

# Contemporary Spanish TV Miniseries: Their Evolution (1980-2012)

## *Evolución del género de las miniseries en la televisión española contemporánea (1980-2012)*

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### **Abstract**

*This article seeks to study the evolution of the genre of contemporary Spanish televised miniseries and its principle characteristics. Taking the definition of this genre as our starting point, we chose contemporary Spanish miniseries as our object of study, given that few academic studies have considered it until now. We focus our analysis on the miniseries produced between 2000 and 2012, a period during which the genre consolidated in Spain, and from this analysis, we identify the characteristics that explain its success. We will also analyze the rankings of the most-watched shows in Spain during the first decade of the 21st century.*

### **Keywords**

*Miniseries, television, production strategies, fiction, non-fiction.*

### **Resumen**

Este artículo, partiendo de la definición del género de la miniserie, se propone estudiar la evolución del mismo en la televisión española y las principales características de las miniseries españolas contemporáneas. Se ha elegido como objeto de estudio las miniseries televisivas porque se trata de un género que, respecto a otros, aún ha sido poco estudiado en el ámbito académico. Lo estudiaremos desde sus inicios y, posteriormente, nos centraremos en analizar las miniseries que se realizaron desde el año 2000 hasta el 2012, período de la consolidación del género en España, deduciendo de ese análisis las características que favorecieron su éxito. Para ello, se utilizarán rankings de las ficciones televisivas más vistas en España durante la primera década del siglo XXI.

### **Palabras clave**

Miniseries, televisión, estrategias de producción, ficción, no ficción.

## 1. Introduction

The article summarizes the history of the miniseries, establishing the origin of the genre and focusing on its development in Spanish television. Miniseries themselves are difficult to define and delimit. Throughout their existence, many terms have been used to refer to them and this has generated the lack of a single concept that can unify and classify their study. Miniseries are often confused with *tv movies* or series and they use this name to refer to them all.

I have defined<sup>1</sup> the miniseries as a "television genre whose storyline is articulated according to the narrative rhetoric of fiction. It is comprised of 2 or more episodes (never more than 10<sup>2</sup>) that share narrative dependence among them, with a finale, a specific number of episodes set in the preproduction phase and without the possibility to increase such number, and with a film-style visual quality". Starting with this idea, when talking about miniseries in this article, it will always be done in relation to this definition.

TV miniseries have been chosen for this study because it is a genre that, compared to others, have been rarely studied in the academic realm. Therefore, it is important to study the evolution they have experienced from the beginnings of the small screen and determine the causes of the increase of miniseries in the last years.

The article studies the beginnings of the genre in the United States and Spain, analyzes the miniseries of the 80s until 2000, period in which the genre undergoes changes in some of its features (duration, themes or production) and its height of popularity period on Spanish networks (2000-2012).

The hypothesis is that the genre has been changing over time and that, nowadays, there is a special interest in producing miniseries based on reality, an interest motivated mainly by the audience ratings that fact-based fiction has. This article also explores the causes

for the increase of history on current television.

## 2. Theoretical Discussion

### 2.1. Fiction and non-fiction on television

One of the hypotheses at the beginning of this research project is that current television, and especially miniseries, turns more and more to non-fiction as an inspiration for fiction. The explanation for this phenomenon is found in the television discourse itself which does not have well-defined limits. We are faced with television that is more and more entertaining, that plays with the representation of reality, situates itself on the limits between genres and categories and is characterized by its heavy fragmentation and hybridity (Imbert, 2010:156). The success of this tendency that approaches "tele-reality" is proof of the entertaining search for authenticity in our societies (Veyrat-Masson, 2008: 88).

Edgerton (2001: 1-2) determines the causes that explain the increase of the presence of history on current television. Firstly, he says that television is the main source by which many people learn about history today. This communication media should be seen as the first channel by which children and adults form an idea about the past. Secondly, history on television is currently big business. Television content on historic events attract high audience ratings, causing TV networks to use these formats and copy them from other networks. Finally, Edgerton considers television to be capable of having a strong influence on types of historic representation which is shown thanks to its technical and aesthetic features.

Finally, as a foundation, you have to consider that the representation of reality in miniseries does not show history itself, but rather the past recreated to produce fiction (Platt, 2008: 19), among other reasons, because fic-

tion television programs that depict the past appeal more to emotions using visual impact more than arguments or reasons, and therefore, choose fiction as a way to narrate.

