

# Another approximation to the Spanish series *Cuéntame cómo pasó*: the special episodes

## *Outra abordagem à série espanhola Cuéntame cómo pasó: os episódios especiais*

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### ABSTRACT

The television series *Cuéntame cómo pasó* (2001-) employs both fiction and a documentary approach to create a telling portrait of the final years of the Franco dictatorship in Spain and the transition of the country to Democracy through a protagonist family named Los Alcántara (The Alcántaras). From the more than 250 broadcasted episodes the object of analysis in this article is the episodes that are considered as special, those which investigate the cultural meaning of the era through the universe created in the series. This focus enables us to understand how the dramatic force of *Cuéntame cómo pasó* permits the creation of diverse and individual episodes, thanks to the continuous self-referential dramatic games at play.

**Keywords:** Television, Spanish fiction, history, documentary, *Cuéntame cómo pasó*

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### RESUMO

A série de televisão *Cuéntame cómo pasó* (2001-) emprega as abordagens da ficção e do documentário para criar um retrato revelador dos últimos anos da ditadura de Franco na Espanha e a transição do país para a Democracia por meio de uma família protagonista, chamada os Alcántara. A partir de mais de 250 episódios transmitidos, o objeto da análise nesse artigo são os episódios que são considerados especiais, aqueles que investigam o significado da época por meio do universo criado na série. Esse foco permite entender como a força dramática de *Cuéntame cómo pasó* possibilita a criação de diversos episódios individuais, graças aos contínuos jogos autorreferenciais.

**Palavras-chave:** Televisão, ficção espanhola, história, documentário, *Cuéntame cómo pasó*



## INTRODUCTION

**I**N A TELEVISION context, the term special refers to an episode that is monographically dedicated to a determined event. In the case of the successful Spanish series *Cuéntame cómo pasó* (2001-), the specials are those episodes that are distinct from the solely fictional ones due to them having their own format. If the series is the great narration of the Spanish Transition to Democracy (Palacio, 2012: 368) – having been adapted to Italy as *Raccontami* (2006-2008) or to Portugal as *Conta-me como foi* (2007-2011), among others –, these episodes function as self-sufficient entities and also possess a narrative construction that varies depending on the topic presented helping to consolidate the fiction screened. Despite the many differences that exist between them, all of the specials stem from the universe of the protagonist family, the Alcántaras<sup>1</sup>, turning fiction into the story line and part of its structure. The purely fictional episodes provide the perfect dramatic impetus to construct a new narrative form that uses documentary like reference and fiction as a continuation of the storyline of the series.

<sup>1</sup> The nuclear family is composed of Antonio (the father), Mercedes (the mother), Pablo (the eldest son), Inés (the eldest daughter), Carlos (the youngest son and the one who tell us the story of his family), María (the youngest daughter) and Herminia (the grandmother).

<sup>2</sup> Hereafter and throughout the duration of the article these episodes will be referred to in the noun form, as special(s) and their citations will be abbreviated to S for season and E for episode.

Up to the fourteenth season of *Cuéntame cómo pasó* (2001-), more than fifteen special episodes had been broadcasted<sup>2</sup>. Some of them are closer to the making of format, others to that of historical documentary, and those which offer a summary of previously broadcasted seasons. If the editorial line of the series is shown to be dramatically defined and delimited by the history of Spain and the story of the Alcántara family, in these special episodes there is not a single path or a marked objective. The object of study is hybrid in form, not uniform and, because of its diversity, is able to give a new interpretation of the work as a whole.

In this article, the focus is specifically on the analysis of the specials “Háblame de ti” (S1, E33, 2002), “El comienzo del fin (S7, E113, 2005), “Y después de Franco, ¿qué?” (S9, E152, 2007), additionally it covers the rest of the specials broadcasted throughout more than 250 episodes. For this purpose, the reflection upon verisimilitude in the analysis of television stories that arise from nostalgia and that combine non-fiction with fictional narrative techniques through an artefactual design will be taken into account.

## PRINCIPAL VOICES

“Háblame de ti” (S1, E33, 2002) is the last episode of the leading first season of *Cuéntame cómo pasó* (2001-), defined as a making of program, the special is hosted by the renowned Spanish journalist Victoria Prego. In

the opening of the series, both the image and name of the journalist appear integrated with the rest of the cast as if she were a fictional character. From that moment, Victoria Prego enters the universe of *Cuéntame cómo pasó* (2001-), and from that vantage point talks about the Alcántara family and the Spain of that era. Her voice, diegetic and extra-diegetic, substitutes the characteristic voice-over of Carlos Alcántara. The voice of the narrator is one of the identifying signs of *Cuéntame cómo pasó* (2001-), as the voice corresponds to the adult character of Carlos Alcántara in the fictional episodes, performed by actor Carlos Hipólito. Its function is to structure the narration and to connect the past with the present. Through his voice, Carlos Alcántara adult is also able to establish a dramatic link between the historical fiction and television contents. His memory pretends to be the memory of the country and is created on one hand through the recollection of childhood and on other on mediated memory. Carlos Alcántara represents the voice of the Spanish generation that lived the last years of Franco dictatorship and the beginning of democracy, in such a way that empathy is assured. Furthermore the series undertakes a pedagogical role telling a nostalgic version of the Spanish recent history to the audience who did not know how the country was. By employing Prego's voice in this way, the symbolic status of the journalist as a historical character – and what she will tell us in the episode as the narrator – is evident from the first minutes. This allows us to think about the existence, as stated by Rueda Laffond and Coronado Ruiz (2009: 120), of a possible sequel associated to the historical documentary series *La Transición* (1995)<sup>3</sup>. In this relevant television production of thirteen episodes of 45 minutes each produced by the public channel TVE, the Victoria Prego's voice describes the political changes happened in Spain during the end of Francoism until 1977, that means during the period known as La Transición. The same as *Cuéntame cómo pasó* (2001-), the documentary series became a TV hit in terms of acceptance and share audience inviting its audience to understand recent history.

