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Intertextuality and police television dramas in Spain (1990-2010). The literary shift to metatelevision and recurrence of the female victim as motif

Abstract

Analysis of intertextuality in Spanish police dramas between 1990-2010 shows that one of the repeated leitmotifs, both on television and on new audio-visual platforms, is the female victim, which recurs both thematically and mythically. This study also confirms the rise of complex narrative (Mittell, 2015) through the development of references to metatextuality and self-referentiality, with a substantial difference between the first and second decades analysed. There are references not only to police dramas but also to the values of the production process, whether ideological or generic, in line with the pleasure of recognition and the *construction* of the model viewer (Eco, 1986).

Keywords

Intertextuality, self-referentiality, television series, police dramas, thematic and mythical recurrence, female victim.

1. The police drama on Spanish television 1990-2010: Context of production and reception

The production of television fiction in the period under review was primarily marked by the end of RTVE's broadcasting monopoly and the consequent deregulation. Thanks to the Private Television Act of 1988, the private channels Antena3 and Tele5 began broadcasting in 1989. The twenty years covered in this analysis reveal a shift in the nature of the police drama, with literary references and adaptations moving towards modernisation and foreign influences.

The two decades studied in this paper are very different. The decade 1990-2000 began with the ending of RTVE's monopoly and the rise of commercial broadcasting, continuing through to the turn of the century and the millennium. Besides productions centred on the Spanish Transition, the decade was characterised by literary influences and adaptations. The decade 2000-2010 then saw a boom in the Spanish police drama, which was modernised and drew inspiration from foreign productions. One of the productions that stand out among those with foreign influences is *Brigada Central* (TVE1, 1989-1992), starring Imanol Arias, which clearly took its cue from Steven Bochco's series *Hill Street Blues* (NBC, 1981-1987). Literary adaptations of the genre are found in *Pepe Carvalho* (Tele5, 1999-2000), *Alta tensión* (La2, 1993), *Pájaro en una tormenta* (TVE1, 1990), *Camino de Santiago* (Antena3, 1999) and *Petra Delicado* (Tele5, 1999). The decade 2000-2010 marked the consolidation of forensic series, clearly inspired by *Crime Scene Investigation (CSI)* (CBS, 2000-2015). These included *Génesis*, *En la mente del asesino* (Cuatro, 2006-2007) and *RIS Científica* (Tele5, 2007), adapted from the Italian *RIS Delitti imperfetti* (Canale 5, 2005-2009). Given the importance of *CSI* as a hypotext

(Genette, 1982, pp. 10–15) for several productions, an examination was undertaken of the characteristics of Jerry Bruckheimer’s series that influenced some of the Spanish dramas. This second decade consolidated the police genre in Spain, with hits including *El comisario* (Tele5, 1999–2009), *Policías. En el corazón de la calle* (Antena3, 2000–2003) and *Los hombres de Paco* (Antena3, 2005–2010), reaching audience shares of 24.5%, 22% and 19% respectively. Between 2005 and 2010, more than 50% of shows of the entire period were aired, the most notable being *Desaparecida* (TVE1, 2007–2008) and standalone miniseries based on real events.

At first, most of the crime drama productions in the period analysed were shot on location in Madrid, where most Spanish production companies were located, and the genre was based on its urban aspects, as studied by Colmeiro (2014). Limited resources at the beginning meant that dramatic action scenes would only gradually appear in the series over time, in particular at the later stage. Later shows, by contrast, explore the “landscape” aspects, with a corresponding territorial decentralisation, thanks to the influence of the Nordic-noir genre. This is seen in titles as *El príncipe* (Tele5, 2014–2016), *Mar de plástico* (Antena3, 2015–2016), *Farinha* (Antena3, 2018) and *Vivir sin permiso* (Tele5, 2018), in which the landscapes of Ceuta, the greenhouses of Almeria and the Galician coastline replace the Spanish capital as locations for police action.

2. Objectives and central concepts of the investigation

The purpose of this research is to analyse to what extent police dramas on Spanish mainstream channels used intertextual references and thematic and mythical recurrence, and how and to what end they did so. It can be hypothesised that these dramas evolved in terms of their references, which become progressively self-referential and metatelevisual and less literary and erudite, while maintaining mythical recurrence.

Television studies (Creeber, 2001, pp. 6, 27) has incorporated intertextuality as an area of interest, and this is a key concept in this research. Analysis of the intertextual, thematic and mythical references allows researchers to verify the changes that have taken place in Spanish television fiction and to correlate them local and international shows. The field of intertextuality has well-defined origins, with a methodology and classic foundations in Lévi-Strauss (1969), Bakhtin (1979), Genette (1972, 1982), Kristeva (1996), Calabrese (1984, 1989), Eco (1984) and Fiske (1987). As regards the study of myth, which is another important concept in this paper, Wright (1975) updates the concept of mythology with respect to the Western. Fairclough (1992) studies intertextuality in relation to discourse analysis, while Collins (1995) reflects on the self-referentiality of popular culture as an “excessive” element linking technology to changes brought about in the media. Spiegel (1992) held that self-referentiality would disappear once the television medium acquired its own language (in the late 1950s), given that it was initially indebted to literature and other sources. Indeed, one of the aims of this research is to trace the evolution of such intertextual references.

Intertextuality in fiction continues to be a field of interest in television research. It should be framed as a contemporary story split into multiple screens that are interrelated. Given that television provides fertile ground for intertextual references, as an exponent of popular culture, high-brow culture, or a combination of the two, along with ‘Peak TV’ (Landgraff in Littleton, 2016), or ‘complex TV’ (Mittell, 2015), a number of researchers have paid attention to the phenomenon, including Eco (1984), Vilches (1984), Lacalle (1986), Olson Scott (1987, 1990), Peñuela (2001), Imbert (2003), Carlón (2005, 2006), Zavala (2003, 2010) and Tous-Rovirosa (2008). Mittell (2015, p. 7) associates the growth in intertextual references with the digital age.