## 2.2. The beginnings of the miniseries

The exact origin of the broadcasting of TV miniseries is unclear. On one hand, you could say that the genre began in the US with the ABC Network's broadcasting of *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich* shown in 1966 and produced by David L. Wolper. This series is based on the book by William L. Shirer and tells the story of Germany from 1938 to 1946. Despite this audiovisual product using some narrative resources belonging to cinema like the use of mounted images giving the story an agile rhythm, you cannot consider *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich* to be a miniseries for various reasons. Firstly, and most importantly, it features many more elements belonging to a documentary than a fiction, among which are the existence of a narrator, who, using voice-over, advances the story. Although this resource can be used in fiction, which in fact happens in movies like *All about Eve* (1950, USA), in documentaries all the narrative weight is placed on the voice-over, just like in *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*. On the other hand, in this movie the events are built using archive photographs and videos that represent the story based on pre-existing historic material. Plus, different real characters (historians and experts) appear speaking on camera in testimonials, a resource that is closer to the narrative treatment of the documentary itself.

Authors like Patricia Diego (2004: 422) place the beginning of the genre in the United Kingdom with productions like *The Forsythe Saga* (1967), *Civilisation* (1969), *Elisabeth R.* (1971) or *Henry VIII and His Six Wives* (1970).

*The Forsythe Saga*, produced in 1967 by BBC has the vicissitudes of the main members of an upper-middle class British family at the end of the 19th century. Although it could

be considered as the first miniseries, it can be used, rather, as an example of TV series, mainly for its length (26 episodes), that make up the narrative structure.

*Civilización* was broadcast on the same English network in 1969. It had 13 50-minute episodes that, with rhetoric close to that of a documentary, talked about Western history via art and culture in each of its episodes. For this article, we decided not to consider it a miniseries due to its documentary theme and because each one of the episodes is totally independent and self-concluding, which is to say, it has a closed ending and each self-contained episode makes no reference to the previous or following episode. One of the characteristics of a miniseries is that each one of its episodes, except the last one, has an open ending, which is picked up again in the following episode. This same objection could also be used in the case of *Henry VIII and His Six Wives*.

According to Patricia Diego (2004), the English genre was exported to USA in the 70's where some miniseries like *Richman*, *Poorman* (1976), *Roots* (1977) and *Holocaust* (1978) were produced. Many consider *Richman*, *Poorman* as the first miniseries in history (Crebeer, G., 2008) but you could argue that it has a structure closer to the series since it has 2 seasons and 30 total episodes.

*Roots* is considered the first massive success of the miniseries genre, and from my point of view, also the first miniseries in history. In fact, the premiere of this production brought about the name "miniseries" where it would be used for the first time. It has film-like visual quality and is a story with a clear ending, which cannot lead to further episodes, being characteristic of the genre.

In Spain, following the example of literary productions of the BBC and North American television networks, some audiovisual products were made in the 60's that were similar to the miniseries. Previously, during

the 50's, various programs were made whose purpose was to take theater to the TV screen. These could be considered direct ancestors of this genre in the country. Thus, programs like *Primera Fila*, *Estudio 1*, *Gran Teatro*, *Fila Cero*, etc. (Bernard, 2017) were created.

In September 1966, the General Director of TV and Radio, Jesús Aparicio Bernal, saw the creation of original series and made-for-TV films as a future business line for Televisión Española (TVE). *Diego de Acevedo* is the first series recorded that Televisión Española produced and broadcast in the 1966-1967 season. As Josep M<sup>a</sup> Baget (1993: 177-178) explains, it was the first part of an ambitious project that was titled "History of Iberian People". However, the project was never carried out due to the Luis de Sosa's illness, the scriptwriter and historic advisor, who passed away directly thereafter.

In the 60's, TVE produced prestigious high-quality dramas and series that won various international awards. The reason for choosing to mention the case of *Diego de Acevedo* in this section is because I consider it an ancestor of contemporary miniseries we see on our screens today, where history plays an important role as a foundation for the fiction.

### 3. Methodology

The methodology used in the article is based mainly on the bibliographic and audiovisual review. Plus, some TV miniseries have been selected to be concisely commented on based on the technique of textual analysis. The selection was based on criteria of importance of the products considering both quality and commercial success (audience ratings) as well as the interest they hold in terms of studying the birth and development of the genre from the 80's to the early 2000's which is the object of this article.