In “Háblame de ti” (S1, E33, 2002), the voice-over of the journalist positions itself at a similar narrative level as that found in the documentary, explaining what Spain was like at the end of the nineteen sixties. In this special episode, the Alcántara family continue to be the protagonists but from another perspective. Prego turns the family into an object of historical analysis and adapts her documentary work to the popular frame of the series through the formulation of two dramatic differentiated planes; on the one hand, the representation of different events and historical landmarks, and on the other, a type of didactic documentary. Frontiers and limits between fictional and documentary models

<sup>3</sup> *The Transition* – written by Victoria Prego, and which later evolved into the book *Así se hizo la Transición* (Plaza y Janés, 1996) – is a reference to a series of thirteen episodes that tells the story of the political evolution of Spain from 1973 to 1977.

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disappear and the resulting narrative becomes realistic as the viewer is deeply steeped into an atmosphere of marginal television formulas that are integrated in what Marnie Hughes-Warrington defines as the post-documentary age. As the author argues is the belief that the movement of new technologies, filmic techniques and situational and textual cues both in and out of documentary making have blurred its boundaries and undetermined its status (Hughes-Warrington, 2007: 133).

In this episode, a setting that includes clips from the series, interviews with actors and directors, images of NO-DO<sup>4</sup> (*Noticiarios y Documentales*) and the archive of Televisión Española, successfully establish a link between the Alcántara family and the emblematic image of the journalist, who is able to provide a critical analysis and historical rigor to the referenced period. Little by little, a personal relationship springs forth between the concept of the series – the story, spaces, and characters – and the image of Victoria Prego, until her emotional involvement is explicit and absolute. In an attempt to give a dramatic effect, Prego ends up televisually integrated in the universe of the Alcántara family. As if she was one more neighbor from San Genaro, the journalist is seen looking out the balcony of the family house, contemplating the landscape from the Azor (Franco's yacht) while Franco records her on a Super-8 camera in some of the locations in which the series is shot such as the Kiosk of Cervan, having a beer in the Bodega de Tinín or strolling around the streets of the San Genaro neighborhood while she runs into actors and directors that she then interviews. If her documentary work is a “global chronicle of the political transition process with personal testimonies from those who participated in it” (Prego, 1996: 12), her appearance in the series confirms the fact that *Cuéntame cómo pasó* (2001-) endeavours to be an emotional chronicle of this historical process. In other words, this series could be the B-side of the documentary that means another form to spark the idea that the Spanish transition was an exemplary historical process. According to William Guynn, the narrator cannot avoid situating the act of narration in time in relation to the events he recounts (2006: 63). If we look at this, becoming the voice of the Transition, the appearance of the journalist in *Cuéntame cómo pasó* (2001-) provides a new narrative status in which, and within an intellectualization process, the historical reality represented plays a determinant role, establishing a strong and direct link between the fictional story of the Alcántaras and the documentary series *La Transición* (1995). Supported by Victoria Prego, *Cuéntame cómo pasó* (2001-) itself becomes an emblem, a new voice in television for the recent history of Spain that is accepted as the new voice of popular memory.

<sup>4</sup> A series of cinema propaganda created in Spain during Franco dictatorship.

The special “Háblame de ti” (S1, E33, 2002) shows for the first time the inner workings and construction of the series – digital effects, false doors, lights, chroma (color attributes) – and a body of opinion is created regarding the significance and the transcendence of the series from its construction to the final, produced version. Through a theatrical game, Victoria Prego presents a frame where some static characters come to life with a voice and move within the scene from the moment she mentions them. Prego’s voice announces the action when she delivers the following phrase: “A family that is about to make their dream come true, to see the sea.” Immediately, the Alcántaras, like automatons, start to interpret their sequence just as they did in the fictional episode “A la orilla de los sueños” (S1, E32, 2002). Little by little the blue of the chroma leads to a black and white background where we see the protagonists boarding a train that will take them to Benidorm. Looking through the window, the dialogue and action is exactly what the audience remembers having seen and heard in the fictional episode but, this time, the family will interact with Victoria Prego, saying goodbye to her when the train starts up, and even taking her picture as a memento. This kind of audiovisual representation turns into a theatrical play in which the main characters become self-consciousness. The Alcántaras understand that they are the historical fiction’s driver of *Cuéntame cómo pasó* (2001-) and, at the same time, identify Victoria Prego as an authoritative voice of the story of Spain, like the most of the audience do. While they are breaking this emotional fourth wall, Prego becomes an active element for the narration and characters – which evokes Pirandello’s work, *Six characters in search of an author* – thus they acquire historical meaning and consistency thanks to her presence. Metaphorically, by marking the beginning of their actions, the journalist becomes their author, a mediatic figure that is able to corroborate their existence and give life to them as true characters by confirming with them, that their historical reality existed and, more importantly, will keep on existing. Her omnipresence is fulfilled as the narrator who knows the history of both Spain and the story of the Alcántaras, and the expressed idea – “...Spain has changed a lot” – feeds a nostalgic account in which past and present confront each other using fictional techniques disguised as a documentary.

