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Jorge Martínez-Lucena
jmartinez@uao.es
Associate Professor. University Abat Oliba CEU. Spain

Enrique Carretero
angelenrique.carretero@usc.es
Visiting Professor. University of Santiago de Compostela. Spain.

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"The basic human form is female. Maleness is a kind of birth defect": positive discrimination in *The Fall*

Abstract
This paper aims to hermeneutically analyse some of the social imaginaries present in the first two seasons of the British TV series *The Fall*. We do so by focusing on its two main characters: the police officer Stella Gibson and the serial killer Paul Spector. While the former is a woman emancipated from certain old-fashioned female roles, the latter is a sociopath who tries to reconcile both his driving need to kill in order to sublimate his desire before successful women with his family life. The interplay between these two protagonists is the setting for the fight taking place in our society between traditional female roles and new ones.

Keywords
Feminism, TV series, positive discrimination, gender equality, stereotype, social imaginary, women's emancipation

1. Introduction

After the fall of metanarratives, the main exclusive sources of our postmodern societies' belief systems are no longer religions or ideologies. The media has become the new and privileged agent of the spread of audiovisual products (Balandier, 1994), and a micro-myth that favours social stability and combats the individual anomie of our era (Carretero, 2006). As Imbert pointed out: "nowadays, ideology has been supplanted by imaginaries, evicted by spectacle" (Imbert, 2008). Video-games, cartoons, films, adverts, comics, video-clips, TV series and other fictions are in the front line of the hidden battle of social imaginaries which is taking place in our globalized society.

With this article we wish to contribute to an already initiated study (Martínez Lucena & Barraycoa, 2012; Martínez Lucena, 2013; Martínez Lucena & Cigüela, 2014; Cigüela & Martínez Lucena, 2014; Martínez Lucena & Cigüela, 2015) that consists of hermeneutically analysing the social imaginaries of certain TV series. In doing so, we would like to draw attention to the performative power of these media products, considered most of the time as innocuous entertainment. Therefore, our intention is to add our grain of sand to the ambitious work framed by the theory of social imaginaries that are methodologically closer to media studies (Carretero, 2010). The aim is, as Juan-Luis Pintos says, *"to make social invisibility visible"* (1995: 6), taking into account that "TV is

still, nowadays, one of the most influential means of communication and socialization" (Galán Fajardo, 2007: 236).

Why focus on TV series rather than other media products? Because of the revolution they have undergone over the last few years (Sepinwall, 2013), which has brought with it the third golden age of the television and the consequent increase in their quality and presence in our daily lives due to the HBO effect (DeFino, 2013), to the advent of media convergence (Jenkins, 2008) and to the transmediality of audiovisual products (Scolari, 2013).

2. Antiheros in *The Fall*

The Fall (2013-), the TV series analysed in this article, is an Artists Studio and BBC Northern Ireland co-production. *The Fall* is one of those British mini-series that, together with Scandinavian, and, of course, both long and short US series, constitutes one of the main focuses of creation of our contemporary TV fictions. Other examples of successful British *noir* productions include *Luther* (2010-2015), *Sherlock* (2010-), *Broadchurch* (2013-), *Peaky Blinders* (2013-) and *Utopia* (2013-).

The Fall, like most present-day thrillers, features mainly antiheros who are morally and mentally speaking borderline characters that become "peripheral subjects —on the margins of a central system of values—, often confronted with it or ambivalent to it, in a game between inside and outside the system: [...] who frequently commit acts of unruly behaviour" (Imbert, 2010: 163). In this respect, the last few years have been a source of creativity. There are repeated examples of police officers or special agents who transcend any imaginary of normality: Jack Bauer in *24* (2001-2010), McNulty in *The Wire* (2002-2008), Vic Mackey in *The Shield* (2002-2008) or *Wallander* (2008-). And, by stretching the meaning of the expression *lawman*, we even have protagonists such as *Dexter* (2006-2013) and *Hannibal* (2013-2015), whose moral and psychiatric normality are highly questionable.

With metanarratives having fallen and post-modernity well-established, globalized societies are no longer able to articulate clear, shared ideals in a conscious and minimally rational manner. The antihero is both an eminent representative of the system of beliefs in our post-metaphysical and post-materialistic societies, and blatant evidence of a certain lack of adaptation by the capitalist system and of his moral code in perpetual negotiation. As Hassan states, the antihero "seems to overcome the contradictions of his experience in the destructive or demonic element by assuming the role of the antihero, the rebel-victim. The rebel denies without saying No to life, the victim succumbs without saying Yes to oppression" (Hassan, 1961: 31).

The figure of the antihero is essentially paradoxical. He is simultaneously representative of the dubious morality of our era, an inevitable victim of the harmful values promoted by our society, and a tragic rebel facing a fate decided by the gods of the cynicism. The antihero is someone who is always inside and outside the place given to him by society. Hence, his existence is a pure moral negotiation between the most admirable and the most reproachable, between accepted and marginal, between the healthy and the sickest or most monstrous.