In order to study the origins of the miniseries, the following miniseries have been chosen: *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich* (1966, ABC), *Diego de Acevedo* (1966, TVE), *The Forsyte Saga* (1967, BBC), *Civilisation* (1969, BBC) and *Roots* (1977, ABC) and the episodes necessary for analysis have been viewed, using *Youtube*. These have been chosen because, as we have seen, they are those that some of the authors that have studied the genre (Diego, 2004; Creeber, 2008) coincide on as predecessors of present-day miniseries.

For the study of genre evolution during the 80s to 2012, the following miniseries have been chosen: *Cervantes* (1981, TVE), *Lorca, muerte de un poeta* (1987, TVE), *La forja de un rebelde* (1990, TVE), *Celia* (1993, TVE), *Padre Coraje* (2002, Antena 3), *23 F, el día más difícil del Rey* (2009, TVE), *Ojo por ojo* (2010, TVE), *Tarancón. El quinto mandamiento* (2010, TVE-Canal 9), *Raphael* (2010, Antena 3), *La Duquesa* (2010, Telecinco), *Felipe y Letizia* (2010, Telecinco), *Operación Malaya* (2011, TVE), *Sofía* (2011, Antena 3). All of them have been viewed on the TV networks webpages. Some representative miniseries from each decade have been chosen, whether for the theme on which the script is based or the media and social impact they had when broadcast. From the 80s, *Cervantes* and *Lorca, muerte de un poeta*, were chosen in order to explain the vehicular function some of the productions serve as. From the 90s, *La forja de un rebelde* and *Celia* were studied. Both had high audience ratings but also are very different in terms of content. While *La forja de un rebelde* is based on a real person and pays homage to the people exiled and repressed by Franco's dictatorship, *Celia* is based on the similarly-named novels by Elena Fortún. *Padre Coraje* is, from my point of view, the production that marks a turning point in the evolution of the miniseries on Spanish TV. This miniseries shown in 2002 set the standard for the productions made thereafter and had its peak popularity during the period between 2009-2012. In fact, for this article, I have chosen to study a large number of miniseries from these

years –8 in total- so that the analysis would be representative, given the elevated number of miniseries productions during this period. Not only that, I am interested in studying the common features these miniseries share, why there were successful and what criteria the networks had used to prioritize this genre over other fiction genres.

The following table created by the author (See Table 1) lists the productions chosen for

analysis. As you can see, there is a clear trend in terms of the number of episodes that has decreased over time. Later in this article, we will explain the reason for this change and we will study the common features that these productions have currently and why they can be grouped as miniseries.

As part of the study, throughout this article, there are different tables made by the author that allow for the analysis of Spanish TV mi-

**Table 1:** Audiovisual productions chosen for analysis.

	Name	Year	Network	Number of Episodes	Thousands of Viewers
1	<i>The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich</i>	1966	ABC	3	-
2	<i>Diego de Acevedo</i>	1966	TVE	13	-
3	<i>The Forsyte Saga</i>	1967	BBC	26	18000 (finale)
4	<i>Civilisation</i>	1969	BBC	13	2500
5	<i>Roots</i>	1977	ABC	8	80000
6	<i>Cervantes</i>	1981	TVE	9	-
7	<i>Lorca, muerte de un poeta</i>	1987	TVE	6	-
8	<i>La forja de un rebelde</i>	1990	TVE	6	6.000
9	<i>Celia</i>	1993	TVE	6	7.000
10	<i>Padre Coraje</i>	2002	Antena 3	3	4.647
11	<i>23F, el día más difícil del Rey</i>	2009	TVE	2	6.718
12	<i>Ojo por ojo</i>	2010	TVE	2	2.495
13	<i>Tarancón, el quinto mandamiento</i>	2010	TVE/Canal 9	2	3.042
14	<i>Raphael</i>	2010	Antena 3	2	2.436
15	<i>La Duquesa</i>	2010	Telecinco	2	4.186
16	<i>Felipe y Letizia</i>	2010	Telecinco	2	4.637
17	<i>Operación malaya</i>	2011	TVE	2	2.091
18	<i>Sofía</i>	2011	Antena 3	2	1.939

niserias, their main themes and audience ratings, which will serve to establish which are the genre's characteristics today and what the audiences are searching for when they view this type of product.

## 4. Results Analysis

### 4.1. The transformation of genre in Spain

#### 4.1.1 The 70s

The 70s marked a boom in fiction on TVE due to various reasons. Firstly, the beginning of the second channel of Spanish television in 1966, whose consolidation took place throughout the 70s, had an important effect on the development of the drama series (García-Serrano, 1996: 75). Its programming featured more innovative content directed towards a small audience in the beginning, that was reduced to those who could watch the channel. Plus, this brought about the abandonment of the typically theatrical execution of the drama series produced to date, given that a new generation of producers had found jobs at the second network, bringing style and ideas learned at the Spain's film school, Escuela de Cine, place where many had studied.