The Spain that is here described has nothing to do, that is more than evident, with the current Spain. The Spain described in this series is a Spain that many young people are now discovering, and one that their elders perfectly remember and recognize. That is why they participate and identify themselves so well with the adventures of the characters in the series *Cuéntame cómo pasó*. That is, in my opinion, one of the key factors for the success of this series<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> Fragment of sequence 31 narrated by Victoria Prego in the episode “Háblame de ti” (S1, E33, 2002).

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On the one hand day-to-day life serves as the best asset for credibility, intimacy and closeness. Apart from reminding us of the economic situation of a middle-class Spanish family, the attitude of political leaders or the situation of women in the labor market, Prego's discourse recalls those thoughts that subconsciously remain in the collective memory through the physical senses. Her narrative tries to bring back sounds such as the tapping spiked batons of the night watchman, or the fork whisking an egg on a ceramic plate "varnished in white with blue edges", and also the smell of fried sardines or veal chops which Prego specifies "talks inevitably of a recently cashed paycheck."

On the other hand, the interviews she carries out throughout the special stem from a pursuit of empathy and the creation of a new method of identification. In a representation game where 'real and authentic characters' are referred to, Victoria Prego talks with the main character Antonio Alcántara and at the same time with the actor Imanol Arias, who plays Antonio Alcántara, without us knowing, at times, which is which. Motivated by the memory and by the effort of situating the Alcántaras as the reference of a family model, she is led to ask the actor: "Are you your father?" The different interviews with actors who perform Alcántara family such as Ana Duato, María Galiana, Pablo Rivero, Irene Visedo and Ricardo Gómez maintain this game between the reality of characters and actors, in a continuous process that merges the realism of the dramatic fiction and that of the documentary. This is why the significance of this special goes further than just breaking the fourth wall of television. This amalgamation of situations and worlds produces a metaphorical and transcendent meaning in the dialogue between reality and fiction, where there is a bid for the spectacular aspect in the form of promo-docs (Hughes-Warrington, 2007: 133) causing *Cuéntame cómo pasó* (2001-) to become the greatly acclaimed television story of historical fiction, and Victoria Prego, the mother of the documentary that validates the content and grants veracity to the Alcántara family.

The next voice in a special episode is that of Ricardo Gómez. He is the actor who plays the fictional character of Carlos Alcántara as a child. In the third season, "Cuéntame cómo se hace" (S3, E60, 2003) introduces itself as a new making of episode starring the child actor according to the idea what Barthes called the 'grain of the voice' (1991) through a new speaking style. This episode, directed by Ignacio Mercero, has a structure that temporally plays with the present and past while the fiction of the series and the day-to-day of the filming interact without any distinction. This way, the references of Ricardo Gómez to "my mother", "my father", later to refer to the actors as "Ana" or "Imanol", occur between concepts such as "Italian table" or "chroma". The clips from the series

help the character of Carlos as a child to summarize the three broadcasted seasons while he explains how some sequences were technically achieved. The desire of revealing “how it is made” brings the narration to a psychotropic state where the child actor presents Carlos Hipólito – the actor who performs the voice-over of Carlos as an adult – and who he introduces as “me as an adult”, to later say “not me because I am not Carlos... what a mess”. The usage of the “old fashioned” terms: *dabuten/cool*, *rollo/drag*, *currar/work* or *mazo/strong* attempts to establish a dialectic distance between the character of Carlos and Ricardo, but confusion reigns. What is shown in this episode does not differ too much from that shown by Victoria Prego in terms of the making of the series. In contrast to this, the historical reflection – or more like an asseveration – that was obtained in “Háblame de ti” (S1, E33, 2002), completely disappears in “Cuéntame cómo se hace” (S3, E60, 2003), just as any other attempts to enquire into the cultural meaning of the series do.

The making of format appears two more times, in episodes “Cinco y acción” (S5, E87, 2004) and “Pasen y vean” (S8, E136, 2007). Fragmentation, dispersion and repetition are part of these episodes that look for a model in “Háblame de ti” (S1, E33, 2002) and in “Cuéntame cómo se hace” (S3, E60, 2003), a special episode format from where small variations can be made. That is why explanations on how dreams work in the series, how to work with chroma, how do children study during the filming, who is their tutor or the comments of the actors Tony Leblanc, Imanol Arias or Ana Duato, are very similar, even repetitive. The most important change is found in the narrative instance. In “Cinco y acción” (S5, E87, 2004) as well as in “Pasen y vean” (S8, E136, 2007), it is the voice of the actor Carlos Hipólito which guides us through a narrative that becomes, on occasions, unreal when he indistinctly alternates his vision, between that of the character and that of the narrator, in and out of the story. The peculiar voice sees its ontology altered within the universe of the series, creating a narrative where the statute of reality encountered in the fiction, and its discourse of authenticity, disappears, recalling Hughes-Warrington’s idea of “documentary-like” (2007: 133). The dominant codes of representation vary and this style of strategy affects the historical continuity of *Cuéntame cómo pasó* (2001-) and its sense of temporality. “Pasen y vean” (S8, E136, 2007) reinforces this mechanism. A variable voice-over takes the narrative along new hybrid paths that are difficult to define. This episode reveals the work of each of the departments involved in filming – repeating, one more time, the importance of wardrobe, the documentation, the image of the trainer or coach, the sound, the dream world of the characters – it also shows the behind the scenes work of the artistic lectures and techniques of the