This phenomenon occurs because one of the inner imaginaries of the *symbolic matrixes* of our western culture perceives evil as the opposite of good (Baudrillard, 2001), which tends to consider inadmissible the complementary conjunction of the two. Thus, the antihero, trapped in this impossibility of the crystallization of this conjunction, is forced to live with this unsolvable tension between his need to perform daily what is socially considered normal or good (Goofman, 1993) and his own abandon to internal clandestine tendencies oriented at undermining social order. In this regard, the figure of the antihero would have visualized an environmental anomie which has never received explicit recognition. The antihero collaborates, in this way, in a change of social perspective on abnormality. He has

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helped to certify as legitimate the transit from an abnormality previously considered anomalous to another which would be hard to reduce to clinical parameters. In turn, this has contributed to awakening a humanized reception of this liminal condition of the antihero, and, in parallel, has revealed that, under the scrupulous fulfilment of socially established canons, there is a hidden struggle, sometimes unfruitful, for the tireless assertion of individuality.

In some way, the portrayed figure has shown that the ambivalent double game of being simultaneously *inside* and *outside* is part of the irremediable unrest inherent to postmodern culture, something that every individual is doomed to fight in his/her personal narrative. The consequence will be the collective perception of the easy transit to explicitly anomic behaviours. Thus, postmodern TV fiction narrative reveals a subtle sympathy of the spectator with regard to the internal complexity of this antiheroic figure. The reason for his magnetism lies in his reaction against dullness, insignificance and mediocrity, which facilitates a relationship with abnormality that is radically different from the socially institutionalized: a perspectivist treatment, an oblique view that is not subject to the admitted dictates and that opposes a dichotomous concept of *good* and *evil*.

Every social model has historically insisted on establishing a clear border between normality and abnormality. Every society's inner social imaginaries (Castoriadis, 1989) would have accomplished this functional mission. Likewise, these imaginaries would have come into play through a dynamic for establishing strategic formulas in order to culturally cope with socially virulent or condemned behaviours. This occurs through the amalgamation of these imaginaries with moral coding devices aimed at fighting chaos through an always unfinished and unfruitful attempt to maintain unharmed the internal cohesion of a society (Balandier, 1996). Thus, the work of the *imaginary* is devoted to sacralising order in which the effectiveness enclosed within the semantic reservoir (the imaginary) specific to every society will play a decisive role. In truth, what is socially assimilated as evil, impure, or any version of this sort, will not be anything other than a demonic transgression of order. In other words, it would challenge the commitment that society demands of its members.

3.The identification with the antihero

If you wish to promote the exchange of imaginaries between the fictitious and the real world, audiences need to feel like they are in the antihero's shoes, and there are some rhetorical strategies to bring about this effect (Smith, 1995). Only this identification makes possible the spectator's intense experience of the unconscious negotiation on his/her inclusion in or exclusion from the system of values of the society to which s/he belongs. To increase productivity and the possibilities of negotiation of this border between fiction and reality, screenwriters use several strategies. One of these consists of offering two models of protagonists in order to increase the range of options with which the audience can identify in terms of gender or generation. There are many TV series that use an antiheroic couple to face the main incident, something that has been seen in recent examples, including *Breaking Bad* (2008-2013), *Sherlock* (2010-) and *True Detective* (2014-), and, with characters of distinct gender, in *The Killing* (2011-2014), *Bron/Broën* (2011-), *Elementary* (2012-), *The Americans* (2013-) and *House of Cards* (2013-).

Another means of bringing about this identification by the spectator and to make the unconscious negotiation of imaginaries productive consists of having two antiheros, both on different sides of the law, as we can appreciate in the first season of *Homeland* (2011-), in *Hannibal*, and in *The Fall*, where this conflict between antiheros complicates the game between normality and abnormality. In *The Fall*, we find two liminal, ambivalent characters confronted with each other: the policewoman, Stella Gibson (Gillian Anderson) and the

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serial killer, Paul Spector (Jamie Dornan). The connections the script establishes between them make the struggle between certain imaginaries they represent not only a clash between a rebel-victim and the society that oppresses him/her, but also a confrontation between the two rebel-victims as well, whose claims collide, showing their two-faced nature. In other words, their undeniable belonging in terms of the *status quo* on the one hand, and on the other, their mutual incompatibility evident in their respective losing vectors and their implied obligations.