3. Previous studies

Contemporary studies analyse intertextuality as a voice to be defined (Vilches, 2017). Some focus on television serial fiction: *The Good Wife* (Harriss, 2017), *Galavant* (Gionco, 2018), *Friends* and their “after lives” (Leppert, 2018), *Frankenstein* on quality TV (López, 2016), while others

undertake textual analyses of the past in the present through revivals (Loock, 2018). One “particularly intertextual” series is *Community*, which Hanna and Tansley (2014) have analysed in metatextual terms. The evolution of television has led to a growing academic interest in intertextuality, which has been extended to areas close to television fiction. These include video games (Consalvo, 2003), animation (Gray, 2006), post-feminism (Schwan, 2016; Cole Miller, 2017), intertextuality in film and television advertising (Jiménez & García, 2012), in the analysis of soap operas (Jonas, 2012) or in film and television adaptations (De Felipe & Gómez, 2008; Gómez, 2012) as well as influences (Bloom, 1991; Paz Gago, 2004; Stam, 2000, 2005), among much else. This is relevant to television analysis, as confirmed by academics from different fields of television fiction (Feuer, 2005; Geraghty, 2005; Rueda Laffond & Chicharro, 2006; Pujadas, 2011; Klinger, 2018).

Our point of departure is acceptance of a collective media and cultural imaginary formed by both “usual topics” (Tomaševskij, 1982, p. 41) and new topics. The latter are updated in accordance with the prevailing hypothesis (Navarro, 1914) and the “horizon of expectations” (Jauss, 1977), constituting a typology of references closely linked to the different reading levels of a text (Eco, 1991, pp. 165–185). Previously (Tous-Rovirosa, 2008) I have analysed intertextual references in television by differentiating between diachronic analysis (the relation with the genre, plot, and mandatory, optional and independent regularities, according to Ryan, 1979) and synchronic analysis (thematic recurrence and updating of myth) based on identifying and studying invariants (Calabrese, 1989; Villanueva, 1991). The main objective of that research was to identify and differentiate themes that are reiterated in cultural production and that can be analysed diachronically and then synchronously, following the diachronic and comparative perspective of Ginzburg (1989) and Nagy (2006), in addition to the comparative mythology of Dumézil (1973). The diachronic aspect examines the thematic and generic cultural precedents of the motif; the synchronic aspect addresses the updating of myth in communication. By applying the classical structuralist–semiotic divisions of the linguistic sign (Barthes, Saussure) to the object of this study, it can be observed that the updating of myth corresponds to the plane of the content (the signified), while the references (mere repetition of themes) correspond to the plane of expression (signifier) and can perform ironic, informative and recognition functions for the viewer.

4. Methodology

The references in the selected sample were diachronically and synchronically analysed (Ginzburg, 1998; Nagy, 2006). The categories of intertextuality were established according to whether the references were regularities (Ryan, 1979) demanded by the genre (mandatory); generic regularities that are not mandatory (optional) or those unrelated to the genre and that add difference and novelty (independent). The categorisation also distinguishes between mythical and thematic recurrence and references, which stems from the consideration of myth as recurrences that achieve true communication and act as the narrative’s driving force. In short, the methodology identifies the mythical recurrence that drives a large part of contemporary crime drama production. Thematic recurrence consists of repetition of the motif. It belongs to the plane of content (signified) and is characterized by a mythical halo, the reason for its survival in the cultural tradition. Thematic recurrences, unlike references, involve the updating and re-creation of a theme. Thematic recurrence is a creative process by which the theme reappears through a new construction. According to Eco (1994), “creation comes only from disjointability.” At the synchronic level, myth is updated through its formal part and the sense of the myth.

References are subject to mere reiteration on the plane of expression (signifier) and can serve various functions (ironic, satirical, parodic, informative, and so forth). As shown below, the television references are classified according to their thematic origin, according to whether they belong to –or are external to– television (cultural, social, religious references).

The references (plane of the signifier) include reiteration, quotation, timely allusion, cliché, stereotype, and straight copy. They make no creative contribution to the serial text, serving instead to allude to the viewer’s universe in order to appeal to the pleasure of recognition. The sample comprised 36 police dramas (series, serials, TV-movies and mini-series) aired in Spain on generalist channels between 1990 and 2010 inclusive.

In order to draw a distinction between diachronic and synchronic analyses, a difference was made between thematic and mythical recurrence (A) and references (B). The references were classified according to the level of self-referentiality when the analysed series includes references to the same production (self-referential), to the same genre (police) or to television in general. Given the engulfing nature and importance of the television medium, metatelevision references were taken as those referring to the same series, to other series, to other programmes (news, music, sports, video games), to films, to comics, and to the Internet. This conception of metatelevision references was adopted with an eye to programming schedules, as the analysed period (1990–2010) predates the complexity of the current situation (Mittell, 2015; Buonanno, 2017). The television story can no longer be considered mere content in a schedule, due to the new streaming platforms or over-the-top TV such as Netflix, HBO, Amazon, and the emergence of the Internet and social media as a field of fiction, herein termed “ambient fiction” in allusion to the “ambient journalism” of Hermida, 2010, which here is extended to include fiction.

