

Propuesta metodológica para el análisis de ficciones históricas televisivas: el ejemplo de *La Señora*¹

Methodological proposal for analysing historical television fictions: the case of *La Señora*

Proposta metodológica para a análise do histórico de televisão de ficções: o exemplo de *La Señora*

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ABSTRACT

The success of historical fictions in Spanish television supports an investigation focused on these productions, which can shape the past. This article presents a methodological proposal that includes the three steps of the communicative process: production, broadcasting and reception. This triple perspective demands the use of qualitative and quantitative techniques. The validity of this proposal was verified by the analysis of the period drama “*La Señora*”. The results show the importance of economic and market factors in the design of production, along with the subjection of the historical elements to the dramatic ones and the limited interest of the audience in aspects of the past.

Keywords: methodology, fictions, drama, History, television, Spain.

RESUMEN

El auge de las ficciones históricas televisivas en España avala su investigación como instancias configuradoras del pasado. Este artículo presenta una propuesta metodológica que incluye las tres etapas del proceso comunicativo —producción, emisión y recepción—, lo que exige combinar técnicas cuantitativas y cualitativas. La validez del modelo se comprobó mediante el análisis de la serie española de época, La Señora. Los resultados evidencian la importancia de los factores económicos y de mercado en el diseño de la producción, junto con la subordinación de los elementos históricos a los dramáticos y el limitado interés del público en aspectos del pasado.

Palabras clave: metodología, ficción, drama, Historia, televisión, España.

RESUMO

A ascensão da ficção histórica televisão em Espanha suporta as suas instâncias do passado de pesquisa e configurando. Este artigo apresenta uma proposta que inclui as três fases do processo de comunicação -produção, transmissão e recepção-, o que requer a combinação de técnicas quantitativas e validade qualitativas. La do modelo foi verificada através da análise da série espanhola de tempo, *La Señora*. Os resultados mostram a importância dos factores económicos e de mercado na concepção de produção, juntamente com a subordinação dos elementos históricos do interesse público dramática e limitado em aspectos do passado.

Palavras-chave: metodologia, ficção, drama, história, televisão, Espanha.

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INTRODUCTION

The importance that fictions have on the current television landscape is undeniable (see the comparative study between Spain and Chile in Castillo, Simelio and Ruiz, 2012). The audience demands stories that are close to their peculiar way of being and thinking, that show distinctive aspects of their country which allow the spectators to recognize themselves in the narrative.

The networks meet this demand and thus strengthen their position in the market, gaining the loyalty of the audience. This type of productions has a positive impact on the audiences' perception of the networks, since it legitimizes television as a media of communication (Palacio, 2001).

In the Spanish case, the national productions of historical nature continue to increase and top the list of most viewed fiction productions (Bellido, 2014, on data from TNS Sofres, Barlovento Comunicación and Kantar Media). In 2009, six of the ten fictions with the highest audience figures were made in Spain: the miniseries *23F, el día más difícil del rey* topped the list with an average of more than 6,705,000 spectators, while *Águila Roja* ended the table with numbers close to 5,000,000. The multiplication of titles became evident in 2010: *La Señora* was in third position, followed by the miniseries *Felipe and Letizia*, the weekly production *Hispania* and the biopic *La Duquesa*. Their numbers were around the 4,500,000 followers. The trend was confirmed in 2011: *14 de abril. La República*, the sequel of *La Señora*, was in fourth position (3,515,000) and two other miniseries appeared in seventh and ninth place (*El ángel de Budapest* and *Tarancón, el quinto mandamiento*)². The success of this format requires a deeper reflection on its treatment of the past.

OBJECTIVE

The aim of this investigation is the implementation of a methodology that allows a rigorous analysis of historical television fictions in order to discover the dramatic elements and the historical contributions of these productions. It is based on the hypothesis that it is essential to consider of the whole process related to television productions (from the genesis of the idea and its transformation into images until the reception by the viewer), because only then sufficient data can be obtained for the correct evaluation of the historical

elements which are included in the dramatic discourse and about the specific weight that other external factors (economic, market, programming, etcetera) can have in the design of audiovisual productions.

Although there are several typologies according to the format, any particular case requires a detailed analysis to assess its relationship with history. This methodological proposal is completed with ideas from the theory and aesthetics of the image, crucial to investigate the creation of meaning.