It was the beginning for productions like *El pícaro* (1974), *Los Comuneros* (1978), *Cañas y barro* (1978), *El Camino* (1978) and *La Barraca* (1979). TVE initiated the practice of adapting the novels of 19th and 20th century Spanish authors for television. Its height of popularity occurred during the following decade. All these productions share elements that speak of a gradual consolidation of genre on Spanish screens: film-style visual quality, increase in production budgets, reduced number of episodes which was set from the preproduction phase and a clear ending that did not lend itself to later creation of more episodes.

Another reason that brought about the increase of fiction was the total hegemony of the public network<sup>3</sup>. According to a study carried out by the Spain's Ministry of Culture, watching TV was the favorite cultural activity of 87.9% of Spaniards<sup>4</sup>. Such is the reason why the content we have mentioned had such popularity with audiences, and as a result TVE decided to continue its production.

The majority of historical fiction produced by TVE towards the end of the 70s and 80s had a vehicular function, which is to say, TV fiction was used as a vehicle to bring back from the past new political and social values related to the liberal democratic ideals on which The Transition was based (López, 2009: 17). These fictions with political or ideological purposes use historical reality to also create a cultural comprehension (Ruoho, 2012), transmitting a determined way of interpreting the present, using the past as a reference.

In 1979, the Ministry of Culture, then responsible for the management of TVE, awarded a credit of 1.3 billion pesetas to promote cooperation between cinema and television, via the financing of "the cinematographic production of series to be shown on the small screen" (Palacio, 2006a). Access to this money was subject to specific conditions, as well as collaboration: preference would be given to projects of series based on great works of Spanish literature (Palacio, 2002). This brought about an increase of fiction production, specifically, in miniseries, during the 80s.

#### 4.1.2 The 80s

The 80s were a decade of great miniseries production, the majority coming from literature like *Fortunata y Jacinta* by Benito Pérez Galdós (1980), *La plaza del diamante* by Mercé Rodoreda (1981), *Los gozos y las sombras* by Torrente Ballester (1982), *Juanita la larga* by Juan Valera (1982), *El mayorazgo de Labraz* by Pío Baroja (1983), among others. Many were based on real people

like *Ramón y Cajal* (1982), *Los desastres de la guerra* (1982), *Goya* (1985) and *Miguel Servet* (1988). Among them, certain miniseries told the story of the recent painful past of the Civil War (Hernández-Corche, 2011) like in *Cervantes* (1981), *Teresa de Jesús* (1984) and *Lorca, muerte de un poeta* (1987). Finally, others had an original storyline, one example being *La máscara negra* (1981).

*Cervantes*, premiering in 1981, is an example of the aforementioned vehicular function. This is shown in the implicit references and the comparisons that can be established between Cervantes's time and the 80s. The discovery of European culture in Spain is an example of this, but, also, there are references to Francoism in the Santo Oficio. Cervantes learns abroad what he could not learn in the dark, close-minded 16th-century Spain and this is what happens in the 80s, Spain begins to open itself to European customs and uses (López, 2009: 17).

Within this same production line, whose purpose is to bring determined topics to public agenda via the fiction resource, we find another significant production: *Lorca, muerte de un poeta*. Directed by Juan Antonio Bardem, the series presents Lorca as a martyr of the Spanish democracy (López, 2009), legitimizing the subject of homosexuality.

#### 4.1.3. The 90s: development of the main features of contemporary Spanish miniseries.

In the decade of the 90s, some Spanish-made miniseries stood out for their high quality. *Don Quijote de la Mancha* (1992) and *La forja de un rebelde* (1990) are two examples. In the latter, there are some narrative resources that seek to indicate the truth of the story, and that will be used in some of the contemporary miniseries, like the black and white photography of Arturo Barea -author of the book and story protagonist – about which

they show a text at the end of the series, including the date and place where the events occurred, etc. In addition, via comments made by the narrator and other characters, radio broadcasts and photos from the pages of newspapers like *El Imparcial* or *Mundo Obrero* mounted images that reinforce what is being said. Also, direct references are made of historic events like the government overthrow of Primo de Rivera, the murder of Calvo Sotelo and the military uprising on July 18th, 1936, that marked the beginning of the Spanish Civil War.

