

Critical book review

MEDINA, M. (coord.) *Series de televisión. El caso de "Médico de familia", "Cuéntame cómo pasó" y "Los Serrano"*.

Madrid: Ediciones Internacionales Universitarias, 2008, 200 pages.

ISBN: 978-987-601-028-3.

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Production and reception of family television series

In spite of the fluctuations characterising the television market, locally produced fictional series remain among the favourite options of audiences. However, their critical prestige is minimal and they are ignored both by detractors of the medium (who prefer to occupy themselves with other genres, such as the news and reality shows) as well as its advocates (who choose to deal with more prestigious, sophisticated products, such as North American fictional series). But this curious critical invisibility has a relevant exception in approaches focusing on economic and creative aspects, an aspect accredited by publications such as *La ficción televisiva popular* by Mario García de Castro (Gedisa, 2002), *¿Qué es eso del formato?* by Glòria Saló (Gedisa, 2003) and *La gestión de la creatividad en televisión: El caso de Globomedia* by Jaime Bardají and Santiago Gómez Amigo (EUNSA, 2004). This critical tendency is continued by a new publication that, although it avoids an in-depth analysis of the cultural repercussions of local series, at least resolutely continues to claim their force as a commercial product and as the central core of the audiovisual industry in Spain at a time when doubts have been raised as to the real use of protectionist measures and subsidies for the cinema, in contrast increasingly out on the margin. In this way, the study of the circumstances surrounding the creation, production, programming, commercial exploitation and reception of Spanish series is the main object of the collective work *Series de televisión. El caso de "Médico de familia", "Cuéntame cómo pasó" y "Los Serrano"*. As indicated by the title, the authors have focused on three series of notable popularity since private television arrived in Spain which, in turn, belong to one of the favourite genres of the medium, family series. The coordinator of the publication is Mercedes Medina, lecturer in the structure of audiovisual communication and audiovisual business at the Communication Faculty of the Universidad de Navarra. Medina has focused her research on the economic aspects regarding the creation and management of audiovisual content and has previously published the monographs

Calidad y contenidos audiovisuales (2006), *Estructura y Gestión de Empresas Audiovisuales* (2005), *European Television Production: Pluralism and Concentration* (2004) and *Valoración publicitaria de los programas de televisión* (1998). She has also been the director for the research project "Valors empresarials i temàtics en les sèries familiars de televisió a Espanya" (Business and thematic values in family television series in Spain), resulting in the book *Series de televisión. El caso de "Médico de familia", "Cuéntame cómo pasó" y "Los Serrano"*.

The fact that the publication originated as a research project is immediately evident in its strongly cohesive structure in which the different authors (from the Universidad de Navarra, the Universidad Católica San Antonio de Murcia and the Universitat Sant Pau-CEU) are concerned with the different areas of analysis without almost any interference between them throughout the six chapters that go to make up the book and also in the fact that, although they are not distributed as such, they could be catalogued into those focusing on economic foundations (M. Herrero/M. Medina), those concerning the circumstances of creation (P. Diego and A. Pardo/R. Gutiérrez) and those focusing on the reception of programmes from a qualitative and quantitative point of view (J. A. Cortés/M. Grandío). In the first, Mónica Herrero deals with the general economic foundations of the television products of family entertainment, the content of which, based on identification between fiction and everyday reality of the viewers, favours long life cycles, the repeated consumption of episodes and a constant popularity even after the programme has been taken off. The next chapter, written by Patricia Diego and Alejandro Pardo, analyses the development of the creation and production of the three programmes analysed. The chapter, the most outstanding contribution of the publication as a whole, is characterised by the wealth of information provided concerning the elements that condition the production of fiction programmes, such as contracts between production companies and channels, the distribution of tasks among the different teams and the importance of the actors as an essential economic (and not

just creative) element. The chapter by José Ángel Cortés concentrates on the programming aspects of family series, including elements such as their duration and narrative structure, and the audience, broken down into demographic profiles, achieved when each programme was originally aired.

Mercedes Medina also uses audience data to show, in the fourth chapter, the economic returns resulting from the series, including advertising revenue, agreements with brands to include products in the fiction of series and international sales. The chapter by María del Mar Grandío is an ethnographic study of reception analysing the opinions and impressions of regular viewers of the two most recent series, *Los Serrano* and *Cuéntame cómo pasó*, concluding that humour and nostalgia are, respectively, the fundamental elements in their audience appeal, above the realism in representing the family situations. The last chapter, by Ruth Gutiérrez, moves away from the economic approach that characterises the book as a whole to focus on a narrative analysis of the three series from the point of view of the way (false according to the author) in which the reality of the family is represented, where the most extreme case is that of *Los Serrano*, resulting in a denaturalisation of similarity to favour the comic effect.

Series de televisión. El caso de "Médico de familia", "Cuéntame cómo pasó" y "Los Serrano" takes three extraordinarily popular series as its object of study, with the security of these being fictional programmes produced locally with the highest audience ratings and therefore from which most economic benefit has been reaped. However, the book can be criticised for a notable lack of multidisciplinary approach with which it is presented to the reader, its lack of a cultural analysis of the programmes that takes into account, for example, the social and psychological problems of the series analysed, their relation to the changes undergone by Spanish society or their position in developing TV narrative in Spain. In this way, the link between the three series, their nature as a family product with regard to content, appears, to some degree, as a trivial element that has not really been taken advantage of from an analytical point of view. But this missed opportunity does not ultimately obscure the success of this interesting contribution to the development of television studies in Spain, which has already been translated into English under the title *Creating, producing and selling TV shows: The case of the most popular dramedies in Spain* (Formal Press, 2008).

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