Towards a new TV canon: The recent history of Spanish TV fiction created for VOD (2016-2020)

Hacia un nuevo canon televisivo: La historia reciente de la ficción española creada para el VOD (2016-2020)

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RESUMEN
Introducción. El presente trabajo analiza el estado actual de la producción de la ficción española seriada para las plataformas de video on-demand (VOD), desde una perspectiva canónica que permita establecer características y patrones comunes en los contenidos seriados de producción española de las plataformas de VOD y que ofrezca la posibilidad de esbozar una historia reciente de la ficción española creada para ser emitida en el universo *in streaming*. **Metodología.** Basado en una metodología mixta que combina el análisis cualitativo con los datos cuantitativos, en el artículo se analizan un total de 60 series creadas para las plataformas de mayor alcance en España y se establecen patrones sobre formas, estilos y cuestiones narrativas. **Resultados**. Los resultados apuntan a un interés creciente por la producción de ficción española para el VOD, motivada por la demanda de las plataformas y sus audiencias, con unas características productivas propias, que marcan la nueva forma de hacer ficción española. **Discusión y conclusiones**. A pesar de que se evidencia poca innovación y transgresión en lo que a narraciones y relatos se refiere, el trabajo pone de manifiesto un canon productivo naciente que se repite y que asienta un sello personal que beneficia la acogida de la ficción española en las plataformas de VOD.

PALABRAS CLAVE: canon; ficción; historia; televisión; producción; series; video bajo demanda.

ABSTRACT

Introduction. This paper analyzes the current state of the production of serial Spanish TV fiction for Video-on-demand platforms, from a canonical perspective that allows establishing common characteristics and patterns in serial products of Spanish TV production of VOD platforms and that offers the possibility of outlining a recent history of Spanish TV fiction created to be broadcast in the streaming universe. **Methodology.** Based on a mixed methodology that combines qualitative analysis with quantitative data, the article analyzes 60 series created for the most far-reaching platforms in Spain and establishes patterns on forms, styles, and narrative issues. **Results.** The results point to a growing interest in the production of Spanish fiction for VOD with its own production characteristics, which mark the new way of making Spanish fiction. **Discussion and Conclusions**. Although little innovation and transgression are evident in terms of narrations and stories refers, this paper reveals a nascent productive canon that is repeated and that establishes a personal stamp that benefits the reception of Spanish fiction on VOD platforms.

KEYWORDS: canon; fiction; history; TV; programming; series; Video on-demand.

CONTENIDO

CONTENT

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1. **Introduction**

Audiovisual in general and fiction, in particular, have not enjoyed the same aesthetic and/or artistic condition as other narrative manifestations, such as literature or cinema, and much less a cultural settlement of the image, such as painting or sculpture. Its massive, multicultural, cross-border, industrial, and popular character has postulated it closer to the democratization that reifies the romantic conception of art (García-Martínez, 2013), a fact that has led to an open debate about the cinematographic vocation of television fiction (García-Martínez, 2014; Nielson, 2007) and issues related to its creative and cult character.

However, the creative and technological maelstrom that serial fiction has experienced since the 1990s has had consequences not only in its scope and distribution but also in the development and quality of its narrative content (Lotz, 2007). Several authors place the beginning of this maelstrom at the end of the nineties, coinciding with what has been called Quality Tv (Thompson, 1996; Carrión, 2019) or the Third Golden Age of Television (Wayne, 2016; Cascajosa, 2009) which is nothing more than the birth of an academic trend that seeks to analyze the new construction patterns of serial fiction that, for the first time in the history of television and sponsored by creations such as *The Sopranos* (HBO, 1999), *The Wire* (HBO, 2002), or *Game of Thrones* (HBO, 2011), among many

others, mark a quality milestone in terms of television fiction production (Carrión, 2019; Costas-Fontán, 2016; García-Martínez, 2014; García-Martínez, 2013).

While the academy began to give importance to the genuine phenomenon experienced by serial fiction, the television business suffered a profound reinvention derived from the democratization of in-streaming platforms and video on-demand (hereinafter, VOD) as consumer media, changing not only the way of accessing content but also accelerating the consumption habits of viewers and audiences like never before (Dhoest & Simons, 2016; Montero, 2015; Costas-Nicolas, 2014). The expansion of television fiction, as explained by García-Martínez (2014: 2-3) derives, firstly, from the possibility of recording, which made it possible to skip the seriality established by the networks, secondly, from the democratization of DVD which broke not only continuity but also strengthened the collectible and cult spirit (Mittel, 2012), and, thirdly, the rise of the internet and its convergent possibilities with the fictional product (Tur-Viñes and Rodríguez-Ferrándiz, 2014; Jenkins, 2008).

