UNIVERSIDAD TECNOLÓGICA NACIONAL

INSTITUTO NACIONAL SUPERIOR DEL PROFESORADO TÉCNICO

En convenio académico con la Facultad Regional Villa María

LICENCIATURA EN LENGUA INGLESA

Tesis de licenciatura

Raymond Reddington, a romanticised criminal on the NBC series *The Blacklist*

Tesista:
Prof. Gala Algranati

Director de Tesis:
Dr. Juan Ferretti

2024

To my beloved family and friends whose unwavering love, support, and encouragement have pushed me to pursue my dreams.

To my husband, whose unconditional support has been the cornerstone of my perseverance and success.

To those who believe in education and the power that words hold.

Acknowledgements

This dissertation has been written with the support of many people. Knowledgeable or not, without their support, this dissertation would not have been possible.

First and foremost, I would like to express my infinite gratitude to my tutor, Dr. Juan Ferretti, who has been my mentor and inspiration for over a decade. His unwavering support, thirst for knowledge, sense of humour, and curiosity have been essential in this process. His insights and continuous assessment have been extremely valuable to me. I am forever grateful for his wisdom and his company, which have been pivotal to my academic and professional growth.

I would also like to thank my family and friends, without whom none of this would be possible. I am especially grateful to my husband, Federico, for his unconditional love and support in every project I venture into. To my best friend, Gonzalo, who always pushes me to be my best self. And to my academic brother, Federico Variglia y Pons, who has been by my side in the academic world since 2005 organising my ideas when I was not able to and believing in me.

Finally, I would like to dedicate this to my mother and grandmother, who are not with me in physical form, but who have been the most powerful driving force behind my academic pursuit.

Abstract

In literature and visual arts, the characterisation of criminals has long been controversial subject. The romanticisation of villains in fiction has woven itself into the fabric of artistic expression. The concept of "willing suspension of disbelief," famously coined by Samuel Taylor Coleridge in 1817 can be said to invite the reader/viewer to temporarily immerse themselves in the work of fiction crafted by a given author. In addition, this suspension of judgement can be considered to allow for a more profound engagement with fictional narratives, enabling readers to empathise with characters who defy societal norms and, in some cases, embrace a life of crime. The present work purports to discuss some key elements that contribute to the romanticisation of the villain in a publicly acclaimed TV series —*The Blacklist*—, and to explore the extent to which such elements turned a notorious and wanted criminal, Raymond Reddington, into a romanticised hero. An exploration of the TV series and the mentioned character against the backdrop of audience response and other theories made it possible to conclude that there are some key elements that helped create the romanticisation of Raymond Reddington, the main character in the TV show: (a) the character's mysterious past which is partially uncovered throughout the seasons; (b) Reddington's physical description and clothes, manners, and language use, which seem central to his characterisation and appeal; (c) the character's intelligence and his solid knowledge of criminal operations on a worldwide basis; (d) the impact of postmodernity helping 'the bad guys' take over. Raymond exhibits a sense of loyalty to certain individuals while remaining ruthless towards others. He defies conventional morality, fostering in the viewers' feelings of identification, empathy, allegiance, and alignment, among others., and (e) a powerful finale which cannot be ignored as a clinching element. The treatment of willing suspension of disbelief is, to some extent, beyond the scope of this dissertation because there are some elements that belong to the field of psychology and which therefore call for a vast background in its experimental procedures. Therefore, neither the results nor the final conclusions will make any claim to any universal validity. It is interesting to point out, too, that the study presents some interesting areas that beg much further research.

Key words: romanticisation, villain, audience response, postmodernity.

Resumen

En la literatura y en las artes visuales, la personificación de los delincuentes ha sido durante mucho tiempo un tema controvertido. La idealización de los villanos en la ficción se ha entretejido en el entramado de la expresión artística. Se puede decir que el concepto de "suspensión voluntaria de la incredulidad", acuñado por Samuel Taylor Coleridge en 1817, invita al lector/espectador a sumergirse temporalmente en la obra de ficción elaborada por un autor determinado. Además, se puede considerar que esta suspensión del juicio permite un compromiso más profundo con las narrativas de ficción, permitiendo a los lectores empatizar con personajes que desafían las normas sociales y, en algunos casos, abrazan una vida delictiva. El presente trabajo pretende discutir algunos elementos clave que contribuyen a la idealización del villano en una serie de televisión públicamente aclamada —*The Blacklist*—, y explorar en qué medida dichos elementos convirtieron a un criminal notorio y buscado, Raymond Reddington, en un héroe idealizado. Una exploración de la serie de televisión y del personaje mencionado en el contexto de la respuesta de la audiencia y otras teorías permitió concluir que existen algunos elementos clave que ayudaron a crear la romantización de Raymond Reddington, el personaje principal de la serie: (a) el misterioso pasado del personaje, que se descubre parcialmente a lo largo de las temporadas; (b) la descripción física y la vestimenta, los modales y el uso del lenguaje de Reddington, que parecen fundamentales para su descripción y atractivo; (c) la inteligencia del personaje y su sólido conocimiento de las operaciones criminales a nivel mundial; (d) el impacto de la posmodernidad al ayudar a "los malos" a tomar el poder. Raymond muestra un sentido de lealtad hacia ciertos individuos sin dejar de ser despiadado con otros. Desafía la moralidad convencional, fomentando en los espectadores sentimientos de identificación, empatía, lealtad y alineación, entre otros, y (e) un final poderoso que no puede ignorarse como un elemento decisivo. El tratamiento de la suspensión voluntaria de la incredulidad está, hasta cierto punto, más allá del alcance de esta tesis porque hay algunos elementos que pertenecen al campo de la psicología y que, por lo tanto, requieren una amplia experiencia en sus procedimientos experimentales. Por lo tanto, ni los resultados ni las conclusiones finales pretenderán tener validez universal. Es interesante señalar, además, que el estudio presenta algunas áreas interesantes que requieren una mayor investigación.

Palabras clave: romantización, villano, respuesta de la audiencia, posmodernidad.

Contents

1.- Introduction

1.1. Overview

In literature and visual arts, the characterisation of criminals has long been a captivating and controversial subject. It could be said that the romanticisation of villains in fiction has woven itself into the fabric of artistic expression. What is more, throughout the history of cinema and TV, there have been several characters able to capture our imaginations with their crooked ways and enchanting personalities, such as could be seen in the cases of Hannibal Lecter (*The Silence of the Lambs*, Orion Pictures Strong Heart / Demme Production), Walter White in *Breaking Bad* (Sony Pictures Television), or Frank Underwood in *House of Cards* (Netflix and Sony Pictures Television). Morally ambiguous and, sometimes, inherently wicked, these alluring villains seem to have appealed to viewers despite their heinous acts and violent endeavours. But, why? What has made them so attractive?

The concept of "willing suspension of disbelief," famously coined by English poet and philosopher Samuel Taylor Coleridge in his 1817 *Biographia Literaria* (Roberts, 2014), can be said to invite the reader/viewer to temporarily immerse themselves in the

work of fiction crafted by a given author. In addition, this suspension of judgement can be considered to allow for a more profound engagement with fictional narratives, enabling readers to empathise with characters who defy societal norms and, in some cases, embrace a life of crime. As a poet and critic, Coleridge delved into the mesmerising process whereby individuals willingly allow themselves to be transformed from passive readers to story participants (1817 / Roberts, 2014). In Coleridge's own words:

> In this idea originated the plan of the "Lyrical Ballads;" in which it was agreed that my endeavours should be directed to persons and characters supernatural, or at least romantic; yet so as to transfer from our inward nature a human interest and a semblance of truth sufficient to procure for these shadows of imagination that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith. (Roberts, 2014, pp.207-208)

It seems important to note that the concept in question was coined in the nineteenth century and that it alone cannot account for readers/viewers' experiences and character building. However, this is a pivotal idea that will shed light on the questions posited in this dissertation as it has transcended time into contemporary research. According to film scholar Anthony Ferri (2007), the ongoing evolution of converging media technologies is poised to advance, fostering a heightened sense of presence—both in the external, tangible reality and within the realms of inner fantasy. He adds that Coleridge's concept of the willing suspension of disbelief remains integral to this expanding media environment. Ferri (2007) states:

With apologies to the late Marshall McLuhan, film might be seen as an extended form of poetry. As Friedrick Kittler suggests, "the movies took over the fantastic imaginary things that for a century had been called poetry" (1990, p. 246). This is what connects Coleridge's theoretical work to contemporary film. The poet reveals the "phantoms of sublimity" in words on a page just as the filmmaker projects images that are truly moving and inspiring. The author and filmmaker trigger the full range of emotional journeys which are willingly engaged by the reader and audience. (p. 67)

In other words, the poet unveils the "phantoms of sublimity" through written words, akin to the filmmaker who projects images that evoke genuine emotions and inspiration. Both the author and filmmaker prompt a diverse range of emotional experiences, willingly embraced by the reader and audience alike. This idea relates to another aspect to be dealt with in this dissertation, the fact that it is not only the viewer who willingly immerses him or herself into the story, but that there are also elements crafted by the writers and directors that lead the viewer to this state.

It is common knowledge that directors and writers play pivotal roles in shaping the narrative and overall quality of TV series. To begin with, directors are responsible for translating the script into visual storytelling, making creative decisions about camera angles, pacing, and overall visual aesthetics. They collaborate with the cinematography and production design teams to bring the script to life on the screen. Directors also work closely with actors to guide performances and ensure that the intended emotions and messages of the story are effectively conveyed. On the other hand, writers are the architects of the narrative. They create the characters, plotlines, and dialogue that form

the foundation of the show. In addition, writers develop the overarching story arcs, individual episode plots, and character developments. They collaborate with the show's creator, if applicable, to maintain consistency in the storytelling. Additionally, writers must stay attuned to audience feedback and evolving trends to keep the narrative engaging and relevant. More importantly, together, directors and writers collaborate to ensure that the artistic vision aligns with the thematic and emotional goals of the TV series. Their synergy is crucial in delivering a cohesive and compelling viewing experience for the audience.

