

BODY AND SENSES IN THE PRODUCTION OF CULTURAL MEANING: FROM MIDDLE AGES TO TV SERIES, FILMS AND VIDEO GAMES¹

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Abstract

In medieval times, the literary nature of the works, including written ones, were determined by contextual elements such as the acoustic and momentary channel of communication along with the domain of gestural, instrumental and vocal codes. These elements conditioned writers and performers when they improved and perfected their capacities and performance, on which the message as a whole depended. Today the media and entertainment industry also use complex and rich connections between verbal and visual signs to produce highly symbolic messages through imaginary re-enactments of the past.

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The wide range of discursive productions of the Middle Ages can be analysed through the study of the elements and factors that become carriers of meanings and the way in which they do so. We consider that a comparable perspective is also suitable for contemporary semiotic practices that, when interpreting documentary sources of various types and incorporating them into suitable fictional formats for the general public, constitute playful re-configurations of the historical, literary and fantastic Middle Ages.

Accordingly, this paper attempts to examine certain components of mass culture which have transformed narratives, characters and fictional worlds, distinctive of the Middle Ages, into communicative and semiotic practices reinterpreting historical and literary texts as a way of reflecting on people, social life and its problems in the present world. It starts from considering that semantic plurality and diachronic bases of the idea of body and senses enable an interdisciplinary and comparative study, in order to understand their historicity, their ideological effect and the innumerable aesthetic possibilities which they promote in different areas of culture. The reflections take into account the bodily and sensory aspects of the Middle Ages selected by series, films and video games with an impact, as significant elements, on current cultural orientations and attitudes.

Keywords: body, senses, meaning, culture, Middle Ages

1. Body, senses, and cultural representation

The aim of this work, framed within a larger investigation, is to establish interdisciplinary links in the analysis of the ways in which knowledge, interpretation and recreation of the medieval past are part in contemporary technological, communicative and semiotic practices. In other words, it investigates the theoretical frameworks, academic formations and methodological resources used when interpreting historical sources of various types. Further, it suggests how to use these frameworks, formations and resources as fictional supports and formats, suitable for the general public, identifying in particular the place of the senses and emotions in the medieval corporalities that these aesthetic and ludic reconfigurations display.

The 21st century has witnessed a widespread interest in 'the medieval'. This interest has an impact on popular culture development and the design of cultural and educational policies. The numerous and dissimilar visions of the Middle Ages are sustained by a memory constructed by a historical narrative corresponding to the social and political demands of another era.

However, as historical discourse is always contemporary and addressed to the society of its time, certain images remain relevant because they emphasise the relations and tensions involving the past and present as well as between the current needs and aims of past studies. It is for this reason that such representations of medieval ambit are resolved in certain components of mass culture as a metaphorical way of reflecting on people, social life and its problems in today's world.

This paper, therefore, explores how the medieval past is recreated in certain current cultural products by the use of sensory, emotional and bodily resources relating the hermeneutics of medieval sources with the experience of the receivers. This relationship enables a discussion on identity, otherness and society, and the link between time and space. Further, it allows us to problematize gender categories as closed.

In this way, any attentive spectator or gamer will realize that bodies of allies, enemies, rivals, circumstantial characters and loved ones are represented in contemporary fictional formats with a great emphasis on creating a medieval world in a visual key. This code is, at times, an indication of the postmodern condition seeking to establish or affirm itself through a constant record of the past (Gómez Ponce 2020), with its own morphology which can be miscellaneous or eclectic (Bull 2005). It is not always consistent with the idea of the body that was held in the Middle Ages (Miranda, 2021).

This allows us to assert that the recreation of medieval times in contemporary fictional formats consists of representations of the body, the senses and the emotions which cross current aesthetic-playful configurations with reinterpretations of various historical sources.

This play on past and present, truth and fiction, and perception and experience is captured in literary works, cinema, television series and video games in a metaphorical way, putting our own ideas about individuals and current society in tension with those of the Middle Ages. The epistemological focus on the body, senses and emotions enables relevant interdisciplinary links, in order to analyse such interpretations and recreations of the medieval past. In fact, it promotes a theoretical-practical knowledge which supports new conceptualizations and projections of medieval studies, focusing on research on the human ideal and social groups. As Miranda and Lell (2019) have pointed out, the body imagery always refers to the constitution and functioning of societies and human behaviour.

The body as a reference to describe the cosmos is evident in the history of literature and in that of cosmogonies. Spatial length in relation to the body, for instance, is a system in which the terms elaborate a language,

the definitive meaning of which corresponds to the person itself. In some more specific cases, the topological dimension is manifested in allusion to the location of the parts of the body: ‘foot of the mountain’, ‘waist path’, ‘river arm’, ‘on the right/left hand’, and so on. Common analogies such as ‘the eyes of Justice’ or ‘the head of the State’, meanwhile, take forms, states and functions from the human body, in order to transform them into clear bodily metaphors, the political use of which often has a symbolic scope that refers to social hierarchies. This has been shown by Le Goff (1992) in some contexts of its application during the Middle Ages.

Human existence is corporeal and, through the body, the human being builds its identity, enabling it to assume an attitude towards nature and ‘the others’ (Le Breton 1995; Bernard 1995). The body constitutes a value, a representation which delimits each person with respect to others. Therefore, at all times, subjects symbolize through the body the depth of the contacts which they establish with the world. Spatial manipulation –instrumented from the corporeality² of existence– is a fundamental factor in the exchange of encounters and relationships in the public sphere.

This cultural knowledge defines the body as a symbolic construction, rather than as a reality itself. Therefore, its study – conceived as an inquiry into its representations and its ways of being constructed – enriches the concept by adopting a way entirely penetrated by historical and ideological notions.

Boltansky (1975) argues that there is a specific somatic culture in each social group which determines a set of rules of conduct regulating the relationship of each individual with their body. For this reason, the area in which the body intervenes, and the ways in which it does so, implies analysing the institutions that shape the representations of the body and society. Based on these premises, it is possible to inquire about the body forged within a given space and time, involving a study of the power structures that intervene in the bonds between people. The body participates in a political field where the relationships of power and domination motivate the existence of a ‘knowledge’ of the body other than the science

²The term ‘corporeality’ refers to the corporal nature or to what belongs to or what relates to the physical material body. When considering the spatial dimension, “as a cartography in the sense that geographers give it, that is, as a map, always fragmented, always incomplete, of the numerous and variable meanings of the body” (Finol, 2021: 3), the body and its multiple presences, its history, its conceptions and its meanings make up a corporeality. Thus, it is possible to conceive corporeality as a “semiotization of the body”, as proposed by Fuenmayor (2005), that is, the installation of the body itself as a model that determines the way of existing and the awareness that the human being has of itself and the world.

of its functioning, as well as a mastery of its forces beyond the ability to overcome them. This knowledge and this domain – “political technologies of the body” (Foucault 1989) –, consist of elements and fragments, and use unconnected tools or procedures. They act as strategies of power that institutions bring into play, but whose field of validity is set between that great functioning and the bodies themselves with their materiality and their forces (Foucault 1989).

