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Spanish history and female characters. Representations of women in Spanish historical fiction

Historia española y personajes femeninos.
Representaciones de mujer en la ficción histórica española

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Abstract: This article provides some thoughts on how serialized fiction may be utilized to reconstruct history. More specifically, it considers how some television series have helped to make a re-reading of past Spanish society by focusing on female characters.

Three pieces of historical fiction were thoroughly analyzed from a semantic perspective. These series reconstructed different periods in Spanish history (*Amar en tiempos revueltos* [*Loving in Troubled Times*], *La Señora* [*The Lady*] and *14 de abril. La República* [*April 14, the Republic*]).

This article holds that these stories articulate an interconnected representation of social change in Spain, with a leading role being allocated to female figures. They depict increasingly empowered women characters who had an increasing presence in the public and, particularly, in the political sphere. Qualitative content analysis was used to unravel the narrative and semantics of these audio-visual texts.

Key words: television, soap opera, woman, historical fiction, public, messages.

Resumen: Este artículo refleja la capacidad de la ficción seriada para reconstruir la historia. Más concretamente, se entiende que las series de televisión han ayudado a releer el pasado de la sociedad Española, centrándose en personajes de mujeres.

Tres productos de ficción histórica son analizados en detalle, desde una perspectiva semántica. Estas series reconstruyen diferentes períodos de la historia española (*Amar en tiempos revueltos*, *La Señora* y *14 de abril. La República*). El artículo sostiene que estos relatos articulan una representación conectada del cambio social en España, concediendo un papel de liderazgo a las figuras femeninas. Apuestan crecientemente por personajes de mujer empoderados, con creciente peso en el espacio público y particularmente en la esfera política. El análisis de contenido cualitativo ha sido utilizado para desentrañar la narrativa y los significados de estos textos audiovisuales.

Palabras clave: televisión, telenovela, mujeres, ficción histórica, públicos, mensajes.

Introduction¹

The uses and gratifications associated with the consumption of television fiction are diverse (West and Turner, 2010; DeFleur, Ball-Rokeach, 1989). While entertainment is its most obvious, hegemonic, and visible function, studies have shown how it is possible to identify other uses linked to the socializing role of the media. An important segment of the audience considers these productions to be realistic and credible representations (García de Castro, 2007), which points to their importance as role models, but also to their ability to provide guidelines for interpreting situations, individuals, and even processes.

It is true that fictional texts do not have to follow the rules of rigor, accuracy or representativeness. However, resorting to historical themes, characters, settings and *mise-en-scène*, referring to current issues and affairs and using historical or political references sometimes seem to transgress the rules of fiction, and imbue the story with a certain documentary tone. This is the direction some of the most emblematic domestic fiction productions have taken in Spain. They have acquired the form of “historical drama/fiction”, in which this way of staging the past becomes a sign of national identity regarding their foreign competitors. Features such as realism, historicism, documentary value and national identity constitute their most visible brand image. They recreate the value of a people, the Spanish nation, as they faced

1 This work is part of the following research projects:

1. “Cultura audiovisual y representaciones de género en España: mensajes, consumo y apropiación juvenil de la ficción televisiva y los videojuegos” (Audiovisual culture and gender portrayal in Spain: messages, consumption and appropriation of television fiction and video games by the young) ref. FEM2011-27381, funded by the Ministry of Economy and Competitiveness, Spain.
2. “Historia de la Programación y de los Programas de Televisión en España (cadenas de ámbito estatal): de la desregulación al apagón analógico (1990-2010)”. History of Television Programmes and Programming in Spain (National Channels): from Deregulation to the Analog Blackout (1990-2010) ref. CSO2015-66260-C4-1-P funded by the Ministry Of Economy And Competitiveness, Spain.
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and overcame well-known historical conflicts, suitably adorned by the resources of fiction. These productions ultimately point to the difficulties faced by a society and its ability to surmount them for the sake of progress, that is, as it moves toward the present in which the viewers find themselves. As well as being “historical”, these texts have a distinctly “female” approach. In addition to their noticeably melodramatic register, they star and target women and they are scripted by teams with a significant presence of female writers who reconstructed the history of Spain from a woman’s perspective. On the one hand, they bring the hidden role of women to light, thereby supplementing formal history lessons that hardly ever acknowledged the role of women; on the other, they use an anecdotal, emotional and familiar register that reflects “history from below” and is very much adapted to the language and interests of a large part of this gender group.

These products of historical fiction are expressions of popular culture and refer to specific social contexts. Spanish society has been slow to experience social change; in fact, issues such as the entry of women into the labor market, work-life balance, the salary gap between women and men and gender violence are now part of public, media and political agendas in Spain. The Constitutional Act for Effective Equality between Men and Women (*Ley Orgánica 3/2007*) is one of the examples of how this process has taken shape: it defined the concepts of sex discrimination, sexual harassment and positive action, and established some actions to be adopted both in the public and the private domains in which women are in a disadvantaged position.

The concern about the limited opportunities for women has also become apparent among professionals in the audiovisual sector. The underrepresentation of women in major positions within the cinema industry and in festivals and awards, their strong presence in cinema occupations related to aesthetic appearance (hairdressing, make-up, costumes) and the lower funding available for productions directed by women are some of the dynamics that characterize audiovisual industry in Spain (Cuenca, 2016). Institutions such as CIMA (Association of Women Filmmakers and Women in Audiovisual Media), which gathers some of the female script writers responsible for the fictional products to be studied in later sections, are working to make women more visible in this industry. In the Spanish Goya cinema awards ceremony, CIMA headed the campaign for increased presence of women both among the industry’s employees and within actual plots, in particular, in leading roles, under the motto ‘more women’ (#MOREWOMEN). This was symbolized by the red fans that presided over the auditorium in the cinema awards ceremony, as black dresses did in

the Golden Globe and white flowers, in Grammy ceremonies, respectively. The ‘Swedish style’ approach, where strong measures (basically quotas) are adopted to achieve equality, is the basis of CIMA’s activist actions.

However, they do not only mobilize through the media; their daily activity can also be useful to improve the situation of women. More specifically, as producers of messages, they have the opportunity to promote a new image of women, whereby they can achieve greater power and a better position, and develop more modern social imaginaries. The next section discusses the latter aspect.

Hypothesis and methodology

This study analyzes three historical drama series made for television, which were scripted with a female audience in mind. The starting hypothesis is that the three titles, *Amar en tiempos revueltos* (2005-2012, TVE1), *La Señora* (2008-2010, TVE1), and *14 de abril. La República* (2011, TVE1) provide an inter-connected interpretation of an important period of Spanish contemporary history: from the 1920s to the 1950s. They have all been broadcast by the main public television channel (TVE1), share narrative and semantic concepts and help to bring history closer to the viewer, albeit in its most reductionist and fictionalized form.

Their analysis will identify the variables that, according to these fictional works, explain the development and the subsequent socio-political and economic stagnation in Spain during that period. The important role of “ordinary” women in the construction of Spain, either from humble or privileged positions, is one of the major threads in the series.

The review will be performed following the order in which the series were broadcast: starting with the earliest and ending with the most recent. This decision follows the evolutionary approach of this study, as it also allows for the reconstruction of the process used by TVE1 to provide its viewers with the pieces of the historical puzzle. The three texts will be analyzed from a qualitative perspective, incorporating an interpretive reading and qualitative content analysis (Fiske and Hartle, 1978; Castello, 2008).

Firstly, the formats of these television series will be identified: on the one side, television melodrama, as an eminently feminine sub-genre; and on the other, historical fiction, which recreates scenarios from a different period. Secondly, each of the formats will be described, identifying its main production characteristics, as well as information relating to how and when they were broadcast and also their audience ratings. Subsequently the

analysis will focus mainly on the narrative characteristics of each production, with particular emphasis on the strategies used to represent history (Marcos, 2015), the resources employed to add informative features to the product, and its semantic aspects (Montero and Paz, 2013). Finally, the meaning of the female characters is discussed, focusing on the values they embody, the treatment accorded to “female” themes, and the characteristics of the stereotypes they represent. More specifically, the main female characters will be evaluated, indicating both their sociodemographic and narrative features, as well as the gender roles that they assume. A number of analytical categories devised by the author will be used for this purpose.

Emphasis will be made on the postfeminist dimension of these characters. Postfeminist movements, also called ‘third-wave feminism’, are those that articulate a critical review of the feminist ideology. They state that classic feminism limits the ability of women to make decisions and imposes male models, disparaging old roles such as child-rearing and housework. They argue that marriage, romantic love and motherhood are legitimate goals but should not involve renouncing freedom and social promotion. From this standpoint, they claim that there are no universal gender models or recommendations, but different ways of exercising femininity, and so are there various intra-gender power differences. They postulate methods to subvert patriarchy that are in contradiction with the most classic feminist recommendations: entertainment, parody, eroticism, aesthetics, and communication and interaction among women are praised as avenues for women’s emancipation and access to power (Baxter, 2009; Kaufer, 2009). Therefore, in their view, women’s bodies can be an asset in upper mobility processes, an idea frequently reinforced by the media (McRobbie, 1994).

Television melodrama and historical fiction

Television melodrama, which is rich in semantics and representations of women and has been particularly linked with female audiences, has been described as an “invisible” subgenre. The relative absence of categories of analysis and valid methodological tools for this object of study explains why there have not been more studies in this field (Mills, 2010; Geraghty, 2010). From a narrative perspective, these productions that are “aimed at women” are usually constructed around one or several leading female characters. Their structures rely on intertwining subplots, in which the storylines develop with no clear denouement and unresolved conflicts (Kuhn, 1984). They often feature matriarchal figures with deep emotional qualities, capable

of surmounting all kinds of conflicts and adversities. These characters display extraordinary skills and abilities (beauty, great ability to learn, emotional intelligence, perseverance, determination, communication and social skills, problem-solving ability, high self-esteem, etc.) and they hold clear and firm convictions (Ellis, 2007). Not surprisingly, comparative and transnational scholarship has shown how female characters very often embody more competent and dynamic values than those associated with male characters (O'Donnell, 1998).

From a thematic perspective, romantic love and family relationships serve as the dramatic core, lending an emotional tone to the story. But this emotional perspective is also used to refer to social concerns that affect female viewers. Divorce, abortion, life and work balance, the difficulties of promotion for women at work, shortages, and economic crisis and unemployment are some of the issues typically addressed, on which guidelines for action and resolution are provided. Moreover, even if the main themes do not directly tie in with these concerns, they are approached from a critical and reflexive female viewpoint (Mankekar, 2002).

Within these formats several recognizable sub-types exist. There are some stories that seek to entertain through the recreation of attractive and desirable lifestyles. Noteworthy examples are classic productions (*Dynasty*, 1981-1989, ABC; *The Colbys*, 1985-1987, ABC; *Falcon Crest*, 1981-1990, CBS) that usually reconstructed grandiose and opulent settings. They invited viewers to project their dreams and desires for luxury and sumptuous consumption, power, social success and romance onto the characters. For instance, attitudes toward the well-known soap opera *Dallas* (1978-1981, CBS) have been widely researched. It was rich in sentimental capital and obtained the emotional commitment of its female followers by recreating the personal and family universe of the Ewings through various social rituals (births, marriages, deaths, intimacies, disappointments, jealousy). The evocation of conflicting situations, behavior and feelings (love and hate, loyalty and betrayal, happiness and compassion, hope and hopelessness) led viewers to play an active role and make different readings of the story (Morley, 1992). In soap operas such as *Dynasty* (1981-1989, ABC), viewers obtained gratification through the use of melodramatic pleasure (through identification with characters and situations), and ironic pleasure (by enjoying the story from a distanced and intellectually superior position) (Ang, 1985). Its aesthetic and narrative excesses made this a revisionist and reflexive production, which criticized and took the rules of the genre to the extreme in order to parody it, and offer a much more distant and less

emotional narrative (Ang, 2007). Its message could act as an instrument for self-reflection and reflection about one's environment (Katz and Liebes, 1990).

Melodrama also encompasses stories that are much closer to everyday life and simply deal with more intimate, subjective issues (marital conflicts, separations and divorces, personal insecurities, dreams, goals, frustrations, etc.), relegating references to material wealth to a second place (*Home and away*, 1988, Seven Network; *Thirtysomething*, 1987-1991, ABC; *Melrose Place*, 1992-1999, Fox). More recent soap operas have added less common registers to these stories. Some productions specifically aimed at female audiences have opted for irony, parody and the absurd as a way to present the concerns and conflicts of women (*Ally McBeal*, 1997-2002, Fox; *Sex and the City*, 1998-2004, HBO; *Desperate Housewives*, 2004, ABC). These are far removed from the emotional and romantic treatment given to these issues in previous productions ("ironic structure of feeling" *versus* "tragic structure of feeling"), as they seek to appeal to younger women, with a higher educational level and with a stronger connection to the public space than viewers of previous melodramas. The use of dramedy as a versatile fiction structure, in which mockery is combined with melodramatic elements in a bittersweet mix, has shown to be a multi-purpose, suitable narrative device (Ang, 2007).

There have been numerous melodramas produced in Spain. The first steps in these productions were taken in collaboration with the Latin American industry (*La mujer prohibida* [*The forbidden woman*], 1991, Venevisión-Telecinco; *La loba herida* [*The wounded she-wolf*], Marte TV-Telecinco, 1992; *Primer amor* [*First love*] Sonotex-Telecinco, 1993; and *Pasión de vivir* [*Lust for life*], 1993, Quality Media-Telecinco). Later, strictly domestic series that focused on national or regional cultural issues and concerns were produced (*Poble Nou*, 1993, TV3; *Nissaga de poder* [*Lineage of power*] 1996-1998, TV; *El super, historias de todos los días* [*The supermarket, everyday stories*], 1996-1999, Antena 3; *El secreto* [*The secret*], 2001, TVE1). Both their realistic outlook and their ability to evoke and connect with national and regional cultural identities seem to have been the keys to their success in adapting to the Spanish audience (Chicharro, 2011 and 2013).

Television melodrama can also adopt an "historical" register and be set in the past. By merging with costume drama a story can be crafted that, in addition to the usual dose of excitement, offers hints of nostalgia. As it occurred with classic television series in the genre (*Roots*, 1977, ABC; *Holocaust*, 1978, NBC; *MASH*, 1972-1983, CBS) they reconstruct and reinterpret particularly tense episodes of recent history. Furthermore, through costume drama, especially

during the 1980s, the values and images of the cultures in which the narratives were located were respectively imported and suggested, which contributed to historiographic imagination (de Groot, 2015).

Some particularly realistic British productions are clear illustrations of this. They are strongly associated with the representation of particular social classes, affecting every day issues such as the family as an institution and their unity: *Coronation Street* (1960, ITV), *Emmerdale* (1972, ITV), *Upstairs, Downstairs* (1971-1975, ITV; BBC One, 2010-2012), *Heimat* (1984-2004, ARD), *Downton Abbey* (2010-2015, ITV), *Call the Midwife* (2012, BBC), *Outlanders* (2014, Starz). They tend to cover and bring to the fore broad social concerns, ranging from homosexuality to multiculturalism and immigration (Geraghty, 1991 and 1995). They also may venture into their respective recent histories, using the family and the community as core elements and presenting strong, efficient and diligent women (Ty, 2014). In some cases, special importance has been given to middle-aged female characters with ideological meanings beyond the “successful ager” (Tincknell, 2013).

Historical melodrama has had a strong presence in Spain since the early 1990s. It was first produced for regional television (Catalan TV3, Basque ETB, Galician TVG) that broadcast only to specific areas. It has been an ideal medium to reclaim, promote and give visibility to the idea of an individual distinctive regional culture based on a shared language, customs and history. Noteworthy are the Catalan series *Temps de Silenci* (*Time of silence*, 2002-2003, TV3) and the Galician series *Rias Baixas* (2005, TVG), for they are the immediate predecessors of those discussed in this article. Their success was a prerequisite for the production of other series with similar formats designed for nationwide audiences that recreated the Spain’s history.

1. *Amar en tiempos revueltos*: the transgressive woman as the leading role in “history from below”

The process of constructing a historical drama for the entire Spanish public originated in some trials previously made in regional television markets. The role of Catalan television is remarkable, as it promoted the first fiction formats that revised Catalonia’s past from a female point of view. *Temps de silenci* (2001-2002, TV3), produced by Diagonal TV, told the ups and downs of the Dalmau family from the years before the Spanish Civil War (more precisely, from 1935) until the 1990s, when the Spanish democracy is considered to have become solidly established.

This television series contained socializing elements and proposed a re-reading of an important period of contemporary Spanish history. Aspects such as modernity, economic development, the progressiveness of rules, the cultural and linguistic repression of the post-war period and women's submission to men were shown from a regional point of view and from the perspective of those who lost the war. Some of the most important plotlines of the series (not only romantic, but also political and public) revolved around women. Positive, strong and independent female characters were presented, highlighting values such as their right to decide, and to be free and break away from social conventions. They largely coincided with a trend identified in Catalan productions between 2000 and 2011 (for example, *Ventdelplà*, 2005-2010, TV3, and *El Cor de la Ciutat* [*The heart of the city*], 2000-2010, TV3), which consistently portrayed female characters with equal opportunities, a distinctive feature of serialized Catalan fiction since its inception (Tous-Rovirosa *et al.*, 2013).

Soon after, the idea used in *Temps de Silenci* was adapted to the daily broadcasts of Spanish public channel TVE1 under the name *Amar en tiempos revueltos* (2005-2012, TVE1), albeit with a very different tone. Produced by Diagonal TV, Endemol Group, and directed by Lluís Maria Güell and Orestes Lara, among others, it was shown daily in the after-lunch time slot, with episodes lasting approximately 45 minutes. Each of the seasons was built around a limited number of central and secondary characters. The last episodes of each block served to bring plots and conflicts to a close, and to introduce those which would be the focus of the following season. The risky venture of producing a historical soap opera, as well as its initial low budget (clearly shown in the use of a limited *mise-en-scène*) contrasted with the enthusiastic welcome it received from the audience. This television series finished its airtime with an average audience share of 21.3% (Miguélez, 2013).

The historical significance of the story was not only to be seen in the visual recreation of pre-war, war-time and especially, post-war Spain. The costumes, overall ambience, props and *mise-en-scène* played a key role in giving credibility to the series, reinforced by the historical quotations integrated into the dialogues. It is interesting to note that references to the Civil War were minimized and even this period was omitted through a narrative ellipsis. References to Franco, his wife Carmen Polo, Eva Perón, the bullfighter Manolete and situations such as rationing and shortages, autarky, the absence of freedom of expression, police repression and reprisals against those who lost the war were just a few examples that added veracity to the story.

In some seasons, the female characters were clearly dominant, nevertheless in most cases the main role was shared with one, or even two male characters, to introduce love triangles into the plot. The female characters acquired an increasingly post-feminist tone. For example, the stereotypes embodied by the characters had an increasing presence in the public space. The main character of the first season, Andrea (Ana Turpín), was a young well-off Republican sympathizer engaged in artistic endeavors and was the first female model of a transgressive woman who was still attached to the most traditional female role, particularly within the domestic space. This character was mainly involved in emotional plotlines, even though her ideology and her commitment to women's empowerment brought in some additional nuances. She represented traditional femininity, as she placed herself in a subordinate position to men characters, but also showed signs of openness to more powerful stereotypes (Table 1² at the end of the text).

As the series progressed, other models were shown with closer links to the public and work sphere: Alicia (Sara Casanovas), a young female university student who wanted to practice as a brilliant lawyer; Ana (Marina San José), with training in business and high-level management; Teresa (Carlota Olcina) of very humble origins, who successfully obtained her first job as a sales assistant and eventually ran her own business; and Asunción (Nadia de Santiago) who used education as a tool for social mobility.

Some of the typical problems faced by women on a daily basis also emerged in the themes, the tone of the plotlines and in the treatment of the settings. Life and work balance, shared household tasks, abuse of women, abortion, adultery, single parenthood, divorce, sex and lesbian relationships were at the core of the major narrative conflicts. Values such as gender equality, co-education, and women's access to power were showcased.

As the series moved on, the home sphere lost its narrative importance in relation to the work sphere, on which female characters tended to be increasingly focused. Ana Rivas embodied the characteristics of the value of property, power, career goals and sexual emancipation. Meanwhile, Teresa portrayed women's ability to take responsibility for their own upward social mobility process. Manolita (Itziar Miranda) exemplified feminine versatility, as she was able to balance the demands of her professional and personal life. Carmen (Pepa Pedroche) epitomized the value of solidarity and mutual support among women. The characters were basically defined by their emotional features. Romantic love and motherhood often appeared as an essential requirement for their personal development.

2 The tables are at the end of the text, in the Annex.

2. *La Señora*: the “Roaring Twenties” as a setting for breakthroughs achieved by women

La Señora was directed by Jordi Frades and again produced by Jaime Banaculocha and Joan Bas, from Diagonal TV (Endemol group) for TVE. It was first broadcast on the main channel of Spanish public television (TVE1) on 6 March, 2008. It ran for three consecutive seasons and had 39 episodes in total (2008-2010).

Designed for a predominantly female audience, it was broadcast in prime time, when the bulk of the family would be gathered in front of the television, which clearly demonstrated the ambitious expectations placed on this particular production. It achieved an excellent average audience share of 18.8%, with 3,244,000 viewers in its first season, and reached its season record the day the final episode was aired, which scored a 23.9% audience share, with nearly 4 million viewers (Radio Televisión Española, 2015).

La Señora used a branching narrative structure that focused on the romantic vicissitudes of two characters: Victoria Márquez (Adriana Ugarte) and Ángel Ruiz (Rodolfo Sancho). The social distance between the two characters was the first difficulty to be overcome. The rigidity of social stratification was illustrated by showing that the relationship between the daughter of a wealthy businessman, owner of lucrative iron mines, and a young man of humble origins was not deemed socially acceptable.

The narrative tone of *Amar en tiempos revueltos* was maintained in this series. It was mainly a television series focused on the characters, in which orality and dialogue had an important explanatory role. Despite the breadth of the cast, which consisted of 27 characters, the narrative was centered on the love triangle between the three main characters (Victoria Márquez, Ángel González and Gonzalo López) in which the character of Victoria (Adriana Ugarte) stood as the major leading role.

La Señora had a serialized format and was broadcast weekly, with each of the episodes having ongoing plots. The fact that the plots were open-ended meant that a spin-off could be created (*14 de abril. La República*) which continued to expand on this narrative continuity. The length of the format was limited, compared to the longevity of soap operas, even though its language was strongly influenced by it and by the genre of serialized melodrama.

La Señora used an extremely Manichean and emotional approach, in which the past was portrayed in a popularized, reductionist manner, in order to adapt its message to all segments of the public. Social reality was

presented in terms of different social groups whose coexistence generated difficult conflicts. The ideological left/right axis and the class divide between affluent/privileged and humble/disadvantaged, within which the differentiation between owners and non-owners (workers) was particularly relevant, were depicted side by side with the classic old regime strata (church, army, nobility). Gender was another key distinction in this representation of a social structure defined by conflicting groups (conservatives versus social rebels and transformers).

Historical quotations and references, in addition to costumes and mise-en-scène, showed events that are well-known in the social imaginary of the Spanish people. References to Primo de Rivera, the War in Africa and the tensions surrounding the proclamation of the Republic gave historical context to the story.

From a semantic perspective, this series maintained the focus on “history from below”, as seen in *Amar en tiempos revueltos*. It departed from past stories about elites and situated the audience at the end of the “Roaring Twenties” and the period before the Spanish Civil War. Far from the urban recreation offered by the previous production, *La Señora* was set in an undefined space, in which rural scenarios and characters (agriculture, animal farming, village life) were combined with references to rituals and spaces of a small community (festivals, local clubs/associations, the brothel, etc.).

Special mention should be made of the main character of Victoria. Young, proactive, with a good social position, she boasted an entrepreneurial spirit and a strong ability to deal with social rules. In terms of features and basic skills, she largely fitted the stereotype of a woman who broke the rules of her time, as exemplified by Andrea (*Amar en tiempos revueltos*). She highlighted the daily efforts of women to empower themselves in their own environment, which was often hostile to their advancement. In addition to the family-centered and emotional sphere, she shifted the focus to the workplace. Her role as a businesswoman, heiress of large iron mines illustrated not so much the value of efficiency and profitability, but of social justice and business ethics, conferring a special importance on the management style of the female character. Again, the key components of this character were the emotional, romantic and maternal dimensions (Table 2).

Other secondary female characters shared the same ground-breaking spirit as Victoria, since they embodied the post-feminist values that combined a presence in the public space with emotional and family life. These included Encarna (Lucía Jiménez), an outstanding Republican activist committed to the struggle to raise the cultural level of women, and also a mother and a wife;

Alicia (Carmen Conesa) who ran a brothel, used her influence and boasted an independent nature, while recalling her daughter, who lived abroad; and Mema (Sandra Marchena), who left prostitution and started to work as a seamstress in order to have a more standard life and work path.

The story portrayed the late 1920s as a stage of revolutionary female advances and breakthroughs that brought about a balance of power between the sexes. The broadcast of the final episode of the first season was preceded by a documentary entitled *La Señora. Felices años 20 (The Lady. The Roaring Twenties)*, which adopted an informative register and depicted this period as an optimistic one. It used archival footage to document how this period saw an affirmation of women's role, thus strengthening the idea presented in the fictional text.

3. *14 de abril, la República (14th April, the Spanish Republic)*: Female empowerment in the public arena

La Señora was given a warm welcome by the public, and a spin-off was produced with a similarly, exquisite set and costume design, selected locations, an emphasis on the historical role of women and the importance of the female outlook, and a clear intention to provide an explanatory account of events.

14 de abril, la República unfolded along similar lines as its prequel series, and maintained the same technical and organizational team (Jaume Banaclocha and Joan Bass, from Diagonal TV). It had an average audience share of 17%, and the first episode scored the highest ratings (19.2% audience share, 4,020,000 viewers, 24 January, 2011), well above its competitors (Fórmula TV, 2011). Endemol TV produced the second season of the television series, with an additional 17 episodes, set between September 1932 (enactment of the Land Reform Act of the Second Spanish Republic) and 18 July, 1936 (start of the Spanish Civil War). Although these episodes had been scheduled to be aired in 2012, they have not been broadcast on TVE1 to date. While no statements have been made to account for this delay, given the ideological and political controversy the series involves, as well as the existing love/hate relationship toward this particular historical period in Spain, the decision seems to be related to the fact that the main public television channel is currently managed by the ruling conservative party (Partido Popular) (*El Mundo*, 2013; *El Confidencial*, 2014).

This series was planned to be broadcast in thirteen episodes on prime time Spanish television (2011), and set to re-acquaint viewers with the

themes, plots, luxurious aesthetics and familiar characters that link back to the original series. It started when Ludi (Mónica Vedia), the servant of the Márquez family (core characters of *La Señora*), arrived in Madrid. Her trip allowed viewers to follow the transition from the emerging bourgeoisie of a small provincial mining town in northern Spain during the reign of Alfonso XIII in the 1920s (the Márquez family, *La Señora*), to the Madrid-based bourgeoisie in 1930s Republican Spain (De la Torre family, *14 de abril, La República*). The narrative drive of the story was the great love story between Fernando (Félix Gómez) and Alejandra (Verónica Sánchez), which was constrained by the social difference between them.

From a semantic perspective, the representation of the Spanish society of the period was based on similar themes that were well-known to viewers of *La Señora*, including the confrontation between landowners and wage earners, the ideological polarization of society, the conflict between reactionary and forward-thinking movements, between the poor and the privileged, as well as the relegation of women to a secondary place and their fight for empowerment. The historical events narrated were also imbued with a romantic tone. The historical purpose of the narrative was again made apparent by the artistic team's effort to recreate the ambiance of the period, and also by references to historical events and figures known to the general public. The narrative was pervaded by references to the party known as "Acción Popular", to the conflict between farming laborers and landowners, to the hostile political climate that gave rise to World War I, and to historical figures such as Dolores Ibárruri, all of which endowed the narrative with historiographic value.

The main female character, Alejandra, was a variation on largely reproduced previous stereotypes, but with added post-feminist nuances. It maintained the psychological features of a strong but emotional woman, who was involved both in the labor market and in the political arena. She was a public servant, had formal education and worked in favor of progressive politics. The character was mainly dominated by emotional conflicts, albeit her professional and ideological features presented a female profile that was further involved in public life (Table 3).

Together with the character of Alejandra, other female characters helped to illustrate the idea that women were able to become empowered and more visible by using whatever little leeway they could find in a system organized around male power. These additional characters included Encarna, who was committed to the need to fight for women's rights from the political sphere, prioritized her ideological commitment over motherhood and evoked some

features of the famous Pasionaria; and Amparo (Marta Belaustegui), who ran a cabaret club, an independent, daring woman with a dark past and lesbian sexual orientation, who was linked to the political cause of the allies and their espionage service.

Women's fight to have their rights (particularly their public rights) recognized was brought to the fore, and their political behavior was presented as an achievement associated with the period of the Spanish Second Republic. This historical period is portrayed as being one of openness and qualitative change in favor of women's social advancement, which was noticeable in their attitudes within their community, both in their work environment and in their relationships. The discourse hinted that this would only be a temporary dynamic that would be abruptly halted by the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War.

Conclusions

In historical drama, claims to representativeness are shown through visual elements such as sets, costumes, *mise-en-scène*. Narrative strategies, such as the recreation of public figures and events that effectively took place in the past and are recognized by the audience, are also used for this purpose. In this way the narrative is infused with a supposedly informative purpose, a "reality effect" that seeks to make it plausible, while in practice it entails an interpretation of the timeline described.

The texts analyzed here provide an interconnected and consistent interpretation of some consecutive periods in Spain's recent history. In all cases history is presented in terms of conflict and opposition, by showing tensions from the perspective of "history from below", and sometimes fights for power among the dominant elites. Romantic plots and female characters weave a narrative structure that reflects some socio-historical aspects of Spain's recent history. The Second Republic, the Civil War and the first stages of the Francoist regime are recreated from the point of view of daily affairs and routines, in which women are given a key historical role, the truthfulness of which is questionable.

The female perspective in these dramas is hegemonic, as it is embodied in leading roles that largely point at how contemporary femininity should be, despite being contextualized in the past. The story focuses on female models that female viewers can identify and feel emotionally involved with, even though this is somewhat at the expense of historical accuracy. Hence, the

conflicts of these characters are often anachronistic, as they reflect problems that affect women nowadays, rather than women in that historical period.

In addition, they show stereotypes that are far from the ideas advocated by second-wave feminist movements. These female characters do not renounce some of the most classical dimensions of femininity (romantic love, motherhood, family focus, etc.), which also strengthen their presence in the public space. Some of the essential features in the construction of femininity (sensitivity, empathy, strength, etc.) remain and are deployed in the public sphere, as these characters reach increasingly powerful positions mainly achieved through the use of their female qualities.

To a certain extent, the key to their success and empowerment is that they possess different characteristics from those of the male characters. Their advancement in the political arena is one of their major achievements. The leading female roles, in an upwardly mobile position compared to that of the leading male roles, display attitudes and attributes such as politicization and political commitment, the defense of minority political causes, the collaboration with the political power and the professional practice of politics.

Fiction provides a revision of history by showing female viewers a more complacent view of history, adapted to present-day values; one that is more intelligible and accessible, thus universalizing the post-feminist definition of femininity and giving it a timeless quality.

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Annex

Table 1

Character: Andrea; sociodemographic characteristics

Age	Youth, Young adult
Marital status	From single to married
Education	Graduate
Employment status	None
Character's narrative features	
Narrative role	Leading role
Main features	Physical beauty Strong character, courage Emotional, sensitive Transgressor, breaking with social rules, rebellious Political commitment
Objective skills	Artistic skills: painting
Emotional skills	Loving, fraternal and maternal competencies: friendly, expressive, warm, empathetic, understanding
Goals and objectives:	Love-related, family-related and political
Type of conflict that dominates the character	Emotional: fulfilling romantic love interests Social: difficulty in making her own decisions due to her subordinate status as a woman
Relationships established with other characters (for her own benefit, for the benefit of her family)	Eminently family, love and friendly relationships
Female dimension of the character	
Gender roles assumed	Lover, wife, daughter, sister, mother
Relationship with men (inferior, equal or superior)	Inferior in her original family home, equal in the love sphere
Reverse gender roles	No
Spaces in which she is represented	Home as a private space Outside the home as a public space
Justification for her behavior	Eminently emotional

Source: own elaboration.

Table 2

Character: Victoria; sociodemographic characteristics

Age	Youth, Young adult
Marital status	From single to married
Education	Elementary
Employment status	Heiress and manager of a mining business. Owner
Character's narrative features	
Narrative role	Leading role
Main features	Physical beauty Strong character, courage Emotional, sensitive Transgressor, breaking social rules, rebellious
Objective skills	Professional competency: decision-making ability, being proactive
Emotional skills	Loving, fraternal and maternal skills: understanding, expressive, warm, empathetic
Goals and objectives:	Love-related, Professional goals are on a secondary plane
Type of conflict that dominates the character	Eminently emotional: difficulty in fulfilling her romantic love interest Social: difficulty in breaking away from some social conventions, not only because she is female, but due to her transgressive attitude
Relationships with other characters (for her own benefit, for the benefit of her family)	Eminently family- and love-oriented
Female dimension of the characters	
Gender roles assumed	Lover, daughter, sister, business woman
Relationship with men (inferior, equal or superior)	Superior in the work sphere, inferior in the domestic sphere, equal in the romantic sphere
Reverse gender roles	No
Spaces in which she is represented	Home as a private space Outside the home as a public space
Justification for her behavior	Eminently emotional

Source: own elaboration.

Table 3

Character: Alejandra; sociodemographic characteristics

Age	Young
Marital status	Single
Education	Graduate
Employment status	Civil servant, Secretary
Character's narrative features	
Narrative role	Leading role
Main features	Physical beauty Strong personality, courage Emotional, sensitive Transgressor of social rules, rebellious Politically and socially committed, courage
Objective skills	Professional competencies: able to make decisions, proactive
Emotional skills	Love and friendship competencies: friendly, expressive, easy-going, empathetic
Goals and objectives:	Love goals Professional goals have secondary importance
Type of conflict that dominate the character	Eminently emotional (difficulty to fulfil her romantic love interest)
Relationship established with other characters (to her own benefit, to the family's benefit)	Eminently family-oriented and love relationships Professional relationships have secondary importance
Character's female dimension	
Gender roles assumed	Lover, daughter, sister, worker, defender of the Republican political system
Relationship with male characters (inferior, equal or superior)	Inferior in work terms, inferior in the home environment, equal in love terms
Reverse gender roles	None
Realms where she is represented	Home as a private sphere, work as a public sphere
Justification of her behavior	Eminently emotional

Source: own elaboration.

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