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The Last Kingdom: A Historical and Philological Study of the Netflix Series

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To my parents, my strength.
To my brother, my support.
To my best friends, my shelter.
To whom is always there for me and truly loves me.
And, last but not least, to my supervisor,
for nurturing my love for words.

Wyrd bið ful aræd

Contents

Introduction

The Last Kingdom is one of the most popular TV series created by Netflix, and its audience has grown considerably throughout the years. It is based on the works of Sir Bernard Cornwell, an acclaimed author of historical novels. Behind the TV series there is a thirteen volumes saga, titled *The Saxon Stories*, or *Saxon Tales*. In *The Last Kingdom*, two stories unfold and intertwine: the story of the main character, Uhtred of Bebbanburg, and that of the birth of England. Bernard Cornwell, through his imagery and storytelling ability, has recreated a ninth century England that captures both readers and spectators. Therefore, thanks to its immersive quality, it manages to fascinate and teach at once.

I decided to focus on Cornwell's works because of the striking way in which they speak to a contemporary reader of the twenty-first century. Considering the amount of history, along with the linguistic and cultural elements which the *Saxon Stories*' saga is imbued with, I could not ignore its academic potential for analysis, as well as its educational potential on the audience. The benefits of studying a nowadays writer lie in the possibility of directly asking him unresolved questions, and in the information he may choose to share with his readers on social platforms. Information which can be crucial in determining the value of his work. I have been one of those lucky folks to whom he answered on his official website[1]. What we know, for instance, is that he wrote *The Last Kingdom* with the purpose of showing those who were not aware of it, how England came to be the country it is today.

The purpose of this paper is to investigate the historical and philological accuracy of the novels, but also to identify Cornwell's approach from a medievalist perspective. This translates into dissecting the novels, and sometimes even the TV

[1] https://www.bernardcornwell.net/

series, in order to collect data helpful in carrying out this thesis. I will focus on the first three volumes of the saga, and on the TV series in the whole. This analysis falls within a discipline of studies that is increasingly gaining ground, although from an academic perspective it needs a bit more time to reach the position it deserves. Nevertheless, I have always been interested in everything dealing with the Middle Ages, and it is my wish that with this contribution there will one more tiny piece in the puzzle of neomedievalistic studies.

I did not choose the word 'puzzle' by accident. Neomedievalism is a complex concept to grasp, for it is a continuation of medievalism, which already escapes any attempt to be defined. This is due to the fact the medieval per se is not fixed. It has never been. Therefore, the wisest decision is that of worrying less about what it is and spending more time "thinking about what it does and why it does it"[2]. That is precisely the fil rouge this paper will trace, while analysing the saga from a historical, cultural, and philological points of view. Even if they are different branches of knowledge, there will be something holding them together, and that is the neomedievalistic lens through which they are taken into consideration. They all work in synergy with the aim to rebuild, in the present, an epoch that is centuries away from our reality.

As for the structure of the thesis, it will be divided into three chapters, each dedicated to specific elements that place *The Last Kingdom* in the neomedievalistic research field. The first chapter will deal with how accurately (or not) Cornwell reawakens ninth century England in the present, thus it will be a historical study. The second chapter will focus on the protagonist, Uhtred, as a perfect instance of neomedievalism: how Uhtred becomes the bridge that links history with the art of storytelling. Lastly, the third chapter will be a technical analysis of words and expressions contained in the novels. These words and expressions belong to the past and to the specific era they supposedly represent. Therefore, the tools of philology will be paramount in defining their linguistic accuracy.

[2] Elizabeth Emery, "Medievalism and the Middle Ages," *Studies in Medievalism* XVII (2009), 81.

Cornwell used his knowledge of history, together with his passion, to recreate an era without rendering it as a documentary would. Because of his neomedievalistic approach, which by definition employs all kinds of media, he managed to bring history into the audience's lives. Cornwell, and the production team behind *The Last Kingdom*, managed to arouse enthusiasm for history, even in those people who probably disliked history while in school. This is the educational potential I mentioned earlier, which should not be taken for granted. But, as stated by scholar Harry Brown, "neomedievalism is an opportunity to […] critically address the increasingly artificial divide between commodity culture and the academy"[3].

Medieval studies and neomedieval studies stem from the need to bridge the academy with popular culture. Their intent is similar, which is to portray the Middle Ages, yet their methods are completely different. While the academy is looking for accuracy and scientific rigour, the popular culture's goal is creating an appealing product for the consumer. All this, without taking anything away from a keen interest toward history. However, is not rare that in neomedievalistic instances history undergoes some minor or major changes. After investigating and establishing the degree of authenticity of the *Saxon Stories* saga, it emerges that its success is perhaps due precisely to the thoughtful choice of where to and where not to be faithful to historical truth. Every decision is indeed made from an informed point of view of real history. And neomedieval commodities involve a certain degree of freedom. Nevertheless, Cornwell has been able to give a sense of the medieval precisely by virtue of the changes he has made.

[3] Harry Brown, "Baphomet Incorporated," *Studies in Medievalism* XX (2011), 2.

Chapter 1
Ninth Century England

1.1 Sir Bernard Cornwell and his "Saxon Stories"

Bernard Cornwell is an English American author, famous for his historical novels. He was appointed an OBE[4] by Queen Elizabeth II. This is the reason behind the title *Sir* before his forename.

Cornwell has written novels about the Napoleonic Wars, but also novels dealing with King Alfred's reign and the birth of England: *The Saxon Stories*, the saga on which I will focus on in this thesis. This has also been adapted by BBC and Netflix into a successful TV series titled *The Last Kingdom*. After the fifth season, a final movie will close the series: *Seven Kings Must Die*[5].

For the purpose of this study, I will examine the sources behind the TV series, that is to say the novels. In particular, the first three of a series consisting of thirteen books: *The Last Kingdom* (2004), *The Pale Horseman* (2005), and *The Lords of the North* (2006).

In this chapter, the analysis will be centered on the historical accuracy. I will try to identify Cornwell's medievalism and the sources to whom he may be indebted in writing the *Saxon Stories*. As KellyAnn Fitzpatrick noted, "the majority of non-medievalists apparently formulate their understanding of the Middle Ages from neomedieval commodities"[6], such as novels, games, movies, and TV Series. Therefore, it is of vital importance to understand how close and how far away from historical truth Sir Bernard Cornwell goes. As I dive into the analysis of the series, drawing inspiration from Fitzpatrick's studies, I will consider two different ways of dealing with medievalism, each represented by two different authors: the progressive Williams Morris and the conservative Sir Walter Scott.

[4] Officer of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire.
[5] A clear reference to the medieval Anglo-Saxon heptarchy.
[6] KellyAnn Fitzpatrick, *Neomedievalism, Popular Culture, and the Academy*, 24.

Interestingly, Sir Bernard Cornwell adds at the end of each novel a "Historical Note", where he goes through the main historical events that actually happened and motivates the ones he decided to change. In almost every book, he claims that the principal historical sources during the writing process were the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, "a series of annals compiled during Alfred's reign and continued thereafter, which provides for the late ninth century a very detailed narrative of the king's military activities in the face of Viking invasion"[7], and Asser's *Life of King Alfred*, the biography written by a monk from St. David's in Wales who got to know the king personally, thus providing a realistic and vivid image of the man behind the crown.

Being Cornwell a contemporary (still alive) author of a modern rewriting, there are many advantages for scholars, such as the chance of contacting him on his official website, and the possibility of glancing over his social media, where he posts useful information about other sources he read and used to build his stories. Recently he has written on Facebook, about the pros of writing historical novels, that "history, by its very nature, is a rich seam of stories, and almost always gives the writer a ready-made world as his background"[8]. In fact, he did not invent almost anything, in recreating the medieval world of ninth century England, the only exception being the fictional characters. As for the character Uhtred, further details will be given in the second chapter of this paper.

The first three novels of the series cover many years of history, starting from 866 until around 890. Among the most relevant historical events, which I will investigate in the next sections of this chapter, we can find the following: the Viking raids, the assault on York, the siege of Nottingham, the battle of Ashdown, Guthrum's occupation of Wareham and his occupation of Exeter, the disaster at Chippenham, the battle of Edington, the Treaty of Wedmore and the establishing of the Danelaw.

The Saxon Stories tells the story of Uhtred of Bebbanburg, son of the alderman Uhtred. Bebbanburg is located in the northern part of Northumbria, one of the seven

[7] Simon Keynes and Michael Lapidge, "Introduction" to *Alfred the Great*, 10.
[8] https://www.facebook.com/bernard.cornwell/posts/pfbid02R5hpk4NDEoXm5TGsMTD4qNXgr7NRrvXmk1p3eGpQh46jZWAeky24fhzr1DWCJBdTl

kingdoms constituting England at the time. After a Viking attack, Uhtred's father gets killed and Uhtred is captured by the Dane earl Ragnar. To make matters worse, his uncle is chasing him with the aim of killing him, to consolidate his power as the new alderman of Bebbanburg. So, it wouldn't be possible for Uhtred to come back to his homeland anyway. He is adopted by Ragnar and is raised as a Dane, thus familiarizing with their war tactics and skills. His greatest desire is to reconquer Bebbanburg and defeat the usurper uncle, but to do so he needs to gain wealth and have men at his service. For this reason, once he grows up, he offers his services to one man in particular: none other than King Alfred, who will in turn take advantage of Uhtred's prowess to achieve his goals. Above all, to keep the Danes at bay.

1.2 The creation of a medieval world

For the adaptation of the novels into a TV series, the production team hired a historical advisor to get some insight concerning the main events. The expert in question is Ryan Lavelle, professor of Early Medieval History at the University of Winchester. In a 2017 interview[9] for the YouTube Channel *Viral History*, he was asked about the process of reinventing the medieval for this TV series. Lavelle said that his role implied some sort of accuracy the production team aimed to respect, nevertheless they also wanted to give their own interpretation of the Viking Age, for dramatic purposes. For storytelling requires specific elements, such as narrative arcs and characters' evolution, without which, the TV series would be just a documentary. Lavelle made another interesting point: this reminded him of the great tradition of Sagas, where people used to narrate stories about the Vikings and their descendants. In the 21st century, we are retelling those stories with a contemporary point of view.

This brings me to the idea at the root of this thesis, that is finding the type of medievalism Bernard Cornwell belongs to with his Saxon saga. According to KellyAnn Fitzpatrick, Walter Scott and William Morris are both the result of the nineteenth-century British medieval revival, a growing interest in the Middle Ages that permeated the British culture. Morris knew the works of Walter Scott, undoubtedly the writer who popularized the historical novel as a genre. His works mostly reflect an idealization of

[9] https://youtu.be/hGHChdGV6Ac

the medieval, with its harmonious society (made up of leaders and followers) and devotion to chivalry, where heroic deeds have an impact on society. Whereas Morris's works "point to an aesthetic medievalism that privileges a love of beauty for beauty's sake, […] an effort to reproduce a medieval space into which one could temporarily escape"[10]. Therefore, Morris leans more towards historical accuracy and a faithful representation, while Scott tends to romanticize history.

1.3 Vikings: from raiders to settlers

Viking is a term employed to describe "an activity rather than a people or a tribe"[11]. Hence "to go Viking meant to go raiding"[12]. As historian Richard Fletcher suggested, Anglo-Saxon England was remarkably rich by the standards of the early Middle Ages, and "wealth attracts predators"[13].

These invaders were peoples of Scandinavia, who crossed the North Sea in search of great riches, and who afterwards returned to their villages and fjords with the plunder. By convention, the first recorded assault in England is that of Lindisfarne in 793. The first assault mentioned in Cornwell's *Saxon Stories* is dated to 866, in Northumbria, made by a group of Danes. Now, between 793 and 866, a great number of attacks on the part of the Northmen took place in England. The scope of the Danish attack of 866 was already greater when compared to those of 790s, for it carried shades of settlement. These raiders not only desired wealth, but they wanted to put down roots there. As the fictional character Ragnar the Fearless explains to young Uhtred: "We're in England to stay now. […] Denmark is bad land"[14]. He was referring to the fact that it was difficult to grow something there, due to the weather and ground conditions.

The Last Kingdom thus begins after the 865, a year historian Sir Frank Stenton views as a turning point for Anglo-Saxon England. Indeed, what had previously been disjointed bands of raiders grew into an impressive army. Plundering was replaced by the ambition to conquer. This huge Danish force is also mentioned in the *Chronicle* as

[10] KellyAnn Fitzpatrick, *Neomedievalism, Popular Culture, and the Academy,* 46-47.
[11] Bernard Cornwell, "Historical Note" to *The Last Kingdom*, 332.
[12] Ibid., 332.
[13] Richard Fletcher, *Bloodfeud – Murder and Revenge in Anglo-Saxon England*, 15.
[14] Bernard Cornwell, *The Last Kingdom*, 54.

the *micel hæðen here*[15], which stands for 'Great Heathen Army'. According to history, this army was led by Ivar the Boneless and his two brothers, Halfdan and Ubba, all sons of the legendary Ragnar Lothbrok. Their campaign against England brought to the collapse of Northumbria, Mercia, and East Anglia.

The first chapter of the first novel begins with the assault on York in 867. In Uhtred's words: "we heard that a great Danish fleet had rowed up the rivers to capture Eoferwic"[16]. This is the battle where Uhtred's father got killed, as well as King Osbert and King Ælla (both Northumbrians). After appointing King Egbert as a puppet ruler in York, the victorious Danish army aims at conquering Mercia.

Another event Cornwell kept in the story was the siege of Nottingham: "We stopped our raids into the countryside and readied Snotengaham for the inevitable siege"[17]. Burghred, King of Mercia, received the support of Æthelred of Wessex. The Saxons' plan was to force the Danes to surrender, but the Danes manged to survive. Interestingly, this was the first time Uhtred saw Alfred, for Uhtred was sent out to spy the enemy encampment. Alfred is portrayed as physically weak, because of an illness, and spiritually weak, unable to resist temptation. An image that mirrors the one provided by Bishop Asser.

After many days of negotiation, Burghred gave up and was allowed to remain 'King'. This is how Mercia fell. In the fourth chapter it was the turn of East Anglia, with the killing of King Edmund. Hence, "Wessex was the last kingdom of England"[18].

1.4 King Alfred's defence of the realm

The heathen army was in control of the entire kingdom, apart from Wessex. Throughout Cornwell's novels, one can sense a need from the part of the Danes to conquer Wessex, the richest kingdom. "All Wessex lay before us and common report said that Wessex was as rich a country as any in all the world, rivalling Frankia for its treasures. […] So we went to war"[19]. For this reason, a year after the conquest of East Anglia, the Danes

[15] Geoffrey Hindley, *A Brief History of the Anglo-Saxons*, 186.
[16] Bernard Cornwell, *The Last Kingdom*, 12.
[17] Ibid., 72.
[18] Bernard Cornwell, *The Last Kingdom*, 123.
[19] Ibid., 153.

arrived at Reading, making it their base. King Æthelred and his brother Prince Alfred tried to fight them, but the West Saxon army was heavily defeated.

The first West Saxon victory happened at Ashdown, in 871. The two royal brothers prepared their army to battle. It took place somewhere near Streatley, on the Berkshire downs. As Uhtred described it: "there were really two battles at Æsc's Hill, the one above and the other below"[20]. Indeed, this is confirmed also by Geoffrey Hindley, when he states that "the Saxon attacked in two forces"[21], Alfred leading the attack uphill to shatter the Danish shield wall, and King Æthelred fighting in the flat meadows. That was the first time Uhtred felt pride in being a Saxon and some sort of admiration for Alfred.

