
How to cite this article:

CUETO ASÍN, E., GEORGE, D. R. Jr.

"*Hispania, la leyenda*: The Myth of
Viriatius' Struggle Transfigured for
Television",

*Communication&Society/Comunicación y
Sociedad*, Vol. 26, n.3, 2013, pp. 117-129.

Hispania, la leyenda: The Myth of Viriatius' Struggle Transfigured for Television

Hispania, la leyenda: la lucha de Viriato como mito transfigurado para la televisión

ELENA CUETO ASÍN, DAVID R. GEORGE, JR.

ecueto@bowdoin.edu, dgeorge@bates.edu.

Elena Cueto Asín. Profesora de literatura y cine. Bowdoin College, Department of Romance Languages. 04011 Brunswick.

David R. George, Jr. Profesor de lengua, literatura y cine. Bates College. Department of Spanish. 04240 Lewiston.

Submitted: March 13, 2013

Approved: April 19, 2013

ABSTRACT: "*Hispania, la leyenda*" is the first Spanish attempt to represent on screen the Roman occupation of the Iberian Peninsula and the resistance led by Viriatius. This paper analyzes the TV series in terms of two key features that define it as a historical recreation that repackages the foundational myth as an adventure story with patriotic overtones: 1) the appropriation of a key figure in Portuguese culture to build a notion of Hispanic identity; and 2) the analogy with the Napoleonic occupation and War of Independence, amply evoked in the film and television of the dictatorship and early democracy as well as in the productions made for the recent bicentennial commemorations.

RESUMEN: *Hispania, la leyenda constituye el primer intento español de llevar a la pantalla la ocupación romana de la Península Ibérica y la resistencia liderada por Viriato. Nuestro trabajo analiza la serie televisiva atendiendo a dos elementos que la determinan como proyecto de recreación histórica, finalmente fallido, que aprovecha el mito fundacional en una estructura de ficción de aventuras con tintes patrióticos: 1) la apropiación de una figura con mayor raigambre en la cultura portuguesa para, eludiendo este factor, elaborar una idea de identidad de lo hispano; y 2) la analogía con la ocupación napoleónica y Guerra de la Independencia, que sí cuentan con tradición en el cine y la televisión tanto de la dictadura como de la era constitucional, y cuyo segundo centenario se conmemora en los mismos años de producción del programa.*

Keywords: Hispania, Television, Viriatus, history, myth.

Palabras clave: Hispania, televisión, Viriato, historia, mito.

1. Introduction

The historical adventure drama *Hispania, la leyenda*, which recreates Viriatus' resistance against the Romans during the conquest of the Iberian Peninsula, made its debut on Spain's TV channel Antena 3 on October 25, 2010. The nine episodes of the first season, which continued through January 2011, were watched by almost four and a half million viewers. Yet neither the second season, broadcast between May and June 2011, nor the third three-episode installment, shown in June 2012, managed to capture and sustain the attention of the viewing public. The finale of the series, set in Rome, generated a spin-off, *Imperium*, which premiered on September 5, 2012, which also enjoyed little success¹. The initial interest in the program generated by its unique historical context, action-packed plot and attractive cast, lost steam when it was extended into the second season in which a repetitive pattern of intrigues – which were not grounded in historical fact – came to overshadow the main character Viriatus and his struggle. Audiences largely ignored the three-chapter finale, even though the hero returned to the center of attention and his infamous murder was played out on screen. Here, the famous phrase “Roma no paga a traidores” (Rome does not reward traitors) was echoed in a vain attempt to ground the final scene in history and legend, but in the end it only served as a further distortion of both².

The waning interest in the series, corroborated by the sharp decline in audience share from the first episode to the last, drew attention to the contentious relationship between history and fiction that is inherent in TV dramas and films set in the past. Like the historical novel, representations of history created for the screen also engage in a balancing act, as William Guynn writes, “between the known events of history that serve to drive the plot and the

¹ The five-episode *Hispania* “spin-off” was first broadcast between September 5 and October 11, 2012; it obtained an average of 1,469,000 viewers and 9% audience share, “*Imperium* despide su primera y única temporada en Antena 3 con una media de 9,1% de share”, *forumulatv.com* 14 Oct. 2012.

² The first season averaged 4,768,000 viewers and 22.8% share; the second season, 2,795,000 and 15 % share; and the third, 2,285,000 and 13% share, which reflects a slight decline, “*Hispania* despide su tercera y última temporada con un 13% de media”, *www.forumulatv.com*, 26 Jun. 2012.

private lives of individuals, the 'holes' of history that the film-maker fills up with undocumented dialogue, imagined events, and inauthentic descriptive detail"³. The alternation between the two parallel plotlines intensifies the need to be faithful to history on both levels in order to inform and entertain viewers without deceiving them⁴. Historical accuracy, in terms of both events and detail, thus becomes the primary gauge with which audiences and critics measure the quality of TV fictions that purport to represent the past, since it enables us to distinguish them from the purely fictional costume or period dramas in which the past is merely a detail of *mise-en-scène*. Nonetheless, in the TV context the question of accuracy is problematic, since the truthfulness of historical representations depends not so much on facts themselves, as on the audiences' perception of them⁵.