professionals in the series. However if we refer to something in this special, it is its explicit and defiant search for the relation between the series and a historical memory that, from the story, is defined as “loyal and true”. This is better illustrated through impactful phrases such as to obtain a “historical memory” or “reality seems to be expressively for *Cuéntame*, and not that *Cuéntame* has been adapted”. This can be considered as a state of the self-reflexive crisis of representation that bear a complex relation to history. As Linda Williams (2005: 60) says, what was once a “mirror with a memory” can now only reflect another mirror. The answer as to why this subtext is portrayed so explicitly is to be found in the contextualization of this special: the final episode of the eighth season, that is to say, just before the broadcast of the ninth season in which Franco dies. With a perspective of five years of broadcasting, the series prepares itself for the challenge of change, to defend its narrative in line with the democratic consensus and to justify the actions of characters in terms of historical and cultural identity.

### THE SPECIAL EPISODES REGARDING CARRERO BLANCO AND FRANCISCO FRANCO

The chosen option to convey the detail the assassination account of Carrero Blanco is the production of a triptych, composed of two fictional episodes “Dos días de diciembre” (S7, E112, 2005) and “El día de la bomba, el día después” (S7, E114, 2005), also inserted between the two, is the special, “El comienzo del fin” (S7, E113, 2005). This audiovisual pack proposes a reflection upon the importance of the past, combining, once more, fiction and a documentary approach. This triptych suggests another type of representation that confronts these previously analyzed episodes, in which the essence of the series format becomes determinant. “Dos días de diciembre” (S7, E112, 2005)– the first of the trilogy – is preceded by one hundred episodes that have situated the characters of *Cuéntame cómo pasó* (2001-) in a setting where actions are perfectly defined and easily recognized by the spectator. This vast background enables the storyline to adapt itself to a free form, although without abandoning the identifying coordinates of the series.

The fictional nature of “Dos días de diciembre” (S7, E112, 2005) is contained within the historical frame of the trial for the so-called Process 1001, Henry Kissinger’s visit to Spain and the pieces of information coming from abroad, specifically from France. In this first part of the triptych, the characters live in a climate of political restlessness reflected by detentions, attempted strikes, general interruptions and stoppages, police sirens and conversations that

include phrases such as “without democracy the regime has no future”, “being a communist is not a felony” or “my grandfather was killed by the reds”. The plots reflect the awakening of the political tension between the victors and the defeated; consequently, this will lead to the attack against Carrero. Children and their elders immediately become aware of the political reality they live in and furthermore they are capable of understanding and verbalizing what is happening and additionally they are able to express the contradictions they feel. The importance of the historical moment is then on everyone’s lips with the same reflective attitude as that expressed in the voice-over of Carlos Alcántara, which accompanies the account. In accordance with this, the rhythm changes and the idea of a documentary provides a glimpse within the fiction itself. Because, as Guynn says, the past is no longer alive in the collective present of the group, and memory belongs thenceforth to the human individual, who is the only entity that remembers, and to the disciplines of psychoanalytic theory and the therapeutic practices of psychology (Guynn, 2006: 174).

In “Dos días de diciembre” (S7, E112, 2005) there is an anticipation of the magnitude of the event that will occur, whereas in the subsequent episode – the special “El comienzo del fin” (S7, E113, 2005)–, the voice-over provides a documentary-like narrative offering complete details of the event – the assassination – nonetheless, in “El día de la bomba, el día después” (S7, E114, 2005), the narrative style reverts to its neutral status and to the characteristic naivety of the fictional character voice-over. At the end of the episode “Dos días de diciembre” (S7, E112, 2005), the nuclear family characters Antonio, Merche, Carlos as a child and Miguel (Antonio’s brother) are seen becoming trapped in a traffic jam at a junction of Claudio Coello Street. It can be inferred that these characters seem to be waiting for the historical event to happen. In this staging, which combines videos from the TVE archives of these traffic jams in Madrid, fictional recreations, and fragments of the movie *Ogro* (1979) – where the Dodge Dart of Carrero appears on the scene – Antonio Alcántara looks over the street and, after a short pause, he says: ‘Look, a car just like Desiderio’s’. A few moments later and, after a great explosion, the character watches the car flying towards the patio of the church of the Jesuits, exactly as it actually occurred. The spectacular aspect of this historical event is emphatically developed in later fictional sequences with the arrival of new characters that come to see the hole that has opened up on Claudio Coello Street, the site where ETA put the bomb that killed Carrero Blanco in December of 1973.

The event becomes a dramatic element with its own journey unfolding during the series. In the same way the dramatic process of Franco’s death was prolonged<sup>6</sup> in this case “Dos días de diciembre” (S7, E112, 2005) is followed

<sup>6</sup> Franco’s death was a special and dramatic event contextualized in seven episodes, in addition to one special.



