

## SOME CONSIDERATIONS ABOUT THE LITERARY WORK OF BERNARD CORNWELL

### ALGUMAS CONSIDERAÇÕES SOBRE A LITERATURA DE BERNARD CORNWELL

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**ABSTRACT:** This article aims to convey into the academic sphere the literary work of the British author Bernard Cornwell. Besides presenting a biography of the author, considering that Cornwell is a bestseller writer, the article discusses about mass literature, through the view of Sodr  (1988), Abreu (2004), Eagleton (2008) and Dering (2012). Then, the critical fortune of the author that is exposed, points out the importance of the writer's fiction for the dialogues between history and literature, demonstrating that one cannot limit mass literature as a simple market product, but as a cultural outcome of great importance for the human sciences. In this sense, the article ends by suggesting that Bernard Cornwell's literature can be considered a "place of memory", based on Nora (1989).

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**KEYWORDS:** Bernard Cornwell; English Literature; Historical Fiction

**RESUMO:** O presente artigo objetiva veicular na esfera acadêmica o trabalho literário do autor britânico Bernard Cornwell. Para além de apresentar uma biografia do autor, considerando que Cornwell é um escritor de *best-sellers*, o artigo disserta acerca da literatura de massa, pela ótica de Sodr  (1988), Abreu (2004), Eagleton (2008) e Dering (2012). A partir disso, a fortuna cr tica do autor que   exposta, assinala a import ncia da fic o do escritor para os di logos entre hist ria e literatura, demonstrando que n o se pode limitar a literatura de massa como simples produto de mercado, mas sim como fruto cultural de grande import ncia para as ci ncias humanas. Nesse sentido, o artigo finaliza sugerindo que a literatura de Bernard Cornwell pode ser considerada um "lugar de mem ria", com base em Nora (1989).

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Bernard Cornwell; Literatura Inglesa; Fic o hist rica.

## 1 A SHORT BIOGRAPHY OF BERNARD CORNWELL

Bernard Cornwell was born in London in 1944, a year still marked by the Second World War. His stories bear the marks of his life's history. The biological son of a British woman and a Canadian aviator, he was adopted by a British family from the Essex region, participants in a religious sect that no longer exists, known as the *Peculiar People*. This "peculiar" group practiced extreme puritanical beliefs, which prohibited certain everyday practices "like smoking, drinking, the theatre, dancing or cinema" (MINGO, 2017, p. 10). Consequently, it is believed that the author "developed a logical curiosity for all these banned things" (MINGO, 2017, p. 10).

Cornwell recounts that he escaped to *London University*, where he majored in Theology (MINGO, 2017). His education certainly contributes to the development of the religious theme, which is very present in his works. As an example, *Saxon Stories*, contrasts the passable and divergent relations between Christians and pagans in 9<sup>th</sup> century England.

Moreover, the majority of his books, all based on significant historical moments, especially concerning the British territory, "are connected with the warlike and military world" (MINGO, 2017, p. 11). Thus, militarism is another substantial theme in *Saxon Stories*, since the series depicts an era marked by the struggle for land not only between the Anglo-Saxons and Scandinavians but also between these peoples and the descendants of the ancient Celts (the Scots, Bretons, Welsh, Irish).

Bernard Cornwell is a great narrator of the history of his British origins. He not only narrates but creates and recreates stories. The author seems to propose in his work a new reading of English History, in which real characters meet fictional characters, shaping a new story. Cornwell assumes his fascination for history and opines about the relationship between reality and fiction, as can be seen in this excerpt from an interview:

I love history, which is why I write historical novels, though (...) truth is invariably stranger than fiction. Still, we try, and my own patch starts at the dawn of Britain's history with Stonehenge, travels into the magical exploits of Arthur and ends with Britain's murderous battles against Napoleon. (CORNWELL *apud* MINGO, 2017, p. 11)

Cornwell taught classes for some time until he was employed by the *BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation)*, a world-renowned radio and television station, where he worked for ten consecutive years. It was there that he met his current wife, an American, who encouraged him to move to the United States, however, "he could not get a Green Card from the USA's authorities and set to writing books" (MINGO, 2017, p. 10)". In other words, Bernard Cornwell became a writer precisely for economic reasons: he needed a job, so he decided to write books to sell, using his journalistic skills to build his narratives about History.

The author has his own website<sup>9</sup>, in which, besides presenting his brief biography, he promotes his work through news, videos, and specifications of each book and/or series of books. Additionally, the author proposes two sections to keep in touch with his readers and fans: "*Your Questions*", in which he tries to answer questions and doubts mainly about his works, and "*Your comments*", a freer section, which receives comments (compliments, criticisms, and suggestions) from his readers. Bernard Cornwell also has a professional page on Facebook<sup>10</sup> where he updates and publishes new information about his work and related topics.

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<sup>9</sup> Available at: <<http://www.bernardcornwell.net/>>

<sup>10</sup> Available at: <<https://www.facebook.com/bernard.cornwell/>>

## 2 A BEST-SELLING WRITER

In the year 2009, the British newspaper *The Telegraph* published a list of the hundred bestselling authors of the decade<sup>11</sup>, in which Bernard Cornwell was ranked 19th, with more than 6 million books sold. For his popularity and large book sales, with over sixty books published to date<sup>12</sup>, Bernard Cornwell is an author of the so-called *Bestsellers*, also known as "Market literature" and commonly associated with the so-called "*Mass Literature*".

In *Best-seller: Literatura de mercado* (1988), Muniz Sodré specifies that there are two types of literature: the cult and the mass literature. According to the author, what mainly distinguishes them are the rules of production or consumption, "making each of these kinds of literature generate different ideological effects" (SODRÉ, 1988, p. 6) (our translation)<sup>13</sup>. Thus, the texts of "cult literature" are considered this way because they are institutionally recognized in that way (SODRÉ, 1988).

