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REPRESENTING DOMESTIC CONTAINMENT THROUGH INTER-CHARACTER NEGATIVE JUDGEMENTS: DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF CAREER TALK IN I LOVE LUCY (1951-52)

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KEYWORDS
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ABSTRACT
This paper approaches fictional telecinematic discourse with a qualitative analysis of inter-character negative evaluation in a specific context. The paper adapts and develops a categorisation for inter-character negative judgements from Appraisal Theory and Moral Foundations Theory, and uses it to analyse instances of negative evaluation where participation in career practices are negotiated between the marital couple of Lucy and Ricky Ricardo in the classic sitcom I Love Lucy. A recurring theme in the show, Lucy's desire to star in show business and Ricky's attempts to thwart her ambitions have been discussed as both a representation of domestic containment typical to Post-War gender roles as well as an example of early feminist representation in televised sitcoms. The analysis reveals three intertwined facets of containment: Moral judgements condemn Ricky's oppressive behaviour of restricting Lucy's access to career opportunities, Lucy's subversion of authority, and the distribution of the couple's social resources.

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1. **INTRODUCTION**

This article investigates inter-character negative evaluation occurring in dialogue sequences negotiating a marital couple's participation in paid labour activities in the 1950's classic sitcom I Love Lucy (CBS, 1951-1957). As such, this article aims to contribute to the study of fictional telecinematic discourse from a linguistic perspective in areas ranging from interpersonal evaluation in a specific context (e.g., Bednarek 2010), (relationship) characterisation (cf. Culpeper and Fernandez-Quintanilla 2017), and the representation of gender roles in early televised domestic sitcoms (e.g., Marc 1989, Mellencamp 1992, Gray 1994).

The article first introduces I Love Lucy from a perspective of a specific representation of gender roles, namely an "ideology of domesticity" (Landay 2005: 90). Then, it illustrates how a study of inter-character negative evaluation provides textual evidence for such a representation. The study is based on the rationale that analysis of inter-character negative evaluation can further support discussion of ideological representations in television series. By selecting a specific topic of dialogue, in this case the Ricardo's participation in career practices, and applying a model for categorising inter-character negative evaluation negotiating the topic, it is possible to reveal the negative values that the characters Lucy and Ricky produce for each other within the specific context and how they amount to a set of (repetitively) represented values.

1.1. I Love Lucy and Post-War Domestic Sitcoms in Media and Culture Studies

In the cultural climate of post-war America, early television shows (1946-) in their episodic series format, including the half-hour situational comedy show, offered a new fertile territory for covering domestic themes on marriage and family (Taylor 1989: 17).

The home-setting in televised sitcoms of the 1950's became a reproductive symbol of the ideology of domesticity: "an idealization of marriage, family, and the home prescribed, albeit differently, to both men and women" (Landay 2005: 90). Scholars in cultural and television studies have discussed *I Love Lucy* and its portrayal of marriage as a representation of ideological containment (Landay 2005: 90). This containment entailed married women abandoning ambitions related to the public sphere, such as higher education and careers (Mellencamp 1992, Gray 1994, Landay 2005).

In domestic sitcoms of the 1950s, the discontent housewife venturing into the sphere of public labour became a single episode plot theme in many prevalent shows of the period (e.g., *I Married Joan* (1.02), *Make Room for Daddy* (1.11)), with an inevitable and comfortable return to the status quo in the final act. No other character, however, was as adamantly and repetitively defiant of her husband's authority to contain her show business career ambitions as Lucy Ricardo (Lucille Ball) in *I Love Lucy* (Marc 1989, Mellencamp 1992). In *I Love Lucy*, the theme became an oft visited plot device throughout the series, and a source for comedic situations to play out in the form of physical slapstick and verbal ridicule. Lucy's husband Ricky Ricardo (Desi Arnaz), a band leader in a nightclub, notably occupied two overlapping roles: the authoritative husband at home, and Lucy's designated potential employer and gateway to stardom in the public sphere.

Ideological readings of *I Love Lucy* as a sitcom text have been made from multiple positions. Marc notes Lucy's failed schemes to challenge her husband became a "ritual celebration of female deference to patriarchal structure" (1989: 56), whereas Mellencamp (1992: 322–333), Gray (1994: 46–53) and Rowe (1995) discuss Lucy's rebellion against the domestic setting as a cultural text enacting "the frustration of women confined to the home" (Rowe, 1995: 170). Seemingly contradictory views are hardly surprising, as fictional telecinematic discourse is multi-levelled, and with a complex participation framework involving both the production crew and TV viewer, as well as the inter-character level between the characters (and embedded recipient) (Chovanec and Dynel 2015, Brock 2015). Lucy can be defiant and rebellious on the level of inter-character dialogue (as this paper will show), but her defiance is mitigated by her "harebrained schemes" (Marc 1989: 55, original quotations). However, it is Lucille Ball's talent in physical slapstick comedy that is put on display in Lucy's schemes (Gray 1994: 47), and for the recipient of the time, the fiction of the show itself was deeply interwoven with the celebrity couple status of Lucille Ball and Desi Arnaz, whose real-world life, such as the birth of their child, were mirrored in the show (Landay 2005).

1.2. Aim and Relevance of the Study

This article contributes to the study of fictional telecinematic discourse from a linguistic perspective by focusing on negative evaluation occurring on the inter-character level of dialogue. The article aims to investigate (1) the language the Ricardos use to negatively evaluate each other on the topic

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of career related practices, and (2) the kind of methodological framework that is required to analyse the direct and indirect evaluative meanings the couple produce for each other, and ultimately, the study shows how these meanings contribute to the representation of domestic containment, discussed above.

As television series are culturally significant texts (Bednarek 2010), the relevance of this study derives from the premise that the study of language and values represented in domestic sitcoms of the early 1950's is a worthy endeavour in and of itself. This is not least because, by their very function, inter-character negative evaluation enforces and/or renegotiates marital (and) gender roles, as shown in Example 1.

Example 1.

LUCY:	(to her husband) You're mean! You didn't even let me finish auditioning, for heaven's sake. You give anybody else a chance but your wife! *I Love Lucy* (1.12) (1951)
JOAN:	(to her husband) Then why are you stifling me? *I Married Joan* (1.02) (1952)
MARGARET:	(to her husband) Lydia's made something of herself from that little business we started in college, but when I wanted to go on with it you wouldn't have it, you didn't have any confidence in me. *Make Room for Daddy* (1.11) (1953)

Example 1 displays three conversational turns from three sitcom housewives of the early 1950's that challenge and condemn their husbands' oppressive behaviour in limiting the women's access to career opportunities in one way or another. As such, the women are effectively renegotiating established obligations, roles, and values within their marital relationship.

Originally aired in a time of Post-War gender role negotiation (Gray 1994, Landay 2005), and before the success of the hegemonic white middle-class family representations of sitcoms such as *Father Knows Best* and *Leave it to Beaver* of the later 1950's "suburban ecstasy period" (Marc 1989: 51), an investigation of the evaluative language of career talk in *I Love Lucy* makes for an interesting study on what sort of values were represented in one of the most popular shows of its time.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 Inter-character Negative Judgements and Dimensions of Evaluation

In this article I use the term negative judgement to signify an occurrence of inter-character negative evaluation within a dialogue turn. Judgements are valenced evaluative expressions, i.e., propositions of attitude towards people or their behaviour (Martin and White 2005: 42–57). Thompson and Hunston regard evaluation as value-laden, with markers for "indications of the existence of goals and their (non)-achievement" (Thompson and Hunston 2000: 21). Thus, an inter-character *negative* judgement is Character A's indication of negative attitude towards Character B's *non*-achievement of any given goal. Consequently, the underlying premise of the communicative act is that, within social interaction, there exists a latent field of desires and expectations towards qualities and behaviour, which upon not being met (or claimed to not being met), may warrant an expression denoting the non-achievement. In Example 1, depending on the choice of wording, the indicated non-achievement of the husbands' behaviours is to not allow (or to actively prevent), let alone encourage, their wives' participation in paid labour practices, for example.

Linguistic evaluation has been a prominent field of research in media discourses, most notably the news discourse, and social media. In fictional telecinematic discourse, some of the most prominent research has been done by Bednarek (e.g., 2010). Though methodologically different to this paper, Bednarek's (2010: 180–223) case study of the ideological representation of food practices in *Gilmore Girls* bears resemblance to the study at hand in that it selects the topic of evaluation (e.g., food, vegan/vegetarian vs. meat-eating) while quantitatively and qualitatively analysing occurrences of linguistic evaluation of the practice(s) in order to arrive at conclusions of ideological representation.

Lemke (1998), Martin and White (2005), and Bednarek (2009) offer perhaps the most comprehensive categorisations for evaluation. Bednarek (2009: 161, 162 in table 7) incorporates extensive linguistic and cognitive research (including

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Lemke 1998, Martin and White 2005) in appraisal and evaluation and proposes seven dimensions of opinion lexis:

- Expectedness – How expected?
- Emotivity – How good/bad? How necessary? How appropriate?
- Importance – How important?
- Authenticity – How real/true?
- Power – How able? How easy to deal with?
- Reliability – How likely?
- Causality – What are the reasons/consequences?

While judgements belong to the emotivity dimension (Bednarek 2009: 160,162), negative judgements as expressed opinions/propositions may criticise a person by indicating the lack or excess of a trait or behaviour with any of the other evaluative axes (cf. Malrieu 1999: 131–134, who emphasises axes of evaluation mixing and combining). Thus, inter-character negative judgements are driven by, but not limited to, an evaluation of emotivity and non-desire.

In their Appraisal Theory, Martin and White (2005: 52–53) divide judgements into judgements of social esteem and social sanction. Judgements of social esteem criticise personal characteristics or social relevance whereas judgements of social sanction condemn behaviour as immoral.

Similarly, I distinguish inter-character negative judgements into two main types: negative personal judgements and negative moral judgements, displayed in the next section in Tables 1 and 2, respectively. For moral judgements, I implement six moral foundations from the Moral Foundations Theory (Haidt 2012, Graham et al. 2013). The Moral Foundations Theory sums itself as "a nativist, cultural developmentalist, intuitionist, and pluralist approach to the study of morality" (Graham et al. 2013: 71). The theory establishes five moral foundations, which form the basis of human morality: The care/harm, fairness/cheating, loyalty/betrayal, sanctity/degradation and authority/subversion foundations (Graham et al. 2013: 68–71), with an additional liberty/oppression foundation put forth by Haidt (e.g., 2012). For the purposes of this article, I adapt these foundations for the categorisation of meanings expressed in inter-character negative judgements because they offer a more context-specific categorisation than Martin and White's (2005) distinction between social sanction of propriety ("how appropriate?") and veracity ("how truthful?"), and Lemke's (1998) normativity/appropriateness. While the definitions of the moral judgement categories (displayed in Table 2) are influenced by (and names carried over) from the Moral Foundations Theory, this paper will not directly contribute to the discussion of MFT.

2.2 Negative Judgements in Fictional Telecinematic Discourse and Sitcom

Among the first issues to resolve when researching inter-character negative judgements is determining the researcher's reading position and what counts as negative evaluation.

Fictional telecinematic discourse involves a complex participation framework between the collective sender (i.e., the production crew) and TV viewer, and the fictitious inter-character level (Brock 2015, and references within). Bubel (2008) and Brock (2015) make space for the TV viewer as an overhearer on the fictitious level, which, in TV sitcom, is largely achieved with the three-camera system enabling the positioning of the viewer within the interaction with close-shots. As Brock notes, the TV viewer's role on the fictitious level is one of empathy (2015: 33), allowing the viewer/researcher to tap into the characters' attitudes.

Methodologically, this access to attitudes is crucial to discerning an act of negative judgement on the characters' level, as their attitudes, intentions, and reactions are available to the viewer/researcher to interpret. The same reading position is used in studies of impoliteness in fictional telecinematic discourse to warrant interpretations of impoliteness (e.g., Culpeper 2011, McIntyre and Bousfield 2017, Bednarek 2010, Dynel 2017).

In fact, it is worth pointing out that inter-character negative judgements, in part, function as coercive and affective impoliteness (Culpeper 2011). They may coerce "a realignment of values between the producer and the target such that the producer benefits or has their current benefits reinforced or protected" (Culpeper 2011: 226), and/or may be instrumental affective displays of negative emotion signalling that "the target is to blame for producing that negative emotional state" (Culpeper 2011: 225), respectively. As discussed in the previous section, both emotivity (or valence) and causality are dimensions of evaluation. This is to say, that if there is a communicative act that signals negative emotivity and causality (blame), even as short as an emotive interjection, it has evaluative meaning. This is useful to keep in mind when assessing indirect negative judgements.

Inter-character negative judgements contribute to many functions of TV dialogue including characterisation and creating the narrative problem, i.e., situation, that must be resolved. Mills defines sitcom as "a form of programming which

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foregrounds its comic intent" (Mills 2009: 49), and negative judgements (and impoliteness) are certainly a dialogue device to create comedy (cf. Culpeper 2011, Dynel 2013, on entertaining impoliteness, and disaffiliative humour, respectively).

Bearing in mind the discussion of ideological domestic containment from the introductory section, the function of telecinematic discourse to express ideology (Kozloff, 2000: 33–34, Bednarek, 2018) is of a greater interest. Though ideology is a contested term (cf. Malrieu 1999, Bednarek 2010: 180–185), I approach ideology in this article as a context-specific micro representation of values. Thus, for current purposes, an ideology of negative (marital) career talk in *I Love Lucy* simply consists of the values expressed in character-character negative judgements negotiating paid labour practices in the text. In the next section, I introduce methodological choices on how to categorise various evaluative meanings occurring in the negative judgements.

3. **METHOD AND DATA**

3.1 Working Definition of Negative Judgements and Analytical Decisions

From discussion in the previous section, I draw a working definition of negative judgement for this paper:

An inter-character negative judgement is an expression (or perceived expression) of a character's negative attitude towards another character's specific quality or behaviour in a specific context.

Tables 1 and 2 display a categorisation of five sub-types of personal negative judgements and six sub-types of moral negative judgements. It is influenced by the classifications of Lemke (1998), Martin and White (2005), Bednarek (2009) and the Moral Foundations Theory (e.g., Graham et al. 2013), which are displayed in brackets below the sub-type of negative judgement and referenced with capitalised letters (see reference key at the bottom of the tables). This categorisation provides the framework for analysing types of inflicted meanings in inter-character negative judgements. In the final column of the tables, I give examples of adjectival realisations for each category. Lexical examples are neither exhaustive nor should they be considered as restricted to a category. For example, *a bitter person* will most often refer to emotional coping rather than the sensory quality of taste. Moreover, as will be discussed below, conversational turns such as *do you have to be like that?* may well indirectly criticize similar qualities of resentfulness in relation to a trigger such as a character's bitter remark.

Following Malrieu (1999), I take the position that axes/dimensions of evaluation should be treated as potentially simultaneously co-occurring. Furthermore, a conversational turn with negative judgements may express disapproval of many (interrelated) social behaviours or characteristics. Analysis of negative judgements should thus allow for the co-occurrence of the various sub-types (displayed in Tables 1 and 2), depending on the situational context of the utterance.

This study employs the conversational turn as a practical unit of observation for two main reasons. Firstly, the analytical apparatus must account for indirect negative judgements, but these are at times difficult to pinpoint to specific units within a turn. Secondly, because evaluation has intensifying and prosodic qualities (Martin and White 2005), observing units within a turn becomes problematic. For example, in Lucy's turn in Example 1, the researcher might easily identify a negative moral judgement of care/harm in *You're mean!* as the judgement is directly inscribed. But when considered in the context of the dialogue sequence, displayed in Example 2, the researcher would face problems identifying how many, if any, indirect denotations of care/harm are present in the follow-up criticism *You didn't even let me finish auditioning for heaven's sake you give anybody else a chance but your wife!*

Example 2.

	(Lucy has frequently interrupted Ricky's business call in an effort to audition for him)
RICKY:	No honey all you have to do is just come out and ask me, Ricky, can I be in the show?
LUCY:	Really?
RICKY:	Of course!
LUCY:	Ricky can I be in the show?
RICKY:	No. (Ricky picks up the phone and resumes talking to his agent) Jerry-
LUCY:	You're mean! You didn't even let me finish auditioning for heaven's sake you give anybody else a chance but your wife!
	I Love Lucy (1.12)

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Sub-Type	Definition	Descriptive Examples
Aesthetic appeal (reaction) M/W (composition) M/W	Evaluate undesired quality of person/behaviour in sensory appeal.	Visual: *ugly, disfigured* Olfactory: *smelly, pungent* Taste: *sour, salty* Auditory: *hoarse, squeaky* Haptic: *coarse, sweaty*
Competence (power) B (capacity) M/W (reaction) M/W (composition) M/W (action-oriented behaviour)	Evaluate undesired quality of person/behaviour in coping with perceptive, intellectual, physical, or social ability or skill (incl. skill in domain).	Perceptive/intellect: *blind, deaf* *stupid, naïve, crazy* Physical: *weak, slow, old, clumsy* Social/skill: *boring, dull, awkward* *incompetent*
Coping (power) B (humorousness/ seriousness) L (capacity) M/W (tenacity) M/W (emotion-oriented behaviour)	Evaluate undesired quality of person/behaviour in regulating/coping with emotion or affective/ emotional circumstance.	Regulating emotions: *angry, cowardly, joyous, surprised, disgusted* Coping with circumstances: *pessimistic, optimistic, reckless, evasive, humorous, serious, callous, jealous, gloating, self-indulgent, proud, hedonistic* Resolve: *stubborn, persistent, distracted, lazy, idle*
Normality (M/W) (expectedness) B (reliability) B (usuality/expectability) L	Evaluate undesired quality of person/behaviour in relation to expectedness, predictability or uniqueness.	Uniqueness: *deviant, unfamiliar, unspecial* Expectedness: *odd, unpredictable* *predictable, unsurprising*
Valuation (M/W) (importance) B (necessity) B (importance/significance) L (belonging)	Evaluate undesired quality of person/behaviour in relation to significance, importance or belonging.	Worthiness/importance: *unworthy, insignificant* *unnecessary* Belonging: *'othering' lexis e.g. ideological slurs*
Reference key: B = (Bednarek 2009), L = (Lemke 1998), M/W = (Martin and White 2005)		

TABLE 1. NEGATIVE PERSONAL JUDGEMENT SUB-TYPES

From the sequence it is clear Ricky intentionally misleads Lucy to thinking she might have a chance to perform in his show. When Lucy is finally snubbed by Ricky, she responds with heightened emotional distress and the negative judgement *you're mean* denoting cruelty. Her distress is visible in the follow-up utterance that condemns Ricky's oppressive behaviour (*you didn't even let me*) and fairness (*you give anybody else a chance*) but whether a negative judgement of care/harm is implicit in these utterances is unclear.

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	Definition	**Descriptive Examples**
Care/ **harm** (MFT) (propriety) M/W (appropriateness) L (causality) B	Evaluate behaviour/person causing undesired suffering (or lack of care).	Lack of care: *negligent* Excess of harm: *cruel, mean* *dangerous*, *violent*
Fairness/ **cheating** (MFT) (propriety) M/W (veracity) M/W (tenacity) M/W (appropriateness) L (causality) B (authenticity) B (reliability) B	Evaluate behaviour/person causing undesired disproportionality in social resources (equity, justice, honesty, dependability).	Lack of Fairness: *unjust*, *unfair* *selfish, greedy* *undependable, untrustworthy* Excess of Cheating: *cheating*, *dishonest* *deceitful*, *manipulative*
Loyalty/ **betrayal** (MFT) (tenacity) M/W (propriety) M/W (appropriateness) L (causality) B	Evaluate behaviour/person causing undesired disruption to in-group loyalty/inclusion/exclusion.	*disloyal*, *betraying* *traitorous* *unpatriotic*
Sanctity/ **degradation** (MFT) (propriety) M/W (appropriateness) L (causality) B	Evaluate behaviour/person causing undesired contamination, disgust or sacrilege (taboo).	Contamination: *unclean*, *messy, diseased* Degradation: *impure*, *spoiled*, *decadent* Sacrilege/taboo: *unholy* *perverted, disgusting*
Authority/ **subversion** (MFT) (propriety) M/W (appropriateness) L (causality) B	Evaluate behaviour/person causing undesired disruption to in-group hierarchy and tradition (lack of authority or excess of subversion).	Lack of authority*:* *weak*, *indeterminate*, *diffident* Excess of subversion: *subversive*, *rebellious*, *unruly*
Liberty/ **oppression** (MFT) (propriety) M/W (appropriateness) L (causality) B	Evaluate behaviour/person causing undesired disruption to autonomy or freedom (lack of autonomy or excess of oppression).	Lack of autonomy: *dependent*, *subject* Excess of oppression: *oppressive*, *tyrannical*

Reference key: B = (Bednarek 2009), L = (Lemke 1998), M/W = (Martin and White 2005), MFT = Moral Foundations Theory (e.g., Haidt 2012, Graham et al. 2013)

TABLE 2. NEGATIVE MORAL JUDGEMENT SUB-TYPES

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Martin and White (2005) and Bednarek (2009) maintain the (problematic) existence of indirect evaluation. Consider the sequence in Example 3, below.

Example 3.

		(Lucy is dancing in a one-sided effort to audition for Ricky, who needs to find a replacement for a dancer in his show)
(1)	RICKY:	What are you so fidgety about, your girdle too tight?
(2)	LUCY:	(happy) No I'm just about to suggest that in this very room there's a very pretty intelligent young lady who is a wonderful singer and dancer.
(3)	RICKY:	Who, Ethel?
(4)	LUCY:	(angry) Who Ethel? No not her me!
(5)	RICKY	(annoyed) Oh!
(6)	LUCY:	Oh Ricky this is a wonderful chance for me I know the number I can take Joanne's place please?
(7)	RICKY:	No that's out of the question.
(8)	LUCY:	Give me one good reason.
(9)	RICKY:	Well you're you're too fat.
(10)	LUCY:	Fat?!
(11)	RICKY:	You said so yourself.
		I Love Lucy (1.03)

A robust sequence of negative judgements, Example 3 has been identified with 8 out of 11 turns containing negative judgements with the exceptions of turns (2), (6) and (11). As far as direct negative judgements go, only Ricky's insult in turn (9) is a straightforward interpretation. In terms of variation for indirect judgements, consider turns (3), (4), (5), and (7). Ricky's request for further information on turn (3) effectively negates the positive judgements of aesthetic appeal and competence Lucy makes for herself in the preceding turn. Lucy's heightened emotional anger on turn (4) both ratifies turn (3) as a negative judgement, as well as indirectly evaluates Ricky's competence (in realising her talent). Ricky's negative emotive interjection *Oh!* on turn (5) is triggered by Lucy reasserting her proposal to star in his show (which, prior to this excerpt, had already been resolved), and finally, Ricky's utterance *that's out of the question* on turn (7) implies that Lucy's proposal is inappropriate.

Inferences of negative judgements may then be drawn from a variety of communicative features including the (intentional) mislabelling of the criticised behaviour (e.g. turn 1, where Ricky references Lucy's non-desirable dancing as *fidgety* and attributes her behaviour to the tightness of her *girdle*), un-cooperative (or dispreferred) responses that negate previously asserted positive values (turn 3), and negative emotive interjections and exclamations (turns 5 and 10) that signal that the target is to blame for causing them.

Following conventions in linguistic appraisal (e.g., Martin and White 2005, Bednarek 2009), an analytical decision was made to include a turn or act as a "Trigger" (Bednarek 2009: 165) for each observation of negative judgement. These triggering turns or acts pinpoint a character's behaviour in the text that causes them to be appraised. I further analysed the triggering turns with variables tailored to capture the context of the dialogue and negotiated career practice. These include keeping track of which career related practice is negotiated (e.g., auditioning) and whose participation in the social action is negotiated. To illustrate, consider turns (1) and (7) from Example 3 in Table 3, below. Table 3 displays some of the variables used to capture the situational context of the negative judgements in the dataset. Variable and variant names from the actual dataset have been changed for purposes of readability.

The benefit of keeping track of the situational context in this manner is twofold. Firstly, when the dataset is summarized, clear topical locations of negative judgements (e.g., Lucy proposing to perform in a show) become apparent. Secondly, identifying a trigger turn (by proximity) effectively embeds a (near-)adjacency-pair into the dataset, and thus the focus of analysis is not just on isolated occurrences of evaluation.