STATE OF THE ART

Bibliography on the ability of cinema to reliably transmit history is abundant and can serve as a basis for new studies centered in the field of television, even admitting the differences between media³. The possibilities of the small screen continue to be debated: Stephen Lacey (2006) asserts that television's inherent witnessing capacity would prevent it from constructing valid historical accounts; David Cannadine (2004) points out that other characteristics of television—such as “television literacy”, the concentration of stereotypes and the “power of the imagination”—are incompatible with historical discourse; while Montero and Paz (2013) defend the potential of audiovisual stories to spread the history, although they necessarily adapt to the demands of the media.

Despite the number of texts generated by this issue, research on the production stage of film stories is scarce: Hughes-Warrington (2007), one of the highlighted works, explains how the enunciating instance can condition the content and form of the historical text since its origin. In this sense, several historians, after a daunting personal experience in the field of audiovisual production, have denounced that the strong influence of economic and market factors in the creation of historical fictions can end up disabling the final product (Blake Smith, 2003; Davis, 2003). In the case of television, the contributions are almost non-existent: the work of Gómez and García (2010) on the specific job of television screenwriters should be mentioned, as well as the methodological proposal of Francisco Zurián (2013) that includes the study of production and reception processes.

Regarding the analysis of television products, research in Spanish is very partial and generally deals with the narrative mechanisms used to construct

meaning through images (Galán, 2006 and 2007, focuses on the archetypes of women and the immigrant; Medina and Rodrigo, 2009, in the structure of love). It is worth mentioning Cascajosa's work (2012) about, the series *La chica de ayer*, set in the Madrid of *la movida*; the study on *La Señora*, by Chicharro (2009b) must be cited, as well as Chicharro and Gómez-García's one (2014) on 23-F, the failed coup in Spain.

As for the investigation of the reception of the message, the analysis model of a blog as a way of promoting an audiovisual product by Jiménez and Solís (2008) should be mentioned.

In short, the Literature review shows the urgency of a deep systematization that accomplishes the formulation of a rigorous methodology, which allows to continue advancing in this type of investigations.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology proposed in this article appears *a posteriori*, in response to the need to find a suitable way to analyze the period series *La Señora*. This historical fiction, produced by Diagonal Televisión for Televisión Española, was broadcast by the first channel of the public network, primetime, between March 6, 2008 and January 18, 2010. The production, composed of 39 chapters structured in three seasons, tells the story of an impossible love between Victoria (youngest daughter of a wealthy man) and Ángel (young worker of humble origin) in a small city of Asturias during the 1920s. The recreation of social differences –the main cause of the lovers' misfortunes– opened the doors to the analysis of the transfer of the social dynamics to the small screen. In fact, *La Señora* was promoted as a “story of class struggle” (<http://www.rtve.es/television/la-senora/>) and, among the characters, there were representatives of the aristocracy, the Church, the Army, the bourgeoisie, workers, etcetera. That evidenced the desire to turn the series into a portrait of a historical period barely treated in cinema or television in Spain.

This research has been developed in several stages. After the literature revision and viewing of the whole series (47:25:49 hours), we conducted a content analysis to: (i) distinguish the plots and their turning points; (ii) identify the characters that represented collectives and

establish their transformation curve; (iii) isolate and describe the scenarios associated with these characters.

In order to certify the results of the qualitative research, we prepared a database with the 2,218 scenes in which the 39 episodes of *La Señora* were broken down. By means of this quantitative tool, we intended to objectify, based on its number of appearances, the importance of historical references and of the plots (love, relative to business or linked to workers).

However, this analysis did not provide information on the production process, so we decided to go to the primary sources: we interviewed the designers of the series and consulted the *bibles*. These documents of internal use, elaborated by the script team, detail the evolution of the plot lines and of the characters, the describe the scenarios and explain the space-time framework in which the action occurs. Therefore, the information contained in these authentic maps of the universe of fiction must be considered in all the phases of the methodological proposal.

For the study of the reception process, we decided to examine the official forum of *La Señora* in the website of Televisión Española⁴. The number of registered persons (22,548), visits (255,625) and published messages (5,423) were a sufficient statistical sample to obtain significant data that could be extrapolated to the entire population.

The quantitative examination figures were completed with the conclusions drawn by the content analysis. In the first place, we created a database with the interventions of each forumer. During this process, we considered interesting to develop a second database with the personal data of each participant in order to establish a profile of the audience. Finally, we analyzed the 270 most significant messages, those ones in which the viewers valued the series. Through the application of this tool, it was possible to find out if the speech had increased the knowledge or modified the spectator's opinion on a specific subject.

In short, the results show only by paying attention to these three stages of the communicative process do we obtain accurate conclusions on intentionality and, therefore, on the effectiveness of audiovisual products in the transmission and consolidation of historical knowledge.