When defining "Mass literature", Sodré presents four major characteristics. The first one would be the existence of a *mythical aspect* in mass narratives, which transforms "many of the characters into true model types" (SODRÉ, 1988, p. 8) (our translation)<sup>14</sup>. There is commonly the archetype of the hero, the one who can do anything, "above human weaknesses and social laws [...]" and "[...] comes out of great physical dangers unscathed and acts as the God of the Old Testament against his enemies" (SODRÉ, 1988, p. 8) (our translation)<sup>15</sup>. The second characteristic refers to the *informational-journalistic topicality*, which, according to the author, transmits in the book "the need to inform, to bring the reader up to date with the great facts, theories, and doctrines - whether of the author himself or of his own time - in an easy and

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<sup>11</sup> Available at <<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/books/6866648/Bestselling-authors-of-the-decade.html>> Accessed on April, 28<sup>th</sup>, 2021

<sup>12</sup> To check all titles published by Bernard Cornwell, access: <http://www.bernardcornwell.net/books-by-bernard-cornwell/> Accessed on April, 28<sup>th</sup>, 2021

<sup>13</sup> "[...] com que cada uma dessas literaturas gere efeitos ideológicos diferentes" (SODRÉ, 1988, p. 6)

<sup>14</sup> "[...] muitos dos personagens em verdadeiros tipos modelares" (SODRÉ, 1988, p. 8)

<sup>15</sup> "[...] acima das fraquezas humanas e das leis sociais [...]" e "[...] sai incólume de grandes perigos físicos e age como o Deus do Antigo Testamento contra os seus inimigos" (SODRÉ, 1988, p. 8)

accessible manner, following the example of journalistic language” (SODRÉ, 1988, p. 8) (our translation)<sup>16</sup>. Sodr  also states that in the market game writer and journalist become very close terms. *Pedagogism* would be the third structural element of mass narratives, which is defined by having a “clear intention to teach something” (1988, p. 8) (our translation)<sup>17</sup>. Finally, Sodr  identifies that the fourth characteristic would be the presence of a *cult* or *consecrated rhetoric*. He explains that the mass text would resume a way of writing that had already been consecrated by cult literature. That is, “stereotypes of romantic literature are revived, like the divine hero, the satanic villain, the immaculate Virgin, the fatal woman, [...]” (SODR , 1988, p. 9) (our translation)<sup>18</sup>. Sodr  also clarifies that in mass literature the content is more important than the question of language and the reflection on the romanesque technique.

We can identify some of these features in Bernard Cornwell’s *Saxon Stories*. For example, the informational-journalistic topicality and the cult or consecrated rhetoric, through the narrator and protagonist Uhtred’s accounts, who is always explaining his beliefs, conceptions, and the facts he experiences in the smallest details. Furthermore, because the narrative is built in a sequence, each book brings explanations that refer to the previous novel, making the reader’s work easier, as he or she will not need to make any effort to remember the important facts already narrated in the other books. In addition, the narrative is full of detailed historical and cultural information about the period reported. Moreover, what can be considered as the main informative-journalistic feature refers to the “Historical Note”, written by the author, Bernard Cornwell, at the end of each book of the series. In these notes, Cornwell justifies what was real and what was fictional in the narratives, how the choice of events and characters happened, which historical sources he used, besides leaving his opinion about the History of England.

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<sup>16</sup> “[...] a necessidade de informar, de p r o leitor ao corrente de grandes fatos, teorias e doutrinas – seja do pr prio autor, seja da pr pria  poca – de uma maneira f cil e acess vel, a exemplo da linguagem jornal stica” (SODR , 1988, p. 8)

<sup>17</sup> “[...] intenc o clara de *ensinar alguma coisa*” (SODR , 1988, p. 8)

<sup>18</sup> “[...] reavivam-se estere tipos da literatura rom ntica, como o her i divino, o vil o sat nico, a virgem imaculada, a mulher fatal, [...]” (SODR , 1988, p. 9)

On the other hand, the work does not bring the *mythical aspect*, by proposing a relationship between real/historical and fictional characters. We do not identify many stereotypical figures in *Saxon Stories*. On the contrary, Cornwell demonstrates the desire to deconstruct many of the stereotypical views about the characters of the period he narrates in his fiction. For example, the Scandinavians themselves, or so-called Vikings, known popularly only for their extremely violent ways, but who in Cornwell's narrative are presented in different ways, highlighting important facts about their culture. Although the setting of the narrative is a historical period, we believe that there is no *pedagogical* principle as defined by Sodré. *Saxon Stories* is certainly able to teach us many things, but not in a practical way or something that can be learned in a quick reading. *Saxon Stories* requires deep reflection regarding the History of England<sup>19</sup>.

If we consider only these characteristics as determinants to stipulate if a literary work is "mass literature" or not, Bernard Cornwell's works could be, in a way, categorized in this type of literature. We aim, however, to rethink these concepts, in order to demonstrate that Cornwell's literary production has the competence to be understood as "Good Literature" deserving space in academic research.

By the way, in recent years, many researchers have reflected on the involvement of literature in the cultural industry from other perspectives. We believe, therefore, that if this type of literature has a great popular reach, why not devote solid analyses to its contents, in order to understand what moves the thought of contemporary society?