In the same year, after his brother's death, Alfred became King of Wessex, inheriting not only the kingdom but also its struggles against the Danish force. After some minor skirmishes, in 875 the heathen army split, a part of it guided by Halfdan to the north and the other led by Guthrum (in the novel, 'Guthrum the Unlucky'), who managed to occupy Wareham. In response, Alfred gathered his army to besiege them. Negotiations for peace started. The Danes promised to end hostilities and Guthrum swore on a ring sacred to Thor. They also exchanged hostages, among whom there was Uhtred. Before this, Uhtred's Danish family was killed by a terrible fire and had nowhere to go. Since he was very skilled in battle and knew quite a lot about his greatest enemy, King Alfred summoned him, in search for help against the Danes. Uhtred accepted to offer him a year of service. In exchange, King Alfred would have rewarded Uhtred with wealth and land.

Guthrum did not keep his promises, killed the hostages, and in 876-7 he was ready to winter in Exeter, thus breaking the truce. Cornwell mentioned the terrible storm that wrecked a consistent part of Guthrum's fleet. "Guthrum the Unlucky […] had been unfortunate indeed. He had broken out of Werham, had doubtless hoped to resupply his army in Exanceaster and then strike north, but the gods of sea and wind had struck him

[20] Ibid., 166.
[21] Geoffrey Hindley, *A Brief History of the Anglo-Saxons*, 189.

down and he was left with a crippled army"[22]. Probably for this reason, he momentarily decided to honour the second agreement with King Alfred.

However, Guthrum broke the truce once again. The Danes came back to Mercia and established at Gloucester, preparing for another invasion of Wessex. "Guthrum […] called himself King of East Anglia, but he wanted to be King of Wessex and this was his third attempt"[23]. King Alfred was celebrating Christmas with his family and courtiers at Chippenham, a royal estate. The attack happened in 878, after Twelfth Night and the Epiphany and, therefore, it was completely unexpected; after that, the Danish Army managed to seize Wessex. King Alfred was now a fugitive, no one knew where he was. "Alfred might be dead, and his kingdom was doomed"[24].

This is all narrated in a section of the novel titled "The Swamp King", with a reference to the Somerset marshes. King Alfred made a fortress at Athelney, where he spent this time planning and organizing the Saxon counterattack. "This period […] became in course of time the most celebrated part of his reign, and gave rise to various popular stories"[25], where history mingled with myth and legend. One of those folk stories is the burning of the cakes, which happened when he took shelter in a peasant's hut. Alfred was supposed to watch the cakes that the housewife had prepared. He was absent-minded, forgot to turn them, and the lady (unaware of the fact that he was the King) berated him. The TV series shows this episode, with the difference that it is set in the camp set up on the marshes, and instead of the peasant woman, the one who berates Alfred is Iseult.

About this event, in his historical note, Cornwell tells the reader that the source behind this story "is very late and thus very unreliable"[26]. Still, he inserts it in the book. It is interesting because it happens while Alfred is discussing with Uhtred about a plan to take back England, thus explaining why he did not pay attention to the cakes. "There was a sudden scream. Alfred, as if startled from a reverie, looked up, but too late,

[22] Bernard Cornwell, *The Last Kingdom*, 292.
[23] Bernard Cornwell, *The Pale Horseman*, 154.
[24] Ibid., 168.
[25] Simon Keynes and Michael Lapidge, "Introduction" to *Alfred the Great*, 21.
[26] Bernard Cornwell, *The Pale Horseman*, 414.

because Elwide was standing over him, screaming that he had burned the oatcakes. […] in her fury, she slapped the king with a skinned eel"[27].

1.5 The establishment of the Danelaw

As Cornwell himself argued at the end of *The Pale Horseman*, "for a few months in early 878 the idea of England, its culture and language, were reduced to a few square miles of swamp. One more defeat and there would probably never have been a political entity called England"[28]. Fortunately, King Alfred had a plan. Some time after the disaster at Chippenham, Alfred and his army rode to 'Egbert's Stone'[29], the assembly point, where he was joined by the people of Somerset, Wiltshire, and Hampshire. Two days after, he fought against the Danes at Edington. King Alfred won, and "that is why history awarded him the honorific 'the Great'"[30]. In the first volume of the series, Cornwell pointed out that the aim of this series was showing why King Alfred gained that title. In my opinion, he did succeed in showing that. Alfred survived and Wessex did not fall into history's oblivion, thus allowing his descendants to continue what he had started to create: the England we know today.

After this burning defeat, Guthrum and his followers retreated to their stronghold at Chippenham, pursued by Alfred and his army. They camped in front of the fortification, besieging the Danes for a fortnight. Their surrender was followed by a treaty, commonly known as the Treaty of Wedmore. Guthrum gave hostages (Alfred did not) and promised to leave Wessex immediately and go back to his lands in East Anglia. Moreover, he embraced Christianity and accepted to receive baptism, changing his name into Æthelstan. Probably his conversion was genuine and authentic, because from then on, he ruled as a good Christian monarch.

Some years after this verbal agreement, a formal, written treaty was agreed, the Treaty of Alfred and Guthrum. With this treaty England was divided into two spheres of influence, thus establishing the Danelaw. "King Æthelstan, […] Guthrum as was,

[27] Bernard Cornwell, *The Pale Horseman*, 216.
[28] Bernard Cornwell, *The Pale Horseman*, 415.
[29] East of Selwood.
[30] Bernard Cornwell, *The Pale Horseman*, 415.

negotiates with Alfred. Alfred doesn't think I know, but I do. Together they will divide England. […] The Danes will be given Northumbria, East Anglia and the north-eastern parts of Mercia. Wessex will gain the south-western part of Mercia"[31]. Uhtred was confused by King Alfred' s willingness to give up half of England. Alfred was the one who envisioned and dreamt of a unified kingdom. Why was he agreeing to those terms? According to Cornwell, "the treaty was a recognition by Alfred that he lacked the forces to drive the Danes out of England altogether, and it bought him time in which he could fortify his heartland of Wessex. […] in large part the victory at Ethandun and the subsequent settlement with Guthrum secured the independence of Wessex and enabled Alfred and his successors to reconquer the Danelaw"[32]. It is true that, during the following years, King Alfred took some measures for the defence of his kingdom, such as building fortresses to defend the frontiers, implementing military reforms, and building ships to counter the Vikings at sea.

In *Alfred the Great*, Simon Keynes and Michael Lapidge suggest that "the Danelaw was not just a simple matter of conquest leading immediately to settlement: […] the Vikings had turned to establishing direct political authority over the English kingdom by military conquest, and their actual settlement was a development that occurred subsequently and over several years, […] eventually as they despaired of achieving the ultimate goal of complete conquest"[33]. Furthermore, this territory under Danish law perhaps never had fixed boundaries. It was on most part a place where Danish laws and customs were allowed to exist.

Something one cannot ignore is the impact the Danes had on English identity. Identities tend to be fluid. For instance, when talking about the Danes, this is not a term referring only to peoples from Denmark. As Ryan Lavelle and Simon Roffey argued, "such groups of 'Danes' are likely to have included other Scandinavians, those from the 'Danelaw' regions, […] as well as those who actually came from the provinces of the Danish polities"[34]. Danes were in Wessex, before and after the Danelaw. They left their mark on the social institutions and greatly influenced the culture, such as the

[31] Bernard Cornwell, *The Lords of the North*, 232.
[32] Bernard Cornwell, *The Lords of the North*, 382.
[33] Simon Keynes and Michael Lapidge, "Introduction" to *Alfred the Great*, 23.
[34] Ryan Lavelle and Simon Roffey, "Introduction" to *Danes in Wessex*, 22-23.

placenames and the dialects, gradually becoming inherently constituting to the notion of England.

Back to identifying the type of medievalism Cornwell belongs to, anticipated at the beginning of this chapter, the idea that has gained ground into my mind is that he is somewhere in the middle of both Morris' and Scott's attitude towards the Middle Ages. Probably leaning a little more on Scott's side. On the one hand, the techniques he employs to shape the medieval allow the reader to momentarily escape reality, thus to relive a distant era. On the other hand, the events recounted by Cornwell are not exactly pacific, nor a reason to get lost into the story, for war is always lurking in the dark. Although there are ongoing injustices throughout the series, all in all, it depicts a harmonious society, where men tend to honor the roles assigned to them by fate. For instance, it appears clear how Alfred takes his role of King very seriously, which sometimes means sacrificing one's happiness for a greater purpose. Likewise, Uhtred is a perfect example of chivalry and heroism, qualities that have repercussions on the whole society.

Chapter 2
Uhtred: An Archetypal Hero

2.1 Dichotomy with King Alfred

The main character of the story, Uhtred of Bebbanburg, is an old man narrating the events from his past. As I mentioned in the first chapter, talking about historical truth and fiction, and more specifically about the characters, Uhtred represents a peculiar case. For a real Uhtred did exist in England and, although he shares some aspects with the Uhtred of *The Last Kingdom*, nevertheless he distances himself from the latter quite a bit. Before diving into those differences, I would first like to explain a theory I worked out, which sprouted from something Sir Bernard Cornwell said about this character: "I always knew one of the essential parts of the novels was going to be the tension between Uhtred and Alfred. Alfred was exceedingly powerless, actually a very boring man. Uhtred is the opposite"[35]. Ever since I have read this statement, I could not unsee the clear dichotomy between those two men: a King and his warrior.

Their first difference is self-explanatory, which is to be found in their hierarchical roles. Alfred is a young king who needs to face the overwhelming Viking menace, Uhtred is an alderman deprived of his land but also a very capable warrior, who also happens to be accustomed to the Danes' warfare and culture. For his kingdom, Wessex, to be free from invasions, Alfred needs Uhtred. In order to reconquer his Bebbanburg, Uhtred needs Alfred. They need each other, yet it seems that they almost hate each other. Uhtred claims: "He was my king and all that I have I owe to him. The food that I eat, the hall where I live and the swords of my men, all came from Alfred, my king, who hated me"[36]. Very often, throughout the whole series of novels, Uhtred's decisive action in battle turns out to be pivotal for West Saxons' victory. In spite the

[35] https://www.facebook.com/bernard.cornwell/posts/pfbid02Mpt7cazHSqRCooeJ5KVQepdRB1JFtfzNQ2XSwqqobaB2x9GMUraqVgnNZJEcm7m3l
[36] Bernard Cornwell, *The Last Kingdom*, 3-4.

help he receives, Alfred never seems to be grateful to Uhtred, whom he ends up treating unjustly. Considering their roles, King Alfred represents rationality, while Uhtred represents instinct.

This difference emerges in the TV series as well, when Uhtred delivers one of his moving speeches in front of a crowd: "I am with him from the Somerset Marshes to Ethandun and all of the battles that have followed. We were bonded, him and I. He was the man that I could never be, nor did I wish to be. He was a man that I loved and despised... but it was never less than an honor to serve him. He was my king"[37].

The second relevant difference between the two characters is religion. King Alfred was raised in a culture impregnated with Christianity and he became a very pious and devoted man. We know for sure that in 853, when he was four years old, he was sent to Rome where he met Pope Leo IV. Two years later he went there a second time. Rome and Christianity certainly had a huge impact on the monarch's life. Uhtred is informed about it by Beocca, who inflates the story: "his father took him to Rome. To see the Pope! And the Pope, Uhtred, invested him as the future king!"[38]. Indeed, later Uhtred discovers that Alfred had only "been given some meaningless Roman honour"[39]. Either way, King Alfred strongly believes that governing his realm is deeply connected to Christianity. Not only, Alfred sees the Danish invasion as a divine punishment for the moral decay into which England is falling. It comes with no surprise that Alfred disdains Uhtred, to his eyes no more than a heathen. Uhtred was born Saxon but was raised as a Dane. Therefore, he worships the pagan gods of the Norse pantheon. Uhtred was even baptised three times during the series, in vain, for he always carried with him what he learned growing up with the Danes. This is the reason Alfred feels resentful towards Uhtred, he never manages to change his heart.

One of the most interesting aspects of *The Last Kingdom* series is the significance given to the written word that can survive the passing of time and can reach out future generations. King Alfred is portrayed as an educated and smart man,

[37] *The Last Kingdom*, season 3, episode ten, directed by Edward Bazalgette, written by Stephen Butchard, aired November 19, 2018, on Netflix.
[38] Bernard Cornwell, *The Last Kingdom*, 91.
[39] Ibid., 91. This is also confirmed in Simon Keynes and Michael Lapidge's "Introduction" to *Alfred the Great*, 14.

particularly interested in the recording of history. "Whatever I discover about my enemies is written down"[40], Alfred explains to Uhtred, and presumably this was true also for the real Alfred. He is related to a revival of culture and learning in his kingdom. For instance, in the preface he wrote for the *Pastoral Care*[41], he lamented the fading of learning and laid out a plan for cultural and literary reform. Many books had to be translated from Latin into English and a school had to be established. Geoffrey Hindley stated that "the programme of historical writing, religious education and literary productions had its part to play by boosting the dynasty and recruiting the energies of his subjects to the common good"[42]. This means that his programme aimed at forming qualified people who would one day rule the kingdom. It is also true, as it emerges from the series, that an Anglo-Saxon chronicle was written during Alfred's reign. "It is a chronicle. The pages. It is a chronicle of Wessex. It will include my life as king... from the moment of my brother's death until now. Songs of a kind. None of which will mention Uhtred of Bebbanburg. Men will remember what I have done. But men will die, as we all must. These pages will remain. The act of committing ink to parchment gives a deed permanence. If it is not burned"[43].

Uhtred, on the other hand, although he received a Christian education when he was a child at Bebbanburg, did not care much about it. Father Beocca was the clerk in charge of his education and, when he introduces Uhtred to Alfred, he says: "I taught him, lord, though in all honesty he was ever a reluctant pupil. Not good with his letters, I fear. His thorns were prickly and his ashes spindly"[44]. Uhtred's attitude is reinforced after spending much time with the Danes, even if he knows to read and write. The Danish culture (and more broadly the Germanic culture) has an oral tradition, so knowledge is handed down orally, through tales and myths. Runes are also common, but they are not employed to store knowledge. We could say that Alfred and Uhtred are both cultured, but in two distinct ways. A very crucial passage in the first novel happens

[40] *The Last Kingdom*, season 1, episode two, directed by Nick Murphy, written by Stephen Butchard, aired October 10, 2015, on BBC.
[41] The translation of Pope Gregory's *Liber regulae pastoralis*.
[42] Geoffrey Hindley, *A Brief History of the Anglo-Saxons*, 216-217.
[43] *The Last Kingdom*, season 3, episode nine, directed by Edward Bazalgette, written by Stephen Butchard, aired November 19, 2018, on Netflix.
[44] Bernard Cornwell, *The Last Kingdom*, 93. This is a joke about two letters of the alphabet: the *thorn*, <ð>, and the *ash*, <æ>. Although, *thorn* should be rendered with <þ>.

during the siege of Nottingham, where the two parties gather to negotiate. It shows how different these two cultures that coexist in England are:

> Alfred said something to Beocca who produced a sheet of parchment and a quill which he gave to the prince. Beocca then held a small vial of ink so that Alfred could dip the quill and write.
>
> 'What is he doing?' Ivar asked.
>
> 'He is making notes of our talks,' the English interpreter answered.
>
> 'Notes?'
>
> 'So there is a record, of course.'
>
> 'He has lost his memory?' Ivar asked, while Ubba produced a very small knife and began to clean his fingernails. Ragnar pretended to write on his hand, which amused the Danes.
>
> 'You are Ivar and Ubba?' Alfred asked through his interpreter.
>
> 'They are,' our translator answered. Alfred's pen scratched, while his brother and brother-in-law, both kings, seemed content to allow the young prince to question the Danes.
>
> 'You are sons of Lothbrok?' Alfred continued.
>
> 'Indeed', the interpreter answered.
>
> 'And you have a brother? Halfdan?'
>
> 'Tell the bastard to shove his writing up his arse,' Ivar snarled, 'and to shove the quill up after it, and then the ink until he shits black feathers.'[45]

This brings to the last point of this section, to the written word as a means to go down in history. If there is no written witness, history completely forgets other people, no matter how important they might have been. This is the ultimate difference between Alfred and Uhtred. "The chronicle will grow. Pages will be added. But Uhtred of Bebbanburg will not be mentioned. Although I, too, was victorious"[46]. Nowadays, there is a cult around the figure of King Alfred, the king who saved Wessex and envisioned a unified kingdom.