In the following, we explain this special confrontation between the antiheros in *The Fall* by firstly interpreting Paul Spector's character, showing his ambivalences and his links with certain imaginaries present in the audience. Secondly, we carry out an equally brief hermeneutic study of the Stella Gibson's character, taking into account her condition as an anti-heroine, trying to show her relationship with imaginary of women's liberation and thirdly, we conclude this article by outlining the power relations between the characters and the imaginaries, aiming to translate their imaginary and narrative interactions into a discussion about concepts such as gender inequality and positive discrimination.

4. Paul Spector: sociopath or a victim of society?

The Fall is the story of serial killer Paul Spector, who devotes his time to planning and hunting attractive, single brunettes who are liberal professionals in present-day Belfast. However, this is not the only hunt. This TV series is also an account of the hunt for the murderer by the Northern Ireland police force, leaded by the methodical and meticulous English woman Stella Gibson, who has recently arrived from London.

However, our sociopathic criminal is not an antagonist in the strict sense, but rather an ambivalent character with a friendly side. As we have seen in numerous evil characters in TV series such as *Breaking Bad* (Figuero Espadas & Martínez Lucena, 2015), *Hannibal*, *Dexter* (Crisóstomo, 2015) or *House of Cards* (Martínez Lucena & Cigüela, 2015), there are many resources available that foster the audience's identification with characters who are not only antiheroic but overtly criminal. In this respect, we should recall certain idiosyncratic behaviours of Paul Spector: his mistreating and murder of certain stereotypically strong emancipated woman while being lovely and even protective towards helpless women. This reveals an apparent masculine frustration that is the result of the progressive weakening of men's dominant role over women. Thus, Spector punishes those women who aim to assume a masculine role and protects those who play a submissive role. In the case of Paul Spector, various script strategies have been employed to show the audience his human side:

a) He is a psychotherapist. Liz Tyler, one of his patients, has just lost her son. Paul discovers that she has been abused by her husband and tries to help her and in doing so, runs certain risks: his boss upbraids him for breaking with protocol by going and seeing her when her husband was not present and who has already complained about this (1x04); he receives threats from the husband's friends, one of whom places a clamp on a wheel of his car (1x05); and, at the end of the second season, he is beaten up by James Tyler and his gang (2x05) and Spector ends up being shot by James who is furious following his separation from his wife (2x06). In this way, Paul is presented to the audience as a victim of someone who is presumably worse than him, as someone human who is capable of breaking protocols and the bureaucracies of the therapy system in pursuit of justice and as someone who fights, risking his own life against one of the most demonised blights of today's society and to which the viewers are particularly sensitive: the abuse of women.
b) He is certainly a murderer, but not indiscriminate. When he discovers that Sarah Kay, the woman he has killed, was pregnant, he contacts her family to express his

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deep regret and to ask their forgiveness for the mistake, thus revealing himself as her murderer (1x04). Children seem to hold a value for him: they are innocent creatures and, as he himself says, he has a protective instinct towards them. He does not murder Rose Stagg directly, but lets her die slowly, as she has a family (2x06), which reveals that, by trying to distance himself from any possible manifestation of sadism, these are murders in which he overdoses —obviously badly administered as a result of his sociopathy— on a more than nuanced compassion. He is someone who is (minimally) capable of being moved by the weak and vulnerable.

c) He is a father and fulfils his duties as such. We see him on numerous occasions in tender scenes with his two children —preparing breakfast for them, taking his daughter to school, taking her for a ride on a quad, holding his sleeping son in his arms on the sofa (1x03), hugging his daughter (2x02), etc. Moreover, his wife is pregnant (1x05) and, despite what she might believe of him, he has not been unfaithful. Even at the end (2x06), when he is under arrest, he asks to see his daughter Olivia instead of telling the police where he hid the body of Rose Stagg.

d) His past was difficult. Paul Spector, it turns out, is not totally responsible for his murderous urges. His fetishist rituals with mannequins (1x03), his need to keep locks of his victims' hair (e.g. 2x01), etc., appear more to be related to his past as an orphan. His mother abandoned him and then committed suicide (2x02) and he ended up being sent to a centre run by Father Jensen, a catholic priest who abused boys and who appears in the series, characterised as a depraved individual who, on being interviewed by Jim Burns (2x05) while in prison, does not feel repentant in any way. Although Paul Spector says he was not abused by Father Jensen (2x06) —he always made sure that he was filthy to avoid being invited by the priest to share a sleeping bag when they were at camps—, with this trait the scriptwriters manage to portray Spector as a victim because of the great social concern about paedophiles, especially within English speaking countries where there have been many scandals of this type involving members of the catholic order.

e) Paul is physical attractive, as we see in Stella Gibson's description of him in her Identikit picture ("pretty face" (1x05)), in the attraction Liz Tyler, the abused woman, has for him (2x04), or the nanny, barely sixteen years old, who works in his house. He has an athletic physique, the result of regular running and workouts in the gym (1x04), which he does during the evenings, while his wife thinks he is working in a Telephone Hope-Line and he is meticulously planning his murders. His good physical condition allows him to get into his victims' homes without any difficulty. His appearance, then, is in tune with a public that belongs to what Lipovestky (1983) refers to as a narcissistic society, one of whose ideals is strongly related to being fit and having a perfect body.