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by “El comienzo del fin” (S7, E113, 2005), a self-sufficient micro story within the general flow of the series (Rueda; Coronado, 2009: 122). If the episode “Háblame de ti” (S1, E33, 2002) sets the tone for the creation of a new symbolic status –capable of setting a form of representation for the historical television documentary –, the special “El comienzo del fin” (S7, E113, 2005), perpetuates it. That is to say, if Victoria Prego carried out an exercise of historical memory in relation to *Cuéntame cómo pasó* (2001-), the director of “El comienzo del fin” (S7, E113, 2005), Cecilia Bartolomé, carries out an investigation around the figure of Carrero Blanco, also from a popular perspective. In this special, the voice of Carlos as an adult tells the story of what happened in those days and guides the narration through clips from previous seasons, pieces of archives and the insertion of interviews with people unrelated to the series. From this perspective, the story links itself with the research appeal of documentary films by Cecilia Bartolomé and José Juan Bartolomé<sup>7</sup>, the objective is to reflect upon the assassination of Carrero Blanco and his figure making the fictional protagonists of *Cuéntame cómo pasó* (2001-) coexist among new protagonists, this time, real. The testimonies of Luis Carrero Blanco’s son, Manuel Fraga, Ricardo de la Cierva, Josefina Samper, Jorge Martínez Reverte, Teo Uriarte, Joaquín Leguina, Mario Gamo or Emilio Ruiz bring us closer to the historical event, to their own memory and to their search for true meaning through analysis and recreation. If the fictional episodes had us accustomed to the fact that they use reality to construct the plot, this episode uses reality to construct the fiction. During the course of this episode titled “El comienzo del fin [Especial Carrero Blanco]” (S7, E113, 2005) the lives of the Alcántaras serve to illustrate the events narrated by those interviewed. The title, which was superimposed in the opening credits, makes this episode stand out from the rest of the specials, furthermore it is also identified on the RTVE webpage as a “Special Documentary”. Fiction becomes a reference through an account that proposes “an innovative retrospective interpretation, based on the personal file of who was considered successor and heir of the Franquism” (Rueda; Coronado, 2009: 122). The story effectively employs the use of nostalgia, “El comienzo del fin” (S7, E113, 2005) delves into the historical characters that are present in the day-to-day life of the Alcántara family, giving a more realistic past to their lives. This effect has the dual function of increasing the audience’s emotional response to the story due to the easily recognizable background and at the same time the audience is able to feel an increased empathy with the history of Spain due to the familiarity with the Alcántara family. The voice-over of Carlos Alcántara becomes, once more, fundamental for this purpose.

<sup>7</sup> *Después de... primera parte: No se os puede dejar solos and Después de... segunda parte: Atado y bien atado* (Cecilia Bartolomé and José Juan Bartolomé, 1983).

Thirty-two years later, little more than his death is remembered, celebrated by many and already it has turned into almost a legend, especially by the young people that did not live it. For those who did live it, it is difficult to forget that, for the first time, we saw Franco cry. Who was this man?<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Sequence 26 narrated by adult Carlos in the episode “El comienzo del fin” (S7, E113, 2005).

The previously referred to triptych concludes with the fictional episode entitled “El día de la bomba, el día después” (S7, E114, 2005), in which the story resumes with the characters at the moment of the explosion at the end of “Dos días de diciembre” (S7, E112, 2005), and new real voices appear in the fiction. The most significant of these is that of Torcuato Fernández Miranda, The General Secretary of the Franco regime, who appeared on the TV sets all over Spain – including on that of the Alcántaras’ – to announce the death of Carrero Blanco and to assume the Presidency of the Government in power. The protagonists of *Cuéntame cómo pasó* (2001-), viewing real images on TV, with watchful eyes, watch as the spectators form a chain with characters who are observing images that the spectators know themselves can be certified as real. The Alcántaras and the neighbors of San Genaro congregate in front of their TV sets and radios waiting for news that will allow them to continue their story – the history of Spain –, under the fear of a renewed outbreak of civil war, which allows the spectators to see a new perspective. The mechanism to create a new statute of reality is launched in this circle, which is closed to metatelevisual emotions. In these new spaces of representation, emotion beats fiction through condensation, synthesis and symbols, not only in plotting the narrative of the series but also in the re-definition process of audiovisual language. In this last episode, the powerful archive images of the funeral on the streets of Madrid – where Cardinal Tarancón can be seen, as well as the coffin of Carrero and the supporters of the regime with their arms raised – greatly increase their intensity when accompanied and amplified with a montage of background sounds, where crying and weeping intermingle with the anthem of the Spanish Falange. In the meantime our characters silently observe what happens around them, letting – one more time – historical reality play the protagonist role. In this moment, the Alcántaras become spectators of their own fiction and past. The trilogy is thus concluded and accounts as – up to this moment – an exception of the series.

