

The evolution of the dramatic genre on RNE. From radio drama to binaural sound fiction in the age of podcasting

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Abstract

Sound fiction has always had a place on the public broadcaster Radio Nacional de España (National Radio of Spain, RNE). The objective of this article is to analyse its development using a mixed methodology that combines a literature review, content analysis of five works representative of different periods, and interviews with professionals who work at the station. The essence of fiction on RNE is adaptations of literary classics, live performances and the use of new technologies with a narrative sense. The tendency is to use film techniques in the scripts, to experiment with binaural sound to achieve an immersive effect and to include audio series to expand the audience niche. Likewise, although there is a need for greater investment in human and economic resources, this paper confirms that this is a genre on the rise, as gleaned from the number of podcast productions, currently 115 on the RNE Audio platform.

Keywords

Fiction, RNE, radio drama, binaural, podcast.

Resum

La ficció sonora sempre ha tingut espai en l'emissora pública Radio Nacional de España (RNE). L'objectiu d'aquest article és analitzar-ne l'evolució a través d'una metodologia mixta que combina revisió bibliogràfica, anàlisi de contingut de cinc obres representatives de diferents èpoques i entrevistes a professionals de la cadena. L'essència de la ficció a RNE són les adaptacions de clàssics literaris, la representació en directe i l'aplicació de noves tecnologies amb sentit narratiu. La tendència és utilitzar tècniques del cinema en els guions, l'experimentació amb el so binaural, que aconsegueix un efecte immersiu, i la incorporació d'audiosèries per ampliar el nínxol d'oients. Així mateix, tot i que s'hi aprecia la necessitat de més inversió en recursos humans i econòmics, es confirma que és un gènere en auge, segons es desprèn del nombre de produccions en format pòdcast, 115 a la plataforma RNE Audio.

Paraules clau

Ficció, RNE, radioteatre, binaural, pòdcast.

1. Introduction

Radio Nacional de España is the broadcaster that has kept the dramatic genre in its line-up for the longest time. Even though the concept of radio theatre seems somewhat out of date or from another era, it has evolved with the transformation of the different formats. After conceiving the earliest works in the dramatic genre as radio theatre, which merges theatre with radio content, the term audio drama was later used for stories recounted via sound and performed before the public, but not necessarily to be broadcast on the radio; finally, radio-produced fiction (Ortiz & Volpini, 2017) and sound fiction are the names

currently used, on digital audio platforms as well (Rodero *et al.*, 2019).

When we look back to the beginning of fiction production on public radio, we can signal the date of 5 August 1939, when one of the first radio adaptations catalogued as important was broadcast: *La verbena de la Paloma* with a script by Tomás Seseña. RNE of Barcelona began its regular broadcasts of plays on 4 September 1949 with the radio dramatisation of *En Flandes se ha puesto el sol* by Eduardo Marquina, adapted by José María Tavera (Munsó, 1998, pp. 375, 378). Its broadcasts kept airing until 1968, and until 1983 with adaptations of universal classical plays using theatre production methods due

to the initial lack of knowledge of the radio language (Hernando *et al.*, 2020).

Radio drama experienced its golden age on this public broadcaster, and the best voices in the country were on its Actors Roster of professional actors, directors, scriptwriters, editors and sound technicians in the 1950s and 1960s. But the arrival of the Transition to democracy, freedom of the press in 1977 with Royal Decree-Law 24/1977 and the focus on news over other contents changed the line-ups for both public and private broadcasters. Despite this, the survival of the professionals, more than the station, reveals the determination to make room for audio drama in its programming. If we compare RNE with the BBC, we find that the British public radio station never dropped the genre, and works like *The Archer* (1951), with more than 20,000 episodes, remain on its lineup.

While in the past radio theatre or radio novels managed to gather the family around the radio, today sound fiction is listened to on podcasts with earphones and enjoyed privately. Privacy and availability anytime anywhere generates an immersive effect that seeks to captivate the listener using the same ingredients: creativity and the ability to create mental images in the audience.

2. Objectives and methodology

2.1 Objectives

The objective of this article is to review the dramatic genre on Radio Nacional de España (RNE), the Spanish public radio station, and to assess its importance and narrative evolution during the station's different eras. To do so, the overarching objective can be stated more specifically in the secondary objectives:

1. To conduct a historical review of the evolution of the dramatic genre, in addition to ascertaining the most prominent dramatic programmes in the genre's different periods.
2. To explore the radio dramas' different production processes via professionals from this station.
3. To conduct a case study of representative dramatic programmes during the different periods.

2.2 Methodology

To achieve these objectives, we used a methodological triangulation: a mixed analysis method with quantitative and qualitative techniques to ascertain the target of the study and provide a more comprehensive picture (Gómez-Diago, 2010, p. 72). To do so, we applied the techniques of literature review, content analysis and in-depth interviews.

The data collection technique was a literature review of scholarly texts and sound documents from RNE, like the programme *Documentos*, audios from the RTVE Sound Archive and other complementary informative texts in the press, blogs and magazines specialising in audio.

We conducted a case study (Rodríguez, Gil & García, 1999) of five representative works from different periods using a mixed quantitative and qualitative methodology and content analysis to draw conclusions via the interpretation of the data (Bardin, 1991; Bernete, 2013). To conduct the analysis, we used the active listening technique called *close analytical listening* devised by Spinelli and Dann (2019, p. 5).¹

The pieces chosen reflect three criteria: 1) they come from these periods (in the decline phase, three pieces from the different decades were chosen because it is a more extensive period); 2) production, on-air time and frequency of broadcast: a) during the golden age and the resurgence, the criterion is whether it remained on the line-up and b) during the decline phase, the frequency and production were the focal point, bearing in mind that this was when the genre became marginalised; and 3) its prominent role on public radio following the criteria of the panel of experts, in addition to its availability in digital format in the RNE archive and the Biblioteca Nacional de España (National Library of Spain, BNE).

We conducted a content analysis with formal variables, production variables and variables related to the creation process and content (Table 1).

We faced certain limitations accessing the works from different periods in the analysis of the sound productions, given that open-access is highly limited. Access to the line-ups or information on certain programmes was obtained through the digital library MyNews.

Finally, we held in-depth interviews with seven professionals from the station, which helped us to 'expand knowledge from inside the community being studied' (Keating & Della Porta, 2013, p. 326). We did this through semi-structured interviews, which followed three fundamental lines of inquiry, with open-ended questions in order to get detailed, descriptive information so the professionals could express themselves on general and specific issues related to their professional work to get qualitative data for the study. The following lines of inquiry were addressed:

1. General and historical matters.
2. Specific questions on the creative and production process.
3. Technical and economic matters.

The answers helped to contextualise the different periods and provide a picture of the creative process in the pre-production, production and post-production processes.

2.2.1 Sample analysed

RNE is comprised of six radio stations: Radio Clásica, for classical music; Radio 3, with cultural and music programming; Radio 4, with general programming in Catalan; Radio 5, with continuous news; and Radio Exterior, a public service abroad. The works analysed were broadcast on Radio 1, Radio 3 and the RTVE platforms (RTVE Play and RNE Audio).

The sample spans three periods from 1961 to 2022. The works were chosen bearing three periods in mind: golden age

Table 1. Variables of the content analysis

Content analysis	
Formal variables	Year, title, director, producer, actors-characters.
Production variables	Original work, adaptation. Length: 5-10 minutes, 11-30 minutes, 31-60 minutes, more than 60 minutes. Performance: recorded, live. Human and technical team.
Creation variables	Theme, genre: tale, story, radio novel, series, radio theatre, fiction (Rodero, 2011).
Content variables	Characters: well-rounded or ambiguous and flat, or around a single idea (Pérez Rufí, 2020, p. 103). Narrators: heterodiegetic (tells the story as an outside voice without being involved), homodiegetic (tells the story as a character), autodiegetic (tells his/her experience as a main character in the story) (García Jiménez, 1996; Martínez Costa, 1998). Language: <i>telling</i> narration (with mediation by a narrator) or <i>hearing</i> narration (without mediation by a narrator) (Guarinos, 2009). Radiosemes: words: monologue, dialogue with different purposes (characterising: related to the characters; action-oriented: driving the action; informative: about what is not experienced firsthand; creating a temporal and descriptive hiatus: about the characters or settings); purpose of the music (expressive: enhancing the moods or expressing emotions; narrative: organising the action; setting: describing the situation and action) and purpose of the effects (realistic: reproducing reality; narrative: as a punctuation sign; symbolic or expressions: enhancing or expressing emotions; atmospheric: elements found in the scene) (Guarinos, 2009; López-Villafranca, 2019 and Rodero, 2024). Static scenes, with less sense of depth, or dynamic scenes, with a sense of movement or depth (Volpini <i>et al.</i> , 2020; Fernández Aldana, 2024).