Hispania, la leyenda is part of a broader cycle of historical fictions and period dramas produced for TV in Spain over the course of the past decade that began with TVE's highly successful, and long running, series *Cuéntame cómo pasó*. Santiago Gimeno notes the way in which such programming has become, "una opción viable –y rentable– para las cadenas, que han asimilado que la divulgación funciona incluso tomándose licencias" (a viable, even profitable, option for TV channels, which have taken on board the idea that you can inform the public even if you take a certain license with the facts)⁶. A certain degree of license is indeed part and parcel of the artistic endeavor of reviving the past for present consumption, and is tolerated particularly when such deviations from the truth serve a didactic function to illustrate key moments in the nation's past⁷. Julián Casanova, like many historians, is critical of historical TV fictions, but also recognizes that they are able to spark an interest in history more effectively than documentary formats⁸. Relevant to the case of *Hispania, la leyenda*, the same scholar points out the greater margin for straying off the facts enjoyed by programs that are not set in contemporary history: "cuanto más lejana es la época, es más fácil inventarse episodios sin que nadie arremeta contra ello" (the more distant the historical period, the easier it is to invent episodes that no one is going to object to)⁹.

The list of period miniseries and telefilms set in Roman times (509BC-476AD) is extensive: from the classic British *I, Claudius* (1976) to Italy's *Quo vadis* (1985), or to more recent popular hits like the British-American-Italian *Rome* (2007-2007) and *Spartacus* (2011), a whole range of themes, characters and events have been explored on the small screen¹⁰. Despite this broad handling, the Roman invasion and colonization of the Iberian Peninsula has remained strikingly absent from historical fictions and period drama produced for TV and cinema in Spain, as well as elsewhere. While the figure of Viriatus has been evoked in a vast range of literary works since the 16th century, prior to the 2011 Antena 3 series it had not been successfully shown on screen¹¹. In 1980, Films Zodiaco began production of a 13-

³ GUYNN, William, *Writing History in Film*, Routledge, London, 2006, p. 3.

⁴ Italian novelist Alessandro Manzoni explores the ethics of this dilemma in his seminal essay, *Del romanzo storico*, see MANZONI, Alessandro, *On the Historical Novel*, Trans. Sandra Bermann, University of Nebraska, Lincoln, 1984.

⁵ Cfr. GUYNN, William, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

⁶ GIMENO, Santiago, "Herodoto escribe para la pantalla", *elpais.com*, 28 Jun. 2010.

⁷ GALLO, Isabel, "Ajustar cuentas con el pasado", *elpais.com*, 12 Jan. 2012.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Antena 3 purchased the rights to *Rome*, which was previously shown on Canal+ and Cuatro, and scheduled it to be broadcast immediately following *Hispania*, cfr. "Antena 3 recupera 'Roma', la aclamada serie de Cuatro", *vertele.com*, 14 May 2011.

¹¹ Among the most important literary works in which Viriatus appears as a main character are: *Viriato trágico* (1596), an epic poem by Braz García Marcarías; the play *El mayor rival de Roma* (1759) by Luciano Francisco

episode biographical series for Televisión Española with the title *Viriato*, but after completing two episodes, shooting was halted and the contract rescinded because the Ministry of Culture's quality standards were not being met¹². The 2007 Televisió de Catalunya series, *La Via Augusta*, set in the 1st century AD, is perhaps the closest precursor for *Hispania, la leyenda*, although it deals with the period when the process of Romanization had already been consolidated¹³.

The Antena 3 series thus stands out as a unique opportunity to recreate for TV viewers the figure of Viriatus and to retell the story of his struggle against Rome. The particular reading of the hero and the events that explain his appearance proposed by *Hispania, la leyenda*, bound by a certain historical rigor, holds up well if the second part of the title is taken at face value: the inclusion of the word "legend" underscores the fictional quality of the drama as well as hinting at the nature of the primary source material used to bring the hero to life. Indeed, as Manuel Salinas de Frías points out, "El problema que presenta la figura de Viriato para un análisis histórico es que [...] ya desde la Antigüedad, el caudillo lusitano se convirtió en un personaje de leyenda" (The problem that the figure of Viriatus presents for historical analysis is that [...] ever since ancient times, the Lusitanian leader has been a legendary figure)¹⁴. The heroic figure reconstructed on screen is based largely on legend, complemented by the few facts known about his life and deeds extracted from Roman histories and corroborated by contemporary historians and archaeologists: he was born a shepherd, and was evidently an excellent political and military strategist in organizing the struggle against Rome¹⁵.

At least in its initial conception, the series sought to offer an accurate historical recreation of Viriatus and of the historical period in which his legend was forged. Director Carlos Sedes and producer-screenwriter Ramón Campos, guided by historian Mauricio Pastor, begin the story with the destruction of Caura, Viriatus' village, and massacre of its inhabitants, ordered by Roman praetor Servio Sulpicio Galba. This figure appears for the first time in Apiano's historical chronicles as a survivor of just such an attack, and it is in the aftermath of this event that the Lusitanians en masse began to gather around him¹⁶. The program's creators sought to be true to the geographical area in which Viriatus operated during the years of his resistance by choosing to shoot on location in Spain's western region of Extremadura, close to the border with Portugal¹⁷.