In his dissertation *A cultura de massa em diálogo com questões de teorias literárias* (2012), the researcher Renato de Oliveira Dering associates bestsellers/mega-sellers to the literature in pamphlets. According to Dering, these kinds of literature reach other social classes, a larger and more diverse audience, leading to the habit of reading and effectively participating in literary changes. Considering bestsellers/megasellers as inferior is to generalize everything that is produced and that has the public appreciation (DERING, 2012). Such attitude

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<sup>19</sup> In the Master's dissertation *"Entre anglo-saxões e escandinavos: História e memória em 'Saxon Stories', de Bernard Cornwell"* defended in 2019 in the Graduate Program in Literature at UNICENTRO, we propose a reading that contemplates the relationship of History and Memory in this literary sphere. Available at: <http://tede.unicentro.br:8080/jspui/handle/jspui/1808> Accessed on: May 5<sup>th</sup>, 2021



disregards certain types of culture, ignoring “[...] that the mass culture is also a producer of a cultural reality, being it the result of a characteristic historical and social process” (DERING, 2012, p. 4) (our translation)<sup>20</sup>.

The relation between bestsellers and mass literature is usually made taking into account the fact that many bestsellers are products determined by market mechanisms. It is interesting to highlight, however, that not all bestsellers should be considered “low literature”, considering that many books that have been on the bestseller list are also the so-called classics of cult literature, as well as many that are part of these lists and sell a lot nowadays show that they have good qualities to be recognized, valued and rethought by the academic context, as is the case of the books of the author we are studying.

Dering discuss the idea of “value” that would be imposed from one culture over another. The researcher infers that “we are not innocent when we work with the other's culture, especially considering that the look of the other [...] is intended for his/her culture” (2012, p. 17) (our translation)<sup>21</sup>, even if unconsciously. In this sense, the canonical perspective directs its vision to the other, positioned among the masses. Dering suggests, therefore, that the academy should direct its view more towards the relations between culture, society, and literature, because this could be “the key to the contemporary problem, to get out of the limits that the canon and institutionalizing means [that] condemn literature and open horizons for new perceptions and a new bias of the literary” (DERING, 2012, p. 19) (our translation)<sup>22</sup>.

It is important to consider that a “work not only expresses the environment but also refracts and portrays the one who is part of that set of sociocultural relations: the subject himself/herself” (DERING, 2012, p. 25) (our translation)<sup>23</sup>. In a way, Dering

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<sup>20</sup> “[...] que a massa também é produtora de uma realidade cultural, sendo ela resultado de um processo histórico e social característico” (DERING, 2012, p. 4).

<sup>21</sup> “[...] não somos inocentes quando trabalhamos com a cultura do outro, principalmente considerando que o olhar do outro [...] se tenciona para sua cultura” (DERING, 2012, p. 17)

<sup>22</sup> “[...] a chave do problema contemporâneo, sair dos limites que o próprio cânone e meios institucionalizantes [que] condenam a literatura e abrir horizontes para as novas percepções e para um novo viés do literário” (DERING, 2012, p. 19)

<sup>23</sup> “[...] obra não apenas exprime o meio, mas também refrata e retrata aquele que faz parte desse conjunto de relações socioculturais: o próprio sujeito.” (DERING, 2012, p. 25).

criticizes, with negativism, the pre-established views coming from literary criticism regarding cultural products, because, in the face of the capitalist scenario in which we live, there is no way to see the arts with eyes from yesterday and, therefore:

[...] what is perceived in contemporary critical and theoretical positions is the negligence which emerges from this industry, in the pre-concept, that is, from a view already consolidated that this cultural industry only produces works in series and low quality. For this reason, poets and novelists of mass literature will always be doomed to discreditability, for emerging from a place already institutionalized as devoid of values (DERING, 2012, p. 26) (our translation)<sup>24</sup>.

Many literary critics simply define literature produced along market procedures as “subliterature” or do not even consider it literature. Therefore, it is important to ask: how can we define values to a fictional text? Terry Eagleton (2008) faces the difficulty of trying to define what literature is, because of the variations that its definition has undergone historically, precisely because it is always set against value judgments. Unlike formalist theories, which would value the formal essence to consider whether or not a text is literary, Eagleton proposes to understand what literature is from a perspective that emanates from the reader:

It is true that many of the works studied as literature in academic institutions were 'constructed' to be read as literature, but it is also true that many of them were not. [...] Some texts are born literary, some achieve literariness, and some have literariness thrust upon them. Breeding in this respect may count for a good deal more than birth. What matters may not be where you came from but how people treat you. If they decide that you are literature then it seems that you are, irrespective of what you thought you were (EAGLETON, 2008, p. 7-8).

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<sup>24</sup> “[...] não há como [...] ver as artes com os olhos de ontem [...]” e, portanto “[...] o que se percebe nas posições críticas e teóricas contemporâneas é o desleixo com que emerge dessa indústria, no pré-conceito, isto é, a partir de uma visão já consolidada de que essa indústria cultural só produza obras em série e de baixa qualidade. Por essa razão, poetas e romancistas da literatura de massa estarão sempre condenados a *descredibilidade*, por emergirem de um local já institucionalizado como desprovido de valores” (DERING, 2012, p. 26).



Marcia Abreu (2004), when studying the history of literature, proposes that “the books we read (or do not read) and the opinions we express about them (having read them or not) compose part of our social image” (p. 19) (our translation)<sup>25</sup>. In this sense, both one's reading stories and the considerations of what is prestigious literature are results of a political process. Abreu proposes to rethink the definitions of literature, reflecting on the question of value “that has little to do with the texts and much to do with political and social positions” (2004, p. 39) (our translation)<sup>26</sup>. It is important to emphasize that a text becomes Literature, with a capital "L", following criteria of what Abreu calls “instances of legitimation”, considering that “what makes a text literary are not its internal characteristics, but the space that is assigned to it by critics and, above all, by the school in the set of symbolic goods” (ABREU, 2004, p. 40) (our translation)<sup>27</sup>.