5. Results

A. Mythical and thematic recurrence

1. Thematic recurrence
1.1. Crime Fiction <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Abduction b. The curious incident c. Miss Marple d. The gifted child e. The autistic child f. Street cop g. Female forensic scientist h. Rogue cops i. Avenging cops j. Agents from lowly backgrounds
1.2. Mandatory thematic recurrences
1.3. Optional thematic recurrences <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. The agent’s personal relationships b. Adultery c. Love triangles d. Unresolved sexual tension e. Ambition
1.4. Independent regularities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Eros and Thanatos b. Telemachy c. <i>Femme fatale</i> d. Goddess/prostitute duality
2. Mythical recurrence
2.1. The sacrificial princess
2.2. Variants (Amber Alert) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Kidnapping of girls by men b. Kidnapping (others)

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> c. Rape of women and girls d. Rape of police officers e. Women persecuted by men
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B. Television References

1.1. Television references to the police genre a. <i>CSI</i>
1.2. Film references
1.3. Music references
1.4. Advertising references
1.5. References to news items
1.6. References to media and technology
1.7. References to animation
1.8. Visual clichés
1.9. Spaces

C. Cultural references

1.1. Literary references
1.2. Pictorial references
1.3. Erudite references

D. Social references

E. Religious references

The hypothesis was corroborated. Metatelevision references feature more abundantly than literary, cultural or erudite references. The evolution is relevant, since literary references gave way to the metatelevision, self-referential sphere, which steadily increased in the two decades under study, while thematic and mythical recurrence remained.

This study highlights the omnipresence of the police drama references, both in metatelevision references and in thematic recurrence. The productions analysed contain mentions that are limited to the plane of expression (signifier) and contribute to constructing the model viewer. They also feature contributions that are situated on the plane of content (signified), re-creating themes with a cultural and generic basis. Television seriality, as shown here, is the result of generic and intertextual combinations. In this sense, Wolf (1984, p. 190) highlights intertextuality as a property of the genre.

5.1. Thematic recurrence (A)

5.1.1. Crime fiction (optional)

Abundant recurrence to crime fiction in the analysed sample comes as no surprise. We find that only one typology of lower passions is a mandatory regularity, while the optional and independent regularities are more numerous. Listed below are the cases in which thematic recurrence alludes to the same crime fiction genre but does not constitute mandatory regularities.

a. Abduction

In several of the series analysed, the investigator solves the case thanks to a brilliant revelation, achieved by tying up loose ends while relaxing or doing something other than police work. This invariant, a trait of the most famous private detective Sherlock Holmes,

concerns abduction as a method of scientific reasoning. It is also found in medical drama series structured along the lines of the crime drama (*House M.D.*, Fox, 2004–2012). *Cuenta atrás* draws on this resource to highlight the genius of Corso (Dani Martín), who is also characterised as a street cop. *RIS* and *Génesis* innovate the resource: in *RIS*, Ventura (José Coronado), while repeatedly going over pieces of the case in his mind (in the form of a video clip), suddenly has a brainwave or finds the clue to solving the case. Corso in *Cuenta atrás* and Mateo (Pep Munné) in *Génesis* are seen contemplating different scenes of the case through a travelling shot. The latter usually listens to music while mulling over cases¹.

This is an optional generic intertextual recurrence of the police drama, related to abduction as a process of scientific reasoning. According to Peirce, a person can do this because there is “some inward light tending to make his guesses” (cited in Sebeok & Umiker, 1979, p. 15). Besides calling it the “originary argument,” Peirce states that abduction has instinctive and emotional aspects not found in reasoning through deduction and induction. This is the subtext that perfectly accompanies the aforementioned characters (Corso, Ventura, Munné) when they solve cases: “Hypothesis substitutes, for a complicated tangle of predicates attached to one subject, a single conception. Now, there is a *peculiar sensation* belonging to the act of thinking that each of these predicates inheres in the subject” (Peirce, *Collected Papers*, 2.643). Sebeok and Umiker (1979, p. 17) add: “Hence the pronouncement of a certain confidence and conviction of correctness which Peirce makes in relation to his detective work.” Abduction, also studied by Eco and Sebeok (1989), is crucial in linking forensic research. It should be noted that this is an optional regularity of the police genre, but it is mandatory in the productions of Sherlock Holmes.

b. The curious incident

In *Desaparecida*, as in *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* (Mark Haddon, 2003) and its hypotext *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (Arthur Conan Doyle, 1902), one of the key clues comes from absence: the dog does not bark when it should. In the TVE series, Cristina (Marina Salas), Patricia’s cousin, has supposedly been kidnapped, but no food or fecal matter are found at the place of the abduction. With the “the judicious exercise of speculation as ‘the scientific use of imagination’”², the crime is solved through the absence of evidence. “One must be willing to imagine what happened and act upon such surmise, and this takes one ‘into the region where we balance probabilities and choose the most likely’” (*The Hound of the Baskervilles*) (Sebeok & Umiker, 1979, p. 28).

c. Miss Marple

The hero of *Los misterios de Laura* is a detective and mother who bears a striking resemblance to Agatha Christie’s sagacious Miss Marple, created in 1930 (*The Murder at the Vicarage*). The outward innocence and naivety of these two investigators contrasts with the surprisingly astute manner in which they solve their cases. Their characterisation as absent-minded, sensitive and kindly women (an elderly lady and a mother of twin children respectively), at odds with a professional side usually attributed to men, produces a surprising effect. Such traits may have a role in helping these detectives solve cases, since their characterisation can prompt suspects to lower their guard.

d. The gifted child

In *Hermanos y detectives*, the gifted child adds a dose of comedy to the series (Lorenzo, the gifted boy, is smarter than his older brother, the chief inspector of police) and provides an educational purpose he shares with other gifted characters or those with a proficient knowledge of science so often found in American crime series (Tous-Rovirosa, 2013, pp. 14–30). In stark contrast to the usual stereotype in the fictions analysed, the main character of

¹ “Ojos sin vida,” 1.4. *Génesis. En la mente del asesino*.