Based on these assumptions, we notice that the representation of medieval corporality in different cultural products – such as historical novels, films, television series and video games – does not entirely coincide with perceptions of that period.

The human body, neglected as an object of study for a long time, has quite recently revived in the field of different disciplines (Finol, 2021)³. The classical components and the Judeo-Christian heritage of Western culture have contributed to determining a dualistic vision of man, as defined by a division or, perhaps, an alliance between mind and body. Both traditions, in different ways and for different reasons, have enhanced the mind or soul and despised the body. This antithesis constitutes a force that has profoundly shaped linguistic uses, classification schemes, ethics and value systems (Porter, 1996) from the assignment of different attributes and connotations that settle a different status for mind and matter.

Physical experience, as Missfelder (2014) has rightly stated, is always first a sensory experience, transmitted by the body and its sense organs. For this reason, the sensory event becomes a topic of cultural and historical interest only as a process that is not simply physiological, but also dependent on a specific social environment (Ortúzar Escudero 2016). Undoubtedly, discourses about perception and bodily practices and techniques shape the reality which we perceive. In this way, possibilities and restrictions are created regarding what we can perceive (Tanner 2017). Then, there is no fundamental difference between experience and practices involving the senses and discourses about the senses or about worlds of sense. Crary (2012) has fully accounted for this overlapping in his classic study on vision and the spectator in the 19th century. He asserts that the vision and its effects are always inseparable from the possibilities of the observing subject who is

³ An exception, which at the same time was the reason for the inadvertence of the body, was medical science and art. For medical science, the body was a domain of nature and not of culture, therefore, an object outside the reflection of the social sciences. In the case of art, especially in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, the body was seen as a symbolic and aesthetic domain far from reality, a circumstance that also excluded it from scientific reflection.

at the same time the historical product and the place of certain technical practices, institutions and processes of subjectivisation. Consequently, sensory perception has both an objective and a subjective character. It is the result of the interrelation between historical and cultural facts and their subjective internalization, which enables us to know and understand the *historisch gevoel* (historical sensation) of the Late Middle Ages and the Renaissance, as Huizinga (1919) has argued.

Referring to the Victorian novel conceived as a particular literary practice of the 19th century, it is interesting to note the proposition therein which emphasizes the sensory and affective properties of the fictional world as represented. It also analyses the ineluctable processes of imaginative commitment of readers with fiction. In his book, Gao (2021) calls “play” the modes of reading, criticism, and perception of the fictional experience as a new way of operating with the literary object (the novel). This is a term which refers to both representation (specifically, theatrical) and the game, implying a “make-believe” and an immersive exercise⁴.

It is frequent that senses and emotions manifest together in multiple ways, because an emotion emerges in a sensorial way or because the body reveals the depth of emotions, as can be seen in the case of tears and crying in the Middle Ages studied by Nagy (2014)⁵.

In view of this finding, several concepts utilised in the historical approach to the study of senses and emotions can be useful, in order to understand the representation of bodies and sensations in current fictional formats set in medieval scenarios. In the first place it is possible to recover the notion provided by the adjective *sensible* (sensitive), proposed by Febvre (1941), in order to refer to senses, affects and emotions as intertwined historical, social and cultural constructs⁶.

⁴ The author assigns the novel the condition of virtuality, which deliberately associates it with the type of interaction with imaginary objects that occurs in the domain of video games and cybernetic reality. In this way, the idea of virtuality is a philosophical concept that contributes to assigning modern digital connotations to literary narration.

⁵ In her pioneering study in the field of emotions, Nagy (2014) analyses the gift of tears as manifestation of spirituality and materialization of deep feelings. Besides, she recognizes the persons enabled to cry, different areas and places in which one can or cannot cry and the ways to do so.

⁶ Boquet & Nagy (2016), Coronado Schwindt, Palazzo & Rodríguez (2019), Boddice & Smith (2020), Newhauser (2021) and Rodríguez, Melo Carrasco & Jiménez Alcázar (2022) have recently taken up such a comprehensive view in order to re-link sensology and emotions.

The complex world of emotions configures social and cultural behaviours, as Rosenwein (2006) has justified when speaking about ‘medieval emotional communities’⁷, a notion which Rodríguez (2021a; 2021b) refers to again for the elaboration of the concept of ‘sensory community’⁸.

Departing from pioneering studies, a number of authors have gone deeper into the theme of sensitivities and emotions in the Middle Ages. Nagy & Boquet (2015) and other specialists have recently addressed the intersection between emotions and gender (Boquet & Lett, 2018), and emotions and political life (Jara, 2021; Jiménez Alcázar & Rodríguez, 2021), for example. All these contributions can be relevant in other fields of knowledge or applied to other historical periods.

Medieval times have also been focus of research on the senses, as shown by Rodríguez (2021c), Coronado Schwindt (2020), Ortúzar Escudero (2016), Newhauser (2014; 2015) and Palazzo (2014), to mention a few referents in the field. Their works account for the areas made up of the ways of feeling, perceiving and getting excited in the Middle Ages and their manifestations in various sources of the period.

Richard Newhauser, in the introduction to *A cultural History of the Senses in the Middle Ages* (2014), emphasizes the essential steps in writing a comprehensive cultural history. The first one involves the reconstruction of the *sensorium* of the period, i.e. the sensory model of conscious and unconscious associations functioning in society to create meaning within the dense network of continuous and interconnected sensory perceptions by an individual. Regarding the classification of sensory perception, the same author, in 2015, explains that medieval scholars usually used three major taxonomies: the external or physical senses, the spiritual senses, and the internal senses.

⁷ Emotional communities form groups in which people adhere to the same norms of emotional expression and value or discount the same or related emotions. This author assimilates emotional communities with social communities (families, guilds, monasteries, parish members, e.g.), which allows her to point out the convoluted ways in they interrelate: a great circle that contains smaller ones, none completely concentric, but rather unevenly distributed in a given space and between which individuals may have some mobility.

⁸ Sensory communities refer to the groups to which individuals, subjects or social actors belong and in which they participate by sharing and involving the body and spirit. They integrate a communion of beliefs, knowledge, practices, concerns, obligations, tastes, affections, sensations, values, emotions and senses, whether they are formally established groups, as historical studies have traditionally indicated, or ephemeral meetings, as anthropologists and sociologist recently have underlined.

These interrelationships change over time. This is the reason why they are focus of the historical analysis and offer the possibility not only of knowing but also of feeling how it really occurred (Missfelder, 2014). Although the history of senses has been studied for more than thirty years and certain thematic units have been established, there is not a single paradigm regarding its specificity and methodology (Ortúzar Escudero, 2016; Smith, 2021). Likewise, it has shown the analytical limits of certain concepts which initially had great importance, such as ‘ocularcentrism’ (Jay, 1988), *sensorium* (Jenner, 2000; 2011) or the invariable hierarchy of the senses.