Source: Own work.

Table 2. Sample of works analysed

Phase	Year / Director	Work	Programme / Station
Golden age	1961 Juan Manuel Soriano	<i>Alicia en el país de las maravillas</i> [Alice in Wonderland]	<i>Teatro Invisible</i> Radio 1
Decline	1981 Carlos Faraco	<i>El juego</i>	<i>Tris Tras Tres</i> Radio 3
Decline	1997 Juan José Plans	Chapter 1 <i>El discípulo de Drácula</i>	<i>Historias</i> Radio 1
Decline	2000 Carlos Faraco	Chapter 02 <i>La primera noche en el puerto de Laris</i>	<i>Cuando Juan y Tula fueron a Siringa</i> Radio 3
Revival of the genre	2023 Benigno Moreno and Mayca Aguilera	<i>Las aventuras de Tintín</i>	<i>Ficción Sonora</i> Radio 1, RTVE Play and RNE Audio

Source: Own work.

(1950s and 1960s), decline (1970s to 2000s) and revival of the genre (2010 until today) (Barea, 1994; López-Villafranca & Olmedo-Salar, 2020) (Table 2).

2.2.2 Panel of experts

The selection of experts is justified by their careers, in addition to their experience in the genre's different periods. These experts are scriptwriters, producers, directors and actors whose answers contributed to our in-depth understanding and

provided information on the phases of the creative process: pre-production, production and post-production. The following professionals are part of the panel:

1. Federico Volpini, radio broadcaster, director and scriptwriter of audio dramas. Former director of Radio 3.
2. Mayca Aguilera, producer of *Ficción Sonora* RNE.
3. Benigno Moreno, director of *Ficción Sonora* and former director of RNE.
4. Alfonso Latorre, scriptwriter of *Ficción Sonora*.

5. Gregorio Parra, director of *Videodrome* on Radio 3 until 2021.
6. Juan Suárez, announcer, scriptwriter, voice actor on *Ficción Sonora* on RNE and host of *La Libélula*.
7. Ana Alonso, former actress on *Ficción Sonora* on RNE.

3. Historical review of the evolution of radio drama in three phases

3.1 The golden age of radio drama in Spain

In 1945, *Teatro Invisible* was created under the direction of the journalist and dubbing actor Juan Manuel Soriano Ruiz. This show was broadcast from Barcelona every Sunday at 10 pm and it stayed on air for 20 years. It had a company which included prestigious actors like Julia Pacheco, Beatriz Vergara and Manuel Luque, among others (Balsebre, 2002). It was rivalled by *Teatro del Aire* from Radio Madrid (Cadena SER), which had been started three years earlier, in 1942, and launched the playwright and scriptwriter Antonio Calderón. The genre began to gain popularity with *Teatro Invisible*, but the competition with the private station to broadcast high-quality radio drama influenced RNE's decision to focus on dramatic plays, with adaptations and works devised for the medium. *En Flandes se ha puesto el sol* by Eduardo Marquina was the first *Teatro Invisible* piece, broadcast on 4 September 1949. Its mission was cultural, and professor Armand Balsebre highlighted it as a 'naturalistic representation' with recordings of real sounds outside the studio (Cendros, 1999).

Live broadcasts were common from the very start, with literary readings or variety series that were narrated to the audience (Aguilera & Arquero, 2017, p. 3). In this sense, Guarinos (2009) stresses the naturalness of the performances, which downplayed a good structure of the story, although audiences were also able to enjoy the magic of noisemakers, sound effects and live music.

One of the most outstanding radio dramas in the golden age was *El Quijote* [Don Quixote] in 1965, which was performed by legendary actors like Adolfo Marsillach, Fernando Rey, Francisco Rabal and Nati Mistral (Barea, 1994). It consisted of twenty recorded hours with a cameo by director Luis Buñuel, which Radio Nacional de España revived and digitalised into 16 compact discs in 2005 (La Nación, 2005).

Radio novels contributed to the massive success of the dramatic genre, and in the postwar years and the 1950s they became entertainment spaces for the entire family before TV arrived in Spanish homes, as well as being an escape valve in the Franco dictatorship. According to the director of RNE's *Ficción Sonora*, Benigno Moreno, the term *radio theatre*, unlike what many authors thought, was due to 'the performance of radio novels in the theatre. The actress Lola Herrera told us where the word came from before a performance, which we didn't know, and it's something that makes more sense than the idea of theatre on the radio' (Moreno, 2024). With radio

novels, Spaniards were able to forget their social and economic hardships after the war, which contributed to the fact that up to eight different novels were produced daily (Gelos, 2016, p. 15).

More than 9,500 pieces of radio theatre from 1951 to 1985 are included in the RNE Sound Archive, although one can assume that the real number is higher because not all programmes were archived and others were lost or forgotten when the public broadcaster moved from Paseo de la Habana in Madrid to Prado del Rey in Pozuelo de Alarcón (outskirts of Madrid) in 1971. In addition to *Teatro Invisible*, other programmes also stood out as dramatic genres in works like *Navidad*, *Teatro en el Estudio*, *Esta semana me llamo Cleopatra*, *Siguiendo su destino*, *Otra vez la primavera*, *Eugenia Grandet*, *Quince bajo la luna*, *Los cipreses crecen en Dios* and *Egoísmo*, among others (Fernández-González, 2019, p. 282).

RNE had an Actors Roster on staff who performed literary adaptations, dramatic works and melodramas created for the medium, with the participation of the leading figures of Spain's theatre. Aurora Vicente, Lourdes Guerras and José María del Río were on RNE's Actors Roster, the latter when it was dissolved in 1992 (Prieto, 2009). In the 1970s, the audience became fragmented and devoted its attention and time to television, a medium that had just reached the country and captured the radio audience (Balsebre, 2002; Ayuso, 2013).

3.2 The decline of the genre: Radio drama in marginal spaces

In the 1980s, the public station resisted the disappearance of the dramatic genre but it focused more on news with the hire of Eduardo Sotillos as the director of RNE between January and November 1981, as part of the 1980s Statute for RTVE. The update consisted of news, live coverage and cross-cutting radio genres, which was dubbed 'total radio' (García Gil, 2021, p. 388). Sotillos justified the decision to prioritise news because 'the events that kept happening day after day in the design of the recently-born democracy brought the station more drama than the theatre productions did' (Afuera, 2020, p. 45).

Radio drama survived on Spanish public radio thanks to the determination of its professionals: Carlos Faraco and Fernando Luna, Federico Volpini, Jesús Beltrán and Juan Ignacio Francia. And when the Actors Roster no longer existed, it continued to survive thanks to Juan José Plans, Faraco, Volpini, Isabel Ruiz Lara, Rafa Roa, Javier Gallego 'Crudo', Lourdes Miyar, Manuel Moraga, Lourdes Castro and Álvaro Soto, among others (Volpini *et al.*, 2020, p. 24).

'RNE's decision to terminate radio theatre primarily reflects this disinterest and lack of understanding within the company, which after 1991 was primarily made by and for journalists' (Volpini, 2024).