Strongly linked to the role of directors and writers is cinematography, which is the art and technique of capturing moving images on film or in a digital format. It involves the use of camera equipment, lighting, composition, and various visual elements to create a visually compelling and aesthetically pleasing work of cinematic art. Cinematographers, also known as directors of photography, are responsible for overseeing the camera and lighting crews, making critical decisions about framing, lens choice, camera movement, and lighting setups. In other words, cinematography is a crucial element in filmmaking, contributing significantly to the overall look and feel of a film or TV series. A skilled cinematographer collaborates closely with the director and other members of the production team to bring the creative vision to life on screen. Interestingly, despite the fact that a character may be a notorious criminal and one of the most sought-after fugitives globally, it is the exceptional skill of the writers, directors and cinematographers that allows the viewer to establish a profound connection with a character of his nature. The audience grapples with their moral standpoint without overt

awareness, advocating for and aligning themselves with a figure typically regarded as a criminal.

Finally, there is also a need to understand what happens in the mind of audience members as they willingly let themselves be immersed into the narrative of the film or TV series. To do so, the work of Norman Holland, the well-known literary critic, will be explored. Particularly his book *Literature and the Brain* (2009), in which the author explains the many ways in which our brains process stories, poems, plays, and films and turns them into pleasure. Holland (2009) posits that when the reader/viewer is immersed in the work of art, the individual becomes absorbed into the narrative and forgets about his surroundings and realities for a given time. He adds that the individual also experiences feelings towards the characters and asserts that the individual's brain behaves in an unusual manner throughout the experience. Several other relevant writers will be taken into account in order to arrive at a series of categories that could serve to explain the character of Raymond Reddington, the protagonist of the celebrated and highly rated (Leiber, 2019; Parrot Analytics, 2024)[1] TV series *The Blacklist* (NBC 2013-2023), who is the focus of this dissertation.

---

[1] Content valuation is essential for any content acquisition decision. Parrot Analytics content valuation system is based on demand data that reveals the dollar value contribution of any title to any platform in any region. *The Blacklist* has 20.0 times the audience demand of the average show in the United States - this suggests the show has significant value. The current demand trend is increasing over the past 90 days, and it achieved the peak rank of #134 in the United States for January. Therefore, it can be deduced that *The Blacklist* is a valuable asset that can contribute significantly to the platform's revenue.
[…]
[E]valuating demand data can inform content distributors about which platforms to target for distribution. The global performance dimension revealed that *The Blacklist* outperformed the average demand of the TV show in all markets where it was analyzed, highlighting that the series could perform well in other countries. (*Parrot Analytics*, 2024: https://tv.parrotanalytics.com/US/the-blacklist-nbc)
- - - - - - - -

1.2.- Research question

The present study purports to discuss some key elements that contribute to the romanticisation of the villain in a publicly acclaimed TV series —*The Blacklist* (NBC 2013-2023)—, and to explore the extent to which such elements turned a notorious and wanted criminal into a romanticised hero[2]. In particular, this paper is informed by the following research question:

What are the key elements contributing to the romanticisation of Raymond Reddington, the main character in the TV series The Blacklist?

The present study is motivated by a question that proposes a description; therefore no hypothesis will be made explicit. Hurtado de Barrera (2012) states that in exploratory, descriptive or comparative research, hypotheses may not be formulated, owing to the absence of cause-effect relationships. In this sense, Suárez Iñíguez (2013) adds:

Research does not begin with hypotheses but with questions. With questions that are often totally open, without having a hypothetical answer and this is true not only in the

---

The Blacklist (0.5 rating in 18-49, 4.0 million viewers overall from 8-9 p.m. ET) ranks #2 in the timeslot among the Big 4 networks in total viewers. (Leiber, 2019: Report for *The Blacklist* & *Dateline*, https://www.broadwayworld.com/bwwtv/article/ratings-see-nbcs-ratings-report-for-the-blacklist-date-line-2019 1123

[2] The term 'romanticised hero' has been preferred to the term 'romantic hero,' given the latter's traditional association with Byronic standards (Stanford, 1968), which seem to be quite different from the character under scrutiny.

social sciences but also in the natural sciences and in all types of research. […] The important thing in research is to reach the truth, to solve a problem, to increase knowledge.[3] (p. 15, my translation)

1.3.- Research method

The chosen approach for this exploratory, descriptive research involves content analysis, preceded by a comprehensive literature review. An extensive literature review will introduce a theoretical framework, which will be aimed to justify the categories implemented to examine the character of Raymond Reddington from the TV series *The Blacklist* (NBC 2013-2023).

It is important to note that, although there will be many references to psychological processes, both simple and deep, this dissertation makes no pretence to delve into the complexities of an audience's psychological traits in a professional fashion, as the present study was definitely not planned as a psychological exploration by an expert in the field. This said, it should also be emphasised that neither the results nor the final conclusions will make any claim to any universal cogency, as it is clear that there may be numberless psychological factors intervening in the audience's response to a character on a television series. Although the study might claim some degree of external validity,

---

[3] "La investigación no se inicia con hipótesis sino con preguntas. Con preguntas muchas veces totalmente abiertas, sin que tengan una hipotética respuesta y esto es así no solo en las ciencias sociales sino en las naturales y en todo tipo de investigación. […] Lo importante en la investigación es llegar a la verdad, a la solución de un problema, al aumento del conocimiento". (p. 15)

there will always remain a portion of tentativeness in any concluding statement(s) at which this exploration may arrive.

2.- Literature review

2.1.- The Coleridge parameter and after

2.1.1 .- Suspension of disbelief and poetic faith in film

Conventionally, the concept of a "willing suspension of disbelief" denotes the conscious act of liberating our imaginations, wherein we willingly acknowledge as genuine that which initially seems illogical or unlikely (Ferri, 2007, p. ix). It seems pertinent to observe that Coleridge's idea has been interpreted in many different ways, nonetheless, it is its possibility of being recycled and adaptable to different media that renders it relevant for this dissertation. It is clear that the phrase is much more broadly used in and applicable to media than it was originally meant to target. A willing suspension of disbelief now appears to help to describe audience's reactions, involvement, feelings and brain activity in readers, movie goers and TV viewers. Ferri (2007) affirms that Coleridge's concept would, in due course, characterise the process of reception in films and various other forms of media. In the same line, the above author considers that "Coleridge seems to attribute a range of effect or efficacy to artistic works. The work can be so incredible as to be "over the top"" (Ferri 2007, p. 8), an argument which the writer supports by providing examples, such as the reaction of a contemporary audience when watching a 1950's sci-fi film's perception of space travel. On the other

hand, he affirms that, instead of being "over the top", "the work can be right on target and absorb the audience as in the film Jaws (1975)" (Ferri 2007, p. 8). In any case, he argues, the act of willingly suspending disbelief requires a certain level of precision from the artist.

Within the context of Coleridge's views (Roberts, 2014), a more precise statement would be that the audience's engagement undergoes phases, starting with an awareness of the necessity to reserve judgement and then progressing into active involvement with the artistic work. In his book, *Willing Suspension of Disbelief - Poetic Faith in Film* (2007), Ferri tries to explain the involvement of the audience and the role of the creator of the play, book, movie, or TV series by bringing back the words of English author and Shakespeare scholar, Reginald Foakes:

> In one of his clearest descriptions of the audience for the stage play, Coleridge writes that the poet or playwright leads the audience to a point where they choose to experience the drama. He wrote how in sleep we pass "at once by a sudden collapse into this suspension of will and the comparative power", in a letter in 1818 on imitation and illusion. "Whereas in an interesting play, real or represented, we are brought up to this point, as far as it is requisite or desirable, gradually, by the art of the poet and the actors, and with the consent and positive abidance of our own will. We choose to be deceived". (Foakes, p. 38, in Ferri, p. 10)

It is worth noting that the assumption here is that the process is gradual, that the play needs to be 'interesting', and that the medium is not as relevant as other aspects of the

fictional work, which will be discussed later in this dissertation. Only then does the viewer seem to willingly embrace deception.

2.1.2.- Willing suspension of disbelief in the brain

2.1.2.1.- Norman Holland and the dynamics of response

There is another key aspect regarding this topic which is how the brain of the reader/viewer works throughout the whole process. The work of Norman Holland (1927-2017), the psychoanalytic literary critic and founder of the reader-response literary theory, is paramount in this field. Holland extensively discusses the concept of the willing suspension of disbelief in his work *Dynamics of Literary Response* (1975). He proposes the utilisation of "imaginative involvement" in a literary piece through an "as if" process (Holland, p. 63). This author identifies fundamental artistic conventions that facilitate the engagement of readers or audiences with the imagination and the work. Initially, the work is "framed", either in a literal sense, as seen in a painting, or on the stage in the context of a play. Another fundamental artistic convention, as outlined by Holland (1975), is that the audience is not required to make use of action in response to literary or artistic expression. He illustrates this with the example that "the altarpiece becomes art when it hangs in a museum rather than a church" (p. 70).

It seems relevant to observe that Holland (1975) makes a distinction between audience receptions of "masterpieces" (e.g. Shakespeare) and "entertainments" (popular movies,

television). In his view, during the consumption of entertainment, intellectual engagement is minimal, with individuals predominantly internalising and indulging in fantasies. For a masterpiece, however, in his own words, "we are likely to respond more at the conscious level of meaning and significance, less at the primitive level of fusion and introjection" (p. 92). It could be said, then, that Holland (1975) proposes that the fantasies induced by both masterpieces and entertainments do not seem to be solely inherent within the work itself. Instead, he posits that these fantasies arise from an interaction between the audience and the work. The audience, hence, functions both as the receiver and creator of the fantasy. As Holland (1975) states, "the literary text provides us with a fantasy which we introject, experiencing it as though it were our own, supplying our own associations to it" (p. 311). Therefore, it could be affirmed that Holland (1975) ascribes an interactive relationship between reader and text, which aligns with Coleridge's notion "by the art of the poet and the actors, and Theoretical Approaches to Film Viewing with the consent [...] of our own will [...] we choose to be deceived" (Foakes, p. 38).