Although emotions and senses have deserved a separated treatment, the dialogue between them is today inexcusable, given that in human experience they generally appear associated. It is the recent work of historians which has caused a uselessly segregated appropriation (Boddice & Smith, 2020).

This paper aims to continue the lines of research developed in an attempt to articulate medieval studies with other disciplines, in order to understand the representation of medieval corporality, both in those times and in the symbolic consumption of our time, especially through sensitive and emotional recreation⁹.

The levels of narrativity and discursivity of texts constitute one of the outstanding objects of semiotic concern with regard to the mechanisms of textualization. This consists of the forms content adopts when it adjoins a plane of expression. In this sense, the particular forms and substances of expression assumed by fictional productions can modify, enrich and/or transform the meaning of their source texts, especially in the case of written documents. For example, describing a character with words requires some effort, while an image can be much more efficient. A movie cannot avoid the problem of what a person or a place looks like, but a novel can. Although the text can avoid the plane of expression when it passes to its non-immediate or non-obvious levels (those of narrative and discourse), at

⁹ Currently, the authors of this article chair two research projects in the field of medievalism that deal with analysing the bodily and sensory recreation of the Middle Ages in contemporary fictional productions: “El cuerpo es el mensaje. Recreación corporal y sensorial de la Edad Media en producciones ficcionales contemporáneas” (PIP 11220210100445CO, funded by CONICET) and “Cuerpos: corporalidades, emociones y sentidos en la Edad Media (I)” (funded by Universidad Nacional de Mar del Plata). The members of both research teams cope with several *corpora* that include a relevant number of historical novels, movies, TV series and video games, so it is impossible to list and/or examine them in this article. For this reason, in these pages we have resorted only to the commentary or description of some narratives as an example of the possibilities that their study has from an interdisciplinary perspective.

a certain moment the plane of expression becomes pertinent. It is for this reason that language, music, colours, and movements, inter alia, become specific codes with their own forms and substances. By intertwining with each other, they enrich the content plane, and multiply its own meaning (Marrone, 2021). This circumstance is fundamental in our research, since it allows us to add to the functional pairs, at the content level, of body/world, past/present, and time/space, that of substance/form –or signified/signifier– surrounding the other pairs and, granting the object a sign character to enable semiotic interpretation.

Nevertheless, at the present time, the expressive ways summoned by visual culture are also considered as sources for historical studies (Pastoureau & Rabel 2002). In effect, images have acquired the right of citizenship among medievalists as a new object of analysis which is likely to influence the understanding that researchers have about the Middle Ages. For this reason, this article may contribute to recovering the notion of image that, in medieval times, referred to a wide constellation of meanings, associated with objects, manuscripts, buildings, practices and spatialization process, in order to compare it with the prevailing idea of image today. It is not possible to think about the Middle Ages without its images, but to do so would be to request images from today. Therefore, this essay seeks to elucidate the anthropological and aesthetic implications which distinguish the medieval “culture de *l’imago*” from the “civilisation de *l’image*” of our millennium (Baschet & Rigaux 2019). Furthermore, it tries to determine the numerous spaces that the body, the senses and the emotions occupy in the so-called “society of the spectacle” (Debord 1967), understood as the social relationships mediated by images¹⁰.

2. History, literature and video games

According to Sanmartín Bastida (2004), medievalism can be understood as a study of the Middle Ages, as an application of medieval models to contemporary needs, and as an inspiration in the Middle Ages of art and thought. Currently, the first of these meanings has prevailed in the human sciences. The author also affirms that this stance has correctly expanded towards various approaches which address a wide range of cultural achievements (literature, politics, music, religion, among others) and thus it is not just one area of academic research. The knowledge of medievalism

¹⁰ The spectacular aspect of society, represented by the metaphor of theatre and the theatricalization of rhetoric, is not new in the history of literature and its use has served to reflect on public life and social exchanges as can be seen especially in ancient, medieval and baroque work.

of an era entails, therefore, an interdisciplinary perspective, the success of which depends on historians being aware of the internal functioning of art, and on literature scholars observing the social framework of aesthetic achievements.

Reflection on medievalism is a productive way to appreciate the complexity of the Middle Ages. Perception by both popular and academic culture is often intertwined with some stereotypes, not necessarily negative but not always adjusted to the historical reality conveyed by documents and other cultural manifestations of that period (Miranda 2021).

It follows, therefore, that medievalism intends to study how the medieval imaginary developed in different times and cultures and how its models were applied and conceived in art, literature or history. The debate about the shared notions of the Middle Ages is convenient and requires an inescapable background and basis. In this paper it will be impossible to establish the conceptual scope of the expression 'Middle Ages', a cultural and historical construction inherited from the valuations preceding us in time and that demands a deep consideration. Synthetically, we can affirm that many historians agree in evaluating the Middle Ages as the extended period in which Western man was forged, a conviction that proclaims it, more than any other time, as the matrix of our present (Le Goff & Truong 2005).

For individuals and social groups, the past is a repository of images and stories which allow them to establish meaning and to create and sustain identities. *Il nome della rosa* (1980), a novel written by Umberto Eco, the remarkable semiotician and expert in the comprehensive study of the Middle Ages, undoubtedly represents an unavoidable milestone in the installation of the problems of medievalism within mass culture. The homonymous film, made in 1986, barely six years after the publishing of the literary work, has also contributed to this circumstance¹¹.

The book had a massive approbation and a great repercussion in academic circles due to its relationships with literary characters and iconic authors such as Jorge Luis Borges and Arthur Conan Doyle, as well as with the philosopher William of Ockham and the scholastic debates of the Late Middle Ages. In 1983, Eco himself published *Postille a Il nome della rosa*, a text in which he comments and explains his literary choices when creating characters, settings and narrative actions of the novel, in order to demolish some myths around his creative labour. Likewise, this later work, a small treatise containing the poetics of the novel, allowed the author to reveal

¹¹ *Der Name der Rose*, co-produced by Italy, France and Germany, directed by Jean-Jacques Annaud, starring Sean Connery and Christian Slater.

and justify the anachronisms, deletions and superimpositions of historical facts, imaginary recreation of historical figures and other resources he resorted to for literary purposes despite 'betraying' certain data of historical truth.

Il nome della rosa is an emblematic novel which allows many reflections. We will narrow them down here to just two questions related with the topic of the paper: first, how Eco contributes with this work to install medievalism in mass cultural interests and secondly, how the body and the senses appear in the context of a semiotic object intended for reading.