If the cultural industry is increasingly producing and selling, and if there is still a huge reading public, regardless of the "type of literature" they choose, why not pay attention to this "entertainment literature", the effects it causes in its readers and the memories it brings by its contents? As Dering points out, we should “[...] focus on the legitimacy of the work concerning the individual, that is, about the non naivety of this reader before the productions that are presented to him” (2012, p. 33) (our translation)<sup>28</sup>. In this sense, “no matter how much there are impositions of a cultural industry, there will always be a thinking reader that will dialogue with this product that is imposed” (DERING, 2012, p. 52) (our translation)<sup>29</sup>.

On the other hand, it is necessary to rethink the definition of Literature, because, as Abreu asserts, literature “is a cultural and historical phenomenon and, therefore, liable to receive different definitions in different times and by different social groups”

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<sup>25</sup> “[...] os livros que lemos (ou não lemos) e as opiniões que expressamos sobre eles (tendo lido ou não) compõem parte de nossa imagem social” (ABREU, 2004, p. 19)

<sup>26</sup> “[...] que tem pouco a ver com os textos e muito a ver com posições políticas e sociais” (ABREU, 2004, p. 39)

<sup>27</sup> “[...] o que torna um texto literário não são suas características internas, e sim o espaço que lhe é destinado pela crítica e, sobretudo, pela escola no conjunto dos bens simbólicos” (ABREU, 2004, p. 40)

<sup>28</sup> “[...] pautar na legitimidade da obra em relação ao sujeito, isto é, acerca da não ingenuidade desse indivíduo diante às produções que lhe são apresentadas” (DERING, 2012, p. 33)

<sup>29</sup> “[...] por mais que haja imposições de uma indústria cultural, haverá sempre um sujeito pensante que dialogará com esse produto que é imposto” (DERING, 2012, p. 52)

(2004, p. 41) (our translation)<sup>30</sup>. In this way, we can identify the status of exclusion target to market literature, entertainment literature or mass literature, because it is possible to verify the rejection of these works by the eyes of a literary elite that does not perceive “[...] the cultural changes that encompass literature, the reader and the world itself” (DERING, 2012, p. 61) (our translation)<sup>31</sup>. In this way, we understand that aesthetic evaluation and literary taste vary according to time, social group, and cultural background (ABREU, 2004), which makes different people look at different forms of literature differently. The meanings of a literary work vary according to the different readings by different readers. Therefore, “value” is a term always in transition, since a literary work is “valued by certain people in specific situations, according to particular criteria and in the light of given purposes” (EAGLETON, 2008, p. 10).

These perspectives are linked to the history of the novel itself. If today the reading of classic novels is mandatory in school curricula, once the “idea seemed a total extravagance” (ABREU, 2004, p. 103) (our translation)<sup>32</sup>. The first novels were considered a complete novelty, being appreciated by the most diverse readers. The erudite people, on the other hand, disapproved the new genre, accusing it of being a waste of time, because “[...] it corrupted the taste and made people get in touch with morally reprehensible situations” (ABREU, 2004, p. 104) (our translation)<sup>33</sup>. The truth is that the danger of the novels for the critics was explained only for being novelty.

The novel was a new genre and therefore had no tradition and no noble ancestors. This was particularly important because, at that time, the criteria for defining the “good” or “bad” performance of writers were recorded in Poetics and Rhetoric. Since they did not say a word about novels, they could not be valuable writings (ABREU, 2004, p. 105) (our translation)<sup>34</sup>.

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<sup>30</sup> “[...] é um fenômeno cultural e histórico e, portanto, passível de receber diferentes definições em diferentes épocas e por diferentes grupos sociais” (ABREU, 2004, p. 41)

<sup>31</sup> “[...] as mudanças culturais que englobam a literatura, o leitor e o próprio mundo” (DERING, 2012, p. 61)

<sup>32</sup> “[...] idéia parecia uma total extravagância” (ABREU, 2004, p. 103)

<sup>33</sup> “[...] corrompia o gosto e fazia com que se tomasse contato com situações moralmente condenáveis” (ABREU, 2004, p. 104)

<sup>34</sup> O romance era um gênero novo e, portanto, não tinha tradição nem antepassados nobres. Isso era particularmente importante, pois, naquela época, os critérios para a definição do “bom” ou “mau”

This fact is similar to what happens today with the products of the cultural industry. Nowadays, the reading of old novels is encouraged, while everything produced for popular taste is condemned, using arguments very similar to those used to condemn the reading of novels. In this way, we can conclude that the definition of literature is something cultural and historical, and not objective and universal (ABREU, 2004). Literature has undergone the most varied mutations, bringing consequent changes for what/who is part of its system: not only the text but mainly the writers and readers.

Bernard Cornwell could be considered simply another best-selling author, and thus his works could be (pre)judged as “mass literature”. Nevertheless, through this article, we will rethink these judgments and (pre)concepts, presenting some research that has already been done on the author's work to understand his literature as a “memory site”.

### 3 THE RESEARCH ON BERNARD CORNWELL

Because of his audacity in representing such significant moments in history, Cornwell has been gaining space in academic research. In the search in several academic research sites, including Google Scholar, we found some works about the author's literature. The international works we found are all productions of scholars in the field of Literature, especially of English Studies.

Carlos Sanz Mingo, a researcher of Arthurian literature and current Professor of Hispanic Studies at Cardiff University, has studied the author and published articles in journals, such as those entitled "Forcing the bull to its knees: The Mithraic Strife in Modern Arthurian" (2009) and "Dark Ages Religious Conflicts and their Literary Representations: *The Winter King*, by Bernard Cornwell" (2011), and the book *The Arthurian World in Bernard Cornwell's The Warlord Chronicles* (2017), which was the result of his PhD research.

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desempenho dos escritores estavam registrados em Poéticas e em Retóricas. Como elas não diziam uma palavra sobre romances, eles não podiam ser escritos de valor. (ABREU, 2004, p. 105).