2.1.2.2.- Schema theory and audience experience

Within cognitive science, schema theory is concerned with how knowledge is structured in the brain. This theory was first introduced by the psychologist Frederic Bartlett in the 1930s and serves this dissertation as evidence of what happens inside the viewer's brain when willingly suspending their disbelief. In short, according to schema theory specialist Jeff Pankin (2013), "a schema is an organised unit of knowledge for a

subject or event. It is based on past experience and is accessed to guide current understanding or action" (p. 1). In other words, a schema constitutes a structured body of knowledge concerning a specific subject or occurrence, shaped by prior experiences, and utilised to inform present understanding or behaviour. It could be said that schemas help individuals to process new information by providing a framework that allows the person to understand and interpret it.

According to Pankin (2013), schemas are dynamic because they are constantly changing and developing as new information is presented, they can be quite influential in the processing of new information, and they store both declarative ("what") and procedural ("how") information. Pankin (2013) turns to Hampson & Morris (1996) to explain what these types of information entail:

> Declarative knowledge is knowing facts, knowing that something is the case; procedural knowledge is knowing how to do something – perhaps with no conscious ability to describe how it is done. (Hampson & Morris, 1996, in Pankin, 2013, p. 1)

Focusing on declarative schemas or schemata, Pankin (2013) describes them as schemas which may be thought to contain "slots, or characteristics and values" (p. 1). He then provides the example of a house, "which may be described in terms of its materials, such as wood and its parts, such as rooms" (p. 1). He explains that materials and parts are "the house schema's slots" and "wood and rooms are the slot values" (p. 1). In addition, slots may have default values (house purpose: to live in) though houses may also be places of worship or museums. On the other hand, Pankin (2013) turns to

psychologist John R. Anderson (2000) to affirm that "schemas may have parent and child relationships with other schemas which inherit or pass on characteristics" (Anderson, 2000, in Pankin 2013, p. 1). To conclude, Pankin (2013) asserts that schemas enable writers and speakers to infer what their audience already knows.

It is known that schemas are developed through experiences, learning, and social interactions. In addition, they can vary in complexity and specificity. For instance, an individual can have a schema for a simple concept such as "cat" and, at the same time, have a range of other more abstract schemas such as "marriage". Individuals may also have schemas for different domains such as culture. We shall delve into cultural schemas to illustrate this notion. In Pankin's (2013) views, "first, we develop schemas for our own and other cultures. We then may develop a schema for cultural understanding" (p. 4). More importantly, according to him, a schema designed for cultural comprehension differs from the rigid framework of a stereotype. In order to explain this, he turns to Renstch, Mot & Abbe (2009), who assert that

> [a] schema for cultural understanding is more than just a stereotype about the members of a culture. Whereas stereotypes tend to be rigid, a schema is dynamic and subject to revision. Whereas stereotypes tend to simplify and ignore group differences, a schema can be quite complex. (Renstch, Mot & Abbe, 2009, in Pankin, 2013, p. 4)

It can be pointed out that the distinction presented by Renstch, Mot & Abbe (2009) seems to be a crucial one. Regarding this, the authors may be said to understand schemas as dynamic frameworks that adapt to new experiences, while stereotypes are seen as rigid

and oversimplify cultural groups. Besides, schemas seem to encompass the complexity of cultural norms and traditions, offering a nuanced understanding of diversity. It bears noting that several researchers have explored this concept, however, the scope of this paper is not on cognitive theory per se. The objective behind introducing this theory is to explore the concept briefly and describe its connection to what happens in the brain and Coleridge's idea of willing suspension of disbelief (Roberts, 2014) through the voices and studies of some important thinkers of the twentieth century.

In the same light as the previously discussed ideas of Foakes, Branigan (1992, in Ferri, 2007) examines narrative as a process and an end in itself that allows someone to predict or anticipate what might happen in a given situation. As such, in his view, narrative applies to fictional and nonfictional processes alike. Paramount to narrative, whether in film or not, is the organising functioning. For Branigan (1992),

> [v]iewers and readers of fiction do not remember exact storylines, but rather morals, conflict, and such. An important aspect of this processing of information is the schema, which Branigan defines as "an arrangement of knowledge already possessed by a perceiver that it used to predict and classify new sensory data... The fact that one often knows immediately what one does not know testifies to the structured nature of our knowledge. (Branigan 1992, in Ferri, 2007, p. 19)

In other words, what seems central to Branigan (1992) is the fact that existing knowledge structures guide the interpretation and classification of new sensory inputs. Therefore, it can be asserted that pre-existing cognitive frameworks direct the

interpretation and categorisation of fresh sensory information. In relation to this idea, Branigan (1992) considers the existence of eight elements that compose what he calls "narrative schema" (Branigan 1992, in Ferri, 2007, p. 19). These include, in his words,

> [t]he "abstract" (the title or summary), "orientation" (time, place, characters), "initiating event" (what would be considered the conflict, what happens to change a person or thing), "goal" (the character's response to this conflict), "complicating action" (linked to the antagonist), "climax and resolution", "epilogue" (the moral to the story), and "narrative" (the continuous sorting of information as new or unusual). (Branigan, 1992, in Ferri, 2007, p. 19)

Apart from these components, Branigan (1992) sates that a hierarchy of levels of narration exists and that it is distinguished by what he calls "focalisation." He defines focalisation or reflection as involving "a character neither speaking… nor acting... but rather actually experiencing something through seeing or hearing it" (p. 101). Branigan (1992) then presents an example to illustrate this idea: He believes that, in a film, it is the character's point of view that we see when a character sees someone or hears something, and this would be a lower level of narration. Ferri (2007) points out that Branigan's hierarchy of narrative is similar to the process of abstraction by explaining that at higher levels of abstraction, specific details regarding a particular referent are omitted. More relevant to this dissertation, Branigan (1992) calls another aspect of the narrative the 'illusion of occurrence,' wherein the visuals displayed on the screen serve as the foundation for "cognitive delusions in which a spectator mistakes narrative patterns for the real world" (Branigan, 1992, in Ferri, 2007, p. 19). Interestingly,

Branigan's "illusion of occurrence" seems very similar to Coleridge's willing suspension of disbelief. It is worth noting that this author argues that the visual deception within cinematic portrayal facilitates or triggers the viewer's capacity to immerse oneself in a fictional narrative. Therefore, it can be stated that, for Coleridge, there is a sense of illusion when an audience enjoys a play or any piece of literature or creative work.

In a similar vein, historian and art expert Ernst Gombrich (1969) posits the concept of an artistic "schema" by arguing that

…[t]he simple fact that without a medium and without a schema which can be molded and modified, no artist could imitate reality. We know what the ancients called their schemata; they referred to them as the canon, the basic geometric relationships which the artist must know for the construction of a plausible figure. (In Ferri, 2007, p. 22)

Ferri (2007) explores Gombrich's idea by sustaining that in art it is essential to have the ability to know how to draw a bird, a face, or a tree. He goes on to argue that the artist must begin with this fundamental framework to allow for subsequent modification in their unique interpretation. While the artist serves as the communicator, it is implied that both the artist and the audience recognise the established canon or "schema".

As Ferri's book explores Coleridge's concept of willing suspension of disbelief in film, he turns to the work of film theorist and film historian David Bordwell (1997), who

posits "that filmmakers can reject stylistic schemas (e.g., shot/reverse shot for dialogue frame)" (In Ferri, 2007, p. 23) but also argues that if there is a total rejection of a schema, the viewing experience might be mind boggling. This seems congruent with the theory of schema presented above as individuals seem to rely on their prior knowledge to process the new information, in this case provided by the film's narrative. Therefore, Bordwell (1997) affirms that filmmakers can manipulate film cannons for the sake of message and style but "this manipulation requires the framing of recognizable schemas" (In Ferri, 2007, p. 23). It could be understood, then, that, otherwise, the viewing experience might be negatively affected.

Ferri (2007) proceeds to explore Fiske and Taylor's (1991) definition of schema. The writers assert that a schema is a "cognitive structure that represents knowledge about a concept or type of stimulus, including attributes and the relations about those attributes" (p. 98) (In Ferri, 2007, p. 23). In this light, schemas can be said to be conceptual expectations regarding individuals, circumstances, and our own identities. Ferri (2007) argues that if one follows this chain of thought, schemas assist in guiding an individual's perception and conduct in response to specific stimuli. This can involve interpreting an event, whether real or depicted through mass media, or determining how to interact with individuals within that event. In his own words:

Schemas are the internal "storehouses" we use to organise and structure our behaviour. We use them like templates for perceiving and responding to the world outside. On one level, schemas aid in the encoding, or symbolic representation, of our ideas. Generally,

encoding is routine and less involved when the schemas are clear, and the queues used for them "fit" neatly with what we expect. (Ferri 2007, p. 23)

From what Ferri (2007) posits, it can be inferred that schemas can be seen as internal frameworks that facilitate the organisation and structuring of behaviour. In addition, the writer argues that schemas serve as templates guiding how individuals perceive and react to external stimuli. It bears noting that, on one level, they seem to aid in the encoding process, wherein ideas are symbolically represented within the mind. Ferri (2007) concludes that when schemas are well-defined and the cues align closely with expectations, encoding becomes routine and less cognitively demanding. This can be said to imply that clear schemas streamline the process of interpreting and responding to the environment, as they enable individuals to efficiently categorise and make sense of incoming information. Therefore, this idea seems to highlight the adaptive nature of schemas, emphasising their role in facilitating cognitive processes and shaping behavioural responses to the world.