The evaluative meanings within the turns of containing negative judgements were disambiguated using question criteria in Table 4, with an empathetic character-character reading of the scene. I positioned myself as an observer of the fictional community on the fictitious inter-character level and interpreted inflicted negative judgements in career conflict talk by considering co-text, retrospective comments (also actions), non-verbal emotional reactions, and identifiable conventionalised and implicational impoliteness as textual evidence for further support of my interpretation (cf. Culpeper 2011: 11 on sources of evidence, and 133–194 on

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Turn containing negative judgement	What is the triggering turn for the judgement?	What is the negotiated career practice?	Whose participation in the practice is negotiated?	How is the participation negotiated in the trigger turn?	Has the participation happened or is it projected to happen in the future?
(1) What are you so fidgety about, your girdle too tight?	(Lucy dancing)	Auditioning	Lucy's	Physical on-screen performance	Has happened
(7) No that's out of the question.	Oh Ricky this is a wonderful chance for me I know the number I can take Joanne's place please?	Performing	Lucy's	Proposal/Interrogative for participation	Future

TABLE 3. EXAMPLES OF VARIABLES FOR CAPTURING SITUATIONAL CONTEXT

Negative Judgement	Question criteria: Does the conversational turn evaluate or afford evaluation of undesired...
Aesthetic appeal	...sensory quality (visual, auditory, olfactory, haptic etc.)?
Competence	...competence quality (perceptive, intellectual, physical, social, or skill in a specific domain)?
Coping	...emotion-oriented coping/reaction to negative or positive emotional circumstance?
Valuation	...(un)importance or necessity of person or their behaviour? ...belonging of person?
Normality	...expectedness, predictability or uniqueness of person or their behaviour?
Care/harm	...causing of emotional or physical suffering?
Fairness/cheating	...causing of disproportionality of distributed social or material resources? ...causing of threat to established obligations? ...dishonesty or deception?
Loyalty/betrayal	...causing of threat to in-group inclusion or membership? ...causing of threat to in-group exclusion?
Sanctity/degradation	...causing of contamination? ...causing of degradation of convention or concept? ...taboo behaviour?
Authority/subversion	...causing of threat to authority and/or tradition? ...lack of authority or weak leadership?
Liberty/oppression	...causing of threat to autonomy, self-direction, self-actualisation? ...lack of self-direction?

TABLE 4. QUESTION CRITERIA FOR NEGATIVE JUDGEMENTS

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impoliteness strategies, Thompson, 2014, on analytical decisions regarding interpretation of evaluation, and McIntyre and Bousfield, 2017, on impoliteness in fiction).

Each observation of a sub-type of negative judgement was complemented with supporting variables including the cline of directness and the section of the turn or sequence where it is found.

I included two additional cases of interpersonal negative judgement where the judgement is not directly aimed at the target. First, I included negative evaluation of a concept or (im)material substance, in which a character has participated or expressed identity. This is because the evaluated character's social action is represented in the thing that is evaluated. Second, I included interpersonal negative judgements not in the hearing of the target that occur either prior to the target entering, or after exiting, the set. This is to consider the overhearer design of fictional television discourse (e.g., Kozloff 2000, Bubel 2008, Brock 2015).

Considerations for the communicative context of an interpersonal negative judgement therefore involve the characters' (non-)desire towards the actions negotiated, the trigger(s) of a negative judgement, the values that are threatened and produced, and the implications that these values have for the characters' (fictitious) social organisation and change.

3.2 Data

The dataset of career talk discussed in this paper is derived from transcriptions of one scene from 9 selected episodes of the first season of *I Love Lucy* (originally aired CBS 1951-52) where Lucy and Ricky negotiate career practices. In the narrative structure of the episodes, the selected scenes occur in the first seven minutes of the episodes, where a problem is established for further escalation and eventual remedial. The next section will show how, even such a small sample case study can reveal repetitive features of negative evaluation both with regards to the specific context in which negative judgements occur and the quality of the judgements.

4. **RESULTS**

4.1 Overview of Situational Context

A total of 106 turns occurring in the selected scenes were identified as containing negative inter-character judgements negotiating career practices. The turns are equally divided between the characters Lucy and Ricky. In the first season of *I Love Lucy*, the situational context of negative judgements in career talk can be described as a representation of an ideological conflict of accessibility and containment. This is reflected in the distribution of moral negative judgements in Table 6, below, where a clear difference is visible in the frequency of judgements of authority/subversion and liberty/oppression. With few exceptions, career conflict talk revolves around Lucy's proposals, and Ricky's denials, for her future participation in show business, with the couple's attitude towards the participation creating a repetitive and oft frequented conflict of interests. The majority of inter-character negative judgements are identified as negotiating Lucy performing or auditioning. Negative judgements negotiating Ricky's participation in career practices mainly involve management practices such as holding auditions and hiring acts, often specifically (not) hiring Lucy.

4.2 Overview of Negative Judgements

Tables 5 and 6 present the frequencies of identified negative judgements. Table 5 displays the presence of the two main types of judgement (personal quality and moral agency) identified in the 106 interpersonal negative judgements of career conflict talk. In Table 5, the frequencies indicate if any of the five personal judgements or six moral judgements were identified in the conversational turn.

Negative Judgement	*Lucy evaluating Ricky*	*Ricky evaluating Lucy*
Personal	85% (45/53)	98% (52/53)
Moral	85% (45/53)	64% (34/53)

TABLE 5. FREQUENCY OF NEGATIVE PERSONAL AND MORAL JUDGEMENTS

Ricky's interpersonal negative judgements are more focused on solely criticising Lucy's personal qualities, with 19 instances where no moral judgements were identified as co-occurring with expressed personal judgements. Ricky's moral reasoning for keeping Lucy from show business is thus often latent or left unexpressed in textual evidence. In part, this result is also a consequence of the analytical decisions I made regarding indirect judgements. For example, I identified a trigger construct such as *proposal for participation-denial-negative emotive response (judgement)* to af-

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Personal Judgement	*Lucy evaluating Ricky*	*Ricky evaluating Lucy*
Aesthetic appeal	0% (0/45)	33% (17/52)
Competence	36% (16/45)	58% (30/52)
Coping	51% (23/45)	35% (18/52)
Normality	29% (13/45)	60% (31/52)
Valuation	60% (27/45)	65% (34/52)

Moral Judgement	Lucy evaluating Ricky	Ricky evaluating Lucy
Care/harm	47% (21/45)	29% (10/34)
Fairness/cheating	89% (40/45)	32% (11/34)
Loyalty/betrayal	13% (6/45)	29% (10/34)
Sanctity/degradation	0% (0/45)	0% (0/34)
Authority/subversion	2% (1/45)	79% (27/34)
Liberty/oppression	67% (30/45)	6% (2/34)

TABLE 6. FREQUENCY OF JUDGEMENT SUB-TYPES IN NEGATIVE PERSONAL AND MORAL JUDGEMENTS

ford an inference of Lucy condemning an unfair distribution of resources (a judgement of *fairness/cheating*), but did not identify a trigger construct of *proposal for participation-negative emotive response (judgement)* to afford a clear inference of Ricky condemning the distribution of resources, unless it was backed up by textual evidence such as retrospective comments in the scene.

Table 6 shows the frequency of the 11 sub-types of negative judgements in their respective personal and moral categories. Three facets of an ideological conflict of containment can be identified in the distribution of moral judgements. A differential distribution between judgements of liberty/oppression (Lucy 67%, Ricky 6%) and authority/subversion (Ricky 79%, Lucy 2%), and a high frequency of judgements of fairness/cheating (Lucy 89%). Notably, Table 6 also shows Ricky's judgements of aesthetic appeal and competence to be more numerous. These intertwined facets, shown in bold, are discussed in the following sections.

It should be noted that analytical decisions and my question criteria have considerable impact on the results. Including necessity (*evaluate person or their behaviour as unnecessary*) in the valuation sub-category resulted in a high number of identifications (Lucy 60%, Ricky 65%), because judging behaviour as *unnecessary* is so closely intertwined with the communicative context of moral negative judgements. The sub-category of sanctity/degradation was not identified as occurring in any inter-character negative judgements. This does not mean that the sanctity of marital roles could not be interpreted as threatened from Ricky's perspective. Rather, this interpretation would be made on a co-constructed level of meaning between the audience and production.

The low frequency of loyalty/betrayal is a result of my analytical decision to consider Lucy's and Ricky's marital relationship as the only in-group. Of course, Lucy's desire to perform in Ricky's shows projects her as a potential member of another group, which she is effectively excluded from. From this perspective, Lucy's negative moral judgements would signify threat of in-group exclusion in a similar frequency comparable to fairness/cheating.

4.3 Negative Judgements of Oppression

Lucy's high frequency of negative moral judgements condemning the excess of oppression are perhaps the most characteristic facet of representing containment. As the word containment implies, her participation in career action is represented as a desired but thwarted opportunity. Her judgements of oppression, then, are triggered by Ricky's turns threatening the actualisation of these opportunities. Example 4 displays three variations of indirect negative judgements condemning Ricky's oppressive behaviour.

In Example 4.1, Lucy juxtaposes Ricky's agency (*someday in spite of you*) with the positive potential of *opportunity* in career practices. Example 4.2 simply contains a negative emotive interjection following Ricky's negative response to her dancing, which restricts her self-actualisation. Finally, Example 4.3 is an instance where comic intent (on the production-audience level) is embedded into a negative judgement by creatively describing Ricky's agency in containing Lucy as sitting on the cork of her bottled up talent. Both 4.1 and 4.3 feature representation of restriction (*in spite of you*, *sitting on the cork*) juxtaposed with a desired event or quality (*opportunity will knock*, *all this talent*).

As a repetitive feature of dialogue, Lucy's negative judgements of oppression not only characterise her ambition as well as defiance of her husband, but also further foreground her positive stance towards career practices with positive tokens for opportunity, which contributes to the representation of containment to the domestic private sphere. However, her negative judgements lack clear tokens of autonomy. While Lucy's access to career practices is represented as restricted self-actualisation, the couple's situational power dynamic,

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Example 4.

4.1	
[Trigger]	RICKY: Oh no you're not going to start that again are you?
[Judgement]	LUCY: Oh I know I know you don't want me in show business but someday in spite of you opportunity will knock and what'll happen? I'll be so big and fat I won't be able to open the door. *I Love Lucy* (1.03)
4.2	
	(Lucy sings and dances in an attempt to convince Ricky)
[Trigger]	RICKY: No.
[Judgement]	LUCY: (displeased) Oh Ricky. *I Love Lucy* (1.06)
4.3	
[Trigger]	RICKY: Look honey you're not serious about this are ya?
[Judgement]	LUCY: I am too! Here I am with all this talent bottled up inside of me and you're always sitting on the cork! *I Love Lucy* (1.19)

Example 5.

5.1	
[Trigger]	LUCY: Oh what kind of acts do you need Ricky? What kind of acts do you need?
[Judgement]	RICKY: Now look Lucy we're not gonna go all over this again you can not be in the show. *I Love Lucy* (1.19)
5.2	
	(In an attempt to audition for Ricky, Lucy is performing a French Apache dance number where she is choking herself)
	RICKY: Lucy.
	LUCY: (makes croaking sounds)
	RICKY: Lucy.
[Trigger]	LUCY: (makes croaking sounds)
[Judgement]	RICKY: (angry) Lucy! *I Love Lucy* (1.12)

where Ricky has the final say over career practices (or Lucy not having the liberty to make her own decisions), is not clearly challenged in the negative judgements of the dataset.

4.4 Negative Judgements of Subversion

On the flipside of Lucy's negative judgements condemning oppressive behaviour are Ricky's judgements condemning subversive behaviour. These occur in two main contexts displayed in Example 5, below.

In the context of 5.1, Ricky negatively evaluates Lucy's repetitive attempts to challenge Ricky's authority and decision making. Similar turns (see 4.1, 4.3, and Example 6, below) containing negative judgements of subversion share the use of emotive interjections as negative attitude markers (*oh no*, *oh Lucy*), message enforcing discourse markers (*now look*) and the establishment of a repeated non-desired behaviour (*this/that again*, *this ten thousand times*), often coupled with a negative assertion or imperative (*we're not gonna go over*). Negative judgements criticising non-desirable repeated behaviour have also been identified as containing judgements of (affective) coping, namely non-desired persistence (or stubbornness).

Example 5.2, on the other hand, is more akin to a sequence that might be expected in a parent-child interaction, with Ricky's repeated attempts at gaining control of a situation ultimately resulting in a negative emotive exclamation that signals blame.

Ricky's negative judgements of subversion re-enforce the default power relations of the couple in the text, characterising Ricky as an authority over Lucy, and representing the patriarchal structure of their relationship, in the context of career practices.

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4.5 Negative Judgements of Fairness and Cheating

Lucy's desire for self-actualisation and opportunity, discussed above, entails a redistribution of resources opposed by Ricky, who is represented as the authority controlling the resources. This conflict of interests results in a high frequency of identified negative judgements of fairness. Lucy's negative moral judgements of fairness most often co-occur with negative judgements of oppression (see discussion of Example 2) and condemn the disproportional distribution of resources.

Ricky's negative judgements of fairness are less frequent. They seek to conserve the current distribution of the couple's resources and obligations and are triggered by challenges or propositions that threaten the distribution, as displayed in Example 6 below.

Here, Lucy's mutual participation in career and household practices are implied as incompatible. In limiting Lucy's membership to a wife and re-enforcing her obligations towards Ricky (e.g., *cook for me)*, Ricky's turn contains invoked negative judgements of fairness (threat to established obligations).

Example 6 displays Ricky's moral judgement and reasoning in the dataset at its most verbose, and the conversational turn has been identified with negative judgements of subversion, fairness, as well as betrayal, with Lucy's triggering challenge seemingly causing a threat to her group membership as a wife. Ricky's turn effectively re-positions Lucy to the subservient role of a housewife who exists to serve his needs.

Example 6.

[Trigger]	LUCY: Why not?
[Judgement]	RICKY: Oh Lucy we've been over this ten thousand times. I want a wife who is just a wife. Now all you have to do is clean the house for me, bring me my slippers when I come home at night, cook for me, and be the mama for my children.

I Love Lucy (1.06)

5. DISCUSSION

The previous section foregrounded three locations of conflicting interests where moral judgements occur. Ricky's negative judgements condemn Lucy's behaviour as a threat to his authority or their established way of life, while Lucy's judgements condemn Ricky's behaviour as a threat to her self-actualisation and autonomy. Together, this flow of overlapping negative meanings that Lucy and Ricky produce for one another establishes a representation of domestic containment, where a clash of desires for social change and conservation are expressed in condemnations and criticisms negotiating participation in career practices. The findings of this study thus resonate with the discussion of ideological containment in the introductory section (Mellencamp 1992, Gray 1994, Rowe 1995, Landay 2005).

Any overtly progressive reading of the text is, of course, quickly watered down by the ideologically elusive nature of sitcoms as a genre (Marc 1989, Bednarek 2010). From a production-recipient reading perspective, negative moral judgements that challenge or enforce the engendered social roles are often softened in the character's turn in various ways. For example, they may occur in conjunction with self-deprecation (Example 4.1), creativity and comic intent (Example 4.3), or a certain degree of excessiveness such as Lucy's obligation to bring Ricky his slippers in Example 6. Furthermore, moral judgements flow in the text together with personal judgements. Consider, for example, the quality of verbal ridicule apparent in negative judgements of aesthetic appeal and competence. Table 6 showed a differential distribution in judgements of aesthetic appeal and competence between the characters, with Ricky more often evaluating Lucy's personal quality, and, notably, with no negative judgements of Ricky's aesthetic appeal identified in the dataset. It is thus Lucy's talent and physical appearance (and, to a slightly lesser degree, her sanity) that is recursively under scrutiny in career talk. In Example 3, this was apparent on turns 2-3 and 8-9, where Lucy's talent, age, and weight are negatively evaluated, for example. Lucy's lack of a situational position of power over Ricky also leave her negative judgements of competence weaker in their persuasive and coercive function. In Example 3, her negative judgement of Ricky's incompetence (to recognize her talent) on turn 8 (*give me one good reason*), for example, lacks the kind of emotional impact Ricky's insult (*you're too fat*) has on turn 9. Inevitably, these values contribute to the less progressive representation of what Marc (1989) describes as female deference to patriarchal structure.

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Nevertheless, for such an interesting conflict of interests as domestic containment, which nearly two decades later became a central topic of social upheaval, to be represented in inter-character dialogue and negative evaluation in one of the most popular sitcoms of its time is certainly worth appreciating in the scope of the historicity of television series. The extent to which this conflict theme is revisited for entertainment in the first season of *I Love Lucy* is perhaps testament to the allure it had for its production and audience. As a serial plot device, it allowed for a familiar and quick source of tension between the characters to be established within the beginning scenes of many episodes, only to later set up the presentation of Lucille Ball's and Desi Arnaz' talents in slapstick comedy and musical numbers. While negative moral judgements rarely embed comic intent, they provide a comedic rhythm in the text, as the dialogue flows back and forth between the ideological conflict established by negative moral judgements, and the creative ways in which the characters' qualities are then undermined in negative personal judgements.

6. CONCLUSION

By adapting and developing a categorisation for inter-character negative judgements and applying it to a specific negotiation of career practices, I showed how specific conflicts in narrative dialogue can be analysed by the quality of negative judgements occurring in them. The results of my analysis support an interpretation of an ideological representation of domestic containment in career talk in *I Love Lucy*. This is negotiated in character-character dialogue with a differential distribution of negative judgements of oppression and subversion, as well as a high frequency of judgements of fairness.

There are, of course, several limitations to this study. The categorisation and methodological decisions I employed were researched and constructed to establish a level of detail I deemed relevant for the aims of the study. Details of the sub-categorisation of personal and moral judgements are a work in progress, with areas of possible improvement. Another limitation is the scope of the study. While my assessment of negative judgements considered other semiotic modes, such as gestures and facial expressions, as well as heightened emotional reactions, as co-textual evidence, the focus of the analysis was solely on verbally expressed negative judgements.

Despite limitations, there is potential for similar qualitative approaches to investigate television series in different genres with a variety of research questions. The obvious caveat being that the texts require sufficient quantities of inter-character evaluation. Here, it is perhaps the close-relation sitcoms such as the marital or family sitcom that provide the most robust sources for research material. Inter-character negative evaluation allows the production to set contrasting values within a text, affording degrees of moral ambiguity and multiple readily established reading positions for the audience. This article highlighted one such reading position, where a representation of containment is expressed in Lucy's character and her negative judgements of oppression that condemn her husband for depriving her of self-actualisation in career practices.

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TV Series

I love Lucy (1951-1957)

I married Joan (1952-1955)

Make Room for Daddy (1953-1957)

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KAMA PIDA: THE DARK EMOTIONS EVOKED BY THE NETFLIX DAHMER STORY

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KEYWORDS
serial killer, kama muta, kama pida, viewer responses

ABSTRACT
This is a study of emotional responses as expressed in user-generated content at International Movie Database (IMDb) concerning the 2022 series *Dahmer – Monster: The Jeffrey Dahmer Story*. The series has triggered vehement emotional reactions. The theoretical point of departure for examining 679 reviews of this series is a phenomenon called kama muta (Sanskrit for "moved by love"), an experience of being deeply moved or touched by something amiable. Kama muta is an intense and elevating feeling of communal sharing (Fiske 2020). This article proposes kama pida (Sanskrit for "moved by pain") as a term for the opposite feeling. Kama pida is on the very "dark side" of the emotional spectrum. It is a multivalent emotion accompanied by bodily reactions or embodied experiences. The emotion of kama pida is in most cases expressed by metaphors concerning the stomach, the nerves, the heart, breathing, and other bodily functions, but also by more cognitive/mental reactions like the experience of being very stressed, seeing a nightmare, or sharing in a trauma. The affective content of kama pida concerns the utterly unspeakable experience of horror, but is all the same expressed verbally by the reviewers of the Netflix series about the serial killer Jeffrey Dahmer.

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1. **THE CONCEPT OF KAMA MUTA**

Feelings can be very subtle. A feeling, for instance of being rejected, can have a wide array of degrees and shades, as well as countless contexts. Feelings rise, flow, transmute and overlap, are strengthened or weakened, often in unpredictable ways. They can be aroused for different reasons and on different occasions. Some feelings are strong, intense – even overwhelming. They can be lustful or painful, causing physiological reactions like heightened body temperature and rapid heart rate. Such reactions can have different real-life effects or consequences, negative or positive. There are also big differences in what is considered affective content, and people react differently and get different feelings from the same event, even though there are cultural conventions influencing emotional responses. There are emotional "management systems" in different cultures, appropriate to gender, age, social position, etc.1 Early in life, we learn how to model our feelings, and this modeling is culture-specific.2 In a culture, there are "affective spaces": for example, some spaces where you can, or even are supposed to, cry openly (for instance in a funeral), and where you should definitely not cry (at a job interview).

In media research, there are several studies on how different media texts evoke feelings and move the audience (Plantinga and Smith 1999, García 2016, Wahl-Jorgensen 2019, Döveling and Konijn 2021, Nannicelli and Pérez 2021, Fischer 2022). There has even been an assertion of an "emotional turn" in academic studies (Lemmings and Brooks 2014), indicating a distinct bend of interest towards audiences' emotional reactions. These media generated emotions are studied in various contexts and frameworks, often focusing on a combination of cognition3 and embodied feelings. The discourse about media and emotions is rich and is becoming increasingly complex.

In recent years, one intense and positive feeling has been given particular attention, and even a specific name. It's called *kama muta*, from the Sanskrit "moved by love", and has been the topic of study by an international research group.4 Alongside a monography by the American anthropologist Alan Page Fiske – titled *Kama Muta: Discovering the Connecting Emotion* (2020) – several articles (Fiske et al. 2017, Zickfeld et al. 2019, Petersen and Andrew 2020, Zickfeld et al. 2020) and have been published, all of which seek to encircle, characterize and exemplify this emotion. It's a feeling5 of intense sympathy and love, a heart-warming or -melting experience, a rapture. Fiske closes in on it with words like "joy", "tenderness", "compassion", "pride", "longing", "uplifting", "awe", "rapture", "ecstasy", but also "sweet sorrow", "mourning" and "pity" (2020: 142). So, an individual who tend to be moved intensely will quite often experience kama muta. It's the kind of "honourable" reaction that readers in the 18th century had when they cried while reading sentimental novels: they were "aristocrats of the heart", not by noble birth or money (Schneider 2004: 214). Kama muta instigates social relationships with others believed to feel the same way, creating a sense of social belonging and of sharing the best things in life, even if you are alone when the feeling arises. It can happen when "standing on a mountain top looking out on a beautiful and immense landscape" (Fiske 2020: 139), or when holding a baby or a puppy. In such situations we may be at a loss of words, or use clichés like "grand", "adorable", and "cute" – but Fiske assures us that "[w]hatever people call it or don't call it, kama muta is kama muta" (2020: 221).

There are plenty of examples of kama muta, in real life, and in the media. It happens for instance when somebody is overwhelmed by patriotism at a ceremony, or when a beloved family member you haven't met for years suddenly turns up at your doorstep, or when a kitten in a Youtube video comforts a puppy that has broken a leg. This last example is a media text, and media is capable of creating the same kind of feelings as actual events in real life. A literary text, a movie, or a computer game can generate the bodily reactions that is typical for kama muta: happy tears, goosebumps, a "heart-warming" burning in the bosom, and for a moment taking your breath away. This is pleasurable and gratifying,

1 The German-British sociologist Norbert Elias studied manner books to uncover "regimes of manners and emotions", changes in "psychic makeup", and other social codes through history. See Wouters 2009.

2 The concept culture used in the restricted sense of "the customs and traditions bequeathed from earlier generations. Culture hence expresses both present and passed values" (Beckman 1997: 116). It's a 'common sensorium' dependent on customs and practices, with coded reactions and behaviour. In a culture, some feelings are appropriate and expected, some not.

3 Cognition includes dynamic relations between perceiving, remembering, conceiving, imagining, reasoning and judging.

4 https://kamamutalab.org/

5 Fiske 2020 tends to use "emotions" and "feelings" as synonyms, for instance in this sentence: "In response to questions about their feelings at the moment, four spontaneously labeled their emotion *rørt* [Norwegian], the nearest term to the English *moved*" (p. 5). It can be argued that emotions are unconscious and physiological, while feelings are conscious and psychological, but in this article, I use "emotions" and "feelings" as synonyms.