At the same time, the program takes important liberties with history, some of which are more plausible than others. While fudging the reality of how the Romans might have communicated with local people is perfectly reasonable in a mass TV context, less so are the

Conella; the drama *La conspiración contra Viriato* (1816), by Judas José Rom; the play *La capa y el puñal* (1846), by Ventura García Escobar; the poem *Viriato, leyenda original* (1854), by Francisco Monforte; the novel *Viriato* (1904) by Teófilo Braga. In the following works the hero is evoked or mentioned: Alfonso X (Alfonso el Sabio) names him in his chronicles; Lope de Vega in his pastoral novel *Arcadia* (1598) presents Viriatus as both Spanish and Portuguese; Cervantes names Viriatus as a character in *La Numancia*, while in *Quijote* he suggests his story be read alongside that of true heroes.

¹² Cf. PÉREZ ORNIA, José Ramón, "Televisión rescinde el contrato para la producción de la serie 'Viriato'", *elpais.com*, 14 Apr. 1981.

¹³ In the 11 chapters, *La Vía Augusta* uses comedy to trace the ups and downs of a patrician family in the Roman city of Tarraco (Tarragona).

¹⁴ SALINAS DE FRÍAS, Manuel, "La jefatura de Viriato y las sociedades del occidente de la Península Ibérica", *Paleohispánica*, 8, 2008, p. 98.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ "Las verdades de Hispania", *antena3.com*.

extreme departures from historical fact taken in the construction of the plot. By the second season, the string of Roman leaders that substituted Galba, who returned to Rome in 149 BC, over the course of Viriatus' 16-year struggle, has been completely elided. The cruel praetor, his malicious wife Claudia and his contemptible general Marco stand in as the hero's adversary for the whole of the Roman imperial project. The resulting presentation, while perhaps successful in transmitting the impression of the invincible foe that was Rome, nonetheless ignores any qualities that might redeem the Romans or at least explain their actions in the broader historical-political context. In its reconstruction of the social and political structure of the community of Hispania from which Viriatus emerged, the series also disregards the opinion of those historians who hold that during his mandate the leader neither suffered uprisings nor faced dissensions that might have signaled an internal crisis¹⁸. Again in the second installment, as already mentioned, the plot shifts attention away from the hero in order to focus on a constellation of subplots generated by internal disputes among the local inhabitants over the alliance with Rome and the struggle for power in Caura, which ultimately makes them vulnerable to the machinations of the more astute Romans.

In the interest of simplifying the complex division of the Iberian Peninsula among numerous tribes, with their different identities and languages, for TV viewers, the creators explain their decision to use the term Hispania to refer to the homeland that Viriatus and his followers defended. Here, the program departed sharply from historical fact: while the Romans called the colonized territories of the peninsula Hispania, in no sense can it be assumed that the inhabitants of those lands were conscious of this toponym, nor that they called themselves "Hispanos", as occurs in the series. Through this choice, the show also somewhat more problematically erases the associations of the myth of Viriatus with the territory corresponding to the Roman province Lusitania. As we shall see in the following pages, the choice consequently displaces the action of the series to a more fluid Iberian space grounded in the notion of the Hispanic in such a way that it creates the impression of a cohesive group with a patriotic consciousness¹⁹.

In this way *Hispania, la leyenda*, intentionally or not, adheres to 19th-century formulations of the legend that emerged in the context of the War of Independence fought against Napoleon's army (1808-1814). It is relevant to note that the TV premiere of Viriatus' resistance on Antena 3 coincides with the variety of commemorative activities and productions that revisited this key event in the elaboration of discourses of national identity in Spain. The context of this anniversary resonates in the series in such a way that, as argued below, the representation of Viriatus' fight can be read as an allegorical transposition of the popular resistance against Napoleon that began in 1808. The episodic structure and character development of *Hispania, la leyenda* clearly harks back to one of the most successful series in Spanish TV history, *Curro Jiménez*, which recreated the context of the war of Independence during the years of the democratic transition. By doing so, as examined below, the 2011 program veers away from the category of historical fiction and embraces that of the period drama.

¹⁸ Cfr. PASTOR, Mauricio, "Viriato: historia compartida, mito disputada", in GORGES, Jean-G rard (coord.) *et al.*, *Lusitania romana: entre o mito e a realidade*, C mara Municipal de Cascais, Cascais, 2009. p. 134.

¹⁹ "Las verdades de Hispania", *antena3.com*.

2. A Legend not Shared

The combination of the geographical truth pursued in the selection of location, and the license taken by the screenwriter when he allows Viriatus and his followers to refer to themselves as “Hispanos”, is problematic and highlights a significant elision. The fact that the legend of the warrior participates in the foundational myths of both Spain and Portugal is at no moment recognized in the program. Roman chroniclers refer to Viriatus as early as 150 BC as *dux lusitanorum*, or leader of the Lusitanians, based on the geographic area in which he and his followers resided. The demarcation of what constituted Lusitania in Roman times remains a topic of some debate, but the territory included the broad area of land between the Guadiana and Miño Rivers in the western Iberian Peninsula that includes present-day Portugal. His birthplace is also thought to have been inside Portugal, in the Serra da Estrela mountain range that lies just east of the Spanish border²⁰.