Regarding the first question, the detective story as the narrative core is a very appropriate choice to interest a common reader who feels 'trapped' by the need to know the reasons for the crime and, most of all, the identity of the assassin or assassins¹². Likewise, the sequences of the investigation which imply for the investigators a deep analysis of indications which can hide or disguise reality, allowing the narrator to bring the receiver closer to hermeneutics, the characteristic mode of interpretation in the Middle Ages. This is closely related to its symbolic nature and requirement for a constant decoding of the signs which are generally opaque¹³. In this sense, Eco's expertise as a semiotician and as a teacher is essential for the *captatio benevolentiae*, i.e. to ensure that the reader does not lose the stimulus and, thus, continues reading. However, this fascination with the story and the investigation are put to the test by a rhetorical organization involving long quotations in Latin, historical and philosophical references to medieval theological disputes and precious descriptions which lead to a kind of vertigo, even for most experienced readers. To put it simply, if someone makes it through the first 100 pages of the novel 'alive', they will be able to continue reading the entire work successfully.

Despite the contrast between the two aspects, or perhaps thanks to it, the novel by Umberto Eco and the projections of this medieval history in cinema and on television enabled many people to approach a realistic representation of an era and an atmosphere which, although fictional, did not lack historical foundation. The interest of the public in the medieval world of *Il nome della rosa* explains why it has become a narrative model, for a

¹² This was also the key to the success of the 1986 film, to which the addition of blockbuster performances and a special medieval atmosphere contributes to increasing curiosity.

¹³ Despite this, the protagonist usually concludes the deductions with the confirmation of the *lex parsimoniae* or Ockham's razor, a philosophical principle postulated by William of Ockham according to which the simplest solution is usually the most likely. Hence, the main character's name is William of Baskerville, as a reference to that philosopher and to one of the best-known stories starring Sherlock Holmes, "The Hound of the Baskervilles".

large number of persons, representing the only way of knowing the Middle Ages. This narrative pattern has had such a force that it has also served as a template for the development of many video games, as we will see later. The novel along with its constellation of media are a good example of the motivating and pleasing ways that contemporary fiction can revive historical content about the Middle Ages.

With regard to the second problem, the presence of the body, the senses and the emotions in the novel are in constant correlation with the rational aspects of the human person to which the main characters refer. The Franciscan William embodies reason and experience, in a smart and measured figure, observant and meticulous. His disciple, Adso de Melk, who is also the narrator of the story¹⁴, with his youth and innocence represents the passionate impulse of man, which inclines him to experience passions, especially the lubricious ones, typical of puberty¹⁵.

Throughout the narrative, the teacher/learner duo formed by William and Adso personifies the communicative act of teaching and advice. Therefore, it alludes to the incessant transmitting activity which characterizes knowledge in the Middle Ages. Certainly, the mentor/disciple relationship and the lessons on deception and evidence applied to the resolution of crimes in the abbey, configure both characters. This relationship refers to the way in which medieval man conceived epistemological and ethical problems. Within this framework, William responds to the queries of Adso and, like a good teacher, is able to see the context and 'translate' its 'true' meaning for the apprentice. The friar is the exegete of reality who helps the young man understand and act appropriately.

Adso's sensory and emotional experimentation is reflected mainly through often very extensive enumerations that he himself offers as the story narrator. They promote a visual/conceptual response in the reader to imagine what the character perceives, who conveys his observations, feelings and thoughts. In these descriptions, the narrator resorts to the representation of the medieval worldview, as set out in the documents and aesthetic works, both secular and religious, which a young novice could

¹⁴ There is also an anonymous 20th-century narrator, who tells the finding of the medieval manuscript, written by Adso in his old age and containing the plot of the novel. Separate prologues precede both narratives. In this way, the work resembles medieval compositions with framed stories (*El Conde Lucanor*, *Decamerone*, and *The Canterbury Tales*, as the most paradigmatic cases) and, mainly, with the fictitious construction model of the narration that will consecrate in the 17th century Miguel de Cervantes with *Don Quixote*.

¹⁵ Other characters in the work also symbolize corporeal and sensitive life through different appetites (gluttony and sex), anger or greed, for example.

have known in the years of his initiation, as well as others that, in his old age, imbue his narrative with a more complete rhetorical and semantic definition. The encyclopaedic nature of the descriptions also refers to the erudition and the acquirement of knowledge in the middle centuries.

Der Name der Rose, based on the novel, creates its own medieval world since, as a visual text, the image conditions the process of capturing and decoding the narrative sections of the source. The iconic sign takes advantage of the sequencing provided by the novel in terms of days and canonical hours, while maintaining the same *dispositio* for the organization of the minimal narrative units. However, in terms of *inventio*, it sacrifices the complexity of some arguments – mainly those of a philosophical nature – to privilege the detective investigation and power struggles in the abbey.

Furthermore, from the cinematographic point of view, the monotony of the abbey helps to show, through the human experience of the place, the inner reality of the characters and the configuration of time in terms of sensory representation. It is precisely this person-based schemata (Bordwell, 1995)¹⁶ which constitutes a key element to produce meanings from the environmental definition: especially sound and lighting effects, costumes and sceneries, together with the shot planes and angles and the framing. All these elements contribute to creating an aesthetic and psychological game between internal and external space.

An example of this occurs when Adso meets the girl in the kitchen, in which the soft lights, shadows and body movements account for the character's emotional state in his sexual awakening: surprise, excitement, urgency and, finally, guilt. The fact that the intercourse takes place in the culinary space is not a minor detail for the recreation of the medieval environment since, in addition to being a place of specialized use and fragmented design (Abad-Zardoya 2015), the kitchen and its related areas (pantry, brewery, winery, bakery) symbolize the practical sense of monastic life. They are the domestic centre that feeds the bodies of the entire community. This is also, metaphorically, a body with many members. It even has a door where waste is excreted. Through the actions and images, this place connotes a lived space, where the lack of linguistic exchange between the lovers emphasizes appetites, both libido – represented by noise and moans – and hunger – suggested by the vision of the stockpile of foodstuffs and the sup-

¹⁶ The person-based schemata constitutes a set of characteristics inserted in a context that, through the cinematographic shots, carry sensory information, mainly visual, about the characters. The body, the perceptual activity, thoughts, feelings and emotions, persistent traits or qualities of disposition and the ability to carry out voluntary actions recode in a conceptual way and allow attribute to them actantial and cultural significance.

posed odours that would emanate from them. In this way, the body and the senses construct the scene, which is opposite to those that take place in the refectory, a ritual setting in which the food received in the body is symbolically elevated to the soul with the reading of the Holy Scripture and which consolidates the hierarchical structure of the community.

Another relevant space to set up medieval ambiances through the person-based schemata is the library, a spatial labyrinth representing the sphere of conjecture, as Eco (1985) has explained. It refers to the rational aspect of the human psychosomatic whole that, in the film, constitutes the intellectual centre where the information collected by the senses – the things seen, heard, touched, smell and tasted – is processed in order to solve the crimes.

Senses, emotions and experimentation with time and space are also summoned in the video games that recreate the novel *Il nome della rosa*.