Before dying in the TV series, the King recognizes that "in one hundred years from now, learned people will read or recite what is written, and Alfred will appear.

[45] Ibid., 88.
[46] *The Last Kingdom*, season 3, episode ten, directed by Edward Bazalgette, written by Stephen Butchard, aired November 19, 2018, on Netflix.

They will know nothing of the Lord Uhtred... nor of your... loyalty... advice... bravery... courage... and insolence. […] It will not be written that Alfred did stand on Uhtred's shoulders"[47]. Somehow, these two characters, at the end of it all come to acknowledge each other's worth and put aside their divergences.

Who knows how many people during Alfred's reign have been essential in the making of England as we know it today, about whom we know nothing.

2.2 Uhtred the Bold

A character in opposition with King Alfred, Bernard Cornwell shaped Uhtred starting from an existing man who carried that name. The first time he ever heard of Uhtred the Bold was when his father, William Outhred (or Oughtred), revealed to him their ancestry from the Saxon owners of the fortress of Bebbanburg. As the author points out, "Ragnar and Uhtred are fictional, though a family with Uhtred's name did hold Bebbanburg (now Bamburgh Castle) later in the Anglo-Saxon period, and as that family are my ancestors I decided to give them that magical place a little earlier than the records suggest"[48].

Uhtred the Bold probably knew who Alfred was, but he lived at the turn of the tenth and eleventh centuries. Therefore, he could have never been a witness of Alfred's reign nor contribute to his campaigns.

We do not know very much about Uhtred the Bold. One of the few historians who have dealt with his life and the events happening during that time is Richard A. Fletcher, notably in his book *Bloodfeud: Murder and Revenge in Anglo-Saxon England*. Right from the start, he affirms that "everything we know about Earl Uhtred of Northumbria could be written on a postcard"[49]. Indeed, an anonymous annalist of the manuscript D of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* related his death in only one sentence.

Uhtred was ealdorman of Northumbria (under King Æthelred II), and he kept that title for approximately a decade. He belonged to a rich and important family. Besides, he was also connected to the royal family by marriage. "Uhtred owed his

[47] *The Last Kingdom*, season 3, episode nine, directed by Edward Bazalgette, written by Stephen Butchard, aired November 19, 2018, on Netflix.
[48] Bernard Cornwell, "Historical Note" to *The Last Kingdom*, 333.
[49] Richard Fletcher, *Bloodfeud: Murder and Revenge in Anglo-Saxon England*, 4.

prominence not simply to wealth and descent but also to military prowess"[50]. The aforementioned anonymous annalist narrated a story where Uhtred, at a noticeably early age, fought against the Scots. In the year 1006, King Malcolm of the Scots laid siege to Durham, in Northumbria, and Earl Waltheof was too old to stand against him. "His son Uhtred [was] a young man of great energy and highly skilled in war"[51]. Hence, he gathered an army and managed to defeat the enemy. Interestingly, the heads of the dead were carried to Durham, where they were fixed on stakes.

The first chapter of Richard's book (titled "Wiheal") is about the murder of Earl Uhtred, an event that unleashed a blood feud that lasted years. He begins by writing that fifty years before the Norman conquest, there was the Danish conquest. During Uhtred's life, the one leading the Danes was King Cnut, son of King Svein. The Danish conquest reached its apex in the 1016, which was also the year of Uhtred's death.

Considering Earl Uhtred's prominent position, he was the most important man in the north of England, it would have been a wise move for Cnut to secure his loyalty. At the beginning of 1016, Cnut arrived at York. Uhtred must have thought Cnut's position was too strong and for this reason he decided to surrender. He gave hostages as a proof of his good intentions, and they agreed to meet for a public ceremony of Uhtred's submission to Cnut. The place of the encounter appears in one of the sources as *Wiheal*, which scholars believe to correspond to Wighill. Uhtred arrived there accompanied by forty men and left their weapons outside, for the meeting was indoor. But Cnut prepared an ambush with another important man from the north, Thurbrand, and killed them all. Interestingly, the bloodshed that this event triggered lasted until 1073-4, continuing well beyond the Norman conquest. Therefore, the new political landscape did not put an end to the hostility between the two factions.

Richard Fletcher tried to give an explanation as to why Cnut and Thurbrand coalesced against Uhtred. The former was seeking for help against King Æthelred and hoped to gain Uhtred's support, who instead refused to offer it to him. On the other hand, the enmity with Thurbrand was in part due to a conflict between Bernicia and Deira (north and south of Northumbria), but mostly because Uhtred's father-in-law

[50] Ibid., 53.
[51] Ibid.

allowed him to marry his daughter Sige on the condition that he would kill Thurbrand. Thurbrand, to protect himself, allied with Cnut. According to Fletcher, it is not improbable that Thurbrand hoped to gain from this allegiance the earldom of Northumbria.

2.3 An instance of neomedievalism

In my opinion, the creation of Uhtred as a fictional character with his roots in a historically real Uhtred is a proper example of neomedievalism at work. In this section I will try to give a definition of neomedievalism and to provide my understanding of the topic by analysing this character.

From the studies on neomedievalism of KellyAnn Fitzpatrick, it emerges that neomedievalism "offers something beyond medievalism"[52]. But what is medievalism? The answer is not easy, since defining medievalism depends on how we define the Middle Ages, which is per se a slippery concept. As Elizabeth Emery argues, "what we call "the Middle Ages" has been in flux since the phrase was coined in the fifteenth century"[53]. According to Leslie J. Workman, the founder of academic medievalism, "medievalism does not engage in uncovering or recovering the Middle Ages; it constantly recreates them"[54]. It is a "discipline constructed around a concept that is itself constructed"[55]. Medievalism could be defined as an everchanging, dynamic concept; a perception of the Middle Ages, depending on time, space, culture, and so on and so forth. We have no access to a static idea of the Middle Ages.

As for the difference between medievalism and neomedievalism, "medievalism implies a genuine link to the Middle Ages, whereas neomedievalism invokes a simulacrum of the medieval"[56], it "produces a version of the medieval that is more medieval than the medieval, a version of the medieval that can be seen and touched"[57]. Nowadays, the medieval appears through any form of media, such as novels, comics,

[52] KellyAnn Fitzpatrick, *Neomedievalism, Popular Culture, and the Academy*, 29.
[53] Elizabeth Emery, "Medievalism and the Middle Ages", *Studies in Medievalism* XVII (2009), 79.
[54] KellyAnn Fitzpatrick, *Neomedievalism, Popular Culture, and the Academy*, 13.
[55] Ibid., 14.
[56] M.J. Toswell, "The Simulacrum of Neomedievalism," *Studies in Medievalism* XIX (2010), 44.
[57] Brent and Kevin Moberly, "Neomedievalism, Hyperrealism, and Simulation," *Studies in Medievalism* XIX (2011), 15.

movies, video games, role-playing games, etc. All these fragmented perspectives of the Middle Ages represent in fact the medieval for most people. This is where the aid from medievalist scholars could shed light on the topic and demonstrate what is pure fiction and what is based on truth, and what message is conveyed, especially there where the distance from accuracy is monumental. In point of fact, Lauren S. Mayer suggests that we should "worry less about what, precisely, it is and to spend more time thinking about what it does and why it does it"[58].

As seen in the second section of this chapter, Uhtred the Bold did exist, and Cornwell decided to develop a fictional character based on him. What I am firmly convinced of is that Uhtred from the *Saxon Stories* can be categorized (with all due differences) as an archetypal hero, as a consequence of Cornwell's neomedievalistic approach. I will delve further into this theory in the following section. For now, I will investigate where the two Uhtred(s) converge and where they do take separate paths.

First and foremost, their epoch is inaccurate, for they lived in two different time frames: Uhtred the Bold belongs to the eleventh century, whilst the Uhtred of the series witnesses King Alfred's reign of the ninth century. Regarding their place of origin, in both cases Uhtred was from Northumbria, more specifically from Bebbanburg.

In Cornwell's novels, the main character informs the reader that he took his brother's name, Uhtred, after the latter's death: "It was the year 866 and I was not called Uhtred then, but Osbert, for I was my father's second son and it was the eldest who took the name Uhtred"[59]. This does not happen to be true for Uhtred the Bold, whose name was only Uhtred, at times written *Uchtred*.

We have seen Uhtred from the novels growing up as a Dane, giving up his Christian faith to believe in the Norse gods of the Germanic culture. This could have never been more inaccurate for Uhtred the Bold, whose Christian faith is testified by his marriage to a bishop's daughter and by the help he offered the bishop and his community to transport the remains of St. Cuthbert, from Chester-Le-Street to Durham.

[58] Lauren S. Mayer, "Dark Matters and Slippery Words: Grappling with Neomedievalism(s)," *Studies in Medievalism* XIX (2010), 75.
[59] Bernard Cornwell, *The Last Kingdom*, 4.

As Richard Fletcher remarked, "our first glimpse of Uhtred as earl of Northumbria tells of his assistance to St Cuthbert's bishop and clergy on the occasion of the move"[60].

Uhtred the Bold did not fight with the Danes, nor did he entertain any kind of relationships with them. Quite the opposite was true, as his refusal to help Cnut in his battle against Æthelred II shows. However, when Uhtred got married for the second time, he married the daughter of a rich Dane (he was the father-in-law who requested him to kill Thurbrand, Styr son of Ulf[61]). Both Uhtred the Bold and the fictional Uhtred had multiple marriages, or love affairs. The former married three times, the latter married a couple of times, and eventually fell in love with other women, including Lady Æthelflæd, the daughter of King Alfred.

The life of the historical Uhtred unleashed a long series of bloodshed, to avenge his death, but he took no part in the feuds. In *The Last Kingdom* instead, Uhtred's whole life is marked by blood feuds. As stated at the beginning of the first novel: "But I am Uhtred, son of Uhtred, and this is the tale of a bloodfeud"[62]. First, he needs to defeat his uncle, who has stolen his title and fortress; second, he wants to avenge the deaths of his Danish father and that of his half-brother, later in the story. Uhtred explains to the reader the meaning of blood feud: "And Ragnar, my lord, who had made me his son, was dead. […] There is a thing called the bloodfeud. All societies have them, even the West Saxons have them, despite their vaunted piety. Kill a member of my family and I shall kill one of yours, and so it goes on, generation after generation or until one family is all dead, and Kjartan had just wished a bloodfeud on himself. I did not know how, I did not know where, I could not know when, but I would revenge Ragnar"[63]. It is important to note that the feud was a legal institution among the Germanic tribes, which has lost part of its legal and moral value with the arrival of Christianity. Moreover, attempts have been made to restrict it, through monetary substitute measures, as for instance the wergild. Cornwell mentions it at some point, in the first novel: "Wergild was the blood price of a man's life, and every person had a wergild. […] a murderer could escape being put to death if the family of the murdered man would accept the wergild".[64]

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[60] Richard A. Fletcher, *Bloodfeud*, 36.
[61] Ibid., 52.
[62] Bernard Cornwell, *The Last Kingdom*, 3.
[63] Bernard Cornwell, *The Last Kingdom*, 196-197.
[64] Bernard Cornwell, *The Last Kingdom*, 134.

Taking into account Uhtred's bravery during the Scottish invasion in Northumbria, it is clear why he gained the honorific 'the Bold'. He was a brave warrior, a trait that he shares with the protagonist of the *Saxon Stories*. Another trait they have in common is their noble rank, for they were both the rightful heir to the earldom of Bebbanburg. Not to mention that Uhtred the Bold was also appointed ealdorman of York by King Æthelred, thus bringing the northern and the southern side of Northumbria under the house of Bamburgh.

The last element I will consider is Uhtred's loyalty towards the King. The annalist in charge of the manuscript D of the *Chronicle* reported an interesting story about Uhtred the Bold, which is in turn narrated by Fletcher:

> When Canute was attempting to enlist Northumbrian help against King Ethelred, Uhtred responded with the resounding words, 'No reward could persuade me to do what I ought not to. I will serve the king as long as he lives. He is my lord, by whose gift I enjoy riches and honour. I will never betray him.' The words may be the narrator's rather than Uhtred's own, and they may have been necessitated in the narrative context to provide a motive for Canute to compass Uhtred's end by allowing Thurbrand to set up his deadly ambush at Wiheal. But as a memory of Uhtred's political probity we cannot disregard the sentiments altogether. They serve to point up the theme of this chapter, the whole complicated and ambiguous matters of Northumbrian identity and Northumbrian loyalties.[65]

With the last sentence of this extract, Fletcher is referring to the problematic relationship between Northumbria and the crown of Wessex. This northern region of England was difficult to access; therefore, the English monarchs did not often visit it. Unsurprisingly, the royal grip upon Northumbria was weaker if compared to that upon other regions. In Fletcher's words: "In Northumbria royal power did not bear down upon the subject, did not shape and mould institutions, was not a constant looming presence"[66]. Northumbria was under the authority of the King of Wessex, who used to appoint an earl to guide it. Interestingly enough, they were often referred to as 'high-reeves' of Bamburgh. Fletcher goes on explaining: "the Old English term *heahgerefa*, 'high-reeve,' is of very rare occurrence and in surviving tenth-century sources was only

[65] Richard Fletcher, *Bloodfeud*, 57.
[66] Richard Fletcher, *Bloodfeud*, 33.

ever applied to members of this Northumbrian dynasty"[67], thus pointing out that Bamburgh's 'high-reeves' allegedly held more power than other ealdormen of England. Even though sources tend be silent about Northumbria, one can imagine how difficult the relationship between the King and the 'high-reeves' could have been.

Nevertheless, the anecdote told by the annalist suggests Uhtred's loyalty to the King, quality that emerges also in *The Last Kingdom's* protagonist, notwithstanding the contrast between him and King Alfred. Hence, in addition to being remarkably skilled warriors, they were both men of honor.

"Neomedievalism does not look to the Middle Ages to use, to study, to copy, or even to learn"[68], it simply offers a contemporary image of the medieval, which can speak to a modern audience. Neomedievalism departs more from the historical events but, at the same time, this straying from history implies a thorough knowledge of it. The producers of *The Last Kingdom* consulted an expert in medieval history before making any change, and it is highly likely that Bernard Cornwell did his research before starting to plot his saga. What Ryan Lavelle claimed as mentioned in the first chapter of this thesis regarding the contemporary interpretation of the stories from the past is accurate. Indeed, Emery affirmed that "what one chooses to say about these 1,000 years often reveals much more about the person evoking the "medieval" than about the historical period itself"[69]. To a certain extent, it is a mirror of the age narrating the story. Indeed, it is not an unusual practice to "use the past, and specifically the medieval past, to prescribe a future"[70], thus carrying with it moralistic nuances.