Taking the above theories into consideration, it seems possible to argue that film narrative requires the effective use of schemas. Furthermore, it can be asserted that the willingness presented by Coleridge in his concept is central to the connection of the audience with the work of art. The conscious effort on the viewer's part, Ferri (2007) believes, "puts the reader or audience into a logically troublesome suspended state". (Ferri 2007, p. 24). Ferri (2007) adds that the characterisation of an individual as an audience member or reader entails being attuned and receptive, whether watching a film,

engaging online, or delving into poetry. He then goes back to Coleridge's (1817 / Roberts, 2014) work to support his argument:

> For the nature of a man's words, where he is strongly affected by joy, grief, or anger, must necessarily depend on the number and quality of the general truths, conceptions, and images, and of the words expressing them, with which his mind had been previously stored. For the property of passion is not to create, but to set in increased activity. (In Ferri, 2007, p. 25)

Coleridge (1817 / Roberts, 2014) appears to revisit a fundamental understanding of human perception that aligns, as we have seen, with contemporary cognitive psychology: we function as perceptive observers, drawing upon our experiences and emotionally charged schemas to interpret the world through vivid imagery.

Finally, Ferri (2007) explores the work of Hallam and Marshment (1998), who maintain that schema or schemata "help add to the realism, or truth, of the filmic experience" (Ferri 2007, p. 25). The authors consider that, during film viewing, there is an active information processing between the screen and the viewer's cognitive memory, which encompasses objects, individuals, and occurrences depicted in the movie. They provide an example to support their argument: as we engage with a film, we utilise various schemas rooted in our prior knowledge and everyday experiences. These schemas significantly influence how we interpret various forms of representation, such as books, magazines, television, artworks, and fictional films. (Ferri 2007, p. 25). These views are consistent with the ones that have been explored in this section and seem to be

strongly connected with Coleridge's willing suspension of disbelief, especially because this seems to be a very active process.

In conclusion, these theories seem to demonstrate that interacting with a narrative, such as watching a movie, is a dynamic process. Within this process, both the viewer's past encounters and expectations, as characterised by Coleridge as "the shadows of imagination", appear to play a pivotal role in immersing the viewer in the film. Coleridge's concept of the temporary effect of his willing suspension of disbelief can be considered to hold significance because it denotes the existence of a distinct mental state during the viewing experience, or in his time, during the theatrical performance. What is more, there appears to exist a transformative element in the viewer's mindset at the moment of engaging with the content. While it may appear to be a self-evident and somewhat mundane assertion, it seems correct to point out that it actually revolves around a matter of belief. Although we acknowledge the presence of some form of audience experience, a precise and comprehensive understanding of it seems to still be evolving. Finally, it bears noting that when we interact with films as viewers, our cognitive preparation seems to involve directing our focus toward the screen and interpreting the content through our cognitive frameworks and cinematic schemas, whether they pertain to the "Hollywood" genre or another genre.

2.1.2.3.- Poetic faith: spatio-temporal aspects

Regarding what takes place in our brains during this period, it is noteworthy to discuss the concepts of time and space as central dimensions within the film viewing process. It is clear that an individual experiences some film at a given time and a given place. While in Coleridge's time a reader or theatre goer enjoyed a poem or play, there was still a specific time and a certain place. In addition, from what has been explored in this dissertation so far, it can be affirmed that the process of imagination is not a single structure that can be broken down with ease. Ferri (2007) maintains that "it is a combination of electrical and chemical reactions within the brain that are communicated throughout the body." (Ferri 2007, p. 69). The writer emphasises that it is extremely difficult to analyse an audience experience and argues that more research needs to be carried out in order to obtain better and more results. Moreover, he asserts that Coleridge's willing suspension of disbelief, in his opinion, represents an "early attempt at cognitive audience analysis if the phrase is read within its full context both in Biographia Literaria as well as his letters". (Ferri 2007 79). The writer affirms that Coleridge solely describes the reader or theatre goer experience, not the poems or plays. More importantly, he points out that Coleridge's willing suspension of disbelief is, to him, "the heart of the motion picture audience process" (Ferri 2007, p. 79). It may be understood by this that Coleridge's concept was, is, and will continue to be of relevance to cinema studies and cinema production since it appears to offer insight into the realm of audience perception and engagement, which is primarily why this dissertation opens with Coleridge's concept.

This argument is sustained by poet, biographer, film, and art and literary critic Parker Tyler (1970/1944), whom Ferri (2007) relies on to solidify his assertion on Coleridge's willing suspension of disbelief. Tyler (1944) describes the film viewing process as the "daylight dream", which seems to echo Coleridge's idea. Tyler (1944) adds, "we are obliged to forget our immediate concerns when we enter a movie theatre and relax in our seats" (In Ferri, 2007, p. 80). When we are in a "readied state", according to Tyler (1944), at a given time, there is a transformation, "and the field of the screen is the lidded eye through which the mind that will not sleep, the universe whose sun will not go down, projects its memory and its wild intelligence" (In Ferri, 2007, p. 80). Interestingly, Ferri (2007) points out that both poets, although from different centuries, delve into the same process, despite the fact that the mediums are different, one being film and the other one poetry. This key process, which Coleridge (1817, Roberts, 2014) coined "willing suspension of disbelief" and that Tyler (1944) named "daylight dream", appears to be a combination of human perception and imagination, according to Ferri (2007, p. 80). It can be contended that poets and other observers may have historically recognized this process. Ferri (2007) adds, "what has changed over time, obviously, is the technology used to engage in this process" (p. 80). During Coleridge's era, print and the theatrical stage served as the primary mediums, whereas contemporary and future delivery systems include video and hypertext, among others.

Going back to Norman Holland's (2009) ideas, the role of the audience is key to this whole process; attention needs to be paid to it and to what happens in the viewer/reader's brain. Unfortunately, despite the seemingly crucial importance of this topic, the

limitations in length and scope of this paper prevent a thorough examination and analysis. Needless to say, Neuropsychoanalysis, neuroscience and psychology can shed more light on what happens in a person's brain, yet these disciplines stand completely outside the academic boundaries of the present study. Suffice it to state that Holland (2009) describes the process as 'being transported' because our brains work differently in the real world. When the readers/viewers are immersed in the fictional world, they get "into a peculiar trance-like state of mind where we accept remarkably unreal things (...)" (Holland 2009, p. 22).

The author again goes back to Coleridge's (1817, Roberts, 2014) willing suspension of disbelief concept to try to explain what goes on in our brains. He points out that

> …Coleridge invented the term we use to describe the credulous aspect in our trance-like state of mind when we are transported by a literary work. He was justifying his writing about "persons and characters supernatural, or at least "romantic". [...] He therefore asked that his readers grant him "*that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment that constitutes poetic faith."* He asked us *not to disbelieve, at least momentarily, for brief periods,* the improbabilities that he had written and that we were about to read. That stance, he said, constitutes a kind of imaginative or empathic belief, which he called "poetic faith." (Holland 2009, pp. 60-61 - *Holland's italics*)

Therefore, the state of "poetic faith" may endure for minutes or even hours, but frequently, it is fleeting, lasting only for a brief moment or a few intermittent moments as we read or watch. In addition, any external stimulus from the surroundings that

activates the reader/viewer's mechanisms for evaluating and responding to the real world has the potential to disrupt their "poetic faith" in what they are currently reading or watching. When suspending disbelief in that trance-like state induced by literary or artistic works, it may be understood that we undergo a shutdown. First, we lose awareness of our bodies; second, our awareness of the surroundings diminishes, focusing solely on the work itself; and third, our scrutiny of the reality and likelihood of what we perceive, hear, or imagine decreases. However, there is a fourth aspect that remains active, if not intensified. The question that Holland (2009) posits is the following: "Why do we feel real emotions toward the unreal things represented in fictions and dramas and poems?" (Holland, 2009, p. 79). This seems to be closely linked to Coleridge's (1817, Roberts, 2014) idea of "poetic faith," in the sense that we experience genuine emotions in response to individuals and situations that we are fully aware are imaginary.

2.1.2.4.- Further cerebral complexities

In spite of the assertion that this study is not aimed to delve into much detail regarding brain functions, a brief overview of the area needs to be provided in order to shed light on evidence and to connect what goes on in the brain with some key concepts that are to be discussed in the sections that follow. A solid starting point may be the following claim made by Holland (2009):

When we are "transported" with a literary work, the right hemisphere language centres become more active than usual in language processing, and we open up a richness of meaning that we call "poetic" or "literary" (Holland, 2009, p. 205 – The author's italics)

Briefly explained, Holland (2009) sustains that an examination of literature on language processing highlights the emotional capabilities of the right hemisphere, which plays a significant role in comprehending and conveying ambiguities and emotional nuances in language, contrasting with the left hemisphere that primarily handles "what the words say." (p. 207). However, the right hemisphere relies on the cognitive processing initiated by the left hemisphere to decipher these elements. Living solely with the cognitive processing of the left hemisphere is insufficient; we depend on the emotional comprehension and expression facilitated by the right hemisphere to navigate social interactions with our fellow human beings. "If we are to survive, the two systems must work together" (p. 207). It could be inferred that readers or viewers are motivated by a natural inclination to seek understanding, connections, and significance within the literary work. It may well encompass the curiosity and desire to unravel the complexities presented in the text, driving the ongoing engagement with literary elements. This prompts an important question that warrants deeper examination: why do we find ourselves caring about this particular matter?

The answer to this question seems rather complex and multifaceted as it involves individual perspectives, values, and emotions, among other external factors. Individuals might care about something due to its alignment with their beliefs, its impact on their

well-being, or its resonance with their own moral code. Additionally, it could be said that social and cultural elements, empathy, curiosity, and a sense of responsibility play roles in shaping why people care about specific matters. According to Holland (2009), deriving pleasure from a poem, story, movie, or play constitutes a cognitive endeavour, engaging verbal skills and leveraging knowledge of the world (declarative memory) and personal experiences (episodic memory). These processes can be considered to primarily involve cortical systems located in the frontal and temporal lobes. In contrast, the writer explains, emotions are associated with subcortical regions. The cerebral, cognitive enjoyment derived from literature activates these subcortical systems. Holland (2009) posits that there are three discernible types of emotional responses elicited by literature and other forms of media: direct emotional stimulation, emotional memories, and emotional situations. These three types operate in somewhat distinct manners (Holland, 2009).