In 1993, *Celia* premiered, an adaption of the similarly-named novels written in the 20s and 30s. Currently, you can watch them in their entirety on the TVE website ([www.rtve.es](http://www.rtve.es)), as well as other literary series<sup>5</sup>.

Even closer to the current miniseries concept is *Lucrecia*, often considered as the first miniseries on Spanish television. It was broadcast in January 1996 on Antena 3 during afternoon primetime and received 27.1% audience share. It tells the story of the murder of Dominican Lucrecia Pérez outside the nightclub *Four Roses* of Aravaca (Madrid) at the hands of a group of right-wing extremists.

#### 4.1.4. From 2000 to 2012: Genre consolidation on Spanish networks

Spain's real miniseries golden age was the previous decade. In 2002, *Padre Coraje* premiered on Antena 3 with an average of 30.1% audience share (4.6 million viewers) per episode. The plot is based on the real story of what happened in Jerez de la Frontera, where there was a murder at a gas station. This miniseries was a complete success and constitutes the explanation for what happens today in terms of large national networks programming 6 miniseries productions per year.

Some authors see Antena 3 as the pioneer network in revitalizing this genre at the dawn of the 21st century. Their investment

in the miniseries has been the result of a specific programming strategy, in which those responsible for each network have valued the genre's flexibility, the relative quickness between its design and broadcast, the ability of the miniseries to be presented as the "world premiere" and its importance in the formation of the network's corporate image (Rueda-Laffond & Coronado-Ruiz, 2009: 82).

In 2009, with the premiere of 23F, *el día más difícil del Rey* the genre was able to consolidate itself on Spanish TV. The following table (Table 2) shows the 2009 miniseries ranking by thousands of viewers.

**Table 2:** Most watched miniseries in 2009.

	<b>Títulos</b>	<b>Canal</b>	<b>Miles</b>
1	23F, el día más difícil del Rey	TVE 1	6706
2	Un burka por amor	Antena 3	4010
3	Marisol	Antena 3	3423
4	Paquirri	Telecinco	3229
5	Días sin luz	Antena 3	3215
6	Lola, la película	Antena 3	3043
7	Sara, no estás sola	TVE 1	2983
8	Una bala para el Rey	Antena 3	2610
9	El bloke, Coslada cero	TVE 1	2281
10	23F: Historia de una traición	Antena 3	2187
11	La ira	Telecinco	1976
12	20N: los últimos días de Franco	Antena 3	916

Source: Tabla de elaboración propia a partir de datos de TNS Audiencia de Medios.

The 2009-2010 season featured the largest number of miniseries premiered on Spanish TV networks (See Table 3). *Ojo por ojo*, broadcast on TV3 and TVE in June 2010 is set in Barcelona in the 20s, with the backdrop of the anarchy and social conflicts of this time.

*Tarancón. El quinto mandamiento* –miniseries directed by Antonio Hernández and starring Pepe Sancho, on the life of Cardinal

Vicente Enrique Tarancón and the role he played in The Spanish Transition as President of the Episcopal Conference – is a co-production between Canal 9 and TVE. Canal 9 premiered the miniseries on Monday, December 20th, 2010, reaching an average audience of 12.8%. TVE broadcast this miniseries in December 2011 and it became the network's most watched miniseries that year.

*Raphael*, was broadcast on Antena 3 in September 2010 and reached 13.7% share. It attempted to show a very specific era of the singer's life. Despite the network's large promotional campaign, the show did not get the audience ratings expected.

*La Duquesa*, starring Adriana Ozores, is a biopic<sup>6</sup> of the life of the Duchess of Alba that gave way to two miniseries (*La Duquesa*, *La Duquesa II*). The first had an average audience rating of 4,185,500 viewers. The sequel, premiered in 2011, reach only a little over half that number of viewers (2,138,000), although it caused much controversy over the opposition of the protagonist.

Without a doubt, the miniseries that was the most popular in 2010 was *Felipe y Letizia*, broadcast by Telecinco in October. It reached first place in the ranking of the year's most popular miniseries, despite also being the focus of lots of criticism on communication media and social networks in terms of the poor credibility of the script and its characters.

Among the top 20 premieres of 2010 (Table 4), both in terms of fiction and entertainment, there were a total of 7 miniseries. This fact leads us to believe in the progressive acceptance of the genre on behalf of the audience. This table also shows the predominance of fiction on the country's television networks.