Uhtred represents an instance of neomedievalism for several reasons, and I have been able to identify a few of them. The narrator of *The Last Kingdom* recounts his story, intertwining it to that of ninth century England. At the time, England was a hodgepodge of distinct cultures, languages, and peoples. And in fact, part of the reason behind authoring this story for Cornwell is that of sharing knowledge. In an interview, he noted that "the history of the Anglo-Saxons isn't much taught in Britain (where I

[67] Ibid., 40. The dynasty of Uhtred the Bold.
[68] Carol L. Robinson and Pamela Clements, "Living with Neomedievalism," *Studies in Medievalism* XVIII (2009), 62.
[69] Elizabeth Emery, "Medievalism and the Middle Ages", *Studies in Medievalism* XVII (2009), 81.
[70] Lee Patterson, *Negotiating the Past: The Historical Understanding of Medieval Literature*, 16.

grew up) and it struck me as weird that the English really had no idea where their country came from. Americans know, they even have a starting date, but the English just seemed to assume that England had always been there, so the idea of writing a series about the creation of England was in my head for a long time"[71]. Moreover, he added, in one of his social media platforms: "If you'd been born in the year of King Alfred's death in 899 you would have said you were a West Saxon or a Mercian or an East Anglian or a Northumbrian, you would never ever have said that you were a native of England"[72]. Therefore, the issue of identity, posited at the end of the first chapter of this paper, resurfaces once again. This is where I think the figure of Uhtred serves as a tool to grasp what was like living in ninth century England, being himself a blend of the Saxons and the Danes. A tool intelligently used by Cornwell, since it is what moves the story forward and reveals engaging for the reader, or the spectator. I am hinting at the interior conflict of any appealing character, which is at the basis of any riveting story. In this case, Uhtred's struggle of finding his place in England, where he is an outsider: never fully a Saxon, and never fully a Dane. Uhtred's peculiar perspective, with which the reader identifies (thanks to the first-person narrative), offers a gateway to medieval history, and hopefully arouses in the reader a desire to learn more about those events.

2.4 An archetypal hero: comparison between Uhtred and Aragorn

Our present-day times require new readings, new interpretations, and Uhtred as a character can be read from a contemporary perspective, in relation to other similar characters. According to KellyAnn Fitzpatrick, "neomedievalism is contingent on and participatory in a constant producing and reproducing, assembling and reassembling of the Middle Ages in contemporary culture"[73]. She remarked that a considerable number of Anglo-Saxonists had discovered the Middle Ages due to Tolkien's medievalist fantasy (I cannot hide that I fall into this category). And, while tons of studies have been made on this author, I found particularly enlightening David Day's books, which cover several topics belonging to Tolkien's world, such as the sources behind the stories, the

[71] Hannah Lafferty, "Bernard Cornwell Talks The Pagan Lord, The Challenges of Historical Fiction, And Future Plans". Emertainment Monthly. Boston: Emerson College
[72] https://www.facebook.com/bernard.cornwell/posts/pfbid02m73i6e4CZLfw8s7QxtWMfYxoTQNXdZNTm55ANsauHxHfBqmQJTBQywt6N1oYRGy2l
[73] Fitzpatrick, *Neomedievalism*, 30.

battles in Middle earth, the heroes, the dark powers, various creatures etc; he also wrote an encyclopaedia, an atlas, and a dictionary of Tolkien. For the purpose of this study, I will develop my theory using one of his chore ideas as a point of departure. In *The Ring Legends of Tolkien*, from the comparison of three heroes[74], David Day brought out "the power of archetypes in dictating aspects of character in the heroes of legend and myth"[75]. Moreover, "if we look at the lives of each of these three, we see certain life patterns that are identical"[76], only the context changes. One of the characters in question is Aragorn from *The Lord of the Rings*. I began to notice the previously mentioned life patterns in Uhtred's life as well, and I will provide my reading of both characters in comparison, to see where they merge and whether Uhtred may be considered an archetypal hero. Also, one might wonder whether Cornwell were aware of these patterns, or if it is only a pure coincidence. As Coote asserts, "deconstructing the text is postmodern, but cutting and pasting it to make something new is neo-medieval – and it brings the cut-and-paster surprisingly, dangerously, close to the medieval reading practices"[77]. This implies that building a main character like Uhtred could be a neo-medieval practice, in which the author makes changes in historical terms, and adds new material with common foundations to medievalist narrative.

The first characteristic of archetypal heroes Day points out is that they are "orphaned sons and rightful heirs to kings slain in battle"[78], therefore they are "deprived of their inherited kingdoms and are in danger of assassination"[79]. Even though they bear distinct titles (Aragorn is son of a King whilst Uhtred is son of an Earl), the circumstances surrounding their inheritance are quite similar. As can be deduced from this paper, Uhtred is an orphaned son since the battle of York, and he is the rightful heir of Bebbanburg. He claims from the very first page of *The Last Kingdom*: "I look at those parchments which are deeds saying that Uhtred, son of Uhtred is the lawful and sole owner of the lands that are carefully marked by stones and by dykes, by oaks and by ash, by marsh and by sea, and I dream of those lands […]. I dream, and know that

[74] They are King Arthur, Sigurd, and Aragorn.
[75] David Day, *The Ring Legends of Tolkien*, 96.
[76] Ibid.
[77] Lesley Coote, "A Short Essay about Neo-Medievalism," 30.
[78] Day, *The Ring Legends of Tolkien*, 96.
[79] Ibid.

one day I will take back the land from those who stole it from me"[80]. Tolkien's hero, Aragorn, was the heir to the throne of Gondor and, similarly to what happened to Uhtred's father, his father was killed while fighting against the orcs. Uhtred is dispossessed of his earldom because of his greedy uncle Ælfric, meanwhile Aragorn was only two years old when he lost his father and had to be kept hidden from Sauron, for he was Isildur's heir. They were both in danger of being murdered: Aragorn, by Sauron's servants, Uhtred by men sent after him by Ælfric.

Another aspect concerning their descent, according to Day, is that they are "the last of their dynasty, and their noble lineage will end if they are slain"[81]. Howbeit this is true for Aragorn, it is not the case for Uhtred. Ælfric was his father's brother, therefore, if Uhtred ever had to die, his uncle could have taken his place, thus preserving the lineage.

Subsequently, Day goes on by explaining what characterizes the upbringing of archetypal heroes: they are "raised secretly in foster homes under the protection of a foreign noble who is a distant relative"[82]. Aragorn was raised at Rivendell, the house of Master Elrond, meanwhile Uhtred was raised by Ragnar the Fearless, who happened to be a *jarl*, the Norse word used by Cornwell for 'earl'. The two characters diverge slightly if we look at the last part of Day's statement: they are under the protection of a distant relative. But of course, it always depends on how one decides to look at the story. As for Aragorn's lineage, Elrond's twin brother Elros was one of his direct ancestors. Uhtred is not directly related to Ragnar, but their relationship evolves as the narrative goes forward, with Ragnar regarding Uhtred as a son. However, after he lost his Danish family, he sought shelter in Mercia, where the brother of his deceased mother lived, and spent some time there. But I would consider Ragnar as the paternal figure who raised him and truly cared for him, as an alter-ego of Elrond.

A further key point in defining archetypal heroes is that "during their fostering – in childhood and as youths – all three achieve feats of strength and skill that mark them for future greatness"[83]. The time spent at Rivendell surely honed Aragorn's martial and survival skills, which served him well when he roamed into the wilderness as a Ranger.

[80] Bernard Cornwell, *The Last Kingdom*, 3.
[81] David Day, *The Ring Legends of Tolkien,* 96.
[82] Ibid.
[83] Ibid.

All the knowledge and training he received, especially from the elves, eventually guided him into embodying the King he was meant to be. On the other hand, Uhtred received advice first from his father when he was a little boy, and afterwards from Ragnar the Fearless. Uhtred's skills do not go unnoticed by King Alfred, and more often than not the West Saxon victories are a result of his ability to train and lead warriors. Uhtred will eventually conquer Bebbanburg, thanks to everything he had learned from the Danes and on the battlefield. Therefore, both Aragorn and Uhtred are destined for glory, which they obtain thanks to the environment in which they grew up.

Moving on with his comparison, Day recognizes another trait common to archetypal heroes, which is that they "fall in love with beautiful maidens, but all must overcome several seemingly impossible obstacles before they may marry […]. Each of these lovers is to some degree a tragic heroine"[84]. Aragorn falls in love with Elrond's daughter, Arwen. As a hindrance of their love there is their belonging to two different races: she is an immortal elf, while he is a man doomed to die. Their love grows deeper over time, and Arwen renounces to her immortality for Aragorn. As she puts it in *The Fellowship of the Ring*: "I would rather spend one lifetime with you, than face all the ages of this world alone"[85].

This is an aspect the two heroes do not share, or at least not entirely. Uhtred's first marriage is arranged by King Alfred, as a means to keep Uhtred bounded to Wessex. But Uhtred becomes infatuated, in the second novel, with Iseult, wife of Peredur, King of Cornwall. Peredur has two wives: a formal queen, and a shadow queen. The latter, Iseult, is a sorceress with the gift of foretelling the future, and Peredur preserves her virginity, for fear she might lose this gift. This is how Uhtred describes their first encounter: "then a door at the back of the hall was opened and Iseult came to my life. Iseult. Finding her there was like discovering a jewel of gold in a midden. I saw her and I forgot Mildrith. Dark Iseult, black-haired Iseult, huge-eyed Iseult. She was small, thin as an elf, with a luminous face and hair as black as a raven's feathers. […] Iseult still stared at me and I stared back. She had a flawless skin, untouched by illness, and a strong face, but sad. Sad and beautiful. Fierce and beautiful"[86]. Uhtred and Iseult

[84] David Day, *The Ring Legends of Tolkien*, 96.
[85] *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring*, directed by Peter Jackson, written by Fran Walsh and Philippa Boyens, and Peter Jackson (2001, New Line Cinema).
[86] Bernard Cornwell, *The Pale Horseman*, 62-63.

fall in love and, after Peredur's death, although they never get married, they are always together. However, she is tragically killed in the Battle of Edington by a Dane, and this is how Uhtred loses his queen.

The last two elements constituting archetypal heroes, as stated by Day, are the hero's sword and the hero's mentor. As for the former, he argues: "the heritage of the sword of the warrior king is, naturally enough, critical […]. Once Aragorn's sword Andúril is re-forged, he sets off to reclaim his heritage. He avenges his father's death, reclaims his kingdom by conquest, and, after the destruction of the One Ring, wins his beloved Elven princess Arwen"[87]. Apparently, Uhtred does not have a special sword like the other archetypal heroes, powerful and inherited from his ancestors. Nevertheless, there is a curious passage in the first book, where the reader catches a glimpse of how important is for Uhtred his sword: "but I remember that spring and summer fondly for it was in those long days that Ealdwulf made me a sword"[88]. He decided to name it Serpent-Breath because the blade had "wondrous patterns, repetitive curling patterns that made flat, smoky wisps in the blade. In some lights you could not see the patterns, but in the dusk, or when, in winter, you breathed on the blade, they showed. Serpent breath, Brida called the patterns"[89]. And, although there is no connection between Serpent-Breath and Andúril, even so Uhtred believes that his sword is somehow magical: "and there is magic in Serpent-Breath"[90]. Once forged and ready to be used, Uhtred asked Ragnar to use it on a man "so that Odin would know she existed and would look well on her"[91]. Serpent-Breath accompanies Uhtred throughout his whole life, and it is also thanks to it that he will manage to reconquer Bebbanburg. Therefore, when he says: "I think Odin did see her, for she has killed more men than I can ever remember"[92], we must assume his sword served him well, and it was powerful in its own way.

[87] David Day, *The Ring Legends of Tolkien*, 100-101.
[88] Cornwell, *The Pale Horseman*, 140.
[89] Cornwell, *The Pale Horseman*, 141.
[90] Ibid., 142.
[91] Ibid.
[92] Ibid.

Concerning the hero's mentor, Day observes: "perhaps the most telling connection between the tree heroes is displayed in the similarity of their mentors"[93]. Not only, he then lists some of their most relevant traits. Aragorn's mentor is the wizard Gandalf, whereas Uhtred receives guidance from Father Beocca. Although they differ enormously in the first trait Day mentions, that is the fact that they are "non-human beings gifted with supernatural powers and prophetic skills"[94], they overlap in all other aspects. Beocca does not wear a pointed hat, nor he does carry a wizard's staff, he does not have a long white beard (in fact, he is redhaired), still Beocca is a priest with a strong connection with God. Far from having supernatural powers, he is supposedly on higher level of wisdom, if compared to most people. The only thing they have in common in their appearance is that they wear long robes. Day describes them as "old yet vital wanderers of great learning"[95], and this is true for both Gandalf and Beocca. Beocca does not stay in one place, and he sometimes accompanies Uhtred in his quests. When he was a kid at the fortress of Bebbanburg, Beocca used to teach him how to read and write, apart from educating him about religious matters. Thus, he is a resourceful and cultured man, just like Gandalf.

Furthermore, Day notes that they are "counsellors of future kings in peace and war, yet have no interest in worldly power themselves"[96]. Gandalf and Beocca share this one more aspect, but with a slight difference. While Gandalf advises Aragorn, the future King of Gondor, Beocca is the counsellor of King Alfred. This is where the figure of the mentor fails in determining Uhtred as an archetypal hero, although this is reasonable, considering the hierarchical difference between Uhtred and Aragorn.

In my opinion, the most relevant trait of the two mentors is that they are "vehicles of fate who guide the hero"[97]. Fate, or *wyrd*, the concept I will explain in the following section of this chapter. Beocca is the one who arranges the encounter between Uhtred and King Alfred, thus playing a fundamental role in the whole story, just as Gandalf is essential in leading Aragorn on the path of his destiny.

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[93] David Day, *The Ring Legends of Tolkien*, 101.
[94] Ibid.
[95] Ibid.
[96] Ibid.
[97] David Day, *The Ring Legends of Tolkien*, 101.

As medievalist scholar Kaufman states, "Neomedievalism is one way of doing medievalism, one that requires certain philosophical and technological shifts to exist at all. Yet while medievalism can exist perfectly independently at any point in time, neomedievalism, despite its seeming ahistoricity, is historically contingent upon both medievalism itself and the postmodern condition"[98]. For what concerns this character analysis from a neo-medieval point of view, it could be argued that Cornwell's attempt to recreate the Middle Ages is a little postmodern, in the sense that he employs modern storytelling techniques. Consequently, his saga cannot be considered fully medievalist, but rather neo-medieval. He did not invent the character Uhtred from scratch, but he took the real Uhtred the Bold and bestowed upon him traits belonging to the archetypal hero, while retaining some aspects of the original Uhtred. Cornwell blended historical accuracy with narrative technique to give the reader a sense of the medieval, the cut-and-paster Coote mentioned when I introduced this study. Furthermore, when one considers Uhtred's inner conflict, it becomes clear that this is supposed to create a reader-protagonist bond. This implies that, in addition to being universal, Uhtred should also possess some typical traits of the present-day audience to which the saga is aimed.

2.5 The concept of wyrd

To bring the audience further into the Anglo-Saxon England of ninth century, Cornwell develops Uhtred as a character around the concept of *wyrd*. All the events taking place in the story gravitate around this concept. According to the Bosworth-Toller dictionary, this word coming from Old English means "what happens, fate, fortune, chance"[99]. Uhtred gives its own definition of *wyrd*:

> Ravn told me time and again that destiny was everything. Fate rules. The three spinners sit at the foot of the tree of life and they make our lives and we are their playthings, and though we think we make our own choices, all our fates are in the spinners' threads. Destiny is everything, and that day, though I did not know it, my destiny was spun. *Wyrd bið ful aræd,* fate is unstoppable[100].

[98] Amy S. Kaufman, "Medieval Unmoored," *Studies in Medievalism* XIX (2010), 2.
[99] https://bosworthtoller.com/36952
[100] Bernard Cornwell, *The Last Kingdom*, 166.

The spinners are the Norns from the Norse mythology. They weave the lives of men, powerless against fate once it has been written.