Afuera (2020) attributes the decline of radio drama to social and economic reasons, which fostered the production of news and music programmes. However, economics was not the determining factor, according to Benigno Moreno, who is in

charge of *Ficción Sonora*:

'It's not that news was chosen for economic reasons; it's because we became the regime's radio station for a period of time. We also did plays with an ideological bias that was no longer feasible with the advent of democracy, plus radio theatre began to be viewed as uncool in the idea of modern Spain that held sway in the 1980s' (Moreno, 2024).

The option was to do radio drama outside the regular programming. Volpini *et al.* (2020) highlight *Diálogos con la Música* by Ramón Trecet (1977), a series of science-fiction tales set to music and performed by a single voice; *Juventud y Pitanza* (1978), dramatised stories; *Arkham 3* on Radio 3 (1979); the Radio 3 program *Tris Tras Tres*, with Carlos Faraco and Fernando Luna, from 1981 to 1988; *Los hombres de Cibola* (1982); *La telaraña*, by Isabel Ruiz Lara (1990); or the chapter of *Cabeza de vaca. Las vidas de Alvar Núñez*, which was recorded in 1992 and was the last dramatic production by RNE's Actors Roster.

When the genre was declining, Juan José Plans was a role model with *Sobrenatural* and *Historias*, cult programmes on Radio Nacional de España's Radio 1 that were broadcast between 1994 and 2003. In 1998, *El Ojo de Yavé* presented an hour of dramatised fiction every day based on original texts, and in 2000 *El Chichirichachi*. The awards that the station received contrast with the fact that it was turning its back on the genre. In 1963, *María*, written and produced by Leocadio Machado, received the Prix Italia award, as *Herederos del tiempo* did in 1998, in addition to an honourable mention in the Prix Italia for *Almacenes Conciencia* (2002) and the award for best radio drama from the First Radio Open sponsored by the CCCB and Radio Barcelona for *Viaje alucinante al Universo Melange* (Fernández González, 2019, p. 112; Volpini *et al.*, 2020, p. 31).

There emerged a kind of nostalgia for the genre in the late 1990s, and *En Flandes se ha puesto el sol* was brought back to public radio 50 years later in homage to the director Juan Manuel Soriano, with the voice of Constantino Romero as the main character (Cendros, 1999).

3.3 From radio theatre to sound fiction

There were halting attempts to include fiction in programmes in the 2000s, but it was no longer called 'radio theatre' but fiction. On Radio 3, Federico Volpini, the director of the broadcaster from 1999 to 2003, tried to revive it with the serial *Cuando Juan y Tula fueron a Siringa* (2000), written and directed by Carlos Faraco. In 2022, Radio 3 and Radio 4 simultaneously broadcast the three-chapter series *El corazón de las tinieblas* [The Heart of Darkness] by Joseph Conrad, featuring Constantino Romero (Volpini *et al.*, 2020). Another effort by Radio 3 is *Videodrome* (2000), written and directed by Gregorio Parra, an innovative programme revolving around music and film that included adaptations by the scriptwriter Mona León Siminiani. In that decade, other productions that stood out for their experimental,

avant-garde nature were *Guerra y Paz* (2001), *Los Inmortales* (2002), *Hércules de Tirinto*, *Tirante el Blanco*, *La Guerra de Troya*, *Radio teatro piezas* (2006-2007).

In 2005, *Epifanía de un sueño* was shown at the Almagro Festival; it featured Josep Maria Pou and Juan Echanove in an adaptation by the Chilean Jorge Díaz, and the station revived the traditional format occasionally, every two or three months (Rojas, 2005). It was the seed of *Ficción Sonora* when, according to Benigno Moreno (2024), 'the idea arose that the technicians and producers would become part of the show and that the viewer would have the opportunity to see how radio is made'.

In 2006, radio theatre plays were performed in front of audiences at Madrid's La Casa Encendida every month. They were a mix of 'humour, terror, suspense and science fiction, enveloped in an avant-garde radio production' (Gallo, 2006). That year, *Querido Mozart* was performed on Radio 3 with the participation of José Sacristán, based on the letters that the musician exchanged with his parents and brother. In 2006, the experience was repeated at the Almagro Festival with *Fuenteovejuna en el frente 1936*, inspired by the Lope de Vega work. In 2007, RNE and Caja Madrid produced *Los farsantes del contrafoso (Farsa semífusa)*, which brought together some of the most famous Golden Age texts. *Viaje del Parnaso* (2006) was produced with the Compañía de Teatro Clásico. The playwright and scriptwriter Laila Ripoll wrote *Guernica, el último viaje* (2006). In 2007, *El guante de hierro*, also adapted by Ripoll, was performed at La Casa Encendida in conjunction with Obra Social de Caja Madrid on the occasion of the five-hundredth anniversary of the birth of Inés de Suárez. In 2008, *El jardín de Venus*, by Félix María de Samaniego, *El convoy de los 927*, by Montse Armengou and Ricard Belis, and *El perro del hortelano* by Lope de Vega in 2009 are performed in this same festival. In parallel, programmes like *Especia Melange*, *El mono temático* and *La ciudad invisible* were launched in 2008 (Hernando *et al.*, 2020, p. 115).

RNE started collaborating with Madrid's La Casa Encendida in 2009 to occasionally offer the programme *Ficción Sonora RNE*, with two or three fictions per year. It is an audiovisual format which can be listened to and watched on RTVE and is designed to be performed before an audience. Some of the titles that can be listened to and watched on the RTVE website include *Psicosis* (2010), on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the film *Psycho*; *Ninfosis* (2010), an original work by Inko Martín, a writer from San Sebastián; *El exorcista* (2010); *Drácula* (2011); *Extraños en un tren* (2011); *La vida de Brian* (2012); *El último trayecto de Horacio Dos*, by Eduardo Mendoza (2012); *Un mundo feliz* (2013); *Blade Runner* (2014); *La isla del tesoro* (2014); *Platero y yo* (2014) on the play's centennial; *El joven Frankenstein* (2015); *Sherlock Holmes: El signo de los cuatro* (2015); *El Quijote del siglo XXI* (2015); *Café de artistas* (2016); *Jekyll y Hide* (2017); *Lorquiana* (2017); *A sangre fría* (2018); *Alicia en el país de las maravillas* (2020); *Reformatorio (de madres y padres)* (2020); *Ventajas de viajar en tren* (2021);

Las aventuras de Tintín (2023); and *La Valentía* (2024), a work written by Alfredo Sanzol in 2018.

In 2011, radio drama was brought back to RNE with short plays by Spanish creators written with the support of the Fundación Autor and produced in conjunction with the Almagro Theatre Festival. This experience gave rise to fiction series like *Noches de miedo*, on RNE as well (2011). In 2014, *El Quijote* was once again performed with the actors José Luis Gómez (narrator), Josep Maria Pou (Don Quixote), Javier Cámara (Sancho Panza) and Michelle Jenner (Dorotea), with a script and adaptation by the language scholar Francisco Rico, a Cervantes expert. In 2016, RNE adapted *Historia de una escalera* by Buero Vallejo. And every year, live fictions are still performed on the grounds of the Almagro Festival, including *Casa con dos puertas es mala de guardar* (2018), *Sor Juana Inés, con el favor y el desdén* (2019), *Magallanes, el viaje infinito* (2020), *La reina muerta* (2021), *Puñados de fuego. Margarita Xirgu en el exilio* (2022), *Entre bobos anda el juego* (2023) and *La dama boba* (2024).

Original plays that are winners of the Margarita Xirgu Awards are performed on Radio Exterior de España. *El emir y la máquina* (2008), by Francisco García Quiñonero; *El oscuro túnel de la mirilla* (2011), written by Manuel Ismael Serrano; *Alanda* (2012), by Emilio López Verdú; *No volveré a pasar hambre* (2016), by the author Paz Palau; and *Un candidato para el fin del mundo* (2020), by María Zaragoza, are available.