The title of the special episode dedicated to the Dictator “¿Y después de Franco, qué?” (S9, E152, 2007) makes a reference to the title of the book written by Santiago Carrillo, *¿Y después de Franco, qué?* (1965). This special imitates the format of that dedicated to the Carrero Blanco episode by introducing fiction as an ideal element and justifying information research through internal dialectic resources such as interviews, archive material and the sequences of



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the series; however, in this case, the historical and fictional relativism dominate the narrative. The documentary sense of the analysis by means of interviews and statements from personalities such as Pilar Cernuda, Juan Luis Cebrián, José Oneto, Nicolás Redondo, Nicolás Sartorius, Alfonso Guerra and Santiago Carrillo appear to have been mediated by a specifically constructed fiction for this episode. This is in contrast to the Carrero Blanco episode, where the fictional element had already been broadcasted appearing to be perfectly differentiated from what is expressed by the people interviewed; thus, fiction served as a link and reference to create a historical reflection as marked out by Bartolomé. Conversely, the fictional frame in “¿Y después de Franco, qué?” (S9, E152, 2007) includes a plot in which a TVE journalist compiles a report by asking each of the Alcántaras about the political situation of the country and Franco. In this narrative style, their related answers gain the same value as those given by the people who were really interviewed; hence it is an unsettling game of narrative and composition. The following are examples that perfectly illustrate a bizarre and risky composition: setting the forensic doctor who embalmed Franco, Antonio Piga, in the hairdressing shop of Mercedes Alcántara, the lawyer and politician Cristina Almeida with the bus of *Cuéntame cómo pasó* (2001-) visible in the background or Ramón Tamames in the terrace of the París-Nalon bar<sup>9</sup>.

<sup>9</sup> These locations are some of the most relevant spaces of *Cuéntame cómo pasó* (2001-).

This random utilization of fictional spaces is completed by transformation of full color images to black and white in the shots of the people interviewed each time that these shots precede archive images; the same treatment is given to images of the President of the French Republic, from 1974 until 1981, Giscard d'Estaing, the dictator of Chile Santiago Pinochet or members of ETA, the Basque terrorist group. All this mixed with archives from different eras and it is here where a powerful photo sneaks in, in which Franco can be seen, in bed, catheterized. For just a single instant we see, for the first time the real flesh of the Dictator, in color, with no black and white colors to neutralize it, a fixed image that proceeds from the future and that “is part of the dead angle of the story of *Cuéntame cómo pasó*” (García Pousa, 2012). Its transcendence and dramatic strength is lost in an amalgam that produces historical distortion. Not even Victoria Prego's presence, now as an interviewee, is able to camouflage the lack of a discourse that is losing coherence as minutes go by. Amongst the historians Ricardo de la Cierva and Santos Juliá, the journalists Mariano González and José María Ansón, the politicians Manuel Fraga, Miquel Roca or Jaime Pastor, the cardiologist on the regular medical staff of Franco, José Luis Palma Gámiz, or Anselmo Álvarez, the Abbot of the Valle de los Caídos, Prego introduces herself as one voice more abandoning the accreditation obtained in the special

“Háblame de ti” (S1, E33, 2002); however, the voice-over of Carlos as an adult positions itself now at a superior level becoming the voice-of-God (Nichols, 1997: 31) of the Transition, capable of talking about the Alcántaras and to later explain the Lucero Operation, the Autonomy Statutes or the role of King Juan Carlos. Due to this great omniscience acquired by the narrator, the episode exceeds the historical time of Franco’s death, reaching the first democratic elections and the Constitution of 1978. The special marks the progression of the fiction offering a glimpse of what it will be like in the twelfth season using historical events of great magnitude narratively, showing – once more – what will be the ideological line of the series: the defense of the Transition process, the Monarchy as the guarantor of Spanish Democracy, and its unconditional support to the King Juan Carlos and Adolfo Suárez. However the most impressive aspect of this special appears when the account decides to show the most anticipated sequence of the series, that we still have not seen in the fiction: that in which the Alcántara family deals with the news of Franco’s death. Situated at the end of the following episode – “Los pingüinos del invicto caudillo” (S9, E153, 2007) – its broadcast breaks the strict chronological sense that defined the series up to this point, breaching its internal logic. It is also worth noting that story formats in television documentary have undergone change and intensification as part of the requirement to increase viewing enjoyment within circumstances of stronger competition (Corner, 2005: 55). The episode ends in an interview with Antonio Alcántara who expresses the necessity for “changing those who rule in Spain”, to later look into the camera and say: “And remember, we, the Alcántara family, are a very normal family”. Lastly, Carlos Alcántara as a child shows the family album to the TVE journalist, while his voice-over, as an adult, identifies the history of his family with the history of “all the Alcántaras past and present in Spain.”

### IMAGINING DOCUMENTARY

As it has been seen so far, the specials position themselves under the ample documental umbrella that includes programs and television reports. Some of this content, which has diverse narrative modes, embodies the process that Leigh H. Edwards defines as imagining documentary (2006: 254): “In the process of imagining ‘documentary’, reality television is playing a high stakes game in the sense that it stages resistance to our critical deconstruction of the ontological claims of visual representation”.