It is precisely this media convergence that has reinvented the classic serial fiction format sponsored by the networks and their advertising fund-raising efforts (González-Oñate, 2014) and has contributed to the innovation and genuineness that occurred in the series. Television platforms, through an economic model far from advertising saturation and focused on the subscription business, have seen in fiction not only the perfect gear of their economic pyramid but also an attractive investment for those audiences considered more elitist, more exquisite, whose training or audiovisual interest were far from the programming of conventional and scheduled television grids (García-Martínez, 2013).

1.1. Background to the study of serial fiction in VOD

The international academy has devoted many works to the study of VOD platforms as business models and their technological implications (Small, 2012; Ellingsen, 2014), but new television discourses and their construction within VOD have also aroused interest (Cascajosa-Virino, 2018; Castellano and Meimaridis, 2016). There are also abundant case studies that show the importance of own production as a starting point for the consolidation of companies (Wayne & Uribe, 2021; Hidalgo-Marí; Segarra-Saavedra and Palomares-Sánchez, 2021; Hidalgo-Marí, 2020; Cascajosa-Virino, 2018; Urbano and Araujo, 2018; Akass, 2015; Ojer & Capapé, 2012; Gallardo-Camacho and Lavín, 2015; Izquierdo-Castillo, 2015; Neira, 2015; Evens, 2014).

Beyond the focus of the works, all of them agree that television fiction products born in the context of VOD inaugurate a convergent television model that takes Jenkins' (2008) concept of convergence one step further, bringing together the most successful film, television, and new technologies and Internet standards in an audiovisual product of great invoice (Heredia, 2017) and relating the convergence of television on-demand with consumer media and its access (Uman, 2018; Uribe, 2016; David, 2010). Although multimedia convergence becomes the characteristic hallmark of fiction created for VOD, it cannot be ignored that there is a process of "indigenization" (Buonanno, 1999), to which fictional products are subjected, that is, the adaptation of audiovisual products to the needs and particularities of national and/or local markets, which results in the geographical adaptation of the products. Faced with this process of indigenization, interest grows in knowing what audiovisual production in a given territory is like and how it is characterized. In a globalized scenario such as that of VOD platforms, the determination of the discourse, the story, and the format should not be removed from cultural proximity, something that "favors the desire for local and national productions over globalized productions" (Straubhaar, 2003: 76).

With the previous premises in common, the purpose of this research is to analyze the current state of the production of Spanish serial fiction for VOD from a canonical perspective, which allows establishing common characteristics and patterns in the serial products of Spanish production of the platforms of VOD and that offers the possibility of outlining a recent history of Spanish fiction created to be broadcast in the universe in streaming, that is, after all, describing the standard of Spanish serial fiction and its contribution to the new television market on-demand.

2. Objectives and methodology

The objective of this work is to describe the Spanish fiction created for VOD platforms, from a formal and content point of view. Based on this general objective, these specific objectives arise:

1. Identify the contribution of Spanish fiction to the development of VOD.

2. Describe the evolution of Spanish fiction created for VOD from its birth in 2016 to 2020.

3. Establish a comparison of the contribution of the predominant VOD platforms in Spain.

4. Identify the predominant formats and genres of the canon of production.

5. Detect narrative and story characteristics in the new production canon.

The purpose, therefore, resides in contributing to document the recent history of Spanish VOD fiction with a double perspective, which goes from the identification of the productive canon of fictions, to the analysis of the narrative content they represent.

To carry out this formal and content X-ray of the Spanish VOD fiction, we have worked with a methodology that combines qualitative analysis with quantitative support. In the first phase of the work, all the series and miniseries released by the five platforms that produce or have produced Spanish fiction for VOD have been compiled, these being: Netflix, HBO, Movistar +, Amazon Prime Video, and Orange Tv, since 2016, the year from which the first production of Spanish fiction for VOD (Netflix) dates, until December 31st, 2020. Other platforms have been ruled out either because they have not contributed to the production of Spanish fiction for the moment (as is the case of Vodafone TV) or because their catalog, as far as Spanish fiction is concerned, focuses on reruns (such as Filmin, Apple TV, Disney +, StarzPlay, or Rakuten Tv, among others).