Noteworthy initiatives include *El quejío de una diosa* (2019), by the Seville-based theatre company *Mujereando*, directed by Carmen Tamayo and performed by non-professional actresses, homeless women and victims of gender violence; and *Regreso a la Calle Mayor* (2022), which Radio Nacional de España produces with the Filmoteca Española based on the unpublished script by the filmmaker Juan Antonio Bardem, the centennial of whose birth was celebrated in 2022.

3.4 Innovation and creativity through new technologies and podcasting

The rise of podcasting around the world, which gained momentum with National Public Radio's *Serial* in 2014, has also had repercussions on the production of sound fiction. The first business models were launched in the United States during this period, which transformed the commercial productive practice and turned it into a mass phenomenon (Bonini, 2015). This aspect was already foreseen in the first era of podcasting, in which it was deduced that the alliance with radio could benefit and even become the future of the medium (Menduni, 2007). What is clear is that the increase in the production of these works of fiction, as well as other sound productions, has been favoured by the consolidation of podcasting with the 'platformisation' and evolution of the cultural production infrastructures, through practices geared at the development of software and programming applications in the last five years (Sullivan, 2019). The advent of podcasting in the age of 'audification' (Piñero-Otero & Pedrero Esteban, 2022) and the fine-tuning of the platforms of broadcasters like RNE Audio,

in addition to the RTVE website, have enabled public radio to increase its range of programmes (Ruiz Gómez & Legorburu, 2023) and to connect via platforms, as the BBC had already done (Berry, 2020), focusing on experimentation and a variety of formats (López-Villafranca & Olmedo-Salar, 2023, p. 88).

In the new era, in 2011 Lab RTVE was set up as the first media innovation lab in Spain and developed a wide range of creation pieces (Ivars & Zaragoza, 2018, p. 261). This is the age of podcasting, which capitalises on transmedia and binaural sound. *Carlos de Gante* (2015) and *Tiempo de Valientes* (2016) are examples of transmedia TV series. The podcast of *Carlos, el emperador* takes a chronological survey of the first seventeen years in the monarch's life (1500-1517). *Tiempo de valientes* (2016) recounts the adventures of one of the main characters from *El Ministerio del Tiempo*, Julián Martínez. The second season, *Una llamada a tiempo* (2017), recounts complementary plots on another of its most beloved characters, Pacino. Other productions are *Bienvenido a la pasarela* (2017), a transmedia podcast of the story *Estoy vivo*, directed by Daniel Écija; *El punto frío* (2019), which is a transmedia product produced by RTVE in conjunction with Dadá Films & Entertainment, with a podcast with stories different to the web series on the mystery stories of Martín, the main character (López-Villafranca, 2021); and *Maitino: el podcast* (2020), a transmedia version of the acclaimed TV series *Acacias 38*, which uses twelve 10-minute episodes to narrate the love story of Maite and Camino in a parallel plot.

In 2018 and 2019, seven chapters of binaural sound² fictions developed by Playz and the RNE *Ficción Sonora* department were produced, creating an immersive sensation by means of post-production using 5.1 equipment. 'Binaural suggests listening on a level where the listener is inside that level, and it is very interesting from the narrative standpoint' (Moreno, 2024).

These innovative fiction pieces are joined with the experience that Gregorio Parra, host of *Videodrome* until 2021, is undertaking with 5G technology, namely an adaptation of the Calderón work *La vida es sueño* (2019).

'This radio theatre is broadcast with an image whose signal was distributed from a TVE studio in Castilla la Mancha as we were making it in Madrid; more precisely, in the Cineteca del Centro Cultural del Matadero. The technicians from RTVE thought it was a good chance to test the technology. It was an adaptation of Calderón's *La vida es sueño*, within a dream triggered in the main character during the test of "a new technology" at a public hospital in which a "dream study" could be transformed into images and sound. The transmission of the dream was possible thanks to the collaboration of the interdisciplinary artist lury Lech, who created the music and the images projected onscreen. We actors were inside the screen (the images were projected over us)' (Parra, 2024).

Parra's intention was to continue showing that radio is still a dream, 'that sounds fabricate the images inside us as much as the images we actually see; that radio is not being killed by technology' (Parra, 2024).

The programme *La libélula*, hosted by Juan Suárez, is from this later period, with dramatized adaptations of literary texts, which tries to get 'the listener to get a feeling similar to going to a bookshop, picking out a book and reading a few random pages' (Suárez, 2024).

In the last five years, in addition to the programmes mentioned above and the work from *Ficción Sonora* as the star programme, other original fiction series have emerged, like the podcast *El hackeo* (2024), a three-episode thriller about privacy, boundaries and false morality after a cyberattack. They are joined by audio series adapted from literary texts like *Los Santos Inocentes* (2021) on the occasion of the work's fortieth anniversary, organised into six episodes and broadcast on *El ojo*

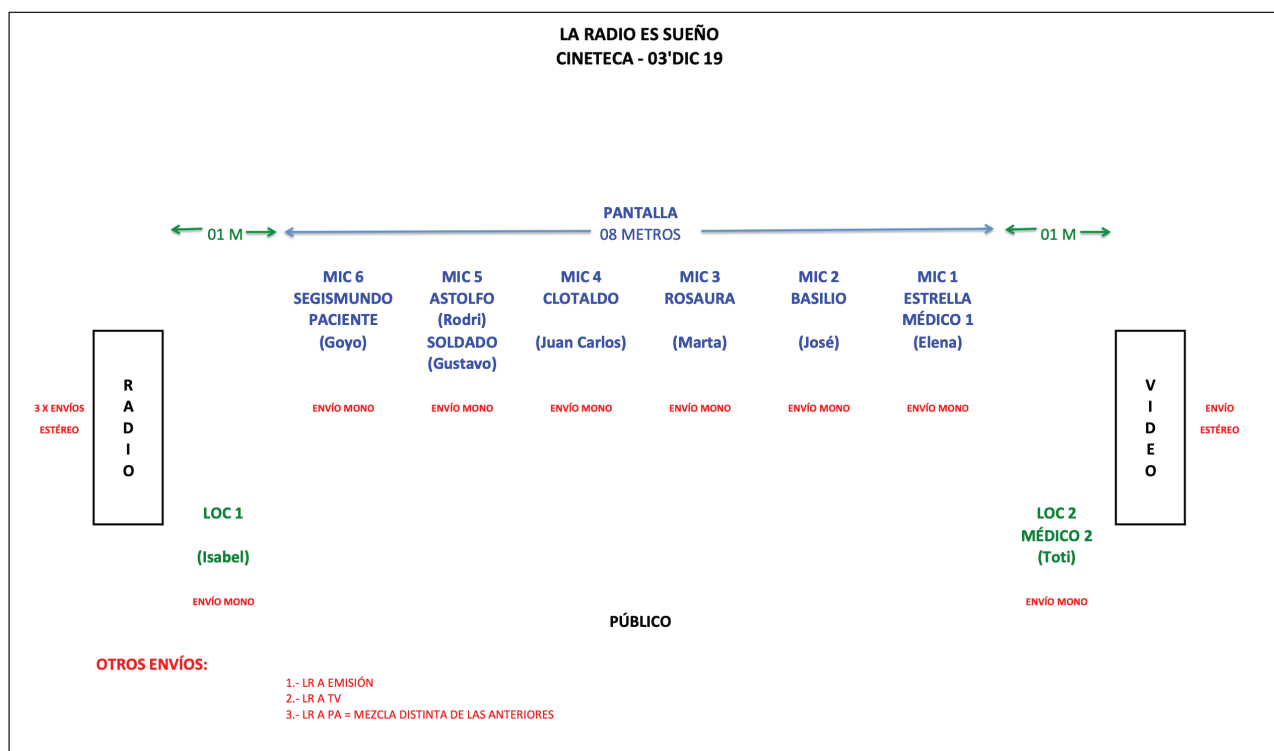
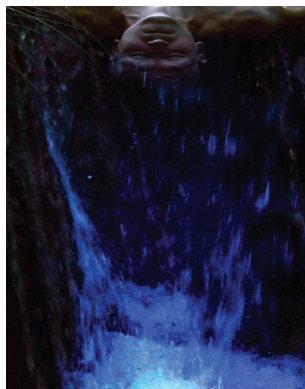
crítico; *Trafalgar* (2022), the radio version of the Pérez Galdós work in four episodes; and *La Tribuna* (2023), an adaptation of the first novel by Emilia Pardo Bazán in four chapters.