Literature, cinema, television and video games are means of leisure, communication and training, which seek to captivate their followers by investing both in content and in quality advances. However, only the video game can achieve interaction and exploration of the environment, transforming mere passive spectators into active receivers who make decisions about what to do, how to do it and when to do it¹⁷.

The video game is a cultural construct, a piece of art, an object that distinguishes and defines the *homo ludens* of our contemporaneity. Among the characteristics that make games unique, playability, immersiveness, multi-sensory and multi-emotionality stand out. They allow gamers to 'truly live' the game experience, involving the senses and emotions from the very moment they handle a joystick.

Playability is the ability of a video game to entertain different players by offering interesting and attractive options, both from the story it proposes, to the materiality of its embodiment. Immersiveness, on the other hand, is what simulates a three-dimensional environment in which the user perceives through sensory and emotional stimuli. It drives players to lose the perception of their own space and time surrounding them.

¹⁷ It is fair to mention that, as an immersive experience, the literary series *Choose your own adventure*, identified as a "gamebook", has had a wide impact on children and adolescent readers because exploratory fiction allows them to make decisions about the characters and modify the story throughout the narrative. It promotes differentiated readings of each title according to the choices readers make. However, unlike the video game, this 'own adventure' reaches a limit in the sequential possibilities offered by the work itself and offers an immersion that does not involve all the senses as the video game does.

For this reason, they both promote a multisensory (Covaci *et al.* 2018) and multi-emotional experience (Rodríguez & Miranda 2022a; 2022b), given that technological advances, like those related to augmented reality and virtual reality, allow gamers to perceive and immerse themselves in the reality proposed by the game. In this way, it is not only possible to feel the movement tactilely, visually experience the colours of the places or auditorily the sound of the soundtracks, but also smell the places visited and taste the food. Gamers also feel revulsion or compassion for what the story tells about the characters, anguish for the pain of others, happiness for winning the game or disappointment because time is over and they must start again. In other words, the plane of fiction offered by the video game, and that of the gamers' reality, overlaps with such subtlety and efficiency that it is practically impossible to separate them in the personal experience.

This intersensory and immersive experience partially achieved explains the success of video games, since gamers feel and move beyond the physical senses involved. This is verifiable in two games which recreate the novel by Eco previously commented on: *La abadía del crimen* (1987) and *The Abbey* (2008)¹⁸.

According to Jiménez Alcázar (2018), these are historical video games, given that they accomplish four basic characteristics making these digital products objects of interest for historians: veracity, plausibility, information and freedom to play.

*La abadía del crimen*¹⁹ is a single-player adventure video game designed by Paco Menéndez and Juan Delcán. Despite its lack of commercial success, the game became a cult classic of the 8-bit era. Thanks to the explosion of the retro phenomenon, it was re-released in 2016 improved as *La abadía del crimen. Extensum*²⁰. This later version has clear additions from the film and television adaptations of the original work by Umberto Eco²¹.

¹⁸ For a general introduction to this topic, see the paper by Jiménez Alcázar & Rodríguez (2018), in which they point out the links between cinema and literature with video games, especially how historical films and novels are adapted to the format of digital games.

¹⁹ Developed, distributed and produced by Opera Soft, designed by Paco Menéndez and Juan Delcán. Game data: Genre, video adventure; Game modes: One player. Software data: Platforms Amstrad CPC, Spectrum, MSX, MS-DOS. Hardware data: cassette and floppy format. Launching Amstrad CPC, November 1987, ZX Spectrum, January 1988, MSX, January 1998, MS-DOS, August 1988.

²⁰ Extended version in Java that allows it to run on Linux, Mac OS X and Microsoft Windows and includes significant changes and improvements (expanded map and graphics, new characters, cut-scenes, character logic and new situations, directional or classic control, and aids to decrease the high difficulty of the original game).

²¹ As we have already indicated, in 1986 Jean-Jacques Annaud made the film version keeping the novel's name, *Der Name der Rose*, with the leading role of Sean Connery as the

In this video adventure, the Franciscan friar William de Occam (William of Baskerville in the book) and the young novice Adso have to discover the perpetrator of a series of murders which take place in an abbey located in the Italian peninsula during the 14th century. Over a period of seven days, they must carry out the work of a monk of that time while, in their spare time, they carry out the investigation in the labyrinthine abbey. William must comply with the abbot's orders at all times, particularly by attending mass and the dining room when the bell rings and by not leaving his cell at night, an order he does not obey.

At the beginning of the game, an initial scroll appears, accompanied by a melody, giving an account of the reasons for the characters' presence in the abbey, which is the same as the quests in the game. The actions must take place inside the abbey and each day in the game is divided into several parts according to the canonical hours, summarizing the real organization for a cloister monk: Matins, Lauds, Prime, Terce, Sixth, None, Vespers and Compline.

With *La abadía del crimen Extensum* the game takes advantage of later adaptations of the novel into a film and television series. It is the cross media phenomenon in its most literal sense: the generation of a basic plot reflected in various media and with different cultural expressions: cinema, novel, comic, video game, painting, sculpture... All are framed within the user's desire to be part of that product in his or her possession. This is the key to marketing.

In the case in hand, the background is certainly complicated, since it concerns adaptations to the video game environment which in turn already have an adaptation to an audio-visual medium. An actor has already 'put a face' to a character. Indeed, it is very possible that the viewer expects to see someone who resembles what he or she already familiar with from the video game, as if the rest of the seen and heard topics, in this case medieval ones.

In *The Abbey*²² both the development of the characters and the treatment of spaces are created using cartoons. This video game relates the ad-

Franciscan friar and former inquisitor of the 14th century, Fray William de Baskerville, and Christian Slater as the Franciscan Adso (a Benedictine in the novel). Subsequently, in 2019, the eight-episode miniseries *Il nome della rosa* was produced for television, an Italian-German production created and directed by Giacomo Battiato, starring by John Turturro as William of Baskerville and Rupert Everett as Bernard Gui.

²² Developed, distributed and produced by Alcachofa Soft. Designed by Carmen Martin, Emilio de Paz, Francisco Pérez, Javier Mota, Santiago Lancha. Game data: Genre, video adventure; Game modes: One player. Software data: Amstrad CPC, Spectrum, MSX, MS-

ventures of Leonardo de Toledo and his novice Bruno in a ruined abbey located on a rocky and desolate mountain: the Abadía de Nuestra Señora de la Natividad, which is full of mysteries. As the great Inquisitor, Leonardo interrogates everyone, gathers information and clues. He goes to every corner of the abbey to solve the mystery behind the death of the brother who is the doorkeeper, and to investigate certain supernatural events that have occurred in the library. That is why the father abbot believes in the intervention of the Devil behind that alleged accidental death.

The abbey contains several different parts: kitchen, library, stables, chapel and cemetery. In each of these areas, there are key objects and characters which clarify the mystery surrounding the events, spaces in which the play of lights and shadows accompanies each level of the game, relating the darkest places with the characters and situations generating anxiety and fear.