In the two articles cited, Mingo analyzes the presence of religion in Cornwell's literary work. In the article published in 2009, the researcher develops his discussion aiming to demonstrate how some of the actions in *The Warlord Chronicles* trilogy (1995-1997) symbolize the doom of paganism, the mystery of Mithra, and the final triumph of Christianity in British territory in the Arthurian context. In the other article, published in 2011, Mingo focuses only on *The Winter King* (1995), the first volume of *The Warlord Chronicles*, to reflect on how conflicts between different religious beliefs influenced the life of the Bretons in the Arthurian period and how they are represented in those Cornwell's books.

The main goal in Mingo's research published in book is to expose the differential aspect in Cornwell's Arthurian narrative. As Mingo states, Arthurian literature has always been dominated by men: besides the most popular authors being male (such as Geoffrey of Monmouth, Chrétien de Troyes, Thomas Mallory, and Lord Tennyson), the main characters are almost always male, usually led by Arthur, who is accompanied by Kay, Bedwyr, and/or Lancelot. In contrast, in Cornwell's Arthurian series *The Warlord Chronicles*, Mingo finds that there are four striking female characters, who have an important role in political and religious issues.

Other international research papers we consider relevant are "A Journey of Growth: Bernard Cornwell's *The Last Kingdom* as a Bildungsroman" (2015), by Kristin Jónasdóttir, and "Christianity Under Fire: An Analysis of the Treatment of Religion in Three Novels by Bernard Cornwell" (2015), by Kjartan Birgir Kjartansson, both produced at the University of Iceland, under the supervision of Ingibjörg Ágústsdóttir, current Professor of British Literature at that university.

Jónasdóttir's research states that *The Last Kingdom*, the first book of *Saxon Stories* series, has features that frame it as a *Bildungsroman*. We believe it is important to understand what are the particularities of this literary genre, to, consequently, better understand the Icelandic researcher's proposal:

The German term "Bildungsroman" originally came from Karl Morgenstein, who introduced it in the early 19th century. It is a form of storytelling in which the protagonist undergoes a moral development, resulting in his maturity (Casano). Ann Casano mentions five common characteristics of a Bildungsroman:

1. The protagonist is foolish and inexperienced at the beginning of the narrative.

2. There is an incident that forces the protagonist into his journey.
3. The journey is not easy, the hero is tested and will have to fight hard to survive.
4. The hero has a “flashing moment” which changes him as a person and he learns how to be a grown man.
5. The hero finds his place in society, equipped with the maturity and knowledge to have a chance in life. (Casano) (JÓNASDÓTTIR, 2015, p. 12)

After analyzing these dimensions present in *The Last Kingdom*, Jónasdóttir concludes her defence that the protagonist and narrator Uhtred follows these characteristics, given that “[...] he begins as a powerless little Anglo-Saxon English boy, is prepared for real life as a warrior, while living with the Danes, and then is able to prove himself as a mature lord and warrior under Alfred’s rule” (2015, p. 20).

Kjartansson discusses in his work the different ways in which Christianity affects the characters and the historical-political events in three novels by Bernard Cornwell, which cover different periods of England's medieval history: the Arthurian era (6th century) in *The Winter King* (1995), the Viking establishment (9th century) in *The Last Kingdom* (2004) and the Late Middle Ages (13th-14th centuries) in *Harlequin* (2000)<sup>35</sup>. According to the Icelandic researcher, Christianity is a religion to which Cornwell directs special attention, especially when contrasting its tenets with other non-Christian (pagan) faiths in his novels.

In the historical period reported in *The Winter King*, Christianity was a novelty for the British natives, and this is how Cornwell puts it in his work: the scepticism of these people towards the new beliefs that begin to influence the political issues of the territory. In *The Last Kingdom*, there is the interface between Nordic paganism, brought by the Vikings, and Christianity, then consolidated in the English territory. In this scenario, Uhtred is between the Christian faith of his current compatriots and the ancient Germanic religion of his ancestors, which was brought "back to life" by the Scandinavians. Finally, *Harlequin*, unlike the other books that contrast Christianity with other faiths, concentrates a critique of Christianity by Christianity itself: religious fanaticism and how Christians were able to be persuasive and politically influential, for example (KJARTANSSON, 2015).

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<sup>35</sup> Each of these books is the first volume that compose, respectively, the following series: *The Warlord Chronicles* (1995-1997), *Saxon Stories* (2004-) and *The Grail Quest* (2000-2012).

Kjartansson concludes that the way Christianity is contemplated by Bernard Cornwell's literature is remarkably hostile and negative. The Icelandic scholar justifies this characteristic employing the English author's own life story:

The negative way in which Christianity is portrayed can be attributed to two main factors, the first being Bernard Cornwell's troubled youth and upbringing in a very religious household, the second being his lifelong atheism and continued criticism of all religions, especially monotheistic ones like Christianity. He explores the various themes in which Christianity can cause trouble, such as wars fought over zealotry [...] and the differences in gender roles among Christian and non-Christian characters. (KJARTANSSON, 2015, p. 24)

We also cite "The Longbow and its military use" (2013), by Michael Marcin. In this work, there is a section entitled "The Longbow in fiction", with the topic "Azincourt by Bernard Cornwell", which brings a brief reflection on how the longbow is represented in *Azincourt* (2008), a narrative that manifests the bravery of English archers in the context of the Hundred Years' War, in the reign of Henry V, especially the Battle of Azincourt (1415).

In Brazil, the academic works about Cornwell's literature we found are exceptionally productions resulting from History and Literature. The first work from Literature is "*Guinevere ontem e hoje: Representação feminina na literatura*" (2007) by Pricila dos Reis Franz. This article, however, does not focus on Cornwell's work itself, as it only compares how the female figure Guinevere is portrayed in different works of Arthurian literature, such as the medieval tale *Lancelot, the knight of the chariot*, and the contemporary series *The Mists of Avalon*, by Marion Zimmer Bradley, and *The Warlord Chronicles* by Bernard Cornwell.