**Table 3:** Most watched miniseries in 2010.

<b>Títulos</b>	<b>Cadena</b>	<b>Cuota (%)</b>	<b>Espectadores</b>
Felipe y Letizia, deber y querer	Telecinco	22.6	4.637
La duquesa	Telecinco	22.1	4.186
El Pacto	Telecinco	20.2	3.769
La Huella del Crimen	TVE 1	17.2	3.464
Farmacia de Guardia, la última guardia	Antena 3	16.2	3.122
Amar en tiempo revueltos. Alta traición	TVE 1	15.0	3.059
Adolfo Suárez el Presidente	Antena 3	15.9	2.944
Alfonso, El Príncipe maldito	Telecinco	17.3	2.897
La Princesa de Éboli	Antena 3	15.4	2.646
Ojo por Ojo	TVE 1	13.1	2.495

Source: Table made by author based on Kantar Media information.

**Tabla 4:** 2010 Best Ranking Premieres.

	<b>Títulos</b>	<b>Canal</b>	<b>Miles</b>
1	Hispania, la leyenda	Antena 3	4768
2	Felipe y Letizia	Telecinco	4270
3	La Duquesa	Telecinco	4182
4	Las chicas de oro	TVE	4073
5	Gran reserva	TVE	4041
6	La escobilla naciocal	Antena 3	3715
7	Los protegidos	Antena 3	3678
8	GH: el reencuentro	Telecinco	3665
9	¡Más que baile!	Telecinco	3573
10	El pacto	Telecinco	3483
11	El club del chiste	Antena 3	3441
12	Gavilanes	Antena 3	3374
13	Adolfo Suárez, el presidente	Antena 3	3059
14	Ojo por ojo	TVE	2867
15	Alfonso, el príncipe maldito	Telecinco	2860
16	La princesa de Éboli	Antena 3	2844
17	Volver con...	TVE	2737
18	Cántame una canción	Telecinco	2656
19	Tierra de lobos	Telecinco	2626
20	Karabujdan	Antena 3	2592

Source: Table made by author based on Formula TV information.

**Table 5:** Most watched miniseries in 2011.

Títulos	Cadena	Cuota (%)	Espectadores
El Ángel de Budapest	TVE1	18.7	3.432
Tarancón, el quinto mandamiento	TVE1	18.2	3.042
Tita Cervera, la Baronesa	Telecinco	17.5	2.918
Rocío Dúrcal, Volver a verte	Telecinco	14.3	2.768
La Duquesa 2	Telecinco	11.4	2.186
11M, para que nadie lo olvide	Telecinco	13.6	2.144
Amar en tiempo revueltos. La muerte a escena	TVE1	13.0	2.118
Sofía	Antena 3	9.7	1.939
Hoy quiero confesar	Antena 3	10.0	1.735
Alakrana	Telecinco	9.3	1.702

Source: Table made by author based on Kantar Media information.

Throughout 2011, the miniseries production tendency continued on behalf of the networks (See Table 5). *Operación Malaya* was heavily criticized by attorneys who work on the real case on which the plot was based. They explained that "the public entity RTVE had programmed the series to coincide with the trial's oral hearing session for the biggest case of city government corruption during the democracy, where fiction and reality are mixed without warning the viewers" (Esparza, 2011).

*Sofía* premiered in 2011. It tells the story of Spanish Queen Sofía of Greece's youth. Nadia de Santiago is the star of this *biopic* that captured 9.6 % average audience rating, a much lower percentage than expected.

Other *biopics* premiered in 2011 were *Tita Cervera, la Baronesa* and *Rocío Dúrcal, volver a verte*. They were broadcast on Telecinco, which has come to specialize in the production of biographies of people in the world of arts and entertainment.

As can be seen, the large majority of these TV productions are based on real events from Spain's recent history, the most popular of which are those called *biopics*. Mercedes Gamero, director of Antena 3 Films, explains the parameters followed for miniseries production: "We choose topics that are in the collective memory, with people who are loved by the audience and of whom we can tell about lesser-known facets of their public profile"<sup>7</sup>. This strategy can be seen upon analyzing the genre and the theme of the most watched miniseries between 2008 and April 2012 (See Table 6).

As seen in the previous table of the 51 most watched miniseries between 2008-2012, 38 have plots based on true events or real people. Therefore, a clear trend in contemporary Spanish miniseries can be observed in using non-fiction. This tendency to use fiction as a way to represent and learn about reality, can be studied as an essential part of our modern culture (Williams, 2003).