“El comienzo del fin” (S7, E113, 2005) unveils a new stage in the production of specials that, just as the one regarding Franco, are ‘linked to relevant political



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facts or to aspects bound by social culture or contrasts between the habits in the seventies and our current time', but that – according to Rueda Laffond and Ruiz Coronado (2009: 122) – “[the specials] have suffered the marks from the original investigation work present in ‘Especial Carrero Blanco’”. The music, the *destape*, the three kings from the East, radio, television, women and the trend *la Movida* are established as central themes within a narrative that mixes archive fragments, sequences of fiction and a huge number of interviews. The existing tension between the idea of drama and documentary, between the anticlimax and the questionable character of the past to which Burke (2004) refers in *Qué es la historia cultural*, defines a style where everything has its place behind the belief in nostalgia as the engine driving towards the recuperation of memory. For instance, in the special “Yesterday” (S7, E118, 2006), interviews with artists such as Mike Kennedy, Miguel Ríos, Tony Randall, Micky Dolenz, Santi Carulla, Paco Pastor, Luis Eduardo Aute, José Ramón Pardo, María del Mar Bonet, Ana Belén, Víctor Manuel, Georgie Dann and Raphael, serve to delimitate the remembrance of the seventies through songs and singers, are complimented with archives of television programs such as *Escala en hi-fi* (1961-1967), *Último grito* (1968-1970), *Noches de sábado* or performances by singers such as Cecilia, Nino Bravo, Salomé, Camilo Sesto or Karina. The changes of themes, of voices and a setting that is limited to detail, allow this episode to become a collage that distances itself from precedent narrative codes, not only fictional but also from the specials. Under the denomination imagining documentary, this special departs from any attempt at investigation, opting for esthetic and superficial criteria. Without controlling the juxtaposition of narrative levels, the story line becomes a simulation, and the narrated story, a virtual reality. Combined with this is the creation of an imposed fiction – unnecessary and irrelevant for maintaining the narrative continuity of *Cuéntame cómo pasó* (2001-) – that adapts to the chosen theme. In this case, the result is a plot story in which children, Carlos Alcántara and his friends, create a pop music band and all of them have instruments, know how to play, sing and even give a concert before the neighbors of San Genaro. The fantastical element of the drama infects the rest of the story. In the episode dedicated to Carrero Blanco, the narrator explains the existence of the related special by creating a dramatic necessity in search of an answer to the question “Who was this man?”, whereas in this episode, the questions are related to the asynchronous functions of the presented story. Viewers can ask themselves: Who is the man taking the pictures? Who is recording the interviewee television producer and director Valerio Lazarov? Why is there a film crew in an airport? Why do they show it to us? And, why is there a

recreation of The Beatles' album cover – Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band – is shown with the image of the film crew from the series? The answers to these questions are found in the syntactic relation established between these elements and the narrative, in the stylistic orchestration before the semantic content. Leigh H. Edwards is clear and concise when he refers to these types of television productions which combine elements and techniques of a different nature – from the talking head set-up interviews of expository documentaries to observational cinema's surveillance of people's behavior (Edwards, 2006: 254) – insisting in offering the spectator the feeling of attending a “real life”. The author acknowledges the lack of persuasion and boredom generated from the interviews as causes for the displacement of interest. It is important to find actions to distract the spectator, creating a new narrative focalization – ethereal and inconsistent – allowing empathy with the spectator through brush strokes of reality of this “real life”. The absence of comprehension of the story increases with the appearance of a new anonymous interviewer, the continuous presence of cameras and microphones in the shoot or spaces through which the interviewees walk, from the luxurious hotels of Madrid, to restaurants, or even Miguel Ángel Bernardeau's (the producer of the series) own office. These frenetic changes of location are due to a misunderstood conception of the television reportage, where a staging that is playful, fragmentary and with no criteria is added to the unjustified changes of format and image textures. The voice-over of Carlos Alcántara as an adult, tries to ensure consistency in a chaotic narration. After having become accustomed to the narrator role in the fiction, this role fully disappears together with the viewpoints and references of the universe of the series. The reflexive function of this vocal role is relegated and limited to serve as the image of the brand, introducing and closing theme where groups of Eurovision, fans, censorship and song lyrics becoming a dramatic sort of interest for the special. The systematic repetition of phrases such as “when we were young” invades those summer song video clips with sentimentalism, converting the special into a metaparody where the interviewed characters magnify the past from a present where they are no longer the protagonists.

Conversely, “Había una vez...” (S8, E123, 2006) is presented as a ‘TVE 50-year special’ and builds a story that exalts the contribution of Televisión Española to the cultural life of the country. To serve this purpose, the special includes interviews with reporters Alfredo Amestoy, Tico Medina, Juan Luis Cebrián, Pedro Erquicia, and actors Ana Duato – characterized as Mercedes –, Imanol Arias, Alicia Hermida, Emilio Aragón Miliki, Carmen Goñi, Jesús Guzmán, and with producers such as Pedro Amalio López or Chicho Ibáñez



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Serrador, and scriptwriter Eduardo Ladrón de Guevara and also with the ex Minister for Information and Tourism during Francisco Franco's dictatorial regime, Manuel Fraga Iribarne, as well as featuring recorded interviews from previous episodes similar to the ones with Valeria Lazarov or José María Íñigo. The clips from Franco's archive inaugurating the studios of Padro del Rey in 1964 mix with other ones of series such as *Crónicas de un pueblo* (1971-1974), *La casa de los Martínez* (1966-1970), *Un millón para el mejor* (1968-1969), *Estudio 1* (1965-1984), *El teatro de siempre* (1966-1972), *Historias de la frivolidad* (1967) or *Curro Jiménez* (1976-1978) in Spanish. The opportunity to integrate *Cuéntame cómo pasó* (2001-) in the history of television and establishing cultural references and identity with those programs – that, on the other hand, also appear in the diegesis of the fiction– is lost in favor of the insertion of the new fictional story. In this way, the possible reflection upon these cultural meanings gives way to cartoon-type stories where the child characters visit the studios of Televisión Española.