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so people long for kama muta, which is one reason why some videos go viral on the Net. We want this emotion, and we want to share it. Kama muta consequently has a social impact by virtually uniting people through embodied emotions. But of course, people are inclined to share negative feelings as well, as pointed out by Fiske: "lexemes such as *being moved* do not always denote kama muta; people sometimes say they are *moved* by something that makes them *sad*, by something that *awes* them, or by something that makes them *outraged*" (2020: 221).

2. KAMA PIDA – THE "EVIL TWIN" OF KAMA MUTA

This article is about the reverse of kama muta. I have chosen to call it *kama pida*, which in Sanskrit means "moved by pain", "suffering", "annoyance", "harm", "injury", "violation" or "damage". The word "pida" has an aura of significance concerning devastation, ache, agony, molestation, and evil. Kama pida is a strong emotional reaction, a feeling sensed in the physical body, as well as mentally. As a contrast to kama muta – without using any specific term – Fiske ascertains how suffering tends to abolish the sense of compassion, affiliation and relief that kama muta generates:

> Suffering often isolates the sufferer – she feels separated from others who aren't feeling her pain. Others can't understand, they don't know what it feels like. Moreover, other people often are uncomfortable dealing with those who are suffering, may feel disgusted by aspects of a person's disability or illness, may avoid them, and may blame or taunt them for their suffering; the suffering is a stigma, and may lead to effective exile (2020: 176).

You can empathize and identify with a torture victim, but unless you have experienced something similar in real life, it is hardly possible to understand what the victim has experienced. Hearing about, in real life, or watching a torture scene in a film, can however cause kama pida, for instance an overwhelming desperation for the sake of humanity. Kama pida is the opposite of the feelings that confirm the value of life and instigate love. It's depressing and can be paralyzing, even if rage and a wish for revenge is evoked. It can certainly cause deep grief, and grief may have bodily, affective, and cognitive consequences:

> On the physical/somatic level, it can entail headaches, exhaustion, insomnia, and loss of appetite. On the affective level, it is associated with attendant feelings like sadness, anger, or guilt. Cognitively, it can bring on obsessive thinking, inattentiveness, apathy, and confusion. Behaviourally, it can lead to crying, social withdrawal, absentmindedness, and substance abuse (Richard Gross, referred from Fischer 2022: 44).

Kama pida can also evoke a tragic experience. Terry Eagleton claims there is a "traumatic horror at the heart of tragedy" (2003: 225). The tragic causes psychological pain, but there is also a suffering or dying body, i.e. corporeal pain (first mental suffering, then physical suffering added). The tragic disaster "is envisaged as final so far as those particular people or events are concerned. That is, no recovery is contemplated, there is no prospect of a 'happy ending'" (Brereton 1968: 6). When tragedy strikes, we are not in control of our existence, but at the mercy of the essential conditions of life, like pain, suffering, annihilation. It generates desperation, a feeling of brokenness, and of waste, that something valuable is lost forever. Again, Fiske touches upon this emotion when writing about "lonely, heavy, melancholy brokenness" (2020: 177). For Eagleton, tragedies are about "human distress and despair, breakdown and wretchedness" (2003: X). The tragedy genre on stage, in movies and novels "deals in blasted hopes and broken lives" (Eagleton 2003: 25).

This article intends to select formulations in reviews of *Dahmer – Monster*, then to classify or organize them into categories that capture aspects of the kama pida experience or feeling. I am interested in the way people express their emotional reactions to something awful, their extreme states or bad feelings. There are certainly some very strong reactions evoked by *Dahmer – Monster*, like this one: "I am STUNNED, SHOCKED, OUTRAGED, AND FEEL INCREDIBLE SORROW FOR ALL THE COUNTLESS UNSUSPECTING YOUNG MEN AND THEIR FAMILIES. [...] IM TOTALLY OUTRAGED!". According to another reviewer, Dahmer in the series "manages to reach the last level of horror, disgusto". How does this "last level" impress the reviewers? How does watching the series affect the body and the mind? Which emotions are evoked and which thoughts are inspired? What spontaneous symptoms emerge, and how are these expressed in the language of the reviewers?

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3. **RESEARCH ON HORROR, FASCINATION AND DISGUST**

Nobody can claim that strong negative feelings haven't been studied and theorized before. In gothic literature, splatter movies and horror computer games, brutality, mutilation and butchering are anticipated ingredients, expected to cause some level of panic, terror, revulsion and shock. To read, watch, or play horror stories is to a certain extent "emotional risk-taking" (Leder 2009: 297), because there is likely to occur "viscerally shocking moments" (Church 2021: 18). The power of these visceral reactions can be overwhelming, causing nausea and a pounding pulse. But as harmless fictions, these works usually trigger both revulsion and fascination, disgust and curiosity, repellence and delight (Carroll 1990: 189).

True crime and other documentaries fascinate as well, but being closer to the truth than fiction, the reactions can be more uncomfortable and disturbing, because we in a sense are experiencing "real evil". The ethics can overshadow the aesthetics. Because of this attachment to actual reality, the element for disgust is potentially more forceful. According to Carolyn Korsmeyer "[d]isgust is a strong, visceral aversion – perhaps more palpably physical and sensory than any other emotion. [...] Disgust is so distinctively tied to visceral responses that it bears close association with physical reactions such as nausea" (2008: 369 and 372). The feeling of disgust is somatic (Hanich 2011: 16), i.e. very corporal, and a very hostile emotion, like contempt and fury. The disgusting is something that people define themselves against, even when (or maybe because) it harbours some level of fascination.

It can be hard to distinguish between the physically disgusting and the morally disgusting, since "disgust operates as a moral emotion" (Miller 1997: 80). "Immoral" and "disgusting" are even used as synonyms (Rozin et al. 2000: 643). Some acts are especially disgusting: "things for which there could be no plausible claim of right: rape, child abuse, torture, genocide, predatory murder and maiming" (Miller 1997: 36). According to Colin McGinn "the ultimate in disgustingly immoral acts is murder – an act with death as its purpose and outcome. So reverberations of death surround and shape our expressions of moral disgust" (2011: 121-122). Even if we are confronted with such an act at a distance in time and space, it's experienced as revolting: "Indirect contact with people who have committed moral offenses (such as murders) is highly aversive, to about the same extent as similar contact with someone with a serious contagious illness" (Rozin et al. 2000: 643).

Disgust is a feeling close to kama pida, but disgust can be evoked by bad smells and rotten food, as well as immoral actions. Kama pida is more existential, and I will claim always more desperate and depressing, more tragic and psychologically shocking. Disgust can be caused by something where no one is to blame, for instance when seeing and smelling a decaying carcass. Kama pida, as I define it, is evoked by human acts, by cruelty, evil and other immorality.

4. **DAHMER THE MONSTER**

Dahmer – Monster: The Jeffrey Dahmer Story is an American biopic and crime docu-drama series in 10 episodes, created by Ryan Murphy and Ian Brennan for Netflix, and released there in 2022.6 It is a rendering of the crimes committed by Jeffrey Dahmer and the consequences for other people involved, primarily the victims' families, Dahmer's neighbour and his father. Dahmer is one of the USA's most famous serial killers, operating from the 1970s up to the 1990s, and killing at least seventeen people. He tortured his victims and practiced necrophilia and cannibalism, even though – as it turned out when he was interrogated – he did know the difference between right and wrong. He grew up in a dysfunctional family and was an alcoholic from a young age. In his teenage years, he found out he was homosexual, not revealing this to his parents. Jeffrey Dahmer's "abandonment syndrome" is stressed in the series: he kills his partners than rather face abandonment by them. The series displays his loneliness, particularly in his youth. Added to this, American society is severely criticized in the series for its blatant racism, homophobia, and police unprofessionalism. The series is a rather untypical biopic, by not focusing only on Dahmer and the horrors he inflicted. Several of the 10 episodes display the consequences for victims' families that he left traumatized in his wake. Being a crime series about a serial killer, it is also rather untypical by visualizing little of the actual violence and gore that took place – leaving the audience to imagine.

6 The series was produced by Netflix, Prospect Films and Ryan Murphy Productions. Central roles are played by Evan Peters (as Jeffrey Dahmer), Niecy Nash, Richard Jenkins, and Shaun J. Brown. The music is created by Nick Cave and Warren Ellis. Having actors in all roles it is not a true crime series.

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5. **REVIEWS IN THE INTERNATIONAL MOVIE DATABASE**

My data consists of 679 viewer responses written at www.imdb.com. The reviews are dated from 21 September 2022 to 31 December 2022 and were collected by me on 3 January 2023. The reviewers' identities are usually unknown. The majority use nicknames like "amheba" and "tacticalvirtue-91875". Such names reveal neither gender nor nationality, but this is of little consequence in this article. Since, in most cases, we cannot know for certain the sex of the writer, the gendered tendencies of emotions are not studied in this material. In this paper, I have chosen to neglect the identities of the cited reviewers, and the date of the posting, even if these individuals have posted their responses to the TV series on a public website. This is in part due to the conflicts concerning the ethics of researching online audiences, but also because the individuals' identities are not important for my research goal. I quote a lot, but with one exception, I am not quoting the same viewer response twice.7

IMDb reviews are never as short as the written responses on YouTube and some other social media tend to be, because the minimum required length is 600 characters to be published.8 The respondents to the series give value points from 1 to 10, based on their personal evaluation of the series, indicated by stars added to the text written. It is also possible for all who visit the IMDb site to mark how helpful they found a review. A review may for instance be noticed with "19 out of 20 found this helpful". Several of the texts has a warning that they contain spoilers. Each respondent has to create an account at IMDb, so it's possible to read other reviews by most of these persons, understanding their preferences and tastes.

There are several research challenges when using reviews at IMDb as qualitative data. These have been described and reflected on by, for instance, Otterbacher (2011, 2013) and Boyle (2014). Their foci are not emotions, though Otterbacher (2011) sporadically mentions that there were many "emotionally charged reviews" of the movie *Schindler's List*. The studies by Bore (2011), Bader (2017) and Mokryn et al. (2020) are about movies and emotions. Mokryn et al. and Bader are studying many movies in different genres with a quantitative approach. Some of their comments on research design have relevance for the present article. Bader observes that "[t]he prevalent approach to emotion detection in text is based on the premise that the emotion expressed in a text is the aggregate of the emotions associated with the words comprising it. The common emotion detection techniques therefore look for the presence of affective words in the text" (2017: 4). Bore (2011) observes in her study of reviews of a romantic comedy that "reviews also often use a more subjective and informal writing style that underlines the articulation of personal emotional responses to the film", and that the film facilitates "emotional and personal investment".

The tendency in the 679 reviews is to post an opinion on *Dahmer – Monster* without responding to the other reviews. The result is a lot of isolated personal reactions and very little dialogue. This indicates that commentators feel little or no "competition" to demonstrate that one feels the strongest abhorrence, and thus take a moral stand in accordance with the comments of others. Consequently, there are hardly any "bonds formed through affective display" (Lemmings and Brooks 2014: 13), or purely imaginary bonds. Still, there are a couple of exceptions, the most severe being this: "People who write poor reviews here because the show featured the victims more are sick. Just say you're a psychopath and go." In a few cases, a reviewer pays attention to what others may feel: "You might feel disgust, disbelief, and perhaps sick. Angry, sad, or sorry for Jeffrey. – Whatever you feel is not wrong."

Some reviewers have trouble with the genre, which they tend to call "true crime", even though the Dahmer crime series is not strictly a documentary. Still, the genre is close to true crime, generating the same kind of ethical agony as that genre does to some. One of the reviewers exclaims: "I feel guilty simply because so many people lost their lives and we are watching it like an entertainment (of their grief)". Another, who apparently hasn't seen the series, criticizes people for watching: "This genre of exploitative fiction, passing for non fiction is disgusting, it should be criminal. To force victims to relive this is ridiculous, all to turn a buck. It's gross.... if you support it, you are to blame".

What I am doing in this article is searching for linguistic "proofs" of feelings, sampling and categorizing the reviewers' formulations of their emotional reactions. I treat the reviews in an analytic way, with several distinctions. One relevant distinction is between feeling for the series as a media product, and feeling for what is displayed in the series. The Dutch media researcher Ed S. Tan has made a useful analytical separation between what he names "artefact emotions" ("A emotions") and "fictional emotions" ("F emotions") (Tan 1996). A emotions are emotional reactions to the casting,

7 As far as I have detected, the reviews are written by different 679 persons, nobody writing a review twice.

8 But in one case a reviewer has just copied her/his text twice to get it accepted.

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the actors' performances (acting), directing, editing, visual style, cinematography etc. It's about the series as a product or art. These feelings are ignored by me in this article. I am interested in the F emotions which are evoked by the content of the series, i.e. the behaviour of the characters, the social dynamics or lack thereof, the portrait of Dahmer's family, the policemen's reactions, etc. It should be added, though, that the distinction between A and F emotions is not always clear cut. It is sometimes difficult to say whether an emotion concerns Dahmer, or the actor pretending to be Dahmer.

Only direct and strongly emotional formulations are included in my sample, including expressions using metaphors, as they are unavoidable in all human language. People use metaphors for feelings all the time, and it is often hard to find words that don't apply conventional metaphors. A researcher can never say exactly what kind of feelings these metaphors are meant to express, but (s)he usually gets an idea, an approximate. In the reviews there are plenty of metaphors like "The content makes your stomach turn" and the series is "emotionally raw".

A complicating factor is how feelings are formulated by different individuals and in different cultures. The reviewers may come from most countries on earth, and euphemisms are quite often used when it comes to harsh subjects, avoiding taboos and blunt expressions, and even strong emotive words. Unpleasant things are circumvented. Words like "uneasy", "uncomfortable", "disturbing", "unsettling" are frequently used in the IMDb responses, where the immediate context indicates that these formulations are meant to be strong, just like a grieving widow may say that her husband has "left her" and put an enormous amount of emotion in that idiom. The euphemisms used can cause misinterpretations. I have chosen not to quote from such formulations, because I cannot be certain whether expressions like "disagreeable", "painful", "odious", etc., are used as euphemisms, or not.

As presented above, my method has been to carefully read the IMDb-responses, not relying on any research software to sample and analyse the reviews. Acknowledging that personal interviews with the viewers of the series would have had advantages, I still maintain that their written and pondered statements in the reviews is a valuable source for a reception study. Their responses may have been written hours, or weeks after watching the show, so their immediate and spontaneous answers may have been different from those written down. Even so, opinions may be more reflective when refracted through written words published for everyone to read, but they are also less intimate and private. A third methodical alternative would have been studying the reception by observing reactions while viewers actually saw the show, but such a research design was not obtainable for me. My material are the viewers' own retold reactions, opinions and evaluations.

6. **FINDINGS**

As with kama muta, there are certain bodily reactions evoked by kama pida. From the IMDb user reviews, it seems that the stomach is among the most affected, even though some formulations probably are metaphors for several ways of feeling unwell when watching the series. A typical example is a person who reports that the series "made me sick to my stomach". The stomach reacts to something very unpleasant: "That feeling of dread in the pit of your stomach". Viewers should be warned: "That said, don't watch it if you can't handle it. It will make your stomach turn inside out, but you won't be able to turn it off". The series "will leave audiences with churned stomachs". The stomach or the gut reacts in an abnormal way in this metaphor: "Disturbing. Horrific. Gut wrenching". Several other comments are in the same vein. Then there are reactions indicating sickness and vomiting: "There were times, especially in the early episodes, where I was literally nauseous"; "Yet I got very nauseous throughout the series, because of story itself"; "It makes you physically sick"; "You're gonna wanna avoid eating while watching though"; "Recommend for cast iron stomachs. Don't watch this if you're prone to puking"; "I almost threw up five times"; "It took me about 3 hours to recover from episode 4. The nausea, fear and depression that it had brought onto me was mind-blowing". We can clearly interpret this as symptoms for embodied abhorrence.

Another emotional embodiment concerns the heart in metaphors like this – of which there are plenty: the series "wrecked my heart". It is significant that the pleasant goosebumps so typical for kama muta, occur with a negative signature with the "evil twin" kama pida – in this case with coldness: *Dahmer – Monster* "made your skin crawl"; "The entire series gives you goosebumps"; "the facts that this was all real gave me the goosebumps". The series can generate a chilling emotion: "a chilling fear"; "even as a 'not easily getting scared' guy Myself got chills in my spine like never before!!"; "it gave me chills in my bones"; "Blood curdling to say the least. [...] I'll pretend it's fiction for my own sanity". The blood may so to speak boil: "It made my skin crawl and my blood boil".

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With kama muta comes happy tears, but compassionate viewers get tears from kama pida as well: "Both me and my viewing companion couldn't stop tears shedding for Lionel Dahmer" [i.e. the killer's father]; a viewer "cried so much during the last episodes"; another was "brought to tears by the horror of what he did in this show". Likewise the feeling of suffocating or being choked can occur suddenly, without check. For one viewer *Dahmer – Monster* was "Suffocating. Nerve destroying". Also breathing is affected: "This was extremely extremely [sic] difficult to watch. I kept pausing every two seconds 'cause it was getting hard to breathe watching this". Unwilling body sounds might occur: "I don't get overly emotional watching or listening to documentaries but this one had me bawling"; "There are images from the show that are permanently seared into my brain and every time I think of them I wince".

There are other feelings as well, less directly connected to uncontrollable physical body reactions, and more cognitive, like anger: "But the fact that neither the police nor the justice system works pisses me off extremely"; "I truly felt so much anger and heartbreak over the victims and their loved ones and never once was comfortable in watching this series. No one should be"; the series "left me personally, anxious and angry". And there is, of course, sadness or depression: "it did have a depressing effect on me"; "this series is really mentally tough, it's truly depressive and hard to watch"; "This show is creepy and depressing". Several persons got scared by the series: it "scared me to death"; "I'm terrified for life now"; "I don't remember being so scared in so long, despite all horror movies in catalog and I've seen over the years. [...] you can feel it in the flesh, you can taste fear you can picture yourself as one of Dahmer's prey". According to criminology professor Scott Bonn, the public is drawn to true crime stories "because it triggers the most basic and powerful emotion in all of us – fear. As a source of popular culture entertainment, it allows us to experience fear and horror in a controlled environment, where the threat is exciting, but not real" (Bonn 2016). The human body is primed to some primary emotional states, like surprise, fear and anger. Fear is one of the basic emotions arranged in Robert Plutchik's "Wheel of emotions" (1980).9

Dahmer – Monster was for some viewers unbearable to watch, at least in full: The series "had me looking away from the tv in some parts as it portrayed dahmer for the sick twisted individual he was"; "at times I had to look away or turn it off completely until I could go back and continue watching"; "I have literally closed my laptop during certain scenes"; "Though no doubt disturbing, and in many cases I had to look away, I believe this film is of necessity to our society today"; "Absolutely a must see but there was a lot I couldn't watch"; "This series, is definitely hard to watch at times, and I have had to look away, cringing, but this side of the serial killer story, needed to be done". This feeling of the series being intolerable to watch can be ever so strong, but some viewers were still unwilling or unable to switch it off, or abandon the series: "This is one of those shows that will stay in your mind even after it ends. In fact that's why I'm writing this at 1am, because I can't fall asleep. This was difficult to watch and often times I wanted to stop watching it and couldn't. [...] You want to scream and shout out to save his victims and can't. The 14yr old and dead victim was pure torture to watch". But at least two viewers did turn it off: "I can't finish the show after episode six. It finally went too far to where it was beyond me to even finish the show"; "Disturbing and unwatchable. Makes Silence of the Lambs look like a stroll through Disneyland".

Even the word "trauma" occurs when describing the experience of watching the series: "The fact that it is based on a true story makes it even more shocking to watch, and perhaps some viewers may leave traumatized with certain scenes"; "To an extent this show captured the emotional trauma so brilliantly that sometimes you yourself will get traumatized of the world around you"; "watch it, if you want to get traumatized". We might, with Birgitta Höijer, call these experiences "symbolic traumas" as distinct from real traumas (1998: 78). Trauma can be connected to darkness, the feeling of entering a space without any light (i.e. hope, joy, consolation): "This show was one of the most disturbing things I've ever watched. [...] extremely difficult to watch especially episode 3. That episode was one of the hardest things I've ever watched. It was super dark and made me feel so disturbed while watching this show"; "it will blow your mind because it's very dark"; "it is daaaark and heartbreaking"; "very very dark"; "The vibe of the show is incredibly dark". According to George Lakoff and Mark Turner, "bad is black" is one of the fundamental metaphors in Western culture (1989 p. 185). Another basic metaphor is that "bad is down", connected with vortex and heaviness. According to two reviewers, *Dahmer – Monster* leads "Into the Vortex" and one must "watch at own risk. Its heavy as hell".

9 The American psychologist Robert Plutchik made this model, with eight primary emotions: anger, fear, sadness, disgust, surprise, anticipation, trust, and joy, all other emotions being aspects and degrees of these.

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All these metaphors circumferences the same kind of feelings. The metaphors vary, but just as Fiske states that "[w]hatever people call it or don't call it, kama muta is kama muta" (2020: 221), we can state that "kama pida is kama pida". The problem for the reviewers is finding an expression for something which in its horror perhaps is unspeakable, with the "monster"' who committed the crime as a morally alien and fundamentally incomprehensible. One reviewer ponders: "What is it about serial killers that we find fascinating? Maybe it's because they are able to do things beyond our own comprehension or capabilities". For others, "his particular crimes seemed more 'humanly unimaginable' than those of most other notorious serial killers [...] the totally unfathomable monster"; "carries a heavy 'otherness' to it"; "nothingness, existential voids, and people without any redemption quality"; "the incomprehensibly crazy and awful things"; "I was left with a series that was heartbreaking, deplorable, sick, twisted, evil, deplorable, grotesque, and beyond human comprehension". In one instance, there is a vague hint, when a reviewer tells that (s)he has "watched many hard to watch movies or series but this one left me thinking days and nights ...".

Most humans want words to express and clarify their thoughts and feelings when those feelings concern what we may call "the common humanity", i.e. something of crucial importance and deep significance. However, feelings can be hard to put into words. An option is to compare X to something otherworldly Y, like a nightmare, a metaphor often used for events in the real world as well. According to some reviewers, *Dahmer – Monster* "is a real nightmare"; "This story really is the stuff of nightmares"; "Truly the stuff nightmares are made of. And images that can never be erased from the mind"; "A Nightmare Reality". A couple of viewers warned others, fearing they might get nightmares: "Watch at your own risk!! [...] Get ready for some serious nightmares"; "I had nightmares from watching this show".

Natural disasters like earthquakes can be like nightmares for the people who are casualties. It is even worse when the calamity is caused by humans, in pernicious acts and malice, in murder, torture and war. Here the concept of evil is adequate – evil as one of life's most profound mysteries. In the reviews of *Dahmer – Monster*, the word "evil" is used 79 times, for instance in expressions like this: "this show is a grossly real interpretation of real evil. [...] This is what evil looks like". The expression "pure evil" is used 7 times, mainly about the serial killer as a person: "Jeffrey, he is pure evil" and "this man was pure evil". But why did he become cruel and evil? We can search for explanations of evil acts in private, social, cultural, or political sources:

> Everywhere, the *how* and the *where* questions quickly revert to a nagging *why*, as if only a first cause – or a final cause – could resolve the mystery. So the scrutiny of conscience or crime leads inevitably back to some prior condition that will make sense of the whole. The root of all evil. That urge to understand is the driver. [...] the problem of evil is ultimately a problem of meaning. You can't deal with it until you understand its origin and raison d'être. (Andrew Beatty in Olsen and Csordas 2019: 71)

It is possible to interpret the concept "pure evil" as Immanuel Kant's concept "radical evil" (Kant 2019 [1792]). This is an innate propensity to evil, a will to cause other harm, without an understandable cause. Such evil is perhaps unfathomable. Eagleton as well refers to a metaphysical sense of evil concerning a murder case: "Calling the action evil meant that it was beyond comprehension. Evil is unintelligible. [...] The less sense it makes, the more evil it is. Evil has no relations to anything beyond itself, such as a cause" (2010: 2–3). Such evil is in a dimension of meaninglessness or Otherness. When we are confronted with it, as with the "monster" Dahmer, we seem to be staring into a black hole which saps us of courage and optimism in life.