Competing archaeologies of Viriatus' origins provide the evidence for the sharp distinction from Celtic-dominated Northern Europe upon which *Iberista* and Pan-Hispanic thinkers based their calls to unify the Iberian Peninsula in the 19th century²¹. The idea of joining the two countries, which dates back to dreams of dynastic union fostered by Spain's Catholic Kings and Portugal's João II, was adopted especially by republicans and federalists in the second half of the century as the geopolitical standing of both nations was threatened by the superpower status of Great Britain and the United States²². While the idea waned after 1910 when Portugal became a republic and Spain remained a monarchy, it did not entirely disappear from public discourse and debates, and persists to this day as a model for regional cooperation in the context of the European Union, and for the recognition of the linguistic diversity of the peninsula vis-à-vis the centralizing tendencies of Castile. The position of Viriatus as a shared founder clearly connects with the evolution of both *Iberista* and Pan-Hispanic thought by incarnating both facets of how a potential union between the two nations has been conceptualized. Portuguese Hispanist Gabriel Magalhães sums it up by saying that most recently such thinking has posited, on the one hand, a complete assimilation of Portugal into Spain, and on the other, an implosion of Spain as a result of the incorporation of Portugal²³. The historical figure of Viriatus also lends itself to other interpretations that seek to equate Spain with Iberia, or by contrast, to extend his spirit of resistance against Rome to present day attempts to bring the nations of the peninsula together.

In Spanish historiography, Viriatus first appeared in the 16th century when Hapsburg monarchs made a concerted effort to identify themselves with the glorious past of the Iberian Peninsula.²⁴ During the Enlightenment, Viriatus was incorporated into definitions of patriotism, and in the 19th century his legendary resistance and military prowess were lauded

²⁰ Cfr. GUERRA, Amílcar, FABIÃO, Carlos, "Viriato: Genealogia de um mito", *Penélope: Fazer e desfazer a história*, vol. 8, 1992, p. 20.

²¹ Cfr. ALZOLA ROMERO, Aarón and SÁNCHEZ-MORENO, Eduardo, "Fabricating Celts: How Iron Age Iberians Became Indo-Europeanized during the Franco Regime", *Proceedings of the Harvard Celtic Colloquium*, vol. 29, Harvard, Cambridge, 2009, p. 10.

²² See SARDICA, Miguel, *Ibéria: A relação entre Portugal e Espanha no século XX*, Alêtheia Editores, Lisboa, 2013.

²³ Cfr. MAGALHÃES, Gabriel, *Los secretos de Portugal: Peninsularidad e iberismo*, RBA, Barcelona, 2012, p. 133.

²⁴ Cfr. ÁLVAREZ JUNCO, Álvaro, *Mater dolorosa: La idea de España en el siglo XIX*, Taurus, Madrid, 2001, p. 54.

as representing two permanent elements of the Spanish national character²⁵. It is during this last period that the aura of Hispania as the first territory invaded by Roman troops and the last to be dominated was established²⁶. In literature, the time-frame from the Baroque to Romanticism, reflects a similar process of myth making that aligned the hero with the essential qualities of the Spanish nation²⁷. He has not disappeared from contemporary literature, which, on the margins of academic histories, has continued to appeal to a mass readership in Spain as well as in Portugal²⁸.

In the mid-20th century, dictatorships in both countries made use of the figure. In the construction of Francisco Franco as “Caudillo”, Viriatus was seen as the originator of the general’s military lineage, which also included Rodrigo Díaz de Vivar, El Cid²⁹. Similarly, Viriatus as *caudilho lusitano* was exalted by Antonio Oliveira de Salazar’s Estado Novo through the late-1960s, when the associations became tarnished in the context of the ill-fated colonial wars in Africa³⁰. Manoel Oliveira’s 1990 film ‘*Nou*, ou *A vã glória de mandar*’ reflects the way in which the figure was deployed in this context by inserting the story of Viriatus’ first victory over the Romans into a conversation among soldiers about to engage Angolan rebels.

Mauricio Pastor concludes that it is pointless to try to determine whether Viriatus was Spanish or Portuguese, as well as to attempt to transform the figure into a regional or national myth³¹. None the less, this is what the series, for which Pastor initially served as a historical consultant, ends up suggesting, both directly and indirectly. If *Hispania, la leyenda* participates in the pan-Iberian vision of the deep cultural connections that unify the diverse peoples of the peninsula, at the same time it also reiterates the long tradition of mutual ignorance and the tendency to modulate the intense relation between the nations for the sake of maintaining the coherency of national sovereignty³². The series is not a co-production, nor does it endeavor to appeal to Portuguese viewers; it makes no concessions that would allow for a cross-cultural identification with the figure. Moreover, the plot itself undermines such a pluralist view of the Iberian Peninsula. The unfolding web of intrigues in the second and third seasons leads to the conclusion that it was the lack of unity among the “Hispanos” vis-à-vis the Roman presence that ultimately led to the treacherous death of the leader and his closest followers. The merchant Alejo de Urso, Viriatus’ rival in politics and in love, and the rest of the dishonorable characters solely motivated by material gain, are the traitors that Rome does not pay with money, but rather with death. What could have been a vision of unity in the liberal and federalist spirit becomes something that might be interpreted as the vindication of a centralized Spanish state founded on the historical idea of Castile with its warrior identity and noble ideas. This is particularly evident in the epic tone and patriotic sentimentalism of the series’s finale in which the legacy of Viriatus and his men, vilely sacrificed, is reflected upon by a mannerist voiceover. These final words of the narrator echo those of Ramón

²⁵ Cfr. *op. cit.*, p. 104.

²⁶ Cfr. *op. cit.*, p. 208.