RESULTS: METHODOLOGICAL PROPOSAL FOR THE ANALYSIS OF HISTORICAL TV FICTIONS

The formulated methodology examines the totality of the communicative process (design of the production, articulation of meaning in the discourse, and decoding and subsequent incorporation to the imaginary by the spectator) and for this, uses different complementary analysis tools (image 1).

STUDY OF THE PRODUCTION STAGE: BUILDING THE HISTORY

The first aspect to be evaluated in a historical television series is the production process. The objective is to determine the concrete relevance that economic and marketing aspects, exogenous to production, have in making decisions about the content and form of the audiovisual story. Political factors are sometimes detected: for example, the Historical Memory Law, approved in Spain in 2007, has stimulated television productions to review the past from different perspectives to those disseminated so far.

The most appropriate tool to tackle this part of the research is the in-depth interview to the directors of the script department and the directors of art, costume, makeup and hairdressing. It is also important to have a talk to the historical advisor –if there is one– because this figure, in principle, seems to guarantee fidelity with the past. Besides, the soundtrack composer's testimony can show the dramatic construction of the story this element is exclusive of audiovisual productions.

Interviews should be based on a questionnaire that contains the key issues, but it must be flexible enough to include those aspects that spontaneously arise during the talk. It is advisable to have at least three large blocks of questions. The first one, focused on the creative process of each of the departments, consists of issues related to the design of the plot and the characters. Members of the script team will be asked to provide information about the origin of the series, the choice of the main theme and the construction of the characters, while costume and hairdressing directors will be asked to describe their work (where it begins, presence in the casting of actors, percentage of the budget they have, etc.).

Given the particular nature of the series being studied, the second block of issues should analyze the sources of documentation used: repercussion of the existence of a historical advisor in the work of other departments, the nature of the literature consulted, the use of images, influences of other audiovisual productions ... This series of questions facilitates the entry into the third block designed to bring to light the special relationship established between the audiovisual medium and History. Therefore, the first question –a very general and subjective one– must be: *Do you think that this series correctly reflects a historical period?* Usually, the interviewee offers his opinion and provides examples to justify it. Thus, common and hidden practices are discovered: criteria for selecting historical events and figures, small adjustments made for the plot and the characters to be more attractive

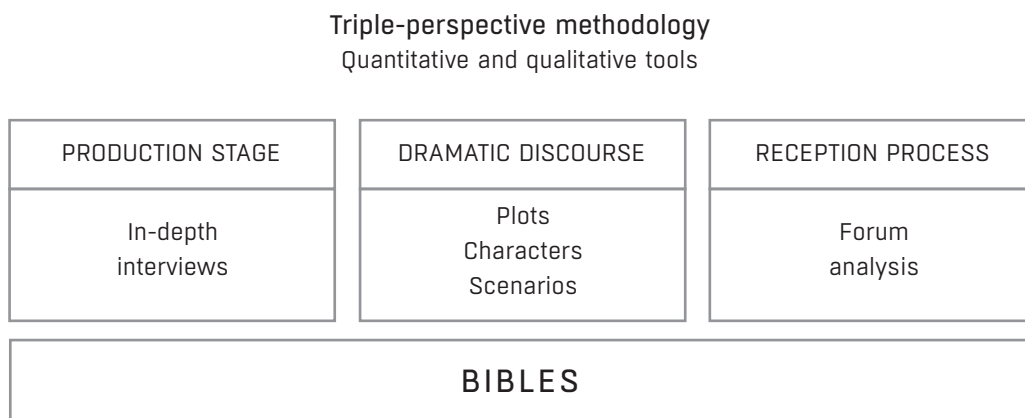


Image 1. Proposed methodology.

Source: Own elaboration.

and interesting, visual adjustments to the viewer's image about the past... In short, the answers allow us to assess the primacy of dramatic aspects over historical or *vice versa*.

It is also important to study the *bibles*, since, as stated by the interviewees, only understanding the stage of evolution in which the character is found it is possible to characterize it and, accordingly, get the scenarios to translate its personality. This is also how the soundtrack accomplishes its tasks⁵.

ANALYSIS OF DRAMATIC DISCOURSE:

DECONSTRUCTING HISTORY

The second section of the proposed methodology focuses on the analysis of the audiovisual story as a product elaborated and designed to carry meaning. For this reason, attention must be paid to the elements that contribute to the creation of meaning: the plots (structural axes of the narration and, consequently, vehicle for the message to be transmitted), the characters (subjects of the action and role models) and, in the case of the period series, the scenarios, since they are the key to endow the production of verisimilitude. The literature consulted indicates that in audiovisual texts, veracity is equated with verisimilitude. Reality is reduced to its appearance: while on the surface, the narrative remains faithful to codes based on the popular imagination, the defining features of an era –the structural conflicts that characterize it– can be avoided and even altered

without harming the supposed historical quality of the production (Davis, 2003; Rosenstone, 1997).

