

DIALOGUE WITH RODOLF GINER

INTERVIEW BY
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Rodolf Giner has been working as a screenwriter for more than 15 years. He is currently the General Director of FAGA (Forum of Screenwriter Associations), an organisation bringing together Spain's most prominent writers of local fiction series. His most recent work includes *Paralelo* (La Tierra Negra), a project of his own that was selected for the second Television Series Creation Lab run by the Spanish writer's association Fundación SGAE, and *Planet Ripos*, an animated series co-produced by Vidoxmedia. Previously, he has written fiction for television series such as *L'Alqueria Blanca*, *Socarrats*, *Autoindefinit* and *Negocis de Família*. He has also written scripts for comics and other animated series, like *Las Aventuras de Marco Antonio*, for TVE, as well as non-fiction formats and children's programming.

A Ideally, what positive qualities do you think local fiction series should have?

G Local series are no different from what we identify as non-local series. In the end, they need to have a story that interests the audience and to tell it well. It sounds obvious, but it is a basic premise for any series. In this sense, we could say that a local series should explain something that the viewer needs to have explained. It should help viewers understand the environment in which they live, based on the idea that we all universally recognize elements that grab our attention and help us understand certain things, but every culture has its own elements that contribute to a better understanding of its own reality and its own identity. And, as I mentioned, the series should respond to certain parameters of quality

and their stories should be told well in accordance with the expectations for any audiovisual narrative.

A *Do you think local television is necessary, and local fiction series in particular?*

G My answer is yes, because in a global context where we have increasing access to universal stories, if as a society you don't tell your own stories, nobody is going to tell them for you. We might find stories that get close to our local context, but they won't show our reality. On the other hand, within those universal stories that tend to become standardised, local fiction series, in addition to fulfilling that social function of explaining minority cultures, contribute to the generation of differentiating elements that can be extremely appealing and help expose the viewer to other languages and other cultures. What I mean by this is that if Danish fiction didn't exist, we never would have experienced the same thing watching American series. However, thanks to Danish fiction, we can discover a country with a minority language and an audiovisual industry that has created stories that we've found really interesting and have consumed eagerly.

A *Are there factors specific to local fiction series that help them attract an audience?*

G To answer, I will draw on two examples. The first one is *L'Alqueria Blanca*, a period series set in the 1960s, broadcast on Valencian regional television from 2007 to 2013, which scored viewer ratings four times higher than the network's usual ratings. In this case, I think it connected very well with the spirit of its time. Valencians needed to be told at that moment that they were the best, in keeping with the discourse of the party in government in the Valencian Community at that time. The series explained that they were living in the best possible world because they came from the best possible world, laying aside the disasters of the Franco dictatorship that Spain was suffering at the time in which the series was set. For example, it didn't show the poverty of a rural world that was forcing its inhabitants to migrate to the city, or the rampant imprisonment and murder that characterised the era... In other words, *L'Alqueria Blanca* didn't sell a real past, but an idealised past, the past that the generations watching TV in 2007 wanted to remember; it explained something that the Valencians needed to have explained about themselves and it explained it well. The second example is the teen musical *Go!azen*, broadcast on the Basque public network ETB1. The series is in Euskara, the co-official language of the Basque Country, and is set at a summer camp where young people

get up to all kinds of shenanigans. What is curious about this case is that the channel ETB1 has an average audience share of 1% and this musical series has a share of 8%. The key here is that this is a story that meets a social need, because it shows the Basque people as cosmopolitan and modern, and also demonstrates that the Basque language has a place in the globalised world. As a result, it has turned into a pop phenomenon with Basque youth, who have been educated in Basque and speak it as their main language. In addition to all this, the series has been bought by Greece and is being broadcast in Basque with Greek subtitles. And it's now in its fourth season.

A *This last answer serves as a link to the next question; is it important to work in minority languages in local fiction series?*

G I consider it essential. Not only for the pedagogical value of television as a basic instrument for disseminating languages, but because societies have a need to have things explained in their own languages, because it brings it closer to them. Coming back to one of the examples I cited before, another of the keys to the success of *L'Alqueria Blanca*, apart from showing us as better than we really were, is that they found a register of language which, being cultivated, connected really well with the need of Valencian speakers for an audiovisual product in a language that sounded familiar to them and close to their way of speaking. And in the case of *Go!azen*, as I mentioned, much of its success was due to it being a musical series in the Basque language.

A *There are series like *Polseres vermelles* in Spain or *Skam* in Norway that have found success beyond their own national borders. Do you think they have done this because they are so different from conventional local fiction series?*

G I think these are cases of rootless series; I mean, they have specific premises, but their stories tell something universal, which makes them exportable to other countries. In the case of *Polseres vermelles*, it is a series in Catalan broadcast on Catalonia's regional network that deals with the everyday lives of sick kids and adolescents who meet in a hospital. It is a series that could be set anywhere and that deals with a universal issue, similar to another Catalan series called *Merlí*. This series is set in a high school and deals with philosophy, and quotes thinkers who are known worldwide, etc. Neither of these series have any geographical roots apart from their language, which makes them easily exportable. I could cite cases of American series like *The Wire*, which offers a realistic and specific view of Baltimore, or *Boardwalk Empire*, which

presents a very clear picture of what the mafia and Irish immigration were like in Atlantic City. Both series have attracted a lot of viewers outside their borders because they deal with universal themes based on specific suggestions. Linking back to where we started, I think what's good about local fiction series is that, if they're able to combine the elements that are most characteristic and identifiable for their local audience with universal themes and to tell their story well, obviously they'll go far. And the specifically unique part, with the most familiar, local geographical roots, won't work against the universal story; on the contrary, it will offer a new and different point of view on a universal theme. And that is the *raison d'être* of local fiction series in a context dominated by big media groups and distribution platforms. In other words, people are going to want to see a story they already know, but with its own distinguishing features. We all operate within the same narrative logic. But I think that ability to distinguish what's different within the sameness actually enhances rather than reduces the international potential of any series.