7. **CONCLUSION**

Dahmer – Monster: The Jeffrey Dahmer Story elicits strong, unpleasant emotions in most of the IMDb reviewers. The episodes seem cued to make the audience feel disgust, anger, terror, and to get a cluster of bodily reactions accompanying such feelings. There seems to be some uncontrollable physical sensations evoked in the bodies of the reviewers, as well as mental reactions. In the present reception study, these emotions and reactions are merged in the term *kama pida*. This emotional power of the series is so strong that several times it is expressed in metaphors and affective words like "trauma" and "evil". The respondents are showing those feelings through their manner of writing, using metaphors like "nauseous" and "dark". The reviewers are scared, shocked and convulsed. The inner, emotional reactions are a state of excess, tending towards the extreme. The series creates

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bodily reactions as well as mental disturbances, which resembles staring into a terrifying void, into impenetrable darkness, etc. Such are the consequences of watching something dehumanizing.

With kama muta, a person is "swept away" in happiness – in kama pida one surrenders to very dark feelings. Kama muta is associated with overwhelmingly positive emotional value – whereas kama pida is associated with overwhelmingly negative emotional value. While kama muta concerns the intensely meaningful, kama pida concerns the intensely meaningless. This lack of meaning almost surpasses language, or at least indicates words' inadequacy, but the respondents to *Dahmer – Monster* still want to put words to their experiences. Experiencing kama pida can urge people to silence, or to communication. When confronted with the worst, it may be a relief to express the soaring emotions and publish them.

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TV SERIES

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STYLE AND STAGING: ASPECTUAL VARIATIONS OF MISE-EN-SCÈNE IN AARON SORKIN'S TELEVISION SERIALS

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ABSTRACT
This article explores style as a central issue in the study of television fictional serials. With a special focus on Aaron Sorkin's works in this field, it aims at stylistic markers that result from the interactions between dramaturgical writing and cinematic *mise-en-scène*. The article points at different solutions employed by directors associated with Sorkin's productions for proper staging of these works. The analysis values the heuristic uses of the concept of "style", in disciplines like art history and literature studies, while experimenting on their possible applications to television serial drama. The article also specifies functionalities of style, in relation to processes of authorship attribution, thus qualifying its place in staging as a creative agency of TV serials. As proving grounds of this examination, the article analyses the works of two directors of Aaron Sorkin's show *The West Wing* (Thomas Schlamme and Alex Graves) by evaluating the manners in which they propose different solutions for the staging of Sorkin's dramaturgy.

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1. **PROLOGUE: STYLE, BUT NOT AUTHORSHIP, TOWARDS A POETICS OF STAGING**

In this study, I investigate "style" in television serials as a means to understand – and mostly problematize – several dynamics governing authorship in works of this specific cultural field, In so doing, I employ stylistics as a heuristic tool for addressing some aspects of creative agencies that bring these productions to life, making them available for aesthetic appreciation and cultural evaluation.

I recognize the issue of authorial attribution in TV serials as something involving several theoretical discourses originated in Social Sciences, Literary Studies, Aesthetics and Philosophy of Art – and even in Law.[1] In most of these cases, authorship is generically associated with diversified dynamics of creation in professional communities, leading to social identification of agents in the production sphere as responsible for artworks. However, my point here is that authorship designates a phenomenon considerably distinct from that of style, at least from a theoretical standpoint.

In most sociological and historical frameworks for theorizing authorship in cultural fields of art production, such attribution is a matter of the social processes within which individuals and institutions strategize and consolidate instances for the recognition of the causal history of these products. Just considering two separate systems of authorship, literary studies and Art History outlined this issue in similar ways: there is a commonality between Pierre Bourdieu's ideas about the formation of a "literary field" (in the ways Gustave Flaubert and Charles Baudelaire projected their literary aspirations of autonomy) and Michael Baxandall's interpretation of Pablo Picasso's strategies for distancing himself early modernist painters of early 20th Century, aiming to establish his own work in Paris. Both cases illustrate how authorship in art and literature is coined as a process of social positioning of individuals within social environments, of disputes and negotiations for recognition, in contexts of collective agencies (involving art critics, dealers, and their institutions, just to name a few).[2]

Such views on authorship are reflected in the ways TV serials are approached, in terms of their modes of production – within hierarchical structures of creation in segmented crafts (scriptwriting, staging, cinematography, sound, acting, among others). Jason Mittell's take on authorship is not distant from Bourdieu's, apart from the fact that television authorship is not defined "by origination" but "by responsibility" (Mittell 2015: 87, 88). One important element of how TV serials are detached from literary authorship is the fact that dramaturgical conception tends to play a larger role than any other sectors of these productions, in terms of authorial recognition – thus serving for my argument for separating "authorship" and "style", since the latter involves sorts of creative choices somehow suggested by dramaturgical conceptions, originated in scriptwriting.

> Since most programs' managerial oversight typically come from a writer, the writing process is seen as more central to a series' creative vision than is the contribution of directors, who are often hired as rotating freelancers rather than permanent members of the production team. The writing staff is much more stable, typically with a regular team of between 6 and 12 writers (many of whom also have producer credits) whose work in a "writer's room" is regarded as the program's nerve center (Mittell 2015: 90).

One critical approach on authorship comes from Ted Nannicelli's appreciation of TV serials as artworks. Departing from contemporary analytic aesthetics, his views on authorship serve as sources for my taking into account the role of staging – with the quota of style embodied by it. For starters, Nannicelli distances himself from the dominance theories pose on stances of production for the analysis of television as an artform – in appraisal of the critical, aesthetic appreciation, and the ways in which it ascribes not only meanings for artworks but also levels of responsibility for their successes or failures. Nannicelli also establishes a distinction between

1 While I recognize this wealth of theories dedicated to studies of authorship, stemming from philosophical to literary sources of explanations (Barthes, 1977; Benjamin, 1998; Foucault, 1998), my aim here is to concentrate on those perspectives more connected with the nature of processes in authorship attribution closer to the study of audiovisual formats, such as film and television serials – the list of which I shall decline when opportunity arises in this article.

2 In the scope of my exploration of authorship in TV serials (Picado and Sousa, 2018), this common ground between Baxandall and Bourdieu is exemplified by how similar are their historical characterizations of disputes in their respective artworlds, regarding the conquest of autonomy: the notion of "*troc*", explored extensively by Baxandall (Baxandall, 1985) is an obvious counterpart of Bourdieu's descriptions of strategies of both Flaubert and Baudelaire in order to consolidate their literary production in 19th Century (Bourdieu, 1996). Concerning authorship in TV serials, the important point is that such disputes for recognition occur mainly within collective contexts of professional circles, and not as a contradiction between artistic creation and managerial logic of cultural production.

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"authorship" and "agency", as a central axis for my arguments favoring entailments between "style" and "staging" – especially in the role played by teams of directors in TV serials. According to him, the concept of agency is more suitable for the understanding of how appreciation points towards the stances of production responsible for the qualities presented by artworks – which is a more nuanced phenomenon than authorship attribution.

> Supposing, again, that authorship does, in fact, involve a certain degree of control over the whole of a work, we are likely to need another means of praising creative contributions and talking about achievement in the context of television, where authorship in this sense simply does not obtain in the majority of cases. The broader concept of agency provides those means (Nannicelli 2016: 25).

I add to this thinking about agency two other sources for how to analyze style in TV serials: the first one is David Bordwell's poetics of cinematic staging as a stylistic vector of classic narrative cinema. Beyond the mere description of the practical procedures of filmmaking, Bordwell insists on the fact that these creative solutions of staging are results from a dual dynamic of the reliance these works develop in regard to the understanding that comes from a history of film reception; apart from such aesthetic groundings of his poetics, Bordwell also rely on the internal negotiations happening between a diegetic model of film narrativity, and the mimetic counterpart of this narrative structure - in short, he is talking about the relationship between dramaturgy and *mise-en-scène*.

> The poetics of any artistic medium studies the finished work as the result of a process of construction – a process that includes a craft component [...], the more general principles according to which the work is composed, and its functions, effects and uses. Any inquiry into the fundamental principles by which artifacts in any representational medium are constructed, and the effects that flow from these principles, can fall within the domain of poetics (Bordwell 2007: 12)

As I move towards aesthetic appreciation of TV serials, my claims about style involve a disciplined sort of perceptual attention, proper to all sorts of cultural criticism. In several branches of Art History and philosophical Aesthetics, this is an issue that calls for the centrality of a notion like "aspectuality", an item to be developed in the next section. In what concerns the import of these attitudes in analyzing TV serials, my approach is supported by a growing body of literature and research, claiming for the employment of methods of "close reading" of TV serials, addressing different qualities of their meanings and aesthetic functioning (Butler 2013; Jacobs and Peacock 2013). This involves attention to how often significant details are disclosed, which often leads to a more analytical approach towards the phenomenon. This approach employs a heuristic of reverse-engineering viewing experience, a recommended procedure indicated by several scholars of TV serials.

> Thus the same attention to detail that scriptwriters, directors, cinematographers, editors, and so on, put into the construction of a television text must be employed in the deconstruction of that text. This is a lesson of film and television analysis that I learned long ago when, as an undergraduate, I was forced to perform shot-by-shot scene *découpages* in a French cinema class. (Butler 2010: 6)

From an empirical standpoint, my choice of examination is centered in the works of playwright, screenwriter, and showrunner Aaron Sorkin. I focus particularly on some of his key productions, including *Sports Night* (ABC, 1998/2000), *The West Wing* (NBC, 1999/2006), *Studio 60 on the Sunset Strip* (NBC, 2006/2007), and *The Newsroom* (HBO, 2012/2014). As an issue of TV stylistics, I concentrate specifically the development of staging techniques for the initial four seasons of *The West Wing*, at the period he remained in charge of scriptwriting[3]. In this short duration, I detect nuances of a "historical poetics of *mise-en-scène*" (Bordwell 2005), referring to a set of theatrical techniques of directors to validate Sorkin's dramaturgical writing.

As I mentioned earlier, in the next section I shall explore a heuristic of style in TV serials, though the articulation of significant markers of staging (hereby defined as "aspects"). In that part of my argument, I decline the importance of several

3 John Wells, one of the producers of *The West Wing* (alongside Aaron Sorkin and Thomas Schlamme) describes, in a statement to the Writer's Guild Foundation, the tension in show's production that resulted in the dismissal of Sorkin as the chief of the series' writing room, by the end of its 4th season – though he remained with the credits as its main creator. The entire statement can be found at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RqbiRdd67d8.

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methods for interpreting artworks, mainly derived from Art History (with significant and documented influences in film and contemporary TV analysis), all of which are considerably based on inferential and functional attributes of perceptual appreciation of artworks. This correlation of inference, aspectuality, and appreciation constitute a system of my conceptions about staging as a stylistic vector and a perceptible property of TV serials.

In subsequent sections, I delve into my inquiries about the poetic dynamics of style in TV serials, centering it on the staging patterns of *The West Wing*. My aim is to explore this "aspectualized" embodiment of such creative choices of *mise-en-scène* in Sorkin's works. While pointing out various approaches of teams of directors of *The West Wing*, I observe two distinct patterns in the *mise-en-scène* - particularly evident in the cases of Thomas Schlamme and Alex Graves. Despite differences in the frequency of their collaborations, the interaction of Sorkin's writing with these directors yields two distinct methods for bringing Sorkin's dramaturgy to fruition. I therefore choose the distinct cinematic framing and shooting techniques adopted by these directors as aspectual markers characterizing this evolving quality of the style of *The West Wing* over the course of the series' arcs and seasons.

2. **STAGING AS STYLISTIC VECTOR: ASPECTUALITY, APPRECIATION, INFERENCE**

I am proposing a stylistics of TV serials, defining the staging activity as an *agential stance* for eliciting effects over audiences – inducive of aesthetic responses that result in the proper evaluation of these works. When this process is addressed through a disciplined perceptual appreciation, one senses the importance and centrality of a notion like that of the significant "aspect" an element that governs attention to artworks in criticism. A quite influential reference of such a disciplined dimension of criticism is Arnold Isenberg's "Critical Communication", from which I extract this single passage as illustrative of his method:

> I may be stretching usage by the senses I am about to assign to certain words, but it seems that the critic's meaning is "filled in", "rounded out", or "completed" by the act of perception, which is performed not to judge the truth of his description but in a certain sense to understand it. (Isenberg 1949: 336)

Within confines of philosophy of art and visual semiotics, "aspectuality" instantiates the assumed "likeness" or "realism" of illusionist paintings (Eco 1968; Lopes 1996; Schier 1986), while also serving for segmenting elements characterizing artworks' recognizable stylistic unity (Ginzburg 1989; Wölfflin 1950). In studies of visual discourse, "aspect" is linked to the selective operations of perceptual gestalt involved in pictorial perception – thus allowing for the dynamic effects on stable visual forms of representation, in the art of caricature (Picado 2016), in genre paintings (Gombrich 1960), and even photojournalism (Picado 2008). These heuristic employments of "aspectuality" by art historians and philosophers carries an important lesson on how to proceed with a structured evaluation of staging in the appreciation of TV serials – thus serving as proving ground for how to define the agencies of style in this field.

Such a connection between a criticism's heuristics (such as Isenberg's) and bearers of style in audiovisual studies (like Bordwell's) could be summarized by a theory of art interpretation founded in poetics as a discipline: from the standpoint of giving value to perceptual abilities of critical evaluation of films, Bordwell's inferential model of interpreting narrative films is instructive on how to understand staged presentation of TV serials, not only as a strict "charge" originated in the dramaturgical conception of the work (Baxandall 1985), but also embodying an important creative agency – ultimately responsible for how TV serials retain a recognizable identity of style. This critical enterprise grounded in poetics is dependent on the appreciator's discipline for segmenting perceptible aspects as bearers of meaning, albeit not reducing these to any constraints of a code, a language, or informational structures.

> By situating matters of meaning within the framework of effects, poetics need not adopt the communication model of sender-message-receiver, or what has been called the "conduit" metaphor. Nor need it follow the signification model of sign, message, and code. The poetics I would propose rests upon an inferential model, whereby the perceiver uses cues in the film to execute determinable operations, of which the construction of all sorts of meaning will be a part. To some extent, the filmmaker (being' himself or herself also a perceiver)

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> can construct the film in such a way that certain cues are likely to be salient and certain inferential pathways are marked out (Bordwell, 1989: 270)

Another important source of Bordwell's influence in my views on TV serials stylistics is his conception of cinematic staging as a *functional counterpart* of how narrative films work by enacting stories - hence by presenting themselves through systems of staging: this idea comes from Bordwell's theories of narration and moves toward a more developed sense of film styles, as engrained in theories of staging. My analysis of TV serials stylistics is connected to Bordwell's insightful coordination between history of staging in classical and modern cinema, followed by the fact that staging schemes result from challenges imposed by the narrative conception of these works, manifested through scriptwriting.

In this sense of Bordwell's film poetics, the narrational programs historically consolidated by classic narrative cinema are not easily separable from the variety of solutions filmmakers brought up to dramatize stories, by means of mimetic resources of live characters, actions, and settings (and later, also sounds and colours), all of which serve a purpose of enacting these narrative structures. For that reason, Bordwell coordinates staging and narration as functional counterparts of his system of film poetics. Borrowing from distinctions drawn by Russian formalists between *syuzhet* and *fabula*[4], Bordwell states that style is somehow correlated with this embodied aspect of staging, and also with how drama manifests itself as plotting – to the point of somehow vindicating controversial points about media specificity of cinematic style.

> Style also constitutes a system in that it too mobilizes components – particular instantiations of film techniques – according to principles of organization. There are other uses of the term "style" (...), but in this context it simply names the film's systematic use of cinematic devices. Style is thus wholly ingredient to the medium. (Bordwell 1985: 50)

This collateral effect of style and media touches on a challenging issue of studies of TV serials, with this peculiar interdiction of any association between fictional television with principles drawn from other cultural domains, such as narrative cinema. Among these sources of the absorption of film analysis into televisual studies, the most widely recognized perspective of such narrowing views in favor of media centrality is Jason Mittell's arguments on the unique quality of narrative structures of TV serials, as a prevalent force in their cultural evaluation – most particularly in the context of the turn of "narrative complexity" in contemporary works in this field (Mittell, 2006).

In this particular angle of Mittell's claims about media specificity, it must be firstly noted that it is a corollary of cultural diagnosis about narrative complexity in contemporary storytelling techniques of TV serials – thus bringing to media's technological and institutional infrastructures an aspect not entirely belonging to its logic of production. In fact, if such complexity is central for narrative structures of contemporary TV serials, this could be perfectly derived from the modes in which televisual staging gave way to some of the creative resources of late 20th Century's modern cinema. Mittell himself claimed that television adopted cinematic elements of complexity (thematic, narrative, and staged presentation), which enabled certain TV serials to be recognized as carriers of some specific, complex style. Therefore, television's media specificity merely serves to separate - in a similar vein of distinction, proper to Bourdieu's sociological theories of taste (Bourdieu 1984) - these conversations of elements of *mise-en-scène*, separating its contemporary manifestation from the negative aesthetic connotations associated with traditional televisual staging for fiction.

> Although certainly cinema influences many aspects of television, especially concerning visual style, I am reluctant to map a model of storytelling tied to self- contained feature films onto the ongoing long-form narrative structure of series television, where ongoing continuity and seriality are core features, and thus I believe we can more productively develop a vocabulary for television narrative on its own medium terms. Likewise, contemporary complex serials are often praised as being "novelistic" in scope and form, but I believe such crossmedia comparisons obscure rather than reveal the specificities of television's storytelling form. Television's narrative complexity is predicated on specific facets of

4 In Boris Tomashevsky's "Story, plot, and motivation", the concept of "Fabula" designates the general universes of the story, specifically in terms of its temporal ordering of presentation, apart from the modes in which narration structures it; "*Syuzhet*", on the other hand, is the actual arrangement established for story, structuring its chronology in a manner to generate the sense of plotting that readers experiment as they follow narrated events (Tomashevsky 2002: 164,165). In Bordwell's take on these concepts, "*syuzhet*" is turned into staging, thus concentrating roles that literary diction ascribed to correlations between plot (as narrative technique), and reading (as aesthetic response).

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> storytelling that seem uniquely suited to the television series structure apart from film and literature and that distinguish it from conventional modes of episodic and serial forms (Mittell, 2015: 18).

In this passage of *Complex TV*, Mittell has suddenly distanced himself from a mandate of Bordwell's original film poetics: by acknowledging connections between narrative and televisual styles of staging (items Bordwell recognizes as germane to specific media profiles), Mittel is in fact, maybe involuntarily, stating that television style is not a matter of media specificity, since "cinema influences many aspects of television, especially concerning visual style" (Idem, ibidem). In Mittel's argument, the weight for differentiating television and film lies on their respective storytelling techniques, i.e., those fields of Bordwell's poetics dealing with narrative structures. In correlating specificity of serial storytelling in contemporary television with claims of media specificity, Mittell brings serial storytelling to the fore, something unspecific to media varieties– unless one thinks that history of televisual seriality is a narrative device altogether distinct from artforms like 19th Century's serial novel, or 20th Century's serial comics.

By examining TV serials, I aim at stylistic markers already embedded in these significant aspects of the works, particularly instantiated in the staged presentation of such products. I focus on the fundamental techniques of staging, addressing these from the standpoint of a disciplined perceptual experience of criticism. Such stylistic heuristics present theoretical and analytical challenges to me, notably as they require a perceptual focus on the "internal" construction of these works – something claimed for in contemporary branches of television studies. In these views, close analysis is claimed for as a heuristic force for cultural evaluation, with special attention to their staging schemes.

> The lack of close analysis in the field has permitted work that is often derivative, unadventurous and under- or unsubstantiated to dominate. Scholars have strayed from an understanding that the most responsive and persuasive theorizing arises from careful observations of the particularities of television texts. (Cardwell 2005: 179)

Back to my central issue, I shall now explore the roles ascribed for staging of TV serials, with a focus upon workings of directors on dramaturgical materials of Aaron Sorkin's televisual narratives. I define those differences of staging approaches as useful items for the employment of stylistic heuristics in the analysis of TV serials, from a poetic standpoint. While demonstrating my points, I direct my perceptual attention towards aspects qualifying such stylistic differences, as well as claiming for the ways in which these resources result from a pervasive influence of cinematic staging on contemporary TV serials.

3. THE DIRECTORS' SHARE, PART 1: THOMAS SCHLAMME

The interaction between dramaturgy and *mise-en-scène* will be examined now as an issue of stylistic analysis: my focus relies on creative choices performed by directors, in response to dramatic resources coming from Sorkin's scriptwriting. Specifically, I consider how dialogue and speech are constructed in TV serials, and how it conditions directors to meet those demands coming from the scriptwriter, as sorts of "charges" of dramaturgy to *mise-en-scène* (Baxandall 1985). The development of staging styles for presenting characters' verbal language is a function of these correlations between creative stances of televisual production. Staging styles are the outcome of the directors' task for enacting stories coming from the resources of dramaturgy, by the ways they employ elements such as the verbal composition of dialogues in these works.[5]

For my part, I initially examine how staging methods and stylistic markers in TV serials are helpful for comprehending the directorial operations employed for specific narrative situations in Sorkin's writing. Such moments revolve around narrative universes primarily organized around various agents, carrying out their journeys and actions within confined interior spaces - teams of people constituted in particular spatial units, such as a wing of the White House, a television studio, or a cable channel newsroom. The staging promotes the verbal performances of characters, as a core resource of how televisual drama is presented in Aaron Sorkin's dramaturgy.

5 This becomes evident as one notices the discrepancies between Sorkin's writing and the approaches emerging through the sharing of his creative ideas and directorial solutions for it. If we focus on director Thomas Schlamme's collaborations during the period between *Sports Night* (ABC, 1998/1999) and *The West Wing*'s first four seasons (NBC, from 1999 to 2003), it is noticeable that the style of Sorkin's production is a result of the staging solutions brought by him to highlight Sorkin's scriptwriting.

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> It is true that Sorkin tends to place his fictions in a very concrete environment, almost always related to professions that have to do with the use of words as their main tool. Television journalists, politicians or lawyers are types of characters who are supposed to have a capacity for oratory. If, in addition, one can add to these a privileged education in elite universities, as usual in the work of the writer, it is not too exaggerated that they also share a similar language. So much so that, at specific moments, when he introduces characters that are foreign to the context of the protagonists, it is clear how the form of the dialect remains unchanged. (Sánchez Baró 2015: 210, my translation)

To analyse the stylistic composition of Sorkin's works, it is important to consider how Schlamme maneuvers the fluctuation between scenes taking place in various locations and those confined to a single space. At the time of *Sports Night*, there was debate over whether to assign a preparatory/intermediate role to the former and a more prominent role to the latter - being worth to notice this TV show has a setting scheme reminiscent of a sitcom, including the use a multi-camera staging system in different parts of the setting[6]. The pilot episode of *The West Wing* completely reversed this procedure. It places emphasis on dynamic situations with characters crossing out different spaces of the setting and always interacting with each other in these contexts. This is done to such an extent that the audience's attention is fully absorbed by a single moving camera panning across different portions of the West Wing of the White House, with very few interventions of cutting scenes, unless when strictly necessary (see figs. 1 and 2).

Staging solutions arise in this context, with the aim of highlighting a unique facet of Sorkin's writing, namely his style of dialogue construction. This involves a *mise-en-scène* entirely structed by *walk-and-talk*, characterizing the most significant cinematic feature of *The West Wing*. This technique has been previously utilized in other TV shows, albeit selectively (like *The Larry Sanders Show* and *E. R.*), in episodes directed by Schlamme, employing Steadicam footage to emulate what these serials had already been doing. This lends a cinematic appeal to Sorkin's work and highlights the dynamic quality of his original drama, achieved by the fluid, mobile, and uninterrupted presentation of its audiovisual content (see figs. 3 and 4).

FIGS. 1 AND 2: FRAMES FROM *THE WEST WING*, PILOT EPISODE, 1999. © JOHN WELLS PRODUCTIONS & WARNER BROS. TELEVISION.

> Through a sequence that is shot in continuity, and in which character's entry and exit is constant, the transition between different argumentative lines is produced with the same immediacy as that effected by a change of spaces. The walk and talk thus reveals itself as an appropriate technique to economically solve the multiple interactions demanded by a seriality of joint protagonism. (Sánchez Baró 2015: 273, my translation)

Returning to specific instances of staging enacting elements of dialogue dramaturgy, let us acknowledge how the renowned sequence shots serve as vectors for *The West*

6 To this respect, strange as it may seem, it is worth mentioning that for some episodes during the first season, *Sports Night* even counted on a laughing track, a clear indicator of this dramatic genre in TV serials – a resource later abandoned after the first episodes of its initial season.

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FIG. 3: FRAME FROM *THE LARRY SANDERS SHOW*, EPISODE "ANOTHER LIST" (S06E01), 1998. © BRILLSTEIN-GREY ENTERTAINMENT, HBO, COLUMBIA PICTURES TELEVISION.