The characters and places in these video games refer to the internal life of a 14th-century Benedictine monastery, just as Eco proposes in his novel. The activity of the monastery has a primary focus of attention: the library and the *scriptorium*. The abbot has forbidden entry into the library, only accessed by the librarian or, occasionally, by certain authorized monks. The images which the video games transmit about these spaces, as well as the activities of the characters, allude to the knowledge of those times. Specialists in Greek, Arabic or rhetoric, copyists, miniaturists and illuminists, all bring the gamer into contact with the rich symbolical figures and monsters of medieval art, as well as with codicological technical aspects (Montero Cartelle 1986). At a time when Romance languages and literatures are flourishing, they remain oblivious to them, thinking and writing in Latin, reflecting on the world and heaven from a biblical, patristic and scholastic formation and vision.

The characters express the typical emotional world of late medieval monastic settings, where obedience was the rule, submission was the recurring attitude, and fear was the predominant emotion.

The commitment to research which keeps both the reader of the novel by Eco and the spectator of the films and series about *Il nome della rosa* in suspense has been added to the interactive experience of the gamer to the video game (García 2008). Certainly, this person not only can see and hear the stories in audio-visual format but also recreate the medieval environment and the experiences of individuals of that time through a subjective experience and sensory and emotional enjoyment.

3. History, literature and TV series

The clear distinction between history and literature has not always existed as such. In the 19th century, for example, the boundaries between the two were foggy and undefined. Those who wrote history could also write stories and other texts, and many times were not limited to works of a historical nature, in order to expose interpretations of the past. They also used literary works. History, as understood in the 19th century, and literature in its various genres, especially texts of customs, novels and plays, served to interpret the past but, mainly, to expose visions of the history of the nascent Latin American countries. This exercise of historical review was not limited to contemplating the past and its traces, and building interpretive discourses on them, but went deeper. Historians and writers wondered about the conditions that led to the realities they lived in. That is to say, they reviewed the past looking for answers and thinking about the nation projects in formation. In the 19th century, literature and history were quite similar narrative strategies in terms of the modes of interpretation of the past (Cortés Guerrero & Martínez Pinzón 2022).

Currently, just as the historical novel disguises its intervention in the present by dealing with the past, many movies and TV series also turn to medieval stories and characters as a metaphorical way of reflecting on people, the social sphere and their problems and dynamics of today. Therefore, by going beyond the anecdotal level, the reading of the image becomes more complex and the viewer's creative function enhances the multiplicity of meanings and the indeterminacy or ambiguity of the image. As a product of a textual functioning, films and series bring into play an expressive level (visual information), a content level (updating by the recipient) and a pragmatic component (active integration of the audience into the communication process). As a result, they constitute an entry into the understanding of historical content by means of the experiences of enjoyment and cognitive challenge of decoding an iconic text.

An essential element of series aimed at creating an illusion of truth and a parallel world in which the spectator can appreciate current concerns is the character or characters. According to Carrión (2011), the television character generates empathy and stimulates identification, although always partially, since the viewer feels it close and distant at the same time, real and virtual. In addition, it is multiple, since it embodies in diverse formats and bodies. The character appears on the screen and on paper (newspapers, magazines, books). It is sold, collected (statuettes or plastic figurines) and it is even the central topic of many private conversations.

From this perspective, the iconic characters take on some characteristics of the medieval poetic self, also multifaceted and polysemic insofar as the same hero can manifest him or herself in different functions, names and characteristics or can go through different traditions, literary genres and periods. As a paradigmatic example of the first case, we can mention the protagonist of the *Libro de Buen Amor* (Hispanic 14th-century text), who masks himself with the narrator or with characters with different names (Don Melón de la Huerta, Don Polo), and even with the author or the idea of author (Rey 1979). A sample of the second type is the *Cid Campeador* who, based on historical accounts, became the central character of medieval epics and ballads and, later, exalted by literature and theatre of later centuries²³ and cinema²⁴. Indeed, his figure brings together the different factors to produce the heroic imaginary: the memory of the people, poetry, plays and the brilliant intervention of certain artists (Le Goff 2013).

In 2020, the Spanish series *El Cid*²⁵ added to the genealogy of the *Campeador*. In the two seasons broadcast to date, the production focuses on the historical stage of the reign of Fernando I de León and the beginning of the succession, after his death in 1065, in which his sons receive the kingdoms of Castile (Sancho), León (Alfonso) and Galicia (García) and his daughters the cities of Zamora (Urraca) and Toro (Elvira). The young Rodrigo Díaz de Vivar is a squire to Sancho and becomes knighted by him towards the end of the currently broadcast episodes.

Television series, on the one hand, offer many opportunities for analysis of the relationships between history, literature and semiotics for the configuration of cultural meanings. In the first place, it enables the debate on the notion of fiction and the extent to which it is complex whether we are referring to medieval or contemporary works. In the Middle Ages, the quest for truth required the written word assigned to different statuses to works and genres (Zumthor 1989). Fictional models richer in symbolic connotations 'suffered' from a lack of adaptation between language and truth. The poetic vehicle itself supported that deficiency. Compositions in verse, such as the epic poem, opposed in this sense to the certainty transmitted by the

²³ Like the *Crónica del famoso cavallero De Cid Ruy Díaz Campeador*, published in Burgos in 1512, republished in 1552 and 1593, *Las mocedades de Rodrigo*, by Guillén de Castro, a play from 1605, and the French play by Pierre Corneille, *Le Cid*, from 1636.

²⁴ Among the films, the one starring by Charlton Heston and Sophia Loren, in 1961, stands out.

²⁵ Zebra Producciones, Spain, 2020. Direction: José Velasco (Creator), Luis Arranz (Creator), Adolfo Martínez Pérez, Miguel Alcantud, Marco A. Castillo, Arantxa Echevarría. Screenplay: Luis Arranz, Adolfo Martínez Pérez. Protagonist: Jaime Lorente.

historical chronicles narrated in prose. In present times, literature has lost part of its specificity due to the existence of a large transmedia network of supports and objects (Baraglia *et al.* 2020). In view of that, series provoke reflections on their historical assumptions, the poetic traces inherited from the medieval literary system and the cultural aspects of fiction that rescue the particularities of each form and the common nuclei of reference.

On the other hand, the serial format allows innovative inquiry into the theme of heroism and the functionality of heroic figures in contemporary culture, both from the view of semantic categories condensing a point of view about the world and forms of problematization of the heroic world in a broader framework of discussion about the typologies of characters. Gómez Ponce (2017) maintains that series with historical/epic content, widely consumed in the last decade along with police, gothic and science fiction series, turn to historical characters in a fictional setting to fill certain voids of memory, the study of which can shed light on the construction of meaning, forms of subjectivation and ideological functioning in our time.