f) Spector is quite skilful in what he does. He carefully plans his crimes and constructs crime scenes in minute detail. He washes the bodies of his victims after having strangled them. He brushes their hair, paints their finger nails in a particular colour and places them in bed in aesthetically pleasing postures (1x02), as he sensitive to how they appear in the photographs and pictures he himself takes and draws, in his lectures on *The Divine Comedy* (2x02) and *Thus spoke Zarathustra* (1x04), in his quote of Camus (2x02), etc. He manages, as is usual for many psychopaths, to live a double life without being discovered by his family, who see him as an exemplary father. It could be said of him that he is efficient, intelligent, capable of achieving anything asked of him. He is, therefore, someone to be admired in a society such as ours, in which we seek our own identity, understood as an ideal of self-realisation beyond any norm (Taylor, 1991).

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In addition to the mentioned script strategies, our identification with Paul Spector is also brought about by the so-called narrative schemes (Shafer & Raney, 2012: 1043), which are a complex mental representation that includes expectations about the internal structure of a certain type of narration and of the way in which this develops. In this way, we experience feelings of sympathy and faithfulness towards antiheroes because, in line with our habit as consumers of postmodern fictions, we are accustomed to witnessing endings in which, in one way or another, the redemption of these types of characters is made strangely possible. Thus, the viewer does not judge these characters solely through the deeds they have done, but take into account or anticipate the narrative scheme of redemption already present in their experience as an expectation through repeated watching of these types of stories.

Thus, Paul Spector, despite being a serial killer, appears to the viewers as an antihero, ambivalent, borderline, as someone gifted in many senses with good feelings, whose problematic tendency to kill has a difficult solution, as he is the victim of a society unable to support him when he was a child. He is undoubtedly a psychopath. Much of his behaviour substantiates this (Hare, 1993): he is a liar (2x03) and a manipulator (2x05), as can be seen with the nanny or with his wife; he is like a mirror, in that he manages to make emotionally fragile women such as Liz feel good with him (2x04); he finds it hard to feel emotions, such as fear when confronted with Liz's husband, who is shocked by this when the police question him (2x04), as can be seen when a gun is pointed at his head and he entertains himself by making jokes about the music on a phone's ring tone (2x05); he is a cold-blooded animal, as we see in the video of a handcuffed Rose Stagg that he records with his mobile, while she calls him a "monster" and a "fucking freak" (2x05). And, despite everything, he is not a pure antagonist, as on occasions it *seems* that he fights to protect the weak —who are unable to protect themselves by their own means— and the abused women and children, something that, as we have mentioned before, society was unable to do in his case.

The Fall is a series with a hidden moral content, although somewhat distant, we should add, from the classic moralising film format. Firstly, it reflects certain incidental sociological transformations —as marked as they are close— precisely in the "moral" sphere and, more specifically, in the moral codes from which new gender roles have been forged. In this regard, the series does have a moral content, since it reveals the modulations that have recently occurred in the order of codes related to "norms" and "customs" (which were academically adopted as a meaning of "the moral") in today's society. However, as we have said, it does so surreptitiously, without any prior consideration of "the good" and "the correct", with no pronounced effort towards a search for this "goodness" or this "correction", and with no purpose towards an ethical reflection around them. When we realise, then, that the series does not aim to present this moral content under a moralising prism; we are obviously alluding to a particular classic feature of the use of moralising exercise. What we are insinuating is that it contravenes a declared theoretical Decalogue of moral principles with which a virtuous social life should comply. It does not explicitly aim to redirect "being" to a formulated "should be", although it is evident that the series does this in a very roundabout way through the linking of its characters' actions, which will conclude, as we shall later see, in a now implicit moralising direction linked to gender relations.

Secondly, it reflects by and large an emptying of the moral structures established in a traditional society. *The Fall* reveals the inevitable inconsistency and transience of all moral adscription as a sub-product of nothing more than an arbitrary personal opinion in parallel with a self that conceives itself as something built in accordance with its individual desires (Giddens, 1994). In the central imaginary of a more traditional account that underpins social order, an overvaluation of the norm above the capricious dictates of desire was presented. It corresponded to the code of a social model in which, in terms of functionality, an undoubted coincidence between "the moral" and "the social" was sought. But in the imaginary inferred

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through the postmodern media story —and especially that in television fiction—, this consideration is confused. The never-ending conflict between desire and norms is redirected towards a weakening of the norms in favour of desire. And this rupture of the connection between "the moral" and "the social" paves the way for the appearance of unconsciously paradigmatic characters. Spector is one of these. In him, "the normal" and "the abnormal", "good" and "bad" merge together and end up being confused in a complex symbiosis. The weakening of the traditional imaginary and consequently the consistency of certain referential moral structures, facilitates the emergence on the scene of characters such as Spector. A son faithful to his era, he moves in a malleable moral vagueness, if not indifference, at least regarding a moral sustained on maxims and supposedly elevated above socially assigned prerogatives in accordance with guidelines through which, in general, the protagonists of the postmodern "moral" story govern themselves, cohabiting in an atmosphere presided by the absence of an absolute moral code and abandoned to the poverty of a moral contingency that is as interiorised as it is inevitable.