²⁷ See note 11.

²⁸ João Aguiar’s historical novel *A voz dos Deuses: romance* (1984) was translated and published in Spain as *Viriato, Iberia contra Roma* (2005); the book was reissued in 2010 ahead of the premiere of the Antena 3 series.

²⁹ Cfr. RUIZ RODRÍGUEZ, Arturo, “Arqueología de la ‘Mala Educación’ (1939-1975)”, in OLMOS ROMERA, Ricardo, *Repensar la escuela del CSIC en Roma: Cien años de memoria*, CSIC, Madrid, 2010, p. 412.

³⁰ Cfr. PASTOR, Mauricio, *op. cit.*, p. 144.

³¹ Cfr. *Ibíd.*, p. 144.

³² Cfr. MAGALHÃES, Gabriel, *op. cit.*, p. 128.

Menéndez Pidal who found in Viriatus evidence of a distinct Iberian race, “de un alma española siempre presente” (of an ever-present Spanish soul)³³.

3. *The Myth as Timely Allegory*

The fact that the imaginary space recreated in the Antena 3 production is more Pan-Hispanic than Pan-Iberian is linked to the way in which the Viriatus myth was revived in the wake of the 1808 uprising against the Napoleonic army. José Madrazo's 1808 painting *La muerte de Viriato* stands as the most important visual legacy of the figure's 19th-century revival. The canvas painted in Rome in reaction to news of the popular revolt against the French invaders in Madrid in May of that year, was conceived as the first of a never-finished series of four works depicting similarly heroic moments in the nation's past³⁴. While the work is a paradigm of Neo-classical painting, the hero's tragic end also carries strong Romantic overtones that invite a direct comparison between present sentiments of sadness and indignation at the violent repression of people of Madrid, and those expressed by the people of Hispania upon discovering that their leader had been the victim of a vile conspiracy³⁵. Between 1830 and 1880, a crucial goal of Spanish historiography, according to José Álvarez Junco, was to, “dejar sentada la existencia de ‘españoles’ en ‘España’ desde el principio de los tiempos con conciencia de identidad y decididos a combatir ferozmente frente a los intentos de dominación extranjera” (reinforce the idea that “the Spanish” had been in “Spain” since the beginning of time, aware of their own identity and determined to combat attempts at foreign domination ferociously)³⁶. In this light, Viriatus' resistance was placed alongside the stories of Numancia and Sagunto in reinterpretations of the war against the French. These legendary struggles against foreign invaders at the same time came to be aligned with any type of resistance to tyranny, including the kind that emerged from within the national community. In this way the figure of Viriatus in particular came to be understood as an abstraction of the eternal spirit of a people constantly engaged in a fight for liberty. Perhaps it is not mere chance that the production and broadcast of *Hispania, la leyenda* coincided with bicentennial commemorations of the War of Independence. The events, publications and artistic productions –some highly innovative, others overly simplistic– created with particular intensity between 2008 and 2010, set out to shed new light on this highly complex moment in Spanish history, but were almost always politically motivated. The commemorative context, and the way in which the plot of the Antena 3 series slips towards period drama, invites the program to be analyzed as an exercise in allegory concerning an alternative historical context to the one explored with the War of Independence. As a point of departure, the subject of the series allows for an analogy to be drawn with the period commemorated most intensely between 2008 and 2012. Both Rome

³³ RUIZ RODRÍGUEZ, Arturo, *op. cit.*, p. 412.

³⁴ Cfr. REYERO, Carlos and FREIXA, Mireia, *Pintura y escultura en España, 1800-1910*, Cátedra, Madrid, 1995, p. 56.

³⁵ It is thought that Madrazo had originally conceived the composition as a representation of Achilles mourning the death of Patroclus, recorded in Homer's *Iliad*; the painter later revisited the theme in a thoroughly Neoclassic watercolor study titled *La disputa de griegos y troyanos por el cuerpo de Patroclo* (1812). See GARCÍA CARDIEL, Jorge, “La conquista romana de Hispania en el imaginario pictórico español (1754-1894)”, *Cuadernos de Prehistoria y Arqueología Universidad Autónoma de Madrid*, 36 (2010), p. 139.

³⁶ ÁLVAREZ JUNCO, Álvaro, *op. cit.*, p. 209.

and France, preeminent military powers, invaded the Iberian Peninsula, along with other regions, claiming to bring progress and development and imposing their cultural and political structures on local populations by harsh and repressive means.

Prior to the airing of *Hispania, la leyenda*, two historical dramas were produced as part of a range of TV programs spurred by the bicentennial. The 2008 feature film *Sangre de mayo*, directed by José Luis Garcí and based on a script by Horacio Varcárcel which adapts two of Benito Pérez Galdós's *Episodios nacionales*, was co-produced by TeleMadrid, which also held a contract for a four-hour miniseries version to be aired in 2010. In 2008, the private Madrid channel also ran a 22-episode period series entitled *Dos de mayo: la libertad de una nación*, directed by María Cereceda and Gonzalo Baz, which was later shown on Canal Sur de Andalucía and Aragón Televisión. The same channel also created the documentary *Una nación y su libertad* that functioned as a kind of prologue to the drama series. TeleMadrid, in collaboration with other regional entities, financed and effectively controlled the commemorative programs made for the small screen, and so imprinted them with an epic and patriotic ideal of a single national organic community reflecting the conservative ideology predominant in the government of the Comunidad de Madrid³⁷.