FIG. 4: FRAME FROM *E.R.*, EPISODE "THE SECRET SHARER" (S02E08), 1995. © CONSTANT C PRODUCTIONS, AMBLIN TELEVISION, WARNER BROS. TELEVISION.

Wing's stylistic profile. In these rather well-known sequences[7], one observes an aspect David Bordwell identified as connecting stylistic characteristics with poetic principles of cinematic staging - in particular, manifested through solutions for the theatrical portrayal of dialogues among multiple parties – exemplified by sequences portraying several people gathered around a dining table:

> Two staging options have come to dominate current practice. There's what film-makers call "stand and deliver", where the actors settle into fairly fixed positions. Usually this is handled in singles and over-the-shoulder angles, but we may get instead the floating-head treatment, with the characters fixed in place and the camera drifting around them [...]. The alternative staging option is "walk-and-talk", with a Steadicam carrying us along as characters spit out exposition on the fly. (Bordwell 2002: 25)

Furthermore, Schlamme's approach to *mise-en-scène* presents another manifestation of the "intensified continuity" prevalent in contemporary narrative cinema (Bordwell 2002). This is not achieved through techniques that emphasize a more cohesive narrative flow, commonly used in current filmmaking through editing resources. Schlamme's staging approach centers on a horizon of sensitive immersion to this sort of televisual presentation of drama. By examining the staging techniques adopted for dialogues in *The West Wing*, this other aspect of a dramatized continuity emerges, brought about by the emphasis on elements derived from Sorkin's dramaturgy. Among others, it includes the musical modulation of the dialogue composition, characterized by rhythms, alliterations, repetitions, and sudden oscillations between the different speech centers interacting within each scene or sequence, functioning for the staging as a significant factor for the cinematic embodiment of these moments.

> [A] key aspect of the speed of Sorkin's dialogue is its constancy; it comes from the essence of the characters and not from the circumstances of the narration. Often, discussion in the style of classic screwball comedy, battle of the sexes, is singled out as Sorkin's favorite territory for fast-paced dialogue, but in reality, the screenwriter uses this style for a variety of registers. In Hawks' comedies, speed is often accompanied by a tension in the scene: the pace is high, as is the tone...(Sánchez Baró 2015: 217-218, my translation)

The switch from "field/counter-shot", in favor of the "full continuity" staging style of verbal interactions among sev-

7 One of the most famous instances of this style is the sequence of the *teaser* of "Five votes down", fourth episode of the first season of The West Wing (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wmv07XfeC1E&t=7s)

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eral characters demonstrates the alliance between dramaturgy and *mise-en-scène*, exemplified by the how Sorkin and Schlamme collaborate in the first seasons of *The West Wing*. This interaction between playwright and director/producer results in a comprehensive sensory experience that enhances the recognizability of the central role of scriptwriting, by the ways in which *mise-en-scène* outlines its presence in a cinematic form. The staging approach embodies the distinctive features of Sorkin's work in contemporary television.

Notwithstanding, it is necessary to comprehend how this "stylistic sharing" occurs in the concrete and continual dynamics of interaction between the creative postures of TV series. The workarounds to improve the staging of Sorkin's dramaturgical style often bring about substantial changes, occurring within lapses of arcs and seasons of this show. In art and literary history this recognition is informed by various techniques one can acknowledge for this sedimentation of significant aspects functioning as bearers of style: their reality is essentially relational, depending on the evolution of appreciation in time.

In this context, "style" refers to the temporal ordering of the manifestation of artforms, expressed through the dynamics of formatting, solidifying, and dissolving. This process is subject to continual testing through interaction with audiences over time - with resulting effects on the works themselves, as they respond to such variations of social appreciation. In the field of literary history, critics examine the concept of "lives of style" in modern fiction, particularly the impact of "usury" of forms on styles. This is done to elucidate how styles wither away due to historical and social contexts of continual aesthetic evaluation.

> As soon as we consider that the aging of stylistic facts by loss of expressive yield is inevitable or even mechanical, this aging does not call for interpretation (...). But it is already interpreting to consider, for example, that the notion of usury is only fully relevant for the "modern" literary regime, that which makes 'novelty' and 'originality' two of its primary criteria for the attribution of aesthetic value. (Philippe 2021: 51, my translation).

As I turn to the works of other directors offering staging solutions for Sorkin's work, especially in *The West Wing*, a glimpse can be offered to inform ways in which such temporal dynamics informs the negotiations of TV serials with their audiences over longer periods of their arcs and seasons. To a certain degree, it is conceivable that Schlamme's staging solutions have met a certain limit, thus requiring the concourse of new sorts of solutions in *mise-en-scène* – thus directing the show to other sorts of styles for dramatic presentation.

4. THE DIRECTORS' SHARE, PART 2: ALEX GRAVES

Coming to this point, my vindication of a heuristics of style for the analysis of staging solutions in TV serials is justified, at least in some respects. The disciplined perceptual attention for significant "aspects" of these works was partially employed in the previous analysis of Schlamme's collaborations with Sorkin - particularly to the end of presenting dialogues through agents' physical and verbal performance (enacted as a *walk-and-talk* staging style), as something spectators can experience as narrative immersion. In this way, the distinctive *mise-en-scène* of the Sorkin/Schlamme collaboration implies a passive beholder of these scenes, functionally structured through "vectors" and "postures" of immersion.

> A vector of immersion is, in a way, the access key thanks to which we can enter this [fictional] universe. The postures of immersion are the perspectives, the scenes of immersion that vectors assign to us. They determine the aspectuality or the particular modality under which the universe manifests itself to us because we enter it thanks to an access key, a specific vector of immersion. (Schaeffer 1999: 244, my translation)

The most noticeable aspect of this collaboration is already apparent, thus defining staging as a functional counterpart (proper to cinematic devices) of a structuring musicality of speeches and dialogues that typify Sorkin's dramaturgical compositions. From this staging perspective of directorial solutions, the selection of cinematic shots implies a preference for the integration of verbal language with bodily performance, especially through walking, visually demonstrated by the concentration of character's scenic presence. In practice, this implies a model for cinematic framing positioned within a closer range to actors' performances. The shots preserve the combined quality of performance and settings, using a system of lenses closer to characters and their movements (see Fig. 5).

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FIG. 5: FRAME FROM *THE WEST WING*, EPISODE "FIVES VOTES DOWN" (S01.E04). 1999. © JOHN WELLS PRODUCTIONS & WARNER BROS. TELEVISION.

FIG. 6: FRAME FROM *THE NEWSROOM*, EPISODE "NEWS NIGHT 2.0" (S01E02). 2012. © HBO ENTERTAINMENT.

As a comparison, other TV shows by Sorkin, as *The Newsroom* (HBO, 2012/2014), present the audience with a unique context to explore the effects of the staging style, particularly in the visual framing of scenes. The staging style here adopted employs lenses with longer focal length, thus resulting in a more distant framing from actors. This approach attenuates the sensibility that would otherwise resonate characters' physical performances, as well as the rhythmic evolution of their speeches and dialogues, as a component of cinematic settings.

The integration between characters' actions and the rhythmic/musical qualities of their speeches is not performed through Schlamme's staging system. This technique of creating a distance between the framing and the character's enactment equally implies a viewpoint overseeing the scene, as a hypothetical representative of a presumed spectator of the scene. This distinguishes us, as viewers, from the dramatic focus created by the interactions of multiple agents in a confined space, in the flow of their physical performances of walking though different settings, such as the consecrated Schlamme's. solution (see Fig. 6).

It is not coincidental that such a staging style appears in an episode of *The Newsroom* directed by Alex Graves: this *mise-en-scène* stems from a specific approach that this director applied to Sorkin's dramaturgy - not only here, but in other works by Sorkin. In various episodes of *The West Wing*, Graves introduced this sort of staging, hence suggesting significant alterations to the entire staging system for this series.

To address this issue, I shall first examine the impact of Graves' staging style, which was indirectly referenced during a discussion among members of *The Newsroom*'s production team – while describing something Sorkin classified as the "coverage" of this show. Producer Alan Poul and director Greg Mottola discuss the filming style of this series, particularly the camera positioning. According to Poul, the camera acts as the viewer's eye, following the action. The system also allows for more natural performances from actors - who are unaware of how they are being framed during the shots. Mottola also recalls that this style originated from cinematographer Barry Ackroyd's approach to filming scenes beyond the limited scope of characters, using telephoto lenses, ultimately achieving a voyeuristic perspective through these shots.[8]

Though not directly aimed at Graves, these comments refer to a key element of the contribution this director brought to Sorkin's dramaturgy, particularly in certain storylines of *The West Wing*, specifically during the second and third seasons. A shift in the staging style is evident during this period, thus suggesting a rejection of limiting *mise-en-scène* to a mere reflection of Sorkin's musical dialogues – such as in Sclamme's system.

8 These discussions compose an extra segment of the DVD of the first season of *The Newsroom* (2012), entitled "The roundout".

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In the development of Graves' involvement with *The West Wing*'s directorial team, there is a consistent shift from the typical approaches employed earlier, serving as an illustration of something that literary stylistics defines as the "usury" of style. According to Gilles Philippe, this phenomenon exemplifies a historical process of transformation that affects the manners by which French writers have improved the development of a literary language - in its ongoing connection to/distancing from French vernacular (Philippe 2021). In applying this principle of "usury" to the dynamics of staging in TV serials, this shift towards new solutions for cinematic enactment demonstrates Graves' ongoing evolution as a director.

Although this presentational tradition of characters conversing while walking still prevails in *The West Wing*, alternative ways of framing the beginnings or intervals of scenes and sequences suggest themselves over time. While serving to indicate "positions of immersion" for audiences (Shaeffer 1999), this new staging style no longer needs to generate resonances between scenic tempos and speech rhythms. In Graves' case, the aim is to present the drama from a neutral standpoint, without imposing any suggestions about a staging function that represents audience's immersion. This staging technique materializes itself through a strategy of cinematic framing that Edward Branigan coined as "point-of-view shot" (POV). The delicate balance between the optical structure of cinematic framing and the discursive implications of this positioning of shots promises a relationship with characters themselves (through their emotional or perceptual states), and the instance of narration signified by these shots:

> The elements of the POV structure require a transition device since the camera must physically shift between element one (point) and element four (from point). This shift is the physical correlate for a shift in narrative perception from, for instance, omniscient and voyeuristic to subjective and personal. The device may take the form of a simple cut to a new camera set-up, an optical printer effect (dissolves, fades, wipes, etc.), or camera movement, in which case we watch while the camera repositions [...]. In fact, we may say that neither a change in camera set-up nor camera movement is necessary to a change in narration. What is important is not the camera as an absolute reference point but the relation among camera, character, object and a perceiver's hypothesis about this relation. (Branigan 1984:109-110)

FIG. 7: A FRAME FROM *THE WEST WING* EPISODE "THE WAR CRIMES" (S03.E05). 2001. © JOHN WELLS PRODUCTIONS & WARNER BROS. TELEVISION.

In *The West Wing*'s third season another shift in staging becomes more strongly pronounced, thereby stressing the significance of Graves' directorial choices. In small parts of this season, a framing style emerges – positioned at a greater distance from main characters' perspective – using the setting's surfaces (walls, glass, mirrors interrupting/revealing scenic elements), and gradually blending in with the prevailing *en route* modes of staging in this show.

This type of occurrence is mainly present in beginnings of sequences, particularly those taking on a more prominent dramatic significance. For example, in the case of the fifth episode of this season, "The War Crimes", we see the secretary of President Jed Bartlett in the foreground, announcing that Vice-President John Hoynes is waiting outside the Oval Office; the camera positions itself at an oblique angle, suppressing the President from our view (but keeping his voice as a dramatic center of the scene), while visually identifying the entering Vice-President positioned in the background, in the adjacent waiting room (see Fig. 7).

The stylistic inflection of this sort of staging is fully consolidated in "The Two Bartlets" (thirteenth episode of the third season, in 2002), commanding larger extensions of the storyline, and conferring a distinct style for the whole episode, in contrast with the show's general profile. In this case, the succession of events in the drama is less significant than the establishment of a more "testimonial" camera positioning for several scenes. This delineates a style of *mise-en-scène* setting the stage for what producers of *The Newsroom* identified as the most noticeable virtue of this alternative staging style for Sorkin's TV shows.

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FIG. 8: A FRAME FROM *THE WEST WING* EPISODE "THE TWO BARTLETS" (S03.E13). 2002. © JOHN WELLS PRODUCTIONS & WARNER BROS. TELEVISION.

FIG. 9: A FRAME OF *THE WEST WING*, EPISODE "THE TWO BARTLETS" (S03.E13). 2002. © JOHN WELLS PRODUCTIONS & WARNER BROS. TELEVISION.

If we examine the relevance of segments like the teaser and the final sequence of "The Two Bartlets", they lay out the foundations for this staging style by introducing the primary storylines of the episode. Graves staging style offers an alternative functionality for the scenic enactment of Sorkin's dialogue dramaturgy, aiming at an effect towards audiences marked by a sort of "immersion position" in the scene – instead of offering a cinematic contrast to the verbal exchanges between the main characters.

The opening sequence in the episode (see Fig. 8) utilizes framing to create a sense of distance between its two characters, Josh Lyman and Amy Gardner. This distancing effect is amplified by the obstacles that interrupt their visibility to audiences (walls and domestic objects), as well as those that enable it (mirrors and windowpanes). Additionally, the speech centers are often situated outside of the frame, meaning that we can hear the characters without always seeing them. The gathering of these elements creates a distinct style for the scene. With Graves, the focus rests on longer silent intervals, emphasizing the more subdued atmosphere of the episodic situations.

In another segment of this episode (See Fig. 9), a brief dialogue takes place in Josh Lyman's office with Sam Seaborn, an assistant on the West Wing staff of the White House. This interaction is staged in the same manner as the teaser, involving the topic that Josh and Amy discuss in the teaser. More noticeably, conventional techniques of cinematic dialogue staging – such as shot/reverse and editing resources – are entirely absent from this scene. These choices detach Graves' staging style from the purpose of producing a more pronounced rhythm of continuous scansion through character's performances through continuous walking and talking, such as in Schlamme's approaches.

Instead, the prevailing staging method involves placing the camera in concealed areas (just behind the doorway to the office), refraining from moving itself towards the area of dialogue, and obstructing our view through Seaborn's blurry figure - or completely blocking it when other characters enter, traversing the space of the room. Again, this staging does not favor any effects of rhythm, characteristic of a *mise-en-scène* that explores a moving continuity, but instead establishes an almost voyeuristic witnessing effect, something permeating almost the entire length of this episode. Extravagant as it might sound, such a staging style resembles the mode of arranging shots dear to Max Ophuls' style, in films like *Lola Montès* and *The Earrings of Madame...* (see figs. 10 and 11).

In contrast, Graves' staging solutions in *The West Wing* demands a heuristic approach to the notion of "style": this includes identifying the temporal inflections of these changes, as noticed by historians of art and literature, by the evolutionary and fading curves of the presence of certain aspectual traits in TV serials. The lengthy collaboration between Sorkin and Schlamme illustrates the historical dynamics of staging styles characterizing their most significant aspects. This includes their origins, sedimentation, and eventual diminishment, all in the context of the continued relationship with audiences that influences stylistic choices in the staging of Sorkin's works.

With Graves, however, I comprehend the emergence of these creative solutions as a turning point in current stylistic characteristics, while being on the brink of exhaustion

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FIG. 10. FRAME FROM *LOLA MONTÈS*, (MAX OPHULS, 1955)

FIG. 11. FRAME FROM *THE EARRINGS OF MADAME DE...* (MAX OPHULS, 1953)

or overuse – and when new dimensions of the synergies between dramaturgy and staging are ultimately defined. So, one gains insights into the heuristic validity of style as a means of exploring TV serials through the analysis of two key vectors: firstly, through Schlamme's work, one comprehends the dynamics underpinning the development and consolidation of style; secondly, we can observe the transformation of style, as it is forced to meet demands posed by the work's interactions with audiences, thus evolving over time - as exemplified by Graves' staging style.

5. IN GUISE OF CONCLUSION: TOWARDS A HEURISTIC OF STYLE FOR A POETICS OF TV SERIALS

In the process of analyzing the agencies of staging in consolidating markers of style in TV serials, I expect to have demonstrated two points of my explorations on these issues: firstly, the importance of distinguishing, either theoretically or in the analysis of these works, the importance of not assuming the stylistic agencies as implicated in dynamics of authorship attribution – something that requires a more centered attention to the poetic functioning of these works, in regards to the social dynamics governing the ways in which TV serials are identified with authorship.

Secondly, such a focalization upon poetic functionalities demands a treatment of style that emerges as a recognizable profile of these works of fiction. At this point, stylistic is embedded in a particular heuristics, which is dependent on the relationships TV serials construct with audiences overtime. This is why traits of style are mainly identified with "aspectuality", a set of significant properties that become recognizable markers of serial works by the processes through which they build up their relationships with audiences across the duration of arcs and seasons.

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In the case I proposed for examination, in the workings of directors associated with Aaron Sorkin's shows, these defining aspects serving as bearers of style are mainly associated with the staging solutions directors brought in (especially during the four first seasons of *The West Wing*), in order to generate a particular traction for the dramaturgy of this work, specifically the dialogue compositions proper to Sorkin's writing. In viewing how directors Thomas Schlamme and Alex Graves worked in staged enactments of this dramaturgy, one encounters these continuous processes of creating, settling, and abandoning artistic solutions, subjected to the tests of time and interaction with the presumed audience of Sorkin's shows.

In such terms, I finally propose a poetic approach of the analysis of TV serials grounded on a heuristic of style, thus conceiving it as an instrument for understanding the workings of television with audiences, particularly in the ways they generate their most recognizable qualities of their presentation. In the role of objective critics of serialized television fiction, we must examine stylistic markers for their impact on the work's aesthetic effects and how they drive the relationship built between the work and its audience.

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MALE RAPE, FEMICIDE, AND TORTURE: HOW *BORGIA: FAITH AND FEAR* DEMYSTIFIES THE ITALIAN RENAISSANCE

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television series, Renaissance, Borgia, demythologize; historicity

ABSTRACT

This article argues the growing interest in investigating how popular historical television series recreates and represents the past by comparing the creative and representational choices of Tom Fontana's *Borgia: Faith and Fear* (Canal+, 2011-14) with those of Neil Jordan's *The Borgias* (Showtime, 2011-13). The comparison aims to show how these historical television series have boosted the public's interest in the branding of Italy, the Italian Renaissance and, at the same time, managed to create a unique sense of historical engagement. I call this phenomenon 'historicity,' that is, something that 'might have happened' given the violent milieu of the times.

Even though the creators and writers alter and adapt certain facts, they successfully manage to make the viewers 'travel through time' and emotionally engage them with the past, allowing them to meet—virtually, of course— the characters and experience events that shaped Italian and European history from 1492-1503. I intend to show how Fontana's Borgia, in particular, succeeds in de-mythologizing the Renaissance by shattering the mythical depiction of a golden age and focusing, instead, on the prevailing unbridled violence of the times. Fontana's narrative does not shy away from displaying the most atrocious tortures, disfigurements, femicides and male rapes. Although some of these scenes are certainly alienating and shocking, and may leave the audience uncomfortable and even appalled, they succeed in reawakening historical consciousness through affective engagement, narrative transportation, and the proximity effect.

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1. **INTRODUCTION**

Two lavish television productions about the Borgia family—Showtime's *The Borgias* (2011-2013) and Canal +'s *Borgia: Faith and Fear* (2011-2014)—speak powerfully to a growing trend of historical narratives, which Milly Buonanno labels a "temporal turn to the past" (2012: 199). The medium of television has often presented historical facts with at least some intention of educating the public. However, in more recent times, producers and consumers have expressed a growing interest in the remediation and re-enactment of the past, a tendency prompted by what Zvetan Todorov describes as a "compulsive worrying about the past" (2001: 61). Assuming that "television is the principal means by which most people learn about history today" (Edgerton 2001: 1)[1] and that "television serves as one of our culture's primary sources for historical consciousness" (Spigel 2001: 368), these productions have boosted the transnational and post-heritage popularity of the Borgia family and public interest in the "branding of Italy as the cradle of the Renaissances (Farinacci 2022: 149) and function as those cultural phenomena that fall under the label of "Renaissance Effect" (Belfanti 2019)

Building on the themes explored in Paul Cooke and Rob Stone's *Screening European Heritage: Creating and Consuming History on Film* (2016), which examines postmodern heritage cinema, and adapting them to television studies (taking into account the latitudinal shift and blurred distinctions between the two media), this article uses mixed methods research to explore the creators' and producers' aesthetic choices, textual narratives and productive strategies to appropriate, recast and 'decenter' the Italian Renaissance through transnational co-productions in the post-heritage global television market. It will also briefly address the impact of these idiosyncratic transnational reappropriations of Italian history on global audiences by defining their identities "as a transnational/Italian cultural product" (Bisoni and Farinacci 2020: 49).

More specifically, the article briefly compares the creative and representational choices of Tom Fontana's *Borgia: Faith and Fear* (Canal+, 2011-2014) with those of another Borgia-themed series that was released in the same year, *The Borgias* by Neil Jordan (Showtime, 2011-2013), both conceived and produced beyond national borders.[2] I will pay particular attention to the creative strategies employed in Fontana's series to demythologize the Renaissance and the function of popular heritage television within the framework of the contemporary heritage industry. I aim to address the following two questions: What type of historical representation and specificities do these transnational television productions generate? How do *Borgia* and *the Borgias* enter in dialogue with the "increasing circulation and governance of heritage beyond national borders" (Lafrenz Samuels 2018: 8) and engage with the national historical heritage patrimony of transnational production companies? My study frames cultural heritage in global terms by applying heritage film theory (Higson 1993, Vidal 2012, Cooke and Stone 2016) to television studies. It also asserts the usefulness of post-heritage considerations (Monk 2001, Abbiss 2020)[3] to delineate the ideologies and the aesthetics of period dramas, using post-heritage film theory as a critical term rather than a generic category, in line with Mittell's discursive approach to the conceptualization of television genres as "cultural categories"(2001: 3).[4] Unlike the main characteristics of heritage cinema, neither of the two series on the Borgias builds on a nostalgic and idealistic view of the nation's glorious past (Cooke and Stone 2016; Higson 1993) to "offer an escape

1 Gary Edgerton (2000) introduced the concept of television as historian. Starting from the assumption that television is the principal means by which most people learn about history, Edgerton states that watching television creates the illusion of "being there" (8). The medium is personified because the viewers feel that they are not only watching history but experiencing it. Thanks to its inherent intimacy and immediacy, the medium becomes the message itself. According to Edgerton, the highest priority of television as historian is not so much to render a factually accurate depiction, but to animate the past by accentuating those matters that are most relevant and engaging to audiences in the present. He adds that this preference is economically driven and can result in an increase in viewing figures. However, the fundamental aim of most popular televised historians is to use elements of historical accounts to create a clearer understanding of current social and cultural conditions.

2 I have chosen not to compare the two series on the Borgias with other productions set in the Italian Renaissance, such as *Medici: Masters of Florence* (Rai 1, 2016), *Medici: The Magnificent 1* (Rai 1, 2018-2019), *Medici: The Magnificent 2* (Rai 1, 2019) and *Leonardo* (Rai 1, 2021), as my study focuses on how the culture and history of Italy are rebranded outside the national border. These programs are Anglo-Italian co-productions, and as such do not fall within my theoretical premises.

3 In the early 1990s, Andrew Higson used the term "heritage film" to describe a particular body of costume dramas made in the United Kingdom since the 1980s, which have since "become associated with a powerful undercurrent of nostalgia for the past" (Vidal 2012: 1). According to Lowenthal, heritage "is not an inquiry into the past, but a celebration of it [...] a profession of faith in a past tailored to present-day purposes" (X). The post-heritage framework elaborated by Monk (2011) is guided by five central elements: interrogation, subversion, subjectivity, self- consciousness, and ambiguity. The consistent application of these five elements to the study of cultural history offers a sustained challenge to the assumptions of heritage criticism, revealing the post-heritage point of view of a production.

4 According to Mittell, genres are discursive practices and "cultural products, constituted by media practices and subject to ongoing change and redefinition (2004: 1). Mittell's proposed discursive approach, which describes the relationship as being born out of "instances of generic activity in interrelated sites of audience, industrial, and cultural practices" (Mittell 2004: 25).