4. Case studies

Formal variables. Descriptive analysis of the works

Alicia en el País de las Maravillas (1961) is an adaptation of the Lewis Carroll story *Alice in Wonderland*, in the *Cuentos Infantiles* space of *Teatro Invisible* on RNE, Barcelona. Directed by Juan Manuel Soriano, it was adapted by Sergio Schaff, with musical direction by maestro Luis Ferrer. It features eight actors from the Actors Roster: Gloria Roig, Joaquín Díaz, Marcela Nieto, Ramón Vaccaro, José María Angelat, Estanis González, Arsenio Corsellas, Rosa Griñón and Fernando Parés.

Figure 1. Image and scene of the physical layout of the work *La vida es sueño* (2019)



Source: Gregorio Parra (2024).

Tris Tras Tres (1981-1987) was an evening programme on Radio 3. The chapter called 'El juego' (1981) from the series *El Manantial de la noche*, was directed and hosted by Carlos Faraco, and the scriptwriter was Fernando Luna. It had four characters (antiheroes) played by Lola Calderón, Guillermo de la Estrella, Artemio Espada Clark and Manuel Montano. It tells the adventures of a modest detective who gets involved in an absurd, ingenious plot; this character is played by Faraco, who also directs and narrates the series, along with 'El Pesca', the neighbourhood thief and former convict played by Alberto Sánchez.

El discípulo de Drácula (1997) is one of the episodes of *Historias*, hosted by Juan José Plans. It tells the story of a young man who is heading to Count Dracula's castle in the Carpathian Mountains in Transylvania. This work commemorates the first centennial of the first edition of *Dracula* and the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the birth of its author, Bram Stoker. There are seven actors: Roberto Cruz as the disciple, Natalia Estrada as the mother, Blanca Gala as the girl, Luis Alonso Carrasco as the friend, Lourdes Guerras as Amparo, Pilar Socorro as the young woman, José Antonio Ramírez as the jailer and Juan José Plans as the narrator and director. The music is by Manuel Ruiz Ramos, the special effects by Joaquín Úbeda and the production by Roberto Cruz.

Cuando Juan y Tula fueron a Siritinga is a science-fiction series with 86 chapters broadcast by Radio 3 in 2000. We will analyse the episode entitled 'La primera noche en el puerto de Laris', about the main characters' arrival in this imaginary place. It was directed by Carlos Faraco, with coordination and plot development by Carlos Faraco, Juan Suárez and Mona León Siminiani. Mayca Aguilera and Carlos Hurtado created the music. The leading roles in this chapter are played by Juan Suárez, Sara Vitores, Federico Volpini, Carlos Faraco and Lourdes Guerras.

Las aventuras de Tintín (2023), in turn, is a video podcast in RNE's *Ficción Sonora* which adapts Hergé's comics *Los cigarros del faraón* and *El Loto Azul*. It features a young Tintín and his dog Milú; Tintín is played by Biel Montoro, while Fernando Cayo plays Filemón Ciclón, Oliveira da Figueira and Wang Jen-Ghié.

The average number of characters in these works is four, although this number rises in large productions like *Las aventuras de Tintín*, which has more than 40 characters.

Production variables

Regarding production, three are adaptations and three are original productions. As the station's producer, Benigno Moreno, says, 'we don't only make adaptations; recently we made an original with Elvira Lindo. We make a lot of adaptations because it's also the essence of RNE. We know that they are very minority works, but that's one of RNE's purposes' (Moreno, 2024).

The works last between 5 and 10 minutes in *Teatro Invisible* and *Tris Tras Tres*, between 30 and 60 minutes in Plans' *Historias* and more than one hour in *Ficción Sonora* shows. Only *Las aventuras de Tintín* is performed live.

Human and technical team

The first production, *Alicia en el País de las Maravillas* (1961), features actors from RNE's Actors Roster. Twelve actors from a select roster of radio and theatre actors perform, in addition to three people on the adaptation, supervision and direction team, one professional specifically working in special effects and another on the musical adaptation. It is a large team in which technological evolution, like video recorders and sound-effects generators, and the artistic direction teams led radio drama to its golden age (González-Conde *et al.*, 2029, p. 22). *Tris Tras Tres* (1981-1987) was coordinated by Carlos Faraco and Fernando Luna as a daily programme on Radio 3, with a production team made up of five professionals and the participation of seven producers. Even though the production team and producers were extensive, the actors were employees in different departments of on-staff announcers and actors, in addition to a roster of amateur actors who participated over the almost six years that the broadcast lasted. According to Volpini *et al.* (2020, p. 25), they did not need the Actors Roster because of 'Fernando Luna's sound developments, and the irresistible power of Carlos Faraco's voice: rich, well modulated, magnificently used, and both of their ability to create atmospheres'.

With the disappearance of the Actors Roster in the 1990s, the production of the other fictions is primarily due to the professionals' interest more than the resources on the human team, given that the emphasis was on the technical side, with better equipment. However, there was not a specific group of actors for these works. In *Historias*, Juan José Plans, besides standing out for his unmistakable narration, focused on the complications of production, sound developments and field depth. When *Cuando Juan y Tula fueron a Siritinga* (2000) was produced, one of the most expensive and celebrated fictions on that station, the Radio 3 director at the time, Federico Volpini, highlighted that the station was a 'bridgehead' in keeping dramatised fiction on its schedule (Volpini *et al.*, 2020), despite the fact that the group's policy had downgraded these spaces to a lower priority. Sound experimentation, the script and the atmospheres were finely-tuned, while the performances were done on a voluntary basis by the radio professionals who stood out in other areas. Part of the team was made up of Javier Gallego 'Crudo' in production, Mona León Siminiani and Alfonso Latorre as the scriptwriters, and special collaboration by Andrés Aberasturi and the subsequent producer of *Ficción Sonora*, Mayca Aguilera, who began to work with Benigno Moreno to create a well-crafted, highly original production. More than 20 people were on the team, and their creativity shone through in every episode. This production became so successful that there was a fandom phenomenon around the fantastical world of Siritinga, with stickers, independent musicals presenting the characters or the spaces where the action developed and other curiosities. It was one of the first series in which the multitrack editor SADiE was used to produce a drama on a public station.

In *Las aventuras de Tintín* (2023), it is evident that the productions survived thanks to a very small team working in the genre, along with the occasional collaboration of organisations. The station's team of thespians is comprised of just two people: the director Benigno Moreno and the producer of *Ficción Sonora* Mayca Aguilera. Occasionally the writer and scriptwriter Alfonso Latorre joins them. As Aguilera (2024) says:

'there are no scriptwriters; there is no set structure. It's just the two of us and we have limited budgets, co-productions with foundations, and many of those secondary actors are always the same, former colleagues who have retired or work in the news and other programmes'.

Regarding the evolution of the technical team, in 1973 the RNE building Casa de la Radio was constructed, and studios were specifically created to record dramas: Theatre 1 and Theatre 2. Theatre 1 is no longer used for dramas because it was dismantled, and Theatre 2, where *Ficción Sonora* is recorded, was renovated in 2021. We further discuss the renovation and technical details in the section with the panel of experts.

Creation variables

Within the dramas analysed, we have examined one tale, one story, two serials and one live fiction event. The themes are varied: for children, with the adaptation of the tale *Alicia en el país de las maravillas* [Alice in Wonderland] (*Teatro Invisible*) and *Las aventuras de Tintín* (*Ficción Sonora*); mystery, in Plans' *El discípulo de Drácula* (*Historias*); and humour, in *El juego* from *Tris Tras Tres* and the episode of *La primera noche en el puerto de Laris* (*Cuando Juan y Tula fueron a Siritinga*), which also blends with science fiction.