Such TV offerings stand in sharp contrast to those produced by TVE immediately following the democratic transition that recreate the period of the War of Independence: *Los desastres de la guerra*, directed by Mario Camus in 1982, and *Goya*, directed by Ramón Larraz in 1984. These series are inscribed within the Spanish public service broadcasting corporation's stated mission to proffer an image of social cohesion and integration in its re-examination of national history³⁸. In the early 1980s, this exercise in historical recreation was undertaken independently of this kind of commemorative intent, which, as Pierre Nora explains, provide states and institutions with the opportunity to appropriate and mold historical processes and symbols with fixed, emotive narrative structures³⁹. In the late 2000s, however, similar series now produced through the investment of private interests do reflect such maneuvers.

Hispania, la leyenda shares a similarly simplistic view of the past to that found in *Dos de mayo: la libertad de una nación*. The latter begins with an equally emblematic moment grounded in history but mythical in resonance: the burial of Maneula Malasaña, the young woman who came to symbolize the popular resistance against the French. From here, attention turned to the daily-life hardships of the people living under French occupation in the capital. Both productions make an effort to depict the period accurately in terms of set and costume, and in the manner of costume drama, end up by building plots centering on the personal lives of individual characters that can be easily extended or shortened according to audience reception and regardless of the demands of history. The series evoking Viriatus' struggle, also created for a private broadcasting company but with national coverage, reproduces the structure of the conventional prime-time TV drama, summarily abandoning the requisites of the historical miniseries initially promised, and achieved to a certain degree in the early episodes of the first season. Both programs end up by projecting a similar sense of epic without ambiguities onto the legitimacy of the struggle against invaders. By recreating a period remote and less well-known to viewers, the confrontation between Viriatus and Galba functions as an allegory of the popular national spirit that impregnates patriotic, nationalistic interpretations of the War of Independence. Furthermore, because the

³⁷ Cfr. RUEDA LAFONT, José Carlos and CORONADO, Carlota, *La mirada televisiva. Ficción y representaciones históricas en España*, Fragua, Madrid, 2009, p. 98.

³⁸ PALACIO, Manuel, *Las cosas que hemos visto. 50 años y más de TVE*, RTVE, Madrid, 2005, p. 61.

³⁹ See NORA, Pierre, *Les lieux de memoire*, vol. 1, Editions Gallimard, Paris, 1997.

period depicted is less likely to be the focus of audience debate, *Hispania, la leyenda* has greater scope to explore in simplistic terms the nature of a pre-existing internal conflict intensified by a foreign invasion. The complex collision between traditionalist and liberal positions stirred up by the French occupation in 1808 is resolved in the Antena 3 series simply by attributing everyday vices like egotism and greed to the enemies of the Hispanic nation.

Rome is not portrayed as a force for political and cultural development in the series about Viriatus. The sophistication of the Romans, represented in the dark red tones that predominate in the encampment set design, fails to attract the audience, since it is accompanied by the arrogance and cruelty with which the praetor Galba, his wife and general exercise their power. Conversely, the precarious Hispanic villages and the simple lifestyle of their inhabitants, depicted in pleasant green and brown tones, convey a sense of ecological pastoralism. The contrast recalls the facile personifications of the effeminate *gabacho* (Frenchman) versus the *gracioso* (jester) and the *castizo* (typically Castilian) that abound in treatments of the French invasion in Francoist cinema. What is more, in the case of the Antena 3 series, the legendary nature of the protagonist offers greater scope for idealization and simplification. It also allows for explorations of romantic themes that would be more readily rejected as false in other better documented contexts or periods. Finally, it gives free reign to the paradigms of melodrama, which is by definition ahistorical⁴⁰.

Unfortunately, *Hispania, la leyenda* crosses the boundaries of what is dramatically permissible in historical fiction. The mise-en-scene of the leader's death at the hand of Hispanic-cum-Roman mercenaries allows an inconsistent degree of drama: first Viriatus is shot through with arrows by his own men, and then he is stabbed in the back of the neck by the Roman general Marco. In the public space of his village Caura, before the eyes of his closest followers, it is inevitable to associate such an execution with a bullfight. The representation has no precedent, either in history or in earlier versions of the legend, which suggest in some way or other that the hero was stabbed or poisoned while sleeping in his tent. This is the way that Madrazo reimagined the scene, but this poignant interpretation is not even remotely alluded to in the Antena 3 version. The simple exercise of ekphrasis is a common recourse in historical telefilms as a means of guaranteeing historical accuracy by appealing to perceptions that reside in the popular imagination of the period⁴¹. In the present context, such a move would have kept the TV production within the limits established by classical presentations, just as Garci does in *Sangre de mayo* by placing his characters in front of the firing squad rendered in Goya's masterpiece *El tres de mayo*.

In its first season, *Hispania, la leyenda* did, as we have already mentioned, maintain a close relationship with *Curro Jiménez*. The figure of the shepherd-turned-warrior after the massacre in his village recalls the story of the ferryman of Cantillana, Curro Jiménez, which inspired the popular 1970s adventure series. Like Viriatus, Curro also became a guerilla-bandit, but the context of his conversion was not the War of Independence, as presented on the small screen, but rather the civil conflicts of the 1830s and 1840s that marked the early years of the reign of Isabella II. In a similar structure, Viriatus flees with a group of men into the mountains, and from there they ambush Roman troops and sack villages loyal to the invading army. The construction of a main character who has left his normal occupation to pursue justice in the company of a few faithful followers, each with particular character

⁴⁰ Cfr. LANDY, Marcia, *The Historical Film. History and Memory in Media*, Rutgers, New Brunswick, 2000, p. 11.