Once the platforms with contributions to Spanish fiction have been determined, all the series and miniseries produced or co-produced by the platform have been compiled, as well as those series in which their participation is not carried out in terms of co-production, but has been responsible for the premiere of the production (a formula mainly exploited by Amazon Prime Video). Those productions that suppose continuations of previous premieres (such as, for example, the production of additional seasons for the series *Money Heist*, made by Netflix) or the acquisition of rights or reruns of series previously released by conventional television networks have been ruled out. At the narrative level, documentary series have been discarded because they are not considered purely narrative fiction, although those series whose narration corresponds to the standard of fiction have been contemplated, although the story has a documentary nature as in the case of *El Desafío: ETA* (Amazon Prime Video, 2020). After applying these criteria to extract only the productions created and born within the VOD, the sample has been made up of 60 productions, distributed as shown in table 1.

Table 1: Sample of productions by platform.

Platform	Nº Productions
Netflix	13
HBO	7
Amazon Prime Video	13
Movistar+	24
Orange TV	3
TOTAL	60

Source: own elaboration.

After applying the criteria for the sample selection, a table of collection of the different descriptive categories of analysis has been drawn up, created ad hoc. We must bear in mind that the descriptive categories in qualitative research allow classifying, conceptualizing, or encoding through a term or expression that is clear and unambiguous the content or central idea of each thematic unit" (Matus and Molina, 2006: 48), using the specific objectives of the research. In this sense, the table of descriptive categories has been established based on the following items:

1. Control categories: Platform, year of release, availability, current status (completed or renewed).

2. Format categories: Format (series and miniseries), genre (drama, comedy, dramedy, and anthology) subgenre (thriller; police; suspense drama; youth drama; teen series, horror; romantic comedy; family comedy; teen comedy), audience, number of seasons, number of chapters, and duration of the chapters.

3. Narration categories: Protagonist (male, female, or choral), setting, time, main conflict, secondary conflict1, secondary conflict2, secondary conflict3, and treatment and representation of minorities and social conflicts (feminism, gender violence, LGTBIQ+, migration, childhood, and others).

After viewing and classifying all the productions that make up the sample according to the described categories, the data has been obtained. For the classification of control and format categories, the criteria of the research team have been taken into account, which has been contrasted with the technical sheets of the analyzed series, available on IMDb[1]. As it is a mixed work that combines the quantitative with the analysis of qualitative narrative content, the results are expressed in a hybrid way, in such a way that the percentage and numerical results are used to enhance the results of the qualitative analyzes, in an attempt to dispose of the conclusions drawn from the study in the most orderly, understandable, and complete way possible.

3. Results

3.1. Beginning and evolution of Spanish fiction production in VOD (2016-2020)

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[1] Internet Movie Database. Available at: http://www.imdb.com

When analyzing the data of own fiction production by the platforms that make up the sample, it is identified that Movistar + is the one that has made the greatest contribution to the global offer, with 40% of the total registered productions (24 cases). It is followed by Amazon Prime Video and Netflix, both responsible for 21.6% of the total (13 cases) respectively. HBO's contribution represents 11.6% of the total and Orange TV's only contributes 5% of the total with 3 productions. However, these initial descriptive data must be interpreted retrospectively and evolvingly to detect determining aspects in the platforms' Spanish fiction production strategy. In this sense, if one looks at the information collected in chart 1, it can be seen that Netflix is the platform that has championed the commitment to the production of Spanish series, since 2016, after the premiere of *Four Seasons in Havana*, although it should be taken into account that this initial product is, in reality, a co-production between Spain, Cuba, and Germany and that Netflix used it as a tester in the broadcast of fiction of its own production in Spain.