Johnni Langer, the most significant Brazilian researcher of Medieval Scandinavian research, published a review of the book *The Last Kingdom*, entitled "Os Vikings na Inglaterra Medieval" (2007). At first, Langer states that:

The author created a literary work with an exciting narrative that manages to unify the result of the most recent academic and historiographical research with literary fiction. The novel's protagonist, the fictional Uhtred, gets involved in the plot with historical characters such as King Alfred the Great, the sons of Ragnar Lothbrok, among others, blending a formidable historical reconstitution with a dense literary text, but at the same time pleasurable and



with moments of the finest British humour (LANGER, 2007, p. 202) (our translation)<sup>36</sup>.

In short, the Brazilian researcher wrote his review by the perspective of Medieval Scandinavian studies, presenting some historical inaccuracies within the literary narrative and pointing out the importance of several points that demystify historical misconceptions disseminated by popular culture. In the same way as Pereira, Langer recognizes that Bernard Cornwell proposes to deconstruct many stereotypes built throughout history about the Vikings:

Cornwell shows himself to be familiar with recent historiography that has deconstructed many stereotypes about the Vikings (such as the horned helmets, the behaviour of the berserkers, the blood eagle ritual as a Christian literary invention, p. 359-360), as well as the daily life, society, family, political and economic structure of both the Anglo-Saxons and the Scandinavians of the 9th century. The information in the novel on paganist religiosity is exceptional, one of the highlights of the work, as are the data on food, war equipment, descriptions of battles, urban and geographical structure. The author had a great concern with toponymy and linguistics, granting the reader all his criteria for these data, besides his main primary and bibliographic sources, such as the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* and the researches of the archaeologist James Graham-Campbell (p. 11-13, 359-362) (LANGER, 2007, p. 203) (our translation)<sup>37</sup>.

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<sup>36</sup> O autor criou uma obra com uma narrativa empolgante que consegue unificar o resultado das mais recentes pesquisas acadêmicas e historiográficas com a ficção literária. O protagonista do romance, o ficcional Uhtred, envolve-se na trama com personagens históricos como o rei Alfredo, o Grande, os filhos de Ragnar Lodbrok, entre outros, mesclando uma reconstituição histórica formidável com um denso texto literário, mas ao mesmo tempo prazeroso e com momentos do mais fino humor britânico (LANGER, 2007, p. 202).

<sup>37</sup> Cornwell mostra-se conhecedor de uma recente historiografia que desconstruiu inúmeros estereótipos sobre os Vikings (como a dos capacetes com chifres, o comportamento dos berserkers, o ritual da águia de sangue como uma invenção literária cristã, p. 359-360), como também do cotidiano, sociedade, estrutura familiar, política e econômica tanto dos anglo-saxões quanto dos escandinavos do século IX. As informações no romance sobre a religiosidade pagã são excepcionais, um dos pontos altos da obra, como também os dados sobre alimentação, equipamentos de guerra, descrições de batalhas, estrutura urbana e geográfica. O autor teve uma grande preocupação com toponímia e lingüística, concedendo ao leitor todos os seus critérios para estes dados, além de suas principais fontes primárias e bibliográficas, como a *Crônica anglo-saxã* e as pesquisas do arqueólogo James Graham-Campbell (p. 11-13, 359-362). (LANGER, 2007, p. 203)

Thus, despite its minor inaccuracies, which do not compromise the quality of the work, Langer recommends Cornwell's novel “for all those who have an interest not only in Scandinavian culture but for admirers of the Middle Ages in general and all that it represents in terms of mental and cultural heritage” (2007, p. 205) (our translation)<sup>38</sup>.

Another article we highlight is “*As relações entre Vikings e Saxões do Oeste na obra O Último Reino, de Bernard Cornwell*” (2017), by Lucas Luiz Oliveira Pereira. This work analyses the cultural interactions between pagans and Christians represented in *The Last Kingdom*. The author exposes the possible problems that young Brazilian researchers encounter in starting their studies about the Vikings, especially when it refers to the absence of translations of written production about the subject. In this sense, Pereira believes that “the scientist of the medieval period can make use of literature from our contemporaneity” (2017, p. 48) (our translation)<sup>39</sup>. In his case, he uses one of Cornwell's fictions as an object of analysis.

We found three Brazilian papers published in Annals of Congress. The first one, “*Gênero e Medievalidades em “As Crônicas de Artur”: representações do medievo nos romances históricos contemporâneos*” (2016) by Gustavo Ogando Insuela Camargo, presented and published in the *VIII Encontro Estadual de História da Anpuh-BA*, is the result of Scientific Initiation Research (*Pesquisa de Iniciação Científica*) (PIBIC) in the field of History. Camargo analyses the Arthurian representation in *The Warlord Chronicles* series, exemplifying how the medieval times are represented in historical novels.

There is also “*Waterloo: nos meandros do Romance Histórico*” presented and published in the *Anais do II Congresso Internacional de Estudos de Linguagem* (UEPG, Ponta Grossa) (2017), by Isaias Holowate. The object of study of this research is the book *Waterloo: The true story of four days, three armies and three battles* (2014), by Cornwell, which presents the Battle of Waterloo in which the French army commanded by Napoleon Bonaparte is defeated by the British and Prussian armies. Holowate analysed the relationship between the theoretical and methodological

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<sup>38</sup> “[...] para todos aqueles que têm interesse não somente pela cultura escandinava, mas para os admiradores da Idade Média em geral e por tudo que ela representa em termos de herança mental e cultural” (p. 205).