The success of the period series lies in the exact and careful reproduction of the smallest details (Monteverde, Selva & Solà, 2004). When the action takes place in the recent past –in a time that the viewer has lived or knows through direct testimonials– sometimes it provokes a feeling of nostalgia based on the recognition of elements. This sensation favors the viewer's identification with the characters (Rueda & Guerra, 2009); whereas in those fictions located in a distant past, the recreation only refers to a mental image about how the viewer believed that period was. What is shown on the screen cannot clash head-on with this mental image because, if it does, the story would be unbelievable.

To address the narrative analysis, it is advisable to break down the chapters into scenes and organize the information as shown in the following analysis code-sheet (table 1). That is, we must include fields identifying the scene: action conducted on the screen, location, day/night and characters present. It is fundamental to ascription each scene to one of the main plots. The use of diegetic or extradiegetic music may offer clues about the dramatic construction of the story; and to determine the importance of history, it is essential to quantify both the events and historical figures cited as well as the aspects and elements of daily life or customs that appear on the screen.

Scene code-sheet

Action developed on screen:	
Set	
Day	Night
Adscription PLOT	
Present CHARACTERS	
Diegetic MUSIC	Extradiegetic MUSIC
HISTORICAL REFERENCES	
Events mentioned	
Historical figures mentioned	
Data relating to daily life or customs	

Table 1. Analysis code-sheet for the study of the scenes in a historical television series.

Source: Own elaboration.

The first step in the study of the plots is their correct delimitation. To do so, we must use the dramatic reading of the story and match the results with what is exposed in the *bibles*. Assigning each scene to a storyline is a rather arduous task, due to the high degree of overlapping of the plots. Following the indications of the interviewed writers, when dealing with several issues in the same scene this must be ascribed to the last mentioned plot, since usually the dramatic importance is concentrated at the end of the audiovisual unit.

The second narrative element essential in the analysis of historical fictions corresponds to the characters. It is recommended to focus the study on several characters selected by their degree of participation (measurable through the elaborated database) and their membership in a group marked as characteristic by the script team.

The analysis starts from the premise that every character is the subject of the action, the one who performs it or the one who suffers it: only through external aspects such as his attitude and behavior, we can deduce his inner world, his way of thinking, feelings, the motives that guide his actions, etc. (Field, 2002). Therefore, it is fundamental to perform a dramatic analysis of the characters: what is its purpose, what does it do to achieve it and what obstacles must it overcome. In addition, details such as the way of dressing or combing should be noted, which contribute to the identification of each character, for example, *does he smoke, read?, what does he read?, how does he enjoy himself?* It is also important to pick up the qualifiers that other characters use to refer to them. This information will serve to elaborate a section in which the vision that is offered of each character is collected. The historical reading is especially significant in the case of the characters who represent collectives, because it allows to verify if they respond to a stereotype and if the assigned traits conform to the exposed in the historical sources.

RECEPTION PROCESS: *REBUILDING HISTORY*

The third element to be analyzed is the reception process. It is interesting to know the mechanisms that allow the viewer to interpret what is shown in an audiovisual production and to delimit both the parts that are ignored and those that are assimilated and become part of the individual's cognitive background.

The study of viewers' publications on social networks makes it possible to know their opinion

directly without the mediation of a third party and thus minimizing the influence that a moderator can have in discussion groups or the direction of closed questionnaires. In addition, the examination of these new forms of interaction makes it possible to verify the transformation of the audience from a passive entity into highly selective and specialized groups that collaborate in the production of derivative products and act as a consumer (Jenkins, 2008; Rosique, 2010).

On the other hand, by reading all the comments we can find out the purpose of this virtual space: are the viewers's suggestions incorporated to the fiction? Is it promotional? Does it seek to gain the audience's loyalty?

It is advisable to create two databases: the first one is the number of visits and comments recorded to analyze the participation; the second, composed of the identification code-sheets of the participants, will enable to obtain of a profile of the audience. The fields included are: nickname on the Internet, photo of the signature (if any), gender, approximate age, profession, place of residence, way of viewing and number of interventions per thread.

