SCHOOL OF ADVANCED STUDY UNIVERSITY OF LONDON
Institute of Modern Languages Research

Television Drama in Spain and Latin America
Genre and Format Translation

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Television Drama in Spain and Latin America
Genre and Format Translation

by

Paul Julian Smith

SCHOOL OF ADVANCED STUDY UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

Institute of Modern Languages Research

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Cover image
Still from *Juana Inés*. Courtesy of Patricia Arriaga Jordán and Canal Once.

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New York City, 2018

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Introduction: TV Nations

Genre, Format, Hispano-America

This book addresses two major topics within current cultural, media, and television studies: the question of fictional genres and that of transnational circulation. While much research has been carried out on both TV formats and remakes in the English-speaking world (as we shall see later in this introduction), almost nothing has been published on the huge and dynamic Spanish-speaking sector. *Television Drama in Spain and Latin America* thus seeks to discuss and analyse series since 2000 from Spain (in both Spanish and Catalan), Mexico, Venezuela, and (to a lesser extent) the US, employing both empirical research on production and distribution and textual analysis of content. The three genres examined are horror, biographical series, and sports-themed dramas; the three examples of format remakes are of a period mystery (Spain, Mexico), a romantic comedy (Venezuela, US), and a historical epic (Catalonia, Spain).

After summarizing the work, the second half of this introduction will address the current state of the question in genre and format studies by international television scholars who address distinct TV economies and ecologies. The book proper that follows will be divided into two sections, each of three chapters: 'Genres' and 'Format Translations'.

Chapter 1 is 'Transnational Horror Light: Production, Fandom, and Scholarship'. This opening chapter, more general in focus than others, begins by charting the recent contrasting conditions of television drama in the US (where 'peak TV' is held to constitute a new Golden Age) and Spain (where the 'digital abyss' is thought to herald disaster for the medium). Contesting these preconceptions, the chapter documents the rise of a new genre it baptizes 'horror light', exemplified by long-running US mystery *Supernatural* (WB, 2005–) and new and innovative Spanish science fiction series *Refugiados* (Antena 3/BBC, 2014), a co-production with the UK, and *El ministerio del tiempo* (TVE, 2015–).

The second chapter examines another rising genre: 'Biopic TV in Mexico: *Juana Inés* (Canal Once, 2016), *Hasta que te conocí: Juan Gabriel, mi historia* [*Until I Met You: Juan Gabriel, My Story*] (Azteca, 2016)'. It treats a newly emerged genre in Mexico, that of the biographical series on a famous historical or contemporary personage. Beginning with an account of recent approaches to the biopic in film, it goes on to analyse two series broadcast free-to-air near simultaneously calling attention to the queer theme exploited in both dramas: on seventeenth-century poet-nun Sor Juana and twentieth-century singer-songwriter Juan Gabriel. Highlighting differences in distribution (the first series was made for and shown by an elite public channel, the second by a generalist, mass broadcaster), the chapter concludes that textually the series have much in common, belonging as they do to a shared but rare genre, newly adapted to its host country.

Chapter 3 turns to sports drama with 'Football TV: *Club de Cuervos* (Netflix, 2015–)'. This third and final chapter on genres examines Mexico's first series with a football theme. While there is a long tradition of 'fútbol' feature film in countries like Mexico, the sole TV series on the subject was also the first made in Mexico by US digital streaming giant Netflix. Targeted at an upmarket demographic with access to high speed internet, *Club de Cuervos* was produced by the Mexican creative team responsible for recent feature film *Nosotros los Nobles* (Gary Alazraki, 2013), briefly the most successful local title of all time. Controversially, however, it was scripted by US screenwriters whose 'writing room' remained located in Los Angeles. It is thus a test case for the national specificity of a drama, one which is controlled by reference to less successful versions of the format in Spain and France, briefly sketched here.

Chapter 4 is 'Copycat Television? *Gran Hotel* (Bambú/Antena 3, 2011–13) and *El hotel de los secretos* (Televisa, 2015–16)'. This fourth chapter, the first on remakes, examines a unique case of format translation in quality television: Mexican free-to-air broadcaster Televisa's remake in 2015–16 of a period romance-cum-mystery series originally shown by the Spanish private network Antena 3. The chapter begins with an account of *Copycat Television*, Albert Moran's pioneering study of transnational remakes, which defines the format not as a blueprint but as a loose and expanding set of programme possibilities, and goes on to explore tensions around genre, TV ecology, and audience in both series, asking how we can account for originality when, as in this case, a remake sticks so closely to its original source.[1]

1 Albert Moran, *Copycat Television: Globalisation, Program Formats and Cultural Identity* (Luton: Luton University Press, 1998).

Chapter 5 is called 'Second Tier Reproduction: *Juana la virgen* (RCTV, 2002), *Jane the Virgin* (CW, 2014–present)'. This fifth chapter examines a further rare case of format translation: the free adaptation of the Venezuelan daily *telenovela Juana la virgen* (RCTV, 2002) as US network weekly series *Jane the Virgin* (CW, 2014–present). The chapter begins with a general analysis of what makes Latin American, and more specifically Venezuelan, television practices distinctive, drawing on a recent monograph by Sinclair and Straubhaar. (Venezuela is held to be a 'second-tier' territory when compared to more major markets such as Brazil and Mexico.) The chapter goes on to examine the production and reception of the two series, basing itself mainly on the trade press in Spanish and English, and calling attention to their appeal to two vital terms in their respective discourses on quality TV: 'dignity' in Venezuela and 'diversity' in the US.

Venturing beyond Spanish (but not Spain) Chapter 6 is 'Television Without a State: *Temps de silenci* [*Time of Silence*] (TV3, 2001–02) and *Amar en tiempos revueltos* [*Loving in Troubled Times*] (Diagonal/TVE1, 2005–12)'. This final chapter, based on research undertaken at the Filmoteca de Catalunya in Barcelona, asks what it means to make television in a nation without a state, such as Catalonia. After addressing questions of quality, commerce, and normalization in the history of Catalan television after the death of Franco, it goes on to examine the emergence of a distinct tradition of realist series in Catalonia. This culminated in *Temps de silenci*, an ambitious retelling of twentieth-century history from a Catalan viewpoint centred on Barcelona. This weekly drama was remade in Madrid by the original creative team as a daily serial, now set in the Spanish capital during the Civil War and the early years of the Dictatorship. Based on close textual analysis the chapter suggests, finally, that the main stylistic and generic conflict between the two series is not their Catalan/Spanish origins but rather their Latin American/British fictional modes. Both series are an unstable hybrid of the (closed) *telenovela* and (open) social realist soap. Where previous chapters drew on major monographs by Moran and Sinclair and Straubhaar, this one is indebted to Enric Castelló's *Sèries de ficció i construcció nacional* (2007), the only book devoted to a critical reading of Catalan series in the 1990s and 2000s.[2]

Finally, the conclusion argues for the vital importance of television drama as the medium that most closely connects with distinct local audiences, even as its genres and formats lend themselves to transnational travel in the Spanish-speaking world and beyond.

2 Enric Castelló, *Sèries de ficció i construcció nacional* (Tarragona: Universitat Rovira i Virgili, 2007).

The State of the Art: *Global Television Formats*

Scholars in television studies are now used to the fact that they should pay attention to territories outside the historical legacy of a discipline that arose in the UK and US. But such awareness is often no more than lip service, limited as it is by empirical and linguistic competence. In *Global Television Formats: Understanding Television Across Borders* (2012), editors Tasha Oren and Sharon Shahaf and their seventeen contributors (Oren also contributes a final chapter herself) attempt to fill that huge gap with accounts of such varied genres as sports, reality, contests, and (to a lesser extent) drama in Europe, Asia, and Africa.[3] While the contributions are, as would be expected, diverse, they coincide in their return to (and revision of) Albert Moran's previously mentioned pioneering work on the global format as a flexible programming unit, held to be in opposition to the more static transnational model of the import/export trade in 'canned' programmes. Likewise, the contributors take it for granted that in this multidirectional model of globalization, top-bottom scenarios (of, say, US media imperialism) no longer hold, given the intense localization inspired by even the most widely distributed of apparently homogenizing formats. Because of its extent and ambition, then, Oren and Shahaf's book can serve here as an introduction to the main issues in the field, offering as it does a kind of state of the art in transnational TV format studies.

Beginning, then, with a synthetic introduction by the editors, the volume is divided into four distinct parts. 'Format Theories and Global Television' seeks to go beyond Moran's model of 'copycat television', offering theoretical reflection. Thus Vinicius Navarro argues for 'performance' as a new mode of conceptualizing variations in format; Dana Heller appeals to critical dance studies; Tony Schirato and Eddie Brennan invoke Bourdieu's cultural field in the context of sport and reality/talent shows respectively (although Brennan is alone in clinging to a critique of colonization here). Yeidy M. Rivero's fascinating case study of a bilingual PBS sitcom from the 1970s seems somewhat out of place in this company but makes welcome reference to a (part) Spanish-language text.

The second section is 'The Format in Historical Perspective'. Here Jérôme Bourdon places European format development, with its borrowing of quiz and games shows from the US, within the history of the transition from public service to commercial broadcasting;

3 *Global Television Formats: Understanding Television Across Borders*, ed. Tasha Oren and Sharon Shahaf (New York and London: Routledge, 2012).

Chiara Ferrari highlights the 'Italianness' of RAI's paradoxical 'original adaptation' hosted by the aptly named Mike Bongiorno; Joseph Straubhaar gives an overview of the development of hybridized *telenovela* in Brazil; while Paul Torre explores the current challenges to Hollywood of a global production environment which is less asymmetrical and more interdependent than ever.

Part III is devoted entirely to a single format: the *Idol* franchise, which the editors acknowledge now seems to be waning in the face of smaller 'lifestyle' shows. Yet Biswarup Sen's enviable local knowledge identifies differences *within* episodes of the Indian version (when competitors come from, say, border regions or are self-defined Indian-Americans); Joost de Bruin examines nation-building strategies in New Zealand, which would still, it appears, exclude the lived realities of Maori spectators; Martin Nkosi Ndlela treats localized *Idols* within and across African nations, paying particular attention to target audiences; and Erica Jean Bochanty-Aguero more predictably finds *American Idol*'s global self-posturing wanting, even as she suggests that the US notion of the national is no longer simple or single.

The last section ('Local Articulations and the Politics of Place') offers accounts of the questions of space and place that have already been treated throughout the volume. Marwan M. Kraidy studies reality TV in two very different Arabic-speaking countries; Michael Keane questions the 'great leap forward' in China's format business; Lauhona Ganguly treats *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?* in India; Sharon Sharp examines domestic reality programing, detecting unexpected differences between British, Chilean, and American versions of *Wife Swap*; and editor Oren's valuable structural account of what she calls 'reiterational texts' climaxes with what she herself calls the 'curious case' of an Israeli version of *The Apprentice* in which luckless contestants are obliged to present their country's political point of view to hostile audiences abroad. The twin themes of localization and interdependence could hardly be clearer than here.

As my account suggests, then, *Global Television Formats* offers both a revisionist theoretical focus, with a number of new models proposed, and valuable empirical research, based mainly on content analysis. Like 'National Mike [Bongiorno]', contributors move nimbly between the two focuses, engaging local knowledge in a way that is accessible to English-language readers and offering a wealth of fascinating detail on such engaging and even humorous matters as the eccentric local hosts that go way beyond US blandness (Turkey's transgender 'Petulant Virgin' stands out here).

Although the vastness of the field precludes universal coverage, there are some notable gaps that offer an opportunity to be filled by my own book. Spanish-language countries are barely mentioned, although two full chapters are devoted to Brazil. Surely a media Goliath such as Mexico's Televisa deserves some attention? Scattered references to the *Ugly Betty* franchise call attention not only to the neglect of Spanish-language-originated formats but also to the absence of drama, which is vital to national and corporate identities but is here overshadowed by realities and competitions. Content analysis can be disappointingly brief and sketchy. Thus Brennan's assertion that national cultures have been 'colonized' by stateless orthodoxy is supported only by a table of some twenty formats that go unanalysed in his piece. Given that readers are unlikely to have access to many of the texts treated, it is a shame that there are just seven illustrations (three of which chronicle one *American Idol* contestant's memorable hairdos).

Global Television Formats remains, however, inevitably (and admirably) diverse in its approach and range. Readers will discover under its broad thematic umbrella a host of valuable data and informed commentary. With the decline of the top-down model of US cultural imperialism now broadly accepted, the book offers an invaluable route map to a new media landscape that is more complex than scholars have acknowledged.

Oren and Shahaf leave open, however, three important areas to be explored in *Television Drama in Spain and Latin America*: Ibero-American production, fiction formats, and textual analysis. This book, then, is the first full-length study of genre and format translation in Spanish-language fiction series. The latter are, I will argue, well worthy of the close readings devoted to titles in other language areas and which they have yet to receive.

Genres

1. Transnational Horror Light: Production, Fandom, and Scholarship

Peak TV in the US, the Digital Abyss in Spain

An unexpected and enviable problem has emerged in the US: the existence of an excess of quality television series sometimes known as 'peak TV'. The year 2015 beat the previous record with the transmission of more than four hundred titles. It is no wonder, then, that the special issue of *Entertainment Weekly* dated 18 September of that year, which provides a preview of the autumn television season, was the largest in the history of the magazine. Ten years ago the British scholar John Ellis divided the history of television in Europe into three stages in terms of access to content: first, scarcity (the initial situation of a single state broadcaster); secondly, availability (competition in the public system with one or two private channels); and finally plenty (the multichannel cable system).[1] In North America it seems evident that viewers currently live in a time of overwhelming abundance that may not be sustainable.

Unlike the European preference, still, for public service, the blossoming of American television has been carried out in an ecology in which public TV is almost non-existent. As is well known, PBS, the modest state service, has little of its own production and continues to rely on co-productions with the UK such as the flagship *Downton Abbey* (Carnival/Masterpiece, ITV/PBS (2010–15)). Moreover, while new platforms have captured the interest of critics and juries, recent seasons have seen innovations not only in minority digital platforms or cable (the already canonical HBO and AMC), but even in the traditional generalist networks that are still attracting mass audiences. On the one hand there is press favourite *Transparent* (Amazon, 2014),

1 John Ellis, *Seeing Things: Television in the Age of Uncertainty* (London: IB Tauris, 2000), 39, 61, 162.

the multi-award-winning series on a transgender father-mother. But on the other there are *How to Get Away with Murder* (ShondaLand/ABC, 2014–), set in a law firm, and *Empire* (Imagine/Fox, 2015–), centred on the commercial conflicts of a hip-hop music company. The last two have African-American protagonists, a phenomenon previously little seen on US television.

With their multiple perspectives and ambiguous characters, these dramas are evidently examples of what Jason Mittell has called in his influential book 'complex' television. More specifically Mittell identifies two forms of textual complexity when it comes to plotting: the centripetal, which delves into the disturbing psychology of these often unsympathetic characters;[2] and the centrifugal, which spreads out from those individuals to cover the collective frameworks in which they are immersed.[3]

However, this much vaunted artistic diversity is also social diversity. That is, the new quality series innovate not only textually but also politically, focusing on the most pressing issues of American society. Apart from the emergence of new and challenging themes such as that of transgender people, TV has addressed recurrent topics that are sadly durable in the US, such as the still pending issue of racism. The fact that much complex TV tends to be realist in mode and contemporary in setting, pushing the boundaries of what were once acceptable subjects on television, is thus inextricable from its progressive social agenda.

In such cases, television has even anticipated socio-political trends. As suggested by Raymond Williams, the doyen of British cultural studies in a work of 1977, mass culture does not have to be 'dominant' or 'vestigial' (i.e. serve as the spokesman for the current ideology or the hegemony of the past). On the contrary it can be 'emergent', revealing to its audience new social formulations before they appear openly in everyday life.[4]

Despite the recent ups and downs in the stock market of old and new companies (both the networks and Netflix), the situation in the US looks very hopeful in terms of content. Conversely, it is generally thought that in Spain free broadcast television faces (and here I quote the title of a recent book) a 'digital abyss'. In the foreword to the volume of that name Enrique Bustamante, a professor at Madrid's

2 Jason Mittell, *Complex TV* (New York: New York University Press, 2015), 223.

3 Mittell, *Complex TV*, 225.

4 Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 121–27.

Complutense University, cites a 'deep deterioration of democratic space and diversity' in the Spanish audio-visual field.[5]

Moreover, it would appear that Spaniards are living through the decline of the traditional financial and creative models to which current channels still cling.

On the one hand, TVE, now deprived by government edict of advertising (although experimenting with product placement, for alleged cultural reasons), finds itself in an intense economic crisis. (It should be clarified that even in the UK the ideal of public service has been tarnished by the scandals of the BBC, which remains much cited as a model in Spain.) On the other hand, commercial national television channels have also experienced a decline in advertising revenue, a trend they have attempted to remedy with increasingly intrusive branding of content. In both cases we have seen a decrease in budgets for Spanish drama, budgets which were already paltry even in a European context, not to mention that of the US.

Moreover, the possible alliance of broadcast TV with social networks like Twitter, which would tend to promote viewing at the time of transmission (a form of consumption that is supposedly archaic, but has been somewhat renewed by the digital 'conversation' on the second screen during first broadcasts), has been wasted by the Spanish networks. I refer here to the recent study by Francisco Gallego, also of the Complutense.[6]

The utopia of close and continuous connection with the audience, which is perhaps most realized in the US, has a meaningful name: social TV. As is well known, that term was developed in the context of social networks, but has been extended to cover the new situation of a television increasingly involved in the daily lives of consumers who are more active than ever. Some attempts have already been made to study this phenomenon in the case of Spain by researchers such as Ana Maria Castillo Hinojosa. She has identified four trends in television drama as 'object of exchange' on the Internet: the creative expression of identity, the search for empathy, collective memory, and group membership.[7]

5 Enrique Bustamante, 'Prólogo. El caso español: mutación ideológica de modelos', in *La televisión de la crisis ante el abismo digital*, ed. Miquel Francés i Domènec *et al*. (Barcelona: Gedisa, 2014), 15–28 (26).

6 Francisco Gallego Calonge, 'Twitter y televisión: nuevas audiencias, nuevos sistemas publicitarios, nuevos negocios', in *La televisión de la crisis*, ed. Francés i Domènec *et al*., 379–97.

7 Ana María Castillo Hinojosa, 'Ficción audiovisual en redes sociales en línea', *Revista Comunicación*, 10 (2012), 907–16 (911).

In scholarly studies on the topic of social TV in the US, Henry Jenkins remains the flagship name. In influential books he has traced a path from the media convergence (the collision between film, television, and Internet) to what he calls the 'spreadable' media.[8] While the verb 'spread' suggests an overcoming of the traditional barriers between new and old media and between production and consumption, 'spreadable' as an adjective is used rather in colloquial English in the case of condiments such as butter on bread. Hence the current experience of media consumption equates, according to this new terminology by Jenkins, to a practice that is domestic and daily, but also pleasurable and even sensual.

Parallel to the path of pioneering figures such as Jenkins, there has emerged a new academic specialization. Traditional studies of reception or of audiences have grown somewhat overshadowed by 'fan studies' and the proposal of the neologism 'fandom', which denotes the new discursive and social field constructed by and for fans of series. Moreover fandom constitutes a zone of encounter between consumers, producers, and scholars.

The tensions in the emergence of this new discipline could be observed in the mega-congress of the Society of Cinema and Media Studies, the professional body of North American scholars in the field, when it was held in 2015 in Montreal, Canada. In a workshop session, young researchers complained that their chosen specialization still had little scholarly legitimacy and might even harm them in their career development. However, they defended their somewhat ambiguous posture of scholars strongly engaged in their subject, claiming the right to be students and fans simultaneously. It is a position that, according to the researchers themselves, owes something to the ethics of reciprocity defended in a discipline such as ethnology, but which is clearly at odds with the tradition of scientific objectivity that remains dominant in communication studies in countries such as Spain.

Also at SCMS there arose the thorny question of the possible complicity of those scholar-fans with the producers of the series that they both analyse and love. In fact, in a recent volume on the subject (one of several), it is noted that academic debate has diverged somewhat from the previous themes of fans' pleasure and creativity (claimed by Jenkins in times of 'convergence') to questions of fan work and even conflict. Moreover the creative labour of fans, which is unpaid, has sometimes been used or even appropriated by creative professionals.

8 Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York: New York University Press, 2006); and *Spreadable Media: Creating Value and Meaning in a Networked Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 2013).

To take one example among many: it is now normal for fans, who have devoted much time and energy to their series, to have to pay large sums to have some access to their favoured TV teams (whether cast or creators) in multimedia shows like Comic-Con. These live events are no longer marginal but have become central to the new audio-visual economy and ecology that are so focused on consumers. Thus while audio-visual media have become 'spreadable' (i.e. they extend or are extended), they have also re-imposed some borders and barriers between production and consumption. The fact that university researchers typically enjoy more contact with creative teams than do fans, having the power to cut in line at these events by using their connections with show runners, raises ethical questions about which scholars themselves are squeamish.

US Horror Light: *Supernatural* (WB/CB, 2005–)

> The story revolves around two brothers, Sam and Dean Winchester, as they follow their father's footsteps, hunting down evil supernatural creatures such as monsters, demons, and even fallen gods while trying to save innocent people along the way. Continuing the 'family business' after their father's death, the brothers soon discovered that the 'hunt' does not just involve slashing and hacking monsters and demons but also dealing with more powerful creatures such as angels, reapers, and even Death.[9]

As the example of Comic-Con shows, the most intense fandom is aroused still around the genres that in Spanish are denoted by the umbrella term 'fantástico' (science fiction, fantasy, and horror), fields still often neglected by critics who tend to favour boundary-pushing realism.

One flagship series in this context is the smart and funny *Supernatural*. This series from cabler WB and its successor CW (Warner remains the co-producer) has survived for eleven seasons since 2005, provoking and exploiting an intense fandom, as is exhaustively documented in a pair of specialist academic books.[10] The 'Supernatural Wiki' (subtitled 'A Canon and Fandom Resource') is also admirably comprehensive in its account of both the more than

9 Plot Summary of *Supernatural*, IMDb (2016) <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0460681/plotsummary> [accessed 1 September 2016].

10 Katherine Larsen and Lynn S. Zubernis, *Fangasm: Supernatural Fangirls* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2013); and *Fan Phenomena: Supernatural* (Bristol and Chicago: Intellect, 2014).

two hundred episodes of the series itself ('canon') and the 'creative, diverse, passionate' responses of the cult audience, which include conventions, projects, distinctive vernacular, and original creative works in many media ('fandom').[11] Now over three thousand pages long, the Wiki is edited by some 37,000 users. Attesting to these users' autonomy and creativity, the fiction created by the long-lasting community of fans of *Supernatural* is often focused on a plotline that is of course absent in the series itself, so-called 'Wincest': a passionate and incestuous love between the two Winchester brothers.

It is no surprise that, although the series seems somewhat displaced and anachronistic with its generic Midwest locations (actually shot in Vancouver) and the brothers' vintage car, *Supernatural* focuses on social issues of today, a long-term goal of its creator. Indeed, showrunner Erick Kripke told *Entertainment Weekly* quite explicitly in relation to *Timeless*, his later time-travel series for NBC that boasts African-American and female leads: 'There's so much untold history from a minority perspective, from a female perspective. [...] [*Timeless*] allows us to make commentary on issues that are happening today'.[12] This new drama would prove controversial in Spain. Commentators noted the close similarities of the format, where three time travellers (two men and one woman) attempt to 'protect the past, save the future' (in the words of *Timeless*'s tagline), to TVE's *El ministerio del tiempo*, which premiered over a year before the US series (24 February 2015 as against 3 October 2016).[13]

Two common themes in *Supernatural* are shocking changes in the family unit (in one episode an evil and murderous girl has kidnapped her parents and grandfather, who are not allowed to leave the house); and the unsettling presence of immigrants (in another, a newly arrived tribe of vampires protests to the brother protagonists that they just wish to live peacefully alongside existing US residents). Belying its title, then, the development of social issues in the key of terror is therefore evident throughout the series, even after creator Kripke left the show after season five.

11 Supernatural Wiki (2016) <http://www.supernaturalwiki.com/index.php?title=Category> [accessed 1 September 2016].

12 Natalie Abrams, '*Timeless*: NBC Explains the Show's Approach to History', *Entertainment Weekly*, 2 August 2016 <http://www.ew.com/article/2016/08/02/nbc-timeless-history> [accessed 1 September 2016].

13 Natalia Marcos, 'Los productores de *El Ministerio del Tiempo* preparan una demanda por plagio contra *Timeless*', *El País*, 2 September 2016 <http://cultura.elpais.com/cultura/2016/09/02/television/1472816593_008401.html> [accessed 3 September 2016].

Moreover, perhaps reacting to the heterodox initiatives of viewers, one innovation by the creative team of *Supernatural* has been the incorporation into the now extensive diegetic universe of the series of characters representing different types of fans in the real world. In one of the seasons, an obsessive fan of the demon-hunting siblings manages to kidnap one of her idols in a plotline somewhat similar to the film *Misery* (Rob Reiner, 1990). Conversely a model fan, whose behaviour is clearly legitimated by the writers, collaborates with the leads in their goal of killing monsters. It is striking in the context of social diversity mentioned above that the obsessive bad fan is heterosexual, while the good enthusiast is a lesbian (in one episode she has a brief affair with a fairy). The series's special 200th episode, which was even called 'Fan Fiction', directly addressed for once viewers' desires for transgressive same-sex or incestuous relationships amongst its regular characters.[14]

In the case of *Supernatural*, the self-reflexive aspect of the narrative serves to lay claim to a certain artistic quality or complexity in the scripts, even in a series such as this which is middlebrow and is shown on basic cable. But this meta-critical strategy also aims to channel and control the new relationships between creative teams and a group of fans who are increasingly aware of their own power and fearful about the possible limits that might be placed on it.

Strikingly this process takes place within a mixed generic context. *Supernatural* appeals still to some genre triggers of horror in its extended or (to use Mittell's term) 'centrifugal' world: the expertly realized scary monsters of the week and the recurring demon characters, the 'terrible places' to which the protagonists regularly descend, and the consistently dark palette and low lighting of the production design. But these disturbing factors are sweetened or 'lightened' by the more domestic and emotional family romance between the two brothers and their absent father (this is Mittell's 'centripetal' or psychological mode) and by an insistent socio-political commentary that, as runner Kripke himself acknowledged, is barely disguised by allegory.

14 Keertana Sastry, '*Supernatural* Addresses Wincest, Destiel, the Lack of Female Characters and More in its 200th Episode', 11 November 2014 <http://www.bustle.com/articles/48816–supernatural-addresses-wincest-destiel-the-lack-of-female-characters-more-in-its-200th-episode> [accessed 1 September 2016].

Spanish Horror Light: *Refugiados* [*The Refugees*] (Bambú, BBC Worldwide/laSexta, 2015); *El ministerio del tiempo* [*The Ministry of Time*] (Cliffhanger/TVE, 2015–16)

> Mankind is suffering the biggest exodus in history. Three billion people from the future have travelled to the present to escape from an imminent global disaster. All the refugees must obey to [*sic*] rules: they must not talk about the future and they must not contact their families. The arrival of the refugees takes everyone by surprise, including the Cruz family. The series centres on their story, the story of Samuel, Emma and little Ani. The shift in their existence after the arrival of the mysterious refugee, Alex, who has an incredible mission that will change their lives, and in order to accomplish his mission, he will not hesitate to do whatever there is to be done: including breaking the rules.[15]

> A warrior from the 16th Century, the first female university student from the 19th Century and a [male] nurse from the 21st Century, join a secret agency to prevent people from changing the Spanish history [*sic*] by using time-traveling doors.[16]

In the second half of this first chapter I will examine two Spanish TV dramas from 2015, which are perhaps parallel to the US series and might be called examples of social television. They also, most unusually in a Spanish media context, draw on elements of what I have described as a 'horror light' format.

Despite the supposed abyss that threatens broadcast TV in Spain, much trumpeted by scholars, these series have managed to demonstrate remarkable industrial and artistic innovations. Moreover, with notable ambition, they propose new temporal settings (between past, present, and future) and new spatial coordinates (between nation and world). The two have combined artistic and social relevance via an intense relationship with the Spanish public, an audience that is often thought to be disconnected from national drama, through social networks and appeals to political solidarity. And both series received external recognition on being nominated for the Prix Europe.

15 Plot summary of *The Refugees*, IMDb (2016) <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt4011172/plotsummary?ref_=tt_ov_pl> [accessed 1 September 2016].

16 Plot summary of *The Ministry of Time*, IMDb (2016) <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt4136774/> [accessed 19 March 2018].

My first example is *The Refugees* aka *Refugiados*, broadcast by the free-to-air laSexta channel and produced by Bambú, better known for lush costume drama such as *Gran Hotel* (Antena 3, 2011–13), which I study in a later chapter. As in Bambú's period titles, the showrunners (who are given credits as both executive producers and writers) are the Galicians Ramón Campos and Gema R. Neira.



Fig 1. Refugiados *[*The Refugees*] (Bambú, BBC Worldwide/laSexta, 2015)*

The premise of their series is an irruption of the future into the present. When three billion migrants suddenly appear on earth, the inhabitants of the globe have to confront the integration of the naked newcomers, who, in a conveniently enigmatic plot twist, are prohibited from talking about the origin and purpose of their time-travel. Since the series premiered in Spain on 7 May 2015, after two years of preparation, this subject of an unprecedented exodus anticipated the most dramatic social question of that summer in Europe, the movement of real-life refugees from the Middle East and Africa in numbers hitherto unknown. *The Refugees*, then, constitutes the kind of anticipatory phenomenon that Raymond Williams called 'emergent', in which cultural expression precedes its social referent.

While the topic was innovative, even within the genre of the 'fantástico' or science fiction genre which has few precedents in Spanish television (or, indeed, cinema), novelty is also seen in the production processes of the series. *The Refugees* is a co-production

with the BBC, under the aegis of its commercial subsidiary BBC Worldwide. This is an arrangement which serves in Spain as a kind of guarantee of international quality. This is especially the case when considering that this is both the first project by a Spanish company in alliance with the British state broadcaster and, similarly, the first by the BBC in collaboration with a European network.

At a textual level, the series reveals a temporal collision (between future and present), but also a spatial convergence (between inside and outside). The (authentic) exterior location is the sierra of Madrid, an area of lakes, forests, and mountains close to the capital and not unknown to Spaniards, but more reminiscent to a foreign audience of Switzerland than of Spain. The cast and original language, however, are British. Emblematic in this context is the presence of the actress known for HBO's epic fantasy *Game of Thrones* (2011–19), Natalia Tena, who was born in Britain of Spanish parentage.

If we look at *The Refugees*' reception, this national slippage is the characteristic most talked about by professional bloggers who, nonetheless, differ widely in their opinions. Some proclaim the Spanishness of the series. Juanma Fernández states in Blúper, perhaps the best site commenting on Spanish TV: 'It is a Spanish series. Yes, sirs, SPANISH'.[17] Others brand it clearly foreign, emphasizing the relatively short duration of the episodes (the fifty minutes standard in the US) and the narrative's slow tempo. According to Chicadelatele, a former professional in the industry, 'It is a British series, with its [or perhaps 'their'] rhythm, its dubbed actors, its *stuff*' (as we shall see, this British viewer did not feel the same way).[18] In sum *The Refugees* is, for her, a 'little blond blue-eyed boy with a Spanish passport', a telling image of transnational audio-visual convergence.

After a multichannel premiere on all of AtresMedia's outlets (including Antena 3, often Spain's highest-rated national network), which won a respectable share of more than 10%, the series declined on minority channel laSexta, known for its foreign imports, to reach only 4.4% in the eighth and final episode. However, in spite of this relative commercial failure, the positive reception from critics confirmed the possibility of a new quality drama in the face of the digital abyss in Spain. And the spatial or national ambiguity of the series made its

17 Objetivotv, '*Refugiados*, la serie que adelanta el futuro de la ficción española' (2015) <http://www.antena3.com/objetivotv/opinion/refugiados-serie-que-adelanta-futuro-ficcion-espanola_2015050500119.html> [accessed 1 September 2016].

18 Chicadelatele, 'Niño rubito de ojos azules con pasaporte español' (2015) <http://www.chicadelatele.com/2015/05/08/refugiados-un-nino-rubito-y-de-ojos-azules-con-pasaporte-espanol> [accessed 1 September 2016].

select audience think, perhaps unwillingly, about current migration flows that have destabilized the boundaries between self and other in the Europe that is confronted with an unprecedented demographic challenge. This real-life refugee crisis was thus anticipated not by a worthy documentary but by a series that falls somewhere within the previously neglected crossover area of fantasy, horror, or science fiction.

Closer analysis of the first episode confirms its allegiance to the international genre I have baptized 'horror light'. The first element would be one we saw in *Supernatural*, that of the family under pressure. From the start, father, mother, and daughter, who are given the Spanish surname 'Cruz' and are first shown at a birthday party, are threatened by the mysterious deadly forces that in the opening sequence have gorily killed a naked woman in the forest where they live. The main location is the Cruz's somewhat austere 'cabin in the woods', a motif so well known to the horror genre that it could serve as the title for 2012's meta-feature written and produced by TV runner Joss Whedon. The family's child, identified in the credits with the Spanish-spelled diminutive Ani, seems constantly in danger, with her mother reacting hysterically when the daughter so much as talks with their enigmatic visitor. David Leon's Alex represents the billions of newcomers, whom we are shown only on the family's TV, which is conveniently tuned to laSexta. These basic narrative tendencies are thus centripetal, re-inscribing a global narrative within the psychological microcosm of the individual's closest relationships.

Beyond these plot points, the visual style also evokes the horror genre, even though here there is more implicit tension than explicit gore. Frequent night shooting makes the lonely rural location yet more menacing, as in the first scene where it is an unlikely nocturnal hunter who discovers a dead naked woman with a round red light still pulsing between her exposed breasts. We next cut in a graphic match to a horror-style full moon. Off-screen space is likewise used in traditional style to conjure up unseen terrors, just out of shot. A pounding on the front door interrupts the placid birthday party. Or again the camera tilts down from that glowering moon to reveal there are hundreds of naked, glowing refugees swarming through the forest. The series also plays with limited points of view. Thus while generally our perspective is that of the harassed parents, at some points we see what they do not: Alex breaking into their home to steal a flashlight or initiating a dialogue with the curious Ani.

Beyond graphic (albeit 'lightened') horror and violence and nudity stronger than those permitted on US networks or basic cable, then,

viewers may well experience a more mobile and fragile form of the uncanny. Watching the Spanish version, laSexta's audience would hear the familiar mannered tones of recognizable Spanish dubbing actors, but issuing from unknown actors from the UK. Spanish viewers, especially of laSexta, would of course be familiar with US series dubbed in this way. But *The Refugees* looks very different to those.

Conversely, but complementarily, the English-language version, whose audio was recorded live on location, places British accents in a setting that seems very un-British. Firstly, the real-life Madrid sierra looks physically different to the damper, greener countryside of the UK. Secondly, the social context of the fictional world of the series is very alien to British spectators. The characters exhibit an intense religiosity rare indeed in the Britain where most citizens claim to have no religion: crucifixes are prominent in the family's home and car, meals invariably begin with grace, and the father fears it is irreligious to tell even a white lie. The central village is also unfeasibly isolated for a small country like the UK, connected only by refugee-choked lanes to a small town that seems to be the only administrative centre. And the inhabitants of this mysterious region have remarkably easy access to the firearms that they store at home and carry openly outside, as if they were American backwoodsmen or survivalists.

The series's extraordinary science fiction premise is soon accepted by its characters and, hopefully, by its audience. But the *unheimlich* setting of its fictional world, both geographical and cultural, proves less easily assimilated on extended viewing. It is perhaps no accident that the series had by 2016 not been shown in UK by the BBC that co-produced it. Clearly 'worldwide' television is difficult to target to local audiences that retain their national distinctiveness.

My second example is much better known in Spain: *El ministerio del tiempo*. This time-travel series (which of course preceded the US *Timeless*) is also the result of a new and innovative producer, in this case Cliffhanger, but in collaboration not with Atresmedia (Antena 3) but with the Spanish public television (TVE) that is so harshly criticized by academic commentators such as Bustamante. It also boasted a couple of showrunners who are the equal of US fantasy creators such as Kripke: brothers Javier and Pablo Olivares, formerly executive producers of proto-feminist historical bio-series *Isabel* (Cliffhanger/TVE, 2012–14).

As in *The Refugees*, we see again here a temporal confusion or collision in the text, in this case the presence of the past in the present. This conflict is embodied by the three figures from different eras that



Fig 2. El ministerio del tiempo *[*The Ministry of Time*] (Cliffhanger/TVE, 2015–16)*

form the main cast: twenty-first-century Madrid paramedic Julián (played by Rodolfo Sancho), nineteenth-century Barcelona student Amelia (Aura Garrido), and sixteenth-century military man Alonso (Nacho Fresneda). But it is also embedded in the main premise of the series, the struggle to preserve a history that, it is supposed, must not be changed, despite the best efforts of evil Frenchmen, Nazis, or Americans. Conversely in *The Refugees* the central family, forewarned by their visitor from the future, are able to take action to change their destiny and save their lives.

Although *The Refugees* gives rise to a perhaps unintentionally disturbing transnational reflection, *El ministerio del tiempo* seems at first sight very national indeed. Taking advantage of its proximity to the Spanish public, it has managed (as Chicadelatele put it, once more) to turn Lope de Vega and Velázquez into trending topics on Twitter. Moreover, the all-too-familiar theme of historical memory, so

much discussed in Spain in the last decade, receives here an original, amusing, and intelligent twist.

As in the case of the long-lived *Supernatural*, the address to the fandom of *El ministerio del tiempo* was carried out in part by meta-critical strategies such as frequent winks to television itself in the scripts. An obvious example is the presence of actor Michelle Jenner in a cameo as Queen Isabel the Catholic, sharing the soundstage with Rodolfo Sancho. He had played her royal husband in historical romance *Isabel* but here takes the role of a humble paramedic. Spanish literary references to Lazarillo de Tormes (protagonist of the first picaresque novel of 1554) are combined with televisual nods to highwayman Curro Jimenez (hero of a much loved and well-remembered series of the Transition (TVE, 1976–79)).

As in the case of *Supernatural* once more, self-reflexivity, little seen in previous Spanish series, here makes a claim to the artistic quality of 'complex TV' while connecting with a public more durable than that of *The Refugees*. The first episode of *El ministerio del tiempo*, which aired on 24 February 2015, had a market share of 8.99%, while the eighth and final rose to 9.45%. Benefitting from a rare critical success for the embattled state broadcaster, the second longer season of thirteen episodes was broadcast from February to May 2016.

As appropriate as *The Refugees* for these times of crisis, *El ministerio del tiempo* does not permit itself the reassuring pleasures of traditionalist nationalism. There are frequent and ironical allusions to the alleged vices of the Spaniards, such as improvization. And episodes typically focus on inglorious moments of national history: the not-so-Invincible Armada of Felipe II in the sixteenth century or the undistinguished reign of Isabel II in the nineteenth. What is more, far from triumphalism, the series gives off a poignant sense of melancholy. This culminates in the final episode of the first season, which is set in the Residencia de Estudiantes where the main characters who have come from the future become intimate with Federico García Lorca, but cannot warn him of a death already intuitively anticipated by the poet himself.

In *The Refugees* the apparition of billions of strangers is represented in the form of a microcosm via the domestic space of a cabin in the woods where a family receives, somewhat unwillingly, a solitary visitor. Likewise in *El ministerio del tiempo* the grand narrative of national history (with its tragedies and ironies) is coupled with the small personal chronicles that bear the emotional weight of the series. In the final twist that is so moving, we see in the Lorca episode that the main character played by Rodolfo Sancho has, by travelling to

the past, unwittingly been responsible for the death of his own wife. There are thus losses, both national and individual, that cannot be remedied even by characters gifted with supernatural powers.

It is no coincidence that this series that is so human and personal in its premise (the theme of mourning echoed the real-life death of the one of the creator-brothers) achieved the most careful and successful expression of social television in Spain, tirelessly extending or 'spreading' its brand. The quantity and quality of creative fan works inspired by *El ministerio del tiempo*, both in text and image, are overwhelming, as can be seen by the detailed analysis of this phenomenon in the book on the series so rapidly and expertly edited by Concepción Cascajosa Virino.[19]

While the management of the series's WhatsApp group (which was kept small and selective) raises the thorny question of complicity between fans and producers, it is too early to criticize the team for taking advantage of unmonetized labour by fans, as researchers have in the American context. In any case it was *El ministerio del tiempo*'s unique achievement to have attracted to Spain's state broadcaster the young, active, and creative public that would previously have devoted themselves exclusively to American series. The latter, unlike local productions, also receive ample and admiring coverage in the Spanish press.

The creators of *El ministerio del tiempo* managed for the first time in Spain to nurture or even pamper through the full range of social networks the loyal following who became known in a self-mocking neologism as 'Ministéricos' (a conflation of 'ministry' and 'hysterical'), devising a complex strategy even before the first episode aired. Indeed, this is the first time in my own experience as a commentator on Spanish-speaking media that I was contacted directly via Twitter. Marta A. Jimenez, @PeriodistaMdT, paid me the honour of becoming ambassador of the Ministry to English-speaking countries. I was also contacted by the producer Javier Olivares. I thus found myself, as the scholar-cum-fan of an exceptional series, caught up in the ethical dilemma of access to creators that at SCMS so troubled academic fans (fan academics) of series such as *Supernatural*.

Nor is it surprising that, as in the cases of American-style quality series, both realist and fantastic, the scripts of *El ministerio del tiempo* gesture towards a new social diversity, especially in relation to female characters. And while both HBO's series focusing on 'difficult men' and the CW's *Supernatural* are notorious for their lack of women

19 *Dentro de 'El ministerio del tiempo'*, ed. Concepción Cascajosa Virino (Madrid: Léeme, 2015).

protagonists, *El ministerio del tiempo*'s principals are more diverse. In this case the focus is on the proto-feminism of the nineteenth-century Catalan Amelia, who generally leads the group of time travellers in their perilous sorties. Similarly Irene (Cayetana Guillén Cuervo) is a lesbian refugee from the deadly repressions of late Francoism who has become a highflying civil servant in the Ministry. In the first episode she recruits Irene, planting a seductive kiss on the younger woman's lips as she does so, an apparently incongruous act in this nineteenth-century setting.

The series thus offers the viewer an unforced and often humorous schooling in the liberal attitudes that are held in its fictional universe to be typical of modern Spain, even in this somewhat stuffy civil-service setting. They are attitudes that at first prove bewildering to the characters who were born in less fortunate and more patriarchal and homophobic eras. The science fiction motif of time travel is thus used to dramatize the theme of the social construction of gender, sexuality, and (to a lesser extent) race, a construction that is shown to be subject to historical change. After much grumbling at the prospect of a woman leader, the macho sixteenth-century soldier Alonso will prove willing to be led into perilous missions by the resourceful Amelia.

This progressive concern for minority social issues (known in Spain as 'solidarity') is combined in *El ministerio del tiempo* with surprisingly scary or gory moments that verge on horror. The first episode opens on the bloody battlefield of Flanders in the sixteenth century, thus introducing the insubordinate and brutalized Alonso, who is one of the three protagonists. The fourth shows the Grand Inquisitor repeatedly burning an unfortunate rabbi at the stake (the main characters are here stuck in a time loop as they attempt to rescue him). A renegade from the Ministry is confined to a hellhole of a prison in eleventh-century Huesca, the 'terrible place' of the horror genre made worse by the character's confinement in a primitive period that is not his own.

Also decidedly ominous is the more frequent location of the (digitally created) shadowy spiral staircase which the protagonists descend to access the many 'Gates' or 'Doors' leading to different periods of Spain's past. Given the time-travel theme, it is perhaps no surprise that graveyards are a prominent location. In episode four the young Amelia will come face to face with her own tombstone, testimony to a future premature death, which is parallel perhaps to the negative prognosis with which some local scholars diagnose Spanish television. Certainly, as mentioned earlier, producers and

fans alike were well aware of the fatal illness suffered by one of the show runners, who did not live to see the first episode broadcast.

Chronicle of Deaths Foretold

While broadcast television is threatened even in the US in the medium term by the digital abyss, perhaps the type of individual or customized address pioneered in Spain by *El ministerio del tiempo*'s social-media team could be television's salvation. Relevant here also is the phenomenon of screening parties that offer physical contact with the creative team that supplements the digital connection. I attended an event in New York which linked viewers, producers, and actors in celebration of one sitcom that had been saved from cancellation by the activity of its faithful fans. Similarly in Spain fans joined together to demand a further season of *El ministerio del tiempo* when media reports claimed that TVE was hesitating to renew a series that had won many prizes but had not attracted a mass audience. When they agreed, the public broadcaster even asked the producers to make the second season more 'accessible', a tone-deaf request in this time of peak complex TV.[20]

We have seen, however, that even in Spain, despite the apparent death throes of public and private media models, the cases of the two series treated here provide evidence for remarkable artistic innovation in both production and reception. And, to their credit, those series have been made not in the HBO-style register of graphic realism but within the newer and less prestigious genre of horror light, a genre previously unknown in Spain. There have already been many media chronicles of deaths foretold over the past century: from radio, to theatrically screened movies, to generalist TV. Such deaths have always been somewhat exaggerated. In this first chapter I have sketched some recent chapters in the history of television and social networks and the relationship between production, fandom, and scholarship. As the remaining chapters of this book will show, surely this is a media drama that is to be continued.

20 Chicadelatele, 'La accesibilidad de los contenidos televisivos' (2015) <http://www.chicadelatele.com/2015/03/31/la-accesibilidad-de-los-contenidos-televisivos> [accessed 1 September 2016].

2. Biopic TV in Mexico: *Juana Inés* (Canal Once, 2016), *Hasta que te conocí: Juan Gabriel, mi historia* [*Until I Met You: Juan Gabriel, My Story*] (Azteca, 2016)

Contemporaneity, (Post-)feminism, Intermediality

This second chapter treats two contrasting biographical series broadcast free-to-air in Mexico in 2016. They were based, respectively, on the lives of the seventeenth-century poet and nun Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz and the recently deceased singer-songwriter Juan Gabriel. While the subjects are evidently very different, their dramas pose a test case as series made in the same country and within the same genre but varying in their production, reception, and cultural distinction: *Juana Inés* was aired to a minority audience on public educational web Canal 11 and *Hasta que te conocí: Juan Gabriel, mi historia* to a mass public on private network Azteca.

I will suggest, however, that confirming the family resemblance of their shared genre and moment in Mexican broadcasting, the two projects have much in common. Sharing as they do a turn away from the hitherto dominant genre and aesthetic of *telenovela*, both mini-series aspire to production values once held to be 'cinematic' and to an event status that transcends the habitual programming schedule. Their privileged position in the Mexican audio-visual field is thus similar to that of the 'horror light' short-run series in Spain.

Although, as we shall see, the biopic and bio-series in film and TV remain rare in Mexico (and are thus barely examined by scholars), my chosen texts coincide to some extent with three themes current in Anglo-American biopic studies (given the relative lack of research on the genre in television I focus here, initially at least, on cinema). The first theme is the new claim to contemporary relevance of films that are set necessarily in the past and are often the object of

intellectual suspicion for their praise of exemplary men of previous periods. Thus George Custen had (in a founding text of 1992) focused on Hollywood's construction of public history in the studio era and its influence on popular conceptions of the past;[1] and more recently Dennis Bingham (2010) examined the genre's form of cultural representation.[2]

Developing from these precedents, in *The Biopic in Contemporary Film Culture* Tom Brown and Belén Vidal see this mainstream role as being re-appropriated for other, more present purposes, just as national (even nationalist) narratives are re-serviced for transnational audiences.[3] Here the biopic distances itself from the rear-guard of aesthetic innovation and forms a counter-hegemonic vehicle intended nonetheless for mainstream audiences.[4] And far from constituting a fixed format of cultural representation, it now displays a formal flexibility that can serve radically different aims.[5] One review of the book claims, however, that by focusing on the formally innovative and politically radical examples of biopics, the collection fails to address more conventional films that make, still, a strong contribution to the genre.[6]

The second theme of recent biopic critical literature is post-feminism, proposed by Bronwyn Polaschek in *The Post-Feminist Biopic: Narrating the Lives of Plath, Kahlo, Woolf, and Austen* (2013).[7] This monograph aims to show how post-feminist sensibilities have conditioned and transformed the way women artists are represented on film. Dialoguing with the distinction between 'female' and 'feminist' biopics drawn by Bingham, Polaschek teases out not two but three levels: traditional images of femininity, alternatives to those

1 George Custen, *Bio/Pics: How Hollywood Constructed Public History* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2002 [1992]).