<sup>39</sup> “[...] o cientista do período medieval pode se utilizar da literatura, da nossa contemporaneidade” (PEREIRA, 2017, p. 48).

assumptions adopted by the English author in this narrative and the so-called Historical Method. For the researcher, this work provides the opportunity for an interesting debate about the relationship between History and Historical Fiction, as Cornwell uses letters and journalistic publications from the time of the battle as sources to reconstruct the facts.

In this same edition of the congress, Isabelle Maria Soares and Luciana Klanovicz presented and published the work "*A Inglaterra entre anglo-saxões e escandinavos: história e memória em 'Crônicas Saxônicas' de Bernard Cornwell*" (2017). This is the first work in Brazil entirely about Bernard Cornwell's books from the Literary Studies perspective. In 2019, the Master's dissertation "*Entre Anglo-Saxões e Escandinavos: História e Memória em Saxon Stories, de Bernard Cornwell*" was defended by Isabelle Maria Soares in the Postgraduate Program in Language and Literature (*Programa de Pós-Graduação em Letras*) of the Midwestern Parana State University (UNICENTRO - *Universidade Estadual do Centro-Oeste*), being the first Brazilian postgraduate research in the field of Literary Studies about the British author, which resulted in the publication of three articles in 2020: "*Entre o real e a ficção: a história da Inglaterra do século IX pela ótica do medieval e do contemporâneo*" and its translation into English "Between reality and fiction: the history of England in the 9th century from the perspective of the medieval and the contemporary" authored by Isabelle Maria Soares and Edson Santos Silva, and "Uhtred's memories in 'Saxon Stories' by Bernard Cornwell: rethinking the history of 9th century England" published only by Isabelle Maria Soares. This research sought, besides giving academic value to Cornwell's work, to analyze the interfaces between History and Cultural Memory present in the first three books of *Saxon Stories* series.

In 2018, Daniel Reyes defended the final paper to graduate in History at the Federal University of Pelotas (UFPEL) entitled "*O Artur de Bernard Cornwell: Entre a História e a Ficção*" (2018). This work compares "the historical Arthur" with the "legendary Arthur" through the reading of Bernard Cornwell's *The Warlord Chronicles*. In the abstract, the researcher explains that his goal is to demonstrate how a non-academic work "can dialogue with history using historical sources to create a universe closer to the reality of the period in which the character would have existed without changing the events reported".

The most recent work about Cornwell's literature was developed by Giovanna Marteleite de Amaral, a PhD candidate in History. Her paper "*História pública e literatura no romance The Last Kingdom*" was presented and published in 2021 in the event *IV Seminário Internacional História do tempo presente - UDESC, Florianópolis/SC*. In this work, Amaral analyses how the story around Alfred the Great from the view of a young Englishman raised by Danes comes to the reader through a perspective that encompasses the relations between history, literature, readers and public history.

The bibliographical material about Bernard Cornwell's work reveals the importance of the author's writings for rethinking history in general. The publications cited here focus on different narratives produced by the English author, which portray various historical periods of the British territory or that are related in some way to British history, and shows the diversity of research topics and perspectives that we can find in these works. In addition, Cornwell's critical fortune exposed here is very significant as it demonstrates and strengthens the relevance of Bernard Cornwell's literature, besides stimulating new researches concerning the author.

#### **4 BERNARD CORNWELL'S LITERATURE: A MEMORY SITE**

Bernard Cornwell builds sites that immortalise English memory. The trilogy *The Warlord Chronicles* reawakens Arthurian history and mythology, as well as the arrival of Christianity in British lands. *Sharpe stories* remembers the actions of the British East India Company. The series *The Grail Quest* brings memories concerning the Hundred Years' War. *Saxon Stories* intends to perpetuate the memory of the Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian peoples, resignifying the history of the relationship of these peoples in English territory.

The author Bernard Cornwell seeks to convey a wide knowledge of history. All his narratives recount, through fiction, some significant historical moment, most of them referring to the history of the British territory. Cornwell, in this sense, by appropriating a specific historical narrative and publishing as fictional, constructs what Pierre Nora (1989) has described as "*lieux de mémoire*" (sites of memory).

Nora believes that the modern world is witnessing the acceleration of history which, consequently, triggers the feeling of a dead past. In this sense, there is an awareness that cultural memory does not spontaneously emerge, and there is a need to create "sites" to deposit them. Cultural memory in our modern world is a registering memory that delegates "to the archive the responsibility of remembering, it sheds its signs upon depositing them there, as a snake sheds its skin" (NORA, 1989, p. 13).

In this sense, only the memory itself is not enough to exist, it is necessary mediating resources of this process of connection between the past and the present. As traditional cultural memory disappears, "we feel obliged assiduously to collect remains, testimonies, documents, images, speeches, any visible signs of what has been" (NORA, 1989, p. 13). The historian defines these means, traces and/or spaces as "*lieux de memoire*" (sites of memory), which would be created in order to preserve memories, connecting the people of the present with the past. Nora describes several of these sites in contemporary societies, such as museums, cemeteries, collections, albums, anniversaries, treaties, monuments and sanctuaries. In this way,

[...] the most fundamental purpose of the lieu de memoire is to stop time, to block the work of forgetting, to establish a state of things, to immortalize death, to materialize the immaterial-just as if gold were the only memory of money-all of this in order to capture a maximum of meaning in the fewest of signs, it is also clear that lieux de memoire only exist because of their capacity for metamorphosis, an endless recycling of their meaning and an unpredictable proliferation of their ramifications. (NORA, 1989, p. 18)

In this sense, Literature can be considered a site of memory. If a site of memory, as Nora (1989) states, is built by means of something that makes it escape from History, for not having a referent in reality, we can state that this same fact occurs with literary fiction, which is built by the imaginary. Even Nora suggests that "memory has been promoted to the center of History: such is the spectacular bereavement of literature" (1989, p. 24). The places of memory would be testimonial remains that intend not only to lead the past to the present but, mainly, transform it at every moment. And this is the role of Literature as a site of memory: to transform the past, to re-signify the present, to evoke memories.