² Sebeok and Umiker (1979) highlight this characteristic of the work of A. Conan Doyle, which we consider extrapolable to the rest of the cases (epigones in this sense).

the series is rounded off as a “desk officer.” *El comisario*, a conservative production that boasted the highest viewing figures, sets up a division between male street cops and female laboratory researchers, with the “geek” or “brain” embodied by a woman. Female officers are shown to keep this facet in reserve or, if they are street cops, it arises with a problem, making for a negative characterisation (excess ambition, sentimental ties, nepotism).

e. The autistic child

The autistic child in *Génesis* is a mute witness who cannot say anything but draws everything. This type of eyewitnesses, supposedly of little use, surprisingly turns out to be invaluable, associating great skill in drawing with a disability (autism, schizophrenia, etc.). This recurrent character also appears in other dramas such as *CSI NY* (CBS, 2004–2013), *Heroes* (NBC, 2006–2010) and *House* (“Histories,” 1.10).

The fictions analysed here feature a broad typology of characters recurring in the crime genre:

Table 1: Crime fiction (continuation).

f) Street cop	Corso in <i>Cuenta atrás</i> , Ventura in <i>RIS</i> , Lieutenant Sierra in <i>Desaparecida</i> . <i>Los hombres de Paco</i> with Lucas Fernández and <i>El comisario</i> with Pope and Charlie.
g) Female forensic scientist	<i>El comisario</i> : two female forensic scientists (Rita Carvajal), Agent Clara, who describes thallium and the chemical table of elements efficiently and quickly (“Revancha,” <i>El comisario</i> , 9.11).
h) Rogue cops	<i>Petra Delicado</i> (Miguel Salcedo as a rogue cop, outlaw antithetical to the team, constant counterpoint).
i) Avenging cops	Guillermo Cuevas, the officer in <i>RIS</i> who takes the law into his own hands.
j) Agents from humble/disenfranchised backgrounds	<i>Brigada Central</i> (Flores), <i>El comisario</i> (Pope), and <i>Policías</i> (Rafa): incorporation of agents of humble origins, adding a disenfranchisement that in <i>Petra Delicado</i> was more clearly differentiated by the character of Champorion. Cipriano in <i>Policías</i> is a corrupt, almost disenfranchised ex-senior cop. (“El horizonte no tiene nada que ver con el futuro,” 6.3).

Source: Own elaboration.

The novelty lies in the female forensic scientists. In ideologically progressive dramas like *Petra Delicado*, the female lead is sometimes a street cop, while in the more conservative and successful series, the male lead is a street cop, either individually (Lucas in *Los hombres de Paco*) or in pairs (buddy-movie), like Charlie and Pope in *El comisario*. It is interesting to note the gradual introduction of police officers from the underclass as an inherent feature of Spanish dramas of this period and genre. This adds a sense of exclusion that in *Petra Delicado* was more apparent in the character of Champorion (José María Tasso). Cipriano (Xavier Serrat) in *Policías* is a corrupt senior cop close to being disenfranchised (“El horizonte no tiene nada que ver con el futuro,” 6.3).

5.1.2. Mandatory thematic resources (lower passions)

The lower passions in the police genre are associated with criminality (mandatory generic recurrence) or personal relationships (optional recurrence) and may sometimes lead to the updating of myth. Such is the case of duality, envy and rivalry between cousins in *Desaparecida*. In this case, duality is a mandatory lower passion since it leads to the crime. As a female variant of the double, the *doppelgänger* (Jean Paul Richter, 1796) can be associated in this case with the characters of Cinderella and Lilith, the living embodiment of evil. The

portrayal of the dual personality in two different persons, but of similar age and characteristics (Taschen of *Yōkihi*, or Amidala in *Star Wars*) owing to an unequal situation can lead to a greater or lesser degree of jealousy and envy (*Cinderella*, *Desaparecida*). *Desaparecida* concerns two carnal cousins, Patricia Marcos (Beatriz Ayuso), the girl who disappears, and Cristina Marcos (Marina Salas). The two were practically raised together because Cristina’s mother died when she was very young.

The figure of the double features in one Stevenson’s most famous literary works, *The strange case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886). One of the last productions of the period under analysis, *Guante blanco* (TVE, 2008–2010), stars two men who are on opposite sides of the law, providing a high degree of personal and professional connection. Duality also appears in the aforementioned character of Guillermo Cuevas (Juan Fernández), whose amyotrophic lateral sclerosis has him fired from the *RIS Científica* brigade. Cuevas takes the law into his own hands at night, even killing a rapist. Duality is a literary and cultural motif and a frequent optional recurrence of the detective, legal and forensic genres, as shown in dramas such as *Dexter* (Fox, 2006–2013) or *Dark Justice* (CBS, 1991–1993). Duality as a motif takes on a criminal quality as a recurrent feature of the police genre.

5.1.3. Optional thematic recurrences (lower passions)

The lower passions associated with the agents’ personal relationships, such as adultery and love triangles (especially in *Los hombres de Paco*), are optional generic regularities. They are not mandatory because the police genre does not require them, although in view of the gradual progressive serialisation of television fiction they have become very common regularities in most fiction genres, due to their contribution to the serial continuity of the professional plots. Adultery, sometimes linked with the portrayal of the street cop, is usually viewed positively, especially in the more conservative productions (*El comisario* and *Los hombres de Paco*). Optional lower passions found in these productions include:

Table 2: Optional thematic recurrences.