In the TV series, 'Destiny is all' is an expression Uhtred repeats in almost every episode, for everything revolves around fate. *Wyrd* is extremely dense in meaning, thus difficult to translate properly. I will delve deeper into the philological analysis of the word in the next chapter, for now I will try to see how it characterizes the *Saxon Stories*, and more specifically the Danish culture. Uhtred is first introduced to the concept of wyrd by Ravn, Ragnar's father, who refers to himself as a *skald*: "a scop, you would call me. A poet, a weaver of dreams, a man who makes glory from nothing and dazzles you with its making. And my job now is to tell this day's tale in such a way that men will never forget our great deeds"[101]. *Skald*, in Norse culture, is a poet who composes skaldic poetry, a type of poetry, complex in metrics and in form reserved to the celebration of kings, nobles, and heroes. The other type of Norse poetry is the Eddic poetry, which was used to describe myths and the gods. In any case, Cornwell might refer to the fact that Germanic cultures convey knowledge orally. For this reason, the Danes from the series need someone like Ravn, a bard who witnesses what happens, to make a story out of it, easy to memorize and pass on to future generations. Interestingly, the last part of the quote may be the perfect description of what Cornwell does through his writing: he manages to inform through storytelling, to create a believable medieval world through the use of language. Perhaps the readers will remember how England came into existence. After all, I am writing a thesis on this matter, because of the curiosity these events have sparked in me.

Back to the topic of *wyrd*, from the moment Uhtred discovers that fate is inexorable, he begins to look at his life through the lens of this concept. A concept that encompasses the gods as well as one's personal choices. Even after the terrible event of his son's death, Uhtred finds solace in the fact that it was preordained:

> 'Wyrd bið ful aræd,' I said. Fate is fate. It cannot be changed or cheated. Alfred had insisted I marry Mildrith so I would be tied to Wessex and would put roots deep into its rich soil, but I already had roots in Northumbria, roots twisted into the rock of Bebbanburg, and perhaps my son's death was a sign from the gods that I could not

[101] Ibid., 33.

> make a new home. Fate wanted me to go to my northern stronghold and until I reached Bebbanburg I would be a wanderer"[102].

Everything is preordained, from the origin of the world to the Ragnarök. *Wyrd* is important to understand the Viking way of life. Uhtred has never hidden his preference to the Danes' lifestyle, especially in comparison with the Anglo-Saxon one. For example, this emerges when he describes the Danish festivity Yule, which was basically the midwinter feast: "Yule is supposed to be a celebration and a consolation, a moment of warm brightness in the heart of winter, a time to eat because you know that the lean times are coming when food will be scarce and ice locks the land, and a time to be happy and get drunk and behave irresponsibly and wake up next morning wondering if you will ever feel well again, but the West Saxons handed the feast to the priests who made it as joyous as a funeral"[103]. Furthermore, Uhtred considers the Saxons too weak and fearful, unlike the Vikings. The Vikings, precisely by virtue of *wyrd*, try to live the best life possible. When the time comes to feast, they do it wholeheartedly, so as when the time comes to fight. The outcome is no longer relevant because it is already written. Therefore, the Danes embrace their destiny, whatever it may be. It is like the Stoic concept of *amor fati*, literally the love of fate. The Vikings and their gods embrace fate even when Ragnarök arrives. Uhtred claims: "I was learning to despise the English. They would not fight, they prayed instead of sharpening their swords, and it was no wonder the Danes were taking their land"[104]. Actually, what Uhtred does continually throughout the series, pointing out the difference between English and Danes, where the English appear weak and inauthentic, reminds me of what Tacitus did with his *De Origine et situ Germanorum*, an ethnographic work about the Germanic tribes, which more often than not served as a tool to highlight vices and weaknesses of Romans.

[102] Bernard Cornwell, *The Pale Horseman*, 313-314.
[103] Bernard Cornwell, *The Last Kingdom*, 192.
[104] Ibid., 95.

Chapter 3
Germanic Terminology

3.1 The role of philology in a neomedievalistic study

Philology means love for words, from the Greek *philologia*: *philo-* "loving" and *logos* "word, speech". Philology focuses on the historical development of a language, or more languages. It studies the authenticity of sources, as well as their meaning. According to Friedrich Nietzsche:

> Philology is, namely, that venerable art that requires of its admirers one thing above all else: to go aside, to take time, to become still, become slow - as a goldsmith's art and connoisseurship of the word, which has nothing but fine, cautious work to take care of and which achieves nothing if it does not achieve it *lento*. But for exactly this reason, philology is today more necessary than ever, by exactly this means, philology attracts and enchants us most powerfully in the midst of an age of "work," that is to say, of precipitateness, of unseemly and sweating overhaste that wants at once to be over and done with everything, even with every old and new book: - philology itself is never so easily over and done with anything whatsoever; it teaches to read well, which means to read slowly, deeply, backward and forward with care and respect, with reservations, with doors left open, with delicate fingers and eyes…[105]

The philosopher is here describing a practice related to philology, that of reading carefully and thoroughly, and, most important thing, slowly. In a world where everyone is always in a hurry, where being constantly busy and fast is praiseworthy, where no one cares about the old, about the books, the philologist takes his time to read. To research, to analyse, to find new connections. This is something that cannot be done fast.

Philology is a window to the past. Thanks to the documents and manuscripts that have survived history, we catch a glimpse of a timeframe, we get an idea of what was like living in a certain epoch.

Words are powerful tools. They can inspire. They can move. They can create worlds. Words can evoke. As KellyAnn Fitzpatrick argues, "both "post-modern medievalism" and neomedievalism see history, and with it the idea of a "real" Middle Ages outside of

[105] Friedrich Nietzsche, "Preface" to *Dawn: Thoughts on the Presumptions of Morality*, 7.

that which we construct, as something that cannot be accessed"[106]. And if real history cannot be accessed, it becomes necessary to find at least a connection between the present and the past, a way to make two eras communicate. In neomedievalistic practices, using language has not the only function to better understand the past, it is a tool to create an immersive and believable experience of the medieval, or of an imagined world. Contemporary medievalism, studied through the lens of neomedievalism, "can critically address the increasingly artificial divide between commodity culture and the academy"[107]. Commodity culture refers to all the media through which medievalism emerges, be they novels, TV series, movies, games. As I have already stated, they all give a perspective on the Middle Ages, and often conflict with the views and knowledge of the academy. The best option would be to work in synergy, so as to be more aware of how the Middle Ages come to life in our modern-day world.

Back to the use of language as a tool to shape a believable world, Fitzpatrick goes on using Tolkien as an example: "Tolkien […] used his knowledge as a philologist to create languages that were modelled after the medieval languages he studied"[108]. Furthermore, she explains that Tolkien invented a language, a mythology, and a history for his novels to create a "fully realized Secondary World"[109]. In an essay titled "On Fairy-Stories", Tolkien gives his definition of this Secondary World:

> the story-maker […] makes a Secondary World which your mind can enter. Inside it, what he relates is "true": it accords with the laws of that world. You therefore believe it, while you are, as it were, inside. The moment disbelief arises, the spell is broken; the magic, or rather art, has failed. You are then out in the Primary World again[110].

In support of his idea, Tolkien mentions the anonymous poet of *Beowulf*, who, according to him, employed a myriad of linguistical and cultural details to "emulate an era that was, at the time of the poem's composition, already part of the distant past"[111].

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[106] KellyAnn Fitzpatrick, *Neomedievalism, Popular Culture, and the Academy*, 22.
[107] Harry Brown, "Baphomet Incorporated", *Studies in Medievalism* XX (2011), 2.
[108] KellyAnn Fitzpatrick, *Neomedievalism*, 57.
[109] Ibid.
[110] J.R.R. Tolkien, "On Fairy-Stories, 132.
[111] Fitzpatrick, *Neomedievalism*, 54.

In essence, through a refined use of language, he managed to give his contemporary readers (or better, listeners) a sense of a faraway past. Which, considering this paper, is exactly what Cornwell does with his *Saxon Stories*: he uses linguistical and cultural elements to depict ninth century England. In this chapter I will study the expressions and the words with which he embroidered his writing in order to make the story immersive. This is where history and art interweave; and philology plays an important role in this liaison. "The illusion of historical truth and perspective, that has made *Beowulf* seem such an attractive quarry, is largely a product of art"[112], Tolkien argues in an essay on *Beowulf*.

As seen in the previous chapter, whatever medievalist or neomedievalistic practice implies a good amount of knowledge, without which it could never occur. And Cornwell's writing process involves, apart from historical knowledge, a remarkable familiarity with words from Old English, Old Norse, and some of them with an uncertain etymology, therefore probably constructed by the author. Another interesting choice is place-names, for them to be more historically accurate. He claims, at the beginning of *The Last Kingdom*: "I have usually employed whatever spelling is cited in the *Oxford Dictionary of English Place-Names* for the years nearest or contained within Alfred's reign, 871-899 AD"[113]. However, the author also admits that he has not been consistent. For instance, he has preferred "the modern England to *Englaland* and, instead of *Norðhymbraland*"[114] he opted for Northumbria "to avoid the suggestion that the boundaries of the ancient kingdom coincide with those of the modern county"[115]. After which, he makes a list of the cities as they were spelled in the ninth century, alongside their modern spelling.

Since philology inevitably carries within itself history, for language can offer a mirror of the time in which it is employed, it comes with no surprise that Cornwell has borrowed heavily from the deep well of terminology belonging to the past. And indeed, Fitzpatrick notes that "in spite of its regimented methodologies, the actual subject

[112] J.R.R. Tolkien, "*Beowulf*: The Monsters and the Critics," 7.
[113] Bernard Cornwell, "Place-Names" at the beginning of *The Last Kingdom*.
[114] Ibid.
[115] Ibid.

matter of philology can be difficult to quantify outside of a general affiliation with language, literature, and the history of one or both"[116]. One cannot ignore the "importance of language, and the role of culture in both constructing and reconstruing distinctly "medieval" worlds"[117].

The aim of this chapter is to study the words employed by Cornwell, and more specifically to investigate their philological accuracy. This without detracting from his works. After all, as Tolkien cleverly pointed out, referring to the author of *Beowulf*, which can also apply to Cornwell: "he knew much about the old days, and though his knowledge […] was rich and poetical rather than accurate with the accuracy of modern archaeology (such as that is), one thing he knew clearly: those days were heathen – heathen, noble, and hopeless"[118].

3.2 References to Germanic culture and literature

At first, I wanted to divide the words into lexical categories, but given the presence of complete sentences and words constructed in a very original way, and being those expressions too difficult to categorize, I decided to divide them thematically. The first group consists of references which nod at the Germanic culture and literature. Some of them are full sentences taken from specific Anglo-Saxon works, and I tried to understand which are the works Cornwell might have possibly read. From a philological point of view, it is also quite interesting finding out the first written records in which they appear. In any case, for every word or expression I will show how they have been used in the novels, afterwards I will proceed with the analysis.

Wyrd bið ful aræd: This expression is employed for the first time in the dedication page, yet there are many other instances in which it appears. I began with this one because I already mentioned the concept of *wyrd* in the previous chapter. Uhtred frequently repeats this expression; therefore, it becomes a sort of leitmotif that holds together the whole narration: "Destiny is all, Ravn liked to tell me, destiny is

[116] Fitzpatrick, *Neomedievalism*, 38.
[117] Ibid., 53.
[118] J.R.R. Tolkien, "*Beowulf*: The Monsters and the Critics," 22.

everything. He would even say it in English, '*wyrd bið ful aræd*'"[119]. *Wyrd* comes from the Common Germanic *wurđíz, with the meaning of 'fate, one of three Norns'[120].

The construction as it is presented in the book (*wyrd bið ful aræd*) has its roots in the Old English poem titled *The Wanderer*[121]. It is a plausible theory, validated by Bernard Cornwell himself, who answered me on his official website, when asked about the sources behind *The Last Kingdom*: "Most of my original sources were either the Anglo-Saxon Chronicles or various Old English poems like *The Wanderer*".
One could argue that *The Wanderer*, in a way, sets up the whole mood of the series, and characterizes even more Uhtred, especially if one considers the comparison between him and Aragorn. Indeed, at some point, they become both lonesome wanderers. Furthermore, *wyrd* is also found in *Beowulf*, with a similar meaning, in the verse 455: "*Welandes geweorc. Gæð a wyrd swa hio scel*!"[122]. This is telling, for it highlights the link between literature and history. Cornwell, in his novels, makes references to the Anglo-Saxon literature, which in turn serves to further define the epoch he is writing about.

It is interesting to note that it is not rare for Uhtred to use this expression to justify himself to the Danes, and probably to himself as well, why he remains on Alfred's side:

> 'We would have made you richer than the richest king,' Ragnar said. 'We would have given you ships, men, horses, silver, women, anything! All you had to do was speak.'
>
> 'I had given him my oath,' I said again, and I remembered how close I had come to betraying Alfred. I had been so tempted to blurt out the truth. That night, with a handful of words, I could have ensured that no Saxon ever ruled in England again. I could have made Wessex into a Danish kingdom. I could have done all that by betraying a man I did not much like to a man I loved as a brother, and yet I had kept silent. I had given an oath and honour binds us to paths we might not choose. '*Wyrd bið ful aræd*,' I said.
>
> Fate is inexorable. It grips us like a harness. I thought I had escaped Wessex and escaped Alfred, yet here I was, back in his palace.[123]

[119] Bernard Cornwell, *The Last Kingdom*, 66.
[120] Vladimir Orel, *A Handbook of Germanic Etymology*, 475.
[121] Hiram Corsom, Benjamin Thorpe, *Codex Exoniensis. A Collection of Anglo-Saxon Poetry, from a Manuscript in the Library of the Dean and Chapter of Exeter*, 286.
[122] *Beowulf*, ed. and transl. by Ludovica Koch, 40. The expression containing *wyrd* means: 'Fate goes ever as she shall'.
[123] Bernard Cornwell, *The Last Kingdom*, 223.

Another extract, where he explains to his Danish stepsister Thyra why he cannot fight for the Danes:

'Which means you'll fight the Danes?'

'The Danes are Alfred's enemies,' I said, 'so yes. I'll fight the Danes.'

'But they're my people' she said.

'And I've given Alfred my oath,' I said, 'so I must do what he wants.' I leaned back as the stallion picked its way down a steep hill. 'I love the Danes,' I said, 'love them far more than I do the West Saxons, but it's my fate to fight for Wessex. *Wyrd bið ful aræd*.'

'Which means?'

'That fate is fate. That it rules us.'[124]

Ac her forþ berað; fugelas singað, gylleð græghama: this quote is inserted at the beginning of *The Pale Horseman*, right after the dedication page, and it is translated as follows: 'For here starts war, carrion birds sing, and grey wolves howl'. The author specifies that it is from *The Fight at Finnsburgh*. It is an allusion to the Battle of Finnsburgh occurred around 450 AD and recorded in only two sources: *Beowulf*[125], and the most significant *Finnsburg Fragment*. As stated by Klaeber, "The MS leaf of the Fragment is lost. The text is therefore based on the transcript published by George Hickes"[126], writer and linguist. *The Finnsburg Fragment* is a 48 lines long poem about a conflict between Danes and Frisians (and probably Jutes), but given the incomplete nature of the text, it becomes quite hard to figure out the whole story. Moreover, the events recounted in the fragment do not coincide perfectly with those in the episode narrated in *Beowulf*. Here, it is narrated as a tale told by a poet at Hrothgar's court, to celebrate Beowulf's defeat of Grendel.