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from the present" (Holdsworth 2011: 103) or on the myth of the golden age in the Renaissance (Levine 1969). Instead, both series rely on a "much more fluid, hybrid and plural sense" of history (Vitali and Willemen, 10). This perspective aligns with Stone's definition of the "postmodern heritage film" as a product where "precepts of fact, truth and history carry the same status as invention, fable and myth, and any rigidity or distinction in relation to these terms collapses" (Stone 2016: 259), thus providing an innovative hermeneutic paradigm that is culturally relevant and historically conscious.

My study aims to show that the Borgia series undermines the notion that Italy's glorious past was a time of unparalleled beauty and challenges the nostalgic tone of period pieces intended as an escape from contemporary issues. In fact, these series present the Renaissance as an inglorious, dark, unpleasant, and dangerous era, thus creating a deromanticizing countereffect and what I define as a 'post-nostalgic' heritage television product. These types of programs typically depict a deviant, vicious, and highly sexualized past, combining brutality and nudity to create a spectacular effect. The traditional heritage perspective tends to generate a nostalgic gaze of the past by portraying it as a time of stability, while its societal structures provide a teleological certainty that is absent in the present. Alternatively, the 'post-nostalgic' heritage framework that I propose here underlines the series' remediation of a gruesome and deglamorized past, which paradoxically offers greater historical veracity and comes across as more reflective of the contemporary era. Thus, my analysis of the Borgia series is not only situated within a "counter-heritage" (Higbee 2013: 61) paradigm but also sets a "globally identifiable picture of Italian identity and culture" (Bisoni and Farinacci 2020) against a demythologizing transnational reappropriation. By deconstructing the traditional narrative and providing an alternative rendition, the series can be seen as a subversive form of cultural resistance that seeks to challenge the status quo and disrupt the dominant discourse. This approach adds to the debate about the denationalization of heritage products by suggesting that national heritage is not just national but part of a much broader transnational discourse. This framework also takes into account the contentious issue of "ownership" of the past and supports O'Leary's definition of "world heritage cinema," which "implies a transfer of ownership of a cultural heritage from a community, region, or nation to a generic humanity" (O'Leary 2016: 63). In this sense, it encourages interaction between different "imagined communities" (Anderson) that can learn from each other and share their knowledge and experiences.

Taking this framework into consideration, I will examine how *Borgia* provides a unique perspective on the past and an unmatched opportunity for national and translational viewers to engage with the period's most troubled aspects, which are only partially covered in written sources. First, I will provide a brief overview of both series; next, focusing on Fontana's *Borgia*, I will identify a number of scenes that exemplify the creators' unsettling 'post-nostalgic' approach to revisit Alexander VI's papacy and the lives of his offspring. I will then discuss the aesthetic and conceptual relevance of *Borgia*'s efforts to deromanticize the Renaissance by reframing it as a counter-heritage and 'post-nostalgic' television product and conclude by considering the power of visual representation in shaping the audience's view of history and redefining how we consume the past in a postmodern, globalized world. Ultimately, my study challenges and deconstructs Samuel's assumptions about heritage industry being a cultural product that "traffics" in history and "commodifies" the past. According to Samuel, the heritage industry turns real-life suffering into a tourist spectacle while, at the same time, creating simulacra of a past that never was (2018: 242). Conversely, I argue that 'post-nostalgic' heritage programs that sensationalize sex and violence deliver an anti-mythical—albeit authentic—image of the past. They give viewers a chance to learn more about the untold brutal past and become less prone to idealize history. This particular focus on historical television programs resists "broad theoretical perspectives" (Cardwell 2006: 77), using textual features and a production studies approach as the basis for my analysis.

2. THE 2011 BORGIA BOOM

The Borgia family exploded onto our screens in 2011, capitalizing on the commercial success of *The Tudors*[5]. *Two unrelated series were released that year: The Borgias* (Showtime), by Neil Jordan, and *Borgia: Faith and Fear* (Canal+), by Tom Fontana. The unlikely airing of two transnational co-productions about the same historical topic in the same year offers a prime opportunity to examine how history is remediated in fiction beyond national borders and consumed in popular culture by international audiences. The series had been concurrently in development for years, but the producers knew nothing of each other's projects: "they were announced literally within

5 For more information on *The Tudors*, see Wray (2011), Parrill & Robinson (2013), and Glynn (2016).

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a day of one another" (Roxborough 2011). Concerned about the fact that two programs about the Borgias would compete for the same audience, Fontana and Jordan attempted to unite their projects. However, their completely different views on source material and the degree of historical accuracy that they wanted to portray resulted in their keeping the projects separate. Fontana wanted to stay as close as possible to recorded history; he even conducted research on fifteenth-century documents written in Latin. By contrast, Jordan was more interested in entertaining his audience, which he did by diverging from recorded history.

Jordan's *The Borgias* premiered in the United States on Showtime, on April 3, 2011, before being released internationally, while Fontana's *Borgia* was launched in Europe in the fall of the same year. On the networks that had purchased the Showtime series (British Sky Broadcasting in the United Kingdom and ProSieben in Germany), *The Borgias* appealed to a mainstream, commercial audience. *Borgia*, on the other hand, was aimed at a more high-brow audience and targeted European public broadcasters: Canal+, Atlantique, and EOS.

Showtime's *The Borgias* is a three-season series that scholars refer to as "quality television" (McCabe and Akass 2007), "complex tv" (Mittell 2015), and "prestige drama" (Buonanno 2018: 9) for its distinctive hallmarks. These include "originality, experimentation, cutting-edge, controversial topics, complexity, visual distinctiveness, film style, genre mash-up, creative freedom, artform status" (Buonanno 2018: 10), high-quality entertainment, a high budget, "sexposition", violence, intrigue, lavish costumes, and an all-star cast. The narrative follows the Borgia family's ascent to power, with a particular emphasis being placed on the amoral conduct of Rodrigo Borgia – Pope Alexander VI – and the unique bond between his children, Cesare and Lucrezia. The script relies heavily on the rumors that created the myth[6] of the infamous Borgia family. Although *The Borgias* remained high in the ratings, Showtime canceled the final season and a two-hour wrap-up film in 2013, probably because of high production costs. Series creator and executive producer Neil Jordan explained this decision as follows:

> For a variety of reasons, we won't be doing a fourth season, but, "The Prince" [the final episode], when I wrote it and shot it, did seem like the end of a journey for the family. Whatever bonded them as a family dies in this episode, and the center of the drama for me was always the family (cited in Braxton 2013).

Despite the cancellation, Showtime's Head of Entertainment David Nevins continued to praise Jordan's talents, saying "this is what premium television can do — take stories that can't be contained in two-hour movie and blow them up to make an amazing series. *The Borgias* is Auteur Television at its best" (cited in Keene 2013). Jordan's auteurial stamp is most evident in his insistence on exposing the moral decadence of a society, sympathizing with deviant characters, and showing us all that is titillating about the past, even if this requires a complete rewriting of the facts. Like many scripted shows on narrowcast channels, *The Borgias* contains a great deal of typical cable TV sex, nudity, and violence, while simplifying and adapting history to contemporary sensibility and taste.

Although both series are illustrations of "Tudors-style sexed-up pop history" (Palmer 2013) and 'post-nostalgic' counter-heritage television programming, *Borgia: Faith and Fear* presents a more authentic Renaissance period precisely because of the authors' and the producers' decision to de-romanticize it by recasting its most horrific traits. Thereby, *Borgia* deconstructs the myth of a golden age when culture and civilization thrived. This utopian image is a nineteenth-century construction that viewed the Renaissance as the beginning of Western civilization's liberation from dogma and bigotry, prior to the Age of Reason (see Burckhardt 1958). However, as later studies have shown, the Renaissance was far from idyllic: it was a period of ceaseless and destructive warfare, torture, and gore (Lee 2015, Fletcher 2021).

Historian Alexander Lee claims that, despite the tendency to consider the Renaissance a period of cultural renewal, refinement, and creative beauty, these achievements were counterbalanced by a dark, sordid, and even devilish reality. The ugly side of this period is easily overlooked because its art, literature, and cultural achievements are so seductive. Owing to the illusion of "unblemished perfection" (Lee 2015: 5), its horrific aspects have been overlooked for centuries:

> Corrupt bankers, greedy politicians, sex-crazed priests, religious conflict, rampant disease, and lives of extravagance and excess were everywhere

6 The "black legend" of poison, incest, and murder that surrounds the Borgia name is a direct result of the political situation at the time, when papal power quickly passed to Julius II, an old enemy of Alexander VI and, by extension, of his family. It also involved the power struggles between the Papal States and other political entities in Europe. The history of the Borgias is furthermore linked to the Black Legend of early modern Spain. This "characterization of Spain by other Europeans as a backward country of ignorance, superstition, and religious fanaticism that was unable to become a modern nation" (Greer, Mignolo and Quilligan 2007: 1) influenced writings on the Borgias as their connection to the Spanish kingdoms was clear.

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> to be seen, and the most ghastly atrocities were perpetrated under the gaze of the statues and buildings that tourists today admire with such an openmouthed adoration. It would have been all but impossible for the greatest monuments of the Renaissance to have come into being had its foremost artists, writers, and philosophers not been mired in every kind of depravity and degradation. If the Renaissance was an age of cultural angels, it was also a period of worldly demons (4).

Margaret Fletcher has recently taken a similar approach, maintaining that "the popular story of the Renaissance – like many versions of modern Western history – tends to focus on genius and glory at the expense of atrocities" (Fletcher 2021: 11).

The current historiographical emphasis on demystifying the image of the Renaissance informs Tom Fontana's depiction of the period and confirms the categorization of *Borgia* as a 'post-nostalgic' counter-heritage piece. Fontana notes that the Renaissance was a highly ambiguous era, adding that "it was the age of Leonardo Da Vinci and Michelangelo, of enlightened creativity and unparalleled intellectual achievement. But it was also the age of Machiavelli, of rampant lawlessness, incessant war, and unspeakable depravity" (Fontana, IMDb). Thus, he acknowledges that his show is a mixture of intrigue, violence, murder, lust, politics, faith, incest, betrayal, and redemption. Nevertheless, this story is also as compelling and enlightening as the age in which it took place[7]. As a result, his version of the past features individuals who engage in manipulative, pathologically aggressive sexual activities and violence. The torture scenes certainly highlight the period's intense brutality and ultimately deromanticize the Renaissance; in doing so, they distance *Borgia* once again from the traditional heritage film industry's tendency to glorify the past and downplay its true horrors.

3. *BORGIA: FAITH AND FEAR*

Borgia: Faith and Fear is a collaborative, European historical drama and a prime example of the relatively new brand of transnational co-productions that have become a viable global alternative to documentaries and docudramas[8]. Filmed in the Czech Republic and Italy, *Borgia* was produced by Atlantique Productions, a subsidiary of Lagardère Entertainment, for the French premium-pay service TV Canal+ in association with EOS Entertainment. *Borgia* premiered on Sky Cinema 1 in Italy in July 2011. A second season followed in March 2013, aired on Canal+ in France, which broadcast the third and final season in September 2014.

The narrative of *Borgia*, which recounts the family's ascent from 1492 (the year Rodrigo was elected pope) to 1507 (the year of Cesare's death), looks beyond the "black legend of the Borgia" (Duran 2008: 72) without justifying or concealing the family's conduct. In Fontana's interpretation, the Borgias are neither wicked monsters nor the misunderstood victims of unfair, long-lasting defamation by their enemies. The series depicts the Borgias' shortcomings and transgressions with intensity, though always within the context of the individuals' motives and circumstances. Although it has abundant gore and violence, it also devotes significant time to a study of the characters' motivations for any crime. Only Juan is depicted as purely evil, whereas the other characters' redeeming traits feed our allegiance to them, in line with one of the signature styles of complex television.[9] As Alexander VI, Rodrigo fights

7 Discussing his show and the time in which it was set, Fontana continues: "At the center of the Vatican [...] was a man whose name would become synonymous with ruthlessness, and whose reign as Pope would be remembered as the most infamous chapter of the history of the Catholic church, Rodrigo Borgia. His four children [...] would provide Rodrigo with a challenge as great as the political maneuvering of his political and religious rivals. [...] Though a man of faith, Rodrigo was also in thrall to the pleasures of the flesh. Not only did he have to deal with the plotting and conspiracies of his fellow cardinals and the representatives of the great powers, but he was locked in a struggle to contain the bitter sibling rivalries that threatened to tear his family apart." (Fontana, IMDb)

8 The twenty-first century has seen many flourishing, internationally produced and distributed television series that rely on their international appeal to attract a modern, post-national audience. These productions share important features, such as internationally known stories and stars, the explicit use of sex and violence, characters seeking power and vicious retribution, on-location shooting, and a mix of historical fidelity and fictionalized plots. Some of those worth mentioning include *Rome* (2005–7, BBC/HBO), *The Tudors* (2007–10 Showtime), *Spartacus: Blood and Sand* (2010, Starz), *The Borgias* (2011–13, Showtime/Take 5/Octagon/Mid Atlantic Films), *Camelot* (2011, Starz/Take 5/CBC/Ecosse/Octagon), *Da Vinci's Demons* (2013–, Starz/BBC Worldwide), *The White Queen* (BBC/Company/Czar Television, 2013) *Marco Polo* (The Weinstein Company/Netflix, 2014-16) , *The Crown* (Left Bank Pictures/Sony, 2016-), *Medici* (Lux Vide/Rai, 2016-19), and *Leonardo* (Lux Vide/ Rai/ Sony, 2021-).

9 One of the defining trends of complex television (Mittell 2015) is the popularity of morally ambiguous antiheroes. Viewers actively define their relationship with a morally ambiguous character, which provides the pleasurable cognitive and affective challenge viewers expect from quality TV. These antiheroes combine admirable traits (professionalism, intelligence, or courage) with less honorable characteristics (violence, meanness, deceit, cruelty). Our relationship with morally ambiguous characters does not automatically lead to sympathy (Vaage 2015: 6) but might increase our fascination with or interest in a character (Smith 1995). For example, learning more about the motivations of morally flawed characters can increase our interest in them, but it still does not require us to sympathize with them (Mittell 2015: 163).

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to maintain and strengthen his family's position as foreigners in Italian politics while making sincere efforts to reform the Church. Cesare is initially torn between his priestly responsibilities to gain the Pope's favor and his growing military aspirations: the latter ultimately prevail. Lucrezia struggles to reconcile her religious calling with her desire for marriage, all the while being used as a pawn in the political maneuverings of her father after he became pope. While the narrative clearly portrays the Borgias' actions as being motivated by violence and amorality, it also attempts to justify their depravity as an inevitable evil under the circumstances. Over the three seasons, the siblings' character arc is best described as the descent of naive individuals into corruption and ruthlessness due to forces beyond their control. Thus, the first season depicts Lucrezia as tormented by the pressure of a political marriage but seeking solace in religion. After committing a number of serious crimes and learning from her mistakes, in season three, Lucrezia becomes a confident, devout, and secure woman. Cesare, instead, grows from a stubborn, tormented teenager into the ruthless megalomaniac genius of Machiavelli's *Prince*. Cesare's escalating brutality is the result of his father's authoritarian demeanor and inflexible demands, which damage his psyche.

According to Monnet-Cantagrel, the series has a quality pedigree and an "auteur seal" (2021: 125) that must be credited to Tom Fontana, who has built a reputation in film and other media[10]. Television thus benefits from a transfer of legitimacy through its cinematic lineage. *Borgia*'s intellectual approach derives from the literary source of its screenplay, the diaries of Johannes Burchard, the Papal Master of Ceremonies, which are a primary source material on the reign of Alexander VI. Although it is widely accepted that these diaries were fed by fifteenth-century rumors and popular fantasies, Burchard's eyewitness memoirs provide important insights into the private lives of Rodrigo Borgia and his children, as well as a rare perspective on the religious and cultural life of the Renaissance. Historical figures in Burchard's diaries include the monk Girolamo Savonarola, Leonardo da Vinci, and Niccolò Machiavelli, who plays an important role in the series and is portrayed from a unique vantage point[11].

Borgia ran for three seasons, with a total of 38 episodes being aired. This long format allows for a slower narrative pace and greater historical detail. Audiences who are unfamiliar with the period may have felt daunted by the vast number of characters and the complexity of the plot, but these aspects reflect Fontana's desire for historical verisimilitude, or 'historicity.' The same reasoning lies behind his decision to use an international cast to convey Renaissance Rome's multicultural nature. This artistic choice resulted in Rodrigo and Joffre being interpreted by Americans, Cesare by an Irishman with an English accent, and Juan by a French actor. Lucrezia was played by a Russian actress and her mother Vanozza by a Spanish one. Such contemporary multiculturality is hard to portray in other media, particularly written texts. Fontana defied the urge to oversimplify the plot or adapt the facts to modern sensibilities, which often results in the type of historical misrepresentation that we see in Showtime's *The Borgias*. A good example of this is the way in which these series present Lucrezia's first husband and marriage at just 13 years of age. According to Bradford: "Lucrezia's marriage to Giovanni Sforza was celebrated with due pomp and festivity in the Vatican on 12 June 1493" (2004: 28). In Jordan's version of the facts, Giovanni takes the newlywed Lucrezia to his home in Pesaro straight after the wedding ceremony, where he violently rapes and abuses her until she flees with the aid of Giulia Farnese, the Pope's concubine. However, according to historical sources (including Bradford, Hibbert, Mallett, Meyer, and Strathern), Lucrezia never left Rome and the marriage was later annulled owing to a lack of consummation, as Fontana shows. In fact, Bradford writes that Alexander had ordered that the marriage was not to be consummated before November, "either out of consideration for his daughter's age or, equally likely, to enable him to have it dissolved on the grounds of non-consummation in case it no longer suited his plans" (2004: 30). Regardless of which series portrays this event more compellingly, the different versions of Lucrezia's marriage demonstrate that the makers interpret history and its protagonists differently. Lucrezia seems freer in Fontana's production for Canal+, and just as cunning and ruthless as her brothers, or even more so. Instead, Showtime portrays her as a kindhearted, innocent young woman whose only wish is for

10 Fontana wrote and produced the films *St. Elsewhere Homicide* and the series *Oz*.

11 Niccolò Machiavelli was first introduced to Cesare Borgia on a diplomatic mission in his role as Secretary of the Florentine Chancellery in 1502. During this time, he sent dispatches to Florence and observed closely his behavior. In *The Prince*, Machiavelli uses Borgia as an illustration of the dangers of acquiring a principality at the expense of another. Pope Alexander gave him the power to set up, but most of the time he ruled Romagna with talent and tact. Cesare's rule ended quickly, though, when his father died and a rival to the Borgia family became Pope. The use of the Borgias by Machiavelli is controversial. Some scholars think that Machiavelli's Borgia served as the model for modern state crimes. Others have historically contextualized it, attributing the admiration for such brutality to the widespread criminality and corruption of the time (see Holman 2018).

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FIGURE 1, 2, 3. *BORGIA,* SEASON 1 EPISODE 1

kind, compassionate treatment. Historical sources imply that Lucrezia had political acumen and used this to her advantage. Fontana's production thus appears to characterize Lucrezia with more historical accuracy, portraying her as stubborn and even Machiavellian.

Another feature that adds to *Borgia*'s historicity and places it in what I refer to as a 'post-nostalgic' heritage television paradigm is the depiction of authentic, extreme violence that makes for uncomfortable viewing: animal brutality, disfigurement, mutilation, male rape, and femicide, among other things. As early as the first episode, we witness the most heinous crime against women: a gruesome femicide. The victim is the beautiful wife of Roman nobleman Orsini, who is caught in flagrante delicto with Juan Borgia, Pope Alexander's son. Narrowly escaping death, Juan flees through the window soon after Orsini barges in and tries to attack him. A different fate awaits the wife: a disturbing—albeit historically authentic—sequence shows Orsini beating his wife to death with the iron fireplace poker. He then tosses the poker onto her corpse and exits the scene, leaving the bloodshed for the servants to clean up.

This compelling sequence employs a variety of stylistic conventions and editing practices of the horror film genre that contribute to heightening the repulsion for this revolting crime and cognitively pairing it with torture and repugnance. It opens with a classic "jump scare," traditionally a quiet scene interrupted by a sudden, loud action taken by a character. In this case, the husband—ominously holding a fireplace poker in his hands—abruptly opens the door, interrupting Juan and his lover's passionate kiss. A handheld POV camera follows the horror, and rapid and disorienting cuts create confusion and agitation. The woman's close-ups enhance immediacy and intensity, drawing us into her terrified state and compelling us to empathize with her suffering. In keeping with classic genre conventions and their penchant for gore, the sequence also features haunting extra-diegetic musical accompaniment and concludes with a bird's-eye view (coupled with a Dutch angle) of the lifeless woman covered in blood, lying at the feet of her executioner. The accompanying musical passages enhance the force of the scene both when present and when not; the notes dissolve when the husband turns to beat his wife to death, at which point we hear only diegetic beating sound effects. In fact, the lack of music is equally powerful in this sequence, as its disappearance allows the audience to focus on the brutality.

This scene reflects *Borgia*'s 'post-nostalgic' and demythologizing approach to post-heritage television and illustrates the pervasiveness of femicide at the time. Crouzet, Pavann, and Vigueur (2018) recently argued that Renaissance women were punished for adultery and for participating in contemporary cultural and political innovation. The authors take the cases of three women, all wives of influential Italian Renaissance lords, who were beheaded for adultery on their husband's orders between 1391 and 1425. By condemning them to death, the husbands demonstrated their authority

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FIGURE 4. CREDIT: NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY/SCIENCE SOURCE

over the women's fates. Colin maintains that "frequent domestic violence was an undeniable aspect of early modern Italian society" (2021: 145). This type of assault was a serious threat as "twenty-one women in the sample of 658 confirmed homicides (~3.5%) died at their husband's or lover's hands" (Colin 2021: 141). Although Colin's study focuses on the homicide of both genders in early modern Bologna, she describes cases of sex- and romance-related femicide that were triggered by "either a husband's jealousy over his wife's perceived sexual infidelities or a lover's unwillingness to accept that his relationship with a prostitute was not mutually emotional" (147). Colin furthermore writes that "these men killed their wives or *meretrici* because they felt aggrieved at their inability to properly enforce the hierarchies of man and woman that undergirded early modern marital relations" (147). According to her research, hegemonic masculinity and dominant patriarchy were socially acceptable aspects of love and marriage in the early modern period, and femicide occurred within the romantic context when that dominance was insufficient or challenged.

Another study that is useful to cite here is Trevor Dean's (2004) examination of domestic violence and assaults in Bologna in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. From the voluminous records of the criminal court of Bologna, the author concludes that, when women were the victims of homicide, there was a strong likelihood that the killer was the husband (usually a 50:50 ratio). He argues that levels of domestic violence were high: "typically, wife-battering happened in the home, with the husband apparently seizing on whatever sharp object was at hand – often a bread-knife, sometimes scissors – and dealing several blows to the upper parts of his wife's body (the head, neck, arms and shoulders), causing bloodshed, the element that prompted prosecution" (528). Hence, although historical records suggest that Orsini's wife died differently, *Borgia*'s depiction of the aftermath of an adulterous affair is true to the 'hidden' zeitgeist of the Renaissance, no matter how disturbing and 'post-nostalgic' we may label it. For this reason, *Borgia: Faith and Fear* succeeds in evoking a sense of historicity and making the characters feel 'verisimilar' in a way that few period pieces can.

The graphic description of torture methods, which were common in medieval and early modern Europe, is another feature of *Borgia*'s 'post-nostalgic' approach to history. In episode 5 of season 1, a traitor is sentenced to one of the most extreme and gruesome methods of execution: death by sawing. This method saw the offender hung upside down while a large saw was used to cut them in half from the crotch toward the head. This cruelty allowed enough blood to reach the victim's brain and keep them alive until the saw hit the main arteries in the abdomen.[12]

What is most astonishing about this sequence is the fact that the Borgia Pope himself ordered the execution after discovering the spectators' enjoyment of watching dogs fighting over a human head near the Vatican. Accounts of the dog fight made it to Florence, and then spread across the world. The Pope thought it would taint the Vatican's image and thereby deter people from visiting Rome, spending money, and contributing to the Vatican's coffers. Thus, the Pope could not allow the organizers of the dog fight to go unpunished and had to set an example to prevent a recurrence. In

12 At the time, this method of execution was commonly used in the Middle East, Europe, and parts of Asia. It was also practiced throughout the Roman Empire and was regarded as Emperor Caligula's preferred method of punishment (see Taussig 1984).