Chart 1: Annual evolution of productions by the chain.
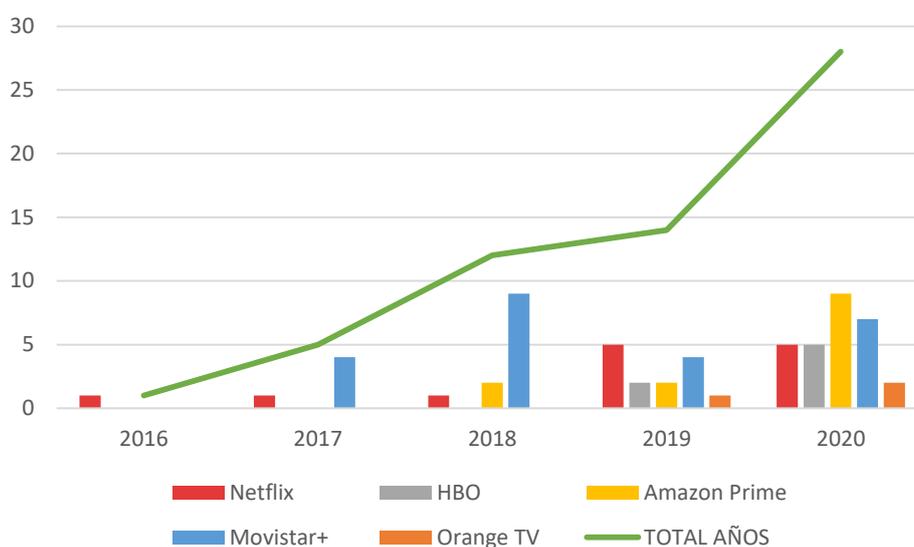
Source: own elaboration.

Given the prevailing demand for Spanish fiction on the part of the platforms and the boom that fiction was experiencing in generalist networks, 2017 was a decisive year, considering it the starting gun for Spanish fiction created for VOD. Thus, while Netflix only released one title, Movistar+ championed its own production strategy with the premiere of 4 series. In quantitative terms, 2017 was a timid year as far as own fiction is concerned, although the scope and success of the premiered programs allow us to justify the importance of this year in global evolution. Thus, Netflix premiered *Las chicas del cable*, a fiction set in the past, which was released in the company's global catalog that same year and whose high success rates contributed to the production of four more seasons (the last one, released in 2020 on the same platform). Movistar+, for its part, combined different formats and genres with the premiere of *Conquistadores: Adventum*, a historical drama, or *La Zona*, a police drama, together with the successful premiere of *Velvet Colección*, a sequel to the original series *Velvet*, broadcast in its entirety on Antena3, and the premiere of the first Spanish comedy for VOD, *Vergüenza*.

2018 was characterized by introducing in the market of self-produced fiction the bet of Amazon Prime Video that premiered with the series *Pequeñas coincidencias*, co-produced with Atresmedia Studios. This series, which premiered on the platform in December 2017 and on open TV on Antena

3 in September of the following year, paved the way not only to Spanish fiction production by Amazon Prime Video but also to a series of alliances business based on co-production that was repeated in subsequent years. Along with the premiere of Amazon Prime Video, Netflix premiered a single Spanish fiction production, *Elite*, a groundbreaking teen series produced by Zeta Producciones that was one of the platform's greatest successes in terms of its own fiction.

Movistar+ quantitatively championed the production of its own fiction, with a total of 9 premieres in 2018, among which *Arde Madrid* stood out, the black and white narration of the life of Ava Gardner; the youth drama *SKAM España*, an adaptation of the Norwegian series *SKAM*, produced with Zepellin TV; or the historical thriller *La peste*, which, according to the company itself, was the best fiction premiere in terms of the audience on the platform[2].

As own fiction titles were released on the platforms, such products were well received and their possibility of contributing to the positioning of the platform in Spain was evidenced. In 2019, HBO entered the Spanish fiction production market with two innovative premieres: the first gastronomic romantic comedy *Foodie Love* and the premiere of the documentary miniseries *El Pionero*, which narrates the life of Jesús Gil. Although indeed, the Spanish premieres of HBO did not have the same scope as the previous productions of the competition, they marked innovation as a continuation axis of their own production and pointed out the transgressive and creative nature of the HBO platform, which had already demonstrated this genuineness in the past, with non-Spanish productions such as *The Sopranos* (1999), *A dos metros bajo tierra* (2001), or *The Wire* (2002). Also in 2019, the first premiere of Orange TV's own fiction, *Caminantes*, was registered, a youth horror drama that marked the late but constant start of the chain's own production.