Content variables

The characters are flatter in the initial period of the dramas, like the *Teatro Invisible* tale, in which the characters are clearly defined with simple attributes; in the *Tris Tras Tres* episode, in which the characters are somewhat childish in tone and their stories are absurd; and in the *Cuando Juan y Tula fueron a Siritinga* episode, with characters with a highly original, creative dramatization but whose function is clearly defined by its humorous, fantastical tone. The character of Dracula in *Historias* is more well-rounded and complex, with many edges, keen drama and a powerful performance. There is a mix of well-rounded and flat characters in *Las aventuras de Tintín* from *Ficción Sonora*, in which the auxiliary characters or antagonists are flatter than the main character.

The role of the heterodiegetic narrator is clearer in the golden age (*Alicia en país de las maravillas*), and the narrator is more descriptive (*telling*), although the evolution of the genre gave way to dialogues and actions that replace the narration (*hearing*). The narrators tell the story as characters (homodiegetic) in *Tris Tras Tres* and *Cuando Juan y Tula fueron a Siritinga*. In the latter, 'as the series goes on, it has more dialogue and

less narration' (Aguilera, 2024). And in the case of *Historias*, the narrator, Juan José Plans, regarded as the 'narrator of narrators' and 'supernatural master', gets involved in the story and even becomes a key part of it despite being heterodiegetic (RTVE audio colecciones, no date). There is no narrator in *Las aventuras de Tintín*, but there is an announcer who 'signals' the date or location of the action.

In the pieces analysed, the radio language is essential in determining the evolution and narrative dimension of the genre on public radio. In his work on radio aesthetic, Arnheim (1980) underscored the fact that the medium prompts sensory experience and creates mental images in the audience, as later corroborated in other studies (Rodero, 2011; Romero, 2017). Words, music and noise or sound effects, in addition to silence, compose a message with very specific expressive systems that adapt to the medium and comprise a specific code (Gutiérrez & Perona, 2002; Balsebre, 2004; Blanco & Fernández, 2004; Haye, 2004). This has enhanced the immersive function of sound fictions thanks to the language and the sound design. Regarding the drama genre in particular, Rodero (2005; 2011; 2024) and Guarinos (1999; 2009) have examined the functions of this language, which we will apply in this case study. When we analyse the radiosemes, we found that words have a more descriptive purpose in the golden age and the age of decline, but in the majority of works the dialogue serves to advance the story, push the action and sometimes characterise the characters, as in *El discípulo de Drácula* and the *Tris Tras Tres* episode. The music at the beginning is used as background sound and expressively in the 1965 story and in *Tris Tras Tres*; it is expressive in *Cuando Juan y Tula fueron a Siritinga*; and it fulfils a narrative or chronotopic function in the sequence changes in Juan José Plans' story and *Las aventuras de Tintín* in of *Ficción Sonora*. Silence is hardly used.

Regarding sound effects, they are expressive and reinforce the mood in *Alicia en el país de las maravillas*; they are realistic in *El juego* from *El juego* and *El discípulo de Drácula*; and they are symbolic when the wind blows or we hear the abyss that envelopes the character. In *Cuando Juan y Tula fueron a Siritinga*, they are realistic; they describe the action and the characters, but they are also symbolic and expressive, and they take us to the series' imaginary world where they reveal the characters' and even the narrators' thoughts. And in *Ficción Sonora* there are realistic effects, atmospheric effects -like the recreation of the ambiance on a night when a tropical storm is raging, or the sound of glasses clinking at a party- and symbolic and expressive effects to accompany comical characters like Hernández and Fernández.

The scenes are dynamic in the performances of the characters in the *Teatro Invisible* tale and static in the narration. There is dynamism in the other pieces: in *Tris Tras Tres*, there is a wide variety of scenes in the performances and movement and close-ups in the narration; in *Historias*, the scenes have more depth and the very close-up for the main character, with different scenes for the atmospheric sounds heard in

different directions; the *Cuando Juan y Tula fueron a Siringa* episode plays a lot with the music and sound effects, which are enormously expressive; and there is even more depth and variety of scenes in *Las aventuras de Tintín*, if possible, based on the characters' movement, and you can even see them play their role in audiovisual format.

5. Creative processes. Panel of experts

5.1 Pre-production. The creation of fiction works

The ideas and themes chosen are not eminently commercial, according to the professionals: 'we do not do dystopias. That's a different type of product. If public radio doesn't do classical works, nobody is going to do them' (Aguilera, 2024). The people in charge of *Ficción Sonora* try to bring the classics to the audience, as in the broadcast of the work *El Quijote del siglo XXI* (2015), which they painstakingly adapted and used the sound language to reach the audience who wanted to access it in a different way.

The script is one of the cores in this creation phase, which is very carefully crafted at the station in terms of the careful use of technical and literary elements. In the golden age, this was done on a daily or weekly basis, as we see in this sample of *Sobremesa en color*, a programme hosted by José Luis Pécker, which included the dramatic section 'Historias de un policía', written by the scriptwriter Joaquín Alarcón Rubio.

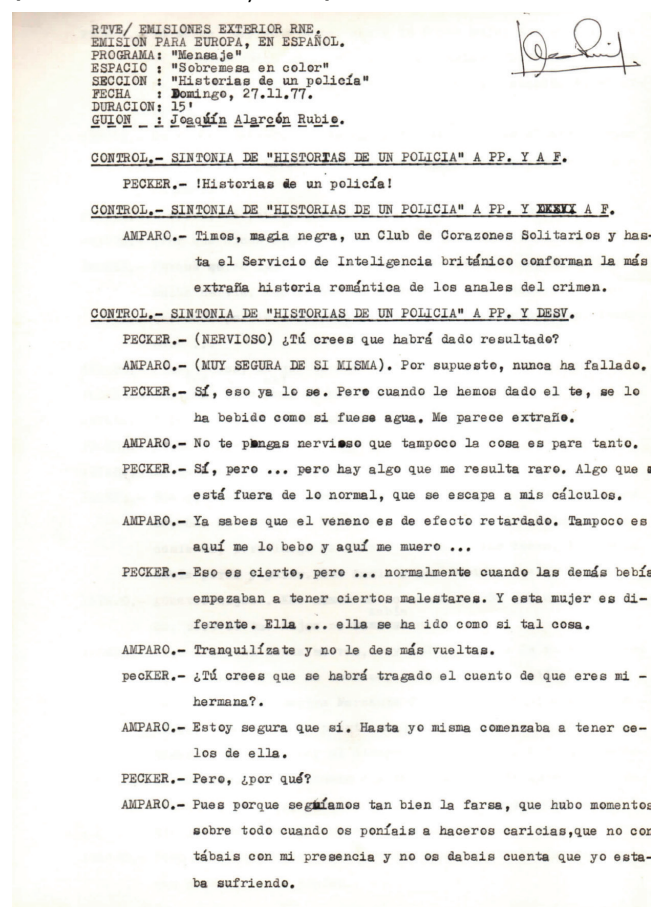
In the golden age, there was a prior work of choosing scripts and assigning a certain producer, with a cast of actors who fit the roles they were playing (*Documentos RNE*, 2014). When the genre started declining, the soul and effort of the station's professionals are what kept it alive:

'Hours of writing, of struggling so that the text could give what it hadn't had. The issue was not what we wanted to achieve but what could be done. But it all came out great, really great at times. The stories by Carlos Faraco and Fernando Luna, by Juan Ignacio Francia and Jesús Beltrán, and my own ones, I hope, emanated magic; they were powerful and overcame any technical shortcomings' (Volpini, 2024).