5. Stella Gibson: the emancipated woman

One of the characteristics of our latest modernity is the emancipation of women, the result of the recognition of their equality on a legal level and, progressively, in their cultural development, through sexual liberation, through the normalisation of divorce, through the use of contraceptives and lastly, through the active positive promotion of new rights and gender equality. This transformation, however, is not limited to the change towards a new female role. Rather, it has brought about transformations in privacy, the family, the labour market, etc. (Giddens, 1992).

Stella Gibson, the police officer in *The Fall*, is the paradigmatic embodiment of an emancipated woman who is not content with being so. Rather, she constantly vindicates herself before a society that is still too sexist, that oppresses her for being as she is. Her attributes as a character in this regard stand out especially in an environment such as Ireland, which subconsciously we still associate with the traditional. In this respect, it is important to point out a characterising aspect of this persona. For Catholics who yearn for the end of British occupation, she, of English nationality, is a police officer and, as such, a representative of the law and of a country perceived as an oppressor. In this regard, Stella Gibson symbolises the English domination outlined through the female gender in such a way that the figure of a dominant woman in which the delegation of the Queen of England in the Northern Irish colony is projected. In brief, the characterising traits of Stella include the following:

- She is an anthropologist, but has more than a university qualification, as she herself mentions to Danielle Ferrington, her assistant in the investigation (1x04). She shows she has extensive knowledge of psychology and criminology and many skills, both in managing people and in dealing with high stress situations. She is a well-prepared professional. Cold when she needs to be (1x04) and empathetic when required, with the sister of one of the victims (2x01), with the policeman who witnessed the murder of a colleague (1x04 y 1x05), etc.
- She separates perfectly sex from any amorous sentiment, something for which her decided dedication to her work leaves her with no time. Maybe for this reason she choses married men and women. We see this clear exploitation of the practice of sex in how she seduces Sergeant Olson when she retires to her hotel: she asks her assistant to introduce her to him as she finds him attractive and she simply tells her the hotel in which she is staying and her room number, after which she retires (1x02). She only has to wait. Moreover, we know from later comments that she had another fortuitous sexual encounter in the past —which she refers to as her "sweet

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night"— with her current boss, Jim Burns (1x03). Maybe in her relationship with the police officer Tom Anderson in the last episode, we glimpse the possibility of another type of relationship between them (2x06).

- She does not confine herself to heterosexuality. She is bisexual, as we see in the proposal she makes to Dr Smith, who eventually turns her down as she recognises that her Croydon upbringing does not allow her to maintain these types of relationships (2x03).
- She theorises about the superiority of women, as exemplified in various conversations with her boss, Jim Burns, or with her assistant, with whom she talks of the matriarchal and matrilineal Mosuo ethnic group (1x04), in which the women only sleep with men when they wish to become pregnant. But she does not limit herself to theorising. She demonstrates that she is better than the majority of men who appear in the series, most of whom are incapable of resisting their sexual urges, while she, when her boss asks her to avoid from then on any possible sexual scandal because of the new responsibility in the investigation, substitutes sex for the swimming pool (2x02) and, when Dr Smith refuses to go up to her room, she does not attempt to convince her to the contrary or force her, as Burns did with her (2x03).
- She sets herself up as the protector of oppressed women. We see this in the way she treats the survivor Annie Browlie (2x01) or the forgotten sister of Sarah Kay (2x01) and in her concern for Rose Stagg (2x02). She does not need a man to defend her. She alone is enough, as we she in the moment her boss attacks her, when she receives a punch on the nose (2x03), or when she is approached by one of the neighbourhood gangs and does not retreat in the face of threats that would intimidate anyone; instead, she confronts them (2x01).
- She is knowledgeable of the social conventionalisms and their limitations, although on occasions she respects then for the good of the investigation, such as when the Irish press focuses on her excessive cleavage when reporting on operation Music Man (1x03) and she decides in future to wear a uniform for these types of encounters. However, in her private life she does not concern herself about what people think, as seen in the conversation she has with Dr Reed in the bar of her hotel. When she kisses her on the lips to frighten off the man who is chatting the doctor up, she asks her whether she liked it and the forensic officer says she did but expresses her concern about what they will say, as the lawyer who was chatting her up knows who she is, as she told him her name and probably knows who Stella is, to which she (Stella) replies that she is not bothered.
- She is an attractive woman. She usually wears elegant jacket suits, tight skirts and silk blouses. She is always well groomed and wears make-up. She has an athletic body that she works out in the swimming pool. Her boss tells her clearly (1x04) in what could be considered a case of sexual harassment (Galán Fajardo, 2007) that later culminates in him telling her "Do you have any idea of the effect you have on men? I would have given up my wife, my kids, anybody, for you."
- She puts up with continuous rebukes for being the way she is and doing what she does. Burns berates her for being in bed with Olson, a married man with two kids, while Sarah Kay is being murdered (1x03). When she is questioned by Matt Eastwood about the night she spent with Olson just before he was killed, she, fed up of questions, says to him: "That what really bothers you, isn't it? The one night stand. Man fucks woman. Subject: man. Verb: fucks. Object: woman. That's OK. Woman fucks man. Woman: subject. Man: object. That's not so comfortable for you, is it?" (1x03). When she is assaulted in her hotel room by Burns, after escaping from him and fixing her broken nose, he asks her why women are stronger than men, to