While HBO and Orange TV began timidly in the production of Spanish fiction, Netflix continued its firm commitment with the premiere of five fictions: two suspense and crime dramas such as *Alta mar* and *Hache*, the comedy *El vecino*, and the miniseries *Criminal: España* and *Días de navidad*. Amazon Prime Video maintained its constant of two annual self-produced premieres, with the historical drama *Inés del alma mía* and the co-production of the comedy *El pueblo*, in collaboration with Mediaset España, which subsequently released it, replicating the strategy applied with Atresmedia Studios a year before with the production of *Pequeñas coincidencias*. Movistar+, for its part, released four titles that combine the police drama (*Hierro*), the erotic thriller (*Instinto*), and the dramedy (*Vida perfecta*), with the biographical drama in miniseries format *En el corredor de la muerte*, which was acclaimed by critics and confirmed the productive power of the platform[3].

2020 confirmed the continued interest of platforms in terms of their own production and produced 28 Spanish fiction premieres, this volume of premieres representing almost half (46.6%) of all Spanish productions since the beginning of VOD. In this period, Amazon Prime Video was the platform that championed the commitment to its own production with a total of 9 fiction premieres, combining historical dramas such as El Cid with social dramas in a miniseries format, as represented by *El Desafío: ETA* or police thrillers among which *Caronte* and *Desaparecidos: La serie*, among others, stand out. Movistar+ premiered seven productions, among which romantic dramas such as *El embarcadero*, historical settings both in dramatic format (*Dime quién soy*) and in the form of comedy (*Justo antes de Cristo*), or thrillers such as *La Unidad* or *Antidisturbios*, both with police cut, stand out.

Netflix, for its part, premiered five self-produced fictions that allowed us to glimpse a direct commitment to the dramatic thriller, with productions such as *Alguien tiene que morir, El desorden que dejas, Los favoritos de Midas*, or *White Lines*, although the premiere of the dramedy *Valeria*

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stands out. HBO, which had been more suspicious of Spanish-produced fiction in previous years, closed 2020 with five dramatic productions both of a historical nature, with the success of the adaptation of the novel *Patria*, or dramatic thrillers such as *30 monedas*, combining these productions with anthological miniseries such as *Escenario 0* or *En casa*, or the comedy *Por H o por B*. Only two productions of their own fiction were released by Orange TV in that year, although, taking into account that the platform premiered in Spanish production the previous year, it increased the volume of releases with two drama-style crime series: *The Head* and *Kosta*, both in collaboration with Mediapro Studios.

3.2. Formats and predominant genres of the production fee

The fiction premieres of the analyzed platforms are characterized by responding to the standard of the "series" format, something logical if one takes into account that it is the fiction television format itself. Thus, of the total fiction products released from 2016 to the end of 2020, 78.6% (47 cases) corresponded to the series format while 21.4% (13 cases) adopted the "miniseries" format, a typology that, a priori, seems to fit with the idiosyncrasy of VOD television platforms (see table 2). Other formats, such as serials, TV movies, or comic strips, do not obtain representation in terms of their own production, although there are examples of foreign original productions.

Table 2: Distribution of formats by platforms.

	Series	*Miniseries*
Netflix	8	5
HBO	4	3
Amazon Prime Video	9	4
Movistar+	23	1
Orange TV	3	0
TOTAL	47	13

Source: own elaboration.

Regarding the predominant genres, the evident commitment to drama stands out, which represents 71.6% of the total of own productions collected and, in a residual way, 4 dramedies and an anthology are registered. Comedy is recorded in 12 of the analyzed productions (20%) of the total, focusing its presence on the platforms HBO (28% of its productions), Movistar+ (25% of its productions), and on Amazon Prime Video (30% of its productions), being residual in the Netflix production, which only includes the comedy of *El Vecino* and totally absent in the limited production of Orange TV, whose complete offer corresponds to the drama (see chart 2). The rise of dramedy in general production for conventional television does not correspond to the production canon of the platforms analyzed, since it is only represented in 6.6% of the cases. Fiction with a documentary story only appears on one occasion, after having eliminated the documentary series from the analysis sample and having only kept fiction of documentary genre, in this case, close to the biopic (*El pionero*, HBO-2019).