El Cid offers relevant space to the current conceptualization of corporality in relation to identities through the image of medieval bodies and senses. This is a valid hermeneutic key to thinking of contemporary societies in a semiotic way. In this framework, in the serial fiction about the *Campeador*, certain characters and narrative nuclei symbolize certain types of body which represent the disputes, tensions and identity needs of the medieval world. These circumstances, signified both in body forms and technologies, as well as in specific sensory experiences, projected from the imaginary to the dimensions of identity and otherness characterizing the current world, are anthropological and political categories which allow reflection on the human condition, and on the aesthetic and historical scope. Certainly, the images in the series of forbidden, barbaric, mutilated and exotic bodies, inter alia, are the most suggestive when it comes to motivating the correlations between history, literature and semiotics.

The kind of body we have considered as forbidden appears in the relationship between Urraca and Alfonso, real siblings who constantly weave a political alliance against Sancho. This in turn constitutes a fundamental springboard of the disputes that hang over the successors of Fernando I. The series underlines that close political affinity through the insinuation of an incest between both characters that, although not consummated, sensually connotes the scenes and environments of the narration through soft voices and eloquent silences. A significant sample of this is the scene in the bathtub, when Alfonso bathes naked while conspiring with Urraca. He splashes her and knocks her into the water, whereupon she ends up with

all her clothes wet. The soaked body, even when it remains dressed, constitutes a representation of desire, taking into account the symbolism that water has in the Western tradition.

Water is known to have a dual meaning since it is essential for the development of life, but its excess can contribute to its destruction, an ambivalence that allegorises the well-known biblical story of Noah's ark. In this sense, the passion animating the characters expressed in the metaphor of overflowing and uncontained water, splashes and wets outside the bathtub in a clear allusion to the lack of control that can therefore lead to total destruction of the bodies – individual and political that the characters combine. The idea of weight reinforces the image of passion through water, because Urraca's drenched body is overburdened and eventually bends over and falls into the tub. That weight of the water immerses her in pleasure, although she manages to escape from it. The narration thus lengthens the suspense both regarding what will happen between the siblings and about the destiny awaiting the Crown.

Although this scene of forbidden bodies offers symbolic lines for the analysis of the connotation of the audio-visual images, from an historical point of view it creates tension with the documentary sources. There is no record of an incestuous affair between Urraca and Alfonso. Rather, it is possible to find the justification for its inclusion in the story in the links that the Spanish series maintain with another medieval-themed series, *Game of Thrones*²⁶ (Marambio 2021), which suggests such relationships. From this, the intertextuality between these series is another field of semiotic inquiry that enables contemporary fictional productions.

The dalliances between García and his squire Nuño also allow for an aesthetic-political analysis of the bodies in the series. A homosexual flirtation supports the friendship and vassalage uniting both characters and which proposes updated readings of male eroticism. However, this duo occupies less space than that of Urraca and Alfonso in the narrative sequence, since Nuño dies early in battle. However, it also does not concur with what is recorded in historical sources and must, therefore, be decoded as a fictional element in the service of narrative logic and current assessments of love between men.

²⁶ *Game of Thrones*, 2011–2019. US–UK co-production, HBO. Direction: David Benioff (Creator), D.B. Weiss (Creator), Timothy Van Patten, Brian Kirk, Daniel Minahan, Alan Taylor, Neil Marshall, David Benioff and others. Screenplay: David Benioff, D.B. Weiss, Bryan Cogman, Jane Espenson. For a historical and literary consideration of its contents, see Porrinas González (2019).

Sancho and his foreign wife Alberta express another type of body. She is presented as a barbaric character, impressive due to her height and strength and because she does not speak Spanish. Then she establishes an almost savage bond with the infant. Since they do not share the language, they communicate with growls and shouts²⁷, especially in the erotic scenes, which also include blows and an alteration of the traditional hierarchy of genders, since she assumes a superior position and dominates sexual encounters. The type of woman Alberta denotes can compare to the *serranas* in the aforementioned *Libro de Buen Amor*. These are rustic and brutal women who harass the protagonist and contrast with city women who practice courtly love (Miranda 2020a). Like Alberta, their manly appearance stands out, the rudeness and brusqueness of their manners and the careless language, that is, their characteristics are opposed to the aesthetic canon and typical feminine behaviour of medieval time.

The couple in the series visually represent the ontological metaphor of love as war. However, in the real war (the siege of Zamora) Alberta fights alongside Sancho, for his own ideals, exposing her own life. They are strategic allies on the political level. Therefore, Sancho and Alberta contrast with the married couple of the infant's parents, Fernando I and Sancha. They are older and mature, and the erotic scenes between them are serene and almost silent. Although they share love and a 'national' identity, the queen lends herself to a conspiracy against her husband by Bishop Don Bernardo and the Count of León, Flaín, thereby betraying the matrimonial alliance, a situation that will at last lead both spouses to death. Marriage as the basis of politics shown in the series is a theme that has antecedents in medieval texts. For instance, some of the *exempla* of *El Conde Lucanor* (14th-century prose text) highlight the relevance that the wife – of the aristocratic estate – should always be an unconditional ally of her husband, in order to ensure the maintenance of all social institutions (Miranda 2018; 2020b).

The war scenes, instead, show the wounded, mutilated or dead body. Along with the sight of blood, the metallic sounds of weapons, of the hooves of horses on the road, of the tools in the forge, neighs, war cries and the music of drums and horns in battle thematize the representation of war through a well-defined soundscape²⁸. The vigorous and skilful body

²⁷ The howl, as a sound close to animal nature, is a relevant element in the audio-visual format to underline the barbarity of that female character, as it opposes the articulated word that defines Spanish actants.

²⁸ Soundscape is the sound caused by nature and human beings in a certain environment that, as a theoretical-methodological category, allows the analysis of the intimate relation-

in the fight is the metonym of the medieval knight. Therefore, the loss in combat of the hand of one of the most seasoned Castilians represents his deprivation of identity, since he will no longer be able to fight. However, the conflict is resolved in terms that are more current than medieval. He 're-converts' into a trainer for pages and squires, a circumstance based on the principle that there are opportunities for everyone in society when there are solidarity and recognition.

Finally, the series also exhibits exotic bodies in the figure of Muslims, both men and women, mainly through clothing and the places they occupy (gardens and palaces). This type of character establishes an identity contrast with the Castilians based on the opposition between their exquisiteness and the rudeness of the Spaniards. This content, which is conveyed by the series and is likely to be apprehended with the conceptual tools of otherness studies, is also recorded in the historical and literary medieval texts. It relates also to current problems of conflict between identities and alterities in the context of an increasingly diverse world which is not always tolerant.

The reincarnation of medieval heroes on the small screen, through the semiotic complexity of representing bodies and groups, is also confirmed in *Vikings*²⁹. This series revolves around the legendary figure of Ragnar Lodbrok, his sons, his warriors and his forays into England, Scandinavia and other parts of Europe.