The study should be completed with the content analysis of the most significant messages. We will choose those in which the plots, characters and historical recreation are valued. It is advisable to focus only on some historical references: a simple search in the database will provide the entry with more messages. Firstly, we find out if viewers recognize the historical elements incorporated into the message; secondly, we compare what they know and what they think before the broadcast of the series; and, thirdly, if their vision changes after what is shown on the screen.

CONCLUSIONS OBTAINED THROUGH THE APPLICATION OF THE METHODOLOGICAL PROPOSAL TO THE PERIOD SERIES *LA SEÑORA* WHAT THE PROFESSIONALS SAY

The application of the methodology to a specific case—the analysis of *La Señora*—demonstrates the need to include the production and reception processes in these investigations. Thus, during the examination of the creation phase, we discovered that the fiction was commissioned by TVE: the public television network was looking for a series of weekly periodicity to broadcast during primetime, starring a woman and set in the 1920s.

The author of the original idea and script coordinator (Virginia Yagüe) was inspired by nineteenth-century Spanish royalist novels, specifically *La Regenta*, by Leopoldo Alas, "Clarín"⁶. This book tells the sentimental relationship between an administration of justice prominent member's wife and her confessor at the end of the century in a city in the province of Asturias: the similarities with *La Señora* are very evident. In addition, both fictions reproduce the pattern of an impossible love established by Romeo and Julieta (Balló & Pérez, 1995; Tobías, 1999), so we can conclude that the choice of the argument responded to a market need: Televisión Española wanted a product focused on a certain timeslot and for a specific audience.

These same factors largely determined the format and, therefore, the genre of production. *La Señora* is an example of the television hybridization: it takes elements of the serial or soap opera, combines them with features of the miniseries about literary works and takes the form of the weekly series produced for the Spanish regional channels during the nineties. These productions, in turn, emerge as an evolution of those which adapted the formula of the soap opera to the particular idiosyncrasy of a community, in a process that has been called *indigenización* (Buonanno, 1999; Chicharro, 2011).

On the other hand, the argumentative importance of the plots conducted by the service personnel, the meticulous recreation of the spaces and the tasks of each group, the adoption of an unusual vertical separation and the emphasis on these aspects through the audiovisual realization links the production with the British period series whose maximum representative is the classic *Upstairs, Downstairs* (ITV, 1971-1975).

In the period series –or in the *pastiche telenovelas* (Mujica, 2007)–, history is only an excuse, a resource for setting. This does not exempt them from maintaining some fidelity to the past, in order to avoid serious mistakes that would not go unnoticed by the average viewer and would break the illusion of verisimilitude. Ángel Bahamonde, professor of Contemporary History at the Carlos III University of Madrid, says this is the main function of the historical advisor⁷. According to his testimony, his work in *La Señora* was limited to the reading and checking the scripts and, in some cases, to provide documentation (literature, graphic sources, etc.). By remaining as a professional outside the design group, his opinion was taken into account,

but he lacked the necessary decision-making power to determine which events or historical aspects were to be incorporated into the plot.

The interviewed members of the script team⁸ admitted the criterion used to be the dramatic potential of the historical event. In the first place they evaluated its necessity and the degree of spectacularity that it had to reach; that is to say, questions were asked as to whether *the character needs to be involved in this fact? Will it change his character? Will it give him a motivation?* If so, the next question was *how the event should be shown, should it be significant?, shocking?* and, consequently, the third question: *does the budget permit it?*

For example, in *La Señora*, the Moroccan war was shown through the characters. The only link with the greatest war in Spain in the first decades of the century⁹ is a young bourgeois who volunteers in the Army and because of his achievements on the battlefield, he climbs the military ladder. Hugo de Viana participated in the landing of Alhucemas, but this episode –historically decisive for the outcome of the armed confrontation, and very spectacular visually– was not recreated on the screen because as *La Señora* was a melodramatic narrative, it was only necessary to show the intimate problems of the characters (Hugo's transformation after his experiences in the front).

The possibilities of interaction between the characters are also weighed from the moment of their creation. In this way, the figure of Fernando Alcázar was designed to incarnate the sector of the Army in favor of the establishment of a Republic. In order to emphasize the ideological differences with Hugo, who, as his *alter ego*, represented the most traditional military establishment, it was decided that they were part of a love triangle.

In short, again, factors unrelated to the production itself determine the content of the historical story: *what happens to who* is decided on dramatic and economic criteria that to prevail over historical data.