⁴¹ Cfr. GUYNN, William, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

attributes is the most explicit way in which *Hispania, la leyenda* replicated this famous series. Paulo, Darío and Sandro recall the unforgettable and endearing characters Algarrobo, Estudiante and Fraile, later substituted by El Gitano, in the earlier program. The fact that Antena 3 attempted to revive the series in 1995 with a 12-episode sequel entitled *Curro Jiménez, el regreso de una leyenda*, in which the hero lives in Uruguay and lends support to the fight for independence from Spain, would seem to corroborate the idea of such an inspiration.

The subtle insertion of theme of the *bandolero* into the plot of *Hispania, la leyenda* corresponds as much to historical reality as it does to the attempt to recycle a successful TV formula. Various Roman observers, including Sallust and Strabo, described the Iberian Peninsula as overrun by marauding gangs, and, as Thomas Grunewald highlights, the Lusitanians in particular were associated with acts of banditry⁴². The word *latro* 'thief' was applied to Viriatus to connote his status as both "a barbarian foe and a guerilla leader"⁴³. The prevalence of bandits can be attributed to the structure of Iberian societies and an unequal distribution of land that forced youths to resort to thievery and also trained them in tactics of guerilla warfare that were just as useful for capturing booty as for resisting Roman invaders⁴⁴. *Hispania, la leyenda* does not delve into the criminal facet of the Hispanii, whereas *Curro Jiménez* does explore both the societal causes that force the individual into banditry and the political context that configures him as a *guerrilla* in the fight against the French.

The Romantic image of the clandestine *guerrilla* leader lends itself to several ideological interpretations. Many have read the period of the War of Independence in TV series as a veiled allusion to the 1936-39 Civil War⁴⁵. During the 20th-century conflict analogies were made on both sides: the Republicans connected the image of the foreign invader with the military support lent by the Fascist governments of Italy and Germany, while the Nationalists found a much clearer analogy as they characterized their struggle as one to preserve the traditional character and Catholic values of Spain. The figure of Viriatus served as an allegorical backdrop to the fight: the regiment of Portuguese volunteers who lent support to Franco was called the "Viriatos", while the same name was deployed to characterize the anti-Fascist *guerilla* fighter that resisted in the aftermath of the military victories that led to the collapse of the Republic⁴⁶.

As Antonio Gómez López-Quiñones has analyzed, in the transition to constitutional government in the late 1970s *Curro Jiménez* echoed the premium placed on moderation as a way to reconcile the ideals of liberalism and patriotism by the centralist politicians who led the process⁴⁷. Decades later, if a parallel were to be drawn between *Hispania, la leyenda* and

⁴² GRUNEWALD, Thomas, *Bandits in the Roman Empire: Myth and Reality*, Routledge, New York, 2004, p. 37.

⁴³ *Ibíd.*

⁴⁴ Cfr. PASTOR, Mauricio, *op. cit.*, p. 139; GRUNEWALD, Thomas, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

⁴⁵ See CUETO ASÍN, Elena, "La Guerra de la Independencia en la pequeña pantalla: de la efeméride a la revisión histórica", *The Colorado Review of Hispanic Studies*, vol. 8-9, otoño 2010, pp. 63-82; ÁLVAREZ DE CASTRO, Luís, "La Guerra de la Independencia como alegoría de la Guerra Civil en la televisión española de la Transición", *Journal of Spanish Cultural Studies*, vol. 12, n° 4, 2011, pp. 401-418.

⁴⁶ Antonio García y Bellido in 1945 alludes to this facet at the same time he problematizes it by recognizing its incompatibility with the status of *caudillo*, GARCÍA QUINTELA, Marco V., *Mitología y mitos de la Hispania Prerromana, III*, Akal, Madrid, 1999, p. 182.

⁴⁷ Cfr. LÓPEZ QUIÑONES, Antonio, "Bandoleros de la Transición: rasgos del imaginario nacional democrático en *Curro Jiménez*", in LÓPEZ, Francisca, CUETO ASÍN, Elena and GEORGE, David R., Jr., *Historias de la pequeña pantalla: representaciones históricas en la televisión de la España democrática, Iberoamericana*, Madrid, 2009, pp. 29-52.

the current political climate in Spain, it would be found in the patriotic sentiment that does not reconcile pluralities, but rather repudiates them as elements seen as posing a threat to the imagined community of a unified nation.