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FIGURE 5,6,7,8. *BORGIA*: SEASON 1 EPISODE 5

this framework, the gruesome execution was significant in reasserting the Vatican's reputation, upper hand, and power. The cinematography in this sequence reveals another crucial, sociocultural aspect of Renaissance society and the human psyche; the interplay of the crowd's POV shots and reaction shots illustrates the social ramifications of crime and punishment, and the morbid pleasure the crowd gains from witnessing another's misfortune. This phenomenon has been dubbed *schadenfreude*[13], which usually occurs when we witness and take delight in the adversities of others. It has permeated civilization for centuries and stems from deeply rooted latent emotions. Expressing these emotions in group gatherings causes a mob mentality that, in turn, tends to feed that very emotion. Scholars have argued that such mentality can sanction "unacceptable types of brutality" (Ruggiero 1978: 251), but this observation ignores the—albeit dormant—psychology that resurfaces when we witness the suffering of others, especially during public executions. Mob mentality is not necessarily the driver behind the pleasure derived from gory executions; instead, it triggers the mind's existing disposition to *schadenfreude*.

In line with current psychological research on *schadenfreude* (Dasborough and Harvey 2017, Kalra and Narang 2019, Smith 2013, Watt Smith 2018), some scholars argue that public executions provided catharsis and psychological relief to the onlookers in that they knew that they were not those being executed. Perhaps it reinforced the economic, religious, social, and political stability that the offender had undermined. Regarding *Borgia*, this ghastly public execution reiterates the power of television to deliver content that demystifies the era's unblemished reputation, which is frequently glossed over in written texts. The cinematic rendition of the execution sequence illustrates this argument.

The execution of Friar Girolamo Savonarola in episode 4 of season 2 offers another perspective on *schadenfreude*. A Dominican friar from Ferrara, Girolamo Savonarola became the moral dictator of Florence when the Medicis were tem-

13 Smith (2013) has argued that *schadenfreude* is "a natural human emotion, and it pervades our experience" (XVIII).

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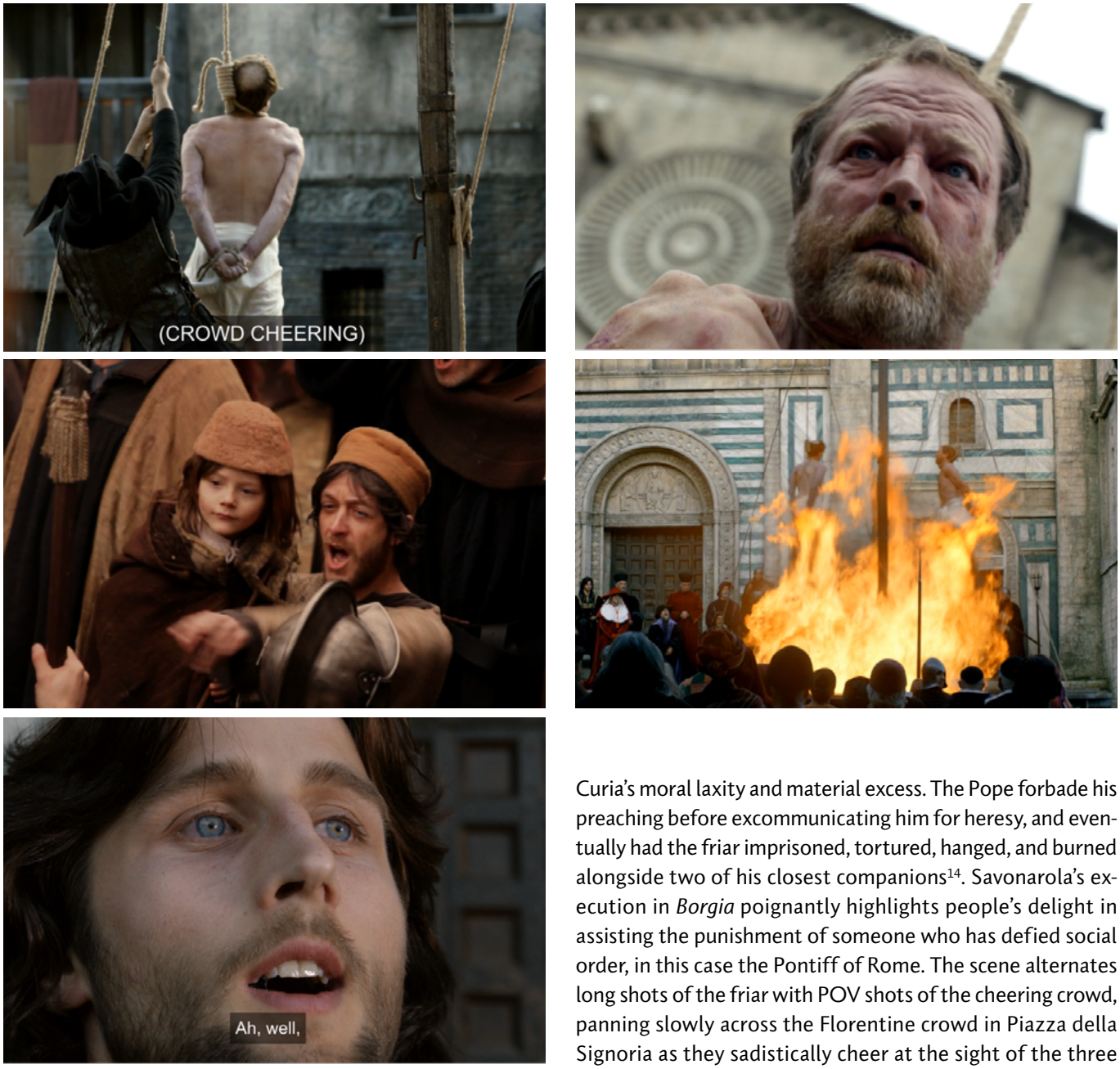

FIGURE 9, 10, 11, 12, 13. *BORGIA*, SEASON 2 EPISODE 4

porarily expelled in 1494. He earned a reputation for his insistence on austerity and aversion to all forms of pleasure and recreation. A renowned prophet and a fervent preacher who was obsessed with sin, he awaited God's vengeance on humanity. Not unsurprisingly, Savonarola attracted many powerful enemies, notably Pope Alexander VI, who had legitimate concerns about Savonarola's denunciation of the Curia's moral laxity and material excess. The Pope forbade his preaching before excommunicating him for heresy, and eventually had the friar imprisoned, tortured, hanged, and burned alongside two of his closest companions[14]. Savonarola's execution in *Borgia* poignantly highlights people's delight in assisting the punishment of someone who has defied social order, in this case the Pontiff of Rome. The scene alternates long shots of the friar with POV shots of the cheering crowd, panning slowly across the Florentine crowd in Piazza della Signoria as they sadistically cheer at the sight of the three bodies. Singing and dancing around the fire, they throw stones at the corpses with contempt.

This is precisely the type of historicity that typically interferes with entertainment as it portrays events in a brutal way, making for unpleasant and 'post-nostalgic' viewing.

Borgia's historical verisimilitude continues in episode 8 of the first season, ominously entitled "Prelude to the Apocalypse." It depicts the rivalry between Marcantonio

14 For further information on Savonarola see Dall'Aglio (2010) and Weinstein (2011).

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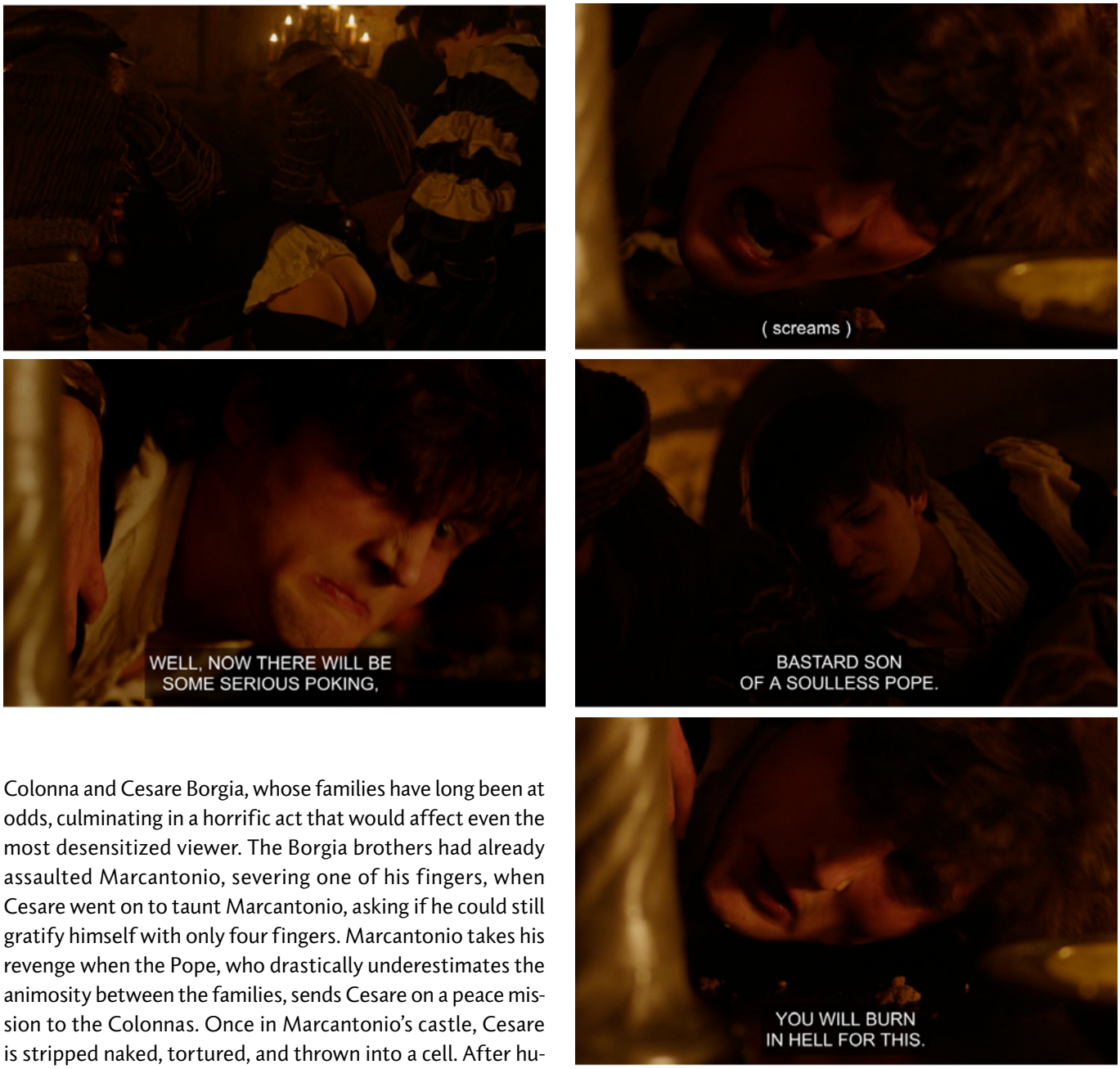

FIGURE 14, 15, 16, 17, 18. *BORGIA*, SEASON 1 EPISODE 8

Colonna and Cesare Borgia, whose families have long been at odds, culminating in a horrific act that would affect even the most desensitized viewer. The Borgia brothers had already assaulted Marcantonio, severing one of his fingers, when Cesare went on to taunt Marcantonio, asking if he could still gratify himself with only four fingers. Marcantonio takes his revenge when the Pope, who drastically underestimates the animosity between the families, sends Cesare on a peace mission to the Colonnas. Once in Marcantonio's castle, Cesare is stripped naked, tortured, and thrown into a cell. After humiliating him for several days, Marcantonio eventually gives Cesare new clothing and invites him to dine. Once he has ascertained that the food is not poisoned, the ravenous Cesare begins to devour it. Unexpectedly, Marcantonio delivers an odd speech about the sensual nature of food and the body's reaction to physical stimuli. He then mentions his missing finger and gestures to his guards to hold Cesare down on the table; what follows is the appalling scene of Cesare's rape by the hands of Marcantonio.

The superb cinematography of this sequence adds to the tension and increases the viewer's discomfort and disgust. Low lighting, jarring camera movements, and reverse angles juxtaposing Cesare's terror with Marcantonio's sadism portray such dehumanization and horror as to change our perception of the Renaissance. In this increasingly corrupt society, forgiveness is rarely a virtue, and retribution the most widespread and conventional modus operandi. Marcantonio's tragic demise perfectly illustrates such vengeance. In episode

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11 of the first season, fittingly entitled "God's Monster," Marcantonio is captured by the papal guards on the charge of treason and imprisoned at the Castle of the Holy Angel. In retaliation for being raped, Cesare instructs his loyal hitman Miguel De Corella to torture rather than kill Marcantonio. This involves severing his testicles and leaving him to die. Hence, far from being a magnificent era of art and elegance, *Borgia* reveals how the Renaissance plunged into viciousness and savagery, and only the strongest and most powerful survived and prospered.

Historians agree that violence between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries is undisputed and "a cultural issue" (Davies 2013: 3). As Muchembled and Birrell write, "everybody was violent at the end of the Middle Ages and in early modern times [...] The brutality of human relations was a universal social language, considered normal and necessary in the West until at least the seventeenth century" (2012: 8, 21). Most violence occurred in defense of honor, since

> the law of shame ruled this world [...] If dishonour fell on an individual, it contaminated all the members of his 'clan', his close family, relatives, neighbours, friends – even the whole village or urban district [...] In this context, violence was both legitimate and obligatory in order to escape shame (Muchembled and Birrell 2012: 26).

Likewise, Cohen's *Love and Death in Renaissance Italy* portrays violence, jealousy, love, and murder as the driving forces of the time. The book details Cohen's meticulous research at the Archivio di Stato in Rome on several trials (*processi*) regarding domestic dramas affecting the lives of ordinary people that exemplify Renaissance Italian society's dark side. Those accounts depict early modern Rome as a place of extreme brutality, unrestrained vice, gory retribution, sexual assault, and rape.

Although non-fiction provides valuable insight into the social dynamics of the period, it fails to elicit "history's affective turn" (Agnew 2007: 299), which is a hallmark of the audiovisual. While I concur with Agnew's argument that historical "reenactment constitutes a break with more traditional forms of historiography" (301), I disagree that "as a form of affective history [...] reenactment is less concerned with events, processes or structures than with the individual's physical and psychological experience" (301). On the contrary, I believe that viewing leads to historical immersion and psychological involvement, promoting the construction of an entirely new way of consuming history. This distinctive practice is what I call an 'affective screened historical experience,' a notion that evokes Collingwood's definition of screened history as "a sympathetic identification with the past" (1946: 215) and a precondition for historical understanding. A key benefit of historical series like *Borgia* is that viewers can emotionally engage with the screened past by immersing themselves in history and vicariously participating in the dramas and atrocities of the period.

4. CONCLUSION

The principal argument that I have raised in this article is that it has never been more important to investigate how televised historical drama recreates and represents the past; as Robert Rosenstone (2003) acknowledges, "the increasing presence of the visual media in modern culture and the vast increase in TV channels seems to ensure that most people now get their knowledge of the past, once school is over, from the visual media" (10). Scholars of screened history recognize "the power of the mass media to shape perception and to affect interpretation of the past" (Weinstein 42). The Canal+ series *Borgia: Faith and Fear* is an excellent case study for examining how a contemporary television program portrays the Italian Renaissance and the papacy of Alexander VI and what impact historical fiction can have on audiences' perceptions of the past. This subsequently affects the collective memory of the public domain. By focusing on specific aspects of production and offering a textual analysis of *Borgia*, this article reveals the usefulness of post-heritage considerations in framing the analysis of period dramas. In line with this approach, my case study shows how a popular contemporary television series chooses to reappropriate and recast the Italian Renaissance beyond the national borders, "as a transnational/Italian cultural product" (Bisoni and Farinacci 2020: 49) for a transnational audience.

My study also demonstrates that the Borgia series undermines the idealized view of Italy rooted in its glorious past, creating a deromanticizing countereffect and what I define as a 'post-nostalgic' heritage television product. Within this new framework, *Borgia* offers a counter-heritage portrayal that subverts and deconstructs the dominant heritage discourse and recasts the Renaissance as a gruesome and anti-mythical period.

Perhaps the most intriguing aspect of *Borgia* is precisely its historical authenticity. No effort is made to romanticize

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the past in consideration of contemporary sensibilities, and appalling behavior is depicted almost without criticism or any need to moralize it. Events that would be scandalous today, such as popes and cardinals having illegitimate children and concubines, are depicted as common occurrences. Although the series includes numerous violent and sexual scenes, these are not unrealistically fabricated and as such have a strong impact on the audience. Instead of adapting the past to suit modern tastes, the writers deliver scenes showing authentic, brutal methods of punishment. Audiences may be appalled, but the producers anticipated this reaction. As Lee insightfully argues,

> if we look behind the façade of beauty [...] the true character of the Renaissance becomes clear. Far from being an age of unalloyed wonder, it was a period of sex, scandal, and suffering. Its cities were filled with depravity and inequality, its streets pullulated with prostitutes and perverted priests, and its houses played home to seduction, sickness, shady backroom deals, and conspiracies of every variety (2015: 352).

In line with Lee's study, *Borgia* shows us a 'post-nostalgic,' sordid, and vicious past where power, politics, perversity, and corruption simmer beneath the elegant surface. It is precisely this 'crude' authenticity in the depiction of every aspect of the Renaissance that encapsulates the sense of historical awareness prompted by Borgia: Faith and Fear and strongly contributes to a more canonical historiographical understanding.

The final sequence of the first season brilliantly encapsulates the overwhelming weight of the Renaissance's brutal essence, which visually 'crashes' the Pope. Alexander's bird's-eye view, as the culmination of a crane shot, elicits conflicting and unexpected reactions from the audience. This sequence disavows the biased notion of the Renaissance as a golden age of elegance and beauty by exposing a more authentic—albeit uncomfortable—side of the period and disempowering the most powerful figure of the time: Christ's representative on earth. Finally, this sequence epitomizes the overlooked value of 'post-nostalgic' historical dramas like *Borgia*, which depict all aspects of the past and do not hesitate to demythologize one of history's most acclaimed epochs.

FIGURE 19. *BORGIA*, SEASON 1 EPISODE 12

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TV Series

Borgia (2011-2014)

The Borgias (2011-2013)

The Tudors (2007-2010)

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DIALOGUE

LAS CHICAS DEL CABLE (2017–2020): AN ORAL HISTORY OF NETFLIX'S FIRST SPANISH ORIGINAL DRAMA

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KEYWORDS
Las chicas del cable, Netflix, interview, oral history

ABSTRACT

The article analyses the production of Netflix's first original series in Spain, *Las chicas del cable* (2017-2020), through 6 interviews with professionals involved in its development, both from Netflix (Diego Ávalos) and the production company Bambú Producciones (executive producer Teresa Fernández Valdés, co-creator Gema R. Neira, head writer María José Rustarazo, head director Carlos Sedes, and cinematographer Jacobo Martínez). The goal is to use to examine the localisation process of Netflix through its original productions, and the challenges (such as cultural misunderstandings) it posed for both the video-on-demand service and the local production companies with whom the service established close links during this period of global expansion. The conclusions point to a mutually beneficial partnership where Bambú Producciones learnt how to work with international video-on-demand services and became less dependent on the Spanish market, and Netflix benefited from a safer arrival to new territory with a company that had a strong track record.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Las chicas del cable (2017-2020), released in English-speaking countries as *Cable Girls*, was the first original series produced by Netflix in Spain and, as such, an early example of the role original fiction has played in the globalization of the North American video-on-demand service. The main characters of *Las chicas del cable* are four young switchboard operators in the capital of Spain, Madrid, during the 1920s. Upon premiering in April 2017, *Las chicas del cable* was Netflix's second European original series, the fourth in Spanish if Latin American productions are considered. By July 2020, when the series ended after five seasons and 42 episodes, Netflix had already released more than 30 original series in Europe and a similar number in Spanish in Latin America.

The following pages analyse the production process of *Las chicas del cable* through six interviews with professionals involved with the series: Diego Ávalos (Vice President of Original Content for Spain and Portugal at Netflix), Teresa Fernández Valdés (executive producer and co-founder of Bambú Producciones), Gema R. Neira (co-creator of the series with Ramón Campos and development director of Bambú Producciones), María José Rustarazo (head writer), Carlos Sedes (main director of the first season) and Jacobo Martínez (main cinematographer of the first season).[1] The method chosen for this article is based on the notion that exclusive informants can provide the "backstage" knowledge needed to understand how a media product is created "within an organizational framework and under the influence of social forces such as technology, economics and cultural politics" (Brunn 2015: 134-5). The use of interview material has been on the rise in film and television research as result of the influence of disciplines such as historiography and the growth of interest in oral history (Cornea 2008). And, in the field of media production research, it is particularly useful for screenwriters (such as Neira and Rustarazo) because their work lends itself well to conversation rather than observation, and normally they are particularly articulate in the analysis of their role in the industry (Banks 2014: 546-7).

Extracts from the interviews are organized in different sections to trace the main challenges Netflix and Bambú faced during the production of the series. These interviews offer the contrasting views of Netflix at the time of its emergence as a global video-on-demand service and Bambú Producciones, one of the many companies that accompanied it along the way.

2. *LAS CHICAS DEL CABLE* AND THE RISE OF NON-ENGLISH SPEAKING NETFLIX ORIGINALS

According to Jenner (2018), Netflix has operated as a transnational broadcaster willing to integrate into national media systems. During this period of integration, Netflix established partnerships with local operators for co-productions and built relationships with local creative communities. *Las chicas del cable* being chosen as Netflix's first original series is, for example, directly related to the success on its catalogue of the Spanish series *Velvet* (2014-16), also made by Bambú Producciones. The series incorporates the usual features of Bambú's dramas, such as the combination of romantic storylines and a big mystery, the centrality of a space (here, the telephone company headquarters), and the combination of rising stars and prestigious veteran actors in the cast (Cascajosa-Virino 2020). Netflix found in Bambú an ideal ally for this first endeavour of original fiction in Spain: the production firm had produced big successes for broadcast television and built up some internationalisation muscle in the previous years, developing links with the German producer–distributor Beta Film and French producer-distributor Studiocanal.

Question: *What prompted Netflix to produce original content in Spanish?*

Diego Ávalos (Netflix VP of Original Content): *Club de cuervos* [the first Netflix Original in Mexico] was launched in 2015 and *3%* [the first Netflix Original in Brazil] in 2016.[2] At the end of 2015, our service became available in Spain, and we already had the idea of producing there. The country has a great history of fiction, both in television and film, that attracted us. At the same time, Latin America had stopped buying Spanish content for distribution. Suddenly, Turkish series were growing. We started buying content such as *El barco* (2011-2013), *Gran Hotel* (2011-2013) and *Velvet*, among many others, and we saw a great appetite again in Latin America.

1 The interviews were conducted using the Meet platform on June 4 (Diego Ávalos), June 26 (Jacobo Martínez), June 29 (Carlos Sedes), June 30 (María José Rustarazo), July 1 (Gema R. Neira) and July 2 (Teresa Fernández Valdés) of 2020. The author would like to thank Rut Rey (Netflix) and Irene Vecino (Bambú Producciones) for helping to facilitate and schedule the interviews.

2 *Club de cuervos* (2015-2019) and *3%* (2016-2020) were the first Netflix Originals in Mexico and Brazil, respectively.

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Club de cuervos was a comedy that showed our hypothesis that, in Latin America, we could do not only content acquisition, but also change how fiction was made and find new stories [that are] impossible to find on traditional channels in Mexico. *3%* worked better outside Brazil than in Brazil, which proved the other part of this strategy: you can find great stories and creators for a local market, but also for a global one, as we had a platform that by then was already becoming global.

Question: *What was the genesis of* Las chicas del cable*?*

Gema R. Neira (co-creator): The idea for *Las chicas del cable* came from [an] exhibition at the Fundación Telefónica about female switchboard operators. It caught our attention because it told us very well that, until then, women could only be housewives, teachers, nuns and servants. And suddenly, with the switchboard operators, a world opened for a type of worker that was very different from the others. They [switchboard operators] were also unmarried. They were trained, first at the capital, and then that spread to the rest of Spain. We took an article and saved it in the database, which is what we often do. With the call from Telefónica [whose Movistar+ division was starting an original drama production strategy], this concept came up again. We thought it would be perfect for them to start with a series about their own company. It was not the same concept as *Las chicas del cable.* It was about the Telefonica Building and the switchboard operators.[3] But Movistar+ said no. [Netflix] instantly said yes.