Questions about the documentation process corroborate the use of historical materials in the design of the series. For example, Marcelo Pacheco¹⁰ –art director of *La Señora*– completed his architectural knowledge by going to monographs on the houses of landlords and recreated the decoration consulting books on Art Nouveau and Art Deco (styles in force in the first third of the twentieth century) and specialized publications (*La construcción moderna*¹¹).

In the same way, Pepe Reyes and Martha Marín¹²—both responsible of the characterization—used photographs of that period: the hairstyles and headdresses were created from photographs from family albums, the costumes of the humbler classes were inspired by Santos Yubero's photographic works and the highest socioeconomic groups's clathing was a reflection of , in illustrations from magazines such as *Adán*, *La moda práctica* or *Blanco y Negro*.

Secondary sources were also used (*The Age of Innocence*, by Scorsese, 1993; *Gosford Park* by Altman, 2001; *Brideshead Revisited* by Jarrold, 2008; and classics such as *Ninotchka* by Lubitsch, 1939, or *Rebecca* by Hitchcock, 1940). This certifies the existence of common codes internalized from previous texts that contribute, to a large extent, to the viewer's image of the past.

Finally, as mentioned, the questions about the relationship between history and audiovisual productions corroborated the primacy of dramatic elements over historical ones. One of the major difficulties of the work of those responsible for the setting and characterization is to find the balance between what the documentation says it actually happened, what the viewers believe happened and what the budget permits. According to their own words, their job is not to make documentaries, but to make an attractive product for the audience. Thus, in *La Señora*, it was essential that the male protagonist was a seductive figure for most of the female spectators, so the cassock was tailored and he was allowed to wear a *two-day beard*, despite contravening the historical rigor. Therefore, it is evident that the first element that is sacrificed for the interest of the audience is the past.

WHAT THE TEXT REVEALS

The analysis of the plots of *La Señora* demonstrates that this fiction was conceived as a drama centered on the intimate history of the characters and not as a narrative intended to explain or induce reflection on certain historical events. Thus, in the *bibles*, the plot lines do not develop from conflicts, but from characters: the amorous plot was identified as "Victoria-Ángel-Gonzalo storyline" and the one connected with the workers was called "Ventura storyline" and "Encarna storyline". The resulting data from the database confirmed the preponderance of sentimental issues:

during the first season, love accounted for more than 70% of the total time of the episode, the percentage increased in the second and decreased considerably in the third. At the same time, there was an increase in the scenes dedicated to the plot related to the workers.

The information obtained during the study of the design can explain this change: the success of the fiction entailed its prolongation in two more seasons, which caused a slowdown of the main plot and the atomization of smaller plots. In addition, at that time, there was already the idea of producing a spin-off located in the Madrid of the Second Republic and whose protagonist would be Encarna: to give importance to this figure —that stood out by her political militancy and implication in the workers' struggle— facilitated continuity between the two series.

In the study of the characters and their ascription to collectives we observed that the women of *La Señora* were strong and determined, reached an incredible level of independence from the men in the Spain of the 1920s, but they were presented as incomplete if they did not have a man's love (multiplication of the plots based on sentimental relations, use of the figure of the *child*—pregnancies, upbringing and education—as an obstacle and, at the same time, dramatic motor of the female characters, etc.). Again, the information obtained during the in-depth interviews helped to assess the situation. In *La Señora*, this paradox was a direct consequence of Virginia Yagüe's double desire to reclaim the role of women in society and to deepen into the concepts of family and motherhood. For this, she projected the values of the current woman on the female characters, managing to emphasize the emancipatory process produced in the first third of the century. This caused that, behind the apparent proactive message, the traditional scale of values remained.

On the other hand, we corroborated that in the case of the characters identified with an ideology, their erratic behavior caused the failed representation of those thoughts. Fascism, for example, became infected with the negative traits of the whimsical, unthinking young man who gave it life and was reduced to his external signs (wearing the black shirt) and to postulates easily identified by the average spectator (seduction by the figure of Mussolini, defense of combat groups, etc.). For all this, it was presented as a weak ideology, little solid, free of an intellectual structure. On

the contrary, the vision of anarchism was sweetened: its leader was a man faithful to its principles and loyal to its companions, a kind of Robin Hood that fought to restore justice in the society.

It is shown, therefore, that in *La Señora* there was a strong reductionism: the *good* were the supporters of the Republic, those who fought for the workers, those who –alas– had always supported the love relationship between the protagonists; the *bad guys* were the most conservative sectors (the Church, the aristocracy, the Army), those who tried to maintain the status quo and, therefore, opposed the story between Ángel and Victoria. The confrontation between these two blocks, representing progress and tradition, was shown as the ultimate motif of the Spanish Civil War (Chicharro, 2009a).