As for the translation Cornwell added, it is quite difficult retracing where he did find it. In another version, this verse is translated with: 'But now starts war; the carrion-birds shall sing, the grey-cloaked wolf shall howl'[127]. The results regarding Cornwell's

[124] Cornwell, *The Lords of the North*, 357.
[125] *Beowulf*, ed. and transl. by Ludovica Koch, 90.
[126] Friedrich Klaeber, *Klaeber's Beowulf and The Fight at Finnsburg,* 279.
[127] Richard Hamer, *A Choice of Anglo-Saxon Verse*, 17.

choice are vague and with no foundation, thus my only opinion, and I might be wrong, is that Cornwell has paraphrased it or adapted it to better fit the novel.

Com on wanre niht scriðan sceadugenga: this quote, like the previous one, introduces the third novel of the series, *The Lords of the North*. It is taken from *Beowulf*, and the translation is: 'From out of the wan night slides the shadow walker'. Heaney's translation is slightly different: 'Then out of the night came the shadow-stalker'[128]. For the purpose of this study, I will focus more on the word *sceadugenga*, since it is crucial in *The Last Kingdom* series, to understand Uhtred's character. At one point, Uhtred shares this memory related to his pagan childhood:

> I stared out into the woods, watching the shadows, wondering what things moved in the dark and thinking of the *sceadugengan*. I often thought of the *sceadugengan*, the Shadow-Walkers. Ealdwulf, Bebbanburg's blacksmith, had first told me of them. […] before Christ came to England, back when we English had worshipped Odin and the other gods, it had been well known that there were Shadow-Walkers who moved silent and half-seen across the land, mysterious creatures who could change their shapes. One moment they were wolves, then they were men, or perhaps eagles, and they were neither alive nor dead, but things from the shadow world, night beasts, and I stared into the dark trees and I wanted there to be *sceadugengan* out there in the dark, something that would be my secret, something that would frighten the Danes, something to give Bebbanburg back to me.
>
> […]
>
> I was only ten years old, but on that night I knew what I would become. I would join the *sceadugengan*. I would be a Shadow-Walker.[129]

First and foremost, we have seen that Uhtred's life is marked by bloodfeuds. He needs to take revenge for what happened to him, starting from the stolen fortress of Bebbanburg, right until his Danish family massacre. Since *sceadugenga* is a term clearly belonging to *Beowulf*'s narrative, I found interesting the similarities between the two stories when it comes to vengeance. In *Beowulf*, the terrifying Grendel hates humanity and seeks out revenge because men made him a monster. Whilst, understandably, Grendel's mother wishes to avenge her son's death. One could claim that *Beowulf* is also a story of bloodfeud, among other themes. The verses 702-703 describe Grendel's attack on the Geats, where he stealthy arrives at night-time. It is

[128] Seamus Heaney, *Beowulf: A New Verse Translation*, 47.
[129] Cornwell, *The Last Kingdom*, 59-61.

quite interesting Uhtred's identifying with Grendel and his desire to become a *sceadugenga* himself.

Sceadugenga is an Old English compound term, a combination of *sceadu*, which means 'shadow', and the suffix *-genga*, from the verb *gengan*, with the meaning of 'to go'. The more literal translation would be "shadow-goer". I also managed to find the Common Germanic origin for *sceadu*, that is to say *skaďuz. Curiously, the meaning of this term is 'shadow' but also 'mirror', according to the dictionary[130]. The Proto-Germanic form for *gengan* should be *ʒanʒjanan[131].

Skidbladnir: this is the anglicized version of *skíðblaðnir*. It comes from Old Norse and literally means 'assembled from thin pieces of wood'. Perhaps *skid* has its origin from the Common Germanic *skīđan[132]. Among the various meanings, 'firewood' and 'a piece of wood split thin' stand out. Uhtred uses this word to frighten Sven, son of Kjartan, since the latter must pay for killing Ragnar's family by burning his house down. Uhtred makes up a story and pretends to be a certain Thorkild, a corpse warrior (in a way, a *sceadugenga*) back to Midgard from Niflheim, with the purpose of sending a message to Kjartan and Sven: "take my greetings to your father and tell him the dead swordsman has been sent for him and we shall all three sail in *Skidbladnir* back to Niflheim"[133]. Uhtred goes on explaining that "Niflheim was the dreadful pit of the dishonoured dead, and *Skidbladnir* was the ship of the gods that could be folded and concealed in a pouch."[134]

This a reference to the Norse mythology. In order to better grasp the meaning behind Skidbladnir, I went through Italian writer and philologist Gianna Chiesa Isnardi's studies on Norse myths, for she is an expert on the subject. According to her: "La nave, come mezzo che consente all'uomo il viaggio in un «altro mondo», diviene perciò bersaglio delle forze oscure che vogliono sopraffare chi si è introdotto nelle loro dimore. […] Legate a questa simbologia sono, evidentemente, le numerose navi funerarie"[135].

[130] Vladimir Orel, *A Handbook of Germanic Etymology*, 331.
[131] Ibid., 126.
[132] Orel, *Germanic Etymology*, 341.
[133] Cornwell, *The Lords of the North*, 40-41.
[134] Cornwell, *The Lords of the North*, 40-41.
[135] Gianna Chiesa Isnardi, *I Miti Nordici*, 682.

Therefore, in Norse mythology, ships that must carry the dead in the underworld do exist. They remind me of Charon, ferryman of the underworld, who carries the souls of the damned into the Limbo, as depicted by Dante. Isnardi goes on further defining this ship:

> Un'altra nave famosa ricordata nel mito è Skíðblaðnir «[fatta di] pezzi di legno piccoli e sottili». Essa è la migliore fra le navi e appartiene a Freyr (in una fonte tuttavia è attribuita a Odino). Costruita dai nani figli di Ívaldi, questa nave può viaggiare in tutti i mondi e può ospitare tutti gli dèi in assetto di guerra; inoltre, quando non se ne abbia bisogno, la si può piegare come una tovaglia e riporre in una borsa. Per il suo legame col dio della fecondità, essa è verosimilmente connessa alle numerose navi cultuali che si ritrovano nelle incisioni rupestri dell'età del bronzo (spesso con accanto o sopra dischi solari o alberi) e pare dunque legata ai culti della vegetazione di cui Freyr è patrono. Il viaggio per mare sarebbe una sorta di processione, il transito nel mondo infero da cui si trae nuova forza vitale (così il sole pare scendere al tramonto nelle profondità marine per riemergerne all'alba).[136]

Thus, it is true that Skidbladnir can be folded and hidden in a bag, as well as it is plausible its ability to transport the dead to the underworld. However, by the way Uhtred describes it, it seems like it mainly carries the dishonoured and damned dead, much like Charon's ship. Always according to Isnardi: "Odino mandò Hel nell'infimo dei mondi, in Niflheimr, le diede potere sui nove mondi e stabilì che dividesse il cibo con coloro che le vengono mandati, cioè i morti per vecchiaia o malattia"[137], thus there is no reference to dishonoured dead. However, when she mentions "Niflhel"[138], a place where evil dead people are gathered, she argues in an appendix note that it is the "«Hel nebbioso» e dunque «oscuro». Pare essere l'ultimo, l'infimo dei nove mondi. Lì, secondo Snorri, saranno radunati i morti malvivi i quali, dovendovi scendere da Hel, subiranno, per così dire, una seconda morte. Può forse essere identificato con Niflheimr, il mondo dell'oscurità"[139]. Therefore, Uhtred description is essentially accurate.

Witanegemot: related to the Anglo-Saxon culture this time, there is the word *witanegemot*, mentioned for the first time when Uhtred is summoned by King Alfred: "Mildrith was excited by the summons. The Witan gave the king advice and her father had never been wealthy or important enough to receive such a summons, and she was overjoyed that the king wanted my presence. The *witanegemot*, as the meeting was

[136] Ibid., 683-684.
[137] Ibid., 63.
[138] Ibid., 71.
[139] Ibid., 84.

called, was always held on the Feast of St Stephen"[140]. *Witanegemot* derives from *witan*, which is a term Uhtred employs interchangeably with *witanegemot*, and they both stand for 'assembly of counsellors'. This, of course, implies that they are wise men. Indeed, the Anglo-Saxon *wita* means, according to the Bosworth-Toller dictionary, 'one who knows, a person of understanding or learning, a wise man'[141]. *Wita* has its root in the Proto-Germanic *witjan[142], meaning 'right mind, wits'. *Ge-mót* is the Anglo-Saxon word for 'meeting', *mót* deriving from the Common Germanic *mōtan[143], 'meeting'. However, there is an error in *witanegemot*, for the plural of *wita* is *witan* and the plural genitive should be *witena*. The right word for 'meeting of wise men' is therefore *witenagemot*. Which, for instance, a term employed and modified by famous author J.K. Rowling, to indicate in her fantasy books the Wizard High Court: wizengamot[144].

And in fact, the *witenagemot* in ninth century England was the institution preceding the modern parliament but of course it lacked the modern organization and procedures. It was an assembly of the most important and influential men, including ealdormen and thegns, and they could have been summoned by the Kings of the various regions. Indeed, England was not a political entity yet. Uhtred goes on describing the *witan* as it follows: "There were also more than a hundred men there, though only forty or fifty comprised the *witanegemot*, and those thegns and senior churchmen were on chairs and benches set in a half circle in front of the dais where Alfred sat with two priests and with Ælswith, his wife, who was pregnant. […] Alfred's court was more like a monastery than a royal hall."[145]

3.3 Everyday use words

The previous group comprises words related to culture and literature, whilst the current one is made up of frequently used words, included in the novels mostly to give that sense of distant past. They might be objects, units of measure and words belonging to

[140] Cornwell, *The Pale Horseman*, 119.
[141] Bosworth, Toller, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary Online:* https://bosworthtoller.com/36090.
[142] Orel, *Germanic Etymology*, 464.
[143] Ibid., 274.
[144] J.K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix,* 95.
[145] Cornwell, *The Pale Horseman*, 124-125.

boating. I would like to make a premise: the list of archaic words and expressions from Old English, or Old Norse, could have been longer than this. Nevertheless, I decided to keep the ones I found more interesting for structure and meaning, and those that helped me define Cornwell's neomedievalistic approach.

Tafl: this is an interesting word, that appears in the second novel, when King Alfred and his courtiers are at the Somerset marshes. Probably, to make the time go by more quickly and avoid boredom while waiting, people started to engage in recreational activities. Among these, there were board games. The history behind the word and behind the game(s) itself is worth mentioning.

In Anglo-Saxon culture, *tafl* games included board games in general, it was not used to denotate a specific game. However, in Scandinavian culture it referred to a specific game, named *hnefatafl* and, considering Uhtred's description of *tafl*, it looks like this is the game in question: "He had summoned me to his hall where I found him bent over a tall board. He was playing against Beocca, who had the larger set of pieces. It seems a simple game, *tafl*, where one player has a king and a dozen other pieces, and the other has double the pieces, but no king, and then you move the pieces about the chequered board until one or other player has all his wooden pieces surrounded."[146]

There are two reasons why I believe this is the game Uhtred is talking about. First of all, being a Scandinavian game, it would be very possible that it was brought in England during the Viking age by Norse people. The second reason is in the name itself, which, apart from *tafl* deriving from the Latin TABULA, it is also formed by *hnefi* (the etymology of which is unknown), meaning 'fist'. Thus, it may be reasonable to think that this term refers to the central king-piece, also mentioned by Uhtred.

Shieling: another term appearing in the novel is *shieling*, and it is a curios choice on the part of the author. Uhtred, after marrying Mildrith, a marriage arranged by King Alfred, travels a lot to reach his wife's dwelling. It was in a place called Oxton, and it "was a *shieling*, as the Danes would say, a farmstead, and the house had a thatch so overgrown with moss and grass that it looked like an earth mound."[147] This suggests it is a Scandinavian term. After some research, I discovered that it comes from the Old

[146] Cornwell, *The Pale Horseman*, 280.
[147] Cornwell, *The Last Kingdom*, 266.

Norse *skjól*[148] 'shelter', which in turn derives from the Proto-Germanic *skeulan[149] with the meaning of 'shelter, cover', and, in later evolutions of the term 'hiding place'.

According to the Merriam-Webster online dictionary, the first known use of the word *shieling* dates to 1568, with the meaning of 'a mountain hut used as a shelter by shepherds'[150]. Perhaps this is the intended meaning in Uhtred's mind, for he does not look very enthusiastic about his new home. In any case, 1568 is a very late attestation, if compared to the age Cornwell is recreating through his writing. One could argue that is an anachronistic use of a more recent term.

Hides: this is another word from the same chapter as the previous one, where Uhtred is always referring to his wife's possessions, which now belong to him: "her twelve *hides* of land, that were now mine, lay in the hills above the river Uisc's sea reach, in a place called Oxton"[151]. Hide was an English unit of land measurement. *Hide* derives from Old English word *hiwan*, which derives from the Common Germanic *xīwan[152] with meaning including 'master of the family' and 'members of a household'. Indeed, *hide* refers to the amount of land needed to support a household. Moreover, it was not a fixed unit of measurement, like the acre, for it was dependant on the quality and richness of the ground. Later, it became a unit of tax assessment and it also involved public obligations.

Bæcbord and steorbord: the last words from this group are words from the nautical world, in fact they both refer to distinct parts of a ship. When Uhtred serves King Alfred, at a certain point he is assigned to the fleet, where the commander makes him "an oarsman, one of the sixteen on the *bæcbord*, which is the left-hand side of the ship as you look forward. The other side is the *steorbord*, for it is on that side that the steering oar is rigged."[153] *Bæcbord* and *steorbord* mean exactly that: the former refers to the left side of the ship, whilst the latter to the right side.

[148] Richard Cleasby, Guðbrandur Vigfússon, *A Concise Dictionary of Old Icelandic*, 378.
[149] Orel, *Germanic Etymology*, 339.
[150] https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/shieling
[151] Cornwell, *The Last Kingdom*, 266.
[152] Orel, *Germanic Etymology*, 173.
[153] Cornwell, *The Last Kingdom*, 224.

Both words are constituted by terms deriving from Common Germanic. As for *bæcbord*, it is the resulting word from the Old English version of *bakan[154], 'back', and *burdan[155], 'board'. Whereas, in *steorbord*, 'steor' comes from the Proto-West Germanic *steurubord, originated from the Proto-Germanic *steur(j)an[156], which in fact gave in Old English *steór*, with the meaning of 'guidance, direction'.

3.4 Words referring to people and offensive terms

This series of words include terms employed to characterize people, be it positively, neutrally, or negatively, as it is the case for the last words. As the title of this section suggests, those are offensive words. The first ones are more related to myth and literature.

Ælfcynn: Uhtred describes his queen Iseult with these words: "She was thin, so thin that she looked like an *ælfcynn*, the elf-kind, but she was happy."[157] *Ælfcynn* is a word constituted by *ælf* and *cynn*. According to Bosworth-Toller, *ælf-cynn* means 'the elf-kind, the race of elves, elfin race'[158]. The Common Germanic word behind for elf is *albaz[159]. *Cynn* stands for the Present-Day English 'kin', which can refer both to family and species, or race. It derives from the Proto-Germanic *kunjan,[160] which signifies 'clan, tribe, race, generation', or more generally 'kind'. Therefore, ælfcynn means 'elf-kind', belonging to the elf species.