Nowadays, Alfonso Latorre, the scriptwriter for RNE's *Ficción Sonora*, is a witness to and mastermind of the change and evolution of the scripts in this type of production, which are closer to TV series and films:

'I use film and TV techniques to write sound fiction. I start with storyboards and treatments, and I make versions of them until I am confident of the structure. Then I move on to the script itself, and I also make successive versions of it. I don't know if the techniques used in the past were very different, but I get the impression that they focused more on theatre than on film when writing them. When I organise and write, I think cinematographically; I visualise the scenes in my

Figure 2. Image of a script from 'Historias de un policía' (Sobremesa en color, 1977)



Source: Personal archive of Joaquín Alarcón (2024).

head and, based on that, I try to find a way so that these scenes, only with the help of sound, can also be recreated in the listener's mind. We can say that I use a game of transcoding: mental image – sound – mental image' (Latorre, 2024).

5.2 Production and post-production. Recording live

In the recording process, there is a perfect yet delicate coordination between the scriptwriters and the production team, the actors' director and the actors themselves. In this section, we discuss production and post-production, given that they are parallel processes in *Ficción Sonora*.

5.2.1 Directing actors. Performance

In the golden age, radio theatre or radio dramas were broadcast frequently. Scripts for drama shows, in programmes like the one we presented in the section above, were made live, and the actors themselves, in conjunction with the scriptwriters and programme hosts, corrected them along the way. The Actors Roster disappeared in the 1990s, which made the recording and production of works with few resources trickier.

'On Radio 3, from 1979 until 1982, when its director Eduardo García Matilla submitted *Temas de la Pasión*, a production by the broadcaster recorded with the Actors Roster, to the Italy Prize, we had rare access to the Roster and not much more after that date. Still, they were wonderful times in which imagination, enthusiasm and dedication made up for the lack of means' (Volpini, 2024).

Juan Suárez, the actor, sound editor and director and host of the programme *La libélula*, believes that there has been a change in dramatization compared to the golden age, in which the tendency is towards 'naturalism, although I think that at times this is confused with a kind of sloppiness'. Ana Alonso used to be an actress in *Ficción Sonora* and is now the director of actors at Cadena SER and the head of the SER Podcast; she believes that it was 'very different work to that of the Cadena SER fictions because it was worked on before the show, rehearsed thoroughly in several sessions and all carefully measured, so the live show was very gratifying' (Alonso, 2024).

Since the 2000s, Benigno Moreno and Mayca Aguilera have directed the actors and produced the shows; they believe that in both *Ficción Sonora* and other dramas on the station, the sound language is enhanced and the actors are asked 'to forget about the microphone and just act'. They use pocket microphones so that the actors move bearing in mind the dance of microphones. Dubbers and theatre people have to change the way they act: not speaking loudly as in the theatre and without mannerisms as in dubbing. In the opinion of the director of *Ficción Sonora*, the important thing is knowing how to act and then adapting to the medium, using the radio language, vocalising and performing in front of the microphone as the actors they are, great professionals, because 'when the actor is an actor, there is a learning process and they end up understanding the mechanism; it's just acting' (Moreno, 2024).

Suárez (2024) believes that the existence of an Actors Roster would clearly improve the frequency and number of fictions on the station, given that in addition to the actors hired for these stories, the RNE staff perform other functions, and their contribution to the fictions is 'just for the fun of it'. It is not their main job, but they voluntarily participate in these works while working on other places on the radio station.

'Retired colleagues do it just for the fun of it, because they like to perform and want to continue. Other colleagues like Juan Suárez, Amaya Prieto, Julio Valverde and Ricardo Peralta, who work for the station, occasionally get some kind of bonus or compensation, but they do it basically because they like it. All the professional actors earn money with the contracts stipulated by RTVE which are made for people from outside the station' (Aguilera, 2024).

5.2.2 Prior to the live show

Mayca Aguilera and Benigno Moreno work closely with the scriptwriter Alfonso Latorre before and during the rehearsals with the actors, so that once the script is written, they make any changes needed, using their own codes (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. Script for *Las aventuras de Tintín* with technical notes (*Ficción Sonora*)

ESCENA: MICROS: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Las aventuras de Tintín
Los cigarros del faraón / El Loto Azul

CONTROL: 101 MÚSICA CABECERA

LOC: 1931, en la cubierta del lujoso crucero Epomeo, que navega por el mar Mediterráneo hacia las costas de Egipto.

AMBIENTE MAR Y MOTOR CRUCERO.

MILÚ LADRA, SE AGITA 0:43

3 TINTÍN: Sí, amigo Milú, mañana haremos escala en Port Said.

MILÚ LADRA CONTENTO

3 TINTÍN: (RÍE) Nos queda mucho trecho: el canal de Suez, el mar Rojo, escala en Adén y, de ahí, a Bombay.

6 MILÚ: (MOHÍN CURIOSO)

3 TINTÍN: Sí, en Bombay, otra escala. Y en Ceilán, Singapur y Hong Kong, hasta Shanghai, fin de viaje.

6 MILÚ: (LLORIQUEO)

3 TINTÍN: ¡Anda, anda! No es para tanto. ¡Será emocionante!

EN F. 201 FX VIENTO + PAPEL VOLANDO. CAMBIO MUS. 0:07

2 FILEMÓN: (LEJOS) ¡Deténganlo! ¡Deténganlo, por Dios!

3 TINTÍN: (DESCONCERTADO) ¿Detener a quién? ¿A qué?

2 FILEMÓN: ¡Ese pergamino que vuela... el papiro de Kih-Oskh!

MILÚ LADRA NERVIOSO. 0:15

3 TINTÍN: ¡Demasiado tarde, ha caído al agua!

2 FILEMÓN: (DESESPERADO) ¡No! ¡No puedo perderlo!

301 FX RUIDOS. AMB. MUS

3 TINTÍN: (FORCEJEA) Pero, ¿adónde va?

2 FILEMÓN: (FORCEJEA) ¡Deje que salte a por él!

3 TINTÍN: ¡No sea loco! ¿No ve que es peligrosísimo?

Las aventuras de Tintín – Los cigarros del faraón / El Loto Azul – Adaptado por Alfonso Latorre (4ª versión) 1/87

Source: Moreno and Aguilera (2024).

In *Las aventuras de Tintín*, a work we have used as a sound reference, there are 250 cuts performed live, which are measured down to the second and rehearsed with the actors. It is a laborious process that requires previous assembly and disassembly to insert the cuts live.

'Things are changed in the text until the end. We record the words with the actors, which is not just the first time they read it together or the reading used to define the characters' voices. There is a very important phase, which is the word recording on which we do the editing. We have to put all this together with a high, complex quality, and later we have to break it down into fragments, which will be interwoven with the live performances' (Aguilera, 2024).

5.2.3 Production, recording

The studio Teatro 2 was renovated in 2021 to make RNE's sound fictions.

'It's a studio that's like a cube; it's nested within the building's structure. No wall touches anything else and it's really spacious, with a table on wheels which is where we record other programmes like *Documentos*, but it can be moved and taken away when we record the fiction. We move the microphones and lecterns as needed' (Aguilera, 2024).

There are two chambers in the studio: the reverberating chamber, which simulates the sound of people inside places like a church or a cave, and the anechoic chamber,³ 'where the effects from manipulating objects are recorded', in addition to stairs with a wooden and marble part to simulate the sounds of going up and down' (Aguilera, 2024).

According to the people in charge of *Ficción Sonora*, they record with one microphone per actor, not like in the past where the microphone was placed in the centre and the actors moved around the space to create the different scenes.

When recording after the rehearsals, the actors have to coordinate under the direction of the technical team: 'they have to know when to come up to and leave the microphone, when to project their voice, that type of thing which is decided in

the rehearsals and is later reflected in the live show' (Suárez, 2024).

In recorded productions, Mayca Aguilera (2024) claims that 'you have to describe where they are, the scene they're in, the action, the noise, and you put them in the situation to project, or the movement they have to make to recreate an action, so the performance is much fresher and stands out more'.

5.2.4. Post-production

Post-production has changed a lot over the years since tape recorders were used, equipment become digitalised, computers and binaural system editing started being used. The *Ficción Sonora* team says that what is interesting about all these techniques is the 'narrative shift', given that if they don't make sense narratively, they should not be used. For example, in *El Monte de las Ánimas*, it made sense to use them 'because of the game with ghosts, its gloomy atmosphere and to simulate different spaces' (Aguilera, 2024).