Teresa Fernández Valdés (executive producer): At that time, Netflix was looking for feature films. They were saying that they were betting on talented directors, but that they would make the films for a million euros. It was a more experimental thing. And after that first contact with a person in Madrid, we stayed on standby. We thought it was not for us. One Christmas [in 2015], we received an email from Eric Barmack.[4] He told us, 'Hi guys, I've heard things about you, and I know *Gran Hotel* and *Velvet* very well. I would be interested if you have any projects to send us. I love your dramas'. And we immediately replied that, of course, we would love to make a presentation, if he wanted to give us some directions or if we could just send concepts that were a bit developed. And he said, 'Yes, full freedom and as soon as possible'. We searched our hard drives, and we selected four projects, all of them riskier and more experimental. But then there was a minute of reflection before we sent it. We wondered, 'If this man says he really likes our dramas, maybe we should present something along those lines and not everything so risky and distanced from our current series'.

Question: *How was the relationship between Netflix and Bambú during the first development of* Las chicas del cable*?*

Diego Ávalos (Netflix VP of Original Content): A marriage, like it is making a series, is a long-term relationship. And with Ramón and Teresa, there was a very quick symbiosis. After that email in December 2015, in January it was NATPE [the Miami-based international television market], and there, we met in person. It was really the beginning of a journey that has also become a friendship. We realised that we were not only bringing each other a story that was extremely interesting. We came and had a lot of meetings, but that is a very normal thing we did back then. We are a company that is a learning muscle, a living being where we are nourishing each other all the time. And with that nourishment, both of information and of relationships, we open our way of seeing the world and our way of seeing fiction. It was a very normal process of learning for us and of sharing information from our side, of how we wanted fiction to evolve when we went into making originals in certain countries. (...) *Las chicas del cable* was a brave story, with a very timeless struggle, but with contemporary topics and relevance. It fulfilled many things that we connected creatively. And Bambú is very attached to various talents (actors and actresses) that we found very interesting and saw a vision of a whole package. It was not a story in a logline: they [Bambú] had a broad vision of what they wanted to do, and that is where we really saw that symbiosis to move forward.

Teresa Fernández Valdés (executive producer): Within a month, we had signed the contract. It was the first time we negotiated a contract with North Americans. In fact, it was the first time that I brought in a lawyer with that profile. Until then, we had not needed it. We felt very responsible because, being the first [Spanish Netflix] series, I thought that what I fought for in this contract was going to remain a precedent within the Spanish industry. At the same time, I wanted to close the deal because it was Netflix, and we were the first. In the United States the industry is very strong. They are very aggressive in their negotiations, and we are not

3 The Telefónica Building, located on Gran Via Avenue in Madrid, was, at the time of its construction in the late 1920s, the tallest skyscraper in Europe.

4 Executive Erik Barmack joined Netflix in 2011 and was Vice President and Head of International Originals between 2015 and 2019.

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used to that. That legal language, which is normal and very common for them, shocks you at the beginning. We decided to make a strong but quick negotiation. At a given moment, when two points got stuck, they told us that Netflix's lawyer and the person who was going to handle the production at a financial level were going to go to Spain. We had a meeting, and the final deal came out from that meeting.

3. THE CHALLENGES OF MAKING AN EARLY NETFLIX ORIGINAL

Netflix's expansion process, which was based on 'long-distance localisation' (Lobato 2019), was gradually accompanied by corporate decentralisation with the opening of more than 30 offices and production centres from Tokyo to Mexico (Roxborough 2019). *Las chicas del cable* is characteristic of this process: when the series was created by independent production company Bambú Producciones, Netflix's executives supervised it from the United States, but by the time the show ended, the company had already opened its first production hub in Madrid. *Las chicas del cable* was the first Netflix original in Spain and one of the first both in Spanish and in Europe, which made production a kind of "trial and error" experience for both companies, as they faced challenges such as communication problems and working in widely separated time zones.

Question: *What were the main changes that Netflix instructed Bambú to perform when developing* Las chicas del cable*?*

Diego Ávalos (Netflix VP of Original Content): The guideline was 'we love what they [Bambú] have done, how can they evolve if we give them the tools and give them the freedom to do it?' (...) We were clear about several things in terms of length and creative freedom. We felt that we did not need 70 minutes per episode,[5] but also because of the nature of our service, no episode had to have an exact length. And we put a lot of emphasis on that from the beginning, but that they [Bambú Producciones] have the freedom to tell the story the way they need to tell it and the number of episodes they need to tell it. (...) We had conversations about the music. Music is part of the narrative. In many countries, and we saw that in Mexico and Spain, music was not considered as part of the narrative. And we had a lot of debates about music, about what and how we should do it, how it can be used to push the narrative forward.

Question: *What were the main differences in making series for a Spanish broadcast channels and Netflix?*

Jacobo Martínez (cinematographer): Netflix has a lot of technical requirements. At that time, we were not used to working with video-on-demand services. The protocols of Antena 3 and other Spanish broadcast channels were far from those of Netflix. The choice of cameras was limited. You had to adapt. You must do 'dailies' [the processing of the footage shot], and you must do this on set. They control the whole process a lot. At first, I was overwhelmed by the Netflix world. You really are like under a big steamroller. It is different producing for Spain than producing for the world. But maybe it is different because you approach it from a different angle. When you see the dossier and all the technical characteristics that Netflix must fulfil, in the end it is not such a big deal, but at first, it is a lot of responsibility.

Teresa Fernández Valdés (executive producer): Time is money. It was important that the budget could be like that of other series or even a little higher, but we were saving 20 minutes of shooting. The series was going to be more ambitious, and it was going to have more resources. When we say that *Las chicas del cable* was at the standard of the production budget at the time, it is true, but with 20 minutes less. The tricky point is that we were going from seasons of 12 or 13 episodes to seasons of eight episodes. But by dividing certain expenses that are prorated over the entire season, such as set construction, you no longer divide by 13; you divide by 8. In order not to lose the target of giving the series more resources, we achieved two guaranteed seasons (eight episodes plus eight). This initial investment to start up the series was divided not by 12 or 13 episodes, but by 16, which again gave the series an advantage in terms of production.

Gema R. Neira (co-creator): We came from making series such as *Velvet* with 16 characters and very choral. And this series is somehow choral, even though it only has four lead characters. The most challenging thing was to balance the four stories so that they all fit in all the episodes. The main one was Lidia's (Blanca Suárez), but all of them had to be interesting because sometimes, if you do not give them space in the story, the characters are not intriguing. You must make

5 Since the 1990s, the standard length for Spanish broadcast dramas and comedies was 70 minutes. Movistar+, Netflix and other operators changed this standard to 50 minutes, which was later adopted by most of the broadcast channels.

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[sure] the four of them were very different, with attractive conflicts, and that each one had a place in the series. Going from 70 minutes to 40 minutes was difficult. We were used to making the storylines in many beats. And here what we must do is narrate them better, with far fewer beats.

Carlos Sedes (director): It took us a while to get used to the length. It is like when you are making a feature film and suddenly you must make a short film. The length and the rhythm are different. And at the beginning, we were writing long scripts, but we were not aware of it. We had a lot of minutes, and we recorded much more than what remained afterwards. And on top of that, in series like ours, which tend to be very choral, it is more complicated. There are many characters and storylines. It took us a season to get to the real size of the series because it is not easy. So when you have a format like *Velvet* in your veins and suddenly you take it to 40 minutes, it is very tricky.

Question: *What were the main obstacles during the production process of the first seasons of* Las chicas del cable*?*

Diego Ávalos (Netflix VP of Original Content): There were obstacles. The time difference was one of them. Bambú received notes from us when it was dawn in Spain, and we would reply when we were going to sleep. We were also a very small team, but we had a view of the whole world. The team of non-English originals when we did *Club de cuervos* and *3%* were just two people. Then we grew, and now it is a global team that is based in many parts of the world. But we had to learn how to work, and we saw it as a challenge. One was how can we make non-English content. From a distance, some things were not easy for our partners, and not easy for us. Because we were a small team, the process depended on who could supervise one series. Sometimes scripts had to be translated, notes translated for the other side, and it was a process, and not the most enjoyable one. But we knew that this was for the short term because our goal was to make the team bigger. I was the only Spanish-speaking member of the team, but I could not be on all the series.

Teresa Fernández Valdés (executive producer): Almost nobody could read in Spanish on Netflix's side. We also had a problem with the schedule. It is a big time-difference with Spain, nine hours.[6] It was almost the end of your day and the start of theirs. The first year it was very common to have calls at eight or nine at night, long calls. And they must catch you wide awake because you are going to talk about characters, casting, and wardrobe proposals... There was a lot of tension in the first year. Netflix started to incorporate Spanish speakers, and then they came to Amsterdam. There, they began to have a team and to be a bit aware of what we were telling them about the time difference.

Carlos Sedes (director): At the beginning, it is true that it was very difficult for me to understand what a video-on-demand service is. I only had made broadcast series for regional and national channels. I remember, for example, the issue with music. Netflix decided to use modern music because they were trying to really bring a young audience to the series. I was shocked because we always tried to rely on the period, to try to make certain things realistic. The stylisation of the costumes is also something that is noticeable in the series.

Jacobo Martínez (cinematographer): When you talk to someone in another language, even if you have some knowledge of that language, it is complicated, the nuances... Even if they are technical issues, there is a very broad context. We were starting to work with the ACES postproduction system, [and] they did not want the LUTs [a conversion profile for colours] in a certain way...[7]

Gema R. Neira (co-creator): Netflix had a working system in which they wanted treatments and not a pilot.[8] And that frustrated me a lot because, for me to feel that a series exists, I need to give the characters a voice. When you give them a voice, you often find the rhythm. That was the initial process, which for me was absurd. There were four treatments without a pilot, and then we had to throw them away and start all over again when we wrote the pilot. We already knew that was going to happen, that the series would turn into something else. (...) Netflix's work methodology was also

6 Even though the company is based in Los Gatos (California), the Netflix content development teams have their headquarters at Los Angeles.

7 The Academy Color Encoding System (ACES) is an industry standard for managing colour throughout the life cycle of a motion picture or television production; ACES was developed under the auspices of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. LUTs is a conversion profile for colours that transforms input values (from the camera) to output values (final footage).

8 A *treatment* is a detailed description of the actions and dialogues of a story. Normally, it is a previous step before writing the film screenplay. But in TV drama, it is more usual to commission the screenplay for the first episode or 'pilot' (instead of treatments) before the final greenlight.

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being established, and they were modifying it with what we were telling them and doing it in the simplest possible way. We lost a lot of time with translations, and now we do not. It was another difficulty. You send something, [and then] you must wait five days for it to be translated, five days for it to be read, get notes back, and go back again and again with each version. It takes a lot longer. But we had no personal difficulties. Everything became much easier when they visited Spain. We sat down and talked to them, told them exactly what we wanted to do, and from then on, we got back to work, writing the pilot.

María José Rustarazo (head writer): When something did not work, we were used to clear directions and suggestions. But what we received from Netflix was characteristic of how they work: asking questions, questioning the character's motivations, making you reflect on the decisions you have made. There was a criticism between the lines that was hard for us to see. At the beginning we suggested that Lidia would be much more selfish, that she would be much crueller to the girls and, at first, trying to take advantage of them. There ended up being a fierce debate. Then we realised that it was a question of how to convey the information. (...) The second season was more complicated than the first. In the first, we were able to talk face to face with the people who made the decisions. When an intermediary person was created, their function was to mediate between the two parties. Sometimes a lot of things were lost. I think that there came a time when Netflix also concluded that this intermediate formula did not work. For the third season, the team was fully Spanish, and that improved things a lot because they knew the Spanish idiosyncrasy [and] had worked in Spain many times. And in terms of notes and communication, everything was much more direct and clearer for everyone.

4. THE CREATIVE OPPORTUNITIES OF TELLING GLOBAL STORIES

Las chicas el cable went into production in 2016 when Netflix began to place commissioning production outside the United States at the centre of its corporate discourse based on the promise that it was "a home for creative talent and 'innovative' storytelling with a 'global audience'" (Crawford 2020: 86). But, even though Netflix's localisation process was burdened by challenges related to the differences between the company's production culture and that of the countries where it began to produce original series, it also offered opportunities for creators who had often been constrained by the limitations of local operators. In the case of Spain, this was especially relevant due to the hegemony of broadcast channels in fiction production. With *Las chicas del cable*, the Bambú team intended to evolve in aesthetics and storytelling in relation to their previous works.

Question: *What were the main creative opportunities that making* Las chicas del cable *for Netflix provided?*

Carlos Sedes (director): It is true that, when they [Netflix] came and explained to us why the close shots or why certain things were done, you understood it. They kept track of how the series are watched and on what kind of devices, on mobile phones or tablets. They said that, for a mobile phone, a general shot was very abusive because it has very little readability. I was very struck at the beginning, like they were getting into a lot more things than the broadcasters, for the good. We would even have to discuss with them to [plan for] the costumes, the type of hairdressing, the sets... They went through everything. (...) We are always talking about evolving, and even though we are doing the same genre, we had the power to do it. I do not say reinventing the genre, but somehow changing the characters. It is not just an aesthetic question. It was a great evolution for Bambú. For example, the main character, Lidia, is much more incorrect than Ana (Paula Echevarría) in *Velvet*. Lidia, Carlos (Martiño Rivas) and Francisco (Yon González) are lonely people and have no need for anyone.

Jacobo Martínez (cinematographer): I also think that, in the wardrobe itself, there is a bit more colour. We played with stronger tones. The last seasons of *Velvet* and *Velvet Colección* (2017–19) are in other tones with much more colour. But in the beginning, the tone was more restrained, including in the colour grading. With *Las chicas del cable*, we wanted a more vintage feel. With the optics, we had more options to test. But with the cameras we did not. I like the Arri camera, and I have always worked with it. But here it was not possible because it did not support the 4K that Netflix demanded. The Red camera, apart from the fact that they [Red cameras] tend to return an error, at a visual level, it generates a more modern image. We tried the Sony F65, which was a camera that was discontinued in Spain, [so] there were almost none. It was brought to us from the United Kingdom. It was almost a prototype; it was uncomfortable to shoot with it. But it gave us a lot of options for the lenses, and we did a lot of tests. And we achieved a more organic image.

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Gema R. Neira (co-creator): I think it made us do a job of trying to be very clear, for example, with political issues and having to explain them very well. In Spain, we know our history, but it is not the same abroad. We had to tell it in certain ways, but telling other kinds of stories I think was given to us by working for [a] video-on-demand service. I do not think we have told any of those stories thinking that the series was going to be watched from another country. They are things that we had not been able to do because we were not on pay TV – for example, the story of Óscar [the trans man played by Ana Polvorosa]. It is a story that we had not been able to tell in this way on any broadcast channel. We were not addressing the same audience. But they [Netflix] were also very brave in thinking that we are at a time when we must stress visibility, and that it was important for us. This included dealing with gender issues as well.

María José Rustarazo (head writer): [What] Netflix offered us was to make a story with much more risk, to present characters with more edges, darker. A character grows the more of a person they are, and all people have a dark side. And then also to tell the story of the period. It was an era that interested us to be able to tell things that had to do with women and to be a little more critical. Netflix allowed us to delve a little deeper into history and politics, and touch on small points and nuances that perhaps we could not deal with in a broadcast show. *Velvet* presents an imaginary post-Civil War, in which there is no dictatorship, and everything is happiness.

Question: *How did* Las chicas del cable *address feminist storytelling?*

Diego Ávalos (Netflix VP of Original Content): We look for a diversity of stories, and we have everything in our offer. What I do believe, and we said it from the beginning, is that one of the goals we had when we created this group of non-English originals was to look for narratives that were not being seen or representation that was not being done. In a certain way, there is a gap that is not being fulfilled, a need or a hunger for female stories. Many series, when they say they are feminine, but you see how the female characters are written or how the narrative progresses, they really are not. So one of the things that we bet [on] from the beginning is to make that change as well.

Gema R. Neira (co-creator): I felt that the women around me still have the same problems. And the same conflicts. If I work, I am not a good mother. If they are always going to put a man ahead of a woman, women cannot get into certain jobs. To a different extent, but they were somewhat the same. And so, we thought it was interesting to speak to young people from a different era. It seems like it gives you distance, but at the same time, you can make a reflection. It was also a time when the social movement was very strong, although not as strong as it was later, and it seemed perfect for a generation. (...) I think the main difference here with the rest of the projects we did before was precisely to say that history must be present; it must be the protagonist because it was the protagonist in the history of women. Women's rights have really changed, and it is also important to say that, in today's world, the rights we have can be lost.

María José Rustarazo (head writer): Netflix asked us for more sisterhood , for us to work in the female group. When *Velvet* was made, it was built entirely as a romantic comedy, with different love stories that worked independently. In *Las chicas del cable*, we worked on the female characters completely. We started to set them against each other, from the inside, from what their ambitions are, what motivates them, what they want. Love in a section. But they had to function independently of their partner. They [the four main characters] complement each other and [act] as if they were a whole. The person they fell in love with is not the one who complemented them. If Lidia were a very clever person, who had already lived a lot of life, very cynical and who did not believe in anything, we needed a character who was very innocent, who would make Lidia remember all that she had lost. And that was Marga (Nadia de Santiago). (...) We made the storyline of Ángeles y Mario about gender violence, which helped us to unite all the girls. We had no idea when we were writing that it was going to be so powerful, that it was going to be the total catalyst to unite these girls, to the point that, when we got to the second season, we said there is nothing more powerful. We are not going to find another season arc that is not these women helping and protecting each other. We had planned a lot of things to tie them together, but this was enough.

5. ENDING THE SERIES AND THE LEGACY OF THE FIRST SPANISH NETFLIX ORIGINAL

After five seasons, the final episodes of *Las chicas del cable* premiered on July 3, 2020, bringing the first Spanish Netflix original series to an end. *Las chicas del cable* was the start of a

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partnership between Bambú and Netflix that would continue with the drama series *Alta Mar* (2019-2020) and *Jaguar* (2021), the documentary series *El caso Alcàsser* (2019), and the film *A pesar de todo* (2019). But both companies also travelled further the path that *Las chicas del cable* had started. On the one hand, Netflix opened its first European production hub in Spain in April 2019, and by July 2021 had premiered another 16 original series. On the other, Bambú became one of the reference production companies for the transnational video-on-demand platforms arriving in Spain, making series for Amazon Video (*Un asunto privado* [2022]), AppleTV+ (*Now and Then* [2022]) and Starz (*Nacho Vidal* [2023]).[9] The years of collaboration between the two companies was fruitful for both.

Question: *What led to the decision to end the series and place the final season during the Spanish Civil War?*

Teresa Fernández Valdés (executive producer): We decided that the time has come to end it so that the series did not suffer. We have been accompanied by the cast the entire time, and they also have other interests. Netflix somehow wants to be able to accompany them in these new interests. Either the actresses go to another series or they lose them. So, I think that it was a decision that has to do with giving new opportunities to the creative and artistic talent.

Gema R. Neira (co-creator): In the final part of the series, the main characters have faced many personal problems, but this was no longer a personal problem. The world is revolutionised, and life and death are more present than ever. The enemy is the political situation itself. The girls have already positioned themselves from minute one, in their ways of thinking, and they have also become self-conscious. This also happens a lot to me and to the women around me. Maybe if you had asked us when we were 20 years old if we were feminists, we would have said no. And now we all say yes. As a series goes on, the character becomes more and more aware of what they want, what they are looking for and the fight for freedom.

María José Rustarazo (head writer): For us as creators, it enriched us and, at the same time, made the characters grow: to abandon a bit of melodrama to focus the series on what we were really interested in, which is to tell the story of the friendship of these women over the years. In other words, there came a moment when we felt that the telephone company phase was running out of steam. We realised that the girls had matured a bit and that we had to show that leap of maturity. And first we started with a little jump, going to the Second Republic [1931-1939]. And then we do it by going to the Civil War [1936-1939]. We could put the characters in a totally different place. And we could tell something that we want to tell, which is women in a historical moment in which they began to conquer many social and cultural territories. And then suddenly there is something that cuts it short, and everything goes backwards. And that is when the series has become a story of friends who love each other, who accept each other, who want to move forward, who want to continue growing. It is total conflict for them.

Question: *What is Netflix's assessment of* Las chicas de cable *and its success?*

Diego Ávalos (Netflix VP of Original Content): If we are going to make an original from that country, in the language of that country, whether it is Spain or Germany, it has only one mission: that it succeeds in that country. The rest is an added value thanks to the global reach of our service. When we made *Las chicas del cable*, it was not made to work in Latin America. It was made to work in Spain. And that was our main market, and it still is to this day. There are few series that make it to 5-6 seasons. We have done several studies on the series to understand the audience a bit more. Normally, in the evolution of series, and this happens on broadcast television, after each season, the audience drops. This is a series that has held its own and has grown with each season. It has found new audiences – not only in Spain but also outside Spain. So, it is saying something that the audience has evolved and grown along with the narrative of series as well.

Question: *What have been the main lessons learnt from* Las chicas del cable *for Bambú Producciones?*

Gema R. Neira (co-creator): We learned one thing when Bambú started. We wanted to take about 15 steps at the same time, and we were wrong: media does not change if society does not change. And changes happen little by little. It was very important to make a popular series with very strong intellectual and social ideas because I think that can help a lot more to raise awareness among girls and women. And in grandmothers, too. But any series that focuses only on that eliminates a type of audience that would never get in

9 Starz, rebranded as Lionsgate+, announced in November 2022 that was closing operations in Spain in early 2023, and Nacho was later released by local Atresplayer Premium.

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there. And here, with the personal stories of the characters of the series, a lot of people who perhaps do not have those political ideas or who do not reflect on our rights, they have been able to think about it.

Jacobo Martínez (cinematographer): With the new projects, communication was much more fluid because there were many more people who spoke Spanish. You feel that you have not done so badly because we are still trusted, and series are still being made in Spain. You know the protocols, and then you realise that they do not pose too many problems. For example, the ACES system, I think we were the first in Spain to use it. I felt more secure; I knew what Netflix wanted, and later the protocols did not change that much. *Alta mar* was a further development of *Las chicas del cable* and for the same audience. Until *Jaguar*, we had not made a series for [Netflix] that was not an evolution of *Gran Hotel*.

Teresa Fernández Valdés (executive producer): I think what we have learned is to work for an international market. Because until now, what we did was to work comfortably in a local territory and export our content with the luck that it succeeded. With Netflix, what you learn is to start from scratch with that vocation. In Spain, we all know perfectly well which interlocutors were involved and, in general, the two sides of Spanish society in relation to the Civil War. And internationally, no, I am not going to give you a history lesson on the Spanish Civil War, but we will stick to what is important, which is the human conflicts involved in the fact that the same family did not remain on one side or the other. We have learned to analyse the content and to judge it in a way that is valid, to think more about this global content, without losing the essence of the local.

6. CONCLUSIONS

Recently, Spanish fiction has experienced a production boom due to the start of the strategy of the pay operator Movistar+ and global video-on-demand services, such as Netflix, HBO and others (Castro and Cascajosa 2020). With *Las chicas del cable*, Bambú proved that Spanish companies could adapt their production culture to the global marketplace, mixing established formulas with innovations in length, storytelling and topics. It was an example of a mutually beneficial partnership: Bambú learnt how to work with international video-on-demand services and became less dependent on the Spanish market, and Netflix benefited from a safer arrival to new territory with a company that had a strong track record.

But the experience also had challenges, especially some due to distance and cultural misunderstandings that transcended language. Significantly, during the making of *Las chicas del cable*, the tallest hurdles were overcome in face-to-face meetings. Plus, the process became easier as more executives who spoke Spanish and had experience in the country's industry came on board. Netflix's expansion shows that 'localisation also occurs in the space between the macro-levels of regulation and infrastructure and the micro-levels of language, content, and audience taste' (Wayne and Castro 2020: 12). As the production history of *Las chicas del cable* proves, the Netflix localisation was essential to establish close relationships with local professionals, avoid communication problems and learn first-hand about the particularities of the local markets.

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Films
A pesar de todo (2019)

TV Series
3% (2016-2020)
Alta Mar (2019–2020)
Club de cuervos (2015-2019)
El barco (2011-2013)
El caso Alcàsser (2019)
Gran Hotel (2011-2013)
Jaguar (2021)
Las chicas del cable (2017-2020)
Velvet (2014-2016)
Velvet Colección (2017-2019)

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