a) The agent’s personal relationships	Paco, worried about his daughter Sara’s relationship with his partner Lucas, in <i>Los hombres de Paco</i> . <i>RIS Científica</i> with the characters of David Conde, partner of Damián Bermejo and his daughter. <i>El comisario</i> : the lawyer worried about his daughter going out with Charlie (“Asomarse al abismo,” 10.9.). Mateo and Rafa in <i>Policías. En el corazón de la calle</i> (“El horizonte no tiene nada que ver con el futuro” 6.3.), after some initially amusing confusion over the relationship, they fall out and then reconcile.
b) Adultery	<i>Los hombres de Paco</i> .
c) Love triangles	<i>Los hombres de Paco</i> . <i>El comisario</i> (Valverde’s daughter, Ponce, and a friend (“Trapos sucios,” 1.9).
d) Unresolved sexual tension	In <i>Desaparecida</i> , <i>UCO</i> (TVE1-2008-2009) and <i>Génesis</i> .
e) Ambition	Virginia, in <i>Brigada Central</i> , “Asuntos de rutina,” 1.6., is ambitious but Flores does not promote her. Deputy Inspector Ríos in <i>El comisario</i> , whom Valverde does not promote either, (“Cordón latino,” 10.9 among others).

Source: Own elaboration.

The references help construct the model viewer and the pleasure of recognition, in some cases with an informative–ideological function. The lower passions associated with personal relationships rather than criminality are less frequent in progressive productions like *Petra Delicado*. The reinforcement of the current status quo (Zunzunegui & Zubillaga, 1988) in productions such as *El comisario* goes hand in hand with an informative–ideological intent and a desire to emphasise some of the agents’ sentimental relations as problematic. On the other hand, social criticism in the progressive productions, as in *Petra Delicado* and *Pepe Carvalho*, highlights other types of corruption (systemic, social, institutional). Besides the unresolved sexual tension, both in *Desaparecida*, *UCO* (TVE1–2008–2009) and in *Génesis* interpersonal relationships in police stations are often perceived as troublesome or comical, especially when they involve one of the agents’ daughters, highlighting the androcentric perspective characterising the more conservative dramas.

Ambition in the shows analysed is nearly always female and usually held in check by a male superior, in line with the prevalent gender perspective in these dramas (Virginia in *Brigada Central*, Deputy–Inspector Ríos in *El comisario*).

5.1.4. Independent regularities

a. Eros and Thanatos

The conflict between Eros and Thanatos is seen in the American series *Six Feet Under* (HBO, 2001–2005), highlighting that love affairs take place in death-related professions. In the forensic series *RIS Científica* it is manifested by a kiss between Ventura and Claudia (Belén López) while they work, given a rhetorical emphasis by a zoom in on the corpse. Similar contrasts are found in a visual–artist murder suspect who paints during sex (*RIS*) and an artist who works with corpses in *Policías. En el corazón de la calle* (TV movie “Mateo y Rafa”).

b. Telemachy

Independent regularities are associated with the genre and provide difference and novelty. In *Cuenta atrás*, for instance, an independent regularity is observed in the figure of the lead character, Corso, and to a lesser extent in *Los hombres de Paco* (“La noche del comisario,” 5.5.). The father–son conflict is a fundamental recurrent theme and one that is predominant in Western culture and contemporary narrative seriality (Tous-Rovirosa, 2013, pp. 43–70). Similar to Jack (Matthew Fox) in *Lost* (ABC, 2004–2010), Corso has a confrontational relationship with his father, a senior in the same profession (physician/police officer respectively), both of whom have committed professional malpractice with deadly consequences. One of the many flashbacks in *Cuenta atrás* reveals that the hero’s father was both a corrupt police officer³ and the murderer of his mother. Corruption among senior professionals such as Corso’s father was previously addressed in the hospital drama (Jacobs, 2003), subverting the canons of the genre in its initial approach, which can be summarised as Dr. Right and paternal hierarchy (transmission of knowledge from father to son). Gonzalo (Aitor Luna) in *Los hombres de Paco* experiences conflictive feelings during the trial against Lorenzo (Juan Diego Ruiz), the superintendent and father of his ex-girlfriend, Silvia (Marián Aguilera).

c. *Femme fatale*; d) goddess/prostitute duality

Thematic recurrences also underpin the drama’s ideological slant in the portrayal of women, which is particularly evident in the series with the highest ratings, *El comisario* and *Los hombres de Paco*, with the motif of the *femme fatale* and allusions to the goddess/prostitute duality (*El comisario*, “Sin pruebas,” 2.4; *Los hombres de Paco*, “El click,” 5.1.), or to the aforementioned portrayal of women as ambitious (*Brigada Central* and *El comisario*).

³ Father to Corso: “Why did you become a cop? To atone for my sins?” (“Cementerio de la Paz,”) 1.13, *Cuenta atrás*).

5.2. Mythical recurrence (A)

5.2.1. The sacrificial princess

The sacrificial princess, a prominent literary and cultural motif, features in American series such as *CSI* and *Lost* (Tous-Rovirosa, 2008). This motif also appears as a thematic and mythical recurrence in the dramas analysed here (*Desaparecida*, *El comisario*, “El huevo de la serpiente,” 2.1), portrayed in the latter with a nonchalant treatment typical of the Spanish police drama. The initial narrative of *Desaparecida* concerns a town in shock following the disappearance of a young girl, presumably abducted by a man, as the investigation suggests throughout much of the series. The sacrificial princess is a stratified motif in the cultural tradition. The sacrifice of a young girl for her community (Propp 1987, p. 319) is usually accompanied by the man-saviour who usually rescues her (from the legend of St. George to *CSI* and in so many police dramas, but not in *Desaparecida*). The sacrificial princess is the thematic recurrence underlying “Amber Alert” and the label of “White Female Victim (WFV)” (Klinger, 2018). Its importance as a motif stems from the updating of myth, as well the lower passions. The continuing popularity of the victimisation of women (in the form of abduction, disappearance, rape, mutilation and murder) by men as a television motif (Steenberg, 2013; Klinger, 2018) and a leitmotif of the genre is mainly due to the contemporary success of this thematic recurrence⁴. Klinger stresses the importance of the motif in galvanizing idiosyncrasies, a transnational commercial vehicle (Klinger, 2018, p. 518). The importance and reiteration of this motif demonstrates that crime fiction (both the kind analysed here and the more contemporary kind) has a recurrent tendency to cast women in the role of victims. Of particular note is the female lead character of *Killing Eve* (BBC America/AMC, 2018), in the role of a serial killer, based on “La tigresa,” the ETA terrorist Idoia López Riaño.