**Table 6:** Most viewed miniseries between 2008-2012.

				<b>T. Individuos</b>	
	<b>Programa</b>	<b>Año</b>	<b>Género</b>	<b>Miles</b>	<b>Shares</b>
TVE1	23F, el día más difícil del Rey	2009	Basada en hechos reales	6.718	33,6
A3	El castigo	2008	Basada en hechos reales	5.105	27,2
T5	Felipe y Letizia, Querer y Deber	2010	Basada en hechos reales	4,637	22,6
T5	La Duquesa	2010	Biopic	4.186	22,1
A3	Un burka por amo	2009	Basada en hechos reales	4.028	22,7
T5	El pacto	2010	Basada en hechos reales	3.769	20,2
A3	Mi gitana	2012	Biopic	3.587	19,7
TVE1	El Ángel de Busapest	2011	Biopic	3.432	18,7
A3	Marisol	2009	Biopic	3.417	17,6
T5	Paquirri	2009	Biopic	3.222	18,5
A3	Días sin luz	2009	Basada en hechos reales	3.215	20,0
A3	20N, Los últimos días de Franco	2008	Basada en hechos reales	3.129	19,7
A3	Farmacia de guardia, La última guardia	2010	Basada en hechos reales	3.122	16,2
TVE1	Amar en tiempo revueltos, alta traición	2010	Basada en hechos reales	3.069	15,0
TVE1	Traición, el quinto mandamiento	2011	Biopic	3.042	18,2
A3	Lola Flores, La película	2009	Biopic	3.034	18,4
TVE1	No estás sola Sara	2009	Basada en hechos reales	2.983	15,9
A3	Adolfo Suárez, El Presidente	2010	Biopic	2.944	15,9
T5	Tita Cervera, La Baronesa	2011	Biopic	2.918	17,5
T5	Alfonso, El Príncipe maldito	2010	Biopic	2.897	17,3
A3	Marco	2011	Basada en hechos reales	2.817	14,9
A3	Soy el solitario	2008	Basada en hechos reales	2.816	17,2
T5	Carmina	2012	Biopic	2.771	17,0
T5	Roció Dúrcal, volver a verte	2011	Biopic	2,765	14,3
A3	Una bala para el Rey	2009	Basada en hechos reales	2.683	14,3
A3	La princesa de Éboli	2010	Biopic	2.646	15,4
TVE1	Ojo por ojo	2010	Guión original	2.495	13,1
A3	Raphael	2010	Biopic	2.436	13,7
A3	48 horas	2006	Basada en hechos reales	2.409	16,2

Source: Elaboración propia.

In the case of Spain, you can see more and more how TV fiction looks to real events or people for inspiration for its scripts and this synthesis between fiction and reality has good audience ratings, causing the formula to be used on different networks and fiction genres (Bellido, 2015). Thus, we can see numerous examples of this way of business, not only in the miniseries –object of our study– but also in series like *Los Tudor*, *Isabel* and *Cuéntame cómo pasó*. Thanks to its successful audience ratings you can deduce that today's viewers desire products based on the past that educate about historic events in a way that is different from the documentary, with a large dose of entertainment (Ruiz, 2016). Thus, we can state with Rueda-Laffond (2011) that in television, an agenda of mediatic memory has been formed that is centered on identifiable events.

#### 4.2. Analysis of genre evolution in Spain

Thanks to the analysis of Spanish television fiction, where from the 50s to today, you can identify changes and evolution that have occurred in miniseries, until arriving at what we currently see on screen.

The main difference, between the products of the 70s and 80s and contemporary miniseries is a question of theme: before, literature was used as a resource and adapted for television and now, they often use events and famous people from recent history. In these miniseries based on true events and real people there is also a certain constant evolution in which, currently, creators seem to be more concerned than before in demonstrating the veracity of the story, for which they use resources like archive images or feature people represented by fiction within the historic documents.