Aglæcwif: here is another word used to refer to Iseult. During their encampment at the Somerset marshes, Æthelflæd asks Uhtred whether Iseult is an *aglæcwif*, as her mother Ælswith told her: "'Mama says Iseult is an *aglæcwif*.' She stumbled over the word, then grinned in triumph because she had managed to say it. I said nothing. An *aglæcwif* was a fiend, a monster."[161] Indeed, the meaning given by Bosworth-Toller for

[154] Orel, *Germanic Etymology*, 33.
[155] Ibid., 63.
[156] Ibid., 377.
[157] Cornwell, *The Pale Horseman*, 92.
[158] Bosworth, Toller, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary Online*: https://bosworthtoller.com/602.
[159] Orel, *Germanic Etymology*, 13.
[160] Ibid., 224.
[161] Cornwell, *The Pale Horseman*, 279.

aglæca is 'a miserable being, wretch, miscreant, monster, fierce combatant'[162]. The etymology behind *aglæca* is still disputed, it is a difficult word. Fortunately, we know a bit more about the second part of the word. The Old English *wif* derives from the Proto-Germanic *wībaz[163], and it means 'woman', or 'wife'. Therefore, *aglæcwif* stands for 'terrible woman'.

Aglæca is a word belonging to the realm of poetry, especially when it comes to depict monsters and devilish creatures. It is found, for instance, in *Beowulf*, at the verse 433: "þæt se æglæca"[164], 'that the monster'. It is quite interesting to note that, recently, further studies have been made on this word. To name one, in her modern translation of *Beowulf*, author and editor Maria Dahvana Headley argues that "*aglæc-wif* is merely the feminine form of *aglæca*, which Klaeber defines as "hero" when applied to Beowulf, and "monster, demon, fiend" when referencing Grendel, his mother, and the dragon. *Aglæca* is used elsewhere in early English to refer both to Sigemund and to the Venerable Bede, and in those contexts, it's likelier to mean something akin to "formidable"[165]. Headley continues: "Grendel's mother is referred to in the poem as "*ides*, *aglæcwif*," which means, given this logic, "formidable noblewoman"[166]. Always following this logic, one could assert that Iseult too could be considered a formidable woman. She was solitary and she was a sorceress, she did not need anyone. As Headley notes, "my own experiences as a woman tell me it's very possible to be mistaken for monstruous when one is only doing as men do: providing for and defending oneself. […] many women have been, over the centuries, mistaken for supernatural creatures simply because they were alone and capable"[167]. Apparently, this is the reason why she has translated Grendel's mother as "warrior-woman".

Ætheling: another Old English word is *ætheling*, and it indicates someone belonging to the royal family, who could possibly succeed the King. In *The Last Kingdom*, Uhtred's use of the term is related to Alfred's nephew, Æthelwold (who will always reclaim his title, during Alfred's reign). Uhtred claims that King Æthelred "left an heir, an *ætheling*, Æthelwold. He was Prince Æthelwold, eldest son of Æthelred, but

[162] Bosworth, Toller, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary Online*: https://bosworthtoller.com/1252.
[163] Orel, *Germanic Etymology*, 464.
[164] Seamus Heaney, *Beowulf: A New Verse Translation*, 31.
[165] Maria Dahvana Headley, "Introduction" to *Beowulf: A New Translation*, XXV.
[166] Ibid.
[167] Ibid., XXVII-XXVIII.

he was not old enough to be his own master for, like me, he was only fourteen, yet even so some men proclaimed his right to be named the King of Wessex, but Alfred had far more powerful friends and he deployed the legend of the pope having invested him as the future king."[168]

This is a compound word resulting from the combination of two words. One is *æþele*, or *aethele*, or it is the prefix *æðel-*, all of which mean 'noble' and come from Common Germanic *aþal(j)az[169], meaning 'noble, eminent, distinguished', or 'of good origin'. The other word is the suffix *-ing*, which expresses belonging, which in fact is also a patronymic suffix. In this case, *ætheling* means 'someone of noble origin'. The suffix should derive from Proto-Germanic as well, but since I was not able to retrace it properly, I will not delve into its analysis.

Endwerc: this is another Anglo-Saxon compound word, used as an insult. Although, interestingly, Cornwall uses it also to refer to a more concrete, or literal meaning. Uhtred explains to the reader how his Saxon friend Leofric addresses to him: "'Show me your hands,' Leofric ordered. I did and he sneered. 'You'll have blisters soon, earsling." That was his favorite word, earsling. It means "arseling." That was me, though sometimes he called me *Endwerc,* which means a pain in the arse"[170]. *Endwerc* is indeed a pain in the buttocks, but in this case the term is used in its figurative meaning. The equivalent of the vulgar Present-Day English 'pain in the ass', which is referred to someone or something that causes discomfort (usually, an annoying person).

The history of this word is quite interesting to retrace. The Old English *ende* comes from the Proto-Germanic *anđjaz, the derived noun from the verb *anđjōjanan 'to end'[171]. Whereas *werc* is an alternative form of *weorc*, which means 'labor', 'creation', or 'deed'. It derives from the Common Germanic *werkan[172], 'work'. Oddly, the derived form *werkjanan[173] means not only 'to work', but also 'to pain'. This should be at the origin of *werc* in this word.

Here, instead, *endwerc*'s literal meaning is pointed out by Uhtred, referring to King Alfred's illness: "he was prone to bouts of sudden griping agony. That, he had told

[168] Cornwell, *The Last Kingdom*, 170.
[169] Orel, *Germanic Etymology*, 27.
[170] Ibid., 224.
[171] Ibid., 18.
[172] Ibid., 456.
[173] Ibid., 457.

me, was better than his first illness, which had been an affliction of ficus, which is a real *endwerc*, so painful and bloody that at times he had been unable to sit, and sometimes that ficus came back, but most of the time he suffered from the pains in his belly."[174]

Earsling: this is another offensive word, always used by Leofric referring to Uhtred: "'There are times,' Leofric grumbled, 'when you are an *earsling*.' An *earsling* was something that had dropped out of a creature's backside and was one of Leofric's favourite insults. We were friends."[175] The Proto-Germanic *arsaz[176], which means 'behind, backside', has given the Old English *ears* as it is in *earsling*. We are in front of another compound word, formed by *ears*, related to the back, and the suffix *-ling*, which normally indicates a direction. In this case, the literal meaning is 'backwards'. Therefore, not having a specific meaning, probably the author decided to give his own meaning, without straying to much from the reference to the back.

Scrætte: the insult *scrætte* is addressed this time to Brida, Uhtred's first girlfriend, who was born Saxon and raised as a Dane, like Uhtred. The one who insults her is Alfred's daughter, Æthelflæd, when she is only a child: "She gave Brida a very sour look and muttered, '*Scrætte*!' That means prostitute and Brida pretended not to have heard, as did Alfred."[177] The meaning given by Uhtred is accurate, for it means 'an adulteress, a harlot'[178]. As for its origin, it is extremely difficult to retrace it with precision. According to Wiktionary, it comes from the Common Germanic *skrattuz[179]. In my opinion, it is not possible, because another Proto-Germanic word with a similar structure (*skrattōn[180]) gave words with different meaning in other languages, meaning 'wizard', 'warlock', 'goblin', 'pixie', or 'monster'. Or I may be wrong, perhaps *skrattōn and *skrattuz are two alternative versions of the same word. In any case, this does not offer an explanation as to why it gave birth to two distinct meanings. I could speculate that there might be a link between sexually promiscuous women and witches, or monsters. Something similar to what I argued about the word *aglæcwif*.

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[174] Cornwell, *The Last Kingdom*, 256.
[175] Cornwell, *The Pale Horseman*, 4.
[176] Orel, *Germanic Etymology*, 25.
[177] Ibid., 221.
[178] Bosworth, Toller, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary Online*: https://bosworthtoller.com/27002.
[179] https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/Reconstruction:Proto-Germanic/skrattuz
[180] Orel, *Germanic Etymology*, 343.

3.5 War related words and boats' names

Skjaldborg: this is a term from Old Norse, that appears quite often throughout the series, every time there is a battle. This is an example from *The Pale Horseman*:

> 'Forward!' Leofric shouted again, and this time Osric and his commanders took up the shout and the men of Wiltunscir shuffled a few paces forward and the Danish shields clattered into the wall and locked together and the sight of that skjaldborg checked the advance. That is what the Danes call their shield wall, the skjaldborg or shield fort. The Danes roared mockery, and two of their younger warriors strutted out of their line to taunt us and invite a duel. 'Stay in the wall!' Leofric roared.[181]

From a dictionary of Old Icelandic, *skjald-borg* has the following meaning: 'wall (rampart) of shields, an old battle-array'[182]. The corresponding word in Old English is *scieldweall*, or *bordweall*. Probably the common root derived from Proto-Germanic is *skelduz[183] and the second part of the word has a different derivation, for *-weall* comes from Latin *vallum*, while *-borg* comes from the Common Germanic *burgz[184], meaning 'hillock, wall, castle, city, fortified place'.

What this tactic involves is that the soldiers stand shoulder to shoulder, holding their shields, so that all the shields form a wall under which the soldiers can be sheltered. This formation has ancient roots, we know for sure that it was employed in England, when the Saxons had to face the Danes. For the Saxon army was mainly made up of volunteers, therefore people with zero to no war experience, and the shield-wall was their best chance to survive against the Danes.

Furthermore, this word is also mentioned in Beowulf, written *scild-weall*[185].

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[181] Cornwell, *The Pale Horseman*, 375.
[182] Richard Cleasby, Guðbrandur Vigfússon, *A Concise Dictionary of Old Icelandic*, 377.
[183] Vladimir Orel, *A Handbook of Germanic Etymology*, 337.
[184] Ibid., 63.
[185] *Beowulf*, ed. and transl. by Ludovica Koch, 262.

Fyrd: I decided to insert this word right after *skjaldborg*, because the Saxon army formed by peasants and common people was named *fyrd*, as Ravn points out in the novel:

> 'They call their army the *fyrd*,' he explained, forgetting for a moment that I was English, 'and every able man is supposed to serve in the *fyrd*, but when the harvest ripens they fear hunger in the winter so they go home to cut their rye and barley.'
>
> 'Which we then take?'
>
> He laughed. 'You're learning, Uhtred.'[186]

Of course, Ravn uses this word as a pejorative term, to evidence the difference between Saxons, not used to war, and the Danes, who cannot stand too long periods of peace, they love war in a certain way, and they are ferocious warriors. The Old English *fyrd* means 'an army, the military array of the whole country'[187]. The dictionary goes on explaining that: "to take part in the *fyrd* was the general duty of every freeman"[188]. This implies their being completely unprepared for war. It comes from Common Germanic *farđiz[189] with the meaning of 'journey', 'way', 'army', or 'military expedition'.

Despite their military inferiority in comparison to the Danes, it is important to note that the Viking invasions are exactly what gave the Saxons the impetus to improve. And they did improve, mainly thanks to King Alfred's defensive measures.

As for the ships' names, I will briefly go through an analysis of their construction. First of all, the names are: *Heahengel*, *Ceruphin*, *Cristenlic*, *Apostol*, *Eftwyrd*, and *Fyrdraca*. The only term that does not require too many explanations is *Apostol*, it simply means 'apostle' and it has roots from the Ancient Greek.

Uhtred claims, after being sent to King Alfred's fleet, that he was "given to *Heahengel*"[190], after which he sarcastically adds: "so help me, that was the ship's name. It means Archangel"[191]. At this point, Uhtred's critical attitude towards the Saxons should not be a novelty. In point of fact, he observes: "I spoke harshly, thinking we

[186] Cornwell, *The Last Kingdom*, 85.
[187] Bosworth, Toller, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary Online*: https://bosworthtoller.com/12891.
[188] Ibid.
[189] Orel, *Germanic Etymology*, 93.
[190] Cornwell, *The Last Kingdom*, 223.
[191] Ibid.

would love our ships more if they had beasts on their prows and had proper names like Blood-Spiller, Sea-Wolf, or Widow-Maker. Instead the Heahengel led the Ceruphin and Cristenlic through the tangled waters, and behind us were the *Apostol* and the *Eftwyrd*, which meant Judgment Day and was probably the best named of our fleet"[192].

Heahengel is a compound word, formed by *heah* and *engel*. *Heah* derives from Proto-Germanic *hauhaz[193] with the meaning of 'high'. *Engel* derives instead from Latin *angelus*, a word borrowed by Proto-West Germanic. The Latin word derives in turn from the Ancient Greek ἄγγελος (*ángelos*). Cornwell's translation 'archangel' is confirmed also by Bosworth-Toller[194].

Uhtred mentions the other ships in the following passage: "We were divided into four flotillas, and Leofric commanded *Heahengel*, *Ceruphin*, and *Cristenlic*, which meant Archangel, Cherubim, and Christian. Alfred had chosen the names."[195]. *Ceruphin* is a curious word, for it has been difficult finding attestations of it, and the one I found is not precise in the spelling. The only poem in Old English where this word shows up is *Andreas*, the first poem in the Vercelli Book. It tells the story of St. Andrew the Apostle, where the saint is portrayed as a powerful warrior. Therefore, the author departs from the original story, which deals mainly with religious matters. In any case, *ceruphin* is located at verse 719 of the poem: "*Cheruphim et Seraphim*"[196]. It is a clear reference to the two orders of angels in the celestial hierarchy: cherubims and seraphims. But from a linguistical point of view, defining the etymology is not easy. According to Oxford Languages and Google[197], the Old English *cherubin* derives from Hebrew *kĕrūḇ*, plural *kĕrūḇīm*. Furthermore, there is also an explanation as to why these angels are represented like chubby children. The Hebrew singular form represents the Aramaic *kĕ-raḇyā*, which means 'like a child'.

Cristenlic is easier to identify, for it is the compound word constituted by *cristen* and *lic*. *Cristen*[198] is the Old English adjective for 'Christian' and it derives from Latin *christianus*. The suffix *-lic* is one of the most common to form adjectives in Old

[192] Ibid., 236.
[193] Orel, *Germanic Etymology*, 166.
[194] Bosworth, Toller, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary Online*: https://bosworthtoller.com/18328.
[195] Cornwell, *The Last Kingdom*, 227.
[196] *The Vercelli Book: The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records, A Collective Edition, Vol. 2*., ed. by George Philip Krapp, 23.
[197] https://languages.oup.com/google-dictionary-en/
[198] Bosworth, Toller, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary Online*: https://bosworthtoller.com/6719.

English. It means 'body', or 'form'. It derives from Proto-Germanic *līkaz[199], with the sense of 'similar', 'alike', 'like', or 'same'. Thus, it probably is the precursor to the Present-Day English -like.

Eftwyrd is another compound word, formed by *eft* and *wyrd*, the latter already discussed in this paper. *Eftwyrd* is defined as 'future fate, day of judgment'[200]. *Wyrd* is related to fate and destiny. *Eft* is an adverb which means 'again', or 'afterwards'. It presumably originates from Common Germanic *aftē, with the sense of 'behind', 'again', 'later', 'afterwards', 'after'. 'Future fate' is the most literal and accurate translation, and perhaps the meaning 'day of judgement' is more figurative and implies a certain resignation to fate.

3.6 Words invented by the author

In this last section of the chapter, there are only three words, one of which is related to the series of words regarding the ships. These are words I never found attestations of anywhere. Therefore, I attempted to identify the terms Cornwell employed during his writing process.

The last ship I mentioned previously, in the last section, is introduced in the second novel as a substitute for *Eftwyrd*, one of King Alfred's boats. After Uhtred kills Ubba Lohtbrokson, Alfred proves to be ungrateful towards his warrior. As a consequence, tired of being used and treated poorly by the King, Uhtred decides to go viking with a group of warriors willing to follow him. Here, Uhtred explains the reader how they remodelled and sculpted the ship in a viking way:

> The creature at the stern, the smaller of the two, was a gape mouthed serpent, probably intended to represent Corpse-Ripper, the monster that tore at the dead in the Danish underworld, while the beast we placed at the bow was a dragon's head, though it was so blackened and disfigured by fire that it looked more like a horse's head. We dug into the scorched eyes until we found unburned wood, and did the same with the open mouth and when we were finished the thing looked dramatic and fierce.
>
> 'Looks like a *fyrdraca* now,' Leofric said happily. A fire-dragon.[201]

[199] Orel, *Germanic Etymology*, 247-248.
[200] Bosworth, Toller, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary Online*: https://bosworthtoller.com/9082.
[201] Cornwell, *The Pale Horseman*, 46-47.