As for the scenarios, we identified several spaces associated with social groups: the casino, as a place of exclusive entertainment for the wealthy classes, opposed the tavern, the workers' meeting point. The social distance between classes was emphasized in the layout of the rooms of the female protagonist's house: the servants remained in the kitchen while the owners lived on the upper floors. Except for this unusual vertical separation (typical of the Anglo-Saxon countries, as mentioned), the recreation of the scenarios conforms to what is described in the documentary sources consulted, which increases the verisimilitude effect, essential for the positive evaluation of the series.

WHAT VIEWERS PERCEIVE

In addition to providing information on the processes of construction of meaning, the work on the forum allowed us to verify the appearance of a much more active spectator who is involved in the communicative act. Thus, the follower of the series did not hesitate to participate in a forum that fulfilled the objective of enlivening the interest of the audience fomenting the broadcaster-producer's contact with the followers and of these among them. The two-week lag between recording and broadcasting made it impossible to add to the fiction the viewers' ideas about the development of the plots or their affiliations/phobias about the characters.

The analysis of 361 code-sheets with the forumers' sociodemographic characteristics ratifies that their profile coincides with that of the target of La 1 of TVE: woman, between 40 and 50 years old, resident in an urban nuclei and with a medium socioeconomic level (Gabinete de Estudios de Comunicación Audiovisual

[GECA], 2006. The 10.83% of the forumers resided outside Spain and resorted to the International Channel of TVE or the website to follow the series. This shows that the design of the series was correct: it arrived exactly to the niche market that was targeted.

The target public does not fit the type of user of the new technologies that is revolutionizing the communication mode¹³, but its practices must be evaluated positively, because they show a change of tendency in a period in which the new technologies were not sufficiently implanted and its development, as channels of communication with the viewer, was in an embryonic state (forum maintenance: May 22, 2009-March 31, 2011). Their activities are similar to the new viewer's ones. This specialized audience already represents between 1% and 5% of the audience (Gómez, 2012): consumption of television and the Internet (22.70% of comments was made during the broadcasting of the chapter) offer alternative readings of the texts (Rubio-Hernández, 2011), manipulate images and assemble videos (González-Alarcón & Anyó, 2009; Turk, 2011).

The textual analysis of the 270 most significant messages of the forum emphasized that, of the three lines of argument identified in *La Señora*, only the loving one managed to engage the spectator. They repeatedly affirmed that the relationship between Ángel and Victoria was the axis of production: they tolerated the rest of the plots as long as they did not reduce development time to the love story between the protagonists. On the other hand, only the plot related to the workers' movement was appreciated when the line dedicated to Ángel and Victoria slowed down. In addition, as mentioned, the conflicts related to the political struggle were identified with the female character around which they revolved, Encarna. In general, this plot is attractive if the viewer had previously empathized with this woman.

The interpretation of the characters by the forumers coincided with the one exposed in the historical reading. The characters who maintained a combative attitude were positively valued, because they represented progress against reactionary conservatism. The messages evidenced that the viewers overturned their conception of the present on the past; that is, it was judged on the basis of contemporary parameters (Porto, 2005).

It is also concluded that followers of the series identified the historical references quoted in the story and used them to anchor the action on a temporal axis. As

these mentions are those that historiography, the media and personal memory have identified as defining stages of the past, the story gains credibility (Edgerton, 2003).

Finally, as inferred from the analysis, the historical knowledge of the average spectator is very limited, but it takes what is recreated in the series as a point of departure to delve into certain aspects of the past. What is learned is shared later in the forum. Therefore, the community is gradually narrowing its own cultural shortcomings, which allows it to better interpret fiction.

In short, the simple viewing of the episode does not increase the viewer's historical knowledge, but the curiosity that it generates works as a detonator of the intellectual process. The quantity and quality of the learning depends, as in any field of study, on the effort invested in the process.

DISCUSSION OF THE METHODOLOGICAL PROPOSAL

The capacity of film and television as adequate means to transmit historical knowledge has been an important topic of debate for cultural and audiovisual studies. It is unquestionable that, even through fiction, the viewer receives information that incorporates in its cultural baggage and in function of which he articulates an interpretation not only of what surrounds him, but of what brought him there, that is, from the past. For this reason, it is necessary to formulate a methodology that makes it possible to obtain correct conclusions, far from speculation and that, to that extent, allows the valuation of television stories as reliable secondary sources for the study of history.