4. Conclusion

In *Hispania, la leyenda* the opportunity to create a historical fiction incorporating all of the details and nuances necessary for a transnational revision of the Viriatus myth is announced but not brought to fruition. Even from an intellectually less ambitious standpoint that takes into account the product's entertainment value, the series still could have done much more to balance historical accuracy as documented fact and as myth. As proven by many earlier series, TV fictions are quite capable of incorporating both elements to insure quality without sacrificing audience appeal and entertainment value. It is possible to attribute the failure of the Antena 3 series to a decision to take advantage of audience's initial acceptance and to ensure the continuity of the program in future seasons. Success, and the possibility of a sequel, diverted the attention of the writers and producers away from the project of offering a high-quality, novel interpretation of the myths as well as the history of Viriatus. In its place, *Hispania, la leyenda* languishes in the safe and well-trodden terrain of the period family saga with a plotline marked by the presence of a manipulative powerbroker, and driven by a complex web of personal intrigues among the rest of the characters⁴⁸. In this scenario, the secondary characters representing the full catalog of human weaknesses and categories of deceitfulness eclipse the unblemished hero Viriatus. The mesh of ungrounded subplots extends the series, but does not enrich it with elements that might deepen our understanding or reinterpret the main character or the historical period in which he lived and died.

References

- ÁLVAREZ DE CASTRO, Luís, "La Guerra de la Independencia como alegoría de la Guerra Civil en la televisión española de la Transición", *Journal of Spanish Cultural Studies*, vol. 12, n° 4, 2011, pp. 401-418.
- ÁLVAREZ JUNCO, Álvaro, *Mater dolorosa: La idea de España en el siglo XIX*, Taurus, Madrid, 2001.
- ALZOLA ROMERO, Aarón, SÁNCHEZ-MORENO Eduardo, "Fabricating Celts: How Iron Age Iberians Became Indo-Europeanized during the Franco Regime", *Proceedings of the Harvard Celtic Colloquium*, vol. 29, Harvard, Cambridge, 2009, pp. 1-29.
- CUETO ASÍN, Elena, "La Guerra de la Independencia en la pequeña pantalla: de la efeméride a la revisión histórica", *The Colorado Review of Hispanic Studies*, vol. 8-9, fall 2010, pp. 63-82.
- GALLO, Isabel, "Ajustar cuentas con el pasado", *elpais.com*, 12 Jan. 2012.
- GARCÍA CARDIEL, Jorge, "La conquista romana de Hispania en el imaginario pictórico español (1754-1894)", *Cuadernos de Prehistoria y Arqueología Universidad Autónoma de Madrid*, 36, 2010, pp. 131-157.
- GARCIA QUINTELA, Marco, *Mitología y mitos de la Hispania prerromana, III*, Akal, Madrid, 1999.

⁴⁸ The same team of screenwriters at Bambú Producciones, which includes producer Ramón Campos, is also responsible for the potboiler plotline of the Televisión Española series *Gran Reserva* (2010-).

- GIMENO, Santiago, "Herodoto escribe para la pantalla", *elpais.com*, 28 Jun. 2010.
- GRUNEWALD, Thomas, *Bandits in the Roman Empire: Myth and Reality*, Routledge, New York, 2004.
- GUERRA, Amílcar, FABIÃO, Carlos, "Viriato: Genealogia de um mito", *Penélope: Fazer e desfazer a história*, vol. 8, 1992, pp. 9-23.
- GUYNN, William, *Writing History in Film*, Routledge, London, 2006.
- "Hispania despide su tercera y última temporada con un 13% de media", *www.forumulatv.com*, 26 Jun. 2012.
- "Imperium despide su primera y única temporada en Antena 3 con una media de 9,1% de share", *forumulatv.com*, 14 Oct. 2012.
- LANDY, Marcia, *The Historical Film. History and Memory in Media*, Rutgers, New Brunswick, 2000.
- "Las verdades de Hispania", *antena3.com*.
- LÓPEZ QUINONES, Antonio, "Bandoleros de la Transición: rasgos del imaginario nacional democrático en *Curro Jiménez*", in LÓPEZ, Francisca, CUETO ASÍN, Elena, GEORGE, David R., Jr., *Historias de la pequeña pantalla: representaciones históricas en la televisión de la España democrática*, Iberoamericana, Madrid, 2009, pp. 29-52.
- MAGALHÃES, Gabriel, *Los secretos de Portugal: Peninsularidad e iberismo*, RBA, Barcelona, 2012.
- NORA, Pierre, *Les lieux de memoire*, vol. 1, Editions Gallimard, Paris, 1997.
- PALACIO, Manuel, *Las cosas que hemos visto. 50 años y más de TVE*, RTVE, Madrid, 2005.
- PÉREZ ORNIA, José Ramón, "Viriato", *El País*, 5 Jan. 1980.
- "Televisión rescinde el contrato para la producción de la serie 'Viriato'", *El País*, 14 Apr. 1981.
- REYERO, Carlos, FREIXA, Mireia, *Pintura y escultura en España, 1800-1910*, Cátedra, Madrid, 1995.
- RUEDA LAFONT, José Carlos, CORONADO, Carlota, *La mirada televisiva. Ficción y representaciones históricas en España*, Fragua, Madrid, 2009.
- RUIZ RODRÍGUEZ, Arturo, "Arqueología de la 'Mala Educación' (1939-1975)", in OLMOS ROMERA, Ricardo, *Repensar la escuela del CSIC en Roma: Cien años de memoria*, CSIC, Madrid, 2010, pp. 407-424.
- SALINAS DE FRÍAS, Manuel, "La jefatura de Viriato y las sociedades del occidente de la Península Ibérica", *Paleohispánica*, 8, 2008, pp. 89-120.
- SARDICA, José Miguel, *Ibéria: A relação entre Portugal e Espanha no século XX*, Alêtheia, Lisbon, 2013.