The WFV theme, also known as “Amber Alert,” broadens the spectrum of violence not only against women but also against children, expanding the typology of the sample analysed:

5.2.2. Variants (Amber Alert)

Table 3: Variants (Amber Alert).

a) Kidnapping of girls by men	<i>El comisario</i> , “Cuatro balas,” 8.9, “Asomarse al abismo,” 10.9.
b) Kidnapping of a brother by his sister	<i>El comisario</i> , “Sola en casa,” 9.5.
c) Rape of women and girls	<i>Petra Delicado</i> , <i>El comisario</i> , <i>Brigada Central</i> (“Asuntos de rutina,” 1.6.).
d) Rapes of police officers (male and female)	Deputy-inspector Ríos in <i>El comisario</i> . Povedilla (<i>Los hombres de Paco</i> , “Vivir tapando,” 5.12).
e) Women persecuted by men	<i>Cuenta atrás</i> , “Bosque del olvido,” 1.1.

Source: Own elaboration.

5.3. Television references (B)

5.3.1. Television references to the police genre

The references are classified according to their field (television or non-television) and theme (social, cultural, religious). References to the police genre abound, but the analysed cases contain few metatelevision references to the same series. These references can be classified according their informative, comic or educational-ideological function and their appeal to the viewer. As for metatelevision and cinema, the references can sometimes have a parodic function, as found in the titles of the episodes of *Los hombres de Paco*, but in the rest of the cases their function is serious and appeals to the model viewer’s recognition.

⁴ *Bron/Broen*, *The Bridge*, *Springfloden*, *Twin Peaks*, *True Detective*, to name a few examples.

a. *CSI*

The success and impact of the forensic sub-genre was greater in the mainstream productions “for all audiences,” such as *El comisario*, than it was in the aforementioned forensic series *Génesis* and *RIS*. The “*CSI* factory,” with its flagship *Crime Scene Investigation* (CBS, 2000–2015), becomes a hypotext and features as an intertextual, self-referential joke in *El comisario*, uttered by forensic scientist Rita Carvajal⁵. It is also used as a visual reference in *Los hombres de Paco*, with the distinctive yellow crime scene tape. The intertextual relationship between *CSI* as a hypotext and *Génesis* and *RIS* is evident in the aseptic images of the laboratory, cutting-edge technology, neatness, speed, recourse to gore, shocking and morbid cases and video clip fragments, in addition to the typology and characterisation of the characters. The three leading characters in *Génesis* are all based on *CSI* characters: Lola Casado (Verónica Sánchez), like Grissom (William Petersen), is intellectual and reflective; Daniel Rocha (Quim Gutiérrez) mirrors Catherine (Marg Helgenberg) as a pragmatic street cop. *RIS* is most directly influenced by *CSI* and bears the strongest similarities to this hypotext. The video clip resource is used not only in forensic productions but also in *Los hombres de Paco* (in this case, in scenes not necessarily related to the drama), *El comisario* and *Antivicio* (Antena3, 2000).

5.3.2. Film references

References usually appeal to the pleasure of the viewer’s recognition. Some of the cinematographic references with a humorous function are at variance with typically erudite references, which suggest a cultural level that has an educational purpose. However, no correlation is found between the thematic typology of the references and their function in the sample analysed. There are parodic references to films such as *Babe* (in *Desaparecida*) and *King Kong* (in *Hermanos y detectives*). Two references to *Rear Window* crop up in *Cuenta atrás* and *Los hombres de Paco*. There is a reference to *The silence of the lambs* in *Génesis*. Similarly, allusions to *The Pink Panther* (in *Hermanos y detectives*) and *Dirty Harry* (in *Los hombres de Paco*) are also intertextual references to the police genre.

One routine resource that television fiction uses to allude to the pleasure of recognition consists in giving titles to the episodes that emulate works⁶ that the model viewer (Eco, 1986) recognises. This is common in *El comisario* and especially in *Los hombres de Paco*⁷. In keeping with the humorous style of the series, the parodic transformation (in the sense of Genette 1982) of the film references in some episode titles is far more common.

5.3.3. Music references

Music referenced in *Los hombres de Paco* provides a parodic function, in keeping with the drama’s trademark dark humour, which seeks the viewer’s pleasure of recognition. Spectacularity is achieved through contrast: a children’s song during a robbery (“La suerte,” 1.1.), classical music such as Pachelbel’s Canon accompanies a holdup at the police station (“El click,” 5.1.), a fragment of a rock musical is heard at the doors of the hospital (5.1.). Music can also provide a comic function (Paco’s politone), although the viewer’s pleasure of recognition always takes precedence. This resource is also found in *Hermanos y detectives*, with references to the band El Canto del Loco. There are some cameos of trendy bands of the time, such as M Clan in *Policías. En el corazón de la calle*.

⁵ “I’m out of here, *CSI* is on” “Cuatro balas,” *El comisario*, 8.9.