The research corroborated the initial thesis: studies on audiovisual fiction, which are usually restricted to the examination of the text and its elements, are not adequate to determine the validity of these stories as vehicles of historical knowledge. By not paying attention to the production process, they ignore the

external factors –above all, economic and marketing factors– that condition the narrative from its origins and which, on many occasions, motivate deep changes in the fiction. In the same way, these studies overstate the capacity of the story to modify the viewer's worldview.

In short, we defend an ambitious methodological proposal, which calls for the importance of external factors in the construction of discourse and claims the role of the spectator as an active subject that filters what is shown on the small screen, confronts it with other sources of knowledge and only internalize it if they consider it true.

This proposal can be used for the study not only of the period series, but of any historical fiction, regardless of its place of production, provided that the importance of certain parameters varies and there is a deep knowledge of the space-time framework recreated. For example, if one works on a biopic, the part dedicated to the characters should be developed to a greater extent.

As a methodological limitation, the possibility of access to primary sources should be emphasized: professionals involved in the production of these productions are not always willing to participate in the study and are sometimes reluctant to teach the materials used in their work. On the other hand, the study is greatly enriched with the *bibles*, but it is difficult for producers to lend this documentation to the researcher.

Finally, it should be noted that the information obtained in each phase should be used to complete that of others, but the samples and objectives of each section must be established with clarity and precision. In this regard, it is recommended to set strict selection criteria and to focus the analysis on a few elements.

Only through a methodology that understands the television product from its genesis until its reception will valid analyzes be reached, whose conclusions shed light on the specific weight of the dramatic elements in the series of historical fiction and on the primacy of these over the historical aspects.

FOOTNOTES

1. This work has been conducted within the research project *Historia de la Programación y de los Programas de Televisión en España (cadenas de ámbito estatal): de la desregulación al apagón analógico* [History of Programming and Television Programs in Spain (state channels): from deregulation to analogue blackout, 1990-2010]. Reference: CSO2015-66260-C4-1-P, funded by the Ministry of Economy and Competitiveness (Spain).

2. It is necessary to differentiate two classes of historical productions: first, the biopic, centered on a documented real figure or fact (for example, *Felipe and Letizia*, on the present kings of Spain, heirs to the throne in 2009; or *La Duquesa*, dedicated to Cayetana Fitz-James Stuart, eighteenth Duchess of Alba); and, second, the period series, which, with fictional characters, treat universal themes such as love, family, friendship or solidarity and are characterized by an historical period that is recreated for the spectator (*Águila Roja* and *La Señora*). In the same way, there is a typology established according to the format of the historical fictions: serials (daily periodicity), series (weekly periodicity) and miniseries (limited number of chapters that present themselves as an extraordinary product within the programming).
3. We can distinguish two opposing positions: Carner (1995), Ferro (1995, 2008) or Rosenstone (1997, 2014) advocate the use of audiovisual materials as secondary sources for the study of history, while the group led by Sorlin (1980) considers that conversion to the media subtracts study rigor to the point of “reinventing” the past (Cartmell, Hunter & Welehan, 2001).
4. In this section, the viewer could access the viewing of the complete episodes after its premiere on television; extra content related to the recording was offered; photos, news and interviews were published with the actors or members of the technical and artistic team, etc.
5. According to Federico Jusid, composer of the soundtrack of *La Señora*, first of all music must “illustrate a period (...), color the physical universe and complete the scenery” and then it has to be an “emotional blower” evoking in the viewer what the characters feel. Personal interview conducted on February 3, 2014.
6. Personal interview conducted on April 12, 2014.
7. Questionnaire submitted on May 7, 2014.
8. Personal interview conducted on February 28, 2014.
9. Many historians point to the enormous dimension that the war in Morocco had in the Spanish political, economic and social panorama (Ben-Ami, 2012; Bahamonde, 2000; Casanova & Gil, 2009). Even General Miguel Primo de Rivera used it to justify its rise and subsequent establishment of a dictatorship between 1920 and 1930.
10. Personal interview conducted on May 22, 2014.
11. Subtitled “Biweekly Magazine of Architecture and Engineering”, *La Construcción Moderna* was the most prestigious publication in the professional field of architecture in Spain. It was published from 1903 until the outbreak of the Civil War.
12. Personal interviews conducted on April 8 and March 31, 2014 respectively.
13. According to the works of Castells (2009) and Tubella, Tabernero and Dwyer (2008), minors of 30, literate in the digital age, question the concept of primetime with their behavior (use of several screens simultaneously, deferred viewing and through other platforms, etc.) and suggest, according to the management of their leisure time, the appearance of the new term mytime: they use several screens at the same time, they use the web for viewing series...

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