Fyrdraca is certainly a compound word, although what is not certain is whether Cornwell invented it, or if he has found it somewhere in the books he had read. There are no attestations of it, therefore I must assume (until proven otherwise) it is a Cornwell's creation. The two words at its base should be *fyr* and *draca*. *Fyr* means 'a fire, hearth'[202] and has its origin from Proto-Germanic *fōr[203], which stands for 'fire'. *Draca* probably arrived in English through the Latin *draco*, which derived from Ancient Greek δράκων, meaning "serpent, dragon". Cornwell has made a curious decision in inventing a term for 'fire-dragon', for the most used Old English word to indicate a dragon was *wyrm*[204], from Common Germanic *wurmaz[205]. Perhaps **fyrwyrm* does not sound frightening enough.

Dwolgods: this is the term King Alfred and the Saxons use to refer to Norse gods. Uhtred recounts: "I […] wondered, for the thousandth time, why I was among Christians who believed I was an offence to their god. They called my gods *dwolgods*, which meant false gods, so that made me Uhtredarwe, living with an aglaecwif and worshipping *dwolgods*."[206] According to the author, the compound *dwolgods* stands for 'false gods'. If I am not mistaken, the author derived *dwol* from the Old English adjective *dwol-líc*, where there is the suffix *-lic*, mentioned earlier. It means 'foolish, erring, heretical'[207]. *God* is a Germanic term, coming from Proto-Germanic *guđ(z)[208]. The translation is 'heretical gods'. There is an issue with *gods*: the plural form in Old English should be *godas*. Hence, in this case, Cornwell is inventing a word that should mirror the language spoken in ninth century England, yet he chooses to modernize it. I would like to point out that the plural is something he modernizes quite often. For instance, he does the same for the *ceorl*: instead of *ceorlas*, he opts for *cerols*. The same goes for *thegn*, which should be *thegnas*. To be precise, if he were to respect the Old English spelling, he should have rendered this one with the <þ>. Thence *þegn*, *þegnas*.

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[202] Bosworth, Toller, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary Online*: https://bosworthtoller.com/12877.
[203] I was not able to find the entry in Orel's *Germanic Etymology*. I did manage to find it on Wiktionary which, far from being accurate as other sources, is nevertheless useful, when no other options are available. https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/Reconstruction:Proto-Germanic/f%C5%8Dr
[204] Bosworth, Toller, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary Online*: https://bosworthtoller.com/36975.
[205] Orel, *Germanic Etymology*, 476.
[206] Cornwell, *The Pale Horseman*, 279-280.
[207] Bosworth, Toller, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary Online*: https://bosworthtoller.com/8169.
[208] Orel, *Germanic Etymology*, 145.

Uhtred*ærwe*: this last term is a very inventive compound word, where Uhtred's name has been used too. It appears in this extract, where he expresses how he feels in Wessex:

> "I was an outsider. I spoke a different English. The men of Wessex were tied by family, and I came from the strange north and folk believed I was a pagan, and they called me a murderer because of Oswald's death, and sometimes, when I rode about the estate, men would make the sign of the cross to avert the evil they saw in me. They called me Uhtred*ærwe*, which means Uhtred the Wicked, and I was not unhappy with the insult, but Mildrith was."[209]

Apparently, Uhtred*ærwe* means 'Uhtred the Wicked'. The only Old English term containing *ærwe* I found was *ge-ærwe*, which indeed means 'perverse, wicked'[210]. I wanted to discover more about the prefix *ge-* and, according to the Bosworth-Toller, it means 'with' and it 'often gives a collective sense to nouns to which it is prefixed'[211]. Therefore, it could signify 'with wickedness', or the adjective 'wicked' alluding to a multitude of people. Maybe this is the reason why Cornwell removed the prefix and replaced it with a proper name, to refer to an individual.

[209] Cornwell, *The Pale Horseman*, 33.
[210] Bosworth, Toller, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary Online*: https://bosworthtoller.com/13380.
[211] Ibid., https://bosworthtoller.com/13353.

Conclusions

I have argued throughout this paper that Cornwell's literary works fall within the neomedievalistic approach of reimagining the Middle Ages. In particular, I have demonstrated the immersive quality of his writing, permeated with cultural and linguistical references, as well as his idealization of a heroic past. In order to understand the extent to which he departs from historical truth, I have analysed the events that actually happened and how they have been transposed into the work of fiction. This analysis served to demonstrate that any neomedievalistic interpretation of an event, or of an era, involves a certain amount of knowledge. Any change, thus, stems from an informed perspective. I have also examined the main character from a multifaceted perspective, ranging from history to storytelling, and also related to the Germanic culture.

Another focal point of the thesis was to bridge the gap between popular culture and the academy, which has increased dramatically in the last years. I have come to the conclusion that the best solution is to work together, in order to create an appealing neomedieval product without sacrificing historical accuracy.

Toward the end, the center of attention shifted towards a narrower field of research, that of philology, in this case with a special interest in Old English. I have argued that language is a great tool to recreate an era as authentic as possible. I have shown how Cornwell has chosen or invented words, the majority of which being everyday use words, terms referring to people, and terms belonging to the warfare world. I have discovered that many words and expressions are related to the Germanic culture, and to the Old English literature.

I explored how medievalist KellyAnn Fitzpatrick analysed neomedievalistic instances in her study, therefore taking inspiration to conduct my own study of a neomedievalistic instance, the *Saxon Stories*. It is a saga narrating how England came to into existence, in a time where Vikings were threating its stability. The figure of King Alfred has been paramount in containing their continuous attacks. As Cornwell himself argues in one his historical notes, "Alfred was responsible for saving Wessex and, ultimately, English society from the Danish assaults"[212].

Furthermore, this paper wants to demonstrate the Scandinavian impact on ninth century England. Apart from bringing destruction and instilling fear, the Danes have also brought their culture, their traditions, their language with them. It is practically impossible to argue that they did not influence the English peoples. They did that especially after the establishment of the Danelaw, where there have never been fixed borders. As a perfect representation of this mingling stands Uhtred, born Saxon and raised as a Dane. Therefore, an instance where the invented element, his Danish upbringing, becomes "more medieval than the medieval"[213].

[212] Bernard Cornwell, "Historical Note" to *The Last Kingdom*, 331.
[213] Brent and Kevin Moberly, "Neomedievalism, Hyperrealism, and Simulation," *Studies in Medievalism* XIX (2011), 15.

Riassunto

The Last Kingdom è una celebre serie TV, realizzata dapprima dalla BBC, e successivamente anche da Netflix. Si tratta in realtà di un adattamento televisivo delle *Storie dei Re Sassoni*, una saga scritta da Bernard Cornwell, autore che si inserisce nella narrativa storico-avventurosa. Il suo interesse principale è tuttavia per la storia, non a caso è soprattutto conosciuto per i romanzi storici. *The Last Kingdom,* in italiano *L'ultimo re*, narra la storia di un guerriero, nato sassone e cresciuto tra i danesi, Uhtred di Bebbanburg. Il titolo fa riferimento all'ultimo regno, ovvero il Wessex, ultimo baluardo contro le invasioni vichinghe. Il titolo in italiano invece si focalizza molto di più sulla figura di Re Alfred, la cui azione in effetti si è rivelata fondamentale per porre fine ai continui attacchi da parte dei danesi. In questo filone narrativo, Uhtred è il nodo principale, poiché la sua storia si intreccia a quella dell'Inghilterra. Egli, essendo cresciuto tra i vichinghi e conoscendo molto bene le loro tattiche di guerra, offre il suo aiuto al Re, in cambio di terre e ricchezze. Il suo aiuto si rivela molto spesso decisivo.

La saga è ambientata nel IX secolo. A quei tempi non esisteva quello che poi diventerà l'*Englaland* (in inglese antico, 'terra degli Angli'). Cornwell ha deciso di scrivere questa storia perché si è accorto che erano in troppo pochi coloro a conoscenza della storia d'Inghilterra e, più nello specifico, di come si è formata l'entità politica del IX secolo, a partire dall'eptarchia precedente. L'obiettivo di Alfred è quello di unificare tutti i regni esistenti sotto un unico re. Il suo impegno come sovrano è capillare: attraversa la politica, la cultura, la Chiesa, la difesa contro le invasioni. È evidente, cioè, che il suo è un autentico desiderio di riformare l'Inghilterra, di migliorarla sotto ogni punto di vista. Cornwell riesce a intessere la sua trama in questo contesto anglosassone, che rievoca attraverso la storia e anche attraverso elementi culturali e linguistici. Ed è qui che è nato il mio interesse di ricerca per questi libri. Da appassionata di filologia, ammetto di essere stata attratta dalle parole scritte con la grafia dell'inglese antico. Questo è stato reso anche visivamente nella serie TV, perché le didascalie dei toponimi

recano la grafia antica che, dopo qualche secondo, lascia spazio alla didascalia con il corrispettivo moderno.

A mio avviso, Cornwell rientra in una corrente di ricerca che inizia ad affermarsi sempre più in ambito accademico, ovvero la neomedievalistica. La neomedievalistica nasce come continuazione del medievalismo; si potrebbe affermare che si tratta solo un altro modo di fare medievalismo. Il medievalismo si occupa del processo di riscrittura del Medioevo. Per analizzare il lavoro di Cornwell, ho preso ispirazione dagli studi della medievista KellyAnn Fitzpatrick, la quale, in *Neomedievalism, Popular Culture, and the Academy*, pone le basi per una metodologia neomedievalistica, fornendo in seguito anche alcuni esempi di messa in pratica di tale approccio. Sostiene che definire in modo preciso medievalismo e neomedievalismo non è affatto facile, dal momento che già di per sé il Medioevo è un concetto costruito[214]. I

La Fitzpatrick si concentra su alcuni esempi calzanti per dimostrare come opera il neomedievalismo e spesso l'analisi ruota attorno ad un tema centrale, come per esempio gli studi di genere in *La Bella Addormentata nel Bosco*, in *Beowulf* e in *Maleficent* a confronto[215]. L'obiettivo della mia tesi è stato seguire il suo modello di analisi e fare qualcosa di analogo per *The Last Kingdom*, avendo come tema centrale l'accuratezza storica e filologica e ponendomi il quesito di cosa renda neomedievalista Cornwell. La risposta mi è giunta nella stesura del secondo capitolo, il quale mi ha permesso di capire che il principale elemento caratterizzante del neomedievalismo è la capacità di parlare ad un pubblico moderno, indipendentemente dall'epoca rappresentata. Cornwell ci riesce proprio attraverso il protagonista dei suoi scritti, assieme alla sua attenzione per i dettagli culturali e linguistici. Altro elemento da prendere in considerazione per questa tesi di ricerca è il vantaggio di poter contattare l'autore oppure di reperire informazioni con estrema facilità, grazie alle piattaforme social attraverso le quali comunica con i lettori. Mi è stato molto utile per farmi un'idea delle fonti, in particolare quelle in inglese antico, che presumibilmente ha letto, o che quantomeno conosce.

[214] KellyAnn Fitzpatrick, *Neomedievalism*, 14.
[215] Ibid., 73.

Il primo capitolo si concentra sul periodo in cui l'opera è ambientata, quello dell'Inghilterra quando era solo una visione nella mente di Re Alfred. Trattando soprattutto di storia, ho analizzato due modi diversi di affrontare il Medioevo in fase di riscrittura, ovvero quello di William Morris e quello di Walter Scott. Il primo più escapistico, il secondo più idealizzante. Dopo aver approfondito i principali eventi storici che hanno luogo in *The Last Kingdom*, sono giunta alla conclusione che lo scrittore svolge un'operazione che si situa a metà strada: la sua opera è abbastanza immersiva da permettere al lettore di staccare dalla realtà e perdersi nei meandri dell'immaginazione, ma al tempo stesso idealizza il Medioevo come periodo in cui la società funziona perfettamente, dove il re pensa solo al bene dei propri sudditi, dove il bene comune supera quello individuale. Tanto Uhtred quanto Alfred sono oggetto di questa idealizzazione.

Nel secondo capitolo, il focus è su Uhtred come esempio calzante del neomedievalismo all'opera. Dopo una prima analisi del personaggio, esaminato in dicotomia con la figura di Re Alfred, ho illustrato chi si cela dietro al personaggio fittizio. Un certo Uhtred l'Ardito, il quale condivide innumerevoli tratti con il protagonista di *The Last Kingdom*, ma che per alcuni se ne allontana considerevolmente. La differenza più importante è nel periodo storico, perché Uhtred l'Ardito appartiene al secolo successivo agli eventi narrati da Cornwell. Successivamente, mi sono soffermata sulla ricerca dell'elemento neomedievalistico in Uhtred come crocevia tra veridicità storica e caratterizzazione fittizia. L'elemento inventato, paradossalmente, si rivela essere quello determinante nel definire il neomedievalismo, in quanto Uhtred, per poter comunicare con un pubblico contemporaneo, deve giocoforza assumere dei tratti appartenenti alla modernità. Lo strumento utilizzato da Cornwell è il conflitto interiore, in questo caso nato dall'impossibilità per Uhtred di definire la sua identità. In effetti, non si sentirà mai pienamente danese, né mai pienamente sassone. Il conflitto interiore permette al lettore o spettatore di immedesimarsi nel personaggio e fa scaturire l'intenzione di proseguire con la storia. Se non fosse per il protagonista, si tratterebbe di un documentario. Uhtred è inoltre un perfetto rappresentate dell'Inghilterra del IX secolo, proprio perché fonde nella sua persona più identità. In seguito, considero l'ipotesi che Uhtred rientri nella

figura dell'eroe archetipico, mettendolo a confronto con un altro eroe archetipico, Aragorn *de Il Signore degli Anelli*. È emerso che, pur con le dovute differenze, nonostante i contesti estremamente differenti, questi due personaggi presentano non poche similitudini, che Day individua come *patterns of life*[216]. Infine, ho approfondito il concetto di *wyrd*, tipico della cultura anglosassone, che funziona da leitmotiv per tutta la serie e serve a tratteggiare ulteriormente Uhtred come personaggio.

Il terzo capitolo è incentrato sullo studio filologico dei termini di derivazione germanica impiegati da Cornwell nelle sue opere. Lo scopo di questo capitolo è sia quello di determinare l'accuratezza delle parole, sia quello di inquadrare l'elemento linguistico come parte del processo di riscrittura neomedievalistica. Perché storia, cultura e lingua sono fondamentalmente inscindibili. La filologia rappresenta l'esempio più lampante di questa verità. Definisce ed è definita da altre discipline, è contenente e contenitore. Così come il neomedievalismo è una caleidoscopica fusione di più discipline.

Vista la complessità del neomedievalismo come corrente di ricerca, ci si potrebbe focalizzare su molti altri aspetti relativi a *The Last Kingdom*, come per esempio lo studio della colonna sonora, frutto del lavoro di Eivør e John Lunn, come ulteriore mezzo per rappresentare l'Inghilterra del IX secolo. In effetti, i testi sono stati scritti in faroese e richiamano qualcosa di antico e primigenio, così come la musica stessa. Per un filologo, sarebbero un interessante oggetto di studio proprio i testi delle canzoni. Ad ogni modo, *The Last Kingdom* si presta a numerosi spunti di ricerca, proprio grazie al suo esistere in un contesto transmediale.

[216] David Day, *The Ring Legends of Tolkien*, 96.

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