⁶ *Desperate Housewives* were titled after songs by Stephen Sondheim. *Grey’s Anatomy* also uses this resource (Tous-Rovirosa, 2008, p. 367). The series analysed include the following: “Operation Picachu,” “Y si Adelita se fuera con otro” (*Los hombres de Paco*, 1.4. and 4.9. respectively), “El huevo de la serpiente” (*El comisario*, 1.10.) and “Sola en casa” (*El comisario*, 9.5.). (*Brigada Central*) “Noche sin fin” (1.7.).

⁷ “El silencio de los maderos” (3.1); “Con faja y a lo loco” (3.3); “Tigre y dramón” (3.8); “Aterriza con las muelas” (3.10); “Todo sobre mi padre” (3.14); “El novio cadáver” (4.25); “Codependent Day” (5.10); “Novicia a la fuga” (6.9).

Less numerous are classical music references, which are sometimes reserved to characterise certain characters, either to signify their socio-economic status (*Los hombres de Paco*, *RIS*, *El comisario*) or to underline their sensitive nature (Corso's mother in *Cuenta atrás*).

5.3.4. Advertising references

The sample featured few anecdotal references (Juan Valdés is quoted in *Cuenta atrás*).

5.3.5. References to news items

Some television news references (the Bosnian war, Aznar) ("Cementerio de la paz," 1.13) with an informative and educational function appear in *Cuenta atrás*. The countless news references in *La chica de ayer*, key to indicating the time shifts (1977/2009), usually have informative, educational and humorous ends. There are also many references to news items in *El caso Wanninkhoff* (TVE1, 2008), a mini-series based on real events, which are due to poor media coverage of the case.

5.3.6. References to media and technology

The representation of changes in media and technology is related to a heightened desire for modernity. Hence, the presence of "real" changes, from print magazines or newspapers to computers and mobile phones. It is interesting to note how *Petra Delicado* slams reality shows through journalist Berta Molina (Marina Saura), who is rebuked for her lack of scruples.

5.3.7. References to animation

Specific references to animation and video games feature in the two most successful series: *Los hombres de Paco* and *El comisario*.

5.3.8. Visual clichés

Due to their similarities with metatelevision references, visual clichés become generic regularities in the analysed dramas: the blackboard on which the agents write down clues on the crime to prompt reflection and solve the case, and the vital sign monitor as a hybridisation between the police genre and the hospital drama.

These two visual clichés appear in American crime fiction: *CSI*, *True Detective* (HBO, 2014-), *Criminal Minds* (CBS, 2005-2020), *Numb3rs* (CBS, 2005-2010) and *House*, *Grey's Anatomy* (ABC, 2005-) and *ER* (NBC, 1994-2009). They are found in Spanish dramas after 2005. The later seasons of *El comisario* (2008-2009) feature similar visual resources, including zoom shots, a computerised re-creation of a tongue, or that of a skull in "Cuatro balas." One other recurrent visual cliché, a generic regularity of TV films, is sex in aircraft toilets, shown in *Cuenta atrás* ("Océano Atlántico," 1.2).

5.3.9. Spaces

In accordance with a generic regularity, several dramas such as *Petra Delicado*, *Los misterios de Laura*, *Hermanos y detectives*, *RIS* and *Cuenta atrás* set their episodes in specific contexts, alternating the invariants (the police station, the special police brigade) and the variants (the cases) (Calabrese, 1989; Lacalle, 1992) as seen in *House*, *CSI*, *Bones* (Fox, 2005-2017), etc. *Génesis*, for example, addresses freemasonry and sects in "Las lágrimas de Raimis" (1.2), Christianity and the obsession with religion in "La virtud del asesino" (1.8 and 1.9), golf in "Handicap" (2.11), and an election campaign in "El candidato" (2.3), etc. This resource is not characteristic of unitary productions such as *Desaparecida* or *UCO*. The action in *Cuenta atrás* is transferred to an intercontinental flight (adventure and action genre in "Océano Atlántico," 1.2). *Petra Delicado* features a limited range of locations (the aforementioned emphasis on Madrid as a

location) but does offer the thematic variety already noted⁸. These specific settings or variants create an optional generic regularity with an informative educational or knowledge purpose.

5.4. Cultural references (C)

5.4.1. Literary references

Cultural, literary and erudite references are usually occasional and are more frequent in the first decade analysed, due to the proximity of literary influences and the progressive change in the pleasure of recognition that takes place in the second decade, with foreign influences and metatelevision references. Shelley's poem "Never wake the serpent" is quoted in *Petra Delicado* ("Tu muerte está cerca," 1.6). The reference serves an educational purpose: the lead character, Petra, played by Ana Belén, also recites Shakespeare, as does Fermín (Santiago Segura), who cites Hamlet parodically: "To have breakfast or not to have breakfast" (*Petra Delicado*, "El tío de Hamlet," 1.8). There are a few further literary references, like Ionesco in *Desaparecida*, Neruda in *El comisario* and Caronte in *Génesis*.

5.4.2. Pictorial references

Génesis. En la mente del asesino harnesses cultural pictorial references to construct its model viewer (Eco, 1986), with crimes evoking Goya's most famous paintings. It should be remembered that the construction of an erudite model viewer in *Génesis* concurs with its high culture educated characters, and that this forensic drama had the lowest audience share in Spain (5.6%).

5.4.3. Erudite references

In *Desaparecida*, the scientific name of the pig (*Sus scrofa*) is mentioned, indicating the cultural level of the characters as an educational purpose.

5.5. Social references (D)

Social references also shape the viewer's imaginary and correspond to the drama's ideological stance. *Petra Delicado* highlights the differences between social classes, the privileges of the wealthy and the aristocracy and the hardships of the poor and the workers. There are also instances of discrimination towards migrants, the presence of skinheads and neo-Nazi violence, and the uphill trudge of the post-Franco transition to democracy, also addressed in *Pájaro en una tormenta* and *Pepe Carvalho* and portrayed, in a much gentler way, in *La chica de ayer*. Although *El comisario* represents migrants rather negatively, because of Eastern European mafia links to violence and prostitution, child soldiers from Sierra Leone or Latin gangs, among others, migrants are portrayed more positively in the last seasons of the series.