2 Dennis Bingham, *Whose Lives Are They Anyway?: The Biopic as Contemporary Film Genre* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2010).

3 Belén Vidal, 'Introduction: The Biopic and its Critical Contexts', in *The Biopic in Contemporary Film Culture*, ed. Tom Brown and Belén Vidal (London: Routledge, 2013), 1–32 (2).

4 Vidal, 'Introduction', in *The Biopic in Contemporary Film Culture*, ed. Brown and Vidal, 18.

5 Vidal, 'Introduction', in *The Biopic in Contemporary Film Culture*, ed. Brown and Vidal, 17.

6 Jonathan Stubbs, review of Tom Brown and Belén Vidal (eds), *The Biopic in Contemporary Film Culture* (2013), *Historical Journal of Film, Radio, and Television*, 34 (2014), 640–41 (641).

7 Bronwyn Polaschek, *The Post-Feminist Biopic: Narrating the Lives of Plath, Kahlo, Woolf, and Austen* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

images, and subsequent critiques of those alternatives. She thus lays claim to having discovered an emergent filmic subgenre[8] and having elaborated a revisionist critical focus of that corpus.[9] One review of Polaschek's book, however, suggests that post-feminism, instead of being a distinctive approach, is rather 'a cluster of different attitudes towards the accomplishments of second generation feminism'.[10] Like contemporaneity, then, which interacts unstably with differing cultural representations of the past, post-feminism is by no means single or simple.

The third and final theme of recent research on the biopic is intermediality, proposed in another collective volume, *Adaptation, Intermediality and the British Celebrity Biopic*, edited by Márta Minier and Maddalena Pennacchia (2014).[11] As with post-feminism, there is a triple focus here, in this case on adaptation (the re-creation of texts and lives), intermediality (the movement between text and screen), and celebrity studies (the promotion and presentation of the self). It is an approach exemplified by the first four chapters of the book, which are devoted to the filmic cycle on royalty in the UK. Once more a critic's view is helpful here. One reviewer of this volume refers, as in the previous cases, to the biopic's renewed ability to transcend traditionalism. In this case, however, it is by finding a third way between the twin extremes of popcorn movies and hard-core art film:

> Though often critically berated as middle of the road or middlebrow filmmaking, [the biopic's] potential for crossover has made it something of a stable niche in a market increasingly polarized around big-budget productions and festival offerings.[12]

Moreover, surprisingly perhaps, this supposedly staid genre is able to cross national frontiers and media divides:

> Textual strategies and media cultures [...] give the British biopic its international appeal [as] an adaptable form of filmmaking poised between old and new media, or between forms of literary biography

8 Polaschek, *Post-Feminist Biopic*, 149.

9 Polaschek, *Post-Feminist Biopic*, 152.

10 Christophe Van Eecke, review of Bronwyn Polaschek, *The Post-Feminist Biopic: Narrating the Lives of Plath, Kahlo, Woolf, and Austen* (2013), *Historical Journal of Film, Radio, and Television*, 35 (2015), 396–97 (396).

11 *Adaptation, Intermediality and the British Celebrity Biopic*, ed. Márta Minier and Maddalena Pennacchia (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014).

12 Belén Vidal, review of Márta Minier and Maddalena Pennacchia (eds), *Adaptation, Intermediality and the British Celebrity Biopic* (2014), *Adaptation*, 8 (2015), 268–71 (268).

> and the overexposure of the private self in the era of [...] ubiquitous social media.[13]

To its credit Minier and Pennacchia's work addresses not only film (and internet) but also the often neglected medium of television. This is vital here in a UK context where, unlike in other countries, TV drama has been more accepted as forming part of a privileged national narrative.

In Mexico, however, the biopic is little practised or studied and subsumed into the more familiar category of 'cine histórico' or period pictures. For example a prestigious collective volume on the cinema of the Revolution, published by IMCINE and the Cineteca, has chapters on *caudillos*, enemies, and (rare) female figures. But, focused as it is on the grand narrative of collective struggle, it does not explicitly address the questions of the biopic that are raised above.[14]

However if we look beyond the scholarly or academic realm to the trade press, we see that a recent resurgence of the biopic is connected to the new health and growth of Mexican film in theatres. Thus in 2013 specialist journalists John Hopewell and James Young wrote that 'Mexican Cinema Crosses the Border: Local Producers and Filmmakers are Riding a Box Office Wave that's Setting Local Records and Extends into the United States'.[15] Massively popular comedies, such as *Nosotros los Nobles* (Gary Alazraki, 2013) and TV comedian Eugenio Derbez's *No se aceptan devoluciones* (also 2013), are treated here alongside Diego Luna's *César Chavez: an American Hero* (2014), described as an 'activist biopic'.[16]

In this new context the producer of *Nosotros* states, unusually for the Mexico where cineastes sometimes take pride in turning their backs on the public: 'We're working to understand our audience and how best to release the films'.[17] The reporters gloss that these are 'pics [...] aimed at audiences that are normally overlooked by Hollywood tentpoles, which target the young-male demo'.[18] Moreover, they add that Televisa, which had produced Derbez's hit, 'certainly thinks

13 Vidal, Review, 268.

14 *Cine y revolución*, ed. Pablo Ortiz Monasterio (Mexico City: IMCINE and Cineteca Nacional, 2010).

15 John Hopewell and James Young, 'Mexican Cinema Crosses the Border: Local Producers and Filmmakers are Riding a Box Office Wave that's Setting Local Records and Extends into the United States', *Variety*, 5 November 2013, 110.

16 Hopewell and Young, 'Mexican Cinema', 110.

17 Hopewell and Young, 'Mexican Cinema', 110.

18 Hopewell and Young, 'Mexican Cinema', 110.

it has the business model nailed'.[19] It is television, then, that offers cinema formats, at once financial and cultural, for connecting closely with local audiences in movie theatres, as is already the case in homes. And while most of the resulting films are comedies, they pave the way for dramas, including biopics.

One year later James Young continued reporting on this trend, writing that 'Mexican Audiences Lap Up Local Laffers: Auteurs See a Trend that Will Bring an Embrace of More Serious Domestic Films As Well'.[20] In this second article Young begins by making explicit the market positioning of the new popular successes which distance themselves from niche art cinema. Moreover there is a thematic connection here once more between quality comedies and middlebrow biopics. Young goes on to write that 'Mexico's selection for the foreign-language Oscar, biopic *Cantinflas*, follows the legendary comedian whose man of the people sense of humour was fed by poverty and the common desire to mock the rich and powerful'.[21] This is precisely the same theme as comedy *Nosotros los Nobles*. Moreover these films are not the low budget, shoddily made *churros* turned out in past decades. Young observes that: 'The new comedies all share an attribute local auds expect when they go to the movies — higher production values, like in the Hollywood films that are the most popular pics in Mexico'.[22]

Hence, where in the previous article Mexican films were thought to have targeted a female demographic neglected by US product, here they are said to aspire to Hollywood's glossy look and are thus rewarded with a bi-national public. Although festival favourites are barely seen in theatres at home, comedies, including this rare biopic, are thus vital to the commercial growth of a Mexican cinema. According to Young's figures 'Mexican pictures took an estimated 10.9% of the overall B.O. in 2013, up from 2012's 4.5%'.[23]

It is striking that not all the partners of high-minded auteurs despised these popular successes. Young concludes by citing Jaime Romandia, 'founder and director of indie shingle Mantarraya and frequent collaborator with festival darlings Carlos Reygadas and Amat Escalante', who notes that 'films that strike a balance between

19 Hopewell and Young, 'Mexican Cinema', 110.

20 James Young, 'Mexican Audiences Lap Up Local Laffers: Auteurs See a Trend that Will Bring an Embrace of More Serious Domestic Films As Well', *Variety*, 21 October 2014, 74.

21 Young, 'Mexican Audiences', 74.

22 Young, 'Mexican Audiences', 74.

23 Young, 'Mexican Audiences', 74.

art and commercial success are appearing in more countries' and will 'open the door for Mexicans to watch Mexican cinema'.[24]

Television is, as so often, absent from the picture here. And it seems unlikely that the uncompromising auteurs Reygadas or Escalante will ever generate much interest amongst the general public. But I would argue that, as in the case of cinema and at the very same time, TV also identified a gap in the market in its continuing attempt to connect with a changing local audience. It is one that could be filled only by that 'middle of the road' genre, finely balanced between art and commerce, that is the quality biographical series.

The Lives and Loves of *Juana Inés*



Fig 3. Juana Inés *(Canal Once, 2016)*

Patricia Arriaga Jordán, perhaps the most distinguished TV producer in Mexico, created *Juana Inés* for Canal 11, the public free-to-air channel owned by the Instituto Politécnico Nacional with which she has long collaborated. The seven hour-long episodes were broadcast nationally twice a week in prime time beginning on 26 March 2016 and subsequently sold to Netflix for foreign distribution.

Arriaga's use of her subject's name 'Juana Inés' without the habitual honorific 'Sister' suggests her series's attempt to get behind

24 Young, 'Mexican Audiences', 74.

the deceptive familiarity of a very visible figure to reach the real woman behind. Typically, one tagline of the drama ran: 'Antes de ser historia, ella fue Juana Inés' [Before she was history, she was Juana Inés].[25] And this Mexican quality drama coincides fortuitously with three questions posed above by recent Anglo-American biopic studies: contemporaneity, post-feminism, and intermediality.

Thus *Juana Inés* is contemporary in its approach, focusing as it does on currently relevant issues and successfully addressing a target audience of twenty-five- to forty-five-year olds. It thus raises the question of the relation of the historicity it documents to the urgency of the present circumstance in which its young viewers live. The series is also overtly post-feminist (or perhaps proto-feminist), portraying as it does a resistant subject who lived in a macho society yet more oppressive than that of modern Mexico, but who finally abandoned that resistance. And it is intermedial, posing implicitly the problem of the connection between Sor Juana's printed works, the iconic depictions of their author (in painting and engraving), and the many posthumous versions of the Sister in fiction film and documentary (one of the latter was made by Arriaga herself).

Like the subjects of many recent international biopics, then, Sor Juana was a proto-celebrity in her own lifetime, praised as the 'Tenth Muse' (Antiquity boasted only nine). And in her most famous portrait (adapted for the current two-hundred-peso banknote) she was posed in front of her precious books, but with a cumbersome painting attached to her habit, the so-called 'nun's shield'. In Juana Inés's seductive figure, literary and visual culture have always been uneasy bedfellows. The fact that Sor Juana was also a kind of performer (entertaining high profile guests behind a screen in the *locutorio* or parlour, even producing a play within the convent) thus makes her especially suitable for a genre that is newly emergent in her home country.

Taking advantage of a unique moment of change in the habitus of Mexican TV, when the heritage genre of *telenovela* is losing its appeal, *Juana Inés* thus appeals to a biographical format in the context of a minority public channel hosted by a university. But in addition to its quality production values, expert scripting, and assured performances by the two actors who play the nun at different ages, *Juana Inés* does appeal to one hallowed biopic technique: the flashback. Dying of plague at the age of just forty-three, the Sister looks back at her secluded but eventful life in a familiar framing device that recurs in each successive episode.

25 All translations are the author's own.

In an email interview with the author, executive producer and head writer Arriaga fleshed out her production process and the somewhat stormy reception that her series received.[26] To return to the three research topics mentioned above, Arriaga wanted above all to make a little known colonial period that is today barely taught in schools feel contemporary to current Mexican viewers. She did this by showing Juana Inés as: 'un personaje cercano a nuestra época en su rebeldía y viveza, en su deseo de ser aceptada, amada, dispuesta a pelear por lo suyo. Son motivaciones contemporáneas, no así del siglo XVII' [a character who is close to our time in her rebelliousness and liveliness, in her desire to be accepted and loved, and in her readiness to fight for what is hers. These are contemporary motivations, not those of the seventeenth century].[27] Sor Juana, she went on, was thus ready to stand up to the fiercely patriarchal Catholic and colonial establishments of her time, an attractive ambition with which modern audiences could easily identify. This emphasis on contemporaneity and closeness was in spite of the fact that the series was shot where possible in authentic historic locations (there was in any case no budget for full scale studio recreations). The art design was also documented from rare surviving sources: some of the lavish costumes were even original period pieces lent by a collector.

A vital issue in this contemporary context was the subject's post-, or perhaps more properly, proto-feminism. This question proves complex, as scholars fail to agree over the historical Juana Inés's socio-political stance, which was in any case severely limited by her status as a nun subject to ecclesiastical authority and threatened by the Inquisition. Thus on the one hand, Juana Inés openly attacked men as the cause of women's ills and vigorously championed women's education. But on the other she finally and somewhat mysteriously abandoned her literary ambitions and, withdrawing from intellectual life, gave away her beloved and well-stocked library. This romance with learning is perhaps the most durable and sensual in the series: having lost her books in the final episode, Juana Inés runs her fingers longingly over the now empty shelves in her cell.

Beyond the attempted vindication of women's rights (barely conceivable in the period of course), the yet more taboo question of homosexuality is also a key issue in *Juana Inés*. While the nun's passionate poetry dedicated to a Vicereine (the wife of the Spanish Viceroy) is well known and was even published in her lifetime, Arriaga sought to show that Juana Inés:

26 Patricia Arriaga Jordán, interview with author via email, 23 December 2016.

27 Arriaga Jordán, interview with author.

> no era 'asexual', que a pesar del gran esfuerzo de la religión católica por someter la sexualidad de las mujeres, de convertirnos en la fuente del pecado, de encerrarnos, ponernos velos, la sexualidad femenina en la corte y en el convento estaba viva.
>
> [was not 'asexual', that despite the great effort of the Catholic religion to subjugate women's sexuality, to turn us into the source of sin, to lock us up, and to put us in veils, female sexuality in the Court and in the convent was alive and well].

Although Arriaga accepts that we can never know how physical the relationship was between the two women, she defends her series's relatively explicit love scenes as a dramatization of the real-life poetic texts that she also puts into the two actors' mouths. This graphic depiction is also defended as appropriate in a 'historical fiction' which must follow the 'rules of drama' (as opposed to those of 'melodrama'). Only in this manner can modern producers recreate on screen a private life of which nothing can now be known (the correspondence between nun and Vicereine mentioned by the series does not survive).

This depiction of lesbian love was an act of daring when portraying a national icon on Mexican TV. And, according to the series creator, it provoked criticism from two sides: the clerics whose ultimate aim is to have Juana canonized and the academics who cling to a literalist conception of historical truth. More significantly perhaps, the queer theme prominent in the series (previous versions have been more discreet) also pointed to the auteur status of Arriaga as executive producer. One of her earlier series for Canal 11 was a workplace drama on the theme of modern masculinity that also provoked controversy for its gay male love scenes.[28] Named for the male chromosomes, *XY* (2013–14), whose tagline was 'Ser. Hombre. Hoy.' [Being. A Man. Today.], was finally not so different in its premise from the *Juana Inés* whose motto could well be 'Ser. Mujer. Ayer.' [Being. A Woman. Yesterday.]. Period fiction and contemporary themes here join hands once more.

Finally comes intermediality. The devout and cloistered nun Juana Inés is often shown in the series as a public performer. In the first episode her erudition is tested by a panel of male worthies in a very theatrical oral examination. In later instalments she recites her verses to admiring courtiers or stages her witty play as part of a strategy for seducing the Vicereine. And *Juana Inés* the TV series

28 Paul Julian Smith, *Dramatized Societies: Quality Television in Spain and Mexico* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2016), 81–112.

plays off earlier depictions of Sor Juana's life in cinema. In interview, Arriaga expressed her familiarity with María Luisa Bemberg's *Yo la peor de todas* [*I, the Worst of All Women*] (1990), a feature film much studied by scholars.[29] Arriaga's drama is thus aware of its place as the latest in a chain of female or feminist re-workings of the poet-nun's enigmatic life.

Yet there are striking differences between the relatively familiar film, now a quarter-century old, and the as yet unstudied series, so recently broadcast. Bemberg, who was Argentinian, created a remarkably abstract biopic. In her studio-shot film, figures are frequently framed by thick shadow that renders the already hermetic interiors literally obscure. And casting is consistently international. The film's Juana is played by the luminous Catalan Assumpta Serna, best known at the time as the murderous femme fatale in Almodóvar's *Matador* (1986). Juana's great love the Vicereine is played by the French Dominique Sanda, whose dialogue is dubbed by the Argentine-born Cecilia Roth (also familiar from Almodóvar). Most of the rest of the Argentinian cast take little care to disguise their accents, which are as distant from the sound of Juana's Mexico City as are the film's stylized studio sets from its visuals.

Conversely Arriaga's series is deeply rooted in the Mexican nun's time and place. Although Juana's real-life cloister still exists, it is now a working university where shooting proved impossible. But the locations used in the series include Mexico City's Cathedral and a sixteenth-century former convent in Mexico State. Canal 11 even aired scholarly shorts on the series's locations under the title *Los lugares de Juana Inés* [*The Places of Juana Inés*]. Although Arriaga laments that budget and time constraints made her unable to correct all the dialogue (especially the Peninsular *ceceo* or lisp), most unusually for a Mexican series the many Spanish characters generally sound authentic in their idiom. Through its precise linguistic distinctions the dialogue thus reproduces the colonists' dominion over their reluctant subjects.

Moreover, stressing pre-Hispanic *mexicanidad* [Mexicanness], Juana is seen and heard in the series speaking Nahuatl, interacting with traditional faith healers, and interceding to protect Amerindian servants from abuse by their European overlords. The question of race, then, so often erased by modern Mexicans who are too swift to distance themselves from their inheritance from the Spanish

29 Cynthia L. Stone, 'Beyond The Female Gaze: María Luisa Bemberg's Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz' [n.d.] <http://www.lehman.cuny.edu/ciberletras/v13/stone.htm> [accessed 1 September 2016].

conquistadors, reasserts itself here. Ironically this indigenist element is combined within a visual look that owes much to Old Master painting, especially the portraits of Velázquez. The cultural specificity of the *mestizo* metropolis of the seventeenth century is thus ably evoked as the series juxtaposes native Nahuatl and priestly Latin or, again, the flowing embroidered dresses of indigenous women with the rigid costumes and sculptured hairstyles of European nobility.

It is perhaps no surprise that *Juana Inés* should have proved controversial. The historical nun found herself in a complex and contradictory position in a society that alternately celebrated and disparaged her during her lifetime. Even today literary critics disagree as to whether her story is one of female empowerment or female abjection. And much of the nun's greatest work, such as the lengthy poem *Primero sueño* [*First Dream*] (successfully brought to the stage by veteran lesbian performer Jesusa Rodríguez), remains hermetic even to scholars.

However, a famous verse reprinted on the two-hundred-peso bank note is openly feminist, attacking as it does 'foolish men' who blame women for the faults for which men themselves are responsible. Taking its cue from its celebrated subject and taking up its place in a Mexican television scene that can sometimes seem as claustrophobic as a colonial convent, *Juana Inés* the series is, like Juana Inés the woman, a remarkable innovator. Just weeks after it took its bow it was joined by another notable contributor to the new genre, Azteca's mini-series on singer Juan Gabriel, *Hasta que te conocí*.

The Life and Death of Juan Gabriel

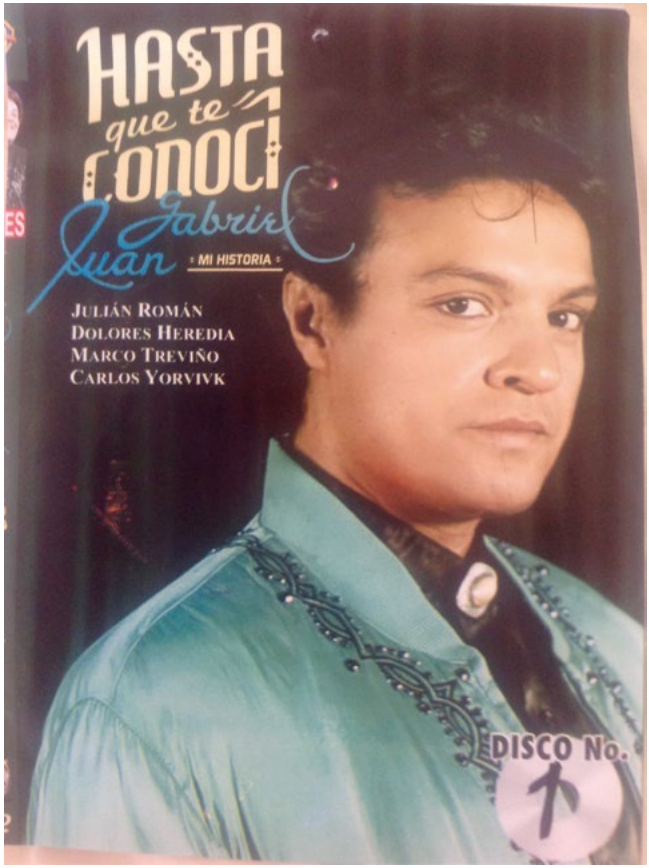


Fig 4. Hasta que te conocí: Juan Gabriel, mi historia *[*Until I Met You: Juan Gabriel, My Story*] (Azteca, 2016)*

Juan Gabriel (real name Alberto Aguilera Valadez) was the best-loved Mexican singer-songwriter of the last half-century. The composer of hundreds of songs in many genres, he was also known for extravagant concert performances lasting up to three hours. He had performed one such show at the Forum in Los Angeles when he died of a heart attack on 28 August 2016. His death coincided with the screening of the last episode of a fourteen-part mini-series on his life, *Hasta que te conocí*, which, when it premiered on 10 July, had been intended to

celebrate instead forty-five years of his career as a performer.[30]

The national mourning after Juan Gabriel's death was reminiscent of the public outpouring of emotion in the UK when Princess Diana died and proved the contemporaneity of a figure whose greatest successes had been decades before. Mexican TV presenters wore strictly black for a week, before accenting their lugubrious garb with a coloured necktie or scarf as the rigorous code of mourning was slowly lifted. Normal schedules were suspended as Televisa replayed its extensive back catalogue of variety show appearances by Mexico's greatest star (rival network Azteca also devoted countless hours to the figure affectionately known as Juanga). A black ribbon was superimposed on the TV screen twenty-four hours a day, whatever programme was playing. The profound grief seemed appropriate for the death of the legend, whose songs often struck a tragic note: one of his best loved ballads is the profoundly pessimistic 'Yo no nací para amar' [I Was Not Born to Love].

Juan Gabriel's ashes journeyed from California via Ciudad Juárez, where the star had been raised the youngest of ten children by his illiterate mother, to be placed on display at the Palace of Fine Arts in Mexico City. This enshrinement was an honour previously accorded only to such artistic, cinematic, and literary luminaries as Frida Kahlo, María Félix, and Gabriel García Márquez (Sor Juana had also received eulogies at her funeral, but was buried anonymously in the Cloister alongside her fellow nuns). Attempting to reach the suddenly sacred site were some 700,000 people, who lined up patiently all night to pay their respects. It was a figure beyond that which any earlier honouree had achieved. Outside the Palace, by an improvised altar of flowers, posters, and tattered LP covers, imitators ranging in age from infants to seniors rehearsed their idol's greatest hits in heartfelt approximations of his high, plangent voice.

In spite of this shared collective mourning, contradictions in the figure of the icon became apparent almost immediately. Like the differing opinions as to whether Sor Juana represented female empowerment or abjection, they proved impossible to reconcile. While some press commentators congratulated a once-macho Mexico on its heartfelt devotion to this effeminate icon, others noted more sceptically that the same men weeping over the so-called

30 'Recrean la vida del "Divo" de Juárez en *Hasta que te conocí*: en el marco de los 45 años de carrera de Juan Gabriel, Azteca TV estrena hoy la series que muestra la vida del cantante', *Sipse.com*, 10 July 2016 <http://sipse.com/entretenimiento/tvazteca-estrena-serie-hasta-que-te-conoci-historia-juan-gabriel-213078.html> [accessed 1 October 2016].

Divo de Juárez were also marching in demonstrations opposing the marriage-equality initiative proposed by President Peña Nieto. One columnist (Luis González de Alba, a pioneer queer activist), wrote in the daily paper *Milenio* in the first person plural, a rarity in Mexico, as elsewhere, saying that 'we gay men' need to see 'our' lives and loves represented in popular culture, just as 'we' did in the person of the *Divo*.[31] But Nicolás Alvarado, another columnist in the same paper, claimed more notoriously that he disliked the star's sequins ('lentejuelas') not because they were queer ('jotas') but because they were kitsch ('nacas'), the latter a term with classist, even racist, undertones.[32] The outcry from readers was such that the unrepentant Alvarado was obliged to resign from his position as director of the UNAM TV channel, the sole rival to *Juana Inés*'s Canal 11. Like Sor Juana, then, Juan Gabriel (a ubiquitous and deceptively familiar figure from another era), became the focus for conflicts around gender and queer sexuality in modern Mexico.

This new proposal of love for the instantly canonized Juan Gabriel was thus cross-cut with an intermittent acknowledgment of the homosexuality of which he himself never spoke. In a famous formulation of the glass closet or open secret that was widely repeated on TV after his death, an interviewer on Univision had once asked him directly if he was gay. He had replied: 'Lo que se ve, no se pregunta' [What you can see, you don't need to ask]. Flagrantly visible, then, Juan Gabriel was also sternly silent, striking a knowing bargain with his socially conservative fans who would not ask if he did not tell. And he never took up a political position in favour of what Mexicans prefer to call 'sexual diversity'.

Yet while the physical expression of Sor Juana's relations with women remains impossible to verify, the homosexual activity of Juan Gabriel attested to by living witnesses was readily incorporated into the hagiography of the now consecrated figure. Scandal sheet *TVNotas* quoted a showbiz pal who said he would have three young men lined up outside his dressing room in case one or more of them took his fancy.[33] Even *TVyNovelas*, Televisa's fawning gossip magazine, cited

31 Luis González de Alba, 'Pero, ¿había necesidad?', *Milenio*, 2 September 2016 <http://www.milenio.com/firmas/luis_gonzalez_de_alba_lacalle/habia_necesidad-Juan_Gabriel_18_804099625.html> [accessed 1 October 2016].

32 Nicolás Alvarado, 'No me gusta "Juanga" (lo que le viene guango)', *Milenio*, 2 September 2016 <http://www.milenio.com/firmas/nicolas_alvarado_fueraderegistro2/Soy_uno_de_los_poquisimos_mexicanos_que_no_asumen_a_Juan_Gabriel_como_un_idolo_18_802299773.html> [accessed 1 October 2016].

33 Shanik Berman, 'Lyn May: "Juan Gabriel nunca se 'echó' una mujer"', *TVNotas*, 30 August 2016, no pag.

a source in its special memorial issue who claimed that Juan Gabriel happily had twenty lovers when confined as a young man to prison.[34] In spite of the star's own code of silence, his voracious homoerotic appetite could now be posthumously acknowledged by the popular press as an essential part of his myth.

But of greatest interest is Juan Gabriel's extensive audio-visual legacy, which, stretching as it does from print and music to cinema and TV, is clearly intermedial. Thus just as Sor Juana's bio-series was preceded by earlier audio-visual versions of her life, so Juan Gabriel's drama was anticipated by the autobiographical feature films in which he had starred in the early years of his career and whose plots provided regular opportunities for expert musical numbers. But Juan Gabriel was also known as a performer whose career grew in tandem with the development of Mexican television. Ironically, as mentioned earlier, his passing coincided with the broadcast by national network Azteca of the final episode of his bio-series, *Hasta que te conocí*, named for one of his most famous songs. In response to the death, US Spanish-language network Telemundo, co-producer with Disney, TNT, and Azteca, which had planned to show the series in November, brought forward its premiere to 11 September.

Music and television thus joined hands in this final, coincidental bow. It is instructive to compare the image that is constructed of this national icon in this high-quality contemporary series (which has Juan Gabriel played at different ages by six actors) with the musical features that he himself had acted in some thirty years earlier. Latterly famous for Liberace-like flamboyance, his rotund figure swathed in hot pink or turquoise satin, the youthful slimline Juan Gabriel was in fact surprisingly sober in appearance and demeanour. Indeed one episode of the series shows his producer sternly counselling him to tone down his vocal and visual style. Like Sor Juana, then, Juan Gabriel, initially at least, staged a renunciation of visual pleasure in order to achieve his professional goals.

Pre-publicity for the biographical series had claimed that, with the *Divo*'s consent, it would indeed focus on the theme of the 'diversity of love'.[35] But *Hasta que te conocí* was equally significant for other reasons. It was the first series based on the life of an entertainment star in a country that, as mentioned earlier, had little tradition in the

34 *TVyNovelas. Edición de coleccion. Juan Gabriel (1950–2016). ¡Nació para ser amado!* (2016), no pag.

35 Ivett Salgado, 'Abordan la diversidad del amor en serie de Juanga', *Milenio*, 25 February 2016 <http://www.milenio.com/hey/television/Abordan-diversidad-amor-serie-Juanga_0_689931011.html> [accessed 1 October 2016].

genre. In the current programming context, this prestige production, which boasts thirteen weekly instalments (*Juana Inés* had just nine), played a key role in Azteca's attempt to diversify from the now-threatened heritage genre of the *telenovela*.

Signalling Juan Gabriel's immense popularity with US Latino audiences, the co-produced series was also lusher and more 'cinematic' than is common on Mexican television, rivalling North American production values. The first episodes boast handsome aerial shots of the misty Michoacán countryside where Juan Gabriel's family had lived, afflicted by biblical-style calamities such as earthquakes and volcanoes.

A 'making of' documentary proclaimed the series's authenticity with a strategy also used by *Juana Inés*: by referencing its use of fifty handsome locations. These included the picturesque Palace of Fine Arts, normally a temple of high culture, where Juan Gabriel would go on to hold his most famous concert and where his ashes would receive the final respects from his multitude of grieving fans. (Soon after his death, pirate DVDs of the video recording of that concert suddenly became available from street stalls in Mexico City.) As in *Juana Inés*, then, the authenticity of the locations serves to legitimate both the cultural distinction of the series and the veracity of its version of a subject's ambiguous and contested life.

The cast of the TV series was also of an unusually high quality, featuring actors better known from premium cable, independent film, and legitimate theatre than from mainstream television. Dolores Heredia, a respected performer who was previously seen starring in HBO Latin America's expert prison drama *Capadocia* (2008–12) and was at the time the director of the Mexican Film Academy, played the key role of Juan Gabriel's much loved but unsympathetic mother. Signalling a shift away from the Mexican chauvinism of casting, the adult Juan Gabriel was even played by Julián Román, a Colombian actor who (unlike the Argentine cast of Bemberg's film on Sor Juana) successfully mimicked his subject's distinctive (Chihuahua) accent. Azteca were here perhaps acknowledging their debt to a country (Colombia) with a greater track record in bio-series than their own. It is interesting that their practice differed from that of Canal 11, which focused on national talent for its own controversial drama.

One key episode in the Juan Gabriel mythology is, as mentioned earlier, the sentence he served in Mexico City's Lecumberri Prison before becoming a star. And it is instructive to compare the episode in the recent series dedicated to this time with the early feature film *Es mi vida* [*It's My Life*] (Gonzalo Martínez Ortega, 1982). *Es mi vida* is

devoted to the same period and features a relatively restrained Juan Gabriel playing himself at the lowest point in his life. Both versions coincide in their main plot points, showing how the young migrant lived precariously on the street where he witnessed the death of a fellow vagrant. Both stress his supposed naïveté as a provincial taken advantage of by unscrupulous city slickers, when he is falsely accused of theft after being invited to provide the musical accompaniment at a glamorous party.

Finally, the still unknown Juan Gabriel is rescued from the hellhole penitentiary only by the intervention of the real-life singing star known as *La Prieta Linda* [The Pretty Dark-Skinned Girl], who invites him to share her comfortable home with her mistrustful homophobic husband. She will prove to be just one of a line of devoted female friends who are shown to be essential to this gay outsider's success. As in *Juana Inés*, then, in this post-feminist drama, the twin themes of gender and sexuality are inextricable.

Yet the numbers Juan Gabriel performs in prison, which attract the attention of the established artist, are depicted quite differently in the two dramas. *Es mi vida*, made in the 1980s and aimed at Juan Gabriel's original teenage fans, is consistently downbeat and shows him sadly strumming a guitar in his sordid cell (the low-budget film was shot on grungy location). The slicker television series, intended now for an admiring general audience, casts a handsome young impersonator lip-synching to a full orchestral backing track. Whether they are read as queer or kitsch, then, Juan Gabriel's showbiz 'sequins' are precociously visible here in scenes reminiscent of the classic movie musical.

Yet in spite of its pre-publicity, the modern series skirted the question of sexual diversity as much as the discreet feature made some thirty years before. It does show Mexico City's showbiz scene as populated by queens in fur coats and full make-up, while in the prison scenes, a more touching male couple support each other *in extremis*. The young Juan Gabriel, however, seems impervious to such sights: the most we see is a chaste kiss he offers a beloved boy in reform school. Even in 2016, it would appear, what is seen all too clearly need not be mentioned. And similar to the old-school biopics of so many closeted stars, the family romance with the mother is made to substitute for queer affairs that cannot be openly staged. As we shall see later, the climactic scene of the last episode is the concert at the Palace of Fine Arts where Juan Gabriel is shown performing to an audience that consists only of an apparition of his now dead mother, in a final spectral encounter. It is no accident that one of Juan

Gabriel's most famous numbers, 'Amor eterno' [Everlasting Love], was written on the death of his mother and was dedicated to her memory.

While it remains to be seen if the legacy of this secular saint will last as long as that of Sor Juana, there is little doubt that Juan Gabriel has made a decisive contribution to Mexican popular culture, as is confirmed by the exceptional production and reception history of his bio-series. We can now go on to examine specimen episodes of the two dramas in order to identify textual similarities and differences between them, which may be traced back to the common genre and historical moment in which they were made and broadcast.

Juana Inés: The Final Episode

The final episode of *Juana Inés*, some fifty-one minutes long, begins with on-screen titles that set the scene. Using a well-known colonial formula, it situates this last part of the series in 'la muy noble y leal Ciudad de México, 1693' [the very noble and loyal City of Mexico, 1693]. The titles further inform viewers that the capital of New Spain has suffered flooding and famine; that the Viceroy's power is now weakened compared to that of the Archbishop; and that Sor Juana is suffering the effects of the publication of the *Carta Antenagórica* [*Athenagoric Letter*], her riposte to a Portuguese cleric.

There are complex textual or chronological layers here, which will be variably visible in the episode to follow: the grand narrative of colonial history (floods and famines) will go unseen; the struggle between religious and secular authority will be played out only through the test case of Sor Juana herself; and the theological controversy, difficult to depict on screen, will be collapsed into the proto-feminist conflict between an active female author and her patriarchal censors.

The episode proper begins with a cold open (pre-credit sequence) condensed into a brisk three minutes. In the first shot Sor Juana (black habit, white wimple) rushes into her ample, comfortable cell (red and gold wallpaper) accompanied by a fellow sister. She then walks back and forward as she urgently dictates a letter to her ally the ex-Viceroy. A quick cut takes us to Spain with the former Viceroy and Vicereine in two-shot, her mane of frizzy hair extravagantly backlit. Spanish clerics with emphatic *ceceo* (the Peninsular linguistic feature that producer Patricia Arriaga was so keen to preserve) agree to endorse Sor Juana's writings, to evident delight of the Vicereine. A play of distinct national locations and linguistic varieties is thus set

up from the start, suggesting the bio-series's ability to cross national frontiers and media divides.

In the third scene, we see Sor Juana in close-up behind the bars of the convent parlour entreating her friend Carlos de Sigüenza y Góngora (an expelled Jesuit and scientific scholar) for his help against the Inquisition. But who will aid her from within the Mexican Church? This cold open thus sets up an enigma or quest motif for the curious viewer. And the relatively fast pace of cutting and shooting signals a contemporary style of bio-series far from the more sedate rhythm and hushed sets of Bemberg's period feature film two decades earlier. Rather than seeing the series's aesthetic as conservative, however, I would suggest that (like recent feature films that have connected with the Mexican public) *Juana Inés* aims to strike a balance between art and commercial success even within the context of a minority public TV channel.

The credits that follow are set to an urgent string soundtrack, composed by Michael Nyman, an expatriate British composer still known for his close collaboration with art-movie director Peter Greenaway. They serve as an abbreviated montage for regular viewers' memory management, composed as they are of ten brief soundless shots. Thus teenage Sor Juana sits proudly in her chair, facing a jury of black-clad scholars in her public exam. Now a little older, she is taking her vows, robed in white and garlanded with a headdress of flowers in front of the gold altarpiece of the Cathedral. Next comes the first Vicereine on her throne at court, an older woman entranced by young Sor Juana. The latter is then shown, also at court, handsome and hopeful in a white and purple gown trimmed with jewels. Now she is mature and seen in black habit and darkened cell, light streaming through a small window behind her. Her confessor-cum-nemesis, beady-eyed Antonio Núñez de Miranda, next looms out of ecclesiastical darkness. The formidable Mother Superior is then shown plucking a harp at a convent entertainment. A box of (forbidden?) books partly covered by a yellow cloth comes next, followed by a convent corridor seen at night and lit gold by flaming lamps. Finally, Sor Juana's quill moves over a parchment as the camera tilts up to her troubled face. These last two shots bear Patricia Arriaga's credits as executive producer and 'series creator', a rare title in Mexico.

The credit sequence thus re-establishes for viewers the main character's trajectory (especially necessary when, as here, she is played by more than one actor) and calls attention to a number of supporting characters chosen from the unusually large cast. By

rehearsing the series's display of period costumes and settings it confirms its access to the higher production values now expected by Mexican audiences in local television, as in film.

This last episode is given a title: 'La vida con que muero' [The Life With Which I Die]. The line, which is taken from a poem by Sor Juana herself, appears to be a typical Baroque conceit or paradox. Here, however, as we shall see, it is to be meant quite literally: by the end of the episode death will be ubiquitous in the life of the convent. The drama before that end is based on a three-act structure that builds to a cliffhanger or climax before each commercial break. Ironically (or appropriately) enough this is exactly the same structure to be found in the Golden Age play or *comedia*, including those written by Sor Juana herself. Such textual strategies make a period series more legible within a contemporary media culture.

As in the cold open, the pace is relatively fast as the episode sets off, cutting between different locations that are not always established. Thus first there is a meeting of men to plan a defence of Sor Juana's writings. Next the friendly Padre Palavicino praises her in a sermon, with the nuns who are (unusually) wearing full veils glimpsed listening behind a grille. (Arriaga says she was criticized by literalist historians for not showing the Sisters as veiled throughout the series.) We cut to the sepulchral, gravel-voiced Archbishop, Francisco de Aguiar y Seijas, who, in his pronounced Peninsular accent, threatens to invoke the Inquisition at this provocation. Sor Juana, meanwhile, is received with frank hostility by her Sisters, jealous after hearing Palavicino's paean. While the camerawork in the series typically uses shallow focus (isolating figures from the ground behind them), here it also employs a dramatic rack focus, showing Sor Juana and her companions separated from one another even within the same shot.

The next scenes crisscross the Atlantic. In Mexico Palavicino is arrested. In Spain the ex-Vicereine presents the newly printed second volume of Sor Juana's complete works to her sickly husband. The Mother Superior confronts Sor Juana in the convent, warning her that her writing affects the whole community. The Vicereine, back in Madrid and suddenly widowed, now takes tea (or is it Mexican chocolate?) with a noble female friend in front of a lush tapestry. We learn that Sor Juana's poetry has been authorized in Spain by the Inquisition, which has pronounced that her verses are 'chaste'. Back in Mexico, the Archbishop, Sor Juana's new nemesis, sarcastically recites her most famous line (much later to figure on a Mexican banknote): 'Hombres necios que acusáis a la mujer sin razón' [Foolish men who criticize women unreasonably].

The rapidly shifting locations thus point to the unstable and perilous position of the wealthy, distant colony, subject to the metropolis yet relatively autonomous of it. But support from far-off Spain has little purchase in the convent. In the *locutorio* Sor Juana is warned by her confessor to renounce her writings. In a response likely to chime with the attitudes of the series's young female audience, she replies that she is willing if necessary to die for the crime of being a woman and a writer. But when the confessor threatens to hand over to the Archbishop her personal correspondence, provoking a public trial for Sor Juana and her beloved ex-Vicereine, Sor Juana surrenders, clutching the letters to her breast. On this note the first act of the episode ends after a swift twenty minutes.

The second act intensifies the array of forces against the protagonist. A meeting of clerics recites Sor Juana's many supposed faults: as a celebrity, she is rich and famous, not least for her library of four thousand books. Her fellow nuns testify against her. Explanatory dialogue from a priest (voicing what is surely known to his contemporary listeners but not to the modern target audience) informs us thus that women, being morally deficient, cannot testify in court, own property, or attend university. Meanwhile Sor Juana visits a rogue nun, who has been incarcerated in the convent because she fell pregnant. Voicing a tolerance more typical of the twenty-first than the seventeenth century and which is pointedly contrasted with the traditionalist misogyny of the Church authorities, she offers the inmate comfort and support in her filthy cell.

There follows the dramatic highpoint of the episode (and perhaps series) when the lugubrious, misogynist Archbishop arrives to see Sor Juana. He is received in the garden outside the convent, unwilling as he is to come into contact with flagstones trodden by so many women. Surrounded by this idyllic greenery, he neither faces nor looks at Sor Juana until the end of the lengthy scene. His dialogue features a conventional moral: the dead branches of a tree are treacherous (he even hands Sor Juana a dry twig). Now she must choose between spiritual devotion and worldly glitz (Spanish 'oropel'). While Sor Juana responds, with typical rebelliousness, that the use of her God-given talents cannot be mere tinsel, the argument is oddly reminiscent of that used by detractors of Juan Gabriel, whose 'sequins' were a supposed sign of queer vanity.

A definitive character arc is enacted in the impressively silent sequence that follows. Seen from outside the convent, Sor Juana advances out of darkness to be framed by a large black window cut in a white wall. On the hushed soundtrack we hear only birdsong. A

sudden 180-degree cut reveals her point of view (p. o. v.): a handsome CGI landscape shot of the two distinctive snow-clad volcanoes that are rarely visible from the polluted Mexico City of today. We cut back to the Sister, framed (trapped) by her window once more. It is a fine example of how, beyond the dialogue which so often advances the plot in period drama, narrative and character development are here communicated through a mise-en-scène that (again unlike in traditional biopic) is never merely decorative.

Next Nyman's strings swell once more as Sor Juana enters her cell and gazes at her serried ranks of books, caressing their spines with her fingers. She takes down a volume by Spanish Baroque poet Luis de Góngora (a relative of her friend Sigüenza y Góngora), a remarkably sensual and secular poet for a nun to favour. In tight close up she opens the volume for the last time as tears roll down her cheeks. Her decision is made: she chooses poverty and piety and her library and scientific instruments are to be sold for the poor. On this downbeat note the second act ends.

Sor Juana's renunciation of her literary ambitions is next shown with dramatic but historically accurate vividness: using blood taken from a palm she has herself wounded in a visual echo of Christ's stigmata, she signs a (still existing) document. The wording reads: 'Yo la peor del mundo' [I the worst woman in the world] (Bemberg's film title was slightly inaccurate). But here performance style is of the essence. Arcelia Ramírez (an actor who has played Sor Juana on previous occasions) displays strength and independence even, as here, in defeat. Sor Juana's repentance thus remains ambiguous. In her cell we watch her struggle not to write on a parchment she keeps hidden beneath empty bookshelves. When the confessor undergoes an operation for cataracts, we are tempted to read his physical blindness as metaphorical failure to recognize the true worth of the Sister.

After the flood and famine cited in the opening titles, plague has come to New Spain. And in graphic scenes, dying nuns are laid out on the hard cloister floor as the steadycam floats over bodies. Sor Juana's selflessly cares for the sick but is also shown actively embracing infection. In a last approximation of the lesbian kisses more happily given and received in previous episodes, she inhales the dying breath of a Sister. Feminine abjection could hardly be more explicit (and more moving) than here.

In the very last shot the now shorthaired Sor Juana is shown feverish and hallucinating in bed (this scene is the origin of the flashback that frames previous episodes). Staring for once directly

into the camera, she says: 'It's me, Juana Inés'. Yet this episode and the series as a whole suggest that such simple self-affirmation is impossible. In the spirit of the contemporary, self-conscious narratives of celebrity studies, Sor Juana's story is shown to be one of continuous and perilous promotion and presentation of the self. This is an ambivalence matched by the final titles, which both confidently claim that the protagonist 'never stopped writing' and more circumspectly acknowledge that the series is only 'inspired by real events'. *Juana Inés* thus appeals to the flexible label of the 'historical fiction' for which creator Arriaga aims.

This ambivalence can be seen at a structural level also. The basic form here is quite traditional, a three-act structure founded on a quest (who will defend Sor Juana?) and a Manichean conflict (the rebellious nun versus the conservative clerics). Yet there remain narrative lacunae. Did Sor Juana abandon her literary ambitions or not? What of her love for the Vicereine, who simply fades from view here, thus frustrating the resolution of a vital plotline? Ambivalence extends to the convent itself, seen as a setting for both repression and affection: the Mother Superior, who had formerly sentenced Sor Juana to kitchen duty and reproached her for her writings, now runs her fingers one last time through the dying Sister's hair. Even the ailing confessor is humanized by the end, confessing himself to the Sister that he was 'not up to [her] level'.

The series can thus be read as confirming what biopic scholars wrote on the theme of post-feminism: we have been shown traditional images of femininity (the nuns' subordination to the Church), alternatives to those images (Sor Juana's public challenge to that subordination), and subsequent critiques of those alternatives (her apparent choice of personal loyalty to the Vicereine over continued participation in the public sphere). Finally the cloister seems, as the episode title suggests, a kind of living death.

With its high production values, *Juana Inés* clearly fulfils the criteria for quality domestic fare sought in cinema too by current Mexican film producers seeking mainstream movie audiences. But the series also exemplifies the formal flexibility of the modern biopic or bio-series (contemporary, post-feminist, or intermedial), adopting as it does a cluster of different attitudes towards the varied accomplishments of its celebrity subject.

Hasta que te conocí: The Final Episode

Like Sor Juana's 'ficción histórica' [historical fiction], the final episode of the Juan Gabriel mini-series begins with an initial disclaimer which says it is 'basado en hechos reales' [based on real events] (the main source is given in the titles as conversations with a female friend). And as in *Juana Inés* once more, the cold open is emblematic but somewhat enigmatic. An extravagantly haired actor playing Verónica Castro (a real-life star still performing today) is shown singing in a TV studio set and on a grainy monitor. But the dated period wardrobe and boxy format of the monitor, framed inside the viewer's modern cinema-style wide screen, suggests a critical or ironic distance from a showbiz spectacle now some thirty years old. The sequence thus offers a certain ideological dimension on popular conceptions of the past, revealing how celebrity is produced and reproduced by mass media.

After a title reading 'Ciudad de México, 1988' [Mexico City, 1988], Castro's piece to camera serves as a recap for regular viewers: Juan Gabriel is now, she says, the best-known singer-songwriter in the Spanish language. On-screen still photos show the *Divo* with Aretha Franklin (the Afro-American singer), Sara Montiel (the Spanish movie star) and Sara García (the grandmotherly Mexican actor), attesting to his translational and trans-generational appeal. Still, 'Vero' attests with giggle, he remains 'proudly Mexican'. And the visibility of his fame is matched only by the 'discretion' of his private life. Finally, the monologue sets up a tension that is satisfied only at the end of the episode's fifty-two-minute running length: she voices the rumour of an exceptional concert at the Palacio de Bellas Artes, Mexico City's opera house.

What is striking about this pre-credit sequence is that Juan Gabriel himself does not appear: we are shown through still photography and television only the intermedial effect of his massive celebrity. Nor is there (beyond the reference to the climactic concert) an immediate hook for modern audiences, who are surely already familiar with the extent of Juan Gabriel's fame at this time.

We cut to the handsome, imagistic credits, which consist of a quick cut montage: a glowering moon; darkly shimmering water; floating candles; another candle snuffed out; rhinestones; a spotlight; a silhouetted figure, black against another blinding light; a microphone; a guitar neck; a prison window, with light streaming down through the bars; a chain and a crashing wave; burning paper; a spinning vinyl disk; an opening flower; a mariachi against a background the same red as the flower; and finally a schematic figure of Juan Gabriel

silhouetted black before a turquoise backdrop, his name traced in flowery letters.

Strikingly, these credits are much more abstract than the referential images that preface the Sor Juana series and do not serve the traditional purpose of (re)introducing characters, locations, or situations to viewers, as they do in ordinary television such as *telenovela*. Rather they provide an impressionistic interpretation of music, celebrity, and the paraphernalia that is needed to create both. Moreover the images are surprisingly gloomy, shot at night and in the dark. The bio-series, produced of course while its subject was still alive, thus signals its concern for mortality. As in the case of Sor Juana once more, it would appear that the narrated life is in close cohabitation with death.

The episode proper begins with another title and a disorientating regress in time: 'Ciudad de México, 1975' [Mexico City, 1975]. The setting is now the office of Eduardo Magallanes, Juan Gabriel's beloved arranger and producer, which is decorated in retro tones of brown. Juan Gabriel announces his intention of renegotiating his contract. Although he claims that singing is his passion (as writing was for Juana Inés), contract renegotiation is not an especially sympathetic motivation on which to base the final episode of the series. But the Divo's struggle with his record label does serve to set up a dramatic conflict: Magallanes warns the star that this could mean the end of his career.

Next, in his dressing room before a concert, the star confronts himself in the mirror, a repeated shot in the series suggesting the reflexivity of celebrity. A gentle piano theme introduces a quick cut montage (a flashback within a flashback) citing earlier episodes: Juan Gabriel (or strictly speaking 'Alberto' before his name change) is seen in the rain when he fled reform school, sleeping in a derelict car when he first came to Mexico City, hitchhiking on an unmade road, taking the bus to San Diego, and performing on the street in Ciudad Juárez.

The next scenes contrast with these memories of impoverishment, shuttling (as in *Juana Inés* once more) between luxurious locations in Mexico and Spain. First comes a wide shot of a Versailles-like hall where Juan Gabriel negotiates with a new record company. Then ('Ciudad de México, 1976') Juan Gabriel is shown entertaining Spanish singer Rocío Durcal and her husband in his own home (her Peninsular accent is prominent). Next the *Divo* sings in the Spanish couple's house in Spain, eliciting praise from those present at the private event. In keeping with the conventions of the movie musical, Juan Gabriel here appears to perform live but is accompanied by an (invisible) orchestra.

Even after two centuries of independence, then, the Mexican celebrity is still (like Sor Juana) seeking approval from European authorities. Conversely this transnational focus could be a sign that national (even nationalist) narratives are being re-serviced for transnational audiences in a co-production that was intended for export to the many markets where its protagonist was known.

The musical romance with Durcal, who covered Juan Gabriel's songs, also substitutes for Juan Gabriel's rumoured affair with the singer's husband. This scandal is no doubt present in viewers' memories, if they are long-term fans, but goes unmentioned in the series itself, following the singer's own rule that 'what is seen need not be spoken'. Later lounging by the pool, with the two men's bodies almost touching, Juan Gabriel will apologize to Durcal for (unspecified) gossip around the threesome.

The death of Juan Gabriel's first musical mentor, a kindly teacher at reform school, provokes yet another flashback, as we return once more to scenes of the young Juan Gabriel learning his musical craft. But Juan Gabriel's motivations remain tantalizingly obscure. For example, after voicing his fears of 'dying alone' and his longing for children, Juan Gabriel comes to a mysterious, unspoken arrangement with his manager's sister. In the very next sequence she is seen standing alone and pregnant, facing a window. Fatherhood is thus presented as a kind of immaculate conception in which the vital messy details (was Juan Gabriel the biological father?) are pointedly omitted. Like its protagonist, the series thus attempts to finesse the overexposure of the private self in the era of ubiquitous mass and (later) social media.

When an ex-employee of the singer publishes an unauthorized biography, the series's dialogue distinguishes clearly between fake and real life stories. The real version, we hear from Juan Gabriel, is the one he tells his producer's tape recorder as they are travelling on a joint road trip. (This is a flashback device that is abandoned in this final episode.) But, beyond the supposedly unmediated truth spoken by the voice of the star, the series also shows how celebrity biography is presented and promoted on screen. Returning once more to Verónica Castro's TV show, Juan Gabriel sings his big number 'Amor eterno', which leads into a flashback to his worn-out, uncaring mother so many years before.

In the discreet TV interview with his fellow celebrity Vero, however, Juan Gabriel is shown skilfully negotiating press intrusions. The song, he claims, is dedicated to his mother and to all mothers. Of his personal life and the unauthorized biography he says simply

'people make mistakes'. And when asked of affairs of the heart, he replies jokingly that his cardiologist says his is perfectly fine. This self-reflexive construction of public image gives way to what is presented as a private moment. There is a cutaway to a hospital room, where Juan Gabriel takes a new-born child (his first son) in his arms. Back in the TV studio, however, he claims to be 'in love with his audience'. The biographical timeline in the series is thus constantly disrupted in an attempt, perhaps, to disguise gaping lacunae in the plot.

The final climactic sequence of the episode and the series, parallel to Juana's confrontation with the Archbishop, is the Bellas Artes concert. It is prefaced by a postcard shot of the building's façade at night, a temple to the Arts as monumental as any colonial cathedral. Inside Juan Gabriel confronts himself in the mirror once more and is visited by fantasized figures of the past: his sister, his mentor, his past female helpers. And here he is granted a voiceover, looking back over his rags-to-riches life: each step he has taken, he claims (against the mixed evidence of the series itself), has been a blessing.

Dressed now in a blazer with gold braid (the costume will be familiar to fans from footage of the real-life event), he makes his way in majestic and lonely slow motion to the stage, where he sings at full length the song of ambivalent love that gave its title to the series, 'Hasta que te conocí'. Rather than celebrating the transformative encounter with the beloved, as might be expected from its title, the lyrics lament the heartbreak caused by him/her. In a showy low angle, the star now looms large before the elaborate Tiffany rosette depicting the nine muses that hangs above him in the ceiling.

When Juan Gabriel reaches the impassioned chorus, we suddenly cut to his dead mother entering the auditorium in her modest housecoat, incongruous in this glamorous setting. Signalling fantasy, the ambient sound is no longer in synch with Juan Gabriel's lips, which do not move in time with the music. The mother makes her way down the strangely foggy aisle, settles tentatively into her seat, gazes lovingly at her son on stage, and weeps (she has generally been stonily dry-eyed throughout the series). As Juan Gabriel vocalizes in an ecstatic climax to the song, she approaches the stage for a moment only to retreat in silhouette. She looks back at her son's success one more time before disappearing into the mist of memory. The last shot of the episode and series, also from a low angle, is of Juan Gabriel, his arms extended Christ-like in the air, as the audience's cheers now well up on the soundtrack. Public triumph thus joins hands with private tragedy, the haughty adult star shadowed still by the traumatized child he once was. Unlucky in love with mother and partners alike,

Juan Gabriel thus suffers a crucifixion that serves as a redemptive sacrifice for his faithful fans.

The titles that follow appeal, as in the case of Sor Juana, to the criterion of literalist truth. Here that truth is expressed in the form of statistics: Juan Gabriel has, we are told, composed 180 songs, sold twenty-five million records, and (by unspecified means) produced four male children with a female friend. And over the final credits we see for the first time footage of the real-life concert that we have just seen recreated, attesting to a facticity that is disavowed elsewhere.

Finally, then, if the apotheosis through art (or 'passion for song') does surpass the childhood abuse on which early episodes dwell, it is clearly at the cost of personal happiness for the adult. We might compare Sor Juana's apparent renunciation of the literary vocation and the Vicereine, both of which she loved. But in the Canal 11 series Sor Juana's lesbian affairs, for which little historical evidence exists, are more visible than Juan Gabriel's innumerable gay hook-ups, so well attested in print and yet so little seen in Azteca's version of his life. Although Juan Gabriel will live another twenty years (to be recreated in a further season of his bio-series), there is death in life for both TV subjects.

In my interview with Patricia Arriaga, she contrasted the 'melodrama' of commercial bio-series with the 'drama' of her own quality work. Yet her version of Sor Juana is more Manichean than Azteca's Juan Gabriel. The protagonist's main enemy in the last episode at least (the ex-employee turned biographer) is, unlike Juana Inés's Archbishop, relatively powerless and barely sketched. And the ellipses in the series's account of Juan Gabriel's private life are perhaps motivated pragmatically by fear of censorship, whether by the still living *Divo* or the executives of conservative generalist TV channels in Mexico and the US alike. But they serve nonetheless to create an evocative narrative imprecision and aesthetic fuzziness, reminiscent of the sudden mist that materializes at the Bellas Artes concert. And while the series is hardly politically radical, the fractures in its plot, whether intentional or not, might be read as formally innovative.

Whatever the case, the Juan Gabriel bio-series, a uniquely successful event in Azteca's new scheduling grid, achieved a status that distances it from the everyday genre of the *telenovela*, from which the network was seeking, finally, to disengage itself.

Textual Strategies and Media Cultures

As I suggested in the introduction to this chapter, the two series, apparently so different, have much in common, beyond the ubiquity and celebrity of their subjects. As part of a new wave of Mexican bio-series that sought to fill the gap in schedules left by the once hegemonic *telenovela*, they emphasize contemporaneity (modern issues, previously untreated), post-feminism (in its queer variant), and intermediality (the shuttling between print and music, film and TV). As if acknowledging that no life story can be definitive, both series refer back implicitly to previous versions of their subject's lives: Bemberg's biopic and Juan Gabriel's own feature films.

Narratively the two series, relatively contemporary and even daring as they are in a Mexican TV context, both engage in oblique strategies of displacement: Juana Inés's lesbian passions are attributed, initially at least, not to herself but to the Vicereines; Juanga's gay affairs are unseen, deflected into the undying love for his mother. The two series also share similar textual strategies: on the one hand, the flashback structure serves as an authenticator of the final, definitive character of the adult self, revealing what the young unformed person will have become by the final episode; and on the other, the central redemptive theme of creativity (in poetry or song) functions as a lasting legitimator of the cruel vicissitudes of everyday life.

In both cases the subject's status as a performer is vital. And although the Sister is invested with more cultural distinction than the singer-songwriter, who was, as we saw, slurred on his death as a 'joto' or 'naco', *Juana Inés* reminds us that a figure who is now revered may have been reviled in her lifetime. Perhaps the same has come to pass with the genre of the biopic and bio-series, once scorned as mere middlebrow entertainment and now acknowledged as a rare counter-hegemonic vehicle that is intended, nonetheless, for mainstream audiences.

In Mexico the new format rapidly became canonic. The year 2016 soon saw primetime network bio-series dedicated to Mexican singer Joan Sebastian (Televisa) and Cuban performer Celia Cruz (Azteca). It would appear that the genre had turned into a cycle analogous to the royal titles ubiquitous on British screens. While such series may not transcend traditionalism, certainly they constitute (as critics of contemporary biopic suggested) an adaptable form of film-making that is poised between old and new media. Amidst a wave of cancellations of old favourites in 2016, the Juan Gabriel mini-series is the only title cited as a successful exception by one

article predicting the (metaphorical) death of network television in Mexico.[36] Meanwhile, the (real) death of the *Divo* had unleashed over two million tweets in just twelve hours.[37]

As we have seen, biopics (and comedies) have contributed in recent years to the health and growth of Mexican cinema in theatres. Situated as they are between elite pay-TV series and down-market network *telenovela*, the market positioning of free-to-air bio-series in television is parallel to that of the audience-friendly films cited in the trade press. The new genre may thus prove central to the survival of a now endangered broadcast television service, just as biopics have to the theatrical feature film whose existence has been long threatened in Mexico. We will now see how sport, a further aspect of Mexican popular culture, was, like showbusiness before it, transmuted into an innovative television genre.

36 Luis León, 'Televisa en jaque', *Eje Central*, 29 December 2016, 14–15.

37 'Juan Gabriel, un luto global que impuso récords en internet', *El Universal*, 24 December 2016 <http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/articulo/espectaculos/musica/2016/12/24/el-divo-un-luto-global-que-impuso-records-en-internet> [accessed 1 January 2017].

3. Football TV: *Club de Cuervos* (Netflix, 2015–)

From Kicks to Words

On 8 December 2010 a scholarly book was launched in the somewhat unlikely setting of a 'well known cantina' in Mexico City.[1] Edited by Samuel Martínez of the prestigious Universidad Iberoamericana, its title was *Fútbol-espectáculo, cultura, y sociedad* [*Football-as-spectacle, Culture, and Society*].[2] The specialist press reporting the event began with a dismissive quotation from Borges ('Football is popular because stupidity is popular') but ended with a more positive citation attributed to Camus ('Everything I know about morality and human obligations I owe to football'). The aim of the book, writes the anonymous journalist, is thus not just to break with the 'stigma' of a sport despised by the elite, but to transform the impact of that sport into 'social change'.

Turning to the collection itself, it is striking that its contributors make little direct reference to television, another popular phenomenon scorned by the establishment. Martínez's own introduction is unusually abstract and abstruse. Yet still it both raises vital questions about the study of sport and suggests priorities for research in a field that (once more like television) remains little developed in Mexico. Thus Martínez claims that sport, in its multiple roles as physical activity, mass-media spectacle, consumer good, life style, linguistic arsenal, emotional identity, and epic narrative, is one of the most 'dynamic, productive, and challenging fields of

1 'Presentación libro *Futbol espectáculo Cultura y Sociedad*', *Mediotiempo*, 9 December 2010 <http://www.mediotiempo.com/futbol/mexico/noticias/2010/12/09/presentaron-libro-futbol-espectaculo-cultura-y-sociedad> [accessed 1 January 2017].

2 *Fútbol-espectáculo, cultura, y sociedad*, ed. Samuel Martínez (Mexico City: Universidad Iberoamericana, 2010).

signification and representation' in the current cultural scene.[3] Or again he suggests that football has blended older images that were belligerent, communal, or gentlemanly with current 'lovemarks' (a marketing term given in English) and 'sponsored heroes' to form 'a complex and unprecedented system for furnishing thought'.

Society as a whole thus deserves to be called 'sportified': games are fused with leisure, pleasure, and entertainment; are tied to affiliations of identity (related to age, class, gender, language, territory, and life style); are used instrumentally to relieve social pressure, to discipline, to instruct, or simply to sell; are idealized in order to inspire values or increase productivity; and are, finally and deceitfully, linked to the reified concepts of 'health', 'beauty', and 'wellbeing'.[4]

Such a complex phenomenon is necessarily both positive and negative. As Martínez writes with some ambivalence:

> Efectivamente, se trata de sociedades *deportivizadas* regidas por la ética hedonista del juego e inmersas todas en el paradójico orden global de la información y su tecno-utopía construida por la 'mano invisible' del mercado; sociedades somatofílicas, desiguales, turbulentas y cínicas donde, es cierto, el deporte hoy está plagado de múltiples contradicciones y antinomias que, a pesar de su evidente presencia y creciente banalización, no han desactivado ni han quitado al fenómeno deportivo su potencia lúdico-recreativa, su riqueza simbólica, su capacidad de extasiar e impugnar a la razón, su complejidad y fuerza centrífuga [...] de las clases altas a las bajas, de los hombres a las mujeres y de los países colonizadores a los colonizados.[5]
>
> [It is indeed a question of *sportified* societies ruled by the hedonistic ethics of the game and wholly immersed in the paradoxical global order of information and its techno-utopia constructed by the 'invisible hand' of the market; societies that are body-biased, unequal, unruly, and cynical, in which sport is doubtless riddled with conflicts and contradictions which, although very evident and increasingly commonplace, have not defused the sporting phenomenon or stripped it of its playful recreational power, its symbolic wealth, its ability to captivate and to contest logic, its complexity and centrifugal force [...] from the high classes to the low, from men to women, and from the colonial countries to the colonized.]

Thoroughly commercialized and mediatized, then, sport remains richly symbolic and universally enjoyed. Moreover, starting from these 'ambiguous affects and effects', football-as-spectacle has moved

3 Samuel Martínez, 'Presentación', in *Fútbol-espectáculo*, ed. Martínez, 9–26 (9).

4 Martínez, 'Presentación', 10.

5 Martínez, 'Presentación', 11–12.

'from kicks to words' (de las patadas a las palabras), provoking endless discourse from fans and players alike.[6] Even as Martínez laments the relative lack of academic study in the field in Mexico, so different to the cases of Britain and Brazil, he praises football as a 'word machine', which may start at the foot but ends inevitably in the mouth.

Surprisingly, perhaps, many of Martínez's own words are sceptical ones. He attacks the 'essentialist discourses' of football that disguise particulars as universals through appeals to truth, purity, and authenticity that justify rejection, hatred and intolerance. He decries the media for suggesting that one city or country is better than another because their team won a match or that a successful squad represents 'what we are as a nation'. He even denounces the 'profitable fantasy' that claims that sports results matter.[7] It is perhaps logical, then, that his book should be addressed above all not to those who are already 'faithful lovers' of the sport but to those who remain mystified by 'the passions of others';[8] and that, in a bid to convince the unconvinced, it should marshal a formidable battery of disciplines, given initially as sociology, anthropology, and communication or media studies.[9]

Curiously, the volume is divided into three parts that do not coincide with this tertiary division, thus suggesting (like Martínez's tortured syntax) the difficulty of coming to grips with such a slippery subject. The first part of the book consists of preliminary remarks on games and sport; the second of approaches drawn from philosophy, communication, and politics; and the third of perspectives based on gender studies and anthropology.

Striking for their novelty in this last section are two essays on the unexpected topics of women and gays in Mexican football. In the first Marta Santillán begins by lamenting the supposed physical weakness of women that was once used to deny them participation in sport and ends by complaining that even now female players and referees lack 'social acceptance'.[10] In the second Rodrigo Laguarda starts by contesting the stereotype that gays have no interest in football and finishes with a plea for integration and the elimination of 'stigma' which is voiced by the proud captain of Mexico's national team

6 Martínez, 'Presentación', 15.

7 Martínez, 'Presentación', 16.

8 Martínez, 'Presentación', 21.

9 Martínez, 'Presentación', 18.

10 Marta Santillán, 'Mujer, deporte, y fútbol', in *Fútbol-espectáculo*, ed. Martínez, 269–80 (269, 280).

as it was competing at the Gay World Cup in 2007.[11] According to Laguarda, widening the range of acceptable masculinity in football would thus be a resource for combatting marginalization more generally, no doubt promoting the social acceptance that Santillán says is still sought on the pitch by women also.

It is striking that Martínez's own essay in his volume (on 'The Society of Entertainment and the Recreational Industry') devotes no detailed attention to television, the main social and industrial vehicle for that entertainment and that recreation. Yet the medium and the sport are inextricable in his country. As we shall see, it is no accident that when Netflix, the US streaming giant, made its first series in Mexico (*Club de Cuervos*, 2015–), it was to be on a football theme. To trace in detail the conflictive history of the relation between Mexico's most popular mass medium and its most popular sport, we must now turn to accounts made in dissertations held in the Cineteca Nacional.

Histories of Underdevelopment

In successive years at the turn of the millennium three students from the UNAM's Communication Science Department wrote theses on the linked history of football and television in Mexico. Confirming Martínez's suggestion of sport as 'emotional identity', they also acknowledged a personal engagement in their chosen topic, as fans and (in one case) as an experienced journalist. It is interesting to contrast Martínez's broad-brush theoretical vision of the supposed universal purchase of football with the students' detailed empirical account of the sport's limited and contested interaction with Mexican institutions and audiences.

Thus, in the widest-ranging text, Ronaldo M. Dromundo Valadez treats 'television and its relation to the underdevelopment of sport in Mexico'.[12] Dromundo correlates the growth of sport to the emergence of leisure at the start of the twentieth century and the arrival of television in the 1950s.[13] Yet, he insists, the technical development of sport has not kept pace with its commercialization and a 'quality sporting system' has failed to appear (much the same is often said of

11 Rodrigo Laguarda, 'Otra mirada al fútbol: jugadores y espectadores gays en un espacio de masculinidad privilegiada', in *Fútbol-espectáculo*, ed. Martínez, 281–96 (281, 296).

12 Ronaldo M. Dromundo Valadez, 'La televisión y su relación con el subdesarrollo deportivo en México'(unpublished master's thesis, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2002).

13 Dromundo Valadez, 'La televisión', 3.

commercial television in Mexico). For Dromundo, as for Martínez, sport is a 'social relation',[14] but it is one that has been neglected by the Mexican government, as 'physical culture' has never been considered a fundamental part of education. Moreover Televisa, long a private monopoly on Mexican TV, has 'managed, controlled, and organized' first-division football in the country according to its own interests.[15]

Even now, long after the appearance of its rival Azteca, the two networks are the owners of several teams, serving as 'judge and jury' of the coverage of the game that dominates their schedules and thus prevents the growth of other sporting activities. Dromundo contrasts Mexico negatively with two other nations. Cuba, he claims, has had a public program of fully incorporating sport into education with the aim of increasing the 'social interaction' of citizens and their state of health.[16] In the United States, on the other hand, the private establishment of college sporting competitions, avowedly amateur but highly lucrative, has led to the media coverage of a variety of sports, a tendency fostered by television broadcasting. In Mexico, he writes, TV has rather been active in preventing sport (or rather sports) from developing.[17]

Dromundo argues that the football leagues in Mexico are 'organs in the service of the TV industry', unconcerned by the long-term benefit of the game.[18] Thus in spite of the huge growth of the 'sporting market' in the 1950s, when TV broadcasting of matches began, that income was not used to 'create the conditions for optimal development' of football. In the 1960s, as mentioned earlier, Televisa blocked the promotion of other sports, because it considered them to be 'foreign to its interests'.[19] What is lacking, then, is a mass sporting 'system' that would both improve the health of the general population (as in Cuba) and produce more 'outstanding athletes' (as in the US).[20]

A year later Eduardo García Isunza treats the more specialized topic of 'the influence of television and advertising on [Mexican] professional football in the 1990s'.[21] Beginning once more from the

14 Dromundo Valadez, 'La televisión', 4.

15 Dromundo Valadez, 'La televisión', 5.

16 Dromundo Valadez, 'La televisión', 6.

17 Dromundo Valadez, 'La televisión', 7.

18 Dromundo Valadez, 'La televisión', 125.

19 Dromundo Valadez, 'La televisión', 126.

20 Dromundo Valadez, 'La televisión', 128.

21 Eduardo García Isunza, 'El resultado de la influencia de la televisión y la publicidad sobre el futbol profesional mexicano durante los 90s: el futbol

premise that football is a 'social phenomenon' (as well as a recreational or financial one) he cites the 'great development of infrastructure' such as the building of new stadiums in his chosen decade, an expansion that is due to economic exploitation of the game by the mass media.[22] The greater part of the burden of this income, however, lies with the viewer, who is seduced by the marketing of branded goods such as jerseys and caps, and even food and drink. Televisa and Azteca have thus produced, García writes, a media phenomenon 'never before seen' in Mexico.[23]

García treats the legal framework of advertising in sport (against whose boundaries broadcasters push); the psychological aspects of viewers 'immersed' in a new mass movement, and the way in which advertisers employ the figures of star players to exploit their image.[24] He further goes on to examine the use of new technology to transmit 'virtual images' during games; the strategies of channels and advertisers to broadcast spots before, during, and after games, and the way in which all actors in the field (TV stations, sponsors, advertisers, teams, and players) are motivated primarily by money.[25]

García concludes that, given the tyranny of economics, it is fans who are relegated to a second division (the successful Necaxa left Mexico City for Aguascalientes without giving a thought to the faithful fans they left behind).[26] Moreover football is also used to achieve political aims, as shown by the fact that political parties are keen to advertise during matches. Such advertising has swollen the wage packets of players, owners, and managers,[27] even as it has helped to create a form of escapist entertainment for ordinary people coping with the economic and social problems of the day that politicians have failed to solve.[28] Moreover treating sport as a business rather than a game has resulted in a 'wave of violence' (often beer-fuelled) in the stadiums, which has kept families away from stands that are now guarded by hundreds of police.[29]

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como un fenómeno social' (unpublished master's thesis, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2003).

22 García Isunza, 'El resultado', 1.

23 García Isunza, 'El resultado', 2.

24 García Isunza, 'El resultado', 3.

25 García Isunza, 'El resultado', 4.

26 García Isunza, 'El resultado', 127.

27 García Isunza, 'El resultado', 128.

28 García Isunza, 'El resultado', 129.

29 García Isunza, 'El resultado', 130.

Finally, in 2001, J. Alejandro Madrid Morales gives a broader and more expert account of the same decade as García, drawing on his lengthy experience as a sports reporter: 'Football and Television in Mexico 1990–2000'.[30] Beginning once more by defining football as a 'very special social phenomenon in Mexico', Madrid goes on to lament that the sport could have had greater international profile if it were not for the lack of an adequate organization in the clubs and federation.[31] Moreover TV has focused attention exclusively on the First Division and national team, neglecting to pay attention to youth and trainee teams ('fuerzas básicas'), which he says are the foundation of 'development' for the 'world powers' in the sport. Adopting short-term measures, the Mexican league permits as many as five foreign players in each team, provoking a 'vicious circle' in salaries for the small number of quality Mexican players. Finally, the latter are monopolized by 'economically powerful' teams, while the smaller sides are left struggling to avoid relegation.[32]

At an international level once more, Mexico is placed by FIFA (the global governing body) in the poorest and least competitive football zone, that of Central America and the Caribbean, thus depriving the nation of regular contact with more skilled teams elsewhere.[33] Meanwhile local team owners know little about the sport and the Mexican federation cares less for promoting young talent. With his specialist knowledge, Madrid divides TV commentators into three categories: the cheerleader (*animador*: the most emotional), the storyteller (*narrador*: the most explanatory), and the analyst (*analista*: the most technical).[34]

Yet all three styles of commentator lack credibility, as the media enterprises for which they work (Televisa and Azteca) are also the owners of the teams whose players are transferred in order to reinforce televisual, not sporting, strength. It thus follows that while Mexican football players are extravagantly paid (unlike their South American opposite numbers) they do not have the experience or quality of their international counterparts.[35] The 'passion, polemics, and fanaticism' that surround the game are converted by television into a mere 'tool of social control'.

30 J. Alejandro Madrid Morales, 'El futbol y la televisión en México 1990–2000' (unpublished master's thesis, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2001).

31 Madrid Morales, 'El futbol', 4.

32 All quotations are from Madrid Morales, 'El futbol', 4.

33 Madrid Morales, 'El futbol', 5.

34 Madrid Morales, 'El futbol', 6.

35 Madrid Morales, 'El futbol', 7.

Madrid concludes that Mexican football management has been unable to 'raise the level of the game in general'.[36] Trainers have been incapable of developing a distinctly Mexican style of play for the sport that is the most popular in the country.[37] Hence the national team's disappointing results in successive World Cups. He suggests, finally, practical recommendations to improve quality: the professionalization of managers, trainers, and even doctors; the geographical decentralization of an activity currently focused on just four cities; and the achievement of 'continuity in work' for local and national teams.[38]

It thus follows that, although Mexican audiences are generally thought to be fanatical about football, Mexican teams are less skilled in their practice of the sport than their popularity on ratings-obsessed national television would suggest. This is one of the apercus of these three dissertations, which are more fine-grained than Martínez's account of a generalized 'football as spectacle'. The UNAM students also suggest that, ironically enough, an improvement in the quality of play might also increase the profitability of the TV broadcasts of the sport. For if Mexican teams are recognized, finally, as being mediocre and undeveloped when compared to those in other nations, increasingly sophisticated viewers may yet begin to question their fanaticism.

Of course, the conditions for the broadcasting of actual games tell us little about the fictional depiction of the sport. Given the lack of primary and secondary material on television drama with a football theme, to learn more about the lengthy audio-visual representation of the game in Mexico we must now turn to sources on its history in cinema.

Football Cinema

Student commentators lament, as we have seen, the underdevelopment of football as a sport in a country where it is so visible and profitable on television that Martínez can baptize it 'futbol-espectáculo' [football-as-spectacle]. Film critics, meanwhile, point to a surprising lack of engagement with the game on the Mexican big screen. Asking the question as to whether football is indeed 'the most watched sport' in his country, Sergio Raúl López (a frequent writer on the theme) notes that, in contrast to the 'Pantagruelian feast [of broadcasts] on

36 Madrid Morales, 'El futbol', 182.

37 Madrid Morales, 'El futbol', 183.

38 Madrid Morales, 'El futbol', 185.

television', football makes for a 'meagre ration' in Mexican cinema, especially when compared to the many more films made about wrestling, boxing, and even bullfighting.[39] He concludes that popcorn and footballs do not mix.

In this piece López interviews a director who is a rare enthusiast for the sport, the then little-known Gustavo Loza, later to have more luck with the crowd-pleasing genre of romantic comedy. Loza claims that many regions of Mexico (the Pacific coast, the south-east, the north) are indifferent to football; that Argentina, Brazil, and Spain boast more faithful fans, and that when he shot his (unsuccessful) feature *Atlético San Pancho* [*Never Too Young to Dream* (2001)] the entire crew and the main actor hated the sport.[40] For Loza the standard is much higher in film than in football: Mexican directors conquer the world when they shoot abroad; Mexican players fail when they join foreign teams.

I will argue here that the relatively rare genre of the football film in Mexico boasts three paradigms: familial, fraternal, and national. The few journalistic articles on the theme cite one title as the pioneer in the field, Joaquín Pardavé's *Los hijos de don Venancio* [*Don Venancio's Children* (1944)].[41] In this family film (in all senses of the word) the director himself, a much-loved comedian, stars as the autumnal patriarch, a widowed Spanish immigrant and wealthy grocer, who houses in his palatial home a neglectful and resentful brood that includes the real-life star player of the day, Horacio Casarín.

On the eve of Martínez's 'sportified society', the football motif serves in the film as a vehicle for social change, parallel with other troubling and stigmatized new phenomena that are accorded equal screen time (indeed the game appears as a major theme only half-way through the film). Thus while one son (Horacio), after noisily practising in his bedroom, leaves home to train for a sport that is dismissed as stupid or shameful by his father, another is obsessed with becoming a popular song composer, even inviting tone-deaf female vocal students into the home. Similarly, while one daughter leaves home to cohabit with an abusive husband who does not have paternal approval, another is obsessed with the movie stars whose pictures paper her bedroom walls. All but the one sensible sibling (an

39 Sergio Raúl López, 'Es peligroso que la tele cree falsas expectativas del futbol', *El Financiero*, 28 June 2006, 42–45.

40 López, 'Falsas expectativas', 45.

41 Ulises Castañeda, 'Luces, cámara, y futbol', *La Crónica*, 15 June 2014, section Espectáculos, 23–24; and Lucero Calderón, 'Mezcla explosiva', *Escelsior*, 14 June 2014, section Función, 6–8.

engineer who will later be commissioned to build a football stadium) patronize the patriarch whom they call affectionately but irreverently 'viejo' [old man]. Sport, music, and cinema are thus privileged and parallel vehicles for challenging and mediating modern family relations.

Like its fellow mediations, football seems inevitably to give rise to conflict. The humble Spanish clerks in Venancio's store (including one with a comic Catalan accent) argue vehemently about their favourite team with their bourgeois Mexican customers, so much so that their boss prohibits discussion of the sport in the workplace. When the respectable Venancio himself first attends a game (a vital final in which his son plays centre forward and scores the decisive goal), even he gets into a fist fight with a rival supporter.

The modernity embodied by the dangerous fad for sport is thus linked to another phenomenon of admixture: immigration. There is much discussion of blood (both Spanish and Mexican) in the film's dialogue and of the positive contributions of post-War immigration to the host country. Conversely the bad son-in-law, who assaults his wife, insults Venancio when he seeks to intercede, using the humiliating slur *gachupín* [dago].

Football, again like immigration, initially disrupts traditional social and familial structures, but finally neutralizes and resolves them. After the son's win (he is urged on by his father's invocation of their shared Spanish blood and name) the whole cast return to the family house for a celebration that coincides with the arrival of Venancio's first grandchild. This baby is a synthesis of old and new, immigrant and native, who serves to reconcile the patriarch with his erring daughter and suddenly reformed son-in-law. As one faithful fan had suggested to the plodding don Venancio, who is so suspicious of the unruly passions of others, football is played not with the foot but with the heart and soul. Confirming Martínez once more, the game thus serves as a touchstone of truth and authenticity in a rapidly changing society.

Los hijos de don Venancio also offers valuable evidence for the nature of the football audience, albeit one that is recreated on a soundstage. Fans are shown to be diverse in both class and ethnicity. Dark-skinned youths mingle on the stands with *criolla* ladies in elaborate hats. Yet, beyond this intense physical and social cohabitation, sport is already mediatized ('football-as-spectacle'), well before the coming of television. Characters in separate locations (the reluctant father, the estranged daughter) listen avidly to the broadcast on their radio sets. It is the inescapability of this media coverage that drives Venancio

finally to attend his son's climactic match. Authentic footage of a game shot at the real-life grounds is here cross-cut with an actor in the studio (clearly an *animador* or cheerleader) commentating the match, who gradually, comically takes off his formal clothes as his (and our) excitement mounts.

There is thus an interesting tension here, rare in studio-shot Mexican melodrama of the period, between actuality and fiction. Professional player and non-professional actor Horacio Casarín, a modest and engaging presence on screen, keeps his own first name and replays the real biography that was well known to contemporary audiences: while playing for Necaxa he had been the victim of a foul, which here (unlike in less lucky real life) is overcome by the intercession of the previously football-hostile father, taking on the unlikely guise of a coach. Anticipating the relentless and deceptive media coverage of football to come, proto-sporting star Casarín's handsome face is more prominent on the original posters than his supporting role in the film itself would seem to justify.

This familial paradigm is complemented some sixty years later by a fraternally themed film, also cited in journalistic articles on football cinema: Carlos Cuarón's comedy *Rudo y Cursi* (2008). But unlike in the case of my other films, there is an expert academic analysis of this title, which I can appeal to here.

The twin subjects of David Wood's article (2013) are a Cuban baseball movie and this Mexican football film.[42] Wood begins by suggesting, first, that sport films tend to be broadly allegorical (serving as metaphors for life itself)[43] but, secondly, that they reveal national specificities that 'map on to an established cinematic tradition in the Anglophone world'.[44] And while the Cuban film reveals the 'individual subordination to the collective',[45] the Mexican is more personal, focusing on the 'brotherly rivalry' between goalkeeper Beto (Diego Luna) and striker Tato (Gael García Bernal). There is a cinematic fraternity here also: both actors (whose fame is equal to that of the best-known Mexican sportsmen) had recently featured in the celebrated *Y tu mamá también* (2001), directed by Carlos's brother Alfonso. And just as *Y tu mamá* rewrote the road movie in a Mexican context, *Rudo* replays the sports movie in a precisely localized way,

42 David Wood, 'Latin America at the (Sports) Movies: Winning, Losing and Playing in *Rudo y Cursi* and *En tres y dos*', *Bulletin of Spanish Studies*, 90 (2013), 1357–75.

43 Wood, 'Latin America at the (Sports) Movies', 1357.

44 Wood, 'Latin America at the (Sports) Movies', 1358.

45 Wood, 'Latin America at the (Sports) Movies', 1364.

one recognizable to national audiences. Cuarón's comedy clearly struck a chord with those audiences, as it went on to be the sixth most successful Mexican film of all time.[46]

Where *Venancio*'s children are safely middle-class and metropolitan, *Rudo*'s brothers are perilously impoverished and provincial. The opening sequence is thus set on the banana plantation in crime-wracked Nayarit where the pair work. It is a location which immediately but implicitly inscribes the pair (as Wood notes) in a 'historical narrative [...] which serves as a shorthand for exploitation and ill treatment of workers' and denounces 'the influence and actions of US neo-colonial interests'.[47] Football, initially amateur (with its 'enjoyment of play and collective celebration of team effort'), thus 'offers an escape from the rigours of manual labor'. This beginning recreates a glimpse at least of what Martínez calls football's appeal to truth, purity, and authenticity.

But it is escapism that is confirmed after the boys are taken up by a Mexico City manager. Predictably, things go badly. Tato is exploited financially by his venal manager and sexually by his model girlfriend. And where *Venancio*'s children neglect their father, *Rudo*'s brothers disappoint their mother: the beach house they had promised her is built rather by a money-laundering drug baron.[48] As Wood writes:

> By tracing connections between football clubs, public entertainments, and the drugs trade [...] Cuarón's film offers a decidedly Mexican take on the sports movie, obliging the viewer to confront the nation's most pressing social and political challenge.[49]

These threats of extreme violence (both made and suffered by the aggressive forward Beto) extend to the sexual arena. The brothers are homoerotically humiliated by teammates in the shower in an 'emasculation' that, beyond the film's evident critique of the commercialization of sport, suggests 'a questioning of gender roles and machismo that opens out well beyond football'.[50] Even in this exclusively male arena, then, Mexican masculinity is in crisis.

The film thus ends with the brothers, now humbled and back at home, singing a romantic song to each other. It has implied finally that the authority of the 'master narratives' of neo-colonialism and neo-liberalism, of machismo and violence, has been 'brought into

46 Wood, 'Latin America at the (Sports) Movies', 1365.

47 Wood, 'Latin America at the (Sports) Movies', 1366.

48 Wood, 'Latin America at the (Sports) Movies', 1367.

49 Wood, 'Latin America at the (Sports) Movies', 1366.

50 Wood, 'Latin America at the (Sports) Movies', 1370.

play'.[51] Football may not substitute for them as a new metanarrative but 'its integral place within Mexican society does mean that we can see reflected and refracted within it a series of key national issues'. Moreover in both this and the Cuban film the moral is not one of US-style 'individual glory' but rather one of 'collective experience', statist and political in Cuba, familial and fraternal in Mexico.[52]

It is Sergio Raúl López once more who pens an extended article-cum-interview with the director of Mexico's most recent football-themed fiction feature, Everardo Gout's self-identified 'action movie' *Días de gracia* [*Days of Grace* (2011)].[53] More clearly even than my previous examples, *Días* aspires to the status of national narrative; and this first film from a director of commercials and music videos is a prestige production. López calls attention to *Días*'s quality cast, experienced cinematographer, and the international contributors to its original soundtrack, including Scarlett Johansen, who offers a sultry version of the standard 'Summertime'. Even the editor is known for his work for Pedro Almodóvar. The popular game thus here gets a quality cinematic treatment.

Días de gracia's pre-credit sequence begins with grainy TV footage of the football stands, a sea of red, white, and green. A male voiceover (which will return at the end of the lengthy running time) claims that to live day after day in 'México' (either the country or the City: the word is ambiguous in the Spanish) is to take a great risk (literally to play or to gamble: 'jugártela'). As the voiceover continues, 'Sometimes you win; sometimes you lose', the screen shows aerial shots of city slums, clinging to hillsides. The parallel between the passions of football and the perils of life in the capital could hardly be more evident. The poster makes the same deadly claim: it shows a pair of boots and a gun strung over a telegraph wire, all against an urban backdrop and under a blood-red sky.

As we slowly discover, the film takes place during three successive World Cups in 2002, 2006 and 2010, none of which took place in Mexico itself. Viewers (and characters) are thus dependent on mediatized sport-as-spectacle to orient themselves. And those who are not already faithful fans or attuned to the passion of others will likely remain confused, as the director relies on knowledge of the game to keep his plot's complex time-jumping calendar (the three time periods are also shot on different stock and shown in different aspect ratios).

51 Wood, 'Latin America at the (Sports) Movies', 1372.

52 Wood, 'Latin America at the (Sports) Movies', 1374.

53 Sergio Raúl López, 'Los *Dias de Gracia* de Everardo Gout: El crimen es como una hidra', *CineToma*, 21 (March–April 2012), 88–90 (88).

In the opening sequences, as football commentary is heard in the background, we see successively a young boxer training under a decrepit highway; a pregnant maid watching TV; and a rich man kidnapped from his SUV, apparently by the police. Later a corrupt chief will explain the film's title: the crime rate plummets during the thirty 'days of grace' of the World Cup as criminals, mesmerized by the TV broadcasts of the contest, let down their guard. This criminal intermission is not however borne out by Gout's film itself, which focuses on two brutal cases of kidnapping during the competition that give rise to multiple shoot-outs and murders.

Football thus provides a constant background commentary to plot strands that serve cumulatively to propose that corruption is endemic in Mexican society (as one bent cop puts it: 'There's always someone higher up'). Yet the sport also provides the possibility at least of social contact across class barriers: one wealthy kidnap victim trades football gossip with his half-hearted minder, the young boxer, finally winning him over. Conversely the corrupt police chief seduces his hitherto law-abiding subordinate by telling him to be a 'team player' and promising 'We're gonna score a great goal' (Gout cuts here to match footage and the commentator screaming '¡Goool!'). As in the very different but equally melodramatic *Los hijos de don Venancio*, the shared sport culture is comparable to the collective experience of the popular music that also plays throughout the film. Just as the pseudo-heroics of the game contrast with the brutalities of everyday criminal life, so the carefully crafted sound track is sometimes set against the brutal image repertoire (Los Panchos's romantic bolero 'Sin ti' [Without You] plays over one torture scene).

As Martínez's collection of essays suggested, one group excluded from this sociability is women. When Gout's film, a Mexican-French co-production, premiered at Cannes, *Hollywood Reporter* noted that it had 'heavy testosterone content [...] for the male teen demographic'.[54] And in the large ensemble cast only two roles are reserved for actresses and both are (as in the world of football) marginalized from the central action. They are the sister of a kidnapper and the betrayed wife of a kidnappee. Yet when, in the final sequence, one victim is released (the other is killed) he makes a call for help from a phone booth which boasts a tattered sticker 'Todo México' [All Mexico]. Although macho- and Mexico City-centred, then, *Días de gracia* clearly claims, like sport-as-spectacle, to embrace the whole of society.

54 Deborah Young, review of *Días de gracia* (2011), *Hollywood Reporter*, 20 May 2011 <http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/review/days-grace-dias-de-gracias-190660> [accessed 1 January 2017].

Gout's film, seven years in the making, was rewarded with the greatest number of Ariel nominations of any fiction feature of its year. Yet, although it opened on a generous two hundred screens, unlike *Rudo y Cursi*, it was a modest box office success. *Días*'s total gross of 400,000 dollars meant that it reached only number 142 in the releases for its year.[55] Its director has yet to make a second feature (he did helm a science fiction TV series for the National Geographic channel, however).

As confirmed by the popularity of my examples of the familial and fraternal paradigms previously mentioned, football fans may feel friendlier toward a sentimental or humorous treatment of their passion than toward this bloodily emotional 'roller coaster' (Gout's own term). Gout's national narrative links the sport to socio-political problems such as narco violence that viewers might prefer to forget, unless they are sweetened by the starry comedy of *Rudo y Cursi*. As we shall see, this was a lesson not lost on Netflix, as they entered the Mexican market with a football dramedy.

Netflix Kicks Off

Just as football in Mexico is at once ubiquitous and underdeveloped, so US streaming giant Netflix is both vital and vulnerable. The narrative in the trade press gives a nuanced account of how the OTT service ventured into the original content business in foreign territories where conditions were very different from the home country where it was so dominant.

On February 10 2016 *Hollywood Reporter* wrote that 'Netflix's Global Push Means Big Spending in Small Countries'.[56] While its 'splashy spending' on feature films at Sundance had drawn headlines, the 'real story' (writes the reporter) is how 'the streaming giant is splurging on original content overseas'. Of 1.2 billion dollars it is spending on production, about one quarter will be made outside the US, including some of the costliest titles in global TV history. The key markets are said to be the UK, France, Italy, Spain, and Mexico, where, one analyst says, 'you will start to see focus on high-value TV series, especially ones with a strong global appeal'. The Mexican example

55 Box Office Mojo, 2012, <http://www.boxofficemojo.com/intl/mexico/yearly/?yr=2012&sort=gross&order=DESC&pagenum=2&p=.htm> [accessed 1 January 2017].

56 Scott Roxborough, 'Netflix's Global Push Means Big Spending in Small Countries', *Hollywood Reporter*, 10 February 2016 <http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/netflixs-global-push-means-big-863401> [accessed 1 January 2017].

of an original title in the production or planning stage is here *Club de Cuervos*, described as a 'dramedy'. The business background is that domestic subscriptions have stalled in 2016, while 'internationally business is booming', with a jump of 68% anticipated.[57] Suddenly, then, the US giant is dependent on foreign markets.

Just five months later *Hollywood Reporter* asked, 'Why is Netflix Struggling Overseas?'.[58] Repeating that Netflix 'kicked off this year with a massive international roll-out', it goes on to say that growth in foreign subscriptions is unexpectedly slowing. Although it has made inroads in the English-speaking world and Latin America, the company is no 'global monolith'. It has 'far less content' abroad; and with a 80/20 model of US/local shows in most territories it offers 'too much English-language content', even for countries like India where many understand English but may prefer to watch TV in their own vernacular.

Netflix's local investment is focused on a small number of 'marquee original productions', such as the Colombia-set *Narcos*, wrongly given here as 'foreign-language' (most of the dialogue is actually in English). Beyond this linguistic problem, 'speed bumps' include price (the service is too expensive for many international audiences) and local competition (from 'entrenched national broadcasters' now themselves launching OTT). With content that is either 'too little' and 'too American', Netflix's 'road to global domination is long (and bumpy)'. Latin America remains, however, an 'established territory' with thirteen million subscribers expected by the end of the year.

Anticipating the challenge from entrenched national broadcasters, an earlier article in the trade journal had announced the launch of Televisa's OTT service Blim, under the headline 'Televisa Launches Netflix Rival'.[59] Acknowledging Netflix's original successes in the region (given as *Narcos* and *Club de Cuervos* once more), the article stresses however the 'vast television library' of the 'Mexican media giant' Televisa. Significantly the composition of Blim's catalogue is precisely the opposite of Netflix's, made up as it is of just 20% 'Hollywood fare' and 80% local programming.

The rivalry proved ongoing. When Televisa suddenly removed

57 All quotations are from Roxborough, 'Netflix's Global Push'.

58 Scott Roxborough, 'Why is Netflix Struggling Overseas?', *Hollywood Reporter*, 22 July 2016 <http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/why-is-netflix-struggling-overseas-913555> [accessed 1 January 2017].

59 John Hecht, 'Televisa Launches Netflix Rival', *Hollywood Reporter*, 22 February 2016 <http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/televisa-launches-netflix-rival-868385> [accessed 1 January 2017].

all of its content from Netflix Mexico, the US service fought back with humorous videos. One showed a weeping husband consoled by his wife when he could no longer watch his favourite *telenovela*. Another, entitled with heavy irony 'It's hard to say goodbye', showed a montage of bawling Televisa heroines, whose lachrymose dramas were no longer accessible to Netflix's select audience, which surely would not miss them.[60] There is a continuing conflict here between local content (featuring the familiar language and culture of the audience) and 'marquee' or 'high value' titles (which trade on novelty and exclusivity). Fusing the two together would surely fill a vital gap in the market.

Club de Cuervos: Production and Reception



Fig 5. Club de Cuervos *(Netflix, 2015–)*

Turning now to *Club de Cuervos*, the first and most vital of those quality series made in Spanish, we see how the US and Mexican presses offered different narratives of the series's development and character. Thus in 'Netflix to Create its First Spanish-Language Original Series', *Variety* described the show as early as 23 April 2014 by making a connection with the feature film sector as 'a soccer comedy from

60 *La Jornada*, 'Entre burlas Netflix se enfrasca en lucha con Televisa', 7 October 2016 <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/ultimas/2016/10/07/entre-burlas-netflix-se-enfrasca-en-lucha-con-televisa> [accessed 1 January 2017].

director Gaz Alazraki that reunites the team that made Mexican box office hit *We Are the Nobles*'.[61] The one sentence premise is: 'a family feud among heirs of a football club after the owner's death'. Shot entirely in Mexico and featuring a cast from 'all over Latin America' (including ubiquitous young Mexican star Luis Gerardo Méndez, of *Nobles*), the series is said to be 'a satirical and highly entertaining look into the world of professional futbol (or soccer as it is known in the US)'. Netflix's Chief Content Officer, Ted Sarandos, praises the showrunner's 'disruptive vision' and 'creative storytelling', key to a market that is 'so important to us as Mexico and Latin America'.

According to *Variety* once more, it would take a year for shooting to start 'in various locations in Mexico' before the thirteen-part series would 'bow globally in 2015'.[62] When the new series was finally launched in August, the trade paper cited Sarandos, the Chief Content Officer, once more, who placed the title in a curious Mexican context where he name-checked both saccharine children's TV classic *El chavo* and violent recent film comedy *La dictadura perfecta* [*The Perfect Dictatorship*]. In the US, we are told, the series will 'complement Netflix's growing Latino-oriented selection', which seems equally diverse, described as 'novelas, kid shows, comedies, docus, and pics'.[63] Given the stress on 'localization' in the trade press narrative, such comments seem strangely ill-focused, blurring as they do the huge cultural differences between Mexicans, Latin Americans, and US Latinos.

Unsurprisingly, the Mexican approaches to the series were more precise and ambivalent. In *Milenio* Álvaro Cueva, the most expert TV critic, welcomed the commissioning of a second season of *Club de Cuervos* by comparing it favourably with the coverage of a recent Mexican-US match of American football: local fans at the Azteca stadium had disgraced themselves and their country by calling foreign players 'putos' [queers].[64] Cueva asks what the American

61 'Netflix to Create its First Spanish-Language Original Series', *Variety*, 23 April 2014 <http://variety.com/2014/tv/news/netflix-to-create-its-first-spanish-language-original-series-1201162045/> [accessed 1 January 2017].

62 Todd Spangler, 'Netflix Comedy *Club de Cuervos* Starts Shooting in Mexico', *Variety*, 14 January 2015 <http://variety.com/2015/digital/news/netflix-comedy-club-de-cuervos-starts-shooting-in-mexico-1201404843/> [accessed 1 January 2017].

63 Anna Marie de la Fuente, 'Netflix launching Gaz Alazraki's *Club de Cuervos* worldwide', *Variety*, 10 June 2015 <http://variety.com/2015/tv/global/netflix-gaz-alazraki-club-de-cuervos-1201516869/> [accessed 1 January 2017].

64 Álvaro Cueva (2016), 'Netflix, la NFL, y más', *Milenio*, November 23 2016 <http://www.milenio.com/firmas/alvaro_cueva_elpozodelosdeseosreprimidos/

family audience that watches NFL must think of the Mexicans, who merely reconfirmed the slurs against their uncouth character made so recently by Donald Trump.

The embarrassing predicament of Mexico is satirized in Netflix's series, whose first season Cueva recommends readers binge-watch now. Cueva presents the series's themes in a chaotic enumeration reminiscent of Martínez, the scholar of football-as-spectacle: 'Our social and psychological vices, our problems with class, gender, ego, and ignorance', all explored on the 'platform' of 'our nationally symbolic football'. *Club de Cuervos*, he writes, is thus a 'true comedy' only because it is 'critical': 'calling attention to our problems [...] in this historical moment of so much hatred and grief'.

Yet, also in *Milenio*, René Franco, a fellow columnist of Cueva's, attacked the series as 'terrible' (pésima), singling out precisely those characteristics that would appear to make it 'marquee' or 'high value'.[65] The series claims to appeal to viewers' 'social conscience' and casts, as ever, the perennially trendy star Méndez. It thinks it is 'daring' because it makes jokes about politics. The fact that it shows 'penises, breasts, and transvestites' does not make it better than the *telenovelas* which, due to network censorship, cannot. The creators, he writes, know nothing of football or 'the business of sport'. For that they should have studied more closely feature film *Rudo y Cursi*. Franco concludes that viewers that stubbornly prefer *novelas* are not 'brainwashed', nor is a series better just because it is carried by Netflix. While Cueva, the connoisseur of global television, thus praises *Club de Cuervos* for its engagement with local reality, Franco attacks it for falsely trafficking in cultural distinction, aspiring to a quality status that it does not merit by its attempt to distance itself from everyday Mexican TV.

A more nuanced assessment comes from elite cultural magazine *Letras Libres*. Here arts reviewer Luis Reséndiz calls the series 'an agreeable surprise'.[66] Reséndiz begins by claiming *Nosotros los Nobles* as a continuation of the cultural syncretism between Hollywood and Mexico that Carlos Monsiváis had acclaimed as far back as the

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netflix-nfl-cobertura_juego-comportamiento_gente_estadio-club_de_cuervos-milenio_18_853294717.html> [accessed 1 January 2017].

65 René Franco, '*Club de Cuervos*', *Milenio*, 20 August 2015 <http://www.milenio.com/firmas/rene_franco_muyfranco/Club-cuervos_18_576722366.html> [accessed 1 January 2017].

66 Luis Reséndiz, '*Club de Cuervos*: Una agradable sorpresa', *Letras Libres*, 19 August 2015 <http://www.letraslibres.com/mexico-espana/cinetv/club-cuervos-una-agradable-sorpresa> [accessed 1 January 2017].

cinema of the Golden Age. In both, American narrative styles and genres are combined with 'concessions to localism' (we might add *Los hijos de don Venancio* as a precedent here also). This canny mix is shared with the series by Netflix, the only US producer to have both 'geographical reach' and 'a desire to innovate'.

The attractions for Mexican audiences are clear: Méndez is the 'poster boy' (a term given in English) for a generation of actors; the satire of *mirreyes* (entitled rich kids) has become a staple of the web, not yet seen on TV; the classic theme of football is the 'axis of the action'; and making fun of the 'national oligarchs' will always be welcome in a country of such stark social inequalities. With its slick sitcom-derived style, *Club de Cuervos* seeks to remedy the deficiencies in everyday Mexican TV (whether narrative, thematic, or technical) by employing a 'multidimensional' approach. Beyond the relatively complex central character, the series offers a host of supporting figures including an 'intelligent, experienced' woman, discriminated against because of her gender; a young player obliged to bribe his coach; an easily seduced press reporter; and a troublesome group of fans, whose support is also up for negotiation.

The series thus covers not only the academic subfields treated by Martínez's commentators on 'football-as-spectacle', but also the practical problems cited by the UNAM scholars, who lament the game's 'underdevelopment' in their home country, which they ascribe, ironically enough, to television. For Reséndiz *Club de Cuervos* marks the start of 'a necessary change of play' (*cambio de juego*, a technical term in football technique) in a Mexican TV system hitherto focused on 'endless remakes of the most popular *telenovela* of 1974'.

In spite of his praise of its localization, Reséndiz mentions a most unusual condition of the series's production process, which goes unspoken elsewhere: its reliance on a team of American scriptwriters. For a detailed account of this process we must turn to the little-read Mexican trade journal *Revista Pantalla*. Veteran specialist journalist José Antonio Fernández Fernández interviewed creator Gaz Alazraki after his show had won prizes in Mexico for best series, director, and script.[67] After the success of *Nosotros los Nobles* (at that time the biggest grossing local film in Mexican history), Alazraki and his stars Méndez and Karla Souza were keen to make a sequel (Souza would later feature instead in a US network series, *How To Get Away With Murder*). However, given that the original story was one of the

67 José Antonio Fernández Fernández, 'Gaz Alazraki gana Pantalla de Cristal por *Club de Cuervos*', *Revista Pantalla*, 22 February 2015 <http://www.revistapantalla.com/telemundo/entrevistas/?id_nota=17162> [accessed 1 January 2017].

education of *mirreyes*, to make the characters forget what they had learned would be a 'break with the truth' and with the 'connection with the audience'. A film sequel was thus impossible.

The original seed of the new story was a different real-life hypothesis: what if the son of Jorge Vergara (the businessman who, coincidentally, was a producer of *Y tu mamá también*) were to take over his father's football team, the famed Chivas of Guadalajara? Such a story could be played by the original cast without breaking the 'pact of truth' with the public. Alazraki considered the new premise more suitable for a series than a feature. Yet when he took it to an enthusiastic Netflix, they still considered it a true sequel to the film.

While the plot of *Nobles* was based on the same original play as Luis Buñuel's *El gran calavera* [*The Great Madcap* (1949)] (a link once more with the golden age of Mexican cinema), the concept of *Club de Cuervos* was wholly new. Given his lack of expertise in the new genre and medium, Alazraki went to Hollywood in search of screenwriters, where he discovered that his budget would not cover a team who expected union-negotiated rates. Here the web proved of the essence: he discovered that, in a contract loophole, employers could negotiate lower fees for new media projects. He interviewed eighty candidates and hired just four, although the writing room boasted as many as eight at a time, including himself and the stenographer who transcribed all discussion. There was a conflict in national sensibilities here: Mexicans, Alazraki says, are unwilling to cooperate, seeking to have a single credit for themselves, whereas Americans must be willing to work together if they wish to be hired at all. There was some geographical mobility here also. One Mexican writer made it inside the room. Although the team was based in Los Angeles, a group trip to Mexico proved especially fruitful for the writing team.

The creative process is thus lengthily complex and collective. The writers first interviewed real-life managers, players, fans, referees, ex-wives, and masseurs, seeking anecdotes to flesh out their scripts. Netflix, belying their reputation for artistic freedom, gave detailed notes (Alazaraki offers them as: 'This part will alienate your audience; this part confused or bored me; this episode climax doesn't work; this character no longer interests me'). Finally Alazraki's brother translated the script from the original English, adding his own corrections. Further changes to strengthen the characters or the narrative logic were made even on the set. The pilot went through no fewer than eight drafts.

Clearly, then, it was not merely in its milieu (football) or with its distributor (Netflix) that *Club de Cuervos* was unique. It was in

a production process that at first drew on a successful cinematic precedent, but later used opportunities from new media to introduce a mode of creative practice to a Mexican television that had never seen it before. We can now go on to explore how this process manifests itself in the text of the series's first season, so highly recommended by critics such as Álvaro Cueva.

Club de Cuervos: The First Season

The basic premise of the plot of *Club de Cuervos* stages a conflict between sport as spectacle (the academic focus we saw at the start of this chapter) and football as underdevelopment (the theme explored in the theses also mentioned earlier in the chapter). Moreover the series clearly engages with the three paradigms I mentioned in the case of Mexico's football cinema. The familial is, however, finished from the start. With the death of the patriarch coming in the first episode there can be no comfy home like don Venancio's in which family members will be reconciled. And, in this conflictive blended family there will be no fewer than three mothers. The fraternal is also revised, with the competitive rivalry (unlike in the testosterone-fuelled *Rudo y Cursi*) now between brother and sister, thus explicitly raising the question of machismo and gender inequality. Finally the national is replayed in a comic context that is lightened and sweetened when compared to the brutal *Días de gracia*, but still raises the same socio-political issues as the film, such as the ubiquity of corruption, in a way calculated to appeal to a sophisticated minority audience.

In similar style the tension in Netflix itself between local production and global attraction is thematized in one central plotline: the provincial setting of Nuevo Toledo (the fictional town whose exteriors were shot in Pachuca) will be confronted by the glamorous world of globalized football in the signing of a star player from Barcelona. Yet, in spite of local critics' claim of a syncretism between Hollywood and Mexico, the series has little in common with US genres of sitcom. There is no studio audience or laugh track, as there were in old-style comedies. With a running time of forty minutes without commercials, episodes last as long as a network drama in the US. Moreover *Club de Cuervos* features relatively few jokes and a relatively relaxed rhythm, unlike US comedies (whether single- or multi-camera) which average some six gags per minute.[68]

68 Talib Visram, 'The One Where I Counted the Jokes in Popular Sitcoms', *The Atlantic*, 28 November 2014 <https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2014/11/jokes-per-minute-sitcom-ratings-link/382734/https://www.

An interview with the one woman in the writing team stresses not just a responsibility toward creating plausible female characters but also the difficulty in achieving the tricky tone of dramedy: the creators, she says, are aiming for comedy without farce, drama without melodrama.[69] One unintended effect of the use of English-language screenwriters is that they are forced to focus not on verbal gags (untranslatable puns) but rather on gentler, character-based humour. The showrunner Gaz Alazraki himself, however, claimed that his goal was a compelling narrative, a desire from the audience to view the next instalment. If we examine the first season's arc, we can see if this dynamic seriality is achieved.

The pilot begins, like all the episodes, with a message scrawled on a blackboard. Here 'Life is a game [...] and we all die' is attributed to Pelé, the greatest player of all time. The camera soars over the stadium at night and we hear an emotional speech from young Chava (Luis Gerardo Méndez), who proclaims himself from the centre of the pitch the new 'presidente' (owner and manager) of the club. His mock-heroic climax is: 'Todos somos Cuervos' [We are all Crows]. Cutaways to the supporting cast introduce them and their mixed reactions. Then comes a literal punch line: sister Isabel (Mariana Treviño) hits her brother with a fist in the face as he leaves the pitch. 'Chava' is the diminutive for 'Salvador'. But, as suggested in this ignominious opening hook, unlike his legendary father (with whom he shares a name) he will not be the saviour of the family team.

A flashback takes us one week earlier, to a druggy, bare-breasted pool party for the players. In English Chava announces to one half-naked girl, 'Meet your new friend' (it is a condom). Actor Méndez here thus reprises his dumb but endearing playboy (or *mirrey*) from *Nosotros los Nobles*, the feature film previously directed by the series's showrunner. Main characters are now introduced by on-screen Twitter profiles: party animal Chava has one thousand followers; morose sister Isabel has just one. Appropriately for a streaming drama, *Club de Cuervos* is highly conscious of social media. When news of the scandalous party gets out, Chava fears not damage to his reputation but the loss of a 'shit load of followers'. In reality the series's characters do indeed have carefully curated Twitter profiles: at the time of writing Chava's Spanglish @DJ_Churches (a literal

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theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2014/11/jokes-per-minute-sitcom-ratings-link/382734/> [accessed 1 January 2017].

69 Xaque Gruber, '*Club de Cuervos* is Netflix's Freshest New Series of the Year', *Huffington Post*, 8 October 2015 <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/xaque-gruber/club-de-cuervos-is-netfli_b_7966254.html> [accessed 1 January 2017].

translation of his surname 'Iglesias') boasts 135,000 followers, many more than he is credited with within the show.

The disappointment of the father with his son's affinity for Hollywood-style excess is clear. He tells him, over-explicitly: 'We're not LA. Half of the population is poor'. When the patriarch then collapses in the steam bath, Chava does not call the ambulance but cluelessly searches for CPR instructions on his phone. Obliged to wait through a commercial, he watches scantily clad girls in an aerobics class as the father lies in agony on the floor, an ironic contrast typical of the series's edgy humour.

All this has been a cold open. And only now do we cut to the handsome credits: a montage of crows, footballs, jerseys, and trophies, all in black, white, and gold, ending with ecstatic fans screaming on the stands. Stressing once more sport-as-spectacle, we now watch as characters themselves watch news of the death on varied screens and in varied locations. In a sight gag, Chava is shown weeping for an unexpected reason: he is having trouble choosing the most flattering suit for the funeral. Even in death, image is all. A jersey placed over the corpse in its open casket has so many brand names that, according to one mourner, 'it looks like Times Square'. At the key event of the funeral, a character conflict is set up. The plain, tear-stained sister Isabel is contrasted with a self-possessed glamour girl in a black strapless gown: Mary Luz will prove to be the father's pregnant girlfriend. The family struggle over inheritance (is there a legitimate third sibling?) will run through the season.

The main focus, however, is sexism. Smart Isabel, with her practical plans, is consistently pushed aside by the men who cannot conceive of a female president. Clueless Chava, conversely, makes barely literate notes for his big speech on a bar napkin: 'Crows ... nest ... It's a metaphor'. In a moving moment of pathos, his sister walks the stadium's empty concrete corridors at night and then shares her memories with the drunken Chava: of how their father defended their team and town from scornful outsiders and brought infrastructure (a new highway and airport) to the previously undeveloped Nuevo Toledo. During their extended dialogue the two siblings share the frame, small lonely figures on the huge pitch. It is striking that in this opening episode other characters will be pushed to the margin, even the vice-president, who is played by Daniel Giménez Cacho, the best known and most prestigious actor in the series.

Chava shamelessly steals Isabel's memories for his own triumphant speech (with which the episode began). He publicly crowns himself president of the club, a position Isabel believes she

alone deserves. While these gender politics are central, the national allegory is also transparent: as in government, power is appropriated by those who do not merit it (the real-life President of Mexico was experiencing historically low poll numbers at this time). In witless Chava's unwittingly appropriate catch phrase, 'it [football] is a metaphor'. This first episode is thematically ambitious, but also technically proficient, circling back as it does to resolve its enigmatic opening in a gracefully scripted conclusion.

While the pilot focuses on the lack of social acceptance of women in Mexican football, the second episode addresses the sport's underdevelopment. At a board meeting, Isabel has an action plan complete with PowerPoint that no one wants to see. Chava, rather, who embodies the poor quality of Mexican football management, sits in the chairman's chair and takes a selfie: #MrPresident. His discussion with Félix, the experienced vice-president played by Giménez Cacho, echoes the questions treated in the theses. Chava says the problem with Mexican football is that there is no glamour and the players are all ugly. Félix says it is short-termism and lack of investment in junior and trainee teams (*fuerzas básicas*). Chava continues heedlessly, advocating international stars and a slickly redesigned strip. The Cuervos' new motto will be 'Alcanzar una estrella' [Reach for a Star], stolen by Chava from the title of a cheesy musical *telenovela* of 1990.

Sensitive to her brother's media obsession, Isabel sends pictures of last week's cocaine-fuelled sex party to fictional scandal magazine *TVNoticias* (a calque of real life *TVNotas*). For a new media project, *Club de Cuervos* seems somewhat naive on the ease of digital circulation of images, as the plot here turns on the retrieval of a mobile phone and thumb drive that are thought to hold the unique copies of the photos. Finally the club is able to keep the pictures from being published by offering compromising images of worthy captain Moisés instead of its already flailing president.

In the next episode Chava's superficiality is contrasted with the seriousness of his charismatic cousin, a flying doctor who surgically corrects poor children's smiles. Chava, rather, hires a PR person from the distant capital, seeking inclusion in a magazine article ('30 under 30') on young entrepreneurs (he will finally be relegated to the background of the cover picture). A comic subplot stresses corruption once more: a trainee player bribes the gruff coach to get off the bench with favours from a transgender sex worker, who impersonates the player's mother. There are some graphic sex talk and visuals here, which would be inconceivable on broadcast TV: the 'travesti' (described as a 'dama con rama' or 'chick with a dick') begs

the coach to use 'the back door'. Trying to keep her anatomy secret, she also claims: 'I've got herpes', to which he replies complacently: 'So have I'.

Working out from the now established central characters, commentators, fans and sponsors are presented as new stakeholders in the football spectacle, each as corrupt as the other. Chava tries clumsily to seduce a female reporter doing a TV piece on the team (we will return to this plot point later). The leader of the *porra* or fan association asks his sister for a bribe to 'keep them happy'. And a former sponsor hints that sex with Isabel might get his firm back on side. An old-school macho, he pees loudly and lengthily in his private bathroom during their meeting. (She later bests him by hiring all of the table dancers at the club he attends.)

Focus shifts in the fifth episode to Giménez Cacho as vice-president Félix. He claims 'Cuervos is my family', but is wooed by rival Pachuca. Blissfully ignorant of the threat to his team, Chava continues to entertain the journalist, announcing in English: 'Welcome to my crib'. Surveying the handsome view from the family house, he intones, 'Mexico could be the best country in Latin America'. The reporter seems less impressed, muttering: 'Yes ... so much grass'. In serious contrast once more, Félix, although wooed by Pachuca with its high-tech equipment, reveals in flashback the reason for his fidelity to the team: the previous president, Chava's father, had paid to retrain Félix as a coach when he could no longer play. Beyond mass-media spectacle, then, football can still serve as emotional identity for some of its faithful adherents.

This contrast with a less mercantile past continues in the next episode, which begins with an unidentified voiceover (it will prove to come from the retiring goalkeeper). It speaks of 'a time before fast cars, fancy clothes, beautiful girls, and greed'. This vintage idyll will diverge markedly from the main thrust of the second half of the season. A pre-credit teasing tag to episode seven consists of an erotic black and white perfume commercial in the style of Calvin Klein. It stars Aitor Cardoné, a scandal-plagued Spanish football star (played by real-life model Alosian Vivancos), who is always accompanied by a sinister manager who boasts a heavy Catalan accent. Inspired by a motivational seminar in Miami ('In Mexico we think small'), Chava tries to sign the Spaniard. Now showing a modest knowledge of the Mexican football scene and the world beyond Nuevo Toledo, the president claims the team will be able to renegotiate a rich contract with TV broadcasters and enjoy soaring ratings and merchandising: 'Aitor will be our Guggenheim!'. This grandiose ambition will be

satirized in a special spoof documentary episode, to which I turn in detail later.

The remaining episodes deal with 'Spanish fever', in a cross-cultural comedy inspired by the new European player (it is striking that there are no US characters in the series and Mexican inadequacy is focused on comparisons with Europe). Impressionable Chava adopts Spanish culinary and linguistic habits, snacking on Spanish meats ('jamón serrano' [cured ham] and 'morcilla' [blood sausage]) and sprinkling his speech with incongruous Peninsular slang ('guay' [cool], 'mola' [dig it]). Unsurprisingly, the new star has a negative effect on the regular players. The captain Moisés, stripped of status and jersey, also loses his wife. The sexually prodigious El Potro becomes impotent on glimpsing Aitor's yet bigger member (the series boasts frequent shower scenes that would be inadmissible once more on network television).

Heedlessly 'pansexual' (his word), Aitor even grabs Chava's penis at an orgy, provoking a new order from the boss to his wayward prodigy: 'Zero dicks in Nuevo Toledo'. The challenge of global football-spectacle to small-town sporting values is thus also the sexual challenge of metropolitan hedonism to more austere macho mores. Later Chava will surprise Aitor penetrating a papaya; and Aitor will give his rival player, handsome ex-captain Moisés, an excessively close and lengthy hug. Conversely, the discreet and loyal retired goalkeeper is deadly dull on his TV debut. The society of the spectacle embodied by the flashy foreigner proves once more incompatible with traditional local values.

As the Cuervos spiral down the league table the tone of the season becomes both gloomier and more dramatic. One vital game (at which Aitor is benched) is crosscut with Mary Luz giving birth in the presence of a Chava who is thrilled by the arrival of his father's posthumous child. There is genuine pathos here when Isabel says to her brother: 'It's a baby, not dad. It won't bring him back'. Even gold-digging Mary Luz now seems sympathetic. She is genuinely tearful after the birth; and, accompanied by the Ronettes' 'Be My Baby', joyful as she presents the new heir to the board.

Meanwhile, a photo surfaces of Aitor kissing his Catalan-accented male agent. This leads into an expertly realized multilingual press montage (in Spanish, English, Portuguese, and Japanese) on the 'first openly gay international football star'. Chava, newly sympathetic, defends his star: 'This isn't the Middle Ages'. Friends counter: 'This is Nuevo Toledo'. Isabel, scheming to take the team from her brother and suddenly mean, holds a press conference denouncing the Spaniard's

behaviour as incompatible with the Cuervos' 'family values'. Fans outside the stadium chant 'puto' [queer], a homophobic custom they share with real-life Mexican sports crowds. Isabel thus invokes football's supposed purity and authenticity to justify rejection and intolerance. After Chava's correct but unpopular progressive stance, no one will come to his birthday party. Rather than celebrating, he visits his father's tomb at the cemetery and makes a tearful soliloquy in which he recognizes his past mistakes.

The final episode boasts barely a joke in the course of its forty minutes. The family celebrate the christening of the new baby (whose DNA test has actually been faked). Aitor defends himself from Mexican homophobes who cannot even spell their slurs right (less admirably he also denies any sexual interest in the Mexican players by saying: 'I don't like beans [*frijol*]'). In a double drama, Isabel replaces Chava at the board meeting where she is elected *presidenta* and Aitor flees from the suitably spectacular location of a rooftop heliport on a Mexico City skyscraper. The cliffhanger at the episode's finale is double too. At the first match that Isabel attends as president the team is struggling to avoid relegation (we are not shown the final result). A sober Chava, now deprived of his position and chair in the stadium, is driven off on a dark and rainy night that drips with pathetic fallacy: 'Take me far from here'. What will the second season hold for the team and former president?

It is clear from this survey of the first season that, as its creators intended, the series's comedy connected with its audience because it was 'true' (that is, satirically critical of football and of Mexico). But the series's drama is strengthened also by plausible character arcs and convincing narrative logic. We can now turn or return to an exceptional episode in this first season, the mock documentary entitled 'Nación Futbol: A Fondo' [Football Nation: In Depth].

Club de Cuervos: Episode 1.5

It is testimony to the confidence of *Club de Cuervos*'s production team in both their experienced writers and their sophisticated viewers that they were willing to contemplate an episode that broke entirely with the dramatic conventions of its fellow instalments. Without warning, then, the whole of the fifth episode consists of a plausible facsimile of a documentary from a Mexican TV sports channel. There could be no clearer sign of the series's engagement with and ironic account of 'sport-as-spectacle'.

A lightning-fast multimedia montage sketches the many celebrity scandals of Aitor Cardoné in Spain. We cut to a sober interview with Isabel where she voices the clichés of football as local emotional identity: 'I've shed blood, sweat, and tears for this team'. A low-tech map shows the plane carrying Aitor as it careers comically from Barcelona, to Miami, to Mexico, via an 'emergency stop' in Cuba. Finally, the celebrity emerges from a luxury hotel in Mexico City with a man bun and furry vest, smirking at a female companion who slips out with him.

Characters familiar from the previous (fictional) episodes are now reshown (reframed) in this pseudo-documentary: Hugo Sánchez, Chava's retiring personal assistant (named, ironically once more, for Mexico's most famous player of all time), is unusually prominent here, where he is continually disrespected by the new arrivals. Reality show-style conflict ensues from the start in the too-lengthy limo drive from Mexico City to Nuevo Toledo. It is instigated by the Catalan-accented manager (officially 'President of Aitor Enterprises') who will later prove to be one of the star's many 'pansexual' lovers. The comedy here is consistently one of embarrassment when Mexican underdevelopment is confronted with European style and glamour. Thus on arrival Chava says unconvincingly as he gestures to the modest Nuevo Toledo plaza: 'This is our Gran Vía, our Ramblas . . .'. Aitor's proposed lodgings are predictably inadequate, even when he is offered the president's own ample home. We see the star airlifted to the Four Seasons in Mexico City while the president purchases a penthouse in the capital for him.

In continuing pseudo-documentary footage, interviews reintroduce former characters and link up with previous episodes, as when the ex-coach badmouths Chava. The show also includes re-takes and bloopers: Chava is first seen boasting of corruption in the construction of the stadium and then asking the TV crew to 'go again'. The episode also knowingly marks out the distance of Netflix's streaming service from the ordinary TV represented here by 'Nación Futbol': in a locker room sequence, El Potro's penis, cheerfully displayed in earlier episodes, is hidden by an elongated censor box or bar. Beyond testosterone, there is pathos here too. Chava's shyly devoted PA, Hugo Sánchez, shows off the team's so-called trophies, actually just souvenirs from the gift shop. One falls and shatters on the floor.

As Aitor continues his tour wearing a series of eccentric hats, Chava displays his ignorance of football to the camera, claiming: 'If Pelé were alive he'd be playing for the Cuervos' (Pelé is actually still

alive). Familiar footage from previous episodes, when we saw the TV team shooting, is reframed here. As Chava repeats that the problem with Mexican football is that there is no glamour and everyone is ugly, the camera now pans over the homely local players who contrast with the model-handsome foreign newcomer. In more reality show-style conflict, Giménez Cacho's testy vice-president vainly instructs the TV crew ('You can't shoot this') or storms off set ('This interview is over').

Meanwhile, Isabel, flattered by a male interviewer who had flirted with her in a previous episode, confesses unwisely that if she were 'Presidenta' things would be very different; and that her brother should be pushed out of the top job. In a final tag we are shown a brief reaction shot to the mock documentary. Chava sits stunned on the sofa before his TV set. A member of his entourage consoles him: 'At least your hair looked presidential'. Finally, then, this special episode is not only a sly send-up of a sportified society. It is also an expert commentary on the continuing connections between mass media and the emotional identity embodied, still, by football.

Crows, Balls, Falcons

The second season of *Club de Cuervos* charts the predictably rocky road of the team under their new management. Alluding to the then current US election campaign, the series used the tagline: 'Yes, there can be a "presidenta"' (Es posible (2016)). Sly as ever, the producers also parodied developments in Mexican football TV. When the real-life Chivas announced that they would stream all matches live for a hefty fee on their own internet site or mobile app, Netflix hit back with 'Cuervos TV', announced as competition for the digital initiative by the storied Guadalajara team. In this short promotional video, Luis Gerardo Méndez as Chava claims to have 'brought technology to football'.[70] The service costs five hundred pesos or $27, a hefty fee for Mexico. Moreover there is also a 660 peso surcharge to see each game, which will be shown 'only one day after it takes place'. Here, then, Alazraki and his team parody not just football but the new streaming medium which supported their premium project.

Yet there is a more positive precedent for football TV on Mexican television. *Futboleros* [*All for a Football*] is a short-form children's drama series first broadcast on free-to-air educational Canal Once in 2006, but still being rerun on Saturday mornings as late as 2017.

70 'Cuervos TV, ¿la competencia de Chivas TV?', *El Universal*, 7 July 2016 <http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/articulo/espectaculos/television/2016/07/7/cuervos-tv-la-competencia-de-chivas-tv> [accessed 1 January 2017].

The narratives here are gender-neutral, often focusing on committed female players, and promote morals of modesty, generosity, and altruism far indeed from the greed and selfishness of sport-as-spectacle. For example, in one episode two girls argue over a precious golden ball and are reconciled only when they lose it and can happily return to kicking a tin can around with their friends. Another episode turns on a birthday gift of a ball to an impoverished child who cannot afford one; a third on a boy who loses his friends when he tries to charge them to use his store-bought goal posts.

Other national versions of football TV are similarly modest: Spain's *Pelotas* [*Balls*], which aired on public network TVE from 2009–10, takes place in a depressed working-class *barrio* in an unnamed Catalan town. Conversely France's *Les Faucons* [*The Falcons*], transmitted, like the similarly titled *Club de Cuervos*, on a streaming site (Ne Zappez Pas (2016)), proved controversial when the young actors obliged to participate in shower scenes accused the respected producer of exploiting them.[71] Sex and football seem inseparable, at least on fiction television. Joaquín Ferreira, who plays Cuervos' macho El Potro, revealed his erect member on stage in 2016 during the course of the Mexico City play *23 centímetros* [*Nine Inches*], a phenomenon that belied his TV character's impotence plotline.[72] Few were surprised when porno footage later surfaced of the actor in a previous lifetime in his native Argentina.[73]

As one previously cited critic wrote of *Días de gracia*, testosterone would thus seem to rule in football stories. It is surely no accident, then, that Netflix, aiming for a broad but educated audience, should place the female character of Isabel front and centre in their series, even if she is presented in an ambivalent fashion. Likewise the series strikes a liberal pose with its transgender and gay plot strands, but does not editorialize (Aitor, the pansexual superstar, is hardly a role model for queer youth). *Club de Cuervos* thus attempts to redress the ambivalence felt by female and LGBT viewers about football, but

71 Fabien Randanne, 'Affaire Morandini: concept, nudité, audience ... Qu'est-ce que la web série *Les Faucons*?', 13 July 2016 <http://www.20minutes.fr/medias/1889087-20160713-affaire-morandini-concept-nudite-audience-web-serie-faucons> [accessed 1 January 2017].

72 'Joaquín Ferreira muestra sus "23 centímetros" en una obra de teatro', *Formulatv*, 4 April 2016 <http://www.formulatv.com/noticias/54858/joaquin-ferreira-23-centimetros-desnudo-integral/> [accessed 1 January 2017].

73 'Filtran los inicios en el porno de Joaquín Ferreira de *Club de Cuervos*', *TVNotas*, 31 December 2016 <http://www.tvnotas.com.mx/noticias-espectaculos-mexico/filtran-los-inicios-en-el-porno-de-joaquin-ferreira-de-club-de-cuervos> [accessed 1 January 2017].

without preaching to its financially upscale and no doubt politically liberal audience.

Moving problematically from kicks to words, football discourse will likely always remain ambivalent. Yet mass-media spectacle and consumer goods do not preclude emotional identity, life style, and even epic narrative (the climactic match of the first season plays out to a stirring soundtrack). Football and television thus provide joint leisure, pleasure, and entertainment, especially when their history is as linked as it is in Mexico.

It is *Club de Cuervos*'s achievement to have called attention to the sport's histories of underdevelopment (poor management, reliance on foreign players) and of social exclusion (of women and gays). While in both real and fictional stadiums, Mexican fans may be heard yelling 'puto' [queer], the series's plot prizes acceptance and its humour serves to critique the essentialist discourses of authenticity that serve to justify rejection, hatred, and intolerance in the sporting arena. Finally, then, TV and football participate in the shared symbolic wealth of a national narrative that, for all its too obvious contradictions, has not lost its ability to captivate viewers on screens old and new. And like the horror-light and showbiz-bio genres of my previous chapters, sports television drama proves capable of building social comment and artistically crafted form on the featherweight foundation of existing popular culture.

Format Translations

4. Copycat Television? *Gran Hotel* [*Grand Hotel*] (Bambú/Antena 3, 2011–13) and *El hotel de los secretos* [*The Hotel of Secrets*] (Televisa, 2015–16)

Format Translation and Import Substitution

As mentioned in the introduction to this book, the founding text in TV Studies on transnational remakes remains Albert Moran's *Copycat Television: Globalisation, Program Formats and Cultural Identity* (1998). In spite of the subsequent growth in publication on the topic, it still repays closer analysis. As is well known, Moran's title contradicts his purpose, which is to suggest that remakes are not mechanical imitations but rather examples of 'format translation' which have 'wider cultural significance',[1] such as 'opportunities for the registration of national elements'.[2]

Crucially his initial 'theoretical bearings' are in opposition to the then current model of US cultural imperialism.[3] Even in 1995 a UK-based market analyst he quotes could write of 'the increasing domestic level of demand in television schedules [while] American dominance is dropping'.[4] Moran's own study was thus an early example of the contraflow argument and of the persistence of cultural specificities in smaller nations. His main case study is thus of Grundy, an Australian producer that exported formats around the world to different effect and with varying success, according to the specific conditions they found in each country. His chapter on, for example, WIP (women in prison) drama gives close textual readings of the genre from not just Australia and the US, but also much less studied territories such

1 Moran, *Copycat Television*, ix.

2 Moran, *Copycat Television*, 91.

3 Moran, *Copycat Television*, 1.

4 Moran, *Copycat Television*, 19.

as the Netherlands.[5] In such transnational contacts, he writes, the format is seen not as a blueprint to be faithfully followed but as 'a loose and expanding set of program possibilities'.[6]

Moran acknowledges that the 'international trade in television programs [...] is [...] dwarfed by the overall volume of [...] programs that receive only domestic circulation'[7] and, citing François Heinderyckx, that 'language is the irreducible impediment to trans-border television'.[8] Yet genre is vital here too. If early scholars held remakes to be mechanical, it is because they focused on game-show format adaptations.[9] It is worth citing Moran at length here:

> As against more nationally prestigious television forms such as the documentary special or the drama mini-series, the game show and the soap opera are more commonplace forms whose individual programs are mostly oriented to a domestic rather than an international audience. The encoding of particular nationalities is therefore likely to be casual and incidental rather than self-conscious, deliberate, and explicit.[10]

I will suggest in this chapter, however, that the prestigious and the commonplace are fluctuating categories and that the two modes of incidental and deliberate encoding of nationality can co-exist in the same text. Perhaps, indeed, the casual may be more significant than its more self-conscious equivalents.

Although it is not of course his main focus, Moran (to his credit) pays attention to Grundy's incursions into Spanish-speaking territories. Here genre and its links to distinct national TV ecologies are vital. Thus while the Australian company had some success with game-show formats, selling them to Basque and Valencian channels and national network Telecinco (wrongly given as 'Telechino' on page 64), it had less luck with the dramas that had been welcomed in territories like the UK. Moran ascribes this to the impact of what he calls 'South American telenovela', temporarily popular in Spain in the early 1990s (in fact most of these daily serials came from Mexico).[11]

Apparently confirming Moran's suggestion that Spain formed part of a 'Latin audiovisual space', the same phenomenon occurred in

5 Moran, *Copycat Television*, 91–107.

6 Moran, *Copycat Television*, 21.

7 Moran, *Copycat Television*, 5.

8 Moran, *Copycat Television*, 8.

9 Moran, *Copycat Television*, 8.

10 Moran, *Copycat Television*, xi.

11 Moran, *Copycat Television*, 64.

Latin America. Grundy successfully sold game shows to Argentina, Uruguay, and Paraguay,[12] but had 'more difficulties' with drama.[13] Local expertise in *telenovela*, Moran writes correctly, had 'shaped schedules and expectations'. And 'lucrative markets to the north such as Brazil and Mexico still remain[ed] untouched' by the globe-trotting Australians.[14] Moreover, beyond genre and national audio-visual ecology, Moran hints at a further condition affecting format translation that is relevant here: 'It is the audience that "nationalizes" an adaptation'.[15]

In his conclusion Moran notes as further evidence for his thesis against cultural imperialism that 'many times over in particular national markets import substitution begins to occur'.[16] He was not to know that from the 1990s this would happen in the Spain that, heedless of the supposed 'Latin audiovisual space', would soon abandon Latin American imports to focus on its own distinctive prime-time TV drama. Yet Moran's general model still holds. And his book's last words (typically on a minor language area) suggest the continuing importance of *Copycat Television*:

> Popular Dutch television program format adaptations [...] provide a vocabulary of elements, both images and sounds, from which an imaginary harmony that is the Dutch nation can be assembled. Thus while [...] format adaptations may seem trivial and ephemeral, clearly these can have political effects which are neither of these things.[17]

We can now go on to examine a test case for the encoding of a distinctive national vocabulary: the Mexican adaptation of Spanish period mystery and romance *Gran Hotel* (Bambú/Antena 3, 2011–13) as *El hotel de los secretos* (Televisa, 2015–16). As we shall see, this example is especially problematic because the remake coincides very closely with the original, not only preserving as it does the great majority of the script verbatim but employing the same musical score and even the shooting style and the blocking of the actors in vital scenes. Surely, then, these twin Grand Hotels are an example of copycat television with a vengeance?

12 Moran, *Copycat Television*, 67.

13 Moran, *Copycat Television*, 68.

14 Moran, *Copycat Television*, 68.

15 Moran, *Copycat Television*, xi.

16 Moran, *Copycat Television*, 171.

17 Moran, *Copycat Television*, 177.

Gran Hotel: The Format

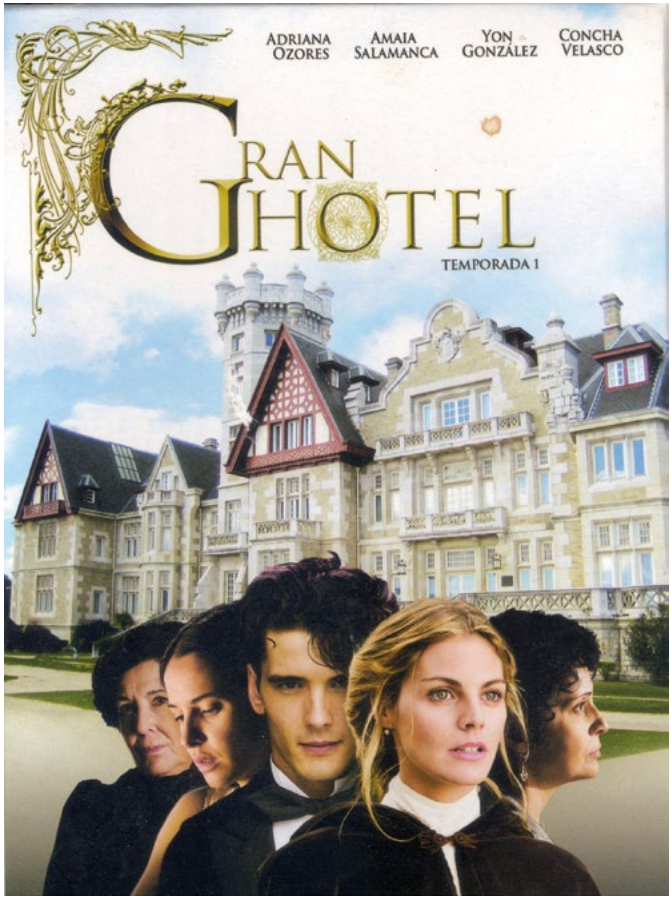


Fig 6. Gran Hotel *[*Grand Hotel*] (Bambú/Antena 3, 2011–13)*

> 1905. Julio, a young man, arrives at the Grand Hotel, an idyllic place in the middle of the countryside, to investigate the disappearance of his sister. He gets a job as a waiter and comes across the sexy wealthy daughter of the owner. He falls in love with her and starts a dangerous affair while she becomes the only person who will help him to discover the truth about his sister's disappearance. Find out all the secrets and mysteries hidden in the wonderful Grand Hotel.[18]

18 Bambú, 'Gran Hotel: Plot Summary' (2016) <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt2006421/plotsummary?ref_=tt_ov_pl> [accessed 14 September 2016].

The format of the Spanish original of *Gran Hotel* is the most common in the country's audio-visual ecology after the flirtation with Latin American *telenovela* in the 1990s. It is the limited-run weekly series ('serie' in Spanish), whose seasons comprise a widely varying number of episodes and are broadcast at irregular intervals. In terms of prestige (one of Moran's concerns) the series occupies a middle ranking between lower-status daily serials and the more highly considered event programming of the mini-series, both of which are also common in Spain. In the case of *Gran Hotel* the three seasons comprise respectively nine, eight, and twenty-two episodes and were broadcast over a lengthy period that lasted from 4 October 2011 to 25 June 2013. (Latin American *telenovelas*, on the other hand, in spite of boasting around 150 episodes, are generally complete within eight continuous months.)

Other particularities of the Spanish broadcasting system shared by *Gran Hotel* are the extended length of episodes, some seventy minutes in running time, reaching two hours with lengthy commercial breaks, and the late scheduling in a country where channels proudly announce the rare occasions on which a prime-time series ends before midnight. *Gran Hotel* played consistently at 10.40pm on Tuesdays or Wednesdays, a privileged slot often set aside for local dramas when the generalist channels hope to turn mass audiences into faithful viewers (a process called 'fidelización' in Spanish).

The series which, in spite of the producer's plot summary shown above, is set in an unspecified year around the beginning of the twentieth century, was aired on private free-to-air network Antena 3. Now subsumed into holding company Atresmedia (which also has interests in cinema and radio), it had long been known for period shows, both in prime time and daytime, where daily serials set in such visually attractive periods as the nineteenth century or 1920s are commonplace in the schedule. The setting thus presupposed no novelty for the channel's habitual viewer, who is likely to skew female and older. Moreover producer Bambú had also specialized in period productions, with some success: the ambitious *Hispania* (2010–11) had treated the Roman invasion of the Peninsula.

Yet some of the internet-savvy audience demographic were already resistant to such shows, citing their hostility to the genre of costume drama associated with the channel when the project was announced (one female viewer even said she could not watch it

because her husband did not care for the genre).[19] Perhaps in order to forestall this negative reaction from prized youthful viewers, Bambú cast as the leads young actors known for their starring roles on recent contemporary series. Amaia Salamanca had played a naive Madrid schoolgirl seduced by a fatally attractive drug baron in *Sin tetas no hay paraíso* [*Without Tits There Is No Paradise*](Grundy/Telecinco, 2008–09), Spain's rose-coloured adaptation of a gritty Colombian title. Yon González had been a schoolboy sleuth in the fantasy-cum-mystery series *El internado* [*The Boarding School*] (Globomedia/Antena 3, 2007–10), which, like *Gran Hotel*, was exported around the world.

In *Gran Hotel* Salamanca was to play the reassuringly modern rich girl Alicia, who is established in the first episode as having left home to live independently in Madrid. With agonizing slowness, Alicia will initiate a love affair with González's poor Julio. Yet more disrespectful than Alicia of the proprieties of the period, the resourceful Julio both flirts from the beginning with the owner's daughter and poses as a waiter, and on occasion a guest, in order to investigate the disappearance of his sister, a maid in the hotel.

Antena 3 also attempted to engage the sceptical younger audience represented on screen by its juvenile stars through social media. As the final episode aired, it released a spoof video on the internet showing González kissing a fellow waiter, his supposed true love (there are no gay characters in the show itself).[20] The channel's website also hosted a trivia contest on the series, donating as prize to the lucky winner an old-time key from the hotel set. And internet viewers were offered the chance to see their beloved characters dubbed into French, German, and Russian, the languages of just three of the seventy territories to which the original series was exceptionally exported. A reassuringly familiar Spanish format, the costume drama, was thus presented in a modern and cosmopolitan media context that sought to make and secure contact with a newly active audience.

Given the extended running time of Spanish series, they tend to be ensemble shows with proliferating plot lines for the minor characters. The central romance here, then, is not overly stressed. Indeed on the DVD jacket we see no fewer than five characters superimposed on an image of the imposing exterior location and the young couple are not even looking at each other. In an attempt to reassure more mature

19 Toluna, '¿Vais a ver la nueva serie de Antena 3, "Gran Hotel"?' (2011) <https://es.toluna.com/opinions/1021919/¿-Vais-a-ver-la-nueva-serie-de-Antena-3,-Gran-hotel> [accessed 14 September 2016].

20 Antena 3, 'Gran Hotel' (2013) <http://www.antena3.com/series/gran-hotel/> [accessed 14 September 2016].

audiences two senior stars complement the junior cast. Adriana Ozores plays Doña Teresa, the steely widow of the hotel's recently deceased owner, and Concha Velasco (an audience favourite since the 1960s) is Doña Ángela, the equally severe housekeeper. In all of these elements, then, *Gran Hotel*, which was to become a transnational phenomenon, is characteristic of its national media environment. The series does, however, push boundaries with its hybrid mystery-romance plot that threatens even to stray into the rare genre of horror (a serial killer wielding a golden knife is on the loose in the first season).

What is exceptional, however, is the lushness of the mise-en-scène. The main location, in gloomy northern Cantabria, is in real life the gothic Palacio de la Magdalena, which was presented to the King of Spain in 1911 by the loyal people of the seaside town of Santander. No longer a royal playground, it is now used for conferences and summer schools. According to the tourist attraction's own website, the building's 'intense history' reflects the social and political situation of Spain over eight decades. Attendance at guided tours doubled after the series aired.[21]

The interiors, recreated of course in a studio, are also grand indeed, as is the pseudo-classical orchestral score to which the action habitually unfolds. Wardrobe is also a reliable source of pleasure. Alicia's intricately lacy white gowns serve as an index of both her class status and her impeccable moral character, contrasting as they do with the darker garb of the series's many schemers and assassins. Indeed, costume and props are often thematized, serving as plot points. In the first episode Julio borrows an elegant jacket in order to masquerade as a high-class guest and retrieves a shiny room key hidden by his missing sister. The plot will prove to be packed with such McGuffins.

This excess of visual (and indeed aural) pleasure seems to substitute for precise reference to Spanish history and society. Although, as we shall see, the first episode focuses on modernization (the installation of electric light in the hotel), periodization is vague and there is no reference at all to the historical events silently encoded in the main location. Geography is equally blurry. Julio and Alicia are first shown taking a lengthy and mistily imprecise trip from Madrid on a vintage train. And the sole location is presented as being unfeasibly isolated. The hotel is perched on a cliff overlooking the unnamed ocean (actually the Bay of Biscay) and there are infrequent excursions to the small fictional town of Cantaloa. This hermetic isolation allows the

21 Palacio de la Magdalena <http://palaciomagdalena.com/es/historia/> [accessed 14 September 2016].

hotel to stand as a broad national allegory that engages such issues as class and gender conflict without requiring any prior knowledge from the viewer.

Typically, while the production company hails from Galicia (a distinctive historic nation also in the north of Spain far from Madrid), the Cantaloa of their series bears no marks of regional identity and its inhabitants speak without local accents. The world of *Gran Hotel* thus exemplifies the 'imaginary harmony' of which Moran speaks. In spite of this vision of a reassuringly abstracted Spain, the key theme of cross-class romance is, however, much more common in the inequality-driven world of Latin American *telenovela* than in the more democratic fictional society generally depicted in Spanish series. It can be central in *Gran Hotel* only because of the period setting. Of course in *telenovela* the class positions are generally reversed, with the Cinderella-style heroine pining lengthily for her handsome prince-cum-plutocrat.

Tensions around genre, TV ecology, and audience are thus clear in *Gran Hotel* as it seeks to take up its place in the crowded and competitive Spanish schedules. They are confirmed by an invaluable document that sets out such themes, first voiced by Moran, in a more concrete context. It is a record of the presentation of the series by its Galician executive producers (billed as 'creators') and featured cast at Madrid's Cineteca, a new cinema normally dedicated to art-house documentaries that is located in the fashionable cultural complex of the Matadero.[22] The occasion was *Gran Hotel*'s nomination as best series of the 2012–13 season with fellow costume dramas the Victorian *El secreto de Puente Viejo* [*The Secret of Puente Viejo*] (Boomerang/Antena 3, 2011–present) and the medieval *Isabel* (Diagonal/TVE, 2012–14). The prize was offered by the MadridImagen [*sic*] festival, the first time the cinephile society had honoured the world of television, previously despised and ignored by film folk.

The pull quote from Bambú's Ramón Campos for the piece, which was published on 29 November 2013 on specialist website formulatv, is: 'Me critican porque dicen que hago series para mi madre, pero es el público que sostiene la televisión' [I get criticized because they say I make series for my mother, but that's the audience that supports television].[23] The journalist writes that the event, sponsored by the

22 Santiago Aparicio, 'Ramón Campos: "Me critican porque dicen que hago series para mi madre"', 29 November 2013 <http://www.formulatv.com/noticias/34407/ramon-campos-critican-hago-series-madre-publico-sostiene-television/> [accessed 14 September 2016].

23 Aparicio, 'Ramón Campos'.

screenwriters' association known by the Spanish acronym DAMA, puts the spotlight on the 'creators of drama' who are, we are told, 'so often forgotten'. The discussion was preceded by a theatrical screening of the first episode, a clear example of the processes of legitimation which had already served in countries such as the US to raise the cultural distinction of TV series and their newly visible runners.

Like his better-known opposite numbers in other countries, executive producer Campos here stresses the difficulties of his process, especially in negotiations with the network: he had first pitched Antena 3 the idea of *Gran Hotel* as early as 2008. Interestingly, Campos says the writers use the names of Spanish literary authors (Salinas, Reverte, Ayala) for their TV characters in a barely masked bid for cultural kudos. Likewise he is flattered by comparison with the British *Downton Abbey* (Carnival and Masterpiece/ITV and PBS, 2010–15), which he takes as a sign that Spaniards have 'evolved' a great deal in their drama production. As Moran wrote, in this age of import substitution US modes of commercial TV production now have little purchase. Rather than citing Moran's 'Latin audiovisual space', Spanish domestic production appeals, then, to a European tradition of quality based on heritage and literarity, even though the production process for *Gran Hotel* had begun before *Downton Abbey*, its alleged model, has taken its bow.

Campos does not mention that the main theme of his series's mystery plot strand (as opposed to its romance) is one of the most frequent motifs in the British and Spanish classic novel and its film adaptations: that of inheritance. Alicia, daughter of the original proprietor, is initially obliged to marry Diego (Pedro Alonso), the scheming interim manager, in order to retain family control over the property. Her womanizing, alcoholic brother Javier (Eloy Azorín, from Almodóvar's *Todo sobre mi madre* [*All About My Mother*] (1999)) is incapable of managing the legacy. In secondary plotlines also focusing on paternity, Alicia's neurotic sister Sofía (Luz Valdenebro) pretends not to have miscarried the dynastically vital child of her ineffectual husband, the Marquis of Vergara (Fele Martínez, from Almodóvar's *La mala educación* [*Bad Education*] (2004)). And Sofía's mother plans to substitute for the miscarried child the baby fathered by uncaring Diego with sly chambermaid Belén (Marta Larralde).

Less flattering than these close connections with a European literary culture that is recast in a more dramatic mode is the continuing industrial conflict between producer and distributor. When Campos started collaborating with the powerful generalist network, he says,

they took '100%' of the profits.[24] Only now that he and his company Bambú are established can he fight for a fairer share of the spoils. But even after the first season of *Gran Hotel* was an audience success, Antena 3 programmed the second against the Spanish version of music talent competition *The Voice*. This was a scheduling decision that, he claims, greatly harmed the ratings of *Gran Hotel*, whose budget was a hefty 500,000 euros per episode. Perhaps punning on the venue in which he is speaking, Campos says bluntly that the channel 'sent us to the slaughterhouse' (Spanish 'matadero').[25]

Yet, finally, the production company's dedicated audience of 'mothers' is the one that remains faithful to Spanish TV drama. According to Campos's colleague Gema R. Neira, 'el resto vemos la tele por internet' [the rest of us watch TV on the web].[26] Official audience figures do indeed confirm a fall from the first to second season. Over the course of the whole series numbers declined from the first episode (an exceptional audience of 3,719,000 and enviable share of 20%) to the last of the final extended season (a more modest but still substantial 2,626,000 and 14.9%).[27]

We have seen, then, that *Gran Hotel*, in spite of its narrative innovations and new-found aspirations to technical quality in mise-en-scène, falls within Spanish conventions of TV genre, ecology, and audience, even as it attempts to attract a younger and more upmarket audience than is customary for costume drama in Spain. We can now go on to chart how the format translated to the very different context of Mexico, paying attention to the wider cultural significance of the opportunities that the original offered the remake for the registration of new or newly national elements.

24 Aparicio, 'Ramón Campos'.

25 Aparicio, 'Ramón Campos'.

26 Aparicio, 'Ramón Campos'.

27 Formulatv, 'Audiencias Gran Hotel' (2011–13) <http://www.formulatv.com/series/gran-hotel/audiencias/> [accessed 14 September 2016].

El hotel de los secretos: The Adaptation



Fig 7. El hotel de los secretos *[*The Hotel of Secrets*] (Televisa, 2015–16)*

El hotel de los secretos will take viewers to such spectacular locations in Mexico as picturesque San Miguel de Allende, and back to an exciting time when technological advances were opening up new worlds of possibilities, but social class differences and political ardour threatened the future of everything, including love. All the drama comes to a head at the Hotel de Los Secretos in a remote provincial town. The series opens with the chance meeting of two strangers on a train. Even though Alicia [*sic*] Alarcón (Irene Azuela) comes from old money and Julio Olmedo (Erick Elías) lacks even a hat to call his

> own, much less the money to buy a ticket, the sparks fly from the beginning.[28]

While *Gran Hotel* fell squarely within the habitual and relatively flexible Spanish audio-visual conventions, albeit boasting an unusually lush and lavish look, Televisa's remake tested the limits of the more rigid understanding of genre, ecology, and audience in Mexico. Thus, in a nation where *telenovela* has been dominant for decades, stripped from Monday to Friday across the prime-time schedules, *El hotel de los secretos* attempted to take up a tricky, fluid position between local and foreign norms. Most surprisingly it did so although produced and distributed by the hegemonic free-to-air broadcaster Televisa. The latter occupies a central position impossible to imagine in the more crowded and competitive Spanish TV scene, as its only rival for generalist viewers is the less watched (and equally despised) Azteca. In spite of the persistence of the one-off or anthology dramas known in Spanish as 'unitarias' in Televisa's afternoon schedule (*La rosa de Guadalupe* [*The Rose of the Virgin of Guadalupe* (2008–)] and *Como dice el dicho* [*As the Saying Goes* (2011–)] are veteran titles), the network is associated above all with the heritage genre of the daily serial melodrama.

Exceptionally, then, *El hotel de los secretos* boasted just eighty handsome episodes of forty-five minutes each, many fewer than a traditional *telenovela*, but many more than the original Spanish series. Although it was shown every week night in Mexico, it aired only from 25 January to 20 May 2016, a period somewhat shorter than that during which Mexican TV fans are accustomed to cohabiting with their favourite characters. The narrative pace in *El hotel de los secretos* is also rather faster than in *telenovela*, where romantic couples hesitate much longer before the inevitable white wedding of the final episode.

Moreover, while Spanish schedules are awash with period drama, costume drama is now rare in Mexico. The annual survey by OBITEL (the Observatory of Iberoamerican TV Fiction) for 2015, directed by scholar Guillermo Orozco Gómez, confirmed that the Mexican free-to-air channels had not aired a single period fiction in the last three years.[29] Where once Mexican audiences were accustomed to bodice-

28 Armando Tinoco, 'El hotel de los secretos Telenovela Synopsis', 15 January 2016 <http://www.latintimes.com/el-hotel-de-los-secretos-telenovela-synopsis-diana-bracho-daniela-romo-star-new-364695> [accessed 14 September 2016].

29 Guillermo Orozco Gómez, *Obitel 2015: Relaciones de género en la ficción televisiva* (2015), 363 <http://obitel.net/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/13–08_Obitel-2015_espanhol-color_completo.pdf> [accessed 14 September 2016].

ripping romances, they were now clearly unprepared for historical drama, especially one in a more subtle and less melodramatic mode. The jacket of *El hotel de los secretos*'s DVD (which I bought from a pirate street stall in Mexico City while the series was still playing on Televisa) gestured, however, towards traditional *telenovela*: unlike in the Spanish equivalent, here the two star-crossed lovers are shown gazing soulfully into each other's eyes.

Televisa attempted nonetheless to move beyond the everyday register of *telenovela* (what Moran calls 'casual') and enter the more elite realm of the Spanish-style 'series' (what Moran calls 'self-conscious'). Where *Gran Hotel* moved downstream in its casting, engaging still youthful veterans of teen shows as its leads, *El hotel de los secretos* ventured upmarket, casting Irene Azuela as its rebellious Alicia (here renamed 'Isabel'). Not only is Azuela almost a decade older than Amaia Salamanca, she is also a more skilled and versatile actor with a distinguished record more in theatre and cinema than in serial television. Indeed she had recently won twice in the category of best actress in the national film awards, the Ariels. As *El hotel de los secretos* was being prepared she was seen (I saw her) in both the intense drama *Crimes of the Heart* at Mexico City's respected Teatro Helénico (with Ilse Salas, also to feature in *El hotel de los secretos*) and in the disturbing and sexually graphic art movie *Las oscuras primaveras* [*Dark Springs*] (Ernesto Contreras, 2014).

If Bambú cast the beloved veteran Concha Velasco as the housekeeper, Televisa sought out Diana Bracho as Teresa, the owner's fierce widow. Bracho not only boasts one of the most distinguished media careers in Mexico but is even the daughter of a renowned director of Golden Age cinema. The executive producer responsible for the adaptation, Roberto Gómez Hernández, who has a meagre track record in *telenovela*, also had a famous pedigree in the Mexican audio-visual scene. He is the son of Chespirito, the legendary comic creator of classic children's TV formats *El chavo* and *El chapulín colorado* [*The Red Grasshopper*].

The setting of *El hotel de los secretos* seems even grander than that of the original *Gran Hotel* and also engages national associations, albeit very different ones to those of the Spanish location. Televisa shot exteriors at La Castañeda in Amecameca, Mexico State, where a wealthy businessman had reassembled the facade of the monumental lunatic asylum first opened in another location by perennial president Porfirio Díaz. The institution, with its division of inmates into such categories as 'epileptics, imbeciles, and infectious', had been a beacon of enlightened modernization at the time, although it declined latterly

into squalor.[30] While its origin was thus not as noble as the Spanish palace, the Mexican location still embodies an intense and contested national history.

Not content with the grand grounds and picturesque forests boasted by the natural location, Televisa tamed the gardens and even built a new mansard level along the full length of the massive structure. This addition heightened the televisual impression of Beaux Arts elegance beyond that which the troubled real-life building had originally possessed. And, as with *Gran Hotel*, *El hotel de los secretos* also boasted of its sets and costumes. Televisa's website shed an unusually scholarly light on wardrobe that was for once minutely documented for historical accuracy (previous period dramas had been much coarser), claiming that two hundred workers had contributed to the costumes.[31]

Costume is also of course an index of character. It is noteworthy that, in accordance with Azuela's more adult profile than Amaia Salamanca, her Isabel is more likely to accent Alicia's virginal white or modest ivory with a more sensual violet or coral. Still, Lucio Godoy's same orchestral score lushly plays near continuously over the assembled high-society dances and low-life brawls. Venturing beyond the ballrooms, both versions of the show feature a curious location in the local village that combines tavern, brothel, and improvised boxing ring, thus offering the handsome male lead Erick Elías (also somewhat older than his Spanish equivalent Yon González) plentiful opportunities to remove his shirt, as did González in the original version.

As might be expected, given the somewhat risky novelty of the concept, reception was mixed. Weekly magazine *TVyNotas*, the more scandalous rival to Televisa's fawning *TVyNovelas*, proclaimed the series had failed to hook audiences at its 'stellar' time slot of 9.30 pm, even though, it wrote, the budget was much less than in Spain.[32] Early-adopting viewers, no doubt Mexican cousins of the internet-

30 Grandes Casas de México, 'Casa de campo de don Arturo Quintana' (2016) <https://grandescasasdemexico.blogspot.co.uk/2016/01/casa-de-campo-de-don-arturo-quintana-y.html> [accessed 14 September 2016].

31 Televisa, 'Así se hace el vestuario de *El hotel de los secretos*' (2016) <http://television.televisa.com/programas-tv/cuentamelo-ya/videos/2016–05–12/vestuario-hotel-secretos-telenovela-backstage-novela-ropa/> [accessed 14 September 2016].

32 Janet Chávez, 'Aunque El hotel de los secretos costó la mitad de Gran Hotel ¡no ha triunfado!', 8 July 2016 <http://www.tvnotas.com.mx/2016/07/08/C-86052–aunque-el-hotel-de-los-secretos-costo-la-mitad-que-gran-hotel-no-ha-triunfado.php> [accessed 14 September 2016].

savvy Spaniards that Antena 3 also sought to attract, had already followed the original series on Netflix and were unanimous in their derision of the local version.[33] Yet if we turn to a series of articles by Álvaro Cueva, the sole serious critic of TV content in the Mexican press, we can understand better the backstory of this unique series and its relation to genre, ecology, and audience in Mexico.

As he writes in his column of 27 January 2016, Cueva loves and hates *El hotel de los secretos*.[34] He praises its beautiful premise, its extraordinary production, the highest level of its cast, its lovely scripts, and exquisite art design. This is for him a true adaptation in that the screenwriters did not just transfer an Iberian matter to 'our country' but have lent it a yet more romantic meaning and more rounded characters. According to Cueva there is a professional reason for this perception of high quality. Producer Gómez Fernández, rather than keeping in-house like his peers, contracted talent from outside Televisa: both writers and actors came from cinema, theatre, and another kind of television. It has been many years, writes Cueva, since there has been a production of this size in 'our country'. It brings a sense of hope to the audience, a hope for transformation in the genre of the *telenovela* and the channel of Televisa, whose schedule remains stuffed with old and bad titles.

Why, then, is Cueva so depressed? Because *El hotel de los secretos* was first premiered in the US and on Univision, the Spanish-language network north of the border with which Televisa is affiliated. Cueva calls this an insult and a stab in the back for free-to-air national television. Being funded by Mexican capital, the series should have been used for the benefit of people here, not those on the other side of the border. Finally *El hotel de los secretos* is beautiful but not for 'us', the second-class viewers.

As we have seen, *El hotel de los secretos* was indeed subsequently shown in primetime on Televisa's main outlet, the so-called Canal de las Estrellas [Channel of the Stars]. And industry mavens had perhaps been right in fearing that mainstream viewers would not take easily to it. Yet, what is significant is that, just as the Spanish *Gran Hotel* was enmeshed in a dialogue with the British tradition typified by *Downton Abbey*, so *El hotel de los secretos* was caught up

33 Armando Tinoco, '"El hotel de los secretos" vs. "Gran Hotel": Original Spanish Series Fans Slam Televisa Remake', 15 April 2016 <http://www.latintimes.com/el-hotel-de-los-secretos-vs-gran-hotel-original-spanish-series-fans-slam-televisa-379988> [accessed 14 September 2016].

34 Álvaro Cueva, 'El hotel de los secretos', 27 January 2016 <http://www.milenio.com/firmas/alvaro_cueva_elpozodelosdeseosreprimidos/hotel-secretos_18_672712765.html> [accessed 14 September 2016].

in a controversy around the relation between traditionalist Mexican series and the more adventurous Spanish-language drama on the US side of the border.

This international conflict is inextricable from technological changes that were transforming, finally, the apparently immovable Mexican media landscape, so long dominated by the duopoly of Televisa and Azteca. Just one month later Cueva returns to *El hotel de los secretos* but in a very different context. On 23 February he reports on Blim, Televisa's new online streaming service, claiming he is moved but confused by its appearance. Finally, he writes, Mexico has some competition for foreign OTT ('over the top') digital platforms.[35] But why should Mexican viewers prefer Blim to other services already available in their country such as the US Netflix, the Colombian Clarovideo, or the Spanish FilminLatino? The foreign streaming services boast respectively exclusive programming, greater freedom of expression, and 'marvellous' archives of independent film. Blim, on the other hand, schedules only titles either already seen on Televisa's free-to-air service or devoid of originality in form and content. Televisa has not invited independent producers to pitch new projects to them. Will viewers really pay to watch re-runs of *La familia P. Luche* [*The Plush Family*] (2003–15), an all-too-familiar coarse sitcom from long-time TV superstar Eugenio Derbez?

Here Cueva even qualifies his former praise for *El hotel de los secretos* (heavily promoted on the launch of Blim). *El hotel de los secretos* was not crafted exclusively for an internet platform and cannot compare in dramatic structure to titles that were, like Netflix's *Orange is the New Black* (2013–). Just, then, as he is depressed and delighted by *El hotel de los secretos*, Televisa's unlikely and somewhat marginal production, so he is both moved and confused by Blim, Televisa's tardy and half-hearted OTT initiative.

If here *El hotel de los secretos* is caught in the melee over technological change (just as the hotel in the show is transfixed by the coming of electricity), Cueva also explicitly compares the Mexican audio-visual ecology with the Spanish, educating his readers as he does so. One year earlier, on 14 August 2015, he had devoted a whole column to Spanish 'series', the word given in quotes to signal its difference from the local tradition of *telenovela* which he brands decadent.[36] Cueva

35 Álvaro Cueva, 'Ya tenemos Blim', 23 February 2016 <http://www.milenio.com/firmas/alvaro_cueva_elpozodelosdeseosreprimidos/Blim_18_688911110.html> [accessed 14 September 2016].

36 Álvaro Cueva, 'Las "series" españolas', 14 August 2015 <http://www.milenio.com/firmas/alvaro_cueva_elpozodelosdeseosreprimidos/series-espanolas_18_573122716.html> [accessed 14 September 2016].

claims that the most painful part of his critique is this comparison. Where once Mexico was the world champion of *telenovelas*, its very name a guarantee of success and quality, now the nation is the shadow of its former self, holding on only because audiences are so nostalgic and traditionalist. Cueva warns, dramatically, that if there is no change soon, the industry will die.

Compare (he says) Spain, where, in spite of a severe economic crisis that Mexico has been spared, 'series' are of the highest quality. Available in Mexico on OTT, they are also, he claims, 100% compatible with 'our culture', being from the 'madre patria' [mother country]. More particularly he calls attention to costume drama in Spain and to the titles made by Bambú, one of which is *Gran Hotel*. Cueva suggests himself that it will be most interesting to compare and evaluate the Spanish original in relation to the Mexican copy, which has been already announced. But he also recommends Spanish series to Mexican fans of their own *telenovelas* of old. For if enough Mexicans watch *Gran Hotel* (and *Velvet*, its successor from Bambú) then surely the Spanish series will awaken envy in a Mexican television establishment that lacks self-criticism, development, and international competition. Shifting between the national and the international, then, Cueva suggests that Spanish series may serve at once as the heirs to a now-lost great tradition of Mexican TV drama and the motivation for a return to that tradition by currently decadent media moguls.

Taking our cue from Cueva, we can now go on to see how the textual detail of a single episode changes in format translation from Spain to Mexico. As we shall see, copycat television offers, through a common vocabulary of images and sounds, opportunities for the registration of local elements that may well be unexpected.

Gran Hotel: Opening Episode

Each of the three disks of *Gran Hotel*'s official first-season DVD box set is preceded by a short educational video sponsored by the Plan against Piracy and the Spanish Ministry of Culture. My pirate copy of *El hotel de los secretos*, on the other hand, is proudly (cheekily) branded on its fragile paper cover: 'Innovando en la industria de la piratería' [Innovating in the industry of piracy]. The twin announcements remind us of the complexity of consumption and distribution of audio-visual works in the two countries and of a continuing struggle over property rights comparable to that depicted in the show itself. As Moran wrote, format translation will inevitably have wider cultural

significance than might at first appear. Close textual analysis will reveal opportunities for the registration of national elements, even in this notable example of copycat television.

In the credits to the lengthy Spanish original version of the first episode (which runs for the seventy-one minutes that are typical of the series) a rostrum camera roams over what appear to be authentic sepia still photos of a period location. The fact that none of the series's stars appears signals a break in this weekly series with the lower-status daily serial, where the presence of the stars in the credits is a helpful aid to memory management for viewers assumed to be inattentive. We next cut straight to a vintage railway platform (the location is familiar to Spanish habitués of period drama) where Julio, in proletarian flat cap, steals a glimpse of assured solitary traveller Alicia, already in lacy white dress and modest straw hat. We see her first from his POV, thus establishing the audience viewpoint as that of the transgressive rebel (he cheekily steals an apple for the journey from an extra's basket). Beyond this initial look, no further contact ensues between the main couple. Brief dialogue with an anonymous fellow traveller establishes that the long journey to Cantaloa must mean an engagement at the celebrated Grand Hotel.

As the smoky train sets out (we see no landscape beyond the station), we cut to voiceover of a letter written to Julio by his missing sister one month before and we see the preparations for the 'Festival of Light' in the hotel (close ups of boxes reading 'Edison Electric Company' are prominent). Older viewers not seduced by the comely couple of Amaia Salamanca and Yon González (perhaps the 'mothers' of whom the series's Galician producers are so aware) are gratified five minutes in by the appearance of Concha Velasco's Doña Ángela, the resolute housekeeper who perhaps summons up memories of her actor's historic performance as the equally determined Saint Teresa three decades earlier (*Teresa de Jesús* (TVE, 1984)).

Still in flashback, Julio's sister Cristina is summoned to the room of the maleficent widow of the manager, played by veteran Adriana Ozores, whose surname signals her membership of one of Spain's most celebrated families of actors and directors. Strikingly Doña Teresa is first shown from behind and conducts her dramatic dialogue with the maid without looking at her (at us). Thus she dismisses Cristina as a pretty but common name, says she hates mistakes and lies, and demands the maid give her back what is hers (this will prove to be a compromising letter whose content is revealed only in the last episode of the first season).

Before the first commercial break, we cut straight to another tour-de-force dramatic scene. The manageress, now more grandly garbed, is shown in close-up addressing the assembled guests ('my family') on the coming of the electric light. She calls it a symbol of modernization that makes this hotel pre-eminent in the 'patria' [fatherland]. The camera pulls back to show the serried black-clad ranks of waiters positioned on the staircase leading up to Doña Teresa's balcony high above the wealthy multitude. As the music swells, the editing pace speeds up and we crosscut quickly between the now brightly lit interior and the gloomy gardens through which Cristina flees, illuminated by lightning like-flashes from the new electric bulbs. The sequence ends with her screaming and a close up of a knife blade, flashing gold in the night.

The first ten minutes of running time have thus economically established the enigmas of the romance plot (what will happen to Alicia and Julio?) and the mystery (what did happen to Julio's sister?). It is a relatively rare generic hybrid. In the rest of the episode, then, Julio will play the double role of would-be lover and apprentice sleuth, his fluidity and versatility contrasted with the formality of class relations depicted in the hotel. It is a rigorously disciplined institution where waiters must observe (in a repeated prescription) good manners, silence, and discretion and keep a distance of precisely forty centimetres between them and the guests. This social control is mirrored in the aesthetic control of the series's look, with its muted palette generally limited to white, black, beige, cream, and brown. The only showy technique is found in the frequent flashbacks when past and present are made to mingle in the same frame: thus as Julio reads his missing sister's letter, she appears in the room behind him.

This economy of means even amidst a handsome mise-en-scène signals prime-time 'quality' to a Spanish audience already accustomed to the ubiquitous and less expert period daily dramas in the afternoon time slot. Soon we are given another set piece of staging. Standing on the staircase once more before the guests, Teresa announces her daughter's betrothal to sinister acting manager Diego. But this marriage contract, however visually pleasurable, is purely pragmatic. The scheming Teresa tells the independent-minded Isabel that she is not required to love Diego, only to marry him. And she counsels the odious Diego in turn that he should contrive to make Isabel fall in love with him if he wishes her to come under his control.

While, as we shall see, the first Mexican episode (shorter than the Spanish) stops with this betrothal scene thus using it as a cliffhanger, the Spanish original offers further dramatic sequences,

intended to hook first-time viewers who (unlike Mexicans) will have to wait a week for the next episode. These are both romantic (Julio, dressed as a guest, shares a cigarette with modern girl Alicia on the hotel's extensive terrace) and violent (Julio intervenes to save Alicia's wastrel brother in a fight at the tavern-cum-brothel). But it is the last five minutes of the episode that constitute a tour de force of crosscutting and multiple plot strands: thus Julio is slapped by Alicia when she discovers he is but a waiter masquerading as a guest; Teresa finds a photo of Julio's sister which he dropped as he sleuthed; Diego receives a package containing the blood stained uniform of the missing Cristina; and Alicia's pregnant sister falls down the now familiar staircase.

In a final shocking image a blind man comes across a murder victim by the lake in the grounds. It is the sex worker whom Alicia's brother had brought to his sister's betrothal party (his mother's only comment is that the girl should be properly paid for her services lest she make a scandal). This unusual complexity of plotting, shooting, and cutting in a first episode thus clearly signals that exceptional 'quality' for which *Gran Hotel* was, as we saw, granted a theatrical screening and an award from a professional cinema society.

The textual detail of *Gran Hotel* confirms what we saw in its production history. The series attains the prestigious status more often granted to the mini-series or feature film by engaging a European tradition of quality that is based on heritage and literarity, as well as technical skill. Yet still the show conforms to many of the conventions of everyday TV (the familiar 'series' genre) in Spain. More precisely, its encoding of nationality is casual and incidental, embodied in traits such as casting and language that go unrecognized by the foreign-language audiences who so eagerly consumed the show.

Yet it is hardly necessary to be familiar with Concha Velasco's sixty years of credits in Spanish film and TV to appreciate as a spectator her severe housekeeper. Although Latin American viewers would of course immediately note the accent of what Álvaro Cueva still calls the 'mother country', the script avoids as far as possible linguistic idiosyncrasies, whether historical or regional. If we move on to the Mexican version, however, we will see a different encoding of national elements that responds to that country's distinct audio-visual environment.

El hotel de los secretos: Opening Episode

The extended first episode of the Mexican remake is fifty-five minutes long (subsequent episodes will last just forty-five minutes) and it takes us up to the engagement party, roughly half-way through the first Spanish episode. Although the Televisa tempo is thus slightly slower than that of Bambú/Antena 3, this is a rapid rhythm for serial melodrama, especially given the fact that five episodes will be aired per week. The full eighty episodes will thus require additional scenes and characters to fill out the running time of a drama that presents itself as a hybrid between the national *telenovela* and the international 'series'.

The textual detail of this first episode reveals two contradictory tendencies which testify to the project's tricky, fluid position between local and foreign norms. First comes an intensified socio-political perspective that requires a more particularized historical setting than the abstracted Spanish original. Indeed we have already seen that *Latin Times* highlighted for the Spanish-speaking US audience of Univision both the supposed location of 'picturesque San Miguel de Allende' (in fact almost nothing of this historic tourist site is seen) and the 'new world' of technological advances, class differences, and political ardour (this last wholly absent in the Spanish version).

Thus the very first image is a painterly view of a historic city, presumably the capital, with both the church towers of tradition and the smoking chimneys of modernity making their presence felt. Likewise the first shot of the Mexican Julio, here shown outside the train station in his habitual flat cap, bears the title '1908' (no date was given in the Spanish version). As Julio looks down despairingly on the few coins in his palm, Mexican viewers would need no prompting that the action is taking place on the cusp of the Revolution. Julio's first act reveals both his sympathetic character and his commitment to social justice: he rescues a street urchin (described with the very Mexican word 'escuincle' [nipper]) who is accused by a wealthy traveller of stealing and tells the boy never to let anyone mistreat him again. And while the Spanish Julio steals an apple, the Mexican steals a coat, which will facilitate his first act of cross-class masquerade.

Isabel (the Mexican version of the Spanish Alicia) is also more precisely located in a social context. She wears the original lacy white frock and straw bonnet, but is accompanied to the track by a new character, a female friend wearing a necktie, who insists twice that Isabel must return in time to take her exams at medical school (Alicia's life in the capital is more nebulous). When the main couple are safely on the train itself, this is, unlike the oddly egalitarian

Spanish vehicle, a microcosm of Mexican class divisions. Mestizo extras sit on crowded wooden benches. European-featured Isabel has a private compartment in a separate car to which Julio gains access only when clad in his fancy and fetching stolen coat.

Subsequent scenes mimic more closely, copycat style, key scenes of the original: Julio's missing sister materializes behind her brother as he reads her diary; Diana Bracho stands with her back to us as she rehearses her demand for 'what is hers' to the 'common' maid and then appears triumphantly on the balcony as the electric light is first festively turned on. Yet even here there is a slight difference to the dialogue. The manageress now mentions the coming centenary of Mexican Independence (1910 would in fact also usher in the Revolution) and claims that electrification makes her hotel comparable to even those in Europe. This is an ambition clearly desired for by the series itself and a signal of allegiance to the European heritage drama, also cited by *Gran Hotel*.

Sophisticated sexual themes suggest rather the 'greater freedom of expression' noted by Cueva in Netflix and rare indeed on Televisa's free-to-air heritage network. Evil manager Diego and treacherous maid Belén engage in the light S/M of buttock beating (absent in the original). It is perhaps no coincidence that the impish Ilse Salas, who plays Belén, had recently appeared in *Güeros* (Alonso Ruizpalacios (2014)), an outstanding example of the innovative independent cinema that Cueva also prizes in OTT services such as FilminLatino. Even the Mexican female lead seems more sexualized. To mark the occasion of the betrothal, the nubile Isabel wears a slinky sheer violet number that the more modest Spanish Alicia and her series's wardrobe designers would surely have found inappropriate.

The most explicitly local elements are associated with a new character, the chef Don Lupe (played by the protagonist of educational channel Canal Once's very contemporary workplace drama *X/Y* (2009–12)). A comic foil for the severe housekeeper, the harassed Lupe enters holding a live hen to be sacrificed for a dish of *mole*, the national recipe par excellence. He welcomes Isabel with the promise of Mexican breakfast comfort food: *chilaquiles* [fried tortilla chips] with precisely four chillis. These apparently trivial references serve to nationalize a foreign format for perhaps sceptical local viewers. But they also engage in explicit dialogue with cosmopolitanism and cultural distinction. When Lupe proposes to the manager a menu that includes hyper-national ingredients (*romeritos* [rosemary sprigs], *nopales* [cactus paddles]), he defends his feast as being composed not of low-status *empanadas* [patties] but rather of fancy French *vol au vents*.

These gastronomic references, absent in the Spanish original, would seem to be an example of Moran's self-conscious, deliberate, and explicit national elements. Crucially, however, they serve to support the elements of implicit nationalization already inherent in a format whose main theme of social inequality is more strongly felt in modern Mexico than in contemporary Spain.

Tiny details of mise-en-scène enforce this pervasively political reading. When the Marquis of Vergara is shown reading a newspaper, he holds it so that we can read the headlines: long-time president Porfirio Díaz (who opened the historic lunatic asylum whose façade figures so frequently in *El hotel de los secretos*) is quoted as saying that Mexico is ready for democracy, while Britons are reported as demonstrating for the female vote. The Spanish *Gran Hotel*'s timid advocacy for the modern woman in the figure of independent Alicia is here made much more explicit. In a later Mexican episode a young prostitute is shown being literally groomed by her mother in the tawdry tavern as Isabel also brushes her hair in her comfortable boudoir, a clear critique of class and gender norms in the period.

Contrary to this challenging tendency, however, which might not be congenial to mature viewers attracted by the period frocks and picturesque sets, is an intensification of the romantic plotline when compared to the Spanish original. This is seen both in the plotting and the shooting style. In the first episode Julio and Isabel are presented with new opportunities to meet that are not granted their Spanish originals. He engages her in lengthy conversation on the train, praising her commitment to medicine; and later has a 'wonderful encounter' with her in her dead father's office. In *telenovela*-ready dialogue, Julio declares somewhat prematurely that his destiny is bound up with hers. Likewise, when Julio first catches sight of Isabel in the station, she emerges wraith-like from billowing clouds of steam. And both of their faces are flatteringly illuminated by a golden setting sun on their train journey through a picturesque landscape whose equivalent goes unseen in the Spanish version.

Evolving implicitly in relation to the new audience attracted by pay TV, *El hotel de los secretos*, then, responds to the desire for what Cueva calls 'another kind of television' by creating a new brand of drama for its free-to-air generalist broadcaster. It is one that, as we saw, was first premiered not in Mexico but in the Spanish-speaking US and was later highlighted on the new OTT service Blim. *El hotel de los secretos* is thus a unique hybrid that by drawing on the established Spanish 'series' format aspires to signal its difference from the now decadent local tradition of Televisa's *telenovela*, even as it cannot

afford to leave behind the still-faithful public of that network and that genre.

Scripted Story Selling

As both series develop, the same eccentric guests (played by aptly named 'guest stars') make their appearance in the same order: the concert pianist with his five irritating pooches, Sofía's aristocratic mother-in-law who brings her own sheets and shoe polish to a Grand Hotel too common for the likes of her. Similarly there is the same successive circulation of objects, structuring a mystery plot that cannot be resolved too soon: the key found by Julio and hidden by his sister or the broken knife found in the bed of wealthy wastrel Javier and placed in the room of loyal servant Andrés. And tracing the arc of the first Spanish season is the compromising letter stolen by Julio's sister, which Teresa demands be returned to her in a first dramatic scene.

As Jacques Lacan wrote so long ago, in such cases a letter always reaches its destination.[37] And that destination determines the status of women and their exchange in marriage and prostitution. In both versions of the format the chaste central couple hesitate endlessly before sharing a first kiss. But, by the last episode, with their antagonists safely out of the way (the Spanish Belén falls from a handy cliff, the villainous Diego is shot), the young lovers are finally free to be together. It is a happy ending that would fit the most traditionalist *telenovela*. Alicia/Isabel is even reconciled with the formidable mother who married her off to a man she despised.

Moreover the missing letter reveals that Andrés, a dutiful waiter, is in fact the illegitimate son of the deceased hotel owner and thus a full member of the property-owning family who have so patronized him. Class conflict is thus, like gender inequality, finally magicked away. It is not hard to see in such wish fulfilments Bambú and Televisa's continuing desire to connect with a predominantly female and unsophisticated audience (represented by the faithful 'mother' of the Spanish creator), even as both producers, within their respective TV ecologies, make attempts at boundary-pushing innovation.

But, in spite of these fairy-tale plot points, reminiscent of what Cueva calls the 'decadent' genre of Mexican serial melodrama, *El hotel de los secretos* especially is brutally cynical about sex. Teresa lectures her daughter Sofía that, if she wants to hold on to her husband, she

37 Jacques Lacan, 'Seminar on *The Purloined Letter*' (1997/2005) <http://www.lacan.com/purloined.htm> [accessed 14 September 2016].

must satisfy him physically even when she is still suffering from the effects of a hidden miscarriage. One major new plotline in the Mexican remake, absent in the Spanish original, is that of a love affair between the very young pregnant woman whored out by her mother and the sympathetic son of the comic cook.

It would seem, then, that, as Moran suggested, the format is seen here not as a blueprint to be faithfully followed but as a loose and expanding set of programme possibilities. And with American dominance long gone in both TV markets (with the exception of channels dedicated to elite paying viewers and internet OTT), both series testify to the domestic demand in their respective free-to-air television schedules. Yet there is no common 'Latin audio-visual space'. Mexico 'nationalizes' an adaptation that might be seen as an example of import substitution by employing a vocabulary of elements, both images and sounds, from which an imaginary harmony (albeit one that is violently enforced) is built: the repressive Mexican society ruled by Porfirio Díaz just before the outbreak of the bloody Revolution.

Key here are landscape and language. The exterior location of *El hotel de los secretos* boasts distinctive rock formations and misty pine forests recognizable to local (but not foreign) audiences that could not be further from the open coastal vistas of northern Spain in *Gran Hotel*. As Moran wrote, language remains an impediment to trans-border television, here even within the same language community. In spite of Cueva's praise of the 'mother country' and his claim that Spain's series are '100% compatible with our culture', the Peninsular accent retains unwelcome associations of colonial rule for many Latin American viewers. And Televisa's adapters take care to sprinkle their dialogue with Mexicanisms (*escuincle*, *chilaquiles*), even as they preserve elements of the Spanish original script (such as the aristocratic characters) that are difficult to reconcile with their new setting.

Television authorship is hard to identify at the best of times and more so in the case of format translation. My pirate DVD of *El hotel de los secretos* offers successive opening credit titles reading: 'Univision presents' and 'Televisa presents'. The end credits cite the Galician scriptwriter-producers of the original under the heading 'Format written by [...]', while a further credit for 'Format distributed by [...]' goes to Pomodoro Stories. The latter's self-description on its website is worth citing in full:

> Pomodoro Stories, LLC specializes in the acquisition, representation and sale of scripted formats for emerging markets in North and South

> America, Turkey and the Middle East. [...] Pomodoro's clients range from US Hispanic channels broadcasting in Spanish or English, to Latin American free TV and cable outlets in Spanish or Portuguese, to Turkish and Middle Eastern broadcasters and cable and satellite channels. Two thirds of our product mix is Latin American and Asian telenovela formats of 60, 120 or more episodes, with a growing part of the business composed of one hour scripted series from Israel and Europe.[38]

A later and more successful version of Moran's Australia-based Grundy, Pomodoro thus brings together far-flung geographical locations (Latin America, Europe, and the Middle East) which cling to distinct genres and schedules (daily *telenovela* and weekly sitcoms and series) and employ different modes of distribution (free-to-air, cable, and satellite). Note that the US (subsumed as it is into 'North America') is marginal in this complex circulation of 'scripted stories' where once-marginal markets are now trading mainly amongst themselves. In such a multi-polar world it is difficult to conceive of any national audience as 'second class', as Cueva suggested. 'Beautiful' TV (like the *Gran Hotel* franchise) is now available to all of us. Indeed as *El hotel de los secretos* was playing, Televisa's rival Azteca took to showing dubbed Turkish *telenovelas* in prime time, a remarkable breach in local scheduling traditions.

Finally, then, the *Gran Hotel* format is a fine example of how copycat television flexibly adapts to new genres, ecologies, and audiences, even when the TV industry is challenged or threatened by technological change. The Spanish series's circulation to seventy countries, in both dubbed and adapted versions, is proof of its global purchase. Ironically, then, it would appear that, here at least, it is only by returning to a past world of rigid gender and class norms that TV fiction can point to a present and a future that offer more flexible identifications for both characters and viewers alike. In the next chapter we will see how format translation negotiates yet wider cultural differences, in this case between Venezuela and the United States.

38 Pomodoro, 'Scripted Story Selling' (2016) <http://pomodorostories.com/about/> [accessed 14 September 2016].

5. Second Tier Reproduction: *Juana la virgen* (RCTV, 2002) and *Jane the Virgin* (CW, 2014–present)

Cultural Proximity and Geo-cultural Regions

What is distinctive about Latin American television industries? A recent scholarly book published, somewhat surprisingly, by the cinephile British Film Institute synthesizes research on the field and offers a broad template which we may compare with the finer grained (and more financially focused) account given by the trade press.[1] Like Moran's *Copy Cat Television* (1998), treated in the previous chapter, this book is an indispensable guide to its field.

In their introduction Sinclair and Straubhaar sketch out their research field, providing some vital initial perspectives as they do so. Mexico and Brazil may, they write, dominate regional markets, but Latin America as a whole is 'unique' globally for three reasons.[2] Firstly it 'has greater linguistic and cultural cohesion than any other world region'. Secondly, although it 'adopted the US's commercial model of broadcasting [...] as distinct from the [European] public service model', it offers 'a distinct pattern of family commercial media empires who have managed their political relationships with successive governments to avoid the regulatory constraints that have limited commercialization elsewhere'.[3] Thirdly, and finally, the region has 'had more time [than others] to develop and institutionalize its own television genres, notably the telenovela', thus creating a 'complex fusion of commercial imperatives and popular culture' that has served as a 'model [for] less developed markets'. In Latin

1 John Sinclair and Joseph D. Straubhaar, *Latin American Television Industries* (London: BFI, 2013).

2 Sinclair and Straubhaar, *Latin American Television*, 1.

3 Sinclair and Straubhaar, *Latin American Television*, 2.

America, then, specific cultural processes 'link television managers, producers, and audiences' in unique ways.[4]

Beyond these particular, empirical observations on production, Sinclair and Straubhaar offer two more general and theoretical proposals in relation to reception. First comes the idea of cultural proximity:

> Audiences will prefer to watch culture on television that is as close to their own as possible [featuring] local or national references in humor, national gossip, knowledge of national stars, historical references, even ethnicity, scenery, and music [...]. Local or national production is more attractive to audiences and hence more profitable.[5]

Secondly, they write:

> The converse of cultural proximity is what is called the cultural discount. That argues that if the culture reflected in a television show or film is too different in values, ideas, images, etc. from what an audience is used to, they will tend to reject it or discount it.[6]

In spite of this discount (which means that only elite audiences can appreciate content such as US sitcom *Friends*, aired in the region on pay TV), 'genre proximity' (as in the case of *telenovela*) 'cuts across cultures' to some extent. Latin America has thus been able to produce or reproduce:

> A mediascape in which a small number of companies have been able to seize a strategic advantage by capitalizing upon linguistic and cultural similarities, and so build themselves hegemonic positions over the development and institutionalization of the medium, first in their home nations and then across the region, and into global markets.[7]

The authors go on to propose in more territorial terms that Latin American television can constitute either 'a geolinguistic region' (amongst neighbouring Spanish- or Portuguese-speaking nations), a 'geocultural region' (amongst neighbours who need not share a language), or a 'cultural-linguistic space' (for those more tenuously related to their families' territories of origin).[8] These three concentric circles can be related historically to the 'three generations of US

4 All quotations from Sinclair and Straubhaar, *Latin American Television*, 2.

5 Sinclair and Straubhaar, *Latin American Television*, 2.

6 Sinclair and Straubhaar, *Latin American Television*, 2–3.

7 Sinclair and Straubhaar, *Latin American Television*, 4.

8 Sinclair and Straubhaar, *Latin American Television*, 5.

Hispanic audience' (a market more valuable than that in many independent nations), who are progressively distanced in time and space from the lived experience of the region.[9]

Latin American media companies can capitalize on such varied and vast demographics because, unlike US networks, they 'have had the additional advantage of being allowed to integrate production and distribution since their inception […] producing their own programming [with] costs recovered even before being exported'.[10] The lengthy 'golden age of television in Latin America' is thus based on 'free to air analogue broadcast television for large, popular audiences, usually on a national scale'. Sinclair and Straubhaar acknowledge finally, however, that this 'mass media' model is now challenged by the emergence of a greater middle class and increasing access to subscription television.

Beyond this general introduction, Chapter 4 of *Latin American Television Industries* is devoted to so-called 'emergent' producers and markets such as Venezuela and Argentina. The authors begin by reminding readers that Mexico and Brazil benefited from:

> A favorable regulatory environment permitting both vertical integration of production and distribution and horizontal integration of related media interests; the development of programming that gained audience approval and loyalty; and the shrewd management of relations with the government of the day.[11]

In the so-called 'second tier' of countries, by contrast, 'discontinuities of government control' negatively affected the development of a television that was 'highly politicized'. The key date for Venezuela was 1953, when Radio Caracas Televisión (RCTV) was launched.[12] With its rival Televisa (later renamed 'Venevisión' and no relation to the Mexican hegemon), the two networks constituted from the start a 'virtual duopoly' which followed the 'Mexican formula' of twin dominance by Televisa and Azteca. Initially 20% of RCTV were owned by US network NBC. And the channel's reliance on some imported programming until the 1970s saw it denounced by local critics at that time for yielding to US 'cultural imperialism'.

Also different to the mediascape of the dominant Latin American countries was Venezuela's commercial set-up. While Mexico's networks were true media corporations, Venezuela's

9 Sinclair and Straubhaar, *Latin American Television*, 6.

10 Sinclair and Straubhaar, *Latin American Television*, 6–7.

11 Sinclair and Straubhaar, *Latin American Television*, 92.

12 Sinclair and Straubhaar, *Latin American Television*, 93.

were embedded in larger industrial holding companies. And unlike Mexican or Brazilian executives, who had immediate access to vast local audiences, Venezuelans had 'incentives to look outside their domestic market'.[13] Once more these are three in number: their home country's relatively small population, its variable (indeed fragile) state of economic stability and prosperity,[14] and, latterly, the accession of Hugo Chávez in 1998 after which 'national television networks were put under extreme pressure'.

As we shall see when we examine the narrative in the trade press, RCTV was taken off the air in 2007 and its frequency appropriated by the government. The motive was not only the network's political resistance to the regime in its news programming, but the content of its fiction: RCTV's *telenovelas*, write Sinclair and Straubhaar, boasted 'controversial, contemporary plots'. Retreating from free-to-air, RCTV was blocked even on cable in 2010. Notoriously, Chávez obliged stations to carry his lengthy talk show *Aló Presidente*, an image from which appears on the back cover of *Latin American Television Industries*. RCTV refused. But, once more, the TV war was not restricted to news. The government also 'backed the production of historical dramas celebrating the original Bolivarian revolution'.[15]

RCTV was thus typical of Latin America as a whole in the 'personalized, patriarchal control and dynastic continuity' that it shared with the regionally hegemonic producers Televisa and Globo. But, in accord with the 'second tier', it remained a 'family-based industrial group [with] interests in property, construction, retailing and manufacturing'. Unlike the securely located Mexican and Brazilian behemoths, however, it found itself latterly 'restricted to international program production and distribution from its base in Miami'.[16] Making a virtue of necessity, RCTV's international arm (initially called Coral) became by 2012 a 'major distributor of programming with its number of hours sold annually comparable to that of Televisa and Globo [...] exporting out of Miami to forty eight countries in a dozen languages'.[17] A typical example of RCTV's innovative programming was *Mi gorda bella* [*My Sweet Fat Valentina*] of 2002–03, a *novela* whose heroine was, as the title indicates, of non-standard body type. Yet, in spite of early allegations of cultural imperialism, as Sinclair and Straubhaar remind us the network

13 Sinclair and Straubhaar, *Latin American Television*, 94.

14 Sinclair and Straubhaar, *Latin American Television*, 95.

15 Sinclair and Straubhaar, *Latin American Television*, 95.

16 Sinclair and Straubhaar, *Latin American Television*, 96.

17 Sinclair and Straubhaar, *Latin American Television*, 97.

had a long tradition of treating controversial topics in its in-house productions: as early as 1961 *El derecho de nacer* had boasted a bold abortion theme.

It was perhaps this corporate mentality and history that allowed RCTV to produce in 2002 one of its greatest international successes on a similarly queasy premise: *telenovela Juana la virgen*, remade in the US as the CW's prize-winning series *Jane the Virgin* (2014–), was to begin with the accidental insemination of its protagonist. But before carrying out a content analysis of this much travelled format (a version also aired in Mexico), we should examine more closely the industrial context of the Venezuelan mediascape from which Juana/Jane would be born.

RCTV and *Juana la Virgen*, the Format



Fig 8. Juana la virgen *(RCTV, 2002)*

Juana Pérez es una joven de 17 años, estudiante e hija ejemplar. Vive con su madre Ana María, que la tuvo de soltera, una mujer joven, bastante impulsiva y arrebatada, y que tiene mala suerte en el amor, básicamente porque se mete en líos sin pensarlo mucho; su abuela Azucena, una mujer dura y amargada por el abandono de su marido;

> y con su tío Manuel, con el que tiene una relación de compañeros y confidentes. Por otro lado, Mauricio de la Vega, joven y exitoso empresario, dueño de una revista de mucho éxito y de una línea editorial independiente. Está casado con Carlota Vivas, perteneciente a una adinerada familia, dueña de un imperio, parece que no muy limpio. En el terreno de los negocios, Rogelio, el padre de Carlota [...] intenta hundir la revista de Mauricio (la revista *Positivo*), para apoderarse de ella.[18]
>
> [Juana Pérez is a seventeen-year-old girl who is an exemplary student and daughter. She lives with her mother Ana María, who had her out of wedlock. The mother is still a young woman, who is impulsive, impetuous, and unlucky in love, as she gets into trouble without thinking first. Juana also lives with her grandmother Azucena, a tough woman, embittered after she was abandoned by her husband; and with her uncle Manuel, who is her comrade and confident. On the other hand, there is Mauricio de la Vega, a young and successful entrepreneur and the owner of a magazine that is very successful and with an independent editorial line. He is married to Carlota Vivas, who belongs to a wealthy family which owns a business empire that seems to be rather murky. In the realm of business, Rogelio, Carlota's father [...] tries to wreck Mauricio's magazine *Positivo* in order to take control of it.]

Juana la virgen is a *telenovela* of traditional format consisting of 153 daily episodes each filling a one-hour slot (actually forty-five minutes in length). It was produced by RCTV and broadcast free-to-air in Venezuela over seven months from 14 March to 16 October 2002. Experienced creator Perla Farías and young star Daniela Alvarado had already established credits in local series. The synopsis above (taken from surprisingly sophisticated fan site Todotnv.com) suggests two traditional elements of the initial premise: a romance across the class divide (the humbly named and financially stressed Pérez family and the industrial dynasty of the Vivas, into which Juana's inadvertent inseminator has married); and a love triangle between rich, handsome Mauricio, his blonde villainess of a wife (who is played by a former beauty queen), and our heroine, modest brunette Juana.

Non-standard elements of the premise confirm rather RCTV's reputation for controversial, boundary-pushing themes, even here in a daily series intended for a general audience. Thus Juana's extended female family is doubly abandoned (by her father and grandfather). And her 'impulsive, impetuous' mother will be kept in line only by

18 Marta Hernández, '*Juana la virgen* – RCTV (2002)', *Todotnv.com*, 6 July 2006 <http://www.todotnv.com/juana-la-virgen-rctv-2002.html> [accessed 6 December 2016].

her own prematurely sensible daughter, who adopts the maternal role in relation to her parent even before her unplanned pregnancy. Moreover, while *telenovelas* often turn on questions of mysterious paternity, Juana's insemination plotline (the result of a medical mix up) is radically new. Indeed, betraying an anxiety unseen in Venezuela itself, the standard English translation of the title in the trade press was the euphemistic *Juana's Miracle*.

From an expert consumer's perspective, Todotnv sketches the vices and virtues of what it calls a 'surprisingly good' series.[19] The website stresses the normality of the show's fictional world. Thus Juana's physical type is (for once) 'totally normal' and her dialogue with her female friends reveals a true friendship between women that, beyond conventional cattiness, survives even rivalry for a man. Male protagonist Mauricio is something of a bore with his obsession with fathering a child (explained in the show by his being a cancer survivor with a justified fear of mortality). But Juana's uncle Manolito (a character absent in the US remake) is, on the other hand, 'original' and 'atypical'. He is masculine without being *machista* and tender and affectionate in his dealings with the three generations of his otherwise female household.

For Todotnv the story is also tender and romantic, at once totally believable and unbelievable (a tricky tonal mix that the US version will also attempt). Similarly, the supporting characters are unusually well drawn and not employed as so often in *telenovela* to pad out the extended running time. Juana herself, even when unexpectedly pregnant, is smart, not dumb like the typical *telenovela* heroine. While she decides to keep the child whom she did not initially want, being a mother is by no means her greatest dream. Even when Juana talks of her future baby, she is never reduced to a 'masa fofa' [flabby lump] by her exceptional condition.

Looking back at the trade press, we can see the industrial and governmental context from which *Juana la virgen* emerged. It was at a crucial moment after the accession of Chávez but before the president took the dominant broadcaster RCTV off the air in Venezuela, confining it to cable. Two irreconcilable narratives emerge: that of the producers and that of the authorities. Let us begin with the former.

In October 2001 (just five months before *Juana* took its bow) *Television International* published a lengthy interview with Eladio Lárez, then the long-time president of RCTV ('Dr Eladio'). Lárez was 'positive' about the future of generalist free TV, which, as we saw, Sinclair and Straubhaar identified with the now-threatened golden

19 Hernández, '*Juana la virgen*'.

age of Latin American broadcasting. The incipient challenge of the internet, still small in a Venezuela where only 5% of the population had access, is (Lárez says) to be countered by improved programming, so the generalist channels continue to be Venezuela's favourite form of mass entertainment. Lárez insists that broadcasters should avoid niches and target the entire public. Heritage networks like his own are closer to their audience, who identify with their channel (this is of course Sinclair and Straubhaar's 'cultural proximity').

In similar terms, although the network has its international sales arm based in Miami (then called 'Coral', later 'RCTV Internacional'), it does not need to become more global: *telenovelas* produced for consumption in Venezuela are one hundred per cent successful abroad. Although RCTV has just signed a ten-year distribution deal with Univision to access the large Spanish-speaking audience in the US, Lárez argues that the key to success in this business right now is production and quality in a tough economic climate.

Two years later, in January–February 2003, *Television Business International* returns to the problems felt by Latin American distributors in adverse economic conditions.[20] Here the focus is on Miami, where Coral's vice-president, José Escalante, claims that the high ratings of his company's *telenovelas* mean that RCTV has kept programme slots in all Latin American countries. Indeed Coral has recently made its first sale to Brazil in a decade. It is no surprise that this is of high-profile title *Juana la virgen*.

Other executives quoted in the piece stress (like Lárez) content quality, stating that programmers are desperate for innovative programmes that attract broader audiences and, consequently, advertising attention. Regional producers thus aim to diversify their product portfolios. Such formats are exported not just to the US but to Europe and even Asia. In a revealing appeal to an extended geo-cultural region based on genre proximity, Escalante argues that his *telenovelas* have the same values and moral issues as Asian dramas, which mean they are 'closer' to the Asian audience than are Hollywood stories.

A company profile of Coral published in the same year in (precisely) *Television Asia* presents in some detail RCTV's slate at

20 John Hazelton, 'Feeling the Heat: Latin American Distributors Are Used to Doing Business in Adverse Economic Conditions. So How Are They Coping with the Latest Crisis in the Region?', *Television Business International* (January–February 2003), 34.

that time that is offered to the world's most populous region.[21] Plot descriptions confirm the tricky balance of modernity and tradition we have already seen in *Juana*. Coral's novelas, we read, tend to focus on the magical variation of a poor smart girl who struggles against evil characters to establish her position and consolidate the love of her life. But they also incorporate new trends and cultural themes, such as the women's movement, politically correct activities and ethical values.

Echoing previous demands for 'quality', the company profile here emphasizes current situations and a more sophisticated story embracing the traditional *telenovela*, with the key example being once more the so-called *Juana's Miracle* (whose premise goes discreetly unmentioned). The human emotions and moral values of such titles are compared to Asia's ancient books, such as *The Behaviour of Kings*. This somewhat sanctimonious thinking is belied, however, by some of the current series described in the profile. For example *Trapos íntimos* (translated euphemistically once more as *Designs of Love*) is set in the lingerie industry and is promoted with images of the entire cast, male and female, in their underwear.

Subsequent reports in the trade press cover Chávez's extended campaign against RCTV, Venezuela's most successful and independent network. *Variety* reported on March 26, 2007 that 'Venezuela's RCTV [was] in gov't crosshairs', threatening to revoke the network's licence.[22] When the Inter-American Press Association complained that Chávez was 'threatening to silence the nation's main television station for its independent editorial line' (note the similarity of wording with Mauricio's equally threatened fictional magazine in *Juana*), Venezuela's Minister of Information called the organization 'press plutocrats [...] who use their media to exert pressure, blackmail, and do business at the expense of the Latin American peoples'.[23]

Later that year, in May, *Video Age International* placed 'RCTV and government woes' in historical perspective, noting that as far back as 1983 the network's 'political irreverence and business boldness' had brought it into conflict with then president Luis Herrera.[24] Like scholars Sinclair and Straubhaar, the trade journal also sketches a

21 'Coral International (Company Profile)', *Television Asia* (January–February 2003), iv.

22 Michael O'Boyle, 'Venezuela's RCTV in Gov't Crosshairs', *Variety*, 26 March 2007, 21.

23 O'Boyle, 'Venezuela's RCTV', 21.

24 Dom Serafini, 'RCTV & Government Woes; It's Déjà vu All Over Again', *Video Age International* (May 2007), 1.

tangled familial set-up worthy of a *telenovela*: RCTV's executive vice-president had suddenly become the stepson of 'founding patriarch' William Phelps when the former's divorced mother married the latter. Threatened now with losing its terrestrial frequencies, the family business could in the future still transmit via cable (as indeed came to pass). Meanwhile, writes *Video Age International*, RCTV still exports Venezuela's most popular *telenovelas* to eighty countries, runs an academy that trained 5,600 actors, journalists, and technicians in the previous year, and boasts a news operation with 250 staff members.

As mentioned earlier, RCTV was indeed restricted to cable in 2007. It was replaced over the air by state-funded and little watched Televisora Venezolana Social or 'TVes'.[25] The latter's ratings were said to be just one tenth of those of RCTV. The 'final nail in the coffin' came in 2010 when RCTV, described as 'Venezuela's oldest broadcaster', was dropped by cable providers after violating new rules obliging stations to 'register with the regulator and air all government broadcasts, including [Chávez's] marathon speeches'. Yet still the company claimed to be 'the biggest producer' in the country.[26]

This so-called 'TV war' took a deadly real-life turn when two students were killed at protests against the suspension of RCTV.[27] The next year *Variety* reported that network chiefs were being 'driven into exile'.[28] And the government meddled directly in scheduling, forcing a remaining network to cancel a Mexican dating game show, drug-related Colombian *telenovelas*, and even Fox's *The Simpsons*, deemed 'inappropriate for children'.

Meanwhile in Miami, the managing director of RCTV Internacional, Jorge Granier (described as a 'scion of the clan that built RCTV into one of Latin America's oldest and largest production-distribution operations') extolled his stocked library of content: some three hundred shows 'ripe for remakes, format sales, and digital holdings'.[29] The eight formats he has brought to the US are said to include *Juana la virgen*. In 2015, with the remade *Jane* now a critical

25 'Chavez's Pet Station, a Ratings Failure', *Video Age International* (October 2007), 56.

26 Anna Marie de la Fuente, 'Venezuela Cablers Dropped', *Variety*, 25 January 2010, 5.

27 Anna Marie de la Fuente, 'RCTV Fights for Life, Two Die in Protests After Chavez Takes Web Off Air', *Variety*, 1 February 2010, 13.

28 Anna Marie de la Fuente, 'Chavez Dogs Venezuela Nets', *Variety*, 31 January 2011, 16.

29 A. J. Marechal and Anna Marie de la Fuente, 'Latin Exex [*sic*] Vault into U.S.', *Variety*, 24 September 2012, 16.

and ratings success, Granier is asked to reflect on *telenovelas*. His aim, he says, is to 'bridge that gap between Latin America and the US'. He goes on: 'It gets less every year, and things like *Jane* happen'.[30] It remains the case, however, that no other RCTV title had such critical or ratings success outside Venezuela. *Juana/Jane* is thus a unique format.

Unmentioned by Sinclair and Straubhaar and little touched in the trade press is the key 'content law' introduced by Chávez's government in 2004 (two years after *Juana*). Bearing the unimpeachable title 'Law of Social Responsibility in Radio and Television' and boasting the innocuous Spanish acronym RESORTE or 'spring', the legislation, called by opponents the 'Ley mordaza' or 'Muzzle Law', had the avowed intentions of protecting children and preserving national security. And it is instructive to compare the rhetoric of the government supporters with that of the oppositional industry actors we have analysed above.

Thus two scholars discuss the challenges of citizens to the media and its professional training.[31] Examining the relation between power, mass communication, and citizenship, a discussion supposedly set in motion by the Law, the authors promote procedures that could modify the interaction between citizens and their means of communication in order to improve the content quality of normal programming. Beyond content, they also raise the institutional questions of the ethics of professional practice and the role of Schools of Social Communication in the context of the law.

The vexed question of the definition of 'quality' in programme content (which as we have seen is also central to the trade press narrative) is addressed in a further academic article.[32] The author here cites an alleged long tradition in Venezuelan media of programming that features vulgar and coarse messages, with a high content of sex and violence, taking little account of time slots and with most of the audiences children and teenagers. With minute precision the Law specifies that, during the hours when programming is deemed to be fit for all viewers, concrete categories of language, health [*sic*], sex, and violence (rated by the letters B, C, D, and E) are prohibited.

30 Marechal and de la Fuente, 'Latin Exex', 16.

31 Elda Morales and Luz Neira Parra, 'Los retos de la ciudadanía a los medios de comunicación social y a la formación profesional del comunicador. Venezuela, La Ley de Responsabilidad Social en Radio y Televisión', *Espacio abierto*, 14.3 (2005), 459–71.

32 María Virginia Corona, 'Análisis de la television en Venezuela', *Revista Telos*, 8.2 (2006), 341–43.

The noxious influence on viewers of such elements is held to be self-evident. Citizens' behaviour is said to be moulded by *telenovelas* that sell them the negative image of a typically working-class protagonist-viewer: 'Un venezolano hundido en la pobreza, viviendo en situaciones críticas, con nombres excéntricos, utilizando un lenguaje vulgar y [quien] [...] convive en una familia careciente de todo tipo de valores' [A Venezuelan sunk in poverty, living in a desperate situation, boasting an eccentric name, using vulgar language and living in a family lacking in any kind of values].[33] (As we shall see, this profile coincides to a large extent with the family members in the *Juana* that had attracted record audiences just four years before the article was published.)

Neglecting cultural formation or training, such shows are also said to be inauthentic, being merely faithful copies of programmes that have been successful in other countries. As examples of foreign culture, they are necessarily neglectful of the dignity of the inhabitants of 'our' country. What is needed, then, is a media dedicated to social coexistence all the more necessary because of the marked social tensions through which Venezuela is said to be passing.

Striking here is the association of low quality, reductively defined in terms of 'vulgar and coarse' content, with foreign imports that damage the supposed 'dignity' of local viewers. The latter are held to be as vulnerable as children to pernicious messages over which they have no control. Hence the perceived need for state regulation (invoked against the 'freedom of expression' voiced by government opponents such as private broadcasters) and the twin avowed aims of the Law: the protection of children and the defence of national security. Aesthetic choices such as the rejection of dirty realism are thus co-opted in the service of a cultural nationalism that is in fact immune to empirical evidence. For, as we have seen, rather than succumbing to inauthentic imports, vulnerable Venezuela has in fact been a remarkable example of a relatively small, 'second tier' nation which boasts nonetheless a history of innovative local production that is exported around the world.

Ironically enough, as we shall now see, the US version of *Juana* would also find itself caught up, like its Venezuelan original, in a debate over the supposed social effects of television, but appealing in its case not to the criterion of national dignity but to that of cultural diversity.

33 Corona, 'Análisis', 341.

The CW and *Jane the Virgin*, the Adaptation



Fig 9. Jane the Virgin *(CW, 2014–present)*

> Set in Miami, the series details the surprising and unforeseen events that take place in the life of Jane Gloriana Villanueva, a hard-working, religious young Venezuelan-American woman whose family tradition and a vow to save her virginity until her marriage to her detective boyfriend are complicated when a doctor mistakenly artificially inseminates her during a check-up. To make matters worse, the biological donor is a married man, a former playboy and cancer survivor who is not only the new owner of the hotel where Jane works, but was also her former teenage crush. In addition to adjusting to pregnancy and then motherhood, Jane is faced with questions about her professional future and the daunting prospect of choosing between the father of her baby or her boyfriend.[34]

Jane the Virgin is a series broadcast on the CW, a minor US channel or, in *Variety*-speak,'netlet'. The first season of twenty-two hour-long episodes premiered on 13 October 2013, some twelve years after the Venezuelan original (at the time of writing three seasons have been produced). Strikingly, the CW, known for its young and female target audience (RCTV was of course to the contrary a generalist network), chose a literal English translation of the original title rather than the widely circulated euphemistic *Juana's Miracle*.

34 Wikipedia, *Jane the Virgin* (2016) <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jane_the_Virgin> [accessed 6 December 2016].

As the unusually accurate Wikipedia synopsis above suggests, *Jane* preserved two traditional *telenovela* tropes found in *Juana*: the cross-class romance and the love triangle. However, *Jane* offers further amorous complications. Jane is given an Anglo boyfriend, Michael, the rival to the Latino inseminator, Rafael, who is here also her employer; and the new lover of Jane's mother is a *telenovela* star (played by real-life Mexican heartthrob Jaime Camil) who also turns out to be Jane's absent father (the boyfriend of Juana's mother is rather an unrelated but equally neglectful married rich guy). Moreover the doctor who inseminates Jane is the lesbian sister of the donor and the ex-lover of the wife of the magnate who is the father of doctor and donor (RCTV's tangled family ties are, as we saw, similarly complex).

But the two biggest differences between the two shows follow on from *Jane*'s relocation to Miami. This city is Sinclair and Straubhaar's 'media capital' or 'strategic cultural-linguistic fulcrum' for *telenovela* production,[35] poised as it is between the US and Latin America. Firstly, *Jane* incorporates prominent parodic or ironic *telenovela* references into its text (such as the running commentary of an off-screen voiceover or the presence of Jaime Camil and his character, whose show shoots in Miami). This meta-perspective relies on a certain geographical and cultural distance for both producers and consumers from a Latin American media practice that takes itself with proper seriousness in its own region. Secondly, while Juana is simply a young local woman whose nationality need not be specified, Jane is defined by her ethnicity as a Latina and, more precisely (in a nod to the format's origins) as a Venezuelan-American. We gradually learn that Jane's grandmother or *abuela* (who is always referred to by that term and speaks only Spanish in the show) had, like many TV executives, fled Caracas with her wealthy husband and is still living undocumented in Miami.

While Jane's surname 'Villanueva' ('New Town') seems emblematic in this context of migration (unlike Juana's commonplace 'Pérez'), her sexually active mother boasts one of those 'exotic' names that so troubled government moralists back in Venezuela: Xiomara. Lacking the original's genial uncle, the remake's household is now wholly female. In spite of a much greater emphasis on the theme and iconography of Catholicism, remarkably absent in the Venezuelan version, student teacher Jane is yet more devoted than the football-playing schoolgirl Juana to the feminist goals of women's autonomy and community.

35 Sinclair and Straubhaar, *Latin American Television*, 108, 110.

Beyond these surface plot points, more difficult to account for are narrative structure and tone. Thus when the US version was premiered in Venezuela on minority cable channel Lifetime on 19 November 2015, daily *El Nacional* (which strongly supports the opposition to the government) carried a detailed article on a format that had boomeranged back home. It noted that the American protagonist is now twenty-three years old, rather than seventeen; and that the remake bore little similarity to the original, except for its basic premise.[36] Festooned in 2014 with US prizes (a rare Peabody, a Golden Globe for its star, and an American Film Institute award for best TV programme), the show also boasts a parade of prestigious, mainly musical special guests who read in the US as 'Latin' but would in Venezuela be recognized as, respectively, Mexican (Paulina Rubio, Kate del Castillo), Spanish (David Bisbal), Colombian (Juanes), and Puerto Rican-American (veteran Rita Moreno). Of course such a parade of celebrities had been impossible in a Caracas, where *Juana*'s network was, in any case, under increasing political pressure and production aimed for a close cultural proximity that was, nonetheless, readily exportable to a wider geo-cultural region.

For *El Nacional*, however, the biggest difference between the two versions is genre: while *Juana* was a 'drama', *Jane* is a 'comedy'. And the rave reviews in the US trade press also called attention to this narrative and tonal dimension. Thus *Variety* wrote that, in spite of 'a few problematic aspects with the premise', the show contains a 'secret ingredient: charm'.[37] Similarly the fact that the tone is 'fun and frothy', referencing 'the exaggerated nature of soaps in general and telenovelas in particular', renders 'political considerations' (such as abortion and reproduction rights) 'less serious'. Welcoming *Jane* as 'the kind of birth worth celebrating' (an example of natalist language frequent in US critical discourse on the show), the review wonders only about the accelerated pace of the series: while the first episode 'keeps steadily churning out [...] twists', it may be perilous to continue to 'move at that kind of speed story-wise' (as we shall see, *Juana* is much slower in its rhythm).

36 Karla Franceschi, '*Juana la virgen* regresa mañana en formato serial', *El Nacional*, 18 November 2015, no pag.

37 Brian Lowry, 'TV Review, *Jane the Virgin*', *Variety*, 8 October 2014 <http://variety.com/2014/tv/reviews/tv-review-jane-the-virgin-1201322959/> [accessed 6 December 2016].

Hollywood Reporter (by now perhaps more influential than *Variety*) also queried the initial premise with a sceptical: 'Really?'.[38] But naming *Jane* the best pilot of the season, the critic stresses the generic blend of 'drama, comedy and magical thinking' in a 'tonal balancing act'. Just as Todotnv called *Juana* totally 'believable' and 'unbelievable', so *Hollywood Reporter* describes Jane as 'improbable', 'absurd', and (once more) 'believable'. But while RCTV was Venezuela's top-rated broadcast network, the CW sought to attract the niche female millennial audience it had once won with series like *Gossip Girl* and *The Vampire Diaries*. The first challenge for unaccustomed viewers 'who want to watch the fall's best new broadcast drama' will be 'to find the CW' on their cable menu.

It is striking that although the trade press narrative of *Juana* focused on executives and their trials with political regulation, the coverage of *Jane* addresses all actors in the production process, albeit focusing initially on Gina Rodriguez, the show's breakout star. *Back Stage* magazine, aimed at the acting community, reverently narrates Rodriguez's story.[39] After training at New York University's prestigious Tisch School of the Arts, her role as a hip-hop artist in Sundance-shown indie feature *Filly Brown* (2012) became her Hollywood 'calling card', attracting the attention of Ben Silverman, formerly a producer of *Ugly Betty*. Although Rodriguez (unlike Jane) was born in Chicago to Puerto Rican parents, the profile consistently compares her patience and determination to that of her character. Thus in her own bilingual household, Rodriguez's mother speaks to her in Spanish and she replies in English (in other press sources she cites rather her grandmother). But Rodriguez is also loyal to televisual tradition, citing *Betty*'s America Ferrera as a precedent for being 'normal looking' and not 'naturally thin'. Rodriguez sees *Jane* as a 'platform' to tell girls and women: 'I'm not makeup-ed up [*sic*], I'm not weaved-up, and I am beautiful'.

In other interviews Rodriguez links this pride in non-standard body type with dignified ethnic representation. Thus she told *Hollywood Reporter* that she 'took a stand' playing only 'characters that serve as role models for young Latinos'.[40] Loyal to Latina showbiz

38 Tim Goodman, '*Jane the Virgin*, TV Review', *Hollywood Reporter*, 13 October 2014 <http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/review/jane-virgin-tv-review-740483> [accessed 6 December 2016].

39 Lesley O'Toole, 'Gina the Star: Gina Rodriguez Waited Patiently and Stayed True to Herself until her Dream Role Materialized with *Jane the Virgin*', *Back Stage*, 16 October 2014, 16.

40 Lesley Goldberg, 'Gina Rodriguez, with *Jane the Virgin*, the Actress-Rapper is the Rare CW star with Critical Buzz', *Hollywood Reporter*, 29 August 2014, 28.

heredity once more, she now cites Rita Moreno (later a guest star on *Jane*) as a precedent for 'refusing to play certain [negative] roles', naming Lifetime's *Devious Maids* as one drama she turned down because of its stereotypical characters.

Beyond ethnicity, her goal is 'to change beauty norms'. One year later, when Rodriguez had won her Golden Globe and *Jane* had been sold to 170 markets worldwide, Rodriguez continues her unapologetically pedagogic perspective in *Adweek*.[41] Her character enables her 'to transcend the cultural boundaries that Latinos tend to have in the industry'. Moreover she claims to be writing 'an empowering book for youth' and 'creating a foundation [...] to help with education and contribute to ending child hunger'. Returning to the show's ambivalent tone, we might agree with its star that in spite of its 'telenovela world of heightened reality', Rodriguez's language has a very American feel of bringing things back to 'grounded reality'. It is a high seriousness belied by the 'frothy fun' to be enjoyed in the show that is celebrated elsewhere in press coverage.

Although Rodriguez is identified as *Jane*'s great attraction and even auteur (with her personal life legitimizing that of her character), the US trade press addressed a range of other agents in the show, focusing once more on the criterion of 'diversity'. Thus *Backstage* once more covered the neglected profession of casting directors. In 'Making diversity a priority', the journalist cites the professionals who cast *Jane* on 'the need to diversify the talent they showcase', a process involving not just Latinos but 'gay [...] and trans-gender characters and African-Americans'.[42] There is some tension, however, in that Latin Americans such as Jaime Camil still tend to be cast over US Latino talent. But the presence in *Jane* of the Puerto Rican Ivonne Coll, as the devout grandmother, raises a further dicey element: the question of the Spanish language. Casting directors now advise US actors to 'hone their craft in Spanish in L.A.'. There is also a divide here: cable channels and Netflix are said to be 'grabbing up minorities' still ignored by the major networks.

Conversely *Jane*'s showrunner, Jennie Snyder Urman, defends her position as the non-Latina 'woman behind Jane'. She claims that her approach to the show is 'not to represent everyone' but rather to stage 'one family's story'. Such specificity enables Jane to avoid

41 Janet Stilson, 'Woman on the Verge: Fresh off Her Golden Globe Win, Gina Rodriguez, Star of the CW's *Jane the Virgin*, Talks about a Comedy that's Hit a Cultural Nerve Not Only Here but also in 170 Markets Worldwide', *Adweek*, 23 March 2015, 20.

42 Sean J. Miller, 'Making Diversity a Priority', *Back Stage*, 9 October 2016, 7.

'stereotypes' (also Rodriguez's main concern). Moreover the writing includes, like the cast, not just Latinas but also Latin Americans: Carolina Rivera came direct to the US from writing *telenovelas* in Mexico. Embracing genre proximity, the US weekly series is, it creator says, 'a love letter to telenovelas'. This diversity and fluidity extend to the audience. Snyder Urman has been surprised to have many men tell her they love the show although they are 'not in the demo [target audience] at all'. Beyond mere identity politics, then, the 'power of [minority] representation' brings both prestige to a network conspicuously lacking it and a newly defined, broad consumer community: *Jane*'s showrunner concludes: 'I guess we really have something for everyone'.[43] A show addressed to women and minorities thus does not appear to operate at a cultural discount.

Bloomberg Businessweek confirms via Nielsen the breadth of the audience for a show that is, nonetheless, 'more firmly grounded [than *Ugly Betty*] in Latin culture'.[44] The CW's 'biggest show in years' attracts 1.9 million people, 68% of whom are female. The magazine attributes this new-found success to the same factor sought by RCTV over the decades: 'better programming'. But meanwhile although 17% of the US population is 'Hispanic' only 3% of supporting film or TV roles go to Latino men and 10% to Latinas.

There is a final wrinkle in this new kind of television production. *Jane*'s executive producer, Gary Pearl, tells *Hollywood Reporter* how 'to make the financial leap from film to TV'.[45] Given that movie studios are devoted to making superhero franchises, 'talented people', unable to green-light the kind of films they prefer, are 'embracing quality on television'. *Jane* is an example of a story that Pearl could have told as a movie but has been able to 'go deeper' with as a TV show. Changing conditions in both media, then, conspire to make minority storytelling, once confined to independent cinema, more feasible on network television.

This ideal of 'quality' in private TV is shared by both the US and Venezuela, although the shows each country produces are very different. It constitutes, commercially and artistically, a challenge and a counterpart to the public service doctrine of 'dignity' espoused by the Chávez regime, which sought to police positive images in its

43 Miller, 'Making Diversity a Priority', 7.

44 Claire Suddath, 'In her Prime: *Jane the Virgin* Minority Themes Have Made It a Serious Sitcom Hit', *Bloomberg Businessweek*, 19 January 2015, 76.

45 Paul Bond, 'Making the Financial Leap from Film to TV: *Jane the Virgin* Executive Producer Gary Pearl on How Indie Movie Producers Can Find Funding for TV Projects', *Hollywood Reporter*, 15 April 2016, 150.

national mediascape. We have suggested that the television wars of the US, much less bloody than those in Venezuela, engage still with deeply felt issues of social justice and power. We can now go on to see how these debates over broadcasting and society are played out in the text of the twin versions of *Juana/Jane*.

Juana la Virgen: Opening Episode

The first episode of the Venezuelan original, lasting forty-five minutes, begins in an uncharacteristic style typical of the most traditional *telenovela* (RCTV, we remember, was known for innovations in both style and subject matter). The lengthy credit sequence used throughout the 153 episodes is made up of glamorous head shots of the actors with their characters' names appearing alongside them, just in case viewers have forgotten them. They might be excused for the oversight, given the size of the cast: there are six stars before the title logo and no fewer than eighteen in the supporting cast pictured afterwards. The romantic theme song by Puerto Rican pop group Jyve V [*sic*] plays throughout (it is used elsewhere also in a faster tempo version). This title song makes an equally traditional promise of everlasting, exclusive love, proclaiming 'Solo a tu lado quiero vivir' [I only want to live by your side]. Yet the series's logo is a provocation to the puritanical Venezuelan authorities on the lookout for vulgarity: in the 'Virgen' of the title the 'g' is made up of a looming ovum and a spritely sperm.

The first sequence is also uncharacteristic of RCTV and the show itself, perhaps revealing an attempt in the opening minutes to attract the attentions of the young demographic no longer known for its love of *telenovela*. Teenage brunette Juana Pérez (note the humble surname, once more), conventionally pretty but with no apparent make-up or hair styling, materializes in a modest denim jacket in the everyday bedroom she shares with her mother. The scene then segues into a fantasy pop video, with Juana strumming a guitar on stage, signing autographs for fans, or backlit by a flaming circle of torches.

Suddenly we cut to a day in the life of the real, unstarry teen, after she is woken by her severe grandmother. The bedroom is ample but crowded, decorated with the clashing colours and patterns that evoke a homely, working-class milieu. Its high-key lighting and high (unseen) ceilings signal what is transparently one of the studio sets in which *telenovela* is conventionally housed. Establishing Juana's premature maturity, we see her rousing the mother who, like a rebellious adolescent, would clearly prefer to remain in bed.

We then cut for contrast. In his luxuriously minimalist bedroom (all beige and grey), wealthy Mauricio, bare-chested in the very first shot, is waking with his blonde Barbie of a wife, Carlota. Next, exercising in his home gym, he instructs his staff on the exquisite breakfast the couple will pick at on their patio. But all is not well in paradise. Mauricio is deep in a sullen conflict with his unsympathetic wife: today is the day of the insemination of their surrogate, a turn of events of which she does not approve. Wardrobe here hints at a later love connection. Mauricio may be a media executive (like those of RCTV who later fled to Miami) but he wears a proletarian black leather jacket, as Juana will in a slightly later sequence. Conversely, Carlota is as flawlessly made-up and weaved-up as the most conventional female star in old-style *telenovela*.

We cut back to Juana's home, exploiting discontinuous editing once more. While Mauricio and his wife are coldly polite in their dispute over breakfast, Juana's grandmother and mother are loudly violent in their argument in the kitchen where the former has prepared the modest family meal (the grandmother earns a few bolivars by baking empanadas out of the home). Trussed up in her apron, she sets out the theme of gender politics explored by the series with uncompromising explicitness, pronouncing that men and women are 'different'. And she attacks the 'immorality' of Juana's mother who, having had a child out of wedlock, is now dating a married man. The unsympathetic grandmother will prove to have a point: Juana's mother is being led on by a sleazy wealthy lover who clearly has no intention of leaving his wife.

Immediately, however, the series sets up the opposing view to that of the traditionalist older woman (who, it should be noted, never cites religious belief as a reason to condemn her 'immoral' daughter). A smiling Juana tells the grandmother that things have changed and she belongs in 'another century'. Moreover Juana's hunky uncle Manuel (often referred to with the affectionate diminutive 'Manolito'), a repair man, happily washes the breakfast dishes himself, even though, as the grandmother says, there are so many women in the house.

The show thus suggests from the start not only a newly toughened femininity (self-assured Juana makes clear that, unlike her man-mad mother, she does not need a boyfriend), but also a newly softened masculinity. Her uncle treats all members of his conflictive female family with respect and affection and yet is still sexually potent. The first episodes show him having vigorous sex not only, somewhat implausibly, with a jogger in the park but also with a customer

whose iron he has fixed at her home (there is some erotic badinage on 'tools' here). Signalling his special significance, Manuel is gifted with a rare, anti-realist technique: the soliloquy. He muses aloud on his grandmother's secret 'fragility': even though she acts so tough, she is the most vulnerable of them all.

Now it is time for Juana and her mother to leave for the high school where the former is studying and the latter teaches gym. In an exterior, we glimpse their modest but visually attractive family terraced house in a placid working-class neighbourhood (the bars on the ground floor windows no doubt look more ominous to foreign viewers than to locals). Juana's chosen mode of transport is an unreliable motorbike with a sidecar for her feckless mom. As in the case of costume, production design here anticipates plot development: the beat-up motorbike's cherry red will rhyme with the colour of Mauricio's sleek sports car. Caught in a traffic jam on their way to work, the two future lovers catch brief sight of each other. When Mauricio somewhat sleazily compliments her ... motorbike ('Es muy guapa ... la moto' [It is/you are very pretty]), Juana reacts sceptically. But still we have seen the lovers, all unknowing of their future fate, meet cute in the first episode, a prerequisite for traditional romance.

Next we are shown the characters' contrasting workplaces, as before we had seen their opposing homes. Mauricio's office boasts trendy exposed brick and views of city skyscrapers and mountains, recognizable as Caracas to local viewers, even though the city is never named. Mauricio tells a close colleague that he would never adopt a child and, citing a traditional model of paternity even here in the context of assisted fertilization, prefers to be a 'father by blood' so as to achieve 'immortality' through procreation.

In a parallel set up, Mauricio's wife Carlota is provided (like her husband) with a best friend to whom she directs exposition on their common backstory. In her case this takes place at the fashion boutique she seems to manage (we never see her actually work). Carlota is pragmatic about sex: she says smugly that Mauricio knows how to keep a woman happy in bed. But why, she asks, can't they just adopt? It's just like choosing a pet: you could pick out the little white one with blue eyes. The blonde Carlota's barely masked racism is evident here. Conversely, Juana's home features a little black boy as a frequent visitor who drops by to help deliver the empanadas. He is treated warmly even by the normally chilly grandmother. There is no doubt as to which household is presented as more welcoming to viewers.

We next see Juana at high school, dressed in jeans and a sporty polo shirt. She brushes off a schoolboy suitor, scoffing when he attacks her and claims that, although she is such a 'modern' girl, she is keeping herself for marriage. Later Juana will deny she is waiting for someone special to partner off with: she is special enough on her own. Her attachment to virginity is thus based on self-esteem and has nothing to do with religious prohibition. In another exterior scene (a relatively rare resource in traditional studio-bound *telenovela*) Juana plays football on her school's field. She is still dressed for sport when the principal informs her that she has won a scholarship to study photography at an (unnamed) university in Los Angeles. While her mother is distraught at the thought of Juana's absence (she says they have never been separated since Juana was born), her uncle soliloquizes rather on Juana's opportunities, chances that no one in her poor family has ever had before.

This explicit exploration of past female subordination and present hopes for autonomy (the grandmother's apron versus Juana's soccer kit) is matched by what might be called meta-moments that comment obliquely on the situation of RCTV, a corporation aiming for popularity and quality but vulnerable to external pressure. Mauricio, the editor of a magazine, plans to become independent by owning his own means of distribution (in his case, a printing press), just as RCTV would fall back on its sister company Coral to distribute its formats. In his office, there is a conflict between the creatives loyal to Mauricio and the money men, who take their orders from his magnate father-in-law, as sinister as his daughter Carlota is chilly. When we see the father-in-law on a golf course, he confirms that he is willing to sabotage the circulation of Mauricio's magazine for the wider interests of his conglomerate. Ironically enough, as in the case of RCTV at the time, these interests include construction, as well as media. Although here the enemy is presented as being big business rather than dictatorial government, editorial independence is thus presented in the very first episode as a necessary condition for media companies, just as creative freedom is vital for ambitious young women.

Taking its time, the famously botched insemination occurs only at the end of the episode (Juana will not even learn that she is pregnant until the end of episode seven). And this indispensable scene is marked by a rare camera angle: jarring overhead shots look down on the consultation room in the clinic where a substitute doctor carries out the procedure on the Juana who was expecting only a pap smear. Surprisingly explicit digital imagery, reminiscent of sex-education lessons, then tracks the sperm making their way to the waiting

ovum. In an ironic sound bridge, Mauricio, musing at the office on his expected and long-desired paternity, tells himself that from now on everything will make sense. He says this as we watch the pensive Juana, still lying on the hospital bed. As we shall see, this is precisely the opposite moral to that voiced at the same point in the story in the remade *Jane*.

Jane the Virgin: Opening Episode

The US remake's first episode (which runs for forty minutes) is called a 'chapter', a calque signalling the series's allegiance to the Spanish language 'capítulo'. It starts with a cold open (that is, an unannounced sequence before the credits) that is explicitly presented as a 'prologue'. A Latin-accented male voiceover intones: 'Our story begins'. We see an extreme close up of the immaculate white petals of a flower and a wide-eyed Jane at ten years old. On screen titles sum up the 'passions' that establish the as-yet unknown characters. Jane's are family, God, and (very American) grilled cheese sandwiches (contrast the role of the emblematic empanadas in Juana's family). Her grandmother's passions are rather God and Jane.

The first dialogue we hear is in subtitled Spanish, with the *abuela* lecturing the child severely and telling her to scrunch the blossom up in her hand. The moral is clear: if you destroy a 'perfect, pure flower' you can never get it back again, just like when you lose your virginity. But, as in *Juana* once more, this conservative view (here explicitly Catholic) is immediately challenged. Jane's mother, the sexy Xiomara (whose 'passions' are Jane and Mexican singing star Paulina Rubio, a future guest on the show), is shown sceptically painting her nails as she lounges on a bed while the grandmother lectures the girl.

With no uncle in sight, this is now an all-female household, a new place as signalled by the characters' single surname 'Villanueva' (Spanish-speakers would normally have two). The crumpled flower falls to the floor. In a graphic match we cut to precisely thirteen and a half years later, when the bloom is now framed on the wall behind Jane's bed. She is making out, fully clothed, with her fair Anglo boyfriend Michael, but stops him short. Heart-faced and freckled, with a softly rounded body and Latina features, Jane (or more properly ambitious and expert actor Gina Rodriguez) is in every sense a new face on American network TV.

The plain title card now appears on screen (there are no troublesome sperm here). But, unlike in the Venezuelan original, there is no credit sequence at all. This will prove typical of the series's

compressed, rapid pace. It would no doubt leave traditional *telenovela* audience, if it were tempted away from Univision to the CW, gasping for breath. We could not be further from the original's leisurely plot development, which stretches over days, weeks, and months.

The women's home is here a colonial-style whitewashed house with colourful, comfortable furnishings. The low ceiling and low-key lighting reveal a relatively realist location. Now a song starts playing, called 'Una flor voy a regalarte' [I will give you the gift of a flower]. It is striking that a lyric that is relevant to the plot is left untranslated, inaccessible to an Anglo audience (conversely, all dialogue in Spanish is subtitled). Apparently non-diegetic, the song is actually coming from the television, suggesting a certain fluidity between everyday life and mediascape (Juana's family in Caracas do not even seem to have a TV set). Sitting on a single couch, the three women watch a *telenovela*: Rogelio (Jaime Camil), resplendent in violet blazer, is kissing his beloved on the prow of boat at sunset.

In another pointed graphic match, the camera speeds over water once more toward Miami high-rises, so near yet so far from Jane's workaday, low-rise neighbourhood. It is an exterior, at night: the swimming pool outside the hotel owned by darkly handsome Rafael (he will first appear shirtless, like *Juana*'s Mauricio, sixteen minutes into the episode). There is a typically crafted example of production design here when the billowing aqua drapes are made to match the water in the swimming pool. Rafael's wife Petra (blonde like the equally unsympathetic spouse in *Juana*) is described by onscreen titles as a 'man eater'. As she sinks to her knees before her husband, the phrase and movement deftly imply oral sex. In spite of the Venezuelan government's attack on the supposed 'crudity' of its television fiction, this is a level of explicitness impossible in *Juana*. The graphic language continues in the next sequence, when a co-worker sceptically warns Jane in the locker room that she has not 'boned' with her boyfriend. Typically intensifying the connections between characters, Jane (unlike Juana) is already the employee of her future inseminator and has shared a romantic kiss with him some time before.

The next sequence embodies the new tone of the remake, much discussed by both US and Venezuelan sources. Jane is dressed, ridiculously, as a mermaid-waitress to serve drinks at the hotel. In a moment of physical comedy, she pitches into the pool to avoid seeing Rafael and an assured sight gag has her mermaid tail flapping as she recedes into the distance. Yet this sequence will also serve as the requisite romantic encounter. Back in the hotel bar we are offered a (re)meet cute for the future lovers. Playboy Rafael has not

forgotten his earlier magical moment with a younger Jane, saying to the dripping waitress: 'You look familiar'. The romantic acoustic guitar theme that plays here is by Oscar-winner Gustavo Santaolalla, evidence of the talent recruited from independent film to new quality television in the US, which is cited by one of *Jane*'s producers in *Hollywood Reporter*.

In spite of evident class conflict and an incipient love triangle (*telenovela* tropes par excellence), the sophisticated Miami of the remake is far from the more homespun Caracas of the original. And in an aside impossible to imagine in *Juana*, Rafael tells his sister (also present in the bar): 'Go home to your wife'. Homosexuality is thus wholly taken for granted within the fictional world, but qualified by a pointed political reference in the titles that illustrate the scene: Rafael's sister is said to be 'married in some states' (the pilot was shot before the Supreme Court legislated marriage equality across the US). Rafael's sister also happens to be the doctor who, distraught at her wife's infidelity, administers the mistaken insemination just ten minutes in (it took an hour in *Juana* for a medic unrelated to any other character to make the same mistake).

Jane's doctor realizes her error at once, as in the next room at the clinic is her own sister-in-law, waiting in vain for the now lost sole sample. *Jane*'s plot is thus both highly accelerated and newly intensified by closer connections between main characters, who are themselves reduced in number compared to the original. At this point (when *Juana*'s Mauricio had said: 'From today everything makes sense'), *Jane*'s voice-over pronounces rather that her life has become the 'stuff of telenovela'. In fact it has not. As we have seen, the remake's opening has little in common with the temporal extension and narrative looseness of the original *Juana* and seems to define *telenovela* via a campy excess that is absent in the rather solemn Venezuelan original.

Two weeks later we see mother and daughter in an everyday working class location: the bus which is Jane's main means of transportation (compare Juana's motorbike). Yet when Jane is told of her inexplicable pregnancy, in a moment of magical realism Rogelio appears in the clinic complete with the violet blazer and dazzling, cheesy smile we first saw on TV. He reassures her, in Spanish, that all will be well. Wardrobe is also key here: unlike the dapper Rogelio, Jane is wearing a dull denim jacket that she seems to have inherited from the equally modest Juana. As the US trade press suggested, then, *Jane* is at once believable and unbelievable, citing alternately the heightened reality of *telenovela* and the everyday reality of the US

series. Negotiating this constant transition is Gina Rodriguez (much more versatile than *Juana*'s less experienced Juana Alvarado), who uses her intelligence, wide-eyed charm, and 'natural' look to carry the audience with her beyond the series's queasy premise.

Typical of this 'grounded' realism is the remake's relatively frank discussion of pregnancy termination and reproductive rights. Jane's mother offers her the pills she could use, but puts no pressure on her, saying quite explicitly: 'You have a choice'. And although Jane suspects that her own mother wanted to terminate her, we learn that it was actually the devout grandmother who asked the mother to abort. Loving her granddaughter as she does now, the *abuela* is deeply ashamed of her past request. Addressing the niche young female demographic who are able to find the WB on their cable menu (an ability *Hollywood Reporter* for one did not take for granted), the series can thus afford to complicate its characters, both psychologically and ethically. It does so in unexpected ways that the original *telenovela*, seeking the broadest of network audiences, will not or cannot risk. Next, surprisingly once more, it will be tender and patient Michael, Jane's Anglo fiancé, who asks her to abort the child that does not form part of the life they had planned together.

In this context of ambivalence, direct conflict between characters is downplayed compared to the original version. Jane's mother and grandmother get along fine most of the time, in spite of the latter's defiantly modern rejection of the former's traditional Catholic morality (indeed, all three women are shown to attend mass). Jane may argue with her mother, who aspires to be a singing star, but is rueful about their close relationship, saying mournfully: 'I derailed her life'. It is characteristic of the series that a montage late in the episode, reviewing the many plot points of the last hour, is anchored by a shot of Jane on the everyday bus and wearing an unflattering hoody.

Yet still the series offers much of the heightened visual and narrative pleasure typical of the *telenovela* that it references so frequently and ironically. *Jane*'s last, huge plot point is the revelation that Rogelio, the TV star watched devotedly by the three women, was the teen boyfriend of Jane's mother and is, moreover, Jane's father.

This unexpected twist (of the kind *Variety* feared *Jane* could not keep up over the full arc of a season) is nonetheless combined with the intense visual pleasure of *telenovela*. When in the last sequence Jane proposes marriage on her knees to Michael (in a clear example of gender reversal), a pure white flower falls ominously from hair. It refers us back to the opening sequence when the crumpled blossom fell from

the child Jane's hand.

In spite of the complexities of its narrative, then, it is often the art design that carries *Jane*'s plot, creating graphic matches and colour effects we have also seen, albeit less carefully crafted, in *Juana*. The final title of *Jane*'s first episode (sorry, 'chapter') reads, archly and unnecessarily, 'To be continued'. In fact the pilot was picked up at once. But the weekly series's ironic play with seriality contrasts not only with the earnestness of much of its cast's performance style but with the frankly heightened visual pleasure it offers to its audience, an effect more marked than the much lower budget daily serial could achieve.

Dignity and Diversity

Jane's credits feature the logos of both the Venezuelan and US networks, RCTV and Warner, signalling the link between the two territories, one a second-tier nation even within Latin America, the other the US behemoth so often critiqued for cultural imperialism. Yet this new geo-cultural region has its particularities. Scholar Nora Mazziotti writes that RCTV's early success in exporting its content to neighbouring countries was due to the fact that, ironically enough, it did not insist like other countries on so-called 'neutralization' of speech: the Venezuelan idiom proved a positive attraction to foreigners.[46] We see (or rather hear) this in *Juana*: pronouns are non-standard compared to elsewhere: the tiny black boy is addressed formally as 'Vd.' by adults (a usage inconceivable in most of the Spanish-speaking world); there is frequent use of the diminutive 'ico' (standard: '-ito'); and the distinctive word 'malandro' [bad guy] is prominent in the criminal subplots.

RCTV's localist geo-politics is also visible in its fictional world. Juana may win a scholarship to study in Los Angeles. But her family worry when she so much as rides her motorbike out of their working-class Caracas *barrio* to the upmarket district in same city where Mauricio's palatial chalet is to be found. Likewise, the Venezuelan TV industry (until Chávez at least) may have followed the broad Latin American model in its attachment to familialism and duopoly. But, locally marked once more, the relative realism of its series remains startling when compared to those of Mexico, as is seen within our chosen show. Juana's grandmother rises at dawn to make empanadas. She tells the girl not to 'dream': reality will always disappoint working 'people like us'.

46 Nora Mazziotti, *Telenovela: industria y prácticas sociales* (Bogotá: Norma, 2006), 135.

Even Juana, generally upbeat, laments that she has seen how men have made her mother suffer all her life. Proving the grandmother right, the downbeat development of the *telenovela* will show Juana disappointed in her plans to study in the US and learn a new language, frustrated by the unexpected baby. *Juana la virgen* thus remains ambivalent about the promises and disappointments of the modern modes that it clearly favours over traditional customs. It is telling that, unlike in *Jane*'s Miami, religion is wholly absent from the *Juana*'s Caracas. And while Juana's mother claims to the grandmother that life has changed and men and women are now exactly the same, this dream of gender equality is belied by her own impotent distress at the hands of her more powerful married lover.

For RCTV, Caracas became of necessity a bridge to a wider cultural linguistic space. Government intervention and regulation thus led to the company's deterritorialization and its focus on international distribution from Miami. As the company's executives had presciently suggested, original *novelas* made for the Venezuelan market would play well unadapted in other Spanish-speaking territories. The bridge between Latin America and the US proved more difficult, even if the gap between the two is indeed (as RCTV Internacional's managing director suggested in interview) getting smaller all the time. As we have seen, there are huge textual differences between *Juana* and *Jane*. But the mere existence of the US remake, which preserves (or indeed creates) so much Latino material for a mainly Anglo audience, proves that cultural proximity and discount are not fixed but dynamic. It is thus no accident that *Jane*, which is shot in Los Angeles, should be set in Miami: the bridge city par excellence, especially for Spanish-language media industries.

Yet perhaps we should shift our attention from place to time. As we have seen, the seven episodes that the original takes for the heroine to learn of her pregnancy are reduced to just twenty minutes in the accelerated US version. And unlike Jane once more, Juana will wait for weeks (with her faithful, attentive audience) before Mauricio will learn that he is her child's father. It will take yet longer for him to acknowledge that he loves her for herself and not just for the longed-for child she is bearing. The leisurely original rhythm of the original has its advantages, however. Viewers are slowly acculturated to Juana's everyday life: to its small pleasures and larger problems, its repeated habits (family meals and arguments) and exceptional events (the scholarship, the pregnancy).

Conversely *Jane*'s rapid rhythm offers some shocks in the first season. Soon the protagonist will ditch faithful Michael to take up with

the seductive Rafael, who has no hesitation in proclaiming his love for her. The second and third seasons bring the momentous challenges, unseen in the original, of raising a baby and negotiating a marriage, far from the show's original premise of virginal insemination.

Yet both versions of the format have much in common. For example, they share an early and unexpected shift into murder mystery. In *Jane* the lover of Rafael's wife, who is mixed up with the East European mafia, meets a violent death. Likewise in the first week's episodes of *Juana* Mauricio's friend, who threatens to reveal the conspiracy against the magazine, is shot dead by the evil magnate, with Juana's photos the only evidence of the crime. The fact that Juana wants to become a photographer also allies her, beyond pregnancy, with the Jane who dreams of being a writer. Both shows reflect, then, on young women's ambitions for their careers and how these intersect with their personal plans. The unusual anti-realist technique of the soliloquy in *Juana* also finds its counterpart in the equally unusual mannered voiceover in *Jane*.

At one point Jane says quite explicitly that she has a 'timeline' that has been interrupted by the insemination. The series's understanding of temporality extends beyond mere pace or rhythm. Perhaps the originality of each version lies rather in its distinct sense of time. Milly Buonanno has claimed deferral as the temporal mode of the serial or *telenovela* (which puts off resolution near indefinitely), while repetition is characteristic of the series (which restages similar situations over and over again).[47] Buonanno interprets both chronological paradigms as ways of forestalling death through telling long-form stories.

Juana/Jane's narrative is more positive, even as the screenwriters trust to deferral and repetition, respectively. The uneasy or queasy premise of reproduction, much remarked on by reviewers, perhaps made the format especially apt for a remake, with Jane serving as the unexpected (but this time intended) offspring of Juana.

Moreover, perhaps dignity and diversity, the virtues I identified as corresponding to each of the two distinct national TV markets, are not so different after all. *Juana* is diverse in a Venezuelan context, addressing class conflict, colouring (blonde or brunette), and even, in a humorous key, race (the little black boy). *Jane*'s concern for positive images means that no member of a cast that is more diverse, both ethnically and sexually, is presented solely as a figure of fun and all will be shown with dignity at some point in their tangled narratives. Even Rafael's 'man-eating' wife has suffered as she made her way

47 Milly Buonanno, *The Age of Television: Experiences and Theories* (London: Intellect, 2008), 121–24.

from dangerous penury in Eastern Europe to frothy fun in Florida. However it matters a great deal whether these ideals of dignity and diversity are imposed by government fiat (as in Venezuela) or elicited by market forces (as in the US). And, unlike prescriptive Laws of Content (whether well-meaning or censorious), market forces may give birth, as in this case, to highly original formats which were by no means guaranteed to connect with target audiences at home or abroad.

As we have seen, *Jane* positions *telenovela* from the start as a tacky, guilty pleasure which it takes pleasure in referencing even while it distances itself from its supposed melodramatic excesses. A close analysis of *Juana*, however, reveals that the classic Latin American genre is much more flexible than is generally thought abroad. Indeed, in this case RCTV's original explicitly promoted a modern imperative far from the Cinderella-style traditional *telenovela*, one that its producers were happy to name as 'the woman's movement'. Juana, reborn as Jane, two protagonists who are apparently so different, are in fact twin, feminist heroines in their very different national contexts, uniquely able to bridge the cultural and linguistic gaps between televisual territories. In the next and final chapter we will see how a historical romance makes the leap once more between two languages but this time within the same nation state.

6. Television Without a State: *Temps de silenci* [*Time of Silence*] (TV3, 2001–02) and *Amar en tiempos revueltos* [*Loving in Troubled Times*] (Diagonal/TVE1, 2005–)

Quality, Commerce, Normalization

What does it mean to make television in a nation without a state, such as Catalonia? Since the death of Franco, Catalan TV, vulnerable and marginal, has proved to be a remarkable success story both in production and reception, even exporting drama formats to be remade in Madrid. Seven rare books held in Barcelona's Filmoteca library chart the public debate around Catalan television over some twenty years.

As early as 1980 a group of anonymous practitioners from state RTVE in Barcelona drafted a report on what a 'national' television might look like in Catalonia.[1] This collectively authored book pays particular attention to drama, the subject of my chapter here. Beginning by stating that drama titles have always been a constant in any TV schedule, the report goes on to address the particular context faced by Catalan TV after the end of the Dictatorship.[2] There has, it writes, been an irruption on the small screen of the Spanish State of American-style telefilms and feature films. This has resulted in a rejection by viewers of the traditional studio-based video drama format, which is hitherto the only one made in Catalonia. This 'colonialist invasion' occupies primetime slots and prevents the emergence of autochthonous drama titles, defined as those which are prepared with dignity and offer valid responses integrated into the reality of the medium and society in which we live and which they

1 *Informe per a una Televisión Nacional de Cataluny* (Barcelona: Graphic Express, 1980).

2 *Informe*, 16.

should reflect. Damningly, the authors claim that Catalan TV drama to date is made in wretched technical conditions and caricatures reality. The dramas produced by our precarious studios, they continue, give off a whiff of monotony.[3]

More positively the authors then sketch an alternative, which is closely related to legitimate theatre. New drama titles, they suggest, could result from the direct transcription of a play, the adaptation of a theatrical or literary original, or a script written especially for the TV medium. Adaptations in particular offer the opportunity for a bridge between theatre and television. The resulting projects should be of the people [*gent*] and for the people, embodying an authentically popular concept. Six new practical suggestions are offered to improve production processes for new drama: clear criteria for the choice of titles by experts; the participation of production teams in scheduling; a rigorous analysis of scripts; the allocation of sufficient time for production; technical and artistic methods that lend personality to programmes; the nurturing of creativity by professionals, who (unlike now) can in future remain true to their original concepts; the creation of an 'artistic director' responsible for all aspects of a drama (what is now called the 'showrunner'); and, finally, new ways of working with actors that enable them to achieve greater psychological depth in their characterization and situations.

Finally, the team recommends a new genre: the fiction documentary, which blurs the boundary between fiction and reality around a subject matter or political denunciation and allows the in-depth study of a particular problem.[4] More generally these practitioners describe the aspirations of the ideal drama to appear in the new conditions of Catalan autonomy:

> Una producció normalitzada hauria de crear productes actuals i diferents, que reflectissin la nostra realitat i que, alhora, illusionessin professionals i espectadors. Aquests dos elements, l'emissor i el receptor, són avui negligits per interessos centralitzants que, en canvi, i massa sovint, provoquen l'aparició en pantalla d'una caricatura vulgar i mediocre de Catalunya, feta, i això és greu i tristament paradoxal, per professionals catalans que estimen Catalunya.[5]
>
> [A normalized production process would create contemporary and novel products which reflect our reality and which would now excite both professionals and viewers. These two elements, the sender and

3 *Informe*, 17.

4 *Informe*, 18.

5 *Informe*, 18.

> the receiver, are neglected today by centralizing stakeholders that, conversely and too frequently, favour the appearance on screen of a vulgar and mediocre caricature of Catalonia which is made (and this is the serious and sad paradox) by Catalan professionals who love Catalonia.]

It is striking that 'normalization', generally applied to the habitual use of the Catalan language in everyday life, is here attributed to new production processes for TV drama.

This 'love' of Catalonia and of television attested at the end of the Dictatorship is confirmed by another collective volume, this time by teachers and students of Barcelona's Universitat Autònoma. Published just one year later in 1981, the authors included J. M. Baget Herms, later to prove one of the few specialists in the field. Where the previous book focused on a future national television, here, after the Statute of Autonomy and the Law of Radio-Television have been recently passed, the stress is on autonomy.[6]

Charting a roadmap for their work, Manuel Parés sets out the guiding principles of an academic group whose aim is both to make theoretical reflections on the medium and to offer policy guidelines to practitioners. Thus he begins by stating that television is one of the most relevant factors that condition society and that almost all Catalans are subject to its influence,[7] especially as the previous (Francoist) regime used the medium to impose uniformity on the distinct nationalities of the Spanish state. Television was thus one of the most important instruments of Spanish centralism. And although it is bitterly attacked on all sides, it remains an indispensible element in the lives of the Catalan population, having created deeply engrained habits in viewers.

Yet the medium is neglected. Intellectuals are scornful or indifferent and political parties have yet to pay it proper attention. However if television is 'the most formidable means of social and cultural integration', the authors cannot conceive of an autonomous Catalonia without its own TV station. Indeed they claim that one cannot talk of Catalonia as a nationality except in terms of its television.[8] Television, they write in lapidary style, is power. And, while the recently approved constitutional framework is inescapable, the collective consciousness of our people (*poble*) should be expressed through the medium.

6 M. Parés i Maicas, 'Introducció', in *La Televisió a la Catalunya autónoma*, ed. M. Parés i Maicas, J. M. Baget Herms *et al*. (Barcelona: Edicions 62, 1981), 7–20 (7).

7 Parés i Maicas, 'Introducció', 7.

8 Parés i Maicas, 'Introducció', 8.

Nonetheless, they claim, bibliography on the subject barely exists in Catalonia and indeed in Spain.[9] The authors propose in the absence of critical reflection of the medium that TV is not just a question of mass media but, in the Catalan case and at the present, urgent time, a matter that is wider and more complex. Their ideal is described as follows: 'Volem una televisió catalana que estigui al servei de la cultura nacional catalana com a element bàsic de comunicació per a tots els que viuen, treballen i, conscientment o no, voluntàriament o no, disitgen sentir-se catalans' [We want a Catalan television which works in the service of a national Catalan culture as a fundamental form of media for all those who live, work, and (consciously or not, willingly or not) wish to feel they are Catalans].[10] While the emphasis on the will or desire to be Catalan echoes political versions of *catalanitat* which address the massive presence of non-Catalan speaking 'immigrants' from the rest of Spain, the stress here is culturalist. Indeed the authors add a fourth term to the familiar triad of public broadcasting goals. Where the BBC aimed, famously, to inform, educate, and entertain (in that order), Catalan TV must also 'culturalize'. While the report offers no fewer than nine contexts in which to study the medium (including historical, linguistic, and educational), the most important seems to be the cultural: TV, they write, is not just a mass medium but a means of developing popular culture which avoids elitism, promotes Catalan culture (after so many years of prohibitions and restrictions), and yet is open, without frontiers, cosmopolitan.[11]

Ten years later this tension between the national and the international is confirmed in a book on television, cultural identity, and the challenge of public TV in Europe.[12] Now that TV3, the main Catalan-language station, which began broadcasting in 1983, is well established within the umbrella service of Televisió de Catalunya, the author compares its practice with state channels in neighbouring nations. With proliferating channels in the continent, she writes, there is a great deal of supply, but little diversity:[13] home-grown production has not grown as fast as new channels have multiplied.[14] Tubella advocates, as in the UK once more, a quota for independent

9 Parés i Maicas, 'Introducció', 10.

10 Parés i Maicas, 'Introducció', 11.

11 Parés i Maicas, 'Introducció', 14.

12 Imma Tubella i Casadevall, *Televisió i identitat cultural: el repte de la televisió pública a Europa* (Barcelona: Generalitat de Catalunya, 1992).

13 Tubella i Casadevall, *Televisió*, 71.

14 Tubella i Casadevall, *Televisió*, 72.

producers in order to fill expanding time slots. Scheduling should have three functions: attracting an immediate audience; creating an image or model for the channel that guarantees viewer loyalty; and finding a rational policy of balanced budgets. Such a programme is by no means incompatible with a model adjusted to the idiosyncrasy of a specific community, namely the Catalan. Indeed Tubella's main aim is the defence of (communal) identity.

While, she writes, there is no point in making a television no one watches, public television has the luxury of experimenting and risk-taking.[15] Drawing a distinction between the consumers courted by private TV and the citizens addressed by public television, Tubella critiques the US, which is protectionist at home, for massively exporting primetime fiction abroad. Yet still tastes remain resolutely local. Sitcoms like *Golden Girls* and *The Cosby Show*, hits in the US, barely play in Holland and Ireland.[16] A primetime soap like *Dallas*, meanwhile, a modest success in its home country, is a ratings phenomenon throughout Europe. Yet even in the case of US imports, public TV can connect with its target: TV3 runs a dubbed version of *Dallas* not to make money, like private European channels, but rather to reach the biggest audience for its cultural goal of linguistic normalization.[17]

Hence where in the previous books Catalan professionals or scholars lamented the lack of an indigenous model of television, here, looking outwards, Tubella claims that (unlike in the US) there is no distinctive model for the medium in Europe as a whole, heterogeneous as it is.[18] Yet, even within this continental diversity, Catalonia is a special case. Now, she argues, language is not enough as a differentiating factor for Catalan public TV. What is needed is a coordinated audio-visual project analogous to that of the BBC once more.[19] Only then can Catalans defend their own culture. The cultivation of difference will protect them from a uniformity that will render them mere quick-witted provincials.[20]

The following year an official volume celebrating the first decade of TV3 boasted opening remarks from institutional figures who

15 Tubella i Casadevall, *Televisió*, 73.

16 Tubella i Casadevall, *Televisió*, 74.

17 Tubella i Casadevall, *Televisió*, 75.

18 Tubella i Casadevall, *Televisió*, 76–77.

19 Tubella i Casadevall, *Televisió*, 80.

20 Tubella i Casadevall, *Televisió*, 81.

clarified what cultural difference meant in politics.[21] Thus Jordi Pujol, long-serving President of the Generalitat, wrote that he wanted a quality television, Catalan in its language and content, open, creative, integrating, carefully thought out and made for everyone.[22] Rhetorically squaring the circle of quality and mass audience that is worried over by specialists in previous volumes, Pujol advocates for a television service of the highest class, comparable to any in Europe, which he contrasts with the mediocre anthropological TV formerly offered to viewers. The new Catalan television is described in a significant repetition as normal, normalized, the most normal thing in the world. Yet it defends a language that is said to be in danger of dying and serves as a fundamental element in the construction of Catalonia.

In the following prefaces to the book the Director General of the Catalan Corporation of Radio and Television, Joan Granados, repeats this instrumental view of TV as a fundamental tool for the lifting up of our country, a nation which he says is not yet normal and must be built by public television.[23] The Director of Televisió de Catalunya stresses rather the emotional reach of the medium. It has made the youngest viewers, who do not remember a Catalonia without television in its own language, loyal to TV3's service and has, more broadly, inspired feelings of possession, affection, closeness, and identification.[24] The objective political goals of nation construction and cultural and linguistic normalization are thus inextricable from a subjective and affective economy of individual and collective investment.

This rise of television is, however, inseparable from the afterlife of another more prestigious medium, namely cinema. A collection of papers from a conference held in 1995 explores the rivalry and complementarity of the two.[25] Strikingly the volume as a whole stresses the convergence between film and TV and the growing cultural reach of the latter before such themes were widely acknowledged elsewhere, thus suggesting that the marginal position of Catalonia (where feature film remains underdeveloped) did in this case lend it a special awareness of the potential of television.

21 *TV3: 10 Anys* (Barcelona: Corporació Catalana de Ràdio i Televisió & Columna, 1993).

22 Jordi Pujol, in *TV3: 10 Anys*, 7.

23 Joan Granados, in *TV3: 10 Anys*, 10.

24 Joan Granados, in *TV3: 10 Anys*, 11.

25 *Cinema i televisió: rivalitat i complementarietat* (Barcelona: Generalitat de Catalunya, 1996).

The keynote was given by distinguished film scholar Romà Gubern. He begins by stating that the once proudly independent medium of cinema now forms part of the broader category of the 'audiovisual'.[26] And that with no less than 221 minutes of average daily viewing, Spaniards rival only Britons as Europe's most assiduous TV watchers. In Catalonia, writes Gubern, television has won the battle over film.[27] Not only has it attracted the mass audience lost to cinema screens, it has influenced the narrative and aesthetic of cinema itself.[28] Moreover TV has developed its own national star system, while cinema has been tempted without success by the international co-productions known dismissively as 'Europuddings'.[29] Gubern's vision of the triumph of television is rejected, ironically enough, by a Spanish film auteur who got her start in TV: Pilar Miró writes in her short contribution to the volume, against Gubern, that cinema cannot be absorbed into the magma of the audio-visual and that film remains singular.[30]

Surprisingly, perhaps, given the persistence of hostility to television in some quarters, in Catalonia one continuing theme is of TV as educator. Thus in early books parents' and teachers' associations, respectively, treat television and the child.[31] A further proposal in 1999 sketches out a project that links home and school via television.[32] What is striking is that (using a term we have seen before) this study takes all three institutions as being mechanisms of socialization; and audio-visual education, available through the TV set, should likewise transmit not just content but attitudes, values, and norms.[33] The pedagogic imperatives of politicians, especially in regard to language acquisition and normalization, are here placed in an explicitly educational context with television posited as an invaluable mediator between the public life of the school and the private life of the family.

Finally, in this literature review, we return to J. M. Baget i Herms (his name now given in full Catalan style) who, twenty years after

26 Romà Gubern, 'Cinema i televisió: rivalitat i complementarietat', in *Cinema i televisió*, 11–24 (11).

27 Gubern, 'Cinema i televisió', 15.

28 Gubern, 'Cinema i televisió', 15.

29 Gubern, 'Cinema i televisió', 20.

30 Pilar Miró, 'El cine como singularidad', in *Cinema i televisió*, 47–48 (47).

31 *La Televisió i els infants* (Barcelona: Escola Thau, 1974); *La Televisió i el nen* (Barcelona: Associació de Mestres Rosa Sensat, 1979).

32 Carme Ciscart *et al*., *Projecte televisió de casa a l'escola: família i televisió* (Barcelona: Generalitat de Catalunya, 1999).

33 Ciscart *et al*., *Projecte televisió*, 10.

contributing to the early volume on television in an autonomous Catalonia, writes an assessment of TV3 on its twentieth anniversary.[34] It would appear that the experiment has proved a success. Baget notes that TV3 tops the ratings in Catalonia and is a reference point for civil society there.[35] He credits it for achieving that linguistic normalization that was, as we saw, only an aspiration in the 1980s, suggesting with admirable precision that it has both reincorporated into daily life words that had fallen out of use and introduced new vocabulary linked to technological advances.

Returning also to an earlier concern, Baget notes that Catalan theatre has experienced a brilliant period, thanks in part to the TV series which have made stage actors into stars, even if they lack the glamour of Hollywood.[36] (A popular book would soon celebrate these new stars born on TV3.[37]) Sport and drama are the two significant genres here, while even Catalan feature film, subject as it is to repeated crises, has benefited from the support of the television medium. Baget cites Catalan independent producers such as Gestmusic (now integrated into the Dutch giant Endemol) as content companies with international reach. Repeating once more the vocabulary that has been referenced over decades, Baget claims that current TV is no longer anthropological, and that normalization has led to a television that is open and without frontiers.[38]

The process has not been easy. TV3's first challenge, writes Baget, was to compete with state TVE, which viewers initially tuned into unconsciously.[39] Then it was to cope with the national private channels, also Castilian-speaking, which began broadcasting at the start of the 1990s and took much of the audience from the heritage state channel. For TV3 it has been difficult to balance quality and commercialism or, again, public service and 'competitivity'.[40] But new formats such as soap operas (*fulletons*) and drama series (*sèries de ficció*) have achieved enviable audience loyalty, comparable to the connection the BBC, the model of public service, has forged in relation to British society. TV3's screen, then, is a mirror in which the

34 Josep M. Baget i Herms, *"La Nostra": Vint anys de TV3* (Barcelona: Proa, 2003).

35 Baget i Herms, *"La Nostra"*, 9.

36 Baget i Herms, *"La Nostra"*, 10.

37 Núria Cuadrado, *Busquem actors i actrius per a una sèrie de televisió: les noves estrelles nascudes a TV3* (Barcelona: L'Esfera dels Llibres, 2006).

38 Baget i Herms, *"La Nostra"*, 11.

39 Baget i Herms, *"La Nostra"*, 11.

40 Baget i Herms, *"La Nostra"*, 12.

daily heartbeat of all the areas and locations of the country (*país*) is reflected. Hence, if TV3 has branded itself as 'Our [Television]' this is no mere deceptive publicity slogan.[41] Indeed Baget proudly names his book *La nostra*.

We have seen, then, that the discourse around Catalan public television has been remarkably consistent since the death of Franco, especially when it comes to nation construction and linguistic normalization, even as the actual conditions of that television have radically changed. We can now go on to address the sole monograph on the drama series, the key genre of the period that, against all the odds, would prove so attractive to faithful local audiences.

Constructing Drama and Dramatizing Construction: Castelló's Imagining of a Televisual Catalonia

Enric Castelló's *Sèries de ficció i construcció nacional* is to date the only book on Catalan series in the 1990s and 2000s. In contrast to the works by practitioners and scholars treated above, it offers at once rigorous theoretical speculation, concrete industrial history based on informant interview, and detailed content analysis. Its importance in this as yet little-studied field can thus hardly be overestimated and is comparable to that of Moran (1998) and Sinclair and Straubhaar (2013), cited in previous chapters. While Castelló's monograph itself is little distributed (and is indeed not found in the Filmoteca library), a useful summary by the author of the doctoral thesis on which it is based remains available on the official website of the Consell de l'Audiovisual de Catalunya.[42]

Castelló's main research hypothesis (from which he later somewhat distanced himself in an email to me[43]) is the following: that cultural representations in the series shown by TVC, the broadcaster that includes TV3 as flagship channel, were a legitimate and democratic ideological option in the decade from 1994 to 2003 (which the author describes as the most Pujolista time). Moreover the new series were in tune with the ideals of national construction during that period, based as the latter were on linguistic uses, cultural and territorial referents, and social models. (We have seen in the previous section

41 Baget i Herms, *"La Nostra"*, 13.

42 Enric Castelló, 'La construcció nacional a les sèries de ficció: visió sobre una dècada de producció de Televisió de Catalunya', *Quaderns del CAC* [n.d.], 23–24 <http://www.cac.cat/pfw_files/cma/recerca/quaderns_cac/q23–24castello.pdf> [accessed 1 September 2016].

43 Castelló, email to author, 6 June 2016.

of this chapter that these same factors are treated somewhat more sketchily by earlier sources.)

The first two chapters of the book establish an international and theoretical context. 'Mitjans de comunicació i construcció nacional' [Mass Media and National Construction] treats well known constructivist models of the nation as 'imagined', 'narrated', 'banal', and 'liberal', as presented by theorists such as Benedict Anderson and Homi Bhabha.[44] 'Sèries de ficció: del gènere a la ideologia' [Drama Series: from Genre to Ideology] stresses in part the influence not of the US but of Britain, as origin both of long-running working-class soap operas (later imitated in Catalonia) and the Cultural Studies approach to television (hitherto unknown in Spain).[45] For Castelló genre is always already cultural and even stereotypical characters respond to social change: thus early negative clichés of women and homosexuals gave way in Catalan drama of the 1990s to 'superwomen' and 'gay saints'.[46]

Castelló cites Albert Moran, the pioneering scholar of copycat TV, on the fact that transnational genres are always intimately adapted to a national TV culture.[47] Production processes in Catalonia thus begin with a genre (Castelló's example is precisely drama), proceed to a format (such as a British-style period show like *Upstairs Downstairs*), before applying that template to a concrete formula (as in TV3's *Temps de silenci*). This last takes into account:

> els objectius culturals de la cadena, la legislació al respecte de la inserció de publicitat, la competència d'altres canals en la franja horària, la disponibilitat de decorats, el pressupost, i moltes d'altres variables de tipus contextual, molt cenyides a la realitat de cada cadena, societat i cultura televisiva.[48]
>
> [the cultural goals of the network, the legislation on the incorporation of advertising, competition from other channels in the time slot, the availability of sets, the budget, and many other variables of a contextual type, closely linked to the real conditions of each network, society, and televisual culture.]

44 Castelló, 'Mitjans de comunicació i construcció nacional', in *Sèries de ficció*, 25–63.

45 Castelló, 'Sèries de ficció: del gènere a la ideologia', in *Sèries de ficció*, 65–92.

46 Castelló, *Sèries de ficció*, 70.

47 Castelló, *Sèries de ficció*, 71.

48 Castelló, *Sèries de ficció*, 72.

In Catalonia, as elsewhere, then, production context marks series.[49] Contradicting previous sources which assume a direct connection between the national public and its public television service, Castelló writes that the character of Catalan series does not have so much to do with the idiosyncrasy of the Catalan people (*poble*) as it does with more material factors such as the professionals and technological resources available for those series. Thus distinct conditions of production mean that Catalans could not have made a title like sophisticated US sitcom *Frasier*.

Beyond content, scheduling is also nationally idiosyncratic. Following the precisely calibrated rhythms of everyday life in different territories, the afternoon news bulletin is shown half an hour earlier in Barcelona than it is in Madrid, while feature films are programmed in Catalonia at 10.30 pm just when Britons and Germans would be getting ready for bed.[50] Scheduling thus always bears within it mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion.[51] Citing the slogan 'La nostra' once more, Castelló suggests that a Catalan generalist channel must claim, nonetheless, to address all its public, even as it is aware that a large proportion of that public prefers Spanish-language content. There can be no TV service that aspires to be national without its own drama production.[52] This genre is an indispensible element for a 'normalization' that is not just linguistic but also 'cultural'.[53]

For Castelló, then, Catalan production does have its own model, a perennial concern of previous commentators. But Castelló charts the contradictions in that model for precise genres, formats, and formulae. Thus the daily daytime serial known here as *telenovela* (cited in earlier sources as *fulleton*) is caught between sober British-style social realism and *costumisme* (the broad-brush appeal to Catalan local colour dismissed elsewhere as 'anthropological').[54] Weekly drama series are seeking the (more elusive) key to popular and critical success.[55] Comedy, meanwhile, is perhaps the trickiest genre (remember the impossibility of a Catalan *Frasier*?), tending as it does on the one hand toward the familiar family setup and on the other attempting an urban and cosmopolitan sensibility.[56]

49 Castelló, *Sèries de ficció*, 77.

50 Castelló, *Sèries de ficció*, 78.

51 Castelló, *Sèries de ficció*, 81.

52 Castelló, *Sèries de ficció*, 82.

53 Castelló, *Sèries de ficció*, 92.

54 Castelló, *Sèries de ficció*, 103–20.

55 Castelló, *Sèries de ficció*, 121–36.

56 Castelló, *Sèries de ficció*, 137–52.

In a final chapter, Castelló treats the four contradictory factors involved in putting Catalonia on stage ('La nació en escena').[57] Thus TV3, the station that aimed to please everyone, locates the overwhelming majority of its series (eleven out of seventeen) in the capital of Barcelona.[58] The channel that sought to 'normalize' the language uses a linguistic department to correct scripts with the perverse and unrealistic result of making all characters talk alike (although latterly dialectical varieties of Catalan are more in evidence).[59] The cultural production of a national 'we' is dependent on the construction of a non-national 'other', such as the post-War invaders who impose Castilian in *Temps de silenci*.[60] Finally, the representation of the nation in series has to be at once particular and universal. One screenwriter summered in beach town Sitges as research for the show of that name; another, Rodolf Sirera, who worked on period drama *Temps de silenci*, was a trained historian.[61]

Castelló offers some final, qualified observations in a field where nothing is black or white.[62] Firstly he believes that, in spite of its drawbacks, linguistic promotion has been satisfactory in applying to drama series a political criterion that is legally mandated.[63] Secondly he notes that 'political correctness' (also legislated from above) is appropriate for the ethical and social point of view of a public-service television. Thirdly, he praises the cultural 'proximity' or closeness that has required content linked to a reality based in Catalonia.[64] Fourthly, the use of real locations (such as Sitges once more) involves an acceptable promotion of those places, which a Catalan audience does not wish to see denigrated. Fifthly, production costs are determined not by ideology or political manipulation but by more mundane material questions such as locations and wardrobe. Finally comes the vexed question of political impartiality. Catalan drama series may seem apolitical because they cannot be seen too openly to support a single party. Conversely they will necessarily have an ideological character: a Generalitat that was controlled by the centralist Partido Popular (rather than Pujol's Catalanist Convergencia i Unió) would

57 Castelló, 'La nació en escena', in *Sèries de ficció*, 153–84.

58 Castelló, *Sèries de ficció*, 158.

59 Castelló, *Sèries de ficció*, 169.

60 Castelló, *Sèries de ficció*, 175.

61 Castelló, *Sèries de ficció*, 179.

62 Castelló, *Sèries de ficció*, 187.

63 Castelló, *Sèries de ficció*, 189.

64 Castelló, *Sèries de ficció*, 190.

not have commissioned Civil War and Francoist drama *Temps de silenci*.[65]

Castelló's last paragraph is equally nuanced:

> Cal fer-se la pregunta si la Catalunya que hi ha a la televisió és un projecte de país interessant per a la població; en certa manera, són dues dimensions que haurien d'estar en sintonia. Si aquesta sintonia funciona, si la nació de ficció s'assembla a la projecció de la nació que existeix en la voluntat collectiva, la televisió tindrà un sentit. En cas contrari, es pot formar una esquerda entre aquesta realitat televisiva i el públic. La ficció catalana construeix un 'somni' national d'acord amb les aspiracions del poble al qual es direix.[66]
>
> [It is necessary to ask the question of whether the Catalonia that is seen on television is a national project that connects with the population; these are two dimensions that really ought to be in harmony. If that harmony works, if the fictional nation looks like the projection of the nation that exists in the collective will, then television will have a meaning. If this is not case, a gap may be created between televisual reality and the audience. Catalan drama series construct a national 'dream' in accordance with the aspirations of the people to which they are aimed.]

We can now go on to see how this national TV 'dream', with its associated 'projections' and 'gaps', accounts for one of the most ambitious of Catalan television's series, historical drama *Temps de silenci*. The fact that, uniquely, this title was later adapted in Madrid for a Castilian-language version by the state broadcaster TVE means that it stands as a test case for imagining a distinctive televisual Catalonia that is open nonetheless to a transnational broadcast context.

65 Castelló, *Sèries de ficció*, 191.

66 Castelló, *Sèries de ficció*, 192.

Temps de silenci: The Format



Fig 10. Temps de silenci *[*Time of Silence*] (TV3, 2001–02)*

Es tracta de la història de tres famílies durant el franquisme. Els Dalmau-Muntaner, representants de la burgesia catalana; els Comes, una família menestral catalana, i els Hernández-Utrera, que són els representants de la classe immigrant treballadora. La sèrie repassa els moments claus de la història contemporània de Catalunya des de la Guerra Civil. Pensada per acabar amb la transició, l'èxit va fer que TVC l'allargués fins al casament de la infanta Cristina amb Iñaki Urdangarín. L'argument es basa en històries d'amor impossible, en trifulgues amb la policia franquista i en l'aparició d'avenços socials i tecnològics i com són rebuts en la vida quotidiana dels personatges.[67]

[This is the story of three families during the Francoist period. The Dalmau-Muntaners are representatives of the Catalan bourgeoisie; the Comes are a Catalan artisan family; and the Hernández-Utrera represent the immigrant working class. The series deals with the key moments of the modern history of Catalonia since the Civil War. Originally intended to end with the Transition to democracy [1975–82], the success of the series caused TV3 to extend it until the wedding of the Infanta Cristina with Iñaki Urdangarín [in 1997]. The plot is based on stories of impossible love affairs, on difficult situations with the Francoist police, and on social and technological advances and how they are experienced in the characters' everyday lives.]

67 Castelló, *Sèries de ficció*, 208.

Temps de silenci, whose genre is initially given by Castelló as 'sèrie dramàtica', consisted of fifty-three episodes of fifty minutes, each broadcast in primetime midweek (Wednesday at 9.25pm) from 17 January 2001 to 10 April 2002. (At the time of writing, fifteen years later, all the episodes remain accessible at full length on TV3's website, even from the US.) According to Castelló's account, Joan Bas of the independent producer Diagonal (named for one of Barcelona's best known avenues) developed the series for TVC in spite of the fact that the broadcaster rejected a number of episodes on the theme of the Civil War which the creative team were anxious to keep.[68] Scheduled between the news bulletin and historical documentary series *Temps era temps*, the series achieved an exceptional average share of 31.55% and an audience of 840,000 viewers.

As a rare 'historical series' (Castelló's other definition of its genre), *Temps de silenci* took as its inspiration, according to varied sources, the British *Upstairs Downstairs*, the German *Heimat*, and even the Australian *Carson and Carson*, attempting to appeal to the collective memory of the audience. It successfully targeted not just the older viewers who had lived through some of the events represented but also a younger demographic, which might be thought to have little interest in the period. The three families depicted in the series are also strategically typified, representing as they do the Barcelona bourgeoisie, the Catalan working class, and the immigrant (Castilian-speaking) proletariat.[69] Castelló cites internal documentation from TVC that claims two distinctive features of the series: that the fictional human history of the main characters is combined with key aspects of our country in the twentieth century as seen in archive footage; and that national history is contextualized within daily life by showing changes in lifestyle, fashion, the appearance of new inventions and new trades etc.

It thus follows that the grand narrative of history (the entrance of Francoist troops into Barcelona, the prohibition of the Catalan language) is combined with the little story of daily life (the introduction of ration cards and the coming of television). Likewise the series seeks to avoid Manicheanism: some Catalans are shown to collaborate with the new regime; some local bourgeois or priests to oppose it. Yet the creators confidently describe the series as 'catalanista' or 'catalanista-progresista'. Clearly there can be no non-ideological television. Castelló himself suggests that the political message of the series is rather that liberal Catalan nationalism could not be reconciled with

68 Castelló, *Sèries de ficció*, 129.

69 Castelló, *Sèries de ficció*, 130.

Franco's creed of Spanish National Catholicism.[70] Indeed, as the series progresses, it is not the upper-class but rather the working-class family that prospers. As we shall see, in the very first episode the factory workers from outside the capital set up a successful radio repair shop in Barcelona; and the daughter of aristocratic lineage ('Dalmau' and 'Muntaner' are 'patrician' surnames), with her family in crisis, will fall for the son of the prosaically named Comes, a tragic passion that she will pursue throughout her life.

Meanwhile the immigrant Hernández-Utrera family (introduced later in the series) are presented as stereotypically 'good'. And their son, who is active in the labour struggle, will join forces finally with the Catalan middle class. The 'message' here, then, is not openly leftist but is rather broadly 'internationalist'.[71] Likewise the linguistic aspect of the series (one of Castelló's main concerns in Catalan drama) is more nuanced here than elsewhere. Castilian is shown to be imposed by the regime on a people presented as being uniformly Catalan-speaking. And immigrants are initially heard speaking Spanish. But the latter rapidly integrate into Catalan society, first trying out the language themselves in public, albeit with a heavy accent. Soon, however, their children are indistinguishable from their native opposite numbers with whom they play in the street. Language (like television) thus serves to socialize and culturalize outsiders, successfully making 'others' into 'us'. Such was the success of this new generic 'model' of historical drama that Castelló credits it with TVE's commissioning of *Cuéntame*,[72] a similarly themed series which used different points of view to narrate the transition to democracy from the perspective of a modest family in Madrid.

It is salutary to compare Castelló's reading of the series, focused mainly on internal production context and implicit ideological message, with that of Charo Lacalle, which deals with those external or contextual factors such as scheduling that are so vital to the series's social reception.[73] In her account of the successes and failures of TV series throughout Spain in 2001, Lacalle focuses on the Catalan *Temps de silenci* and the Castilian *Cuéntame*, once more. She begins by sketching some general and perhaps unexpected pointers in the televisual ecology of the time, some of which intersect with

70 Castelló, *Sèries de ficció*, 131.

71 Castelló, *Sèries de ficció*, 131.

72 Castelló, *Sèries de ficció*, 129.

73 Charo Lacalle, 'Éxitos y fracasos. Análisis de caso: *Temps de silenci* y *Cuéntame cómo pasó*', *Quaderns del CAC* (2002), 37–49 <http://www.mesadiversitat.cat/pfw_files/cma/recerca/quaderns_cac/ficcioexit_ES.pdf> [accessed 1 September 2016].

the narrative of Catalan television we saw in the first section of this chapter.

Thus she contrasts the conservatism of state channels (those broadcast throughout Spain), which cling to old-fashioned formats, with the innovations of FORTA (the public channels of the historic nationalities, not just Catalonia, but also the Basque Country and Galicia), innovations which have led to TV3's historically high ratings.[74] Even the previously declining state public service TVE has drawn away from its private rivals. And while Spanish channels have had little success with comedy, TV3 once more has triumphed with *Plats bruts*, one of those sophisticated and cosmopolitan titles that are so difficult to make outside of the US.[75] The autonomic channels are thus much more diversified in their genres. TVC is even preparing a full slate of TV movies for 2002 (some eighteen titles).[76] It is a genre that years before was held to be responsible for colonizing Catalan screens with bigger-budget and more technically accomplished US product.

Turning to her two case studies, Lacalle argues that, more than simply being a coincidence, the success of the somewhat similar *Temps de silenci* and *Cuéntame* (which are respectively second and first in their network's ratings) corresponds to production trends elsewhere in Europe, where period dramas are also on the rise.[77] Naming the cross-class romance of *Temps*'s female narrator as the main theme of the show, she claims that the history of Catalonia is proudly erected on it. This is a surprising turn, given that previous Catalan series, whether dramas or comedies, have felt more comfortable commenting on the present.[78] *Temps* may be much cheaper (and thus more profitable) than *Cuéntame*, with each episode budgeted at just 114,200 euros rather than the Spanish series's 420,000.[79] But it integrates archive footage more naturally into its text, as the fictional Comes family are shown from the start to have a professional interest in cinema as well as radio (the working-class male lead carries a camera with him from the first episode).

Finally, Lacalle gives a new account of the Catalan series's narrative structure. Closer to a serial than a series, it is made up of

74 Lacalle, 'Éxitos', 37.

75 Lacalle, 'Éxitos', 38.

76 Lacalle, 'Éxitos', 40.

77 Lacalle, 'Éxitos', 43.

78 Lacalle, 'Éxitos', 44.

79 Lacalle, 'Éxitos', 45.

three concentric circles: the love story (which serves as a guiding thread); the socio-political issues; and the everyday experiences of the characters. This exposition of historical memory is thus both 'amena' [pleasant] and 'didáctica' [educational], a tricky tonal combination to pull off. Meanwhile the narrative point of view (the voiceover from the female protagonist's perspective) reinforces the verisimilitude of the fictional world and logic of its storytelling.[80]

Where Castelló suggests the ideological novelty of *Temps de silenci*, poised between Catalanism and internationalism, Lacalle stresses the series's artistic originality in the context of the Spanish programming of its time. We can now go on to examine the well-known Spanish remake of the series, which preserved and enhanced the original's Catalan creative team.

Amar en tiempos revueltos: The Remake



Fig 11. Amar en tiempos revueltos *[*Loving in Troubled Times*] (Diagonal/TVE1, 2005–12)*

> Los personajes se mueven en un mundo construido a base de ideales, aspiraciones y creencias. Cada uno de ellos, de diferente extracción social, luchará por defender unas ideas en las que cree sinceramente. Las vidas y los destinos de los hijos de familias de ascendencia burguesa o aristócrata se cruzan con las de aquellos provenientes de padres humildes de la clase obrera, y las creencias se mezclan y se confunden con los sentimientos más profundos del corazón. A medida que la trama se va desarrollando, los personajes se van descubriendo

80 Lacalle, 'Éxitos', 45.

> a sí mismos mientras buscan su lugar en el mundo y una felicidad que parece difícil de alcanzar en unos tiempos difíciles.[81]
>
> [The characters exist in a world founded on ideals, aspirations, and beliefs. Each of them, from a different social class, will fight in defence of the ideas in which they honestly believe. The lives and fates of children from middle-class or upper-class families are crosscut with those with humble, working-class parents, and their beliefs are blended and fused with the deepest feelings of the heart. As the plot develops, the characters discover themselves as they seek their place in the world and a happiness difficult to achieve in such difficult times.]

The 'universe' of *Amar en tiempos revueltos*, as described above at the press launch of the drama, is decidedly abstract, retaining from the original only the division of characters along class lines (here the rich family is named 'Robles' and the poor 'Ramírez') and the combination of socio-political issues ('beliefs') with emotional investments ('the deepest feelings of the heart'). Playing at 4pm from Monday to Friday on main state channel TVE1, the remake transformed the original from primetime weekly series into a daily serial scheduled in the unique Spanish time slot known as *sobremesa* (a lengthy post-lunch). Like *Temps de silenci*, the rating success of *Amar* will mean that it will be extended well beyond an initial run that is here given as 130 episodes.

The change in genre (here the show is described as 'telenovela', a term normally used only for Latin American titles) has significant implications for both production and reception. As TVE's Director of Programming notes with some understatement a daily, period, quality series was not common in Spain.[82] The launch identifies, however, the continuing Catalan contingent in the creative team, with Joan Bas of Diagonal repeating as executive producer and historian Rodolf Sirera as a chief screenwriter once more. Testifying to the continuing links between theatre and television, *Amar* even boasts as chief screenwriter a celebrated Catalan playwright (Josep Maria Benet i Jornet) who took no credit on TV3's original. It is striking, however, that this extended article on a specialist website makes no reference to *Temps de silenci* as the origin of this unprecedented Castilian project, a cross-class romance set in the traumatic period between 1936 and 1945.

81 Formulatv, 'La Primera estrena *Amar en tiempos Revueltos*', 25 September 2005 <http://www.formulatv.com/noticias/1503/la-primera-estrena-amar-en-tiempos-revueltos/> [accessed 1 September 2016].

82 Formulatv, '*Amar en tiempos Revueltos*'.

In an interview ten years later, with *Amar* still running on a different channel and under a different name, Sirera himself sets out the differences between the two titles on which he worked.[83] Sirera claims that until the end of the 1990s executives believed that period dramas would not attract audiences, to such an extent that TV3 was highly reluctant to green-light *Temps*.[84] The theme of the Catalan bourgeoisie's collaboration with the Franco regime was controversial. *Temps* was 'special' because of its use of time: with the fictional world extending until the year 2000, there were gaps of up to seven years between episodes. The series thus treated not the lower-case 'story' of the characters, but rather 'HISTORY', all in caps.[85]

In the case of TVE, on the other hand, the first plan was for one hundred episodes based on the opening premise of *Temps* and coming to a definitive close at the end of the season, as does a Latin American *telenovela*. And this time TVE, unlike TVC, made no conditions about the content of the show, even in the depiction of the Civil War. Sirera notes, however, that the fact that the leftist PSOE government was in power at that time may have smoothed the way for the series, which was indeed criticized by parts of the press for stirring up 'ghosts of the past' that would better be left alone. In fact the first season, set during the War and most bloodily repressive post-War period, lasted for 180 episodes and was renewed for a second and third, featuring new protagonists on the same sets and reaching an extraordinary total of 1,700 episodes.

This industrial mode of production imposed especially rigorous conditions, with twelve to fourteen writers responsible for the fifty or sixty minutes of footage shot daily.[86] Sirera laments that the relentless rhythm meant it was not always possible to preserve the 'historical rigour' he would have preferred. His examples come from everyday practice and language: a soldier improperly saluting while not wearing his beret and the overuse of the word 'vale' [OK], apparently uncommon in the period. And while he takes credit for the boom in period series that followed *Amar*, Sirera claims that innovation remains rare in 'Spanish television' (he does not comment specifically on the Catalan), where the creative directors of the networks are unwilling to take risks.

83 Ana Piles Giménez, 'Historia y ficción a partir de *Amar en tiempos revueltos*: entrevista a Rodolf Sirera', *Series*, 1 (Spring 2015), 103–05.

84 Piles Giménez, 'Historia y ficción', 103.

85 Piles Giménez, 'Historia y ficción', 104.

86 Piles Giménez, 'Historia y ficción', 105.

While Castelló treated the Catalan *Temps* in broad terms of nation construction and historical memory, Spanish scholars of *Amar* have drawn attention also to the precise correspondences between plot points and political developments under the PSOE government. Thus Elena Galán writes on the traces of time in *Amar*'s post-War period, arguing that the show's revisions of the past are 'presentist'.[87] Hence the Socialists' reparative Law of Historical Memory is echoed in the drama's stress on the traumatic consequences of the War and the vicious repression of the losers. Recent liberalization of divorce is contrasted with its prohibition after the War. Modern legislation on work/life balance is countered by the prohibition on women working in the Francoist regime, even as prostitution was tolerated. A new law on domestic violence is countered by the drama's view of wife-beating as a purely private matter. Finally, modern marriage equality is juxtaposed with the prohibition of male and female homosexuality in the earlier period. Finally, then, the series attempted to attract the interest of the audience by mounting an astonishing correlation between a now distant historical period and the current preoccupations of Spain.

Unlike in the case of *Temps*, however, where Castelló speculates about Catalan series' socializing role as constructors of an imagined or narrated nation, for *Amar* we have empirical research on audience response to the fictional recreation of the Spanish past. Mar Chicharro writes on the basis of in-depth informant interviews with fans of the show.[88] Taking for granted that TV series are a source both of identity and information,[89] she mainly studies four groups of viewers (all women) differentiated by age, profession, and education. Not mentioning the Catalan origin of the series, Chicharro stresses once more the Latin American associations of *telenovela*, which here heighten by contrast the 'familiarity and closeness' of a rare Spanish example of the genre. The latter is held by informants to be more informative and educational (and less exaggerated) than the foreign titles whose *sobremesa* time slot it shares.[90] A perceived sense of realism and historicism as compared to a foreign 'other' thus

87 Elena Galán, 'Las huellas del tiempo del autor en el discurso televisivo de la posguerra española', *Razón y Palabra*, 56 (April–May 2007), no pag. <http://www.razonypalabra.org.mx/anteriores/n56/egalan.html> [accessed 1 September 2016].

88 Mar Chicharro, 'Aprendiendo de la ficción televisiva. La recepción y los efectos socializadores de *Amar en tiempos revueltos*', *Comunicar*, 36.18 (2011), 181–89.

89 Chicharro, 'Aprendiendo de la ficción televisiva', 182.

90 Chicharro, 'Aprendiendo de la ficción televisiva', 185.

enhance viewers' sense of 'Spanish idiosyncrasy' (compare the use of the same word earlier in a Catalan context).

Unsurprisingly more educated viewers are more sceptical and less credulous about the supposed anachronisms of the show. These focus precisely on those current-day issues highlighted by Galán, such as divorce and homosexuality, which are presented positively in the fictional world. Yet, beyond overt plot points, the message of the show is especially persuasive when it individualizes situations that form part of the personal and oral legacy of female viewers, who willingly cite memories of what their mothers or grandmothers told them of the period in their discussion of the series.[91] And for Chicharro the modern anachronisms in the show, no less than its testimonies to the repressions of the past, aid the construction (both personal and communal) of a socializing function that contributes to positive social change in the present. In this case it is a female empowerment, problematically embodied by *Amar*'s forceful women characters, that favours gender equality.[92]

As we have seen, Catalonia's condition as a nation without a state favoured and indeed required the promotion of television drama as a tool of national construction and linguistic normalization. Taking for granted the luxury of a hegemonic nation and language, television in Spain could afford to explore further socializing factors such as gender, profession, and education, even in the case of a remake of a Catalan original whose exploration of traumatic historical memory it shared. Yet the complex identifications and anachronisms evoked by *Amar* in Spanish viewers are not so far from the 'dreams' and 'gaps' produced in Catalan spectators by the pioneering *Temps*. We can now go on to give a close textual reading of parallel episodes from the two series in order to continue the exploration of the similarities and differences in their depiction of the past.

Temps de silenci: The First Episode

> La família Dalmau es disposa a passar, un cop més, l'estiu a la torreta. Però aquest no serà com els altres estius. Francesc Dalmau, el patriarca, porta notícies que trasbalsaran la fins ara plàcida vida familiar. I la Isabel, la filla, té plans molt diferents dels que ha dissenyat la seva

91 Chicharro, 'Aprendiendo de la ficción televisiva', 185.

92 Chicharro, 'Aprendiendo de la ficción televisiva', 188.

> mare. L'amor veritable és incompatible amb la calma oficial que, fins ara, ha imposat sempre la Victòria.[93]
>
> [The Dalmau family gets ready to spend summer once again in their country residence. But this will not be like the other summers. Francesc Dalmau, the patriarch, bears news that will shatter the hitherto peaceful family life. And Isabel, the daughter, has plans that are very different from those intended for her by her mother. True love is incompatible with the official calm that has until now always been enforced by Victòria.]

The opening shot of the first episode of *Temps* combines quality, commerce, and normalization. From an initial high angle, the camera cranes down on a group of actors in period dress (one of them wears the formal uniform of a chauffeur). A black vintage car stands in the courtyard of a grand house with a spindly tree rising beside it. The historic mise-en-scène (a title specifies 'Summer 1935') thus establishes immediately the special status of the title, so different to the contemporary dramas with which TV3 had made its name. The exterior shot signals a distance from the studio-based video drama format which, as we saw, was characteristic of the early 'monotonous', 'caricatured', or 'anthropological' Catalan TV service.

Concerned perhaps that viewers might feel distanced from this historical setting, *Temps* sets up a direct connection with the viewer through omniscient female voiceover. From an unspecified point in the future, young heroine Isabel (Cristina Dilla, an actor with an extensive TV curriculum), standing by the car in a flowery frock, puts the scene in perspective: this is the summer that would change everything for her. Unafraid of clunky symbolism as of cliché, she continues that 'love would grow in [her] like a tree'. A delicate piano theme reinforces anticipation of the *telenovela*-style romantic plot to come.

The historical concreteness of the period drama, comparable to that of the 'fiction documentary' (a specific date, a particular car and wardrobe, the faded sepia shots of the credit sequence that follows this cold open), is thus combined from the start with an appeal to the present and to an authentically popular concept, the romance. Aiming to inform, educate, and entertain, the series will also culturalize: all the characters naturally speak Catalan and Castilian-speakers will no doubt feel a slight frisson as they hear family retainer Julieta Serrano, known from a number of features from arch-*Madrileño* Pedro Almodóvar, speaking her native tongue. In a pedagogic but

93 Castelló, *Sèries de ficció*, 208.

also normalizing manner, subtitles are provided in Catalan for the language learner. It is no accident that the end credits feature a 'linguist' whose role is to ensure normalized usage.

The wealthy Dalmau Muntaners are heading out of the (as yet unseen) city to their country estate, which is given the distinctive Catalan name 'torreta' and implausibly perhaps also houses the family's factory (the voiceover tells us the handsome location is both 'far from Barcelona' and 'magical'). We cut to an interior where the cloth-capped male lead (Àlex Casanovas, earlier the star of Almodóvar's *Kika*) is joking around with his mother, the Dalmaus' housekeeper. Meanwhile the rich family are sitting glumly by the road side. In another emblematic incident, that shiny vintage car has already broken down. Arriving belatedly at the summer home, Isabel will lock eyes with Ramon, as the voiceover informs us: 'He didn't stop until he got what he wanted'. This over-explicitness, even redundancy (the soundtrack tells what the image track has already shown), signals both an attempt to secure viewer loyalty and the defence of a communal identity, beyond class differences and historical periods.

This pedagogic aim is combined consistently with melodramatic narrative structures. Thus the sympathetic patriarch (played by distinguished stage and film actor Josep Maria Pou) fires the secretary with whom he is having an affair just as she is about to tell him she is pregnant with his child. Rich girl Isabel's first flirty dialogue with worker Ramon (set in another attractive exterior: a verdant country lane) is interrupted when her wealthy fiancé suddenly shows up. Mise-en-scène signals class difference once more: Ramon rides a modest bicycle, his rival a roaring motorbike on which he sweeps Isabel off her feet. In the very next scene the rival will interrupt them once more as they are about to kiss. Knowing Isabel has summoned a sweatily sexy Ramon to her home on the pretext of fixing her radio (he says, repeating the voiceover: 'When I like something [the girl or the radio?], I don't stop until I get it'). New viewers are thus addressed both as the consumers courted by private TV (tantalized by visual pleasure and desirable commodities) and the citizens addressed by public television (schooled in the collective consciousness of 'our people').

The theme of class conflict is played out in brief scenes in a modest family factory that seems to have only one machine and a clutch of workers (the series credits here the lengthily named Museu de la Ciència i de la Tècnica de Catalunya in Terrassa, province of Barcelona). But in keeping with the 'liberal Catalanist' ideology

mentioned by Castelló and avoiding explicit Leftism, the theme of class conflict is consistently downplayed. The family patriarch and factory owner is generous to both daughter and workers, counselling the former to 'follow her heart' even in her most inappropriate love match and gifting Ramon's brother, wounded in an industrial accident, with a radio repair shop in the city. When angry workers confront the boss's son in his office, Ramon will take the blame for the accident (he had asked his brother to replace him at work when he was filming current events with his camera). Castelló's image of the TV series as 'projection of the nation' is here quite literal: Ramon screens his footage on the domestic wall. The fictional scenes are interrupted by no fewer than five varied archival documentary inserts, mostly showing street disturbances in Barcelona.

But, strikingly, violence, whether personal or political, is never shown, even as historical time, signalled by titles, moves ominously forward ('Spring 1936', 'Summer 1936'). We do not see the industrial accident in the country or the corpses piled up in Barcelona's central Plaça de Catalunya that are merely mentioned in the dialogue. No doubt limited by budgetary constraints, mise-en-scène is modest. A fancy cocktail party where Isabel's rich fiancé presents an engagement ring she will reject seems to have only five guests; the working-class celebration she prefers that same night, where she dances a foxtrot with Ramon, takes place in the tiny studio-shot patio of his building. The little square where the Comes' radio shop joins established businesses (all, of course, with signs in Catalan) such as the bar and barbershop could be in a country village rather than the Catalan capital.

Yet these resources, clearly limited when compared to TV budgets in Madrid, are sometimes used to telling effect. When Isabel's father visits his lover, also in a popular central *barrio*, we are given a brief shot of the (real) narrow street from her window. In this dizzying high angle, a tiny pair of baby socks, belonging to the patriarch's illegitimate child, are drying on the line in the foreground. The series signals here its political correctness. Like his daughter, the kindly father will 'follow his heart', asking his haughty wife for a divorce (one of those attractive but 'anachronistic' themes highlighted by Chicharro in her reception study of *Amar*).

From its first episode, then, *Temps* follows all of Castelló's prescriptions for constructing national drama. It deploys linguistic promotion (the only words heard in Castilian are a period radio announcement on the ill-fated elections of 1936), cultural proximity (the script abounds in specific referents such as toponyms), promotion

of locations (Granollers, another small town in the province of Barcelona, is thanked in the credits), and production costs (evidently reduced here, even for the expensive and novel genre of historical romance). Finally the ideological character of *Temps* is carefully nuanced. We have seen that the (justified) collective complaints of the factory workers are neutralized by individual commitments (Ramon takes the blame). But even Isabel's conservative mother, who thinks only of conserving the family's social reputation, is not unsympathetic. In a final, melodramatic dialogue with her husband, she complains, plausibly enough, that she has 'suffered in silence' during his long affair. And when he dies in a car crash at the climax to an event-filled first episode her horror seems unfeigned.

We have seen that *Temps*'s ratings and extended run testified to its close connection with the Catalan public. Analysis of this opening episode reveals, moreover, that this was based in Castelló's terms once more on the 'harmonization' (*sintonía*, a word also and appropriately meaning 'radio tuning') between the televisual projection of the nation and a collective will. The textual gaps so evident in the show itself (most especially the fissure between romantic melodrama and historical chronicle) are thus neutralized by a national 'dream' skilfully contrived to mask the divisions within Catalan society, both past and present.

Amar en tiempos revueltos: The First Episode

Madrid, febrero de 1936.

Mientras Antonio y muchos compañeros, de clases populares, celebran, en una verbena improvisada en la calle, el triunfo del Frente Popular, Andrea regresa a casa en compañía de su amiga Consuelo. Allí le está esperando su padre, Don Fabián, dueño de una empresa de materiales de construcción a quien, Andrea, se enfrenta continuamente porque no le permite estudiar en la Universidad. Doña Loreto, su madre, logra convencerle de que le permita asistir a una academia de dibujo. Allí conoce a Eduardo, un joven pintor de ideas progresistas, aunque de familia aristocrática, con quien descubre un mundo de libertad que sus padres no sospechan y de quien cree estar enamorada.

Los hechos se precipitan. Llegan noticias del alzamiento militar y mientras los partidarios de la República salen a la calle dispuestos a defenderla, Rodrigo, hermano de Andrea, prepara con los suyos la neutralización de los rojos. En esta escaramuza estúpida se produce un trágico suceso que favorece el acercamiento entre Andrea y

> Antonio, obrero e hijo del encargado del almacén de la empresa de don Fabián, que ha sido despedido de la fábrica por agitador. Entre ellos surgirá un amor apasionado, que se ha mantenido latente desde la adolescencia.[94]
>
> [Madrid, February 1936.
>
> As Antonio and many of his working-class companions are celebrating the triumph of the Popular Front in an improvised street party, Andrea is walking home accompanied by her friend Consuelo. There her father is waiting for her. Don Fabián is the owner of a construction-materials business and Andrea is constantly in conflict with him because he will not let her study in the university. Doña Loreto, her mother, manages to convince him to let her attend a drawing school. There she meets Eduardo, a young painter of progressive ideas, in spite of his aristocratic background. With Eduardo, Andrea discovers a world of freedom unsuspected by her parents in which she believes she is in love with him. Events move fast. News of the military uprising arrives and while the supporters of the Republic take to the street to defend it, Rodrigo, Andrea's brother, makes preparations with his gang to wipe out the Reds. In the stupid skirmish that follows, a tragic event takes place which brings Andrea closer to Antonio, a working man who is the son of the warehouse foreman in don Fabián's company. Antonio has been fired from the factory as an agitator. Between Andrea and Antonio there will grow a passionate love affair, which has been budding since they were teenagers.]

The first, feature-length episode of *Amar* is from the start more dramatic, cinematic, and urban than the relatively rural and placid *Temps*. The opening scene is set and shot in a crowded city-centre street where workers loudly celebrate the elections, shouting 'Long live the Popular Front!'. The female lead, here called Andrea, echoes them. Her eyes lock with male protagonist Antonio (here given a sexy beard) as he kisses an unknown girl amidst this political tumult (*Temps*'s Roman does the same but in the empty verdant woodlands beside the factory). And, unlike Roman, Antonio taunts his future lover as a pampered rich girl who drinks only out of crystal goblets and is on the lookout for a *señorito* (a gentleman of leisure).

We cut to the hushed bourgeois home, where Andrea's father, a convincingly severe patriarch, comments darkly on the news he reads in conservative *ABC*. Using a familiar cliché of the Right

94 RTVE, 'Amar en tiempos revueltos. T1 Capítulo 1' (2005) <http://www.rtve.es/alacarta/videos/amar-en-tiempos-revueltos/amar-tiempos-revueltos1t-capitulo-0/348713/> [accessed 1 September 2016].

that will echo down the Franco era to come, he says that current conditions are not 'liberty' but 'debauchery' ('libertad', 'libertinaje'). His wife sits subdued on the couch. Later will we learn she is the victim of domestic abuse, one of Chicharro's charged 'presentist' issues addressed by this handsomely dressed period drama. When Andrea asks to go to university, her father replies that a woman's education should be limited to practical matters. Speaking back, she asks why, if that curriculum is so important, her brothers do not also learn needlework. *Amar* thus offer viewers from the start a strong protagonist who embodies, perhaps anachronistically, an attempted and longed-for female empowerment.

Antonio, meanwhile, discusses workers' rights in the bar (a location not seen in the first episode of *Temps*) using the expletive 'mierda' [shit] to describe bosses' practices. But he is soon seen eyeing up Paloma, the sexy shopkeeper next door in a little plaza that seems more lived in, more convincingly worn than in *Temps*'s squeaky-clean, small-town Barcelona. Next he is angrily confronting Andrea's rightist brother Rodrigo in the street. While *Temps*'s family also has a Falangist brother whose imprisonment and release on the outbreak of war go unseen, here the sinisterly committed Rodrigo will play a major, visible, and violent role in the first stages of the plot.

After her mother intercedes, Andrea is allowed to attend evening classes in drawing, where the *telenovela*-handsome teacher proves to be a free-thinking 'libertarian'. Meanwhile the outspoken Antonio is beaten up by rightist thugs but consoled by Paloma, who offers him a sweaty session of illicit sex in the backroom of her shop. The artist-teacher woos Andrea ('Soon she will surrender to me'), taking her on trips to handsome real-life locations such as the Prado Museum and the Retiro Park. But when war breaks out, he is shot dramatically dead by Andrea's brother on a demonstration with Antonio.

At the funeral Andrea clutches the Republican flag to her breast (red, purple, and yellow against the black mourning dress) and says with fierce political commitment: 'He believed in the Republic, in liberty. His killers will always be my enemies'. After a discreet pause for mourning, she will take to the rooftop with Antonio. Both dressed in their white undergarments, they pledge to struggle for a better world where all will be equal. They repeat that final word in turn ('Equal.', 'Equal.'), before essaying a first, passionate kiss, a prerequisite for the daily *telenovela* genre into which *Temps*'s weekly series has been so expertly transformed. (The Catalan lovers had also been gifted a kiss on the roof, this time on a star-spangled night, in their second episode.)

It is striking that *Amar*'s kiss is open-mouthed. The Spanish serial is more passionate and more pragmatic about sex than *Temps*, which was created nonetheless by the same producer and writers. Antonio is offered a job in her shop by the mature unmarried Paloma when he is fired for political activism by Andrea's father. The pay is poor, but, as the flirty dialogue specifies, the (sexual) benefits are good. On seeing he is in love with Andrea, however, Paloma soon takes up with another man. (Would the community in the little square really have turned a blind eye to such female sexual forthrightness?) The amorous painter-teacher, meanwhile, has no intention of marrying the passionate but virginal Andrea. After the tour of the Prado, he invites her to share a studio that is decked with disconcertingly Cubist works and asks her to abscond with him to Paris (Picasso gets a name check here).

Likewise politics in *Amar*'s Madrid is much more explicit and conflictive than in *Temps*'s Barcelona. While the Catalan Roman mediates between militant workers and a sympathetic boss, the Castilian Antonio leads the rebellion against a sternly patriarchal factory owner who is wholly unsympathetic. He even hangs a Republican flag in front of the apartment building the modest Rodríguez share with the wealthy Robles.

Yet (and here *Amar* coincides with *Temps*) political positions are also carefully nuanced. The series makes precise distinctions within Left and Right. Antonio demands workers' rights, but rejects the militants' plan to occupy the factory, at least until private property is legally abolished. The libertarian painter's wealthy mother is a monarchist who has nothing in common with Andrea's father, who longs for the army to step in to restore 'order'. Andrea's older brother, meanwhile, a Falangist, seeks to stir up chaos on the streets in order to provoke a coup d'état even before Franco's rebellion. Chillingly, Andrea's little brother Sito (who will much later prove to be gay) is shown repeatedly playing with a toy pistol. Soon, in a genuinely frightening sequence, he and the rest of his family will be threatened when violent proletarians invade their once comfortably isolated bourgeois home.

Pedagogically schooling Spanish viewers in the detail of a bitter conflict that they might prefer to forgot (especially in a post-lunch time slot previously devoted to distantly dreamy Latin American *telenovelas*), *Amar* thus takes up a clearer position in a more crowded and detailed political landscape than *Temps* chooses to do. This is no doubt because the Catalan series has as its main intention and responsibility the normalizing and culturalizing of an audience as yet

unused to seeing its history dramatized on screen in its own language at all. Once relocated to Madrid, the Catalan production team are freed from the heavy but necessary burden of national construction.

Although they are not so charged or so strictly necessary, *Amar* does include the specific (or 'idiosyncratic') referents that *Temps* also uses in a very different context to create a sense of national televisual space. This time, of course, it is focused around Madrid and its environs. The Robles are said to summer in El Escorial (the location of the Dalmaus' *torreta* is not given). And, in an aside only likely to be recognized by Madrid natives, Antonio invites his brief summer lover Paloma to take the cool air in Las Vistillas, a small park on a hill with a view of the Royal Palace and the Casa de Campo. But this difference is also a question of budget, one of Castelló's external, but inescapable, production factors. *Amar* offers many more expensive location shots around the city than the country- and studio-bound *Temps*. And, unlike in *Temps*, these locations are fully populated with appropriately dressed extras. The Spanish remake's cast is, to this viewer's taste, more handsome and expert, its sets more detailed and evocative, and even its lighting more resonant and subtle than the relatively flat and unconvincing mise-en-scène of the Catalan original.

This greater subtlety and expertise are no doubt because *Amar*, unlike the solitary, pioneering *Temps*, seeks a comparative advantage in the crowded, global market of Spanish-language TV drama. Indeed, as we have seen, the competition here for producers and consumers alike is not Catalonia, but Latin America. Thus while *Temps* has an internal discourse on historical reproduction (the Comas' radio shop and camera), *Amar* has a commentary on emotion itself. Echoing Spanish viewers' dismissal of Mexican soaps as 'exaggerated', the painter's aristocratic mother says at her own son's funeral: 'Feelings should be kept inside. Tears are for common people'. *Amar*, then, takes care to anchor its deep affective charge (its connection with viewers' traumatized mothers and grandmothers) within an expertly realized depiction of the past and a nuanced script and characterization. In spite of the undeniably fraught debates around such issues as historical memory in Spain at the time *Amar* was shot and shown (so ably dealt with by Galán), this is a luxury that the 'normalizing' *Temps*, which must aim to be all things to all Catalan viewers, cannot permit itself.

Where is the Romance?

The two series had twin after-lives, showing the flexibility of the format in both Barcelona and Madrid. As Castelló writes, when *Temps* came to its definitive end (having reached the present day), the location of the little square was recycled by producer Diagonal for a new sitcom unrelated to the original title, *Setze dobles*.[95] At the end of a third season with a third cast, *Amar*, on the other hand, left public network TVE for the private Antena 3, retaining the location of the square (with its vital bar) once more but changing its name to *Amar es para siempre* [*Loving is Forever*]. It is striking that while the place of action remained the same, the mode of temporality changed: as its title suggests, the new series, although period-set, advances more slowly in chronological time and, after over one thousand episodes, has no end in sight.[96] Retrospectively it is clear that the original *Amar* opened the floodgates for costume drama made out of Madrid: Antena 3 currently offers some three hours of female-targeted period serials per day.

As I suggested earlier, it is perhaps unfair to compare *Temps* and *Amar*, given the radical differences in budget and broadcasting context between them. Yet it should be acknowledged that the creative team of both the original and the adaptation are Catalan. *Temps* clearly filled a special role for local (national) audiences, rivalling contemporary titles which, as we saw, had been the main aim of a new industry and government which sought to reflect on TV a new Catalonia for a new audience. Sophisticated comedy *Plats bruts* was set against *Temps* in TV3's schedule.

As we have seen, *Amar*, which literally waved the Republican flag, was surprisingly partisan in its politics, especially given its target daytime audience, which is considered conservative. And given the then current context of the Law of Historical Memory, it made a clear intervention into Spanish politics, both past and present. Perhaps the series's reliance on its intersection with a genealogy of female memory[97] smoothed the edges of its social critique by engaging a familiar familial context for faithful viewers. However, according to screenwriter Rodolf Sirera, the unforgiving rhythm of a daily production process which was much faster than with the weekly

95 Castelló, *Sèries de ficció*, 132.

96 Berta Ferrero, '"Amar es para siempre" o la dignidad del culebrón', *El País,* 13 December 2016 <http://cultura.elpais.com/cultura/2016/12/13/television/1481644228_876596.html> [accessed 1 September 2016].

97 Cited by Chicharro in 'Aprendiendo de la ficción televisiva'.

Temps must have left little time for reflection on either politics or aesthetics. We saw that Sirera was more concerned with details of historical accuracy than of ideology, in both word and deed.

Temps was insistent rather on the normalization of language and culture, a theme confirmed by the introduction of the rapidly assimilated immigrant family in later episodes. But it bravely acknowledges uncomfortable facts for a newly autonomous nation, such as the complicity of the Barcelona bourgeoisie with Franco. Moreover its ambitious narrative embraced seven decades of history, tracing generations across time (when Isabel dies her daughter takes over the voiceover). *Amar* remains rather marooned in past.

Beyond melodrama (and the central cross-class romance remains a staple of *telenovela*), much of the first season of *Amar* comes close to tragedy. Andrea's secular marriage to Antonio is dissolved after the War and her child, suddenly illegitimate, is forcibly abducted by nuns. Historically sourced and motivated, such emotive themes are of course impossible to depict in contemporary Spanish drama, where they would seem implausible.

I would suggest then, finally, that the main stylistic and generic conflict in the two series is not Catalan/Spanish but Latin American/British. Both series are an unstable hybrid of the (closed) *telenovela* and (open) social realist soap, genres that were already familiar to Catalan audiences. While local content clearly connects with local publics, in Barcelona as in Madrid, the model of audience implied varies according to TV genre. Thus Hugh O'Donnell, who provided the prologue for Castelló's book, has suggested that *telenovela* requires a viewer who serves as a bystander, dazzled by intense spectacle, while the more modest pleasures of soap opera suggest a public willing to participate in a plausible public sphere.[98] We might compare this with the distinction made by Tubella between viewers as consumers and citizens.[99] While providing generous doses of visual and narrative pleasure, *Temps* and *Amar* tilt toward the public sphere and citizenship. The presentism identified by Galán[100] could thus be read as a civic good: employing a historical perspective to illuminate vital present issues. Even the function of emotion, beyond alienating alibi, could be seen as a kind of cognition, guiding viewers

98 Hugh O'Donnell, 'High Drama/Low Key: Visual Aesthetics and Subject Positions in the Domestic Spanish Television Serial', *Journal of Spanish Cultural Studies*, 8 (2007), 37–54.

99 Imma Tubella i Casadevall, *Televisió i identitat cultural: el repte de la televisió pública a Europa* (Barcelona: Generalitat de Catalunya, 1992).

100 Galán, 'Las huellas del tiempo del autor'.

to discover other stories that might just be their own also. Certainly both titles achieved that rare harmonization or *sintonia* between production and consumption for which Catalan producers aimed for as far back as the 1980s.

In this televisual 'dream', posited by Castelló, the conscious and the concrete mingle with the subjective and the fantastic. Here the role of romance, unmentioned by no doubt nervous professional and academic sources, is not to be dismissed. *Temps* and *Amar* both take care to stage, amidst precise historical and geographical referents, a utopian location of emotion. Their twin couples kiss on the roofs of their respective buildings, whether in the bright Madrid sun or under a starry Barcelona sky. Here the romantic protagonists are in the world (in time and space) but somehow not of it. It is a tricky but positive position also taken up by this rare example of a TV historical romance in both its Catalan original and its Castilian remake.

Conclusion: Series Planet

When the eleventh edition of the Observatorio Iberoamericano de Ficción Televisiva's survey of Spanish- and Portuguese-language TV drama was launched in July 2017 in Barcelona's Universitat Autònoma, the event testified to a time of tension in an established medium. Founded in 2005, OBITEL aims to give an accurate account of a huge field: all the fictional programming shown free-to-air on national channels in no fewer than twelve countries including all those treated in this book (crucially, this includes Spain and the USA).

OBITEL's remit is not just individual but also comparative. With that aim in mind, its survey is published on paper and online in three languages.[1] Each edition is divided into five sections: audio-visual context (audiences, public investment, merchandising); production (titles, episodes, formats); trans-media (from official websites to social media); a comparative analysis of trends (such as the rise of the biographical series treated in Chapter 2 of this book); and, finally, a special theme of the year (in this case 'a decade of Ibero-American television'). Unsurprisingly the audio-visual industry of Venezuela, whose politically motivated televisual decline is charted in my Chapter 5, was now in full-blown crisis.

One key question raised by the handbook is that of cultural proximity. While the closeness of TV content to its local audience is an acknowledged strength of the medium (and one which cinema sometimes struggles to match), OBITEL asks how possible it is to share shows between countries whose cultures are widely different, such as Mexico and the USA, a key concern also for the creators of the adaptations treated in the second half of this book.

Of the transcontinental trends sketched at the event by Professors Guillermo Orozco and Gabriela Gómez (both of the University of Guadalajara) perhaps the most important were the gradual decline in traditional TV ratings and advertising as pay TV and streaming

1 Past yearbooks can be consulted for free at <http://www.obitel.net>.

platforms take off, albeit more slowly than in other regions; and the decrease in numbers of episodes for *telenovelas* (seen in titles such as *El hotel de los secretos*, examined in Chapter 1), whose genre is now blurring with that of series and mini-series to create the new genre of 'mega-series'. These boast more controversial topics and higher production values. The key example of this trend is graphically violent narco-novela *El señor de los cielos* [*The Lord of the Skies* (2013–)], shown in full on Telemundo in the USA but only in a censored version by Televisa in Mexico. While the researchers attribute this reduction in episodes in part to the influence of Netflix-binging (viewers are losing the patience required to follow a daily series over a six-month period), they caution that only half of Latin America's population has broadband access. Even after the digital switchover, free-to-air TV, the research team proclaimed in Barcelona, is not dying.

While elsewhere in the Catalan capital the new director of TV3 did indeed blame Netflix for the fading fortunes of a local broadcaster unable to compete with the global streaming giant,[2] the Mexican section of the yearbook, also presented by Orozco, showed, as in the film sector, signs of healthy growth. In 2016 a new network (called 'Imagen') had arrived to challenge the duopoly of Televisa and Azteca. Fifty-four new Ibero-American titles had been aired (an increase of fifteen on the year before), of which twenty-seven were produced wholly at home (eight more than in 2015). Although Azteca made two Spanish-language co-productions with the USA, foreign-language titles shown in dubbed versions free-to-air in Mexican primetime originated not from the USA but from Brazil and even culturally distant Turkey, continuing evidence for the existence of the unexpected connections forged by the 'global television formats' cited in the introduction to this book.

In line with the trend away from the heritage genre, a number of the highest rated shows were no longer *telenovelas*. In first position came *Por siempre Joan Sebastian* [*Forever, Joan Sebastian*], a biographical mini-series on the troubled life of veteran singer, the so-called 'Poet of the People', a title somewhat similar to that of Juan Gabriel examined in Chapter 2 here. Second was *La rosa de Guadalupe* [*The Rose of the Virgin of Guadalupe*], an anthology drama series in which social problems such as drugs, sex work, and bullying are resolved each afternoon by tearful appeals to the Mother of God. In 2017 this series, reviled by journalists and loved by mass youth audiences, reached the extraordinary milestone of one thousand episodes. (We saw in the

2 Blanca Cia and Miguel Noguer, 'TV3 no puede influir sobre el "procés" con un 11% de cuota', *El País* (Barcelona), 2 July 2017, 8.

final chapter that Spanish period serial *Amar es para siempre*, distantly based on Diagonal's original *Temps de silenci*, had also reached this landmark figure.)

In keeping with this changing scene, OBITEL's case study of trans-media is focused on Netflix's limited series *Club de Cuervos*, the subject of my Chapter 3. As noted by the presenters of the handbook, the producers' aim was to avoid 'telenovelizing' its content. With that in mind the latter carried out a sophisticated strategy of blurring the divide between fiction and reality for the series's select audience. Thus, as mentioned earlier, characters tweeted under their own (fictional) names in specially crafted feeds. And a YouTube video that drew half a million views was of protagonist Chava (the mediocre soccer manager on the show) receiving the gift of a jersey from glamorous real-life Real Madrid star James Rodríguez. This transnational theme (the reliance of a Mexico with an inferiority complex on former colonial ruler Spain) is of course a key element in a series made for a platform with global reach.

If we turn now to Spain (with Mexico, the other main territory treated in this book) we find a similar stress on change, mostly for the good, which belies the 'digital abyss' predicted by specialists cited in my first chapter. Writing in 2016 Concepción Cascajosa, perhaps the most perceptive academic commentator on the medium, identifies a 'renaissance' in Spanish series.[3] Ironically she does so in *Caimán*, an auteurist film journal which previously went under the name *Cahiers du Cinéma España* and here makes rare room for the rival medium.

Cascajosa makes a number of points relevant to this study. First she identifies a radical change in a mode of production that had been 'atrophied' for twenty years by the success of the family dramas pioneered by producer Globomedia.[4] Two factors that challenged this established format were new routines of writing (as we saw in Mexico in the case of *Club de Cuervos*) and the hiring of film directors as showrunners (as we also saw in *Club de Cuervos*). By making these changes, Spanish series also achieved international access.

Confirming the creativity of Catalonia, which we saw in my final chapter, Cascajosa locates the origin of many of these innovations in the so-called 'periphery' of Spain, far from the capital Madrid. Two independent producers to which she pays special attention are treated in this book: the Galician Bambú (*Gran Hotel*, *Refugiados*) and the Catalan Diagonal (*Temps de silenci*, *Amar en tiempos revueltos*, *Amar*

3 Concepción Cascajosa Virino, 'Series españolas: signos de enacimiento', *Caimán* (March 2016), 22, 24.

4 Cascajosa Virino, 'Series españolas', 22.

es para siempre). While both had been specialists in period drama, they had now ventured into boundary-pushing contemporary thrillers. But the most creative individual titles are *Vis a vis* (a gritty women's prison drama which marked a radical shift for Globomedia) and fan favourite time-travel drama *El ministerio del tiempo* (treated in Chapter 1).[5] Meanwhile Spain-based telecommunications giant Movistar, a would-be local rival to Netflix, has commissioned series from prestigious film directors and broken with the pernicious conventions of earlier TV dramas, such as episodes seventy minutes long. Cascajosa concludes that in the Spanish audio-visual field cinema and television are now walking hand-in-hand.

In this book I have preferred to focus not on trans-media convergence but on the continuing specificity of television, even at a moment when production and distribution are clearly in crisis. I have argued that free-to-air TV is by no means dead, especially in countries such as Mexico where huge audiences, isolated by the digital divide, still rely on the heritage medium for their national narratives.

Yet we have seen that national formats are in flux throughout the region, as the once dominant *telenovela* is transformed; and that transnational remakes do not constitute copycat facsimiles, but rather engage widely and deeply with local forms of knowledge and pleasure. Indeed one of the innovations cited by Cascajosa is that Spanish shows no longer take place in what local professionals call 'planeta series' [series planet],[6] a location with no connection to everyday local life, but are now based in recognizable regions. This is the case even as those series are exported around the world to territories with very different TV traditions: I was surprised in 2017 to come across Globomedia's graphically violent *Vis a vis* (whose relatively rare title means 'Conjugal Visit') shown in primetime on Mexican network Azteca, which had only recently abandoned the romantic *telenovelas* that had dominated its schedules for decades. Spain's biggest breakout TV hit was even shown subtitled and free-to-air on Channel 4 in Britain, a notoriously insular televisual territory, under the more accessible title *Locked Up*.[7] It is no surprise that when Mexico's Fénix film awards (which embrace, like Obitel, the whole Ibero-American world) first introduced a category for television

5 Cascajosa Virino, 'Series españolas', 24.

6 Cascajosa Virino, 'Series españolas', 24.

7 Mark Lawson, 'Why *Locked Up* Has Become Spain's Biggest Breakout Hit', *Guardian*, 27 April 2017 <https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2017/apr/27/locked-up-spain-biggest-breakout-tv-hit-prison-drama> [accessed 19 October 2017].

series *Vis a vis* was one of those nominated, along with Netflix's *Club de Cuervos*.[8]

We remember that *Copycat Television*, Albert Moran's pioneering study of transnational remakes, defines the format not as a blueprint but as a loose and expanding set of programme possibilities. Having explored tensions around genre, TV ecology, and audience in series around the Spanish- (and Catalan-)speaking world, I have attempted to show how we can account for originality when a remake sticks to its original source or when a new series follows, as most necessarily do, the conventions of its format. While such innovations may well be limited by the potentials of local producers and consumers, they testify nonetheless to a body of television drama that is, as it so richly deserves, becoming known transnationally even as it holds tight to its cultural closeness with a primary Spanish-speaking audience.

8 Anna Marie de la Fuente, 'Mexico's Fénix Ibero-American Film Awards Honor TV Series for First Time', *Variety*, 11 October 2017 <http://variety.com/2017/film/awards/mexicos-fenix-ibero-american-film-awards-honor-tv-series-first-time-1202586833/> [accessed 19 October 2017].

Interview with Patricia Arriaga Jordán, Creator of *Juana Inés* (23 December 2016)

Paul Julian Smith (PJS): How do you view the changes in the current television ecology in Mexico, especially the increase in biographical series on free-to-air TV?

Patricia Arriaga Jordán (PAJ): This boom of misnamed 'dramatized series' in Mexico is actually a boom in short *telenovelas* of between eighty and 120 episodes. Regardless of the quality of the productions, which is highly variable, the combination of biography with melodrama is not successful, because it does not allow us to enter deeply into the conflicts in the lives of the characters presented. This results in these series being limited to the general life of the character filtered through the conventions of melodrama: the poor kid who overcomes obstacles in order to succeed, that is, more of the same. In addition to this, in these biographical series or *telenovelas* in many cases the real-life protagonist or family makes editorial decisions and decides which issues can be addressed and which cannot. The result is thus always disappointing and leaves something to be desired as far as biographical fiction is concerned. This was not the case in *Juana Inés*, which is a dramatized series properly speaking, and is governed not by the rules of melodrama but by those of drama.

PJS: How do you see the issue of so-called quality TV and the educational function of Channel 11, with which you have collaborated so much?

PAJ: Twenty-five years ago the educational remit of Channel 11, which used to broadcast the classes of the Instituto Politécnico Nacional [a public university in Mexico City], was redefined to go beyond the strict sense of the word to encompass a broad understanding of the concept of education. It was within the scope of this re-definition that we find quality television: good productions, serious content,

relevant issues, attention to all audiences, and diversity of formats. Channel 11 was no longer considered 'educational' and become a public television channel.

PJS: How did you carry out the research for the series? More particularly, how did you balance external historical sources with Juana's own writings?

PAJ: The research process was complicated, as we had very little time and resources. Sor Juana's life itself could be researched relatively quickly. I had already made a documentary on her and my father was president of the Cultural Center that bears her name in Nepantla, the village where she was born. Sor Juana was thus not unknown to me. What was complex was the research on the period in which she lived. We were obliged to rely on various experts, for example on costume, protocol in the Court and Church, forms of discourse, the use of Latin, convent behaviour, the role of women, the history of New Spain, etc.

On the other hand, as you rightly point out, it was difficult to balance what is known about the life of Sor Juana with her own writing, which is extraordinary. As far as possible, we took phrases from that writing for her dialogue. The phrases used in the series did not always correspond to the context or the time when she had written them, but we considered it more important for viewers to get to know the richness and depth of her thought and talent than for us to strive for strict historical accuracy.

It was also difficult to reconcile the timeline of Sor Juana's life with the dramatic arc of a series, so that each episode would work and hook the viewer to continue watching the subsequent episodes.

PJS: You have commented in interviews on the ignorance of Mexicans today of the colonial period. How is that ignorance reconciled with the (perhaps deceptive) familiarity of the figure of Sor Juana?

PAJ: The average viewer knows a little more about Sor Juana than about the colonial period, which s/he really does not know anything about because it is barely taught by the public education system. The problem is that what is generally known about Sor Juana is very little: that she was a very talented nun who lived many years ago and wrote poems. She is briefly studied in high school and is, therefore, part of the school curriculum. But Sor Juana is like a paper cut-out, without nuances or light and shade. That was the main challenge of the series. Who would want to see a series on a little nun [*monjita*] who wrote

verses hundreds of years ago in a language that is sometimes difficult to understand?

We try to reconcile these two realities by making Juana Inés a character who is close to our time in her rebelliousness and liveliness, in her desire to be accepted and loved, and in her readiness to fight for what is hers. These are contemporary motivations, not those of the seventeenth century. We gave her a very weighty establishment as antagonist: the Catholic Church and Colonial macho society. Hence we rely on this to bring the viewer closer to Sor Juana today and to create the drama of the life of Juana Inés beyond her poetry.

This was one of the reasons why I decided to start the series with her life in Court, so that the audience would understand the wider society in which Sor Juana lived and the Court could serve as a counterpoint to her life in the convent.

PJS: The feature film on Sor Juana by María Luisa Bemberg, *Yo la peor de todas* [*I, the Worst of All* (1990)], is well known and much studied by scholars in the US. Its approach is very different from that of your series. Did you watch the film? Or did you not want to see previous versions of Sor Juana?

PAJ: Of course I saw it. I had seen it years ago and I saw it again now. I love it. I saw and read everything I could, not only about Sor Juana, but also on monastic life in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and the role of the Catholic Church in governing lives at that time.

PJS: What is the connection between this dramatic series and the documentary you already made about Juana?

PAJ: The documentary allowed me to sort out information I had about Sor Juana, to get into her work, and to familiarize myself with the controversy surrounding many aspects of her life. It was then that I realized that there was material for a mini-series or short-run series for television on Sor Juana. The documentary permitted me quickly to find the core of the series and know what would be the fundamental issues that we should treat and which would allow us to create drama.

The series takes up a different position on Sor Juana's final decision to stop writing and donate her library from that presented by the documentary because new documents were found about her relationship with Bishop Manuel Fernández de Santa Cruz between the date of making the documentary and the series.

PJS: What was the production process like and how was the relationship between Channel 11 and your own production company, Bravo?

PAJ: I pitched the series to a director of Channel 11 who first fell in love with the project and approved the co-production between Channel 11 and Bravo Films, my production company. Unfortunately, during the production of the series there was a change in the management of the channel. The new administration had no experience in the production of dramatized series and was unfamiliar with the time period of production and post-production required for such an ambitious series as *Juana Inés*. This gave rise to various frictions, mainly that I needed the time originally agreed to complete the series but was unable to convince them of this and finally lost that battle. I had to speed up the process of post-production, leaving some things unfinished, such as the dubbing of the dialogue of actors playing Spaniards or Creoles so it was perfect, without any errors in the accent or *ceceo* [Peninsular pronunciation].

PJS: There are two striking aspects of the mise-en-scène of the series: the shooting in authentic locations; and the costume design, hair styling, and makeup, which sometimes seem to go beyond realism (the women of the Court look almost like dolls). How do you see the role of these resources, which are so important in period series?

PAJ: I think the locations, wardrobe, makeup and hairstyles are essential to create a sense of period. With respect to the locations, we did not have the budget to build a set or recreate the places of the time. For some of them, indeed, there are no visual references, such as the vice-regal Court in the seventeenth century. We aimed, then, to create atmospheres.

Hence the vice-regal Court is filmed in a building from the eighteenth century, as we did not find any of the seventeenth in which we could shoot. The series's convent of the Hieronymites is actually the former convent of Acolman [in Mexico State], which is Augustinian and Franciscan and from the sixteenth century. It was impossible to shoot in Sor Juana's real-life Cloister because it is now a university which is always alive with students and activities throughout the day and is located in a very noisy area of central Mexico City. For reasons of sound recording and because of our requirement of very long periods of shooting, we were unable to film there. Of course, we would have loved to.

With respect to costumes and makeup, there are paintings of the Viceroys, but none of the Vicereines. We relied on original paintings to characterize the men. For the women, we used works by contemporaries of Sor Juana, such as Diego Velázquez, for clothing, hairstyles, and make-up. The women look like dolls, that's true, but it was the custom in Court. We also used some paintings of the Mexican colonial period, not many, but we did rely on those that survive.

A large part of the wardrobe was lent to us by a collector, so many pieces of clothing in the series are originals from the colonial period, from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

PJS: You are known for creating a very contemporary workplace series, *XY* (2009–12), whose tagline was 'Being. A Man. Today'. Do you see connections with a period series like *Juana Inés*? Can you comment on the subject of gender and its evolution from 'Being. A Man. Today' to 'Being. A Woman. Yesterday'?

PAJ: We can say that both series share a common theme: sexuality. In the case of *XY* our intention was to present the sexuality of Mexican men at different stages in their lives: from twenty to sixty years old. And a fundamental theme represented by one of the protagonists was homosexuality. In the case of *Juana Inés* sexuality was not the main issue, but it was one of them: in the series we tried to show that Sor Juana was not 'asexual', that despite the great efforts of the Catholic religion to subjugate women's sexuality, to turn us into the source of sin, to lock us up, and to put us in veils, female sexuality in the Court and in the convent was alive and well.

Whether Sor Juana was homosexual or not we will never know and it remains a matter of debate. But you need only read the poetry she dedicated to the Vicereine María Luisa Manrique to understand how deep and complex her feelings were toward her female friend. Probably there was nothing physical between them, but in the series we opt to let those feelings express themselves not only in the written word but in a very subtle, almost innocent manner by depicting a loving and physical relationship between these two close friends and putting into the mouths of both women phrases from Sor Juana's poetry.

PJS: The main distribution of the series was of course through Channel 11, with each episode broadcast twice a week in primetime. Beyond that, was there any distribution via internet? And has the series been sold and transmitted outside of Mexico?

PAJ: Unfortunately I'm not aware of Channel 11's plans to exhibit the series or the issue of its distribution. I do know that for the moment it has not been distributed on the internet. It was sold to Netflix but I do not know what dates it will be available on the platform.

PJS: What was the reception of the series like in Mexico? You told me earlier of the disapproval of conservative Catholics linked to the Opus Dei. On the other hand, was the series supported by more progressive viewers?

PAJ: The series was written and designed so that a young audience of between twenty-five and forty-five years old would find it attractive and be hooked by the story of Sor Juana. And the strategy worked. The series had a great acceptance among this viewer demographic and was also seen by a forty-five-plus audience.

The biggest controversy came from specialists in Sor Juana, some of them supporters of Opus Dei, who found Juana Inés' lesbian relationship with the Vicereine and the relationship posited in the series between Juana Inés and Father Núñez de Miranda unacceptable. As I understand it, some groups are seeking the beatification of Sor Juana and this view of her as a woman, and not as a nun with a deep religious vocation, was not to their liking.

Some historians also made trouble, questioning whether things were really like that or not. If we had had the time and resources we could have represented the colonial era with 100% accuracy, but we would still have taken the same dramatic liberties to create a fictional television story. Historical fiction is fiction and follows the rules of drama. One aspect criticized by historians is, for example, that the nuns in the series do not wear the veil: in television it is impossible to have the protagonists veiled and not to be able to look them in the eyes and see the expressions on their faces.

The events of the public life of Sor Juana that are known were incorporated into the series. Conversely, her every-day and private life, of which there is no record, was fictionalized and each person will have their own version of what might have happened. For example, the correspondence between the Vicereine María Luisa ('Lysi' in the poems) and Sor Juana is lost. But we used it to create a dramatic event in the series. I wish historians would understand that it is one thing to make a documentary and other to make a historical fiction. And, hopefully, that they would no longer despise television: sixty million Mexicans watch it every day.

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