Marketing and self-promotion are naturally linked to these episodes, which is also the case for “La familia y muchos más”(S9, E156, 2008). In this case, this episode resorts to different versions of *Cuéntame cómo pasó* (2001-) produced and broadcasted in Italy, Portugal and Mexico. “Y llegó el destape” (S10, E162, 2008) is centered on the female emancipation movement, their political battle and feminism, with interviews featuring different professionals such as Rosa Montero, Carmen Alborch, Victoria Vera, María José Goyanes, Celia Villalobos, Rosa María Mateo, Lidia Falcón and Susana Estrada, among others. In this instance, the explanation of the *el destape* era by means of testimonies and a fictional storyline created around the topic – Carlos and his parents happen to meet in a movie theater to watch *La Trastienda* (1975) – build one of the most organized and enclosed stories, which is denominated as imagining documentary.

The following special “Año nuevo, vida nueva” (S10, E180, 2008) employs another type of mimesis of equivalent structures, copying the interview format of “¿Y después de Franco, qué?” (S9, E152, 2007). In this case, Carlos Alcántara, as a child, interviews his family and the neighbors of San Genaro for his high school radio show, with the intention of making a balanced overview of the situation in Spain in the year 1976, repeating the same ideas as those in the special about Franco. Without any contemporaneous celebrity interviews and making little use of archive material, fictional characters are in charge of spreading slogans in which freedom and looking to the future prevail in the historic speech, even reaching the point of looking directly to the camera and addressing the spectator. Conversely, in the special “Toda una vida” (S11, E181,

2009) the fictional storyline situates the Alcántaras in Sagrillas<sup>10</sup>, the family town, in a night in which there is a power cut. The father and grandmother start to reminisce about how life used to be when Carlos had not been born yet. From this fictional plot, the characters talk about relationships, weddings, pre-matrimonial relationships, children, towns, and, in this non-fictional part they talk about the Feminine Section of the Falange movement, of the “*destape*”, of Pilar de Rivera, hygiene, hunger, ration cards and agri-food policy, illegal trade, Madrid nights, television, games, immigration... This story is interspersed with archive pieces that, simultaneously, illustrate testimonies of anonymous people – from Asturias, Barcelona, Andalucía – and others such as the Director of the Documentary Center of the Historical Memory of Salamanca, Maria Jose Turrión García, madame Ms. Rius, the bullfighter Antoñete, the actor Quique Camoiras and the psychologist Amando de Miguel. The absence of a dramatic objective, as well as the impossibility of joining the story through the voice-over of Carlos as an adult, obliges the special to be organized by signs that announce the changes of themes. The narrative model repeats itself in “Esos locos bajitos” (S12, E205, 2010), once again the interviews are with anonymous people, with children<sup>11</sup> to the president of the Asociación de Muñecos/Association of Figures, psychologist Lourdes Gaitán, the president of UNICEF Consuelo Crespo or Luis Figueroa-Ferreti. The storyline created around the Three Kings completes an episode that, just as the previous ones, demonstrates the vocation of the specials to take a closer look at the fiction and *Cuéntame cómo pasó* (2001-) attempts to revise the historical memory of the era through the documentary and television reports are put to one side.

These types of products, that arise from nostalgia, use blockbuster techniques, voice-overs, and black and white archives, to create the feeling of being in front of ‘a fantasy version of a documentary’ (Edwards, 2006: 254), break the temporality of the series to function as satellite episodes. As it is seen so far, the formula has been muting itself to expose a documentalization of fiction in the thirteenth season exemplified in “Diez años y un día” (S13, E216, 2011). In this case, with no interviews, no archive material and by creating parallel fiction settings to the chronologic sense of the story of the Alcántaras. In the same fashion, “La movida y mucho más”(S14, E234, 2013), a thematic episode that questions the heterosexuality of Josete, Carlos’ friend in the fiction<sup>12</sup>, mixes performances by Pedro Almodóvar, Alaska, The Franzines, the representation of the Madrid Movement ‘movida madrileña’ with songs from Serrat, Aute, Labordeta, Luís Llach and Nino Bravo. In the fourteenth season, it is safe to state that these ambiguous episodes, far from becoming autonomous pieces that

<sup>10</sup> Sagrillas is an invented town located in Castilla La Mancha where Alcántaras go back to their roots. From a narrative perspective, Sagrillas is related to the civil war trauma and with a strong feeling of losers and winners.

<sup>11</sup> This part of the special imitates the format of the children’s program *Juego de niños* (1989-1991).

<sup>12</sup> The reason is his participation in the group Rosa Chillón (Loud Pink) that in the fiction belongs to *Movida madrileña*.



complement and enrich the story offered by *Cuéntame cómo pasó* (2001-), end up establishing a dialectic confrontation with the series itself. The path opted for by the production, to disassociate itself from reference episodes “Háblame de ti” (S1, E33, 2002) and “El comienzo del fin” (S7, E113, 2005), has turned these specials into dysfunctional audiovisual collages. Fiction with no continuity and no historical interest gains ground in the documentary with each passing series. The specials have lost their initial nature of metatext that reinforced the diegesis of the fiction to become independent audiovisual productions, filling hours of television, forgetting the importance of *Cuéntame cómo pasó* (2001-) as the series that was the creator of a new televised memory.

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