However, it is important to highlight that a site of memory only exists when "the imagination invests it with a symbolic aura" (NORA, 1989, p. 19). That is, for a literary work, as any other space, to be a site of memory "there must be a will to remember" (NORA, 1989, p. 19). But this will must come from whom? In the case of Literature, would it be from the author or from the reader?

In the conception of some readers, Cornwell's narratives might be able to describe historical reality. Nora understands that *lieux de memoire* are capable of converting memory into history, since "with the appearance of the trace, of mediation, of distance, we are not in the realm of true memory, but of history" (1989, p. 8). Because of this, he states that "without the intention to remember, *lieux de memoire* would be indistinguishable from *lieux d'histoire*" (NORA, 1989, p. 19). From this perspective, we verify that there is "a play of memory and history, an interaction of two factors which results in their reciprocal overdetermination" (NORA, 1989, p. 19). If the intention of a "site" must first come from its creative origin, as Nora argues, does Bernard Cornwell fulfil this assumption?

In *Saxon Stories* series, for example, the "Historical Note" left by Cornwell at the end of each volume is a space in which he, somehow, justifies the importance of the reflection he proposes in his literature. In the sixth book of *Saxon Stories*, *Death of Kings*, we identify, in some of his words, one of the motivations of his "will to remember":

It has always puzzled me that we English are so incurious about our nation's genesis. In school itsometimes seems as if Britain's history begins in AD 1066, and all that went before is irrelevant, but the story of how England came to exist is a massive, exciting and noble tale (CORNWELL, 2014, p. 373) (our translation)<sup>40</sup>.

The author highlights his justification in the brief essay "*A criação da Inglaterra. O pano de fundo da história de Uhtred*" (The Creation of England. The background of Uhtred's story) present at the end of the Brazilian edition of the ninth volume,

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<sup>40</sup> "Sempre fiquei curioso com o fato de nós, ingleses, termos tão pouca curiosidade sobre a gênese de nossa nação. Na escola, às vezes parece que a história britânica começa em 1066 d.C. e que tudo que aconteceu antes é irrelevante, mas a história de como a Inglaterra passou a existir é uma narrativa enorme, empolgante e nobre" (CORNWELL, 2014, p. 373)



*Guerreiros de Tempestade* (2016) (*Warriors of the Storm*). Still, to consolidate the defence that it is crucial to make a review about what is remembered and forgotten by history popularized in the English territory, the author introduces that the origins of England are surrounded by mysteries:

The novels about Uhtred deal with the creation of England. Some countries, like the United States, have a birth date, a date that definitively marks the beginning of their existence, but England's origins are much more obscure, lost somewhere in what we randomly call the Dark Ages. The same goes for Wales, Scotland, Ireland and indeed many other European states. The beginning of English history as told in many schools is the Norman invasion of 1066. England, of course, already existed at that time, but little attention is paid to pre-Norman England, other than to note that Julius Caesar came saw and won (actually he came, saw and left) and that King Alfred was not good at baking cakes. Vikings are romantic adventurers and killers with horns on their helmets (apparently an invention of opera costume designers in the 19th century) who came in dragon-headed boats to rape and pillage, but their true relevance to the creation of England is rarely told or even understood. However, the presence of the Vikings in the story of England's birth should tell us that it was an extraordinary adventure, with blood, heroes and battles. It is the story of Uhtred (CORNWELL, 2016, p. 343) (our translation)<sup>41</sup>.

Bernard Cornwell recognises the need to rethink the history of the creation of England. When denouncing that the period before the Norman invasion does not receive as much attention by English politics and/or popular culture itself, by

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<sup>41</sup> Os romances sobre Uhtred tratam da criação da Inglaterra. Alguns países, como os Estados Unidos, têm uma data de nascimento, uma data que marca definitivamente o início de sua existência, mas as origens da Inglaterra são muito mais turvas, estão perdidas em algum lugar do que chamamos aleatoriamente de Idade das Trevas. O mesmo vale para Gales, Escócia, Irlanda e, de fato, muitos outros Estados europeus. O início da história inglesa como é contado em muitas escolas é a invasão normanda de 1066. A Inglaterra, é claro, já existia nesse tempo, mas presta-se pouca atenção à Inglaterra pré-normanda, além de observar que Júlio César veio viu e venceu (na verdade ele veio, viu e foi embora) e que o rei Alfredo não era bom assando bolos. Os vikings são aventureiros românticos e assassinos com chifres nos elmos (aparentemente uma invenção de figurinistas de óperas no século XIX) que vinham em barcos com cabeças de dragão para estuprar e saquear, mas a verdadeira relevância deles para a criação da Inglaterra raramente é contada, quanto mais entendida. No entanto, a presença dos vikings na história do nascimento da Inglaterra deveria nos dizer que ela foi uma aventura extraordinária, com sangue, heróis e batalhas. É a história de Uhtred (CORNWELL, 2016, p. 343).

mentioning that this usually occurs in the school context, the author expresses the feeling he has in creating a "site" to value the memory of a period and of a people who contributed deeply to the formation of English culture in many aspects.

The author's words raise the interpretation that it is necessary, urgently, to remember what is being forgotten and/or devalued. We witness Cornwell's "will to memory" when he states that this part of history, often forgotten by the British themselves, is also the story of Uhtred, the fictional protagonist he created in his work *Saxon Stories*. Through this character, the author revives a historical moment that he considers relevant, while it fosters new configurations, reflections, evaluations and questions when thinking about history.

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