2.1.3.- Empathy

There exists a need to explore the basics of human responses to emotional expressions in order to better understand the concept of *empathy*, which is central to this dissertation. In broad terms, as observed by Adam Smith and Darwin, humans have a tendency to share similar emotions as a response to the emotional expressions of others, and this may be said to align with evolutionary principles. The ability to feel and understand the emotions of others can be considered to provide advantages for survival and reproduction in a highly social species like humans.

As we turn to narratives, it should be important to cite Amy Coplan's (2004) article 'Empathic Engagement with Narrative Fictions', in which she asserts that scholars have not reached an agreement on how to precisely define the connection between readers and the characters within narratives. She goes on to explain that the challenge arises from the fact that many of the terms used in this type of narrative, such as identification and empathy, are somewhat unclear or open to interpretation. In her article she examines recent empirical research related to text processing and understanding narratives. The most relevant part, which is related to this dissertation, is that she puts forth a pluralistic perspective on character engagement, emphasising the significant role played by empathy. Coplan (2004) describes empathy "as a complex imaginative process involving both cognition and emotion" (p. 143). This author goes on to explain that when one engages in empathy with another person, they adopt the other person's psychological viewpoint and, to some extent, imaginatively undergo what they are experiencing. She then emphasises, however, that throughout this process, one retains a distinct awareness of their own separate identity. In simpler terms, even when deeply involved in understanding the feelings of the person one empathises with, one does not lose their individual sense of self. One maintains a representation of themselves that remains separate from their representation of the other person. The author affirms:

> Empathy integrates cognitive and affective processes, creating a complex and dynamic psychological experience that draws on different capacities we have for connecting and responding to the world and those in it. The cognitive component of empathy involves using the imagination to undergo a shift from one's own cognitive perspective to the

cognitive perspective of the target individual. This process is often referred to in social and developmental psychology as "role-taking" or "perspective-taking." The emotional component of empathy involves the empathizer's imaginative adoption of the target's emotional state. (Coplan, 2004, pp. 143-144)

It could be argued that empathy is a complex psychological phenomenon, combining cognitive and emotional processes to create a rich and dynamic experience. What Copland (2004) explains could be interpreted as the use of our various capacities for connecting with and responding to the world and the people in it. In addition, the cognitive aspect of empathy may be said to entail using our imagination to transition from our own cognitive viewpoint to that of the person we are empathising with. On the other hand, the emotional facet of empathy, according to the author, involves the empathiser imaginatively embracing the emotional state of the person they are empathising with. In essence, empathy may be understood to be a complex interplay of cognitive and emotional engagement, allowing individuals to understand and share in the experiences of others.

Coplan (2004) moves on to separate empathy from emotional contagion and sympathy, which are other psychological processes usually confused with the one being discussed here. The author defines emotional contagion as a phenomenon observed when an individual's emotions and associated behaviours are unconsciously and automatically impacted by the emotions expressed by others. The key is that this process seems to entail the transfer of emotions from one person to another, resulting in a synchronisation or mirroring of emotional states within a social group. Therefore, the person appears not

to be aware that the emotions in question have, indeed, "originated outside of him, in another individual." (Coplan 2004, p. 145). The differences between empathy and emotional contagion are threefold. In Coplan's (2004) words, "(1) emotional contagion lacks self-other differentiation, (2) emotional contagion is not an imaginative process, and (3) emotional contagion lacks perspective-taking." (Copland 2004, p. 145). Regarding the second psychological process, the author argues that while empathy and sympathy share several characteristics, they represent distinct phenomena. She adds that sympathy revolves around caring for another individual, feeling for them, without necessarily involving the direct sharing of their experience. Although sympathetic emotions may be said to often be prompted by and connected to the emotions of a target individual, they may not necessarily be qualitatively identical. In her words, "sympathy means having concern for another's well-being, not imaginatively experiencing her mental states." (Coplan 2004, p. 145). She provides an example of this by bringing philosopher Peter Goldie's (1999) explanation on the topic:

> Empathy is consistent with indifference: "you can imagine the other's suffering, yet simply disregard it, or you might empathise with a person who has committed a terrible crime, yet feel no sympathy for you think he thoroughly deserves his punishment. (Goldie, 1999 in Coplan 2004, p. 145)

It could therefore be suggested that when expressing sympathy toward another individual in distress, there typically seems to be a natural inclination to help alleviate the stress. In contrast, empathy, in and of itself, does not appear to involve such a spontaneous impulse.

3.- Theoretical framework

The sections that follow will mostly aid the design of categories will "neaten" the exploration proposed by the basic research question, although it must be stressed that the dividing line between the literature review and the elements that compose this framework is indeed blurry, given the close connection between the two and the theoretical nature of the state of the art.

Firstly, it should be important to make reference to researcher Baila-Bigné (2020), who explores the emotional response to negative empathy as a literary narratological construction. Her research has focused on the literary devices, which she has coined "empathic builders", that promote an empathic engagement with negative characters. It is this section of her work that will be discussed now to further explain the categories that will mostly inform this research.

Baila-Bigné (2020) presents S. Keen's (2007) views on empathy as a positive emotional state per se as what, in Keen's words would be called "mainstream empathy" (Keen 2007, p. 74), which aligns with the traditional notion of an emotional reaction that the empathiser willingly experiences and that the target of empathy deserves. She does so in order to oppose this idea with that of "negative empathy" which, according to her, is "the intricate and practically unexplored emotion" which she considers to be one of

those dissident forms of empathy that is more likely to emerge in the realm of the fictional." (Baila-Bigné, 2020, pp. 7-8). In this regard, the author goes back to the original coinage of the term "negative empathy" by citing the German philosopher Theodor Lipps (Ercolino, 2018, p. 245), who believed that negative empathy was "empathy for others' negative emotions" (Morelli, Rameson, & Lieberman, in Baila-Bigné 2020, p. 8). However, she turns to contemporary revisions of the concept which have re-defined negative empathy as

> [e]mpathy with those who perform atrocious acts […] or, in relation to literature, "a cathartic identification with negative characters" (Ercolino 2018: 244). Therefore, starting off from a general description of empathy as a sympathetic "'understanding' of someone's feelings, not the 'sharing' of them" (Pedwell 2014: 6), negative empathy would consist in undertaking this same process with respect to those who commit immoral deeds. (Baila-Bigné 2020, p. 8)

It is worth noting that Baila Bigné's (2020) work serves to deepen the taxonomy presented by Coplan (2004) as the focus of her research appears to be narrower. Baila-Bigné (2020) goes on to explore A. Morton's (2011) idea that the constraints that limit empathic capacity, "are due, on many occasions, to an "internalised code of behaviour" (2011, p. 318) that morally restricts our imagination when it comes to humanising others." (Baila-Bigné 2020, p. 9). She then asserts that

> [a]mongst those who have been traditionally excluded from the "spotlight" of empathy […], one paradigmatic case is that of "people who do evil", whom we are "prone to

dehumanise" (Bloom 2016:181) because of our moral principles. Therefore, negative empathy, in which this Evil other is the target of empathic understanding, demands an overcoming of the "moral barriers" (Coplan 2011a: xlvii) that normally constrict empathic engagement and fosters an epistemological expansion of the focus of empathy, taking the emotional practice of empathy towards its moral limits. (Baila-Bigné 2020, p. 9)

It could be argued that the author delves into the concept of empathy and its application to individuals traditionally excluded from empathetic consideration, as discussed by Bloom (2016). Besides, one notable group in this regard is individuals categorised as people who do evil, whom society tends to dehumanise due to prevailing moral standards. Consequently, she concludes that the notion of negative empathy challenges the viewer to extend empathic understanding even to those perceived as morally reprehensible, necessitating a transcendence of typical "moral barriers" that restrict empathetic engagement. Finally, it could be understood that this expansion of empathy's scope represents an epistemological shift, pushing the boundaries of empathetic practice to its moral thresholds.

Baila-Bigné (2020) then proposes that literature not only provides encounters with a diverse array of subjectivities, which are often limited in real-life experiences, but also serves as a "safe space" where the "moral barriers" inhibiting empathy can be dismantled. This allows for, as Ercolino (2018) delineates, "a potentially regressive aesthetic experience, consisting in a cathartic identification with negative characters" (in Baila-Bigné 2020, p. 11).

These distinctions are of utmost importance to this research as they provide insight into fundamental concepts that will be elaborated upon in subsequent sections of this dissertation, particularly concerning the portrayal of Raymond Reddington and the romanticisation of his character in the television series *The Blacklist*. By understanding these distinctions, one might best understand the dynamics of character romanticisation and its implications within the narrative framework of the show.

3.1.- The romanticised criminal on the silver screen and the small screen

3.1.1.- General overview on silver-screen elements

Before going into the romanticisation of fictional criminals proper, the need is felt for some background information on the modes of representation in the different types of cinema and particularly into contemporary cinema, which is the frame within which *The Blacklist* (2013-2023) was created. Sanchez Casarrubios (2012) discusses the villain as a narrative figure in contemporary cinema and sets off her research by providing contextual information on the three major modes of representation in American cinema. She posits that they are "classical cinema, mannerist cinema, and post-classical cinema"[4] (Sánchez Casarrubios, 2012, p. 190). She moves on to assert that the classical mode represents the primary and institutional form, and subsequently, mannerism evolves as a derivative of this mode. Extending through European modernity, it transforms into the

---

[4] "Los tres grandes modos de representación del cine americano son, el cine clásico, el cine manierista y el cine postclásico." (Sánchez Casarrubios, 2012, p. 190)

post-classical cinema observed today. The films of the current decade align with this latter model (Sánchez Casarrubios, 2012).