Chart 2: Predominant genres according to platforms.
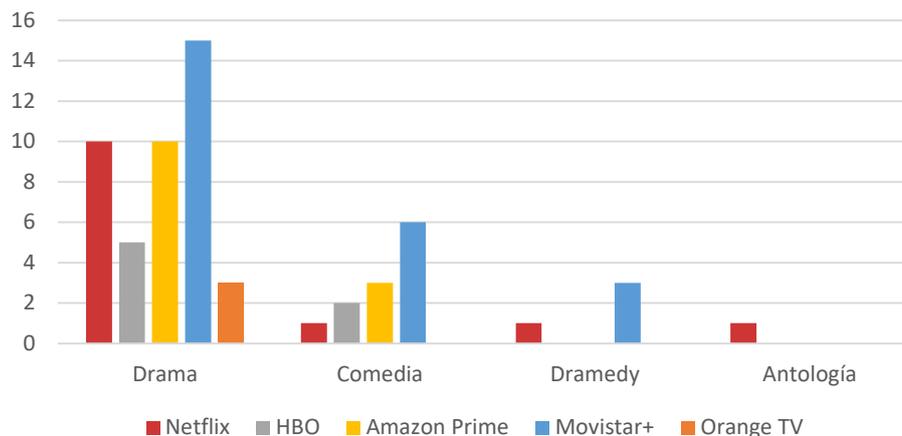
Source: own elaboration.

Regarding the formal production canon, it is identified that, in general terms, the average number of seasons that give life to fictions is 1.32, that is, there is a trend towards short series (1 or 2 seasons), compared to the major productions of the platforms that hosted many more seasons (*House of Cards*, Netflix-2013, with 6 seasons; *Orange Is the New Black*, Netflix-2013 with 7 seasons, or the mythical *Game of Thrones*, HBO-2011, with 8 seasons). Movistar+ is the platform with the longest average duration of series, although the longest example of the sample resides in the production of *Las chicas del cable* (Netflix, 2017) with five seasons, something unusual in the fiction of self-produced VOD, only replicated by the teen series *SKAM España* (Movistar+, 2018).

The average number of episodes per season is 9.46, indicating the single-season or short seasons, something that is related to the commitment to the miniseries format as a characteristic element of VOD and that had already been marking the way of doing it on general television, with seasons of 8 or 10 chapters on average and single-season miniseries with 4 or 6 chapters on average. However, the case of Amazon Prime Video should be highlighted in terms of the lasting of the seasons, with two productions of 2019 with 13 episodes in duration (*El pueblo* and *Inés del alma mía*). As far as miniseries are concerned, the tendency is to keep 4-6 chapters in length, although shorter examples are detected, such as the 3-episode dramedy *Días de Navidad* (Netflix, 2019).

The duration of the chapters responds to the standard of 45 minutes, specifically with an average of 43 minutes per chapter, with notable differences between series with much longer chapters, such as *Four Seasons in Havana* (Netflix, 2016) with 90 minutes of duration, or closer to the short format as seen in the 25-minute chapters of *Relatos Con-fi-na-dos* (Amazon Prime Video, 2020).

3.3. Narrative issues of the new production canon

As far as narration is concerned, the content of Spanish fiction productions is characterized by responding to the customary canon that has identified Spanish fiction from practically its origins on television.

The protagonism remains choral in 78.3% of the cases (47 productions) although a tentative rise in female protagonists is perceived (10% of the total, with 6 productions), as confirmed by series such

as *Las chicas del cable* (Netflix, 2017), which recounts the struggle for equality in Spain at the beginning of the 20th century, *Inés del alma mía* (Amazon Prime Video, 2019), a literary adaptation about the life of a woman arriving in Chile in the 16th century; *Madres* (Amazon Prime Video, 2020) a story about the moral debates and conflicts experienced by the main mothers, or *Arde Madrid* (Movistar+, 2018) that narrates the life of actress Ava Gardner. In this sense, it is remarkable how female protagonists acquire greater relevance when dealing with fictions framed in the past, in an attempt to reflect the social differences historically experienced by women. Some of the productions motivate stories with a female protagonist that, as they unfold, equate the main roles with men, as in *Valeria* (Netflix, 2020) or *El desorden que dejas* (Netflix, 2020). Regarding the exclusively male protagonist, it is not relevant (11.6% represented by 7 productions) although there are examples set in the past such as *Conquistadores: Adventum* (Movistar+, 2017) or *El Cid* (Amazon Prime Video, 2019) or others that, as in the case of the female, inaugurate the story with a clear male protagonist that, as the series progresses, leads to choral protagonism (*Los favoritos de Midas*, Netfix-2020 or *En el corredor de la muerte*, Movistar+ -2019, for example).

The setting prevails in the present (76.6% of the sample with 46 productions), supporting the folkloric story to which Spanish fiction has clung in general terms since its origins. However, there is an evident trend towards the production of narratives set in the past (23.3% of the sample with 14 productions). This phenomenon is a replica of a trend that was also seen in the production of fiction for general television in recent years (Hidalgo-Marí, 2017) and combines both settings in the distant past with a historical purpose (*Inés del alma mía*, 2019; *El Cid*, 2020, or *La tempelanza*, 2020, all of them from Amazon Prime Video) or *La peste* (Movistar+, 2018), as in recent past that has much more nostalgic and pedagogical objectives such as *Las chicas del cable* (Netflix, 2017) or *Alta mar* (Netflix, 2019), *Patria* (HBO, 2020), or *El desafío:* ETA (Amazon Prime Video, 2020).

If one attends to the predominant conflicts in the stories, the romantic problems, and the police or investigative conflicts stand out, which occupy the total of dramatic productions (71.6% with 43 productions).

Comedy, for its part, is committed to family and work conflict, as well as the standard of romantic comedy, as can be seen in examples such as *Pequeñas coincidencias* (Amazon Prime Video, 2018), *Vergüenza* (Movistar+, 2017), or Nasdrovia (Movistar+, 2020). In both drama and comedy, the essential conflict of the story replicates the narrative model that has prevailed in conventional fiction on general television, although some transgressive bets recreate much more complex political conflicts, as can be seen in dramas such as *Caronte* (Amazon Prime Video, 2020), *La Unidad* (Movistar+, 2020), or *Kosta* (Orange Tv, 2020) or dramedies with narratives and complex reflections, close to the psychological thriller, as seen, for example, in *El embarcadero* (Movistar+, 2020).

Special mention should be made of the stories born in the heat of the pandemic that struck in 2020 worldwide, enhancing the social character of television fiction to reflect the society that supports it. This is demonstrated by examples such as *En casa* (HBO, 2020) or *Relatos Con-fi-na-dos* (Amazon Prime Video, 2020) that narrate everyday situations and experiences lived within the confinement derived from the health crisis.

Regarding the treatment and representation of real problems, the Spanish fiction produced for VOD remains shy in the face of new social reflections, such as gender violence, feminism, class differences, or the treatment of the LGTBI collective. These problems assume a fleeting presence within the stories and are not usually the main narrative thread of fictions, in the face of the rise of conflicts such as corruption and scams (*Los favoritos de Midas*, Netflix-2020), drug trafficking (*Hache*, Netflix-2019; *Gigantes*, Movistar+, -2019), terrorism (*La Unidad*, Movistar+, 2020), or historical examples such as *Patria*, HBO-2020), or police and detective investigations (*Hierro*,

Movistar + -2019; *Desaparecidos: La serie*, Amazon Prime Video-2020, or *The Head*, Orange TV-2020). The few teen series, meanwhile, treat LGTBI narratives, class differences, bullying, or gender violence in a tangential way, although their stories continue to focus on generational conflict and the exaltation of sexuality as found in *Elite* (Netflix, 2018) or the adaptation of *SKAM España* (Movistar+, 2018). Although in general terms, the narrative conflict continues to divert social problems for the sake of stereotyping and social conventionalism, it is necessary to highlight the groundbreaking bet of SKAM *España* in this sense, giving an obvious role in each season to issues such as gender violence, the treatment of the LGTBIQ+ collective, or Islamophobia.

4. Discussion and conclusions

The recent history of fiction created and thought for VOD in Spain yields a series of conclusions, for the moment, short in time but interesting when it comes to establishing a new way of producing Spanish fiction.

If one looks at the contribution of Spanish fiction to the development of VOD, it is observed that there is an evident trend that is committed to the development of its own fiction created, thought, and produced for VOD. While, in the first years of this study, the number of exclusive productions for VOD was residual and not very relevant, as the years of this short history progress, the platforms increase their interest in local production. Furthermore, the fact that each year the number of titles increases, but also the number of platforms that begin the production of Spanish fiction (as is the case of HBO in 2018 or the productive premiere of Orange TV in 2019) supposes a clear indicator of interest in premiering Spanish fiction productions on the VOD stage.

Although it is true that Netflix is the first platform to launch into the original production of Spanish fiction and has generated worldwide success products such as the teen series *Elite*, the commitment of Movistar+ is relevant by positioning itself as the platform with the most contribution to the development of the Spanish fiction for VOD, something that makes sense if one takes into account not only the company's national origin, but also its trajectory in Spanish audiovisual development, both with serial productions such as cinema and other television products.

Regarding the production standard, two differentiated facts are evident: first, in terms of formats, a fiction created for VOD moves away from the way of making conventional television fiction, by betting on shorter duration, a fact that is directly opposed to the essence of general television fiction: seriality. Productions for VOD are, in general terms, shorter and have fewer seasons and chapters than conventional television productions, which lengthened seasons by exhausting all possible narrative resources with a clear purpose: the maintenance of audiences. Now, in the context of the new television industry, on-demand television, in which the audience is not measured in share but in the number of subscribers, the longevity of fictional products is no longer so determining, while innovation, productive capacity, and the maintenance of an attractive and diverse offer for all audiences are.

The predominant narratives remain dramas set in the present. The fact that the dramatic genre is the predominant one confirms the conclusions of previous works, such as those of Hidalgo (2020: 129) when verifying "the globality of drama compared to the humorous particularity of comedy, which is more difficult to penetrate in a globalized market, with significant cultural differences between countries". That is, the ease of internationalizing a dramatic genre product such as, for example, *Elite* (Netflix, 2018) or productions exported to the Ibero-American market by Movistar+ (*Velvet Colección*, 2017; *La zona*, 2017, or *La peste*, 2018).

Despite the prevalence of drama based on the present, it has been shown that series set in the past acquire a notable interest in the production of Spanish fiction for VOD. This fact replicates a trend that was already detected in the fiction production canon for general television, especially from the

beginning of the 21st century. Fictions such as *Isabel* (TVE, 2011-2014), *Águila Roja* (TVE, 2009-2016), *Hispania, la leyenda* (Antena 3, 2010-2012), or other adaptations such as *El tiempo entre costuras* (Antena 3, 2013-2014), *Velvet* (Antena 3, 2014-2016), *Tiempos de guerra* (Antena 3, 2017), or serials such as *Amar en tiempos revueltos* (TVE, 2005-2012), *Bandolera* (Antena 3, 2011-2013), *El secreto del Puente Viejo* (Antena 3, 2011-2020), including the representation of a recent past in *Cuéntame como pasa* (TVE, 2001), positioned fiction set in the past at the forefront of general television in the last years prior to the emergence of VOD.

On the other hand, it has been shown that the Spanish fiction created for VOD continues to bet on the choral role, something logical when relating it to the heterogeneous audience to which the offer of the platforms is directed and that, furthermore, it is directly related to export intentions. However, a significant fact is found in the stories in which there is a female or male role and it is the tendency to dilute it for the sake of a choral role as the story progresses. This issue could be a technique to link an initial target audience, but minimize the associative impact that could be generated.

As far as the narratives are concerned, it is observed that the new production canon flees from the implications and social issues and advocates for entertainment close to the thriller. Although some products indeed deal with social issues and real problems in a transversal way, the data show that the essential narrative of Spanish VOD fiction navigates between romantic and family customs and suspense, mystery, corruption, or investigation, but without betting on a critical story that echoes latent social problems.

This fact is, perhaps, the most worrying conclusion of the present work: While the academy at the international level debates on the verification of the Third Golden Age of Television, derived from canonical fiction productions considered practically "cult" series, an audience that is increasingly trained and demanding in terms of audiovisual culture, the story continues to feed on the folkloric stories that have characterized conventional television fiction. Doesn't VOD promote a scenario of greater creative, transgressive, and innovative freedom, thanks to the direct independence of conventional television audiences? Faced with increasingly exquisite productions at a technical level, directly nourished by the production standards of cinema, we find stories that make little progress in terms of the construction of social narratives. It seems that in a market focused on subscription, Spanish fiction, as far as the chains' own production is concerned, is still far from becoming an international export benchmark. A phenomenon that, however, can be seen in the international success of series such as *Money Heist* (Atresmedia, Netflix, 2017), considered the most-watched non-English-speaking series in the history of Netflix, which represent a historical milestone as far as the exploitation of Spanish fiction is concerned.

In any case, and although we have pointed out certain limitations detected in the Spanish production for VOD, it is necessary to highlight the unstoppable growth of own productions, something that shows not only the growing offer of the analyzed platforms but also the commitment of other platforms, outside the sample and the period studied, to the production of their own fiction, such as Filmin, Disney+, or Vodafone Tv.

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