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> which Stella replies that the reason is that the basic human form is the woman, and that masculinity is a type of birth defect, after which she says: "You look at me like you looked at that bottle of Scotch: a mixture of fear and anger. I don't like that." (2x03).

Stella Gibson is an example of the usual masculinised female model of TV series (Tous Rovirosa, 2013). She embodies the wholly emancipated woman, with a sexual conduct more similar to that which would be traditionally accepted in men. She resembles other characters from Scandinavian series, such as the saga of *Bron/Broen* (2011-) or Sarah Lund in Forbrydelsen (2007-2012), and their respective US adaptations, *The Bridge* (2013-2014) and *The Killing* (2011-2014), and other characters less radical in this respect, such as the typical heroines in Shonda Rhimes (Everett, 2015), Carrie Mathison in *Homeland*, Elizabeth Jennings in *The Americans* or Robin in the Australian series *Top of the Lake* (2013-). This is also reflected to a certain extent in the female stereotypes in Spanish primetime series aired between 1999 and 2005 (Galán Fajardo, 2007).

Many of the female characters mentioned share with Stella Gibson her condition of anti-heroine in the sense of rebel-victim, of characters disengaged from their social surroundings, characters who constantly suffer the negative effects of the social system and who rebel against it. In the case of Stella Gibson, both in her condition as an emancipated woman sexually speaking and her condition as a woman highly dedicated to her job, she comes up against repeated opposition in the form of the convictions of a particularly traditional Irish society.

If any character stands out, at least apparently, as the winner in this series, it is without a doubt Stella. In effect, she represents and connects with an emerging social imaginary around women in which the breaking away from the more traditional role is the most idiosyncratic condition that defines their social nature. Thus, this character manages to adapt perfectly to a growing social agreement and to forge an empathy around her way of being. Nevertheless, Stella, in an effort to free herself from the corseted confinement of the antiquated role, resorts to some of the stigmatisations that women's liberation movement accused men of. Thus, curiously, our character finds a unidirectional and biased path of personal self-realisation in the form of competitiveness and triumph within the hostile work environment, psychologically entrenching herself in the *inner-worldly asceticism* that, according to Weber, penetrates the cardinal values of the labour world. Paradoxically, the emancipation of Stella becomes an impersonation of the role usually assigned to men in the traditional social imaginary. Therefore, her behaviour is not presented as an affirmation of the feminine, but as a metabolised appropriation, but with more shadows than light, of the masculine.

6. The clash between two antiheroes

As the plot of the first two seasons advances in *The Fall*, the meaning of the confrontation between Paul Spector and Stella Gibson increases. What started out as nothing more than a game of cat and mouse between a criminal and a policewoman, both attractive and intelligent, transmutes episode after episode into a friction between two antiheroic characters who do not fit into society, one of which is harmful to society, while the other, with all her limitations, proves herself to beneficial.

Right from the series' outset, as we have mentioned before, Stella is at the receiving end of the pressures of a traditional and sexist society. Moreover, however, the atmosphere portrayed appears biased. As the majority of the men in the series appear fragile, morally speaking in terms, in the way they treat their wives and/or with regard to their ethics or professional capacity. Sergeant Olson and Jim Burns are unfaithful to their respective wives.

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Paul Spector lies to his wife, seduces the nanny Benedetto and does not fulfil his work obligations. Matt Eastwood crumbles in extreme situations and is incapable of coping with them like Stella. Glen Martin does not like having a woman as a boss and is inefficient at work, as we see when he arrives late for a meeting or when his phone rings in the same meeting (1x03). Sergeant Olson and his colleague Jim Burns and the politician Morgan Monroe are corrupt to different degrees and lack the commitments required of their respective jobs. Aaron Monroe is unfaithful to his wife, takes cocaine and runs shady businesses. James Tyler beats up and abuses his wife and other women, as well as firing at Paul Spector (2x06). Jim Burns forces himself on Stella with the intention of abusing her and imposing his physical strength as a man (2x04), making true what Stella later tells him when she says there is no great difference between him and Spector (2x06).

This scenario of genders so biased and extreme is where our two antiheroes encounter each other. The first time Paul Spector sees Stella Gibson is when she appears on television to report of the discovery that three of the murders of women were connected and that there seems to be a serial killer on the loose (1x03). Their first face-to-face encounter is in the corridor of the police station (1x05) when he voluntarily goes to identify himself as one of those who appears in a video the police have shown on the television in an appeal for help from the public. Their brief glance at each other is highlighted by a slow motion camera shot. In this same episode, which appears at the end of the first season, a telephone conversation takes place at the initiative of the anonymous murderer who asks to be put through to Stella Gibson.

> Paul : We're very alike, you and me.
>
> Stella: Oh. I don't think so.
>
> P: Both driven by a will to power. A desire to control… everything and everyone. Obsessive, ruthless. Living and breathing moral relativism. It's just you bound by conventional notions of what's right and wrong. And I'm free.
>
> S: How are you free? You're a slave to your desires. You have no control at all. You're weak, impotent. You think you're some sort of artist, but you are not.
>
> P: Art is a lie. Art gives the chaos in this world an order that doesn't exist.
>
> S: Is that why you called me? To expound some half-baked philosophy? I'm disappointed.
>
> P: I called to say goodbye. I called you to say it's over.
>
> […]
>
> S: You think I'd let you walk away? You try to dignify what you do, but it's just misogyny. Age-old male violence against women. For Fiona Gallagher, Alice Monroe, Sarah Kay, Annie Brawley, I won't let you. You fucked up. You moved against Annie too soon. You didn't prepare properly. You didn't do the groundwork. And you didn't kill her. You fucked up and we're on to you.
>
> P: If you're on to me, you will come for me. You have no idea who I am and you never will.
>
> S: I know your name is Peter, or at least you called yourself Peter at one time. I know that you studied literature at Queen's or possibly Stranmillis.
>
> P: Wrong.
>
> S: I think you have at least one child, a girl. How old would she be now? Seven or eight? Does she love her daddy? Does she look up to him? Does she think he's the most important thing in her whole world? Does she dream about him? What's going to happen when she finds out who you really are, what you really do? It will destroy her. It will kill her.

In this conversation we witness the first duel between the two, with Stella coming out victorious, though Peter/Paul has not fallen entirely into her hands. Paul says they are equal in a certain sense, although Stella points out their differences, stressing the bad she considers fundamental in him, his "ancestral male violence against women".

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In episode 2x03 they fortuitously meet again. Stella is at the site where the Rose Stagg's telephone case has been found and Paul Spector drives up this road in a stolen car, but he has time to turn around while Stella manages to write down the false registration number.

In this same episode we see how Spector carries around a newspaper cutting of a photo of Stella in his wallet and we also witness Spector entering her room and violating her privacy by reading and photographing her personal diary, something Spector usually does with his victims before killing them. In this series, the women's diaries come to symbolise their privacy, always subject to interference and/or aggression by the misogynistic Spector. After secretly visiting her room, Spector not only changes the screen saver on Stella's computer to a picture of the devil standing over the prostrate body of a woman, he also leaves a note for her in her diary, leaving evidence of this violation and intending to intimidate her. His note states: "Oh, Stella, how revealing, how exposing. It's all in these pages. Sweet little Stella missing her daddy, lost and alone. Sexy Stella, expressing her deepest, darkest desires. Stroppy Stella, angry and misunderstood, lashing out against the world of men. Oh, Stella Gibson, how well I know you now " (2x03).

Further on, in the last episode of the second season (2x06), when Paul Spector is arrested and questioned by successive police officers, he always hopes for and seeks a direct relationship with Stella, until finally he gets his way and is interviewed by her personally, at which point he confesses. It seems that Stella has won. However, she does not stop there and continues in order to save Rose Stagg until, negotiating with Spector, she succeeds in identifying the place where she is hidden and rescues her just before she dies of thirst.

7. Conclusions

In the end, it is Stella who wins the battle between the two antiheros. The emancipated woman imposes herself on the psychopath with whom the audience at first empathised and from whom, as the plot advances, they emotionally distance themselves until the last episode in which the public sees Stella talk of Spector to Tom Anderson: "I despise him with every fibre of my being" (2x06) after telling him a story in which it is said that men fear being ridiculed in front of women, while what women fear of men is being murdered.

By now, Paul Spector has for everybody come to stand for, through antonomasia, the abuser, although in the scenario of generalised male evil —with the exception of Tom Anderson among the most representative characters of the drama— there is a risk of stigmatising all men jointly in the assertion Stella Gibson herself makes: "The basic human form is female. Maleness is a kind of birth defect" (2x03). Thus, it can be seen that the plot of *The Fall* is a narrative and dramatic modulation of what in law has been referred to as positive discrimination. That is, faced with a social situation of gender inequality, a solution has been chosen that in other circumstances would be unfair —that of discriminating against men for being men. In other words, in the story related to us in this series we see a clear tipping of the gender valuation balance in favour of women, in favour of Stella Gibson, that anti-heroine aware of the dangers of social normality in terms of the oppression of women. And this bias is justified by the urge to rebalance the inequality present in our society towards the opposite direction. In this way, the principle of equality is being harmed not only in the legal ambit but also in the narrative realm, with the aim of achieving gender equality and favouring the possibility of the emancipation of women.

The character of Stella embodies the exaltation of a (female) "difference" that, nevertheless, is fatally subsumed in an "identity" (the "universalised" male) from which it wished to extricate itself. She fits into what, in the context of feminist theory, has been referred to as *difference feminism*. This *feminism* will lift a female identity by virtue of a primitive essence of "being a woman" separate from the pigeon-holed referential discourse of a superimposed masculine model (Irigaray, 2009). As pointed out paradigmatically by

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Victoria Sendón de León (2000), an authentic separation of female discrimination will not be achieved if the legal-political emancipation is not backed by a recognition of a strictly female "difference", which inevitably happens by questioning the archetypal-cultural advocate of the male dominion.

Stella defends, with her conflictive attitudinal ambivalence, co-naturally female cultural values and characteristics distanced from a "social construction" of gender such as irrationality, the body, nature, subjectivity and experience. Nevertheless, our character, seized by an excessive anxiety of the self-affirmation of her female singularity, derives a rigid denial of the male. She will evidently fail (which she knows) in this attempt at self-affirmation. While the self-affirmation of the "difference" in a society governed by patriarchal categories —based on a male "difference"— is condemned beforehand to be reabsorbed by these. In other words, on being subsumed in the "identity", an "identity" forged, as has been reiterated many times, through hostility, competitiveness and success, which Stella will metabolise and eventually reproduce. In line with the hypotheses of Sendón de León (2000), when faced with the structural impotence of establishing a female "symbolic order", an alternative to the patriarchal order, the female "difference" becomes trapped and constricted by the relational side of male power. Hence, Stella will be doomed to reproduce the "symbolic order" of a characteristic male power. *Difference feminism* would classically reproach that fact that *the equality* that the legal-political equality does not imply an authentic substantive equality. Stella takes an opposite path, aiming fruitlessly to give value to a "substantive difference" in the heart of a patriarchal legal-political framework. Here we find the crux of her failure.

In this regard, the series' failure lies in its predictability. The dramatization in postmodern terms of gender conflict, represented through the fight between an imaginary of the affirmation of the male singularity and its female counterpart, between Paul Spector and Stella Gibson, finds its probable resolution, insofar that this resolution finds a tight arrangement with the direction of the social imaginary with hints of hegemony that is increasingly being adopted as a means of collective agreement. In effect, both antiheroic and, in their heart of hearts secretly anomic, characters crave an affirmation of their individuality in tune with a postmodern psycho-political scenario. In this context, with Stella Gibson's singularity coming out victorious over that of Paul Spector, the final confirms a concession to the expectations of the audience. Undoubtedly, it gives credit and legitimacy to what it consensually wished to be credited and legitimised. In effect, *The Fall* exhibits a triumphal end of "the female" over "the male".

Thus, it may be superficially condescending when fulfilling certain predictable expectations around the current pressing issue regarding gender relations, even if it is confined to the cinematic space. It does not, however, extend this condescension to the understanding of the violation regarding the "real" discrimination in gender relations. It prevents us clarifying the deep-rooted failure in the project of the self-affirmation of Stella and its causes —and, therefore of the frustration of a particular consideration of female emancipation— hidden behind its Pyrrhic victory namely, the infeasibility of a self-affirmation of the female "difference" in a dominant male "symbolic order" and the inevitable final subsumption of this "difference" under canons of the male "identity" that it longed to subvert. Presenting this in a paradigmatic way, *The Fall* indirectly paves the way for the endorsement of an ideology of women's liberation severed from an exclusively legal-political framework; limited to an access, as equitable as it is paradoxically restrictive, to the rights and participation in public life (and the protection of a concomitant pleasure in the private sphere) that only the professional success of Stella can guarantee. Ultimately, the series reaffirms and extols, above any other reference variable, the parameters of an emancipated female identity inextricably tied to the conquest of professional status.

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