It is worth noting how the social relevance of the Roma community is emphasised in the first season of *Brigada Central*, only to be replaced by the drugs world in the second season. The social references shift from social denunciation (*Petra Delicado*, *Pepe Carvalho*) to an eminently informative and education purpose (*Cuenta atrás*, *Soy el solitario*), so as not to forget the past, in *Hermanos y detectives* (neo-Nazis and Francoism in "El extranjero solitario," 1.4), with politically incorrect jokes in *Los hombres de Paco* (ETA, the Basque Country and Catalonia, "Sin tregua," 2.8). The presence of the Spanish King's portrait and the Spanish flag in the police stations in *Brigada Central* is also worthy of note. Both this series and *Petra Delicado* include many explicit visual and textual references to the Spain of the post-transition era. Thus, social references can serve as a denunciation, as humour, or as an informative and educational or ideological contextual frame.

⁸ Migration in "Dulce compañía," 1.3; neo-Nazism in "Tu muerte está cerca," 1.6.; street artists in "El tío de Hamlet," 1.8; and gyms in "Nadie, el asesino," 1.9 (*Petra Delicado*).

5.6. *Religious references (E)*

Although few in number, the prevailing religious references point to the Catholicism (*El comisario*), but also to Judaism (*Hermanos y detectives*). References constituting optional regularities are religious, morbid and gore on the one hand (*Génesis* and *RIS*) and religious and medieval on the other (*Camino de Santiago*).

6. Conclusions

The references in the twenty years under review evolve in parallel with the television medium. Spiegel (1992) anticipated the demise of literary references, but this research seems to show that they change in accordance with the references with which the model viewer (Eco, 1986) can best identify. Literary and cultural references are gradually replaced by self-reference to the television medium. The most noteworthy of the few post-cultural references found in the second decade feature in *Génesis*, which obtained poor audience figures, whereas productions such as *Los hombres de Paco* or *El comisario* appeal to their model viewers through references to popular culture, at times parodically. To our mind, given the emergence of “ambient fiction,” self-referentiality as a concept needs to be revised in future research on intertextuality in contemporary audio-visual productions. The study of television references in relation to time slots in the programming schedule (1990–2010) is pertinent since it was still not possible to speak of ambient fiction at that time.

In keeping with the genre, there is an omnipresence of references to crime fiction, either as television references or as optional recurrences (abduction, gifted child, Sherlock Holmes, Miss Marple) and mandatory recurrences (lower criminal passions). The sacrificial princess stands out as a mythical recurrence and leitmotif of the contemporary drama. It is a stratified motif in the cultural tradition: the sacrifice of a young girl for her community (Propp, 1987, p. 319), usually accompanied by the man-saviour who comes to her aid (from the legend of St. George to many police fictions). The sacrificial princess is the thematic recurrence underlying “Amber Alert” and “The White Female Victim.” Its importance as a motif stems from the updating and re-creation of myth and constitutes one of the foundations of the androcentric story. This motif is so relevant to the period analysed that several variants have been found (Amber Alert).

No correlation has been established between the thematic typology of the references and the function they serve, although music occasionally has a humorous purpose and erudite references have a serious, educational function.

Both the social references and the cultural and thematic references closely concur with the ideological line of the drama and the shaping of the model viewer. The social references are adapted to their time and evolve in line with the “real” concerns of the period in which they were aired. In *Petra Delicado*, the references are complemented by a progressive approach and sharply critical media references to reality shows.

In *El comisario*, conservatism is expressed through a wide range of references and recurrences. The reinforcement of the status quo in dramas like *El comisario* goes hand in hand with an educational-ideological commitment to the audience, and it shows some of the agents’ sentimental relationships (lower passions associated with personal relationships) as problematic, while the social criticism of *Petra Delicado* or *Pepe Carvalho* stresses other forms of corruption (systemic, institutional).

The portrayal of women is also reflected using certain references and thematic recurrences, according to the ideological perspective of the drama and the construction of the model viewer.

Table 4: Function of intertextual relations.

Function	Satirical Ironic Parodic	Serious Pastiche	Descriptive Metaphoric Referential Metatelevision Thematic recurrence
Level of signification	Signifier (plane of expression)	Signified (plane of content)	
Relation	Transformation	Imitation	

Source: Own elaboration based on Genette, 1982; Tous-Rovirosa, 2008.

The analysis of the references also allows us to ascertain the weight of foreign influences and the idiosyncrasy of the Spanish police drama. Foreign influences are present in telemachy (due to their use in American fiction and their presence in Western culture), in the forensic sub-genre, in the use of visual clichés, etc. The idiosyncrasy of the police Spanish drama is reflected in the lightness of the genre (with the aim of being credible) and in the gradual introduction of agents from disenfranchised backgrounds.

Overall, the references characterise the protagonists or serve as a form of denunciation, irony or humour, or an informative and educational or ideological contextual framework. The universe of the viewer is alluded to through both thematic and mythical recurrence, in addition to references, whether social, televisual, cultural, literary or erudite. Television fiction is an engulfing field in which there is usually a constant combination of references of different kinds.

Literary and erudite references were more numerous in the first decade analysed, due to the proximity of literary influences and the progressive change in the pleasure of recognition that occurs from the second decade, with the rise of foreign influences and metatelevision references. As Zavala (2010, p. 84) observes, modern references are “pretextual,” postmodern references are “architextual.” The move from one paradigm to the other occurs through the presence and growing rise of metatextuality and self-referentiality, mixture and pastiche.

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