On the other hand, considering the parameters that the General Audiovisual Law of 2010<sup>8</sup> establishes, you cannot consider as miniseries TVE fiction productions mentioned in Section 4.1, because their total len-

gth exceeds the 200 minutes of broadcast time that –as a limit– the law indicates in its definition. Nevertheless, other features such as the audiovisual quality, closer to that of film, allow for us to be able to include them under the miniseries concept and we speak of genre evolution that –similar to the rest of TV genres– with the passing of time has changed some of its original characteristics. In this case, this evolution mainly affects the total duration of the miniseries and to their division into just two or three episodes these days, instead of the five, six or more episodes they had in previous decades. This is so for various reasons. On one hand, it is the result of some business policies aimed at reducing risks. By producing miniseries with fewer episodes, the budget needed is lower, and in terms of broadcasting, it tends to be more profitable to program fictions with fewer episodes, because getting the viewer to tune into every episode is hard work. On the other hand, the General Audiovisual Communication Law establishes a 200-minute limit in terms a TV miniseries' total duration, and therefore if the networks plan for their productions to be considered inside the limits the law imposes, they must adjust them accordingly.

Some of the features we consider fundamental in the previously-mentioned productions and that bring us to classify them as miniseries are: abandonment of the typical theatrical execution of the first TVE fiction productions, use of a more cinematographic language, reflected in the shots and camera movements, in the staging and in the type of assembly. Starting in the 70s, the miniseries increased the use of natural locations –contrary to what happened in the programs of the 50s, such as *Estudio 1* that was recorded live and direct– providing authenticity and grandeur. The work of the artistic direction is important to accurately recreate and make the era in which the stories and characters are set believable. Production began to use cinematographic techniques for filming, different from the multicamera filming used in television. Other production aspects also change considering the aforementioned: bu-

dgets begin to increase and filming takes longer. In terms of production, each miniseries was a different prototype that required a certain filming schedule and budget, feature for which this genre appears closer to a film than made for television.

## 5. Conclusions

Based on the analysis of the miniseries genre evolution in Spain, it has been determined that some productions that can be considered predecessors of the genre and that, little by little, some characteristics have consolidated and become included in the majority of contemporary Spanish miniseries. Plus, we were able to verify the initial hypothesis that part of the success that we could call "the golden era of the miniseries in Spain" (2000-2012) is the fact that they began using reality as basis for the creation of new fiction scripts.

From the analysis of the miniseries broadcast in the decade 2002-2012 you can conclude on the characteristics this genre has presently. All of them are shown on *prime time*, the time of highest-level TV viewing. These are production in which TV networks associate with independent production company to execute them. This production is known as "turn key" and it consists of the network delegating the production to the independent production company, they agree on the industrial profit and once the product is delivered, the set price is paid to the production company. During the days previous to airing, the networks implement heavy marketing and advertising, seeking recognition by viewers, creating interest and congregating a large number of viewers for the premiere and following episodes.

These are not products that need to retain an audience during a long period of time, like programs that are shown daily or weekly, which implies less risk for networks. Overall, contemporary Spanish miniseries have between 2 and 4 episodes. You can see that they have a larger signature identity than the rest of TV fiction content. In other words, in the

case of the miniseries, the starring actor, the director and the scriptwriter have more importance for the production and for the audience than in other TV products. Often times, this signature character is also used to promote the miniseries. Finally, among the topics discussed there is a clear tendency throughout the 2002-2012 period to represent non-fiction, in the sense that scripts are based on real people and events.

## Notes

1. The title of the thesis is "Fiction and non-fiction in contemporary Spanish miniseries", Universidad Complutense de Madrid, 2014. The text can be seen at: <http://eprints.ucm.es/25335/1/T35338.pdf>

2. Even indicating an exact number of episodes, it is necessary to explain that it is a conventional number. However, considering the history of the genre and the change it has undergone over time, you can say that around 10 episodes is the limit for differentiating between a miniseries and another, longer product, like a series.

3. Antena 3, first private channel in the history of Spanish television, began broadcast in 1990.

4. <http://www.rtve.es/television/20090327/tras-estela-exito-canas-barro/256533.shtml> viewed 23 December 2017.

5. <http://www.rtve.es/alcanta/videos/celia/celia-capitulo-1/457131/> viewed 23 December 2017

6. Biopic (biographical picture) is a film genre that the Akal technical film dictionary defines as "movie that narrates the life of a famous person". This same name is applied to TV series and miniseries.

7. [http://www.elpais.com/articulo/gente/tv/cadenas/apuestan/genero/tv/movies/elpepugen/20100403elpepugen\\_1/Tes](http://www.elpais.com/articulo/gente/tv/cadenas/apuestan/genero/tv/movies/elpepugen/20100403elpepugen_1/Tes). Article viewed 23 December 2017.

8. Full text of Law 7/2010, of 31 March, General Audiovisual Communication can be seen in the Official State Bulletin (<https://www.boe.es/buscar/act.php?id=BOE-A-2010-5292>).

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