The image of Ragnar and his men refers to the topic of the Nordic body, characterized by long hair, the use of fur, tattoos and slovenliness in general, a style not ratified by historical or anthropological studies (Gómez Ponce, 2016). This aesthetic, supported in principle by stereotypes set by the Franks and the Romans, alludes to an atavistic and violent state originated in the mid-19th century, a time when academic history comes into contact with sagas and other medieval poems of Iceland. They were written by monks and clergymen, representative of institutions who are most vulnerable to Viking raids, since their churches and treasures were the best loot. The literature presents Vikings as the dark forces who act through barbarism and terror. Modern archaeology, however, has shown that the Vikings were immersed in a complex trade network, thus discrediting their most widespread image and supporting a more domestic and less aggressive vision of the Scandinavians of the Middle Ages (Bull 2005).

ship established between individuals and their cultural context beyond the visual dimension (Rodríguez, Palazzo & Coronado Schwindt 2019).

²⁹ *Vikings*, 2013–2020. MGM Television; History, 2013. Creator: Michel Hirst. For a historical and literary consideration of its contents, see San José Beltrán (2014).

However, the cultural stereotype of the Viking is still valid today. It is even spread on a large scale in the numerous series and films in which it is as a theme. This is so because at the base of the composition of the image, there is a contrast between nature and culture and between identity and otherness. In this case, the interaction of meanings that the series proposes occurs from the figure of a body that is different, that is another and that therefore, evokes a wild, almost animal world.

For this reason, the character of the Viking can be conceived as a mechanism for reflection on our own culture, and usually found outside of it, given that the limits with the wild today are not the same as in the Middle Ages. The elements of cultural memory that persist and the values attributed to the Nordic body due to the interaction with other texts and other semiotic spaces, such as fashion and advertising³⁰, and with historical and semiotic research³¹, require an examination that goes beyond forms in an attempt to demystify the prototype. That is why notions such as border and frontier are postulated by various authors in the field of history, anthropology and semiotics (Turner 1987; Lotman 1996; Slatta 1997; Rodríguez 2012; Finol 2014, among many others). They are conceived as an information transit zone which separates but at the same time articulates. They can be very useful analytical categories to understand and relate different cultural systems or different portions of culture using the central concepts of the field of medieval studies.

Certainly, the semantics of the wild reveals signs of barbarism, masculinity and exoticism in the configuration of a hybrid human model defined by a body that is harmonic and attractive, but inclined to chaos, excess and uncertainty. In this sense, the Vikings in the series create a counterpoint with the heroic figures which promote the most representative medieval texts (heroic poems, hagiographies, chronicles, clerical poems, etc.), and who, in general, are distinguished by their restraint and the order.

³⁰ Undoubtedly, fashion and advertising, as languages of culture, contribute greatly to creating and/or consolidating models of masculinity through clichés and analogies with fictional characters (gods and heroes) of the medieval Nordic world that insist on perpetuating the more traditional views about the Vikings. Thus, for instance, the lumberjack look can be understood as an updated version of those wild, bearded and scruffy men, vindicating a wild virility that is rustic but no less attractive than the metrosexual look.

³¹ The hairy-looking wild man, who was supposed to inhabit forests and jungles outside of civilized society, is one of the most fascinating imaginary figures of the Middle Ages and later centuries. It was a motif widely used in goldsmith and heraldry, in stalls, in different literary genres, including chronicles and oral legends, and in court festivals (López Ríos 2006).

From the point of view of the collective, the barbarian horde represented by the Viking warriors on the screen also constitutes a myth around the idea of chaos and the bestiality of the herd. A careful interpretation can deconstruct this image, in principle, because herds are not chaotic (Gómez Ponce, 2016) and, secondly, because serial fiction builds a single Nordic community based on ethnic unity and homogeneity (Gómez Ponce, 2018), which contrasts with historical reality.

4. Final words

In medieval times, contextual elements such as the acoustic and momentary channel of communication along with the domain of gestural, instrumental and vocal codes determined the literary nature of the works, including the written ones. These elements conditioned writers and performers in their endeavours to improve and perfect their capacities and performance, on which the message as a whole depended (Marimón Llorca, 1999). Today the media and entertainment industry also use complex and rich connections between verbal and visual signs, in order to produce highly symbolic messages through imaginary re-enactments of the past.

It would be useful to analyse the wide range of discursive productions of the Middle Ages through the study of the elements and factors which become carriers of meanings and the way in which they do so. We consider that a comparable perspective would also benefit from contemporary semiotic practices which, when interpreting documentary sources of various types and adapting them to suitable fictional formats for the general public, constitute playful reconfigurations of the historical, literary and fantastic Middle Ages.

Such a point of view is comprehensive, dynamic and systematic. It enables an examination of the relationships between texts, participants in communication and their respective contexts in active processes. It also serves to analyse networks of tensions which promote significances that are never closed, but constantly renewed in more or less systematic cultural frameworks and, therefore, susceptible to being academically investigated. As a result of its semiotic nature, such an approach is interested in the spatiotemporal circumstances and the cultural systems which participate in the production of meaning and, consequently leads to other non-discursive disciplines with which it can create conceptual nets to explain the implications of texts in relation to the real world that generates and receives them.

Accordingly, this paper has attempted to examine certain components of mass culture which have transformed narratives, characters and fictional worlds, distinctive of the Middle Ages, into communicative and semiotic practices reinterpreting historical and literary texts as a way of reflecting on people, social life and its problems in the present world.

The way in which past societies perceived the past and the authority they gave to that past raise questions for medieval studies about our contemporary society, the temporal orientation of which is usually dominated by the present. Consequently, this field of research will face an increasingly exigent social demand which, in addition to including the training of students and researchers, also leads it to reach a broader, demanding and open public about the world, curious of a Middle Ages. One that does not always conform to the one studied in the cloisters. Indeed, the idea of a Western heritage which determines our current identity together with a confrontation of our identities with the strange, unknown and different, as occurred in the Middle Ages, implies an ideological exercise that, in the popular sphere, is manifest in the consumption of cultural products such as those described in these pages. The medieval world is not the only topic that allows interpretations and experiences focused on human relationships, social conflicts, personal tensions and ambitions, desires and fears through metaphorical and sensitive mechanisms. However, its choice as an aesthetic and playful field reveals that, although medievalism takes place when the Middle Ages, as a historical age, has effectively already ended, the period is perceived as something not past or not totally finished, as something necessary to revive or preferably to be imitated in some of its aspects.

Within the wide repertoire susceptible to analysis, the article has focused on the expressive and ideological mechanisms which certain literary, film and playful texts use to account for the significant facets of the medieval body, senses and emotions. Together with epistemological, normative and philosophical principles of our historical moment, they help to understand the semantic plurality and the diachronic bases of the idea of body and senses, as well as the innumerable aesthetic possibilities generated by its impact on current cultural orientations and attitudes.

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