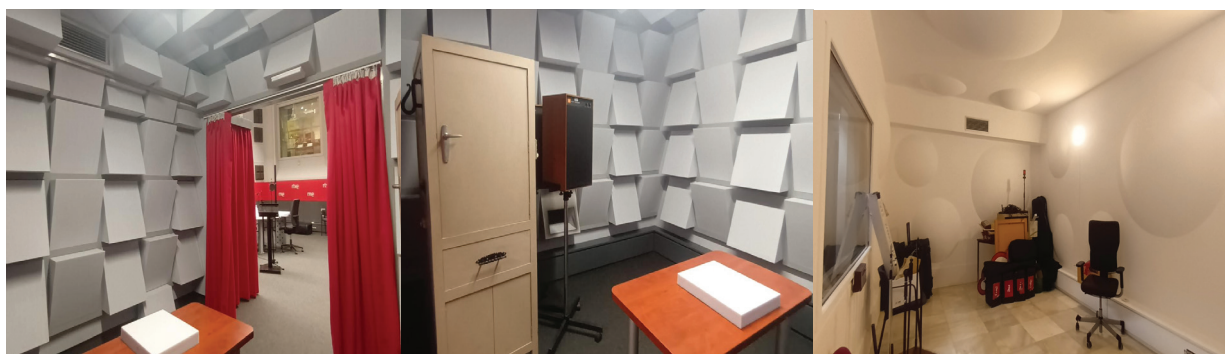
Another factor of interest for post-production is the soundscapes used in live and recorded shows, which are the hallmarks of *Ficción Sonora*. For example, in *Los Santos Inocentes* (2021), these soundscapes were recorded on a farm because 'the sonority and reverberation is different and we preferred not to use canned effects because they fit the action

Figure 4. Theatre 2 studio (*Ficción Sonora*)



Source: Aguilera and RTVE (2024).

Figure 5. Anechoic chamber and reverberating chamber in Theatre 2 (*Ficción Sonora*)



Source: Aguilera (2024).

Figure 6. Control room where the binaural sound is edited and processed

Source: Aguilera (2024).

and sound better' (Moreno, 2024). The figure of the noisemaker continues to exist in some way at RNE, but not live, in the recordings to create Foley sound effects, a concept coined for the first time in 1920 in film referring to a technique in which real sounds are recorded in a studio to generate sounds that imitate reality (Arias Larrea, 2019, p. 6).

The control is elevated and the studio is on the ground floor. It is equipped for 5.1 recording with a multitrack editor called SADiE, which is later processed binaurally. Regarding binaural sound, 'we record the words only, we record on tracks and without scenes so that we can edit them ourselves' (Moreno, 2024). Aguilera highlights the number of panoramic scenes and fine, varied movements in the works that are later edited. Sometimes they prefer to record in close-up and vary them.

5.3 The future, according to the experts

The future of fiction is guaranteed because of its professionals' good work, as noted by Federico Volpini (2024): 'Today Juan Suárez often and Isabel Ruiz Lara occasionally participate in audio drama on Radio 3, although the main programme, which is infrequent and disseminated over time, is *Ficción Sonora*. They are marginal shows which hardly affect the continuity of the programming.'

The advent of podcasting has also fostered the revival of the genre, given that, according to Suárez (2024), 'there is a stronger and stronger commitment to sound fiction, and it is promoted more in-house, and in fact more programmes contain some fiction contents or brief pieces to support their own contents'. Latorre (2024) points to the overabundance of podcasts and platforms that have filled with products 'many of them irrelevant, of questionable interest and low economic yields'. Aguilera and Moreno concur, as they believe that the commercial aspect is prioritised, with scripts that are not designed for audio, but that they manage to adapt thanks to knowledge of the sound language and painstaking work with professionals from other sectors, who allow themselves to be guided by the expertise of the station's professionals.

Conclusions

From the historical standpoint, the fiction that RNE has made stands out for its excellent adaptations of classic works and a team of professionals that never gave up in their determination to create high quality productions, even when the genre was in decline. During the golden age, the Actors Roster stood out for their live performances with works that are still conserved in the RNE Archive. The works analysed in the case study show us that RNE productions had a style of their own and have evolved with the new technologies, which they use conscientiously and always with a narrative sense. The themes chosen over time show that they have been targeted at minority audiences, more interested in culture than in fads or commercial products.

As fiction stopped being part of the programming line-ups, the imagination and ingenuity of the RNE professionals made up for the lack of means, as found in the production processes. As happens today, even though there is keener interest in the genre now, the team of professionals in charge of dramas is quite small, and they have to draw on outside professionals, volunteerism from their colleagues who have other jobs at the station and perform or collaborate occasionally and sometimes without pay, and funding from foundations and other private organisations. The production processes reaffirm the fact that the station's good work is due to the efforts of its professionals, oftentimes out of vocation rather than for pay. We find cinematographic techniques in script creation, but the station prioritises the sound language, an aspect that can be recognised in the stories of its fictions, which are based more on dialogue and action. In this sense, we can detect a transformation, and even though the essence of sound is never lost, we do find an interest in creating a story in which both the script and the use of techniques like binaural technology create an immersive effect in listeners. This technological and narrative evolution is the outcome of greater complexity of the characters and plots and the way the sound editing is played with by experimenting with the scenes, their depth and dynamism.

The fact that many current productions were created to be consumed as podcasts has also changed the way they are produced and the stories themselves, given that live sound fictions have a certain structure and narrative, which differ from those of the binaural pieces or audio series that the station has been producing since 2022. RNE is beginning to develop series similar to those on other platforms, like *El Hackeo*, a briefer, serialised original audio series with a narrative structure similar to that of other platforms, which seeks to end each episode with a *cliffhanger*, a narrative resource that is used in audiovisual series which consists of creating a great deal of dramatic tension that is interrupted and then resolved in the next episode.

According to its professionals, the advent of podcasting has been beneficial in reviving the genre with the video podcast of *Ficción Sonora*, even though it remains to be seen whether the station commits to the genre by earmarking more human and technical resources to this department in the future. Even though the *Ficción Sonora* professionals believe that the overabundance and quest for commercialism may jeopardise quality, the shift in trend has been far from damaging and has brought the genre to younger audiences, with productions in which internationally renowned audio platforms and producers are working. The evolution of the genre in terms of quantity and quality can be perceived in the public station, and even though it does not have the resources it needs, the *Ficción Sonora* section of the RNE Audio platform houses 115 productions in the guise of podcasts on the date this article is being written, which indicates that the genre is more vital than ever and that audiences are interested in it.

The public radio station plays a crucial role in Spain because it has committed to the genre and has constantly experimented with it over time, even when no fiction was being produced in any radio station or broadcaster. On the other hand, the application of technological innovation with binaural sound, sound narrative with an immersive function and live performances are the hallmarks of RNE's audio dramas. The quest for quality in the scripts, adaptations, the creation of soundscapes and Foley sound effects, which is later used in live shows, comprise a working methodology that is only used by public radio. This entails an economic and human effort that other private stations and platforms cannot afford, despite the fact that there is no human team to do this work permanently or a department with more professionals.

Regarding possible lines of research, the number and variety of pieces analysed could be enlarged to further study the different phases. Furthermore, audio series and more recent productions by the station could also be added, and the number of professionals who have participated in the different periods could be expanded.

Notes

1. This technique consists of listening carefully and analytically pausing the sound every few seconds to observe both the language (who is speaking, what are they saying, where and to whom are they saying it) and how the audio is processed, how the elements of the narrative are composed, reactions as a listener and connections that are drawn and how the different sound elements are used to ascertain its meaning.
2. Binaural sound creates a sense of 3D sound in listeners, similar to what happens when they are physically located in the same place as the sound source.
3. An anechoic chamber is a room designed to absorb the reflections of soundwaves or electromagnetic waves and is insulated from any source of outside noise.

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