According to this author, "classical cinema is characterised by being a symbolic narrative structured around the dual framework of donation (donación) and lack (carencia)."[5] (Sánchez Casarrubios, 2012, p. 190, my translation). She goes on to add that "the fact that this is symbolic narrative requires a robust structure of donation where a Sender (Destinador) embodying the Law assigns a Task to the Hero."[6] (Sánchez Casarrubios, 2012, p. 190, my translation). What seems relevant about this is the fact that the narrative in question seems to function beyond a mere sequence of events, instead it appears to embody deeper meanings and representations. In addition, it can be understood that the framework characteristic of classical cinema, in Sánchez Casarrubios (2012)'s view, is one in which the assignment of tasks is not arbitrary, but rather seems to carry weight and purpose within the narrative's symbolic landscape. The author explains that

> [i]n classical cinema, the role of the Hero constitutes the central figure in the film, as the entire narrative is articulated around them. On the other hand, a cinema structured around film genres places essential importance on the stylization patterns of these genres providing an ideal pathway for the unfolding of their internal and symbolic logic. In classical cinema the staging is subordinated to the construction of the symbolic narrative

---

[5] "El cine clásico se caracteriza por ser un relato simbólico estructurado sobre la doble estructura de la donación y la carencia, que hemos visto con anterioridad." (Sánchez Casarrubios, 2012, p. 190)
[6] "El hecho de ser un relato simbólico requiere que haya una estructura sólida de Donación, en la que un Destinador que encarna la Ley otorga al héroe una Tarea." (Sánchez Casarrubios, 2012, p. 190)

and not the other way around. Editing, lighting, and all components of the staging contribute to the creation of the narrative structure and of the axis donation-lack (donación-carencia).[7] (Sánchez Casarrubios, 2012, p. 191, my translation)

The author contrasts classical cinema and cinema structured around genres in order to explore the role of the Hero and the storylines. While classical cinema appears to be a linear and character-centric approach to storytelling, where the Hero's journey drives the plot forward, the latter seems to emphasise the stylised patterns inherent in each genre, offering a framework for the expression of their internal logic and thematic elements. In addition, it seems important to point out that, from her point of view, staging, editing, lighting, and all components of filmmaking appear to contribute to the overarching narrative structure in classical cinema. Finally, the writer's perspective suggests a holistic approach to storytelling, where every aspect of the cinematic experience serves to reinforce the central themes and motifs of the narrative.

More importantly, the author maintains that European cinema is in complete opposition to the cinema created in Hollywood regarding their narrative structures. She points out that

---

[7] "En el cine clásico el papel de héroe constituye la gran figura del film puesto que sobre él se articula todo el relato. Un cine, por otro lado, configurado en torno a los géneros cinematográficos, los patrones de estilización de los mismos adquieren una importancia esencial y una vía idónea para el despliegue de su lógica interna y simbólica. En el cine clásico la puesta en escena está supeditada a la construcción del relato simbólico y no al revés. El montaje, la iluminación y todos los componentes de la puesta en escena contribuyen a la creación de la estructura del relato, y de su eje Donación-Carencia." (Sánchez Casarrubios, 2012, p. 191)

[t]he staging in Hollywood (classical) cinema went beyond illustrating the narrative. In other words, it did not merely construct a coherent narrative universe and introduce the viewer's perspective into it. Instead, it *wrote* the narrative, articulating it through various mechanisms of cinematic writing. The classic film often breaks formal continuity to create a system of opposition that articulates the meaning of the story. In this way, classical cinema configured staging as the symbolic writing of the very structure of the narrative.[8] (Sánchez Casarrubios, 2012, p. 191, my translation)

Regarding this, it seems relevant to observe that, according to the writer, rather than serving as a passive backdrop, staging appears to actively participate in constructing the narrative universe and engaging the viewer's perspective within it. In addition, Sánchez Casarrubios (2012) suggests that staging operates as a form of cinematic writing, wherein it not only conveys a coherent narrative but also articulates its meaning through various mechanisms. From her view on classical cinema, it can be argued that staging is not just about creating a visually cohesive environment, but also about crafting a symbolic representation of the narrative's structure endowing it with depth and several layers of meaning.

The author emphasises the role of staging in cinema as a means of constructing the narrative and points out that metaphors, rather than realistic continuity, are central to the

---

[8] "La puesta en escena del cine de Hollywood (clásico), no se limitaba a ilustrar la narración. Es decir, a construir un universo narrativo coherente y a introducir en el mismo la mirada del espectador. Sino que escribía la narración, la articulaba mediante los diversos mecanismos de la escritura cinematográfica. El film clásico rompe en muchas ocasiones la continuidad formal, para crear un sistema de oposición que articula la significación del relato. De este modo, el cine clásico configuraba la puesta en escena como la escritura simbólica de la estructura misma del relato." (Sánchez Casarrubios, 2012, p. 191)

symbolic narrative of classical cinema. In her own words, "classic cinema diverges from visual allure; it avoids showcasing what the audience desires."[9] (Sánchez Casarrubios, 2012, p. 192, my translation). The author illustrates this through the following example:

In a classic film, the meeting between the Object of Desire (the female character) and the Hero (the main character) is deliberately withheld until the film's conclusion. This delayed revelation, often culminating in a kiss after the fulfilment of a significant task, the writer argues, limits the audience's glimpse, specifically preventing a view beyond the kiss, symbolising sexual consummation. The hero's perspective remains distant, reinforcing his authentic heroism and eluding the viewer's proximity.[10] (Sánchez Casarrubios, 2012, p. 191, my translation)

In the 50's, classical cinema started to give way to mannerist cinema, which is called that since authors began changing the classical structure in a bigger or smaller manner. Sánchez Casarrubios (2012) explains:

In mannerist cinema, the figure of the Destinator weakens to such an extent that it becomes a false or suspicious Destinator, and therefore, the Task entrusted to the Hero as well. This is how the strong figure of the Hero begins to dissolve. With a deceitful Task, he himself becomes an ambiguous figure. A psychological characterization begins to be

---

[9] "El cine clásico no es un cine de la fascinación visual, en el cine clásico no se muestra lo que el espectador quiere ver." (Sánchez Casarrubios, 2012, p. 192)
[10] "En un film clásico no veremos el encuentro entre el Objeto de Deseo (la chica) y el Héroe (el protagonista) hasta seguramente el final del film. En el que se pueda producir el beso después de haber concluido la Tarea. Nunca veremos más allá de ese beso, que representa una consumación sexual. El punto de vista del héroe se encuentra inaccesible para el espectador, por eso es el auténtico héroe. No podemos acercarnos a él." (Sánchez Casarrubios, 2012, p. 192)

attributed to the character, which will reach its climax in later post-classical cinema with the demented or unhinged protagonist.[11] (Sánchez Casarrubios, 2012, p. 193)

It could be interpreted that in mannerist cinema, the destabilisation of the Sender's role introduces a notable shift in the Hero's characterisation. The once firm and decisive Hero is now confronted with a dubious Task, undermining the traditional heroism associated with classical cinema. This deviation could be said to mark a departure from the clear moral contours of classic storytelling. Additionally, the Hero's psychological depth may be seen to become a focal point, paving the way for the exploration of more complex and mentally intricate characters. This trend finds its zenith in post-classical cinema, as exemplified by films like "Hard Candy" (2005), where protagonists are portrayed as psychologically disturbed or unhinged, challenging conventional perceptions of heroism and narrative structure.

Finally, as from the 1980s, the western world uniformly embraces "the demystification of culture"[12] (Sánchez Casarrubios, 2012 p. 194, my translation) as its defining feature. Sánchez Casarrubios (2012) emphasises that individuals in the 1980s west experienced a loss of belief in any overarching ideology. She points out that

---

[11] "En el cine manierista la figura del Destinador se debilita, hasta tal punto que se convierte en un falso o sospechoso Destinador, y por tanto, la Tarea encomendada al Héroe también. Así es como se comienza a diluir la figura fuerte del Héroe. Con una Tarea tramposa, él mismo se convierte en una figura ambigua. Comienza a otorgársele al personaje una caracterización psicológica, que tendrá su paroxismo en el posterior cine postclásico con la figura demente del protagonista, o desquiciado" (Hard Candy, 2005) (Sánchez Casarrubios, 2012, p. 193)

[12] "A partir de los años 80, Occidente de forma general adopta definitivamente la desmitificación de la cultura como su punta de lanza." (Sánchez Casarrubios, 2012, p. 194)

[e]stablished systems crumble, the dominant intellectual and political currents of the 20th century collapse definitively, and the fall of the communist bloc marks the end of the Cold War. This era witnesses the ascent of mass culture and a lifestyle dominated by consumerism, lacking the symbolic cohesion that once defined culture. This marks the inception of the post-classical cinema era.[13] (Sánchez Casarrubios, 2012, p. 194, my translation)

It bears noting that, according to the writer, this transformative period marked by significant socio-political and cultural shifts can ultimately be considered to have paved the way for the emergence of post-classical cinema. Moreover, it can be asserted that the rise of mass culture and consumerism as dominant forces shaping societal norms and values seems to reflect a departure from the symbolic coherence and ideological underpinnings that previously defined cultural expression. Regarding this new era of cinema, it is worth noting that Sánchez Casarrubios' belief is that it embraces experimentation, innovation, and diversity, mirroring the eclectic and pluralistic nature of contemporary society. To her, this era appears to represent a departure from the linear storytelling and symbolic clarity of classical cinema, offering filmmakers greater creative freedom to explore new narrative forms and artistic expressions. Again, the advent of consumer-driven lifestyles signals a paradigm shift towards a more fragmented and decentralised cultural landscape, where traditional boundaries and hierarchies give way to a more fluid and dynamic exchange of ideas and values. Interestingly, in addition,

---

[13] "El occidental de los años 80 ya no cree en nada. Los antiguos sistemas han caído, las grandes corrientes de pensamiento y políticas del siglo XX se desmoronan definitivamente, el bloque comunista cae y la Guerra Fría se desvanece. Emerge la cultura de masas, el consumismo como forma de vida, sin símbolos que coordinen la cultura. Comienza el tiempo del cine postclásico." (Sánchez Casarrubios, 2012, p. 194)

the writer argues that "American post-classical cinema, while transforming and subverting the narrative form, refrains from outright abandonment."[14] (Sánchez Casarrubios, 2012, p. 194, my translation)

3.1.2.- The villain

It is in this realm of post-classical cinema, that the figure of the villain (especially "our" villain) will gain paramount significance. An ideal starting point may be the following statement by Sánchez Casarrubios (2012):

> The figure of the villain is crucial in the post-classical narrative; all its pillars are built upon it. False senders who turn into villains, villains who shape up as protagonists, intense characterization of the wicked figure… As we will see later, the villain is, in today's cinema, the key figure in its evolution. One could even argue that the villain is more important within the narrative than the hero. (Sánchez Casarrubios, 2012, p. 198, my translation)[15]

From this, it follows that the significance of the villain in post-classical narrative cinema is paramount, serving as a linchpin upon which the entire narrative structure rests. Besides, from the author's perspective, this pivotal figure not only shapes the trajectory

---

[14] "El cine postclásico americano no abandona, sin embargo, la forma relato. La destruye, sí, la cambia y la voltea pero no la abandona." (Sánchez Casarrubios, 2012, p. 194)

[15] "Ciertamente la figura del villano es vital en el relato postclásico, sobre él se erigen todos sus pilares. Falsos destinadores que se convierten en villanos, villanos que se conforman como protagonistas, intensa caracterización de la figura malvada... Como veremos posteriormente, el villano es, en el cine de hoy en día, la figura clave en su evolución, podríamos decir que incluso, es más importante dentro del relato que el propio héroe." (Sánchez Casarrubios, 2012, p. 195)

of the storyline but also seems to undergo significant evolution within the narrative arc. From false senders who transition into villainous roles to antagonists who emerge as central protagonists, character dynamics in post-classical cinema exhibit a fluidity and complexity that challenge traditional storytelling conventions. Moreover, the intense characterization of the villainous figure can be considered to add depth and dimension to the narrative, delving into the intricacies of their motives and psychology. Interestingly, following the writer's ideas, there appears to be an evident shift in narrative focus, with the villain often assuming a more prominent role than the hero in contemporary cinema. It can be understood that a departure from conventional heroic archetypes is taking place and that the evolving nature of storytelling in the post-classical era, where the antagonist may wield greater narrative weight and intrigue than the traditional protagonist, is more predominant.

Going back to the importance of directors and producers previously explored in this dissertation, according to Sánchez Casarrubios (2012),

[t]he camera is always placed in the subjective shot, that of the protagonist or that of the other characters, including the villain. This is how maximum suspense and maximum emotional identification with the character are achieved. The viewer is placed at the very point of action; there is no third-person distance as in classical cinema. We do not see the hero as something superior, a third figure that we must contemplate.[16] (Sánchez Casarrubios, 2012, p. 199, my translation)

---

[16] "La cámara es emplazada siempre en el plano subjetivo, el del protagonista o el del resto de personajes, incluido el villano, así es como se consigue el máximo suspense, la máxima identificación emocional con

It is worth noting that the strategic use of camera placement described above seems to profoundly influence the viewer's engagement and emotional investment in the unfolding narrative. In addition, placing the camera within the subjective perspective of characters, whether protagonist or antagonist, can be said to create a sense of immediacy and intimacy that intensifies suspense and emotional resonance. According to Sánchez Casarrubios (2012), by aligning the viewer's viewpoint with that of the villain, the audience is immersed directly into the heart of the action, eliminating the traditional third-person distance characteristic of classical cinema. This immersive approach appears to foster a deeper connection between the viewer and the narrative, heightening emotional identification with the characters and their experiences. As a result, it can be concluded that viewers are not merely spectators but active participants in the unfolding drama, experiencing events as if they were unfolding in real-time, without the hierarchical distance often associated with classical cinematic portrayals of heroes and villains, as if they were in a state of willing suspension of disbelief.

The significance of the villain is crucial within this narrative trend. In this light, Casarrubio (2010) posits that

> [t]he discourse frequently revolves around antiheroes in this context, as numerous villainous figures assume the role of protagonists without a distinct hero present in the

---

el personaje. El espectador es emplazado en el punto mismo de la acción, no hay una distancia tercera como en el cine clásico, no vemos al héroe como algo superior, una figura tercera que debemos contemplar." (Sánchez Casarrubios, 2012, p. 199)

storyline. She adds that the audience accompanies the protagonist with authentic disapproval, yet concurrently, they are captivated by the escapades of the antagonist. The antihero stands out as a charismatic and alluring character, holding a unique appeal for the audience.[17] (Sánchez Casarrubios, 2012, p. 207, my translation)

This phenomenon described by the author may be said to prompt audiences to follow the protagonist's journey with genuine scepticism and disapproval, even as they find themselves drawn to the compelling exploits of the antagonist. In addition, the antihero, characterised by a magnetic charisma and an undeniable allure, is bound to captivate viewers, according to Sánchez Casarrubios (2012). Despite their morally ambiguous nature, antiheroes seem to possess qualities that resonate deeply with audiences. Such is the case with Raymond Reddington and his charming personality. To conclude this section, the author goes back to the concepts of Lack and Donation by affirming that they are completely blurred or inverted. She asserts that "undoubtedly, the antihero has a Task, but it is not given to them by any figure embodying the Law; they have their own law"[18] (Sánchez Casarrubios, 2012, p. 207, my translation), as will be the case with Reddington.

González Torres (2017) discusses the role of villains as heroes in today's movies. The author explores the relationship between entertainment and contemporary society,

---

[17] "El papel del villano es imprescindible, solemos hablar de antihéroes en esta tendencia pues muchos de los personajes villanos son a su vez los propios protagonistas del film sin que exista un héroe real en el relato. El espectador sigue a su protagonista con auténtico rechazo pero a su vez asombrado de las peripecias del villano. El antihéroe se caracteriza por ser un personaje carismático y atrayente para el espectador." (Sánchez Casarrubios, 2012, p. 207)

[18] "Sin duda, el antihéroe tiene una Tarea, pero no le es donada por ninguna figura que encarne la Ley, él tiene su propia ley." (Sánchez Casarrubios, 2012, p. 207)

portraying entertainment as "a mirror reflecting people's fears and desires"[19] (González Torres 2017, p. 66). He asserts:

> The image presented is not always clear-cut; instead, it can be murky and tainted with populist elements that interpret a bloody revenge or the actions of a criminal as acts of justice outside legal and ethical boundaries, which suggests a complex interplay between entertainment creators and the audience's perception.[20] (González Torres 2017, p. 66, my translation)

He adds that it prompts reflection on the blurred lines between morality, justice, and the influence of entertainment on shaping societal norms. It could be argued that the metaphorical "mirror" illustrates how entertainment projects back the fears and desires prevalent in society. The mention of a "murky, sordid" final image may be said to imply that the reflections are not always clear or wholesome, suggesting an intricate interaction between entertainment and societal values. The reference to populist elements influencing the perception of bloody revenge or criminal actions as acts of justice can be inferred to emphasise the impact of creative forces and audience interpretation on shaping unconventional notions of justice that transcend legal and ethical boundaries. Nevertheless, modern villains are inspired by contemporary references, but they are independent regarding some concrete characteristics. The author explains:

---

[19] "La sociedad contemporánea es la que se contempla y refleja en el 'espejo' del entretenimiento, devolviendo éste la imagen de sus miedos y deseos." (González Torres 2017, p. 66)

[20] "Un resplandor que en ocasiones configura una imagen final turbia, sórdida, con ciertos ingredientes populistas que explican que la sangrienta venganza contra un violador o la actuación de un peligroso delincuente llegue a ser entendida –desde el punto de vista de directores, guionistas o creativos, respaldados a su vez por los espectadores– como un acto de justicia al margen de la ley y de la ética." (González Torres 2017, p. 66)

Individualism, a powerful charisma, an excessive ambition to control knowledge, the display of a permanent personal dissatisfaction, or the desire to dominate one's environment at the expense of subduing others.[21] (González Torres 2017, p. 66, my translation)

It could be asserted that the qualities mentioned by the writer and the reference to a powerful charisma may suggest a magnetic or influential personality, ambitious and with a mix of individualistic and dominating traits. Interestingly, the character to be explored in this dissertation seems to exhibit traits that align with these characteristics.

González Torres (2017) turns to the individual's ability to "feel what the characters are feeling, getting emotionally involved with them"[22] (Gonzalez Torres 2017, p. 68, my translation) to explain that this responds to a multidimensional concept, which in his words,

[a] multidimensional concept that encompasses different processes ranging from emotional to cognitive empathy, passing through temporary loss of self-awareness, positive evaluation of the "model" to follow, and the desire to be one of those who protagonize the plot, varying in intensity within an intermittent perceptual process.[23] (González Torres 2017, p. 68, my translation)

---

[21] "El individualismo, un poderoso carisma, una desmedida ambición por controlar el conocimiento, la muestra de una permanente insatisfacción personal o el deseo de dominar su entorno a costa de doblegar a terceros." (González Torres 2017, p. 66)

[22] "Esa capacidad de sentir lo que los personajes sienten, implicándose de manera afectiva." (Gonzalez Torres 2017, p. 68)

[23] "Un concepto multidimensional que comprende procesos distintos que van desde la empatía emocional a la cognitiva, pasando por la pérdida temporal de la autoconciencia, la valoración positiva del 'modelo'

Here, the writer describes a range of psychological processes involved in the perception of a narrative or storyline. He begins by mentioning various processes, such as emotional and cognitive empathy, probably indicating the engagement of both emotional and intellectual aspects in the audience's response. The reference to the temporary loss of self-awareness could be said to suggest a deep immersion or absorption in the narrative, potentially leading to a transient disconnection from one's own reality, as discussed above in the section on willing suspension of disbelief. The positive evaluation of the "model" to follow may imply the admiration or identification with certain characters, and the desire to be part of the narrative may reflect a form of wish fulfilment or vicarious participation. The mention of varying intensity within an intermittent perceptual process could be said to highlight the dynamic and fluctuating nature of these psychological responses throughout the narrative experience.

In addition, González Torres (2017) presents the concept of "drama or tragedy paradox" ('paradoja del drama o la tragedia') and posits that it works in favour of the villain as, in most cases, shares the same starting point with other evil representations:

> In a past time, sometimes coinciding with childhood or adolescence, he has experienced a trauma that has marked him for life. At this point in the character-building process, the resemblance to the hero is total, as the hero also has a similar genesis.[24]
> (Gonzalez Torres 2017, p. 69, my translation)

---

a seguir y el deseo de ser uno de los que protagoniza la trama, variando la intensidad dentro de un proceso perceptivo intermitente." (Gonzalez Torres 2017, p. 68)

[24] "En un tiempo pasado, a veces coincidente con la infancia o con la adolescencia, ha vivido un trauma que lo ha marcado de por vida. En este punto del proceso de construcción del personaje, el parecido con el héroe es total por cuanto éste también cuenta con una génesis parecida." (Gonzalez Torres 2017, p. 69)

It is interesting to note that the author discusses a crucial aspect of character development, emphasising a shared experience of trauma in both the villain and the hero. The mention of a trauma in the character's past can be said to be suggestive of a pivotal life event that has left a lasting impact, contributing to the shaping of their personality or identity. Besides, the comparison with the hero may point towards a parallelism in their life experiences, creating a connection between the villain and the hero based on shared adversity. Finally, this shared genesis may be said to serve to establish a profound similarity between the character and the hero. All this becomes evident, according to González Torres (2017), to "endow the villain with great empathic weight."[25] (González Torres 2017, p. 69, my translation)

3.1.3.- Third Golden Age of TV and the new protagonists

The concept of TV 's "Golden Ages" recognizes periods of exceptional creativity, innovation, and quality in television programming. Galindo Furió (2015) affirms that television has had three Golden Ages so far. According to the Encyclopedia Britannica, "the period that ran roughly between 1948 and 1959 is referred to by many historians and scholars of the medium as the "Golden Age" of television." (*Encyclopedia Britannica*, 2024). This period was characterised by the rise of live television dramas and really cult anthology series like Rod Sterling's acclaimed *The Twilight Zone* (CBS), where each episode features a self-contained story or narrative, quality shows which are

---

[25] "El recurso a esa connotación se hace evidente para dotar una mayor carga empática al villano". (Gonzalez Torres 2017, p. 69)

still considered classics today like *I Love Lucy* (CBS). Among the more emblematic series of the mid- to late 1950s was the suburban family sitcom, which presented traditional happy families in pristine suburban environments. *Father Knows Best* (CBS/NBC, 1954–62) was the most popular at the time" (*Encyclopedia Britannica*, 2024) However, according to this renowned website, in the early stages of television's prominence as the primary mass medium in the country, network executives adopted a philosophy later termed "least-objectionable programming". This approach presumed that, given the limited options of three networks, viewers would choose content that they found tolerable rather than specifically enjoyable. Consequently, live theatrical performances transitioned to different genres. It can be concluded that the subsequent decrease in quality, along with a series of scandals ultimately prompted the conclusion of the Golden Age.

The Second Golden Age is believed to be associated with the 1980s and 1990s, marked by the emergence of revolutionary shows like *The Sopranos*, *The Wire*, *Seinfeld*, and *Friends*:

> Up to the 1980s, the three original networks—ABC, CBS, and NBC—enjoyed a virtual oligopoly in the American television industry. In the 1980s, however, cable television began to experience unprecedented growth. Whereas broadcast TV allowed a viewer to receive the signals of nearby stations over the air with the help of an antenna, cable technology brought a much wider array of channels directly into the home by way of a coaxial cable. (*Encyclopedia Britannica,* 2024)

As explained above, this era witnessed a surge in high-quality, complex, and critically acclaimed television shows. In addition to this, people started watching different things at different times, not just what was tolerable and all together in the same room:

> Many had predicted that cable would reduce the number of broadcast networks or put them out of business entirely. On the contrary, broadcast networks proliferated as well during this period, doubling in number from three to six. (*Encyclopedia Britannica,* 2024)

The term "Third Golden Age of TV" refers to a period in television history marked by a surge in high-quality, critically acclaimed, and culturally impactful television shows. The "Third Golden Age" is typically associated with the late 1990s and early 2000s, continuing into the 2010s, and today. According to *Encyclopedia Britannica* (2024), TV shows during this period were praised for their high production values, complex storytelling, and well-developed characters. What is more, the proliferation of cable channels and the rise of streaming services allowed for more diverse and niche content, challenging traditional network television. The most relevant characteristic to this dissertation being that many shows featured morally ambiguous or flawed protagonists, such as those in *The Sopranos*, *Breaking Bad*, *The Blacklist*, and *Mad Men*. Galindo (2015) points out the following:

> The third golden age of television is also the era of anti-heroes, considerably distant from classical heroic standards, and a new notion of villain with characters much more nuanced and narratively rich than those we were accustomed to, whose sole function in the narrative was to thwart the hero's path. With quality as its hallmark, contemporary

television fictions are led by psychologically and morally complex characters, for whom the end matters more than the means used to achieve it. However, this brings them closer to reality than to the repetitive heroic prototypes, and despite being serial killers, mobsters, hitmen, or traffickers, they have managed to evoke sympathy from viewers in a way never before seen.[26] (Galindo 2015, p. 4, my translation)

It could be argued that departing from classical heroic standards, and with a new notion of villains with characters that are much more nuanced and narratively rich than those we were accustomed to, the Third Golden Age of TV highlights the prevalence of antiheroes and the evolution of the portrayal of villains. It bears noting that Galindo (2015) emphasises the departure from traditional heroic norms, presenting characters with greater psychological depth and moral complexity. In addition, the focus on the end justifying the means adds a layer of realism to the narratives. More importantly, it could be asserted that despite featuring morally ambiguous and often criminal protagonists, contemporary TV has succeeded in creating empathy and connection with these characters, challenging traditional storytelling conventions:

The contemporary hero is really an antihero, an ordinary individual, much like any of us, possessing both strengths and weaknesses. Frequently engaging in activities that fall

---

[26] "La tercera edad dorada de la televisión es también la era de los antihéroes, alejados considerablemente de los estándares heroicos clásicos, y de una nueva noción de villano con personajes malvados de mucho más recorrido y riqueza narrativa que aquellos a los que estábamos acostumbrados, cuya única función en el relato era interponerse en el camino del héroe. Con la calidad como seña de identidad, las ficciones televisivas contemporáneas están protagonizadas por personajes complejos psicológica y moralmente, para quienes importa más el fin que los medios utilizados para conseguirlo. Sin embargo, eso les acerca más a la realidad que a los repetitivos prototipos heroicos y, a pesar de tratarse de asesinos en serie, mafiosos, sicarios o traficantes, han conseguido que los espectadores simpaticen con ellos de una manera nunca antes vista." (Galindo 2015, p. 4)

outside legal boundaries, the character consistently prompts us to reflect on the ever-shifting line between what is morally acceptable and what is not.[27] (Galindo 2015, p. 7, my translation)

Galindo (2015) goes on to provide a definition from the *Royal Spanish Academy Dictionary* to sustain her point of view regarding empathy towards theses morally ambiguous characters:

Like that character who 'in a work of fiction, although performing the narrative functions typical of the traditional hero, differs in appearance and values,' the emergence of this type of protagonist has perhaps been the most powerful narrative force behind this fatal attraction that occurs between viewers and morally questionable characters.[28] (Galindo 2015, p. 7, my translation)

She goes on to describe that "it is the enduring human struggle between embracing the untamed instincts within us and the ongoing effort to control them that is portrayed in these characters."[29] (Galindo 2015, p. 7, my translation). The author highlights that the thrill experienced by the audience in surrendering to such characters is evident and concludes that this kind of character is "a complex figure that transcends the

---

[27] "El héroe contemporáneo es más bien un antihéroe, un personaje corriente como cualquiera de nosotros, con virtudes y defectos, que se mueve en muchas ocasiones fuera de la ley y que nos hace cuestionarnos constantemente dónde está el límite entre lo moralmente correcto y lo incorrecto." (Galindo 2015, p. 7)
[28] "Como aquel personaje que "en una obra de ficción, aunque desempeña las funciones narrativas propias del héroe tradicional, difiere en su apariencia y valores", la irrupción en escena de este tipo de protagonista ha sido quizá el motivo de mayor fuerza narrativa de esta atracción fatal que se produce entre espectadores y personajes de moral cuestionable." (Galindo 2015, p. 7)
[29] "Vemos reflejado en personajes ficticios el eterno conflicto humano entre dar rienda suelta a la naturaleza salvaje que bulle en nuestro interior y el continuo intento por domarla, y vemos la euforia que supone para el espectador dejarse llevar por esta clase de personajes." (Galindo 2015, p. 7)

conventional hero-villain dichotomy, adding depth and realism to the characterisation [30] (Galindo 2015, p. 7, my translation). As to the changed rules and the present focus on moral ambiguity, villains and antiheroes, Galindo (2015) observes the following:

> The processes of projection and imaginary identification of the subject-viewer/TV spectator are focused on fictional subjects who, through their performance in the plot, contradict traditional heroic values, often representing prototypes of blatant evil (...) Characters who are equally heroes and villains, from their villainy stems a heroic path whose development arc offers the viewer the satisfaction of a fantasy populated both by admiration and denial due to its essentially immoral or repulsive nature. This consummation of a sort of morbid pleasure or unconfessed joy simultaneously stages an attraction towards the figure of the monster."[31] (Galindo 2015, p. 14, my translation)

Regarding this, it may be posited that the intricate dynamics of projection and identification within the viewer's psyche focuses on fictional characters that defy traditional heroic norms. It seems plausible that the complexity of characters who straddle the line between heroism and villainy, