, *Sátira e invectiva en la España medieval*, Madrid, Gredos, 1971, pp. 261-262.

<sup>132</sup> Cf. Perea Rodríguez, “Quebrantar la jura de mis abuelos”, p. 209.

<sup>133</sup> Cf. Jaime Moll, “Problemas bibliográficos del libro del Siglo de Oro”, *Boletín de la Real Academia Española*, 59 (1979), pp. 49-107, specifically pp. 50-52.

<sup>134</sup> Cf. Miguel Ángel Ladero Quesada, *La España de los Reyes Católicos*, Madrid, Alianza Editorial, 1999, pp. 189-190.

<sup>135</sup> To further explanation, see Óscar Perea Rodríguez, “Este rastro de confeso: Converso Poets and Topics in Medieval and Early Modern Spanish *Cancioneros*”, in Antonio Cortijo Ocaña & Marcial Rubio Áñez (eds.), *Las ‘Obras de burlas’ del Cancionero general de Hernando del Castillo*, Santa Bárbara, Publications of eHumanista–University of California, 2015, pp. 141-185, especially pp. 167-170.

treason. According to the laws in force then, the *Siete Partidas*, the notary and the bachelor were executed at once for their lèse-majesté betrayal.<sup>136</sup> This is not a punishment as extreme as cutting out their tongues in the throne room in front of a crowded court, but it surely is more lethal.

What about Hernando de Vera? There is one more astonishing connection between the Catholic Monarchs and GoT in this story of audacious troubadours punished by death for making light of the monarchy. Let us recall that, according to law enforced enquiries, Vera was identified as the author of most of the controversial stanzas, yet he was the only one who saved his life, although in a far-fetched manner.<sup>137</sup> When in 1490 his two comrades were captured, he managed to travelling at night through Andalucía and escaped on horseback to Portugal.<sup>138</sup> He lived incognito there for a few years, constantly hiding himself from Isabella's fury: the Queen was so eager to find him that she offered a complete debt forgiveness to any of her subjects that might provide a single clue as to the fugitive's whereabouts.<sup>139</sup> Finally, in 1497 the alderman was allowed to obtain a royal pardon thanks to the mediation of his father, Pedro de Vera, although he was forced to abandon his self-imposed exile in Portugal and joining instead a quite challenging employment: serving one entire year in such a perilous destination as the Gibraltar strait galleys.<sup>140</sup> Pedro de Vera intervened to save the life of his wayward son making good use of his chivalric reputation: the Catholic Monarchs held him in high esteem, for he was first a brave conqueror, and later an efficient governor of the Canary Islands, whose lands had recently been incorporated into the Castilian dominions.<sup>141</sup>

Readers interested in medieval history perhaps have enjoyed of this brief and not very-well known story. But if you are also a follower of GoT, I am sure that you already recognised –as my students did– another one of these unexpected analogies that link the Middle Ages in Spain and the fantasy of Westeros. Yes, Hernando and Pedro de Vera are just two Hispanic doppelgängers of Sir Jorah and Sir Jeor Mormont, father and son in GoT, two characters that protagonised a peculiar history of treason, banishment, and family enmity, just like that of the two members of the Vera lineage.

In the instructional design of this lesson, the last activity in class to evaluate student's understanding of the risks threatening medieval minstrels was analysing these two images below. They represent indeed the actors characterised as King and Queen Mother of the Seven Kingdoms in GoT –Joffrey Baratheon and Cersei Lannister– as well as the actors performing the Catholic Monarchs –Isabella I of Castile and Ferdinand II of Aragon– in the successful Spanish TV show *Isabel*.

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<sup>136</sup> Cf. Perea Rodríguez, “*Quebrantar la jura de mis abuelos*”, pp. 207-208.

<sup>137</sup> As explained by Miguel Ángel Ladero Quesada, “Las coplas de Hernando de Vera: un caso de crítica al gobierno de Isabel la Católica”, *Anuario de Estudios Atlánticos*, 14 (1968), pp. 365-381.

<sup>138</sup> Perea Rodríguez, “*Quebrantar la jura de mis abuelos*”, p. 208.

<sup>139</sup> Cf. Ferrer-Chivite, art. cit., p. 157.

<sup>140</sup> Cf. Ladero Quesada, “Las coplas de Hernando de Vera”, pp. 379-381.

<sup>141</sup> Cf. Hipólito Sancho de Sopranís, “La familia del gobernador Pedro de Vera”, *Revista de Historia. Universidad de La Laguna*, 75 (1946), pp. 260-276.



After having taken a look at these pictures, I encouraged the students to compare both stories, that of Marillion and that of the authors of *Coplas del tabefe*, in order to establish which one of the two pair of monarchs may be described as cruel and unmerciful and why. They needed to contrast their ideas with the secondary literature read towards this lesson and the popular characterisation of each one of these pairs. I was obviously trying to warn them against the artistical profiling of historical characters,<sup>142</sup> especially in shows and films,<sup>143</sup> because the limits between historiography and political propaganda are often unclear outside of the academia. At the same time, we dealt with the consequences of confronting power by critiques against the government, not only in Medieval Iberia, but in our times as well. In regard to Spain, the deplorable lack of freedom of expression this country is suffering nowadays was not unnoticed to my students. In fact, they quickly connected these actions with news they were aware of, such as modest puppeteers incarcerated due to allegedly performing criminal plays;<sup>144</sup> rap singers on trial for composing lyrics against political mechanisms of the State;<sup>145</sup> and law-abiding citizens sentenced to jail for having written a few jokes on Twitter about deceased rulers.<sup>146</sup>

#### 4.- By way of conclusion

GoT has boundless possibilities for application in higher education, more than can be dealt with the modest space I have in these lines. Thus, I will simply close by pointing out a few of the most salient themes that would lend themselves to application

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<sup>142</sup> There is an evident risk in using the past inadequately, with no separation between what is truthful and what is veracious, as maintained by Robert Rosenstone, “The Historical Film as Real History”, *FilmHistoria Online*, 5.1 (1995):

<<http://revistes.ub.edu/index.php/filmhistoria/article/view/12244/14998>> [2017-03-02].

<sup>143</sup> Cf. Andrew B.R. Elliott, *Remaking the Middle Ages: The Methods of Cinema and History in Portraying the Medieval World*, Jefferson, N.C., McFarland & Co., 2011, especially pp. 177-191.

<sup>144</sup> I am obviously referring to the authors of *Títeres desde abajo*, briefly incarcerated in 2016 due to a play entitled *La bruja y Don Cristóbal*, that was partially based on *Retablillo de Don Cristóbal*, by Federico García Lorca: <<http://www.lavanguardia.com/politica/20160207/301972775526/titiriteros-encarcelados-enaltecimiento-terrorismo-inspiraron-lorca.html>> [2017-03-02].

<sup>145</sup> As it happened to Pablo Hásel, César Strawberry, and some others *Rimadores en el punto de mira*, defined by Nando Cruz: <<http://www.elperiodico.com/es/noticias/ocio-y-cultura/cesar-strawberry-pablo-hasel-ayah-prok-valtonyc-5771773>> [2017-04-30].

<sup>146</sup> I am referring to the one-year prison sentence for the author of some Twitter messages that provoked the sound and unanimous rejection of foreign press on how the so-called Justice in Spain actually works:

<[http://www.eldiario.es/rastreador/condena-Cassandra-Carrero-Blanco-internacional\\_6\\_627897220.html](http://www.eldiario.es/rastreador/condena-Cassandra-Carrero-Blanco-internacional_6_627897220.html)> [2017-04-21].

in the classroom and offering some advice for those who would like to explore using GoT as a resource in classroom.<sup>147</sup>

First, I do believe that the two fictional languages created for the show, Dothraki and High Valyrian,<sup>148</sup> are a great opportunity to work in class on the evolution of the romance languages in the Iberian Peninsula, by using documents such as *Glosas emilianenses*, *Nodicia de kesos*, and the Orgañá homilies. With a more historical perspective, everything that surrounds the story of the Night's Watch and the Wall built in the North to keep Westeros free of foreign invaders offers an excellent background for the study of border and cross-border societies. Additionally, the plot involving the fight between the legitimate heir to the Iron Throne, Stannis Baratheon, and the illegitimate candidate, his brother Renly, clearly recalls the Castilian civil war of the 14<sup>th</sup> century between another pair of siblings: Peter I, the legitimate king, and the pretender Henry of Trastámara, future Henry II. A more typical element in all films related to the Middle Ages is that of tournaments, jousts, and courtly games, which is very well treated in GoT and may stimulate the analysis of the medieval chivalric universe using texts such as *Paso Honroso de Suero de Quiñones*, by Pero Rodríguez de Lena. Last but not least, the significant presence of books of lineages describing the main families of the Seven Kingdoms, in which clues can be found even about incestuous relationships inside a certain powerful family, may serve to initiate students in the analysis of Medieval Spanish narrative classics, such as *Generaciones y semblanzas* by Pérez de Guzmán, *Claros varones* by Pulgar, and most of medieval chronicles and galleries of distinguished ladies and gentlemen.

It is also possible to use GoT for teaching topics that surpass the chronological boundaries of the Middle Ages, such as those pertaining to the Spanish Golden Age. The most evident topic here is the figure of Brienne of Tarth, the warrior woman of GoT, who is so strong and extremely skilled in the art of war that breaks all sort stereotypes for women in the Renaissance. She does have indeed a direct equivalent in Hispanic history and literature: Catalina de Erauso y Pérez de Galarraga y Arce, nicknamed *the Ensign Nun*, title of her controversial memoirs.<sup>149</sup>

In sum, while I am skeptical about the impact that GoT's popularity may have on changing the field of medieval research,<sup>150</sup> I am indeed convinced that it does have enormous and thought-provoking educational possibilities. Any teacher interested in experimenting this method only needs to be brave, have a bit of imagination, and a clear will to break from routine. If you are convinced of trying it, let us establish a decisive point here: in doing it so, you are not being less academic than others if, for instance, you decide to utilise Jack Sparrow, the main character of the most successful saga of adventure films, as a mean to explain medieval piracy to your students.<sup>151</sup> In fact, this

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<sup>147</sup> I do not specify documents nor edition of texts that I am enumerating. I trust readers can make it by their own, for they all are of common knowledge and quite popular. I just want to limit myself to showcase a few more examples, among the many possibilities that GoT offers on this regard.

<sup>148</sup> In fact, they can be studied in the place in which they were originated, the University of California at Berkeley, in a course administered by the very inventor of them, the linguist David J. Peterson: <<http://news.berkeley.edu/2017/04/21/dothraki-developer-invented-language-leader-to-teach-summer-class/>> [2017-01-21].

<sup>149</sup> Cf. Eva Mendieta Garrote, *En busca de Catalina de Erauso: identidades en conflicto en la vida de la monja alférez*, Castellón, Publicacions de la Universitat Jaume I, 2010.

<sup>150</sup> Cf. Olivia B. Waxman, "Game of Thrones Is Even Changing How Scholars Study the Real Middle Ages", *Time* 14.07.2017: <<http://time.com/4837351/game-of-thrones-real-medieval-history/>> [2017-07-22].

<sup>151</sup> As J. Leonardo Soler Milla did in his talk entitled "¿Es Jack Sparrow el modelo histórico de pirata? Mitos y realidades sobre la piratería medieval", *Seminario Internacional El Mar vivido. Perfiles*

path has been frequently followed in recent times, popularising the academic analysis of audiovisual elements, especially in videogames, and applying it to both research and teaching of global history,<sup>152</sup> and also to specifically medieval history.<sup>153</sup> In our daily toil, teachers should remain aware of all options we have without spurning any of them, because no matter how hard they appear to be, with the appropriate method, selecting a brand new approach could secure the great success of our educational efforts.

In spite of everything I have said so far, I would like to warn all colleagues about one important fact: designing a course like this one does not guarantee achieving some sort of academic panacea. It would be desirable that teachers dare much more to work with audiovisuals and entertainment industries, especially to get rid of that fear –quite noticeable in the Spanish academy– to be put on the spot by both academic and non-academics accusing us of using gimmicks arguments to curry favour with young students. Strictly related to this, I would like to add a new piece of advice: in teaching a course like mine on GoT, one must have a very careful academic approach, choosing materials from inside the subjects to the outside, this is, selecting aspects from history, language, literature, etc., towards the audiovisual materials chosen by the teacher. As I mentioned before, I believe it is permissible to start with an impressive scene visualised in GoT attempting therefore to look for an equivalent in the Hispanic cultures. But this cannot be done at any price, for teachers should be absolutely sure that both the historical events narrated are basically the same in both history and TV show.

If I am emphasising this advice that much is precisely because there is a specific danger looming over our educational interests. All departments of any given higher education institution in the world are nowadays under constant pressure to increase the “number of students”, a well-known euphemism which actually means “increasing the amount of tuition money to balance the budget”. Due to this fact, the university authorities often seem interested –at least initially– when a teaching initiative like a course on GoT reaches their ears. Obviously, they trust that the appealing elements of this curriculum design may imply higher enrollment, especially if they also include any other novelty, such as social networks,<sup>154</sup> or technology applied to the classroom.<sup>155</sup>

Once you have calibrated everything to reach this point, I must warn my teaching colleagues very seriously about the next step to take: if the only pushing force you have for embarking yourself in this journey is coming from the university bigwigs, it is better that you abandon the boat right away. Two simple reasons will suffice to explain my refusal: firstly, their initial corporative enthusiasm will give way, sooner rather than later, to the most recalcitrant bureaucracy, especially if “the numbers” –a monetary euphemism, once again– end up being not as good as previously expected.

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*sociales de las gentes del mar en la larga duración (siglos XV-XXI)*. Albacete, Facultad de Humanidades, 21-22.10.2015.

<sup>152</sup> Cf. Juan Francisco Jiménez Alcázar, Íñigo Mugueta Moreno y Gerardo Fabián Rodríguez (coords.), *Historia y videojuegos: el impacto de los nuevos medios de ocio sobre el conocimiento histórico*, Murcia, Compobell, 2016.

<sup>153</sup> Cf. Juan Francisco Jiménez Alcázar, “El otro pasado posible: la simulación del medievo en los videojuegos”, *Imago Temporis. Medium Aevum*, 5 (2011), pp. 491-517.

<sup>154</sup> In my GoT course, students participate in weekly debates using Twitter and they receive credits for engaging in academic discussions. I am currently writing an article on this educational use, which will be published with the title: “Using Social Networks in Higher Education: Twitter Assignments Will Not Make Disappear the Pillars of Western Civilisation”.

<sup>155</sup> Among many other examples, let us underscore the project based on using Siri, the voice recognition application installed in Apple phones, to teach the History of California. See Covadonga Lamar Prieto, “On Teaching the History of California Spanish to HLL using Siri: Methodology and Procedures”, *New Approaches in Educational Research*, 5.2 (2016), pp. 107-114.



Secondly, it is very difficult to fool students, because all of them are digital natives,<sup>156</sup> and therefore they move in these shifting sands of technology and TV *pop* culture much better than ourselves. If they detect that either the syllabus or the educational materials are designed from the outside in, trying to take advantage of the inebriating lullaby of transmedia novelty but with nothing really to offer in academic terms, the course will be doomed to fail since its very beginning.

But this warning notwithstanding, I would like to finish these lines by encouraging my colleagues to exploit the entire gamut of appealing possibilities that TV shows like *Game of Thrones* bring to the teaching in higher education, provided that the curriculum design is rigorous. Do not have hesitations in experimenting with courses like that. Only this way you may be able to feel the immense and invaluable reward of seeing how students learn and enjoy at the same time, whilst they extend by themselves their learning processes inside and outside the strict limits of classrooms, books, and TV and computer screens.

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<sup>156</sup> In the widest possible meaning of this term, this is, the people to which internet and social networks are not technological novelties, but something so mundane that has been taking part of their lives since they all were born. Cf. Marc Prensky, *Nativos e inmigrantes digitales*, Madrid, Cuadernos SEK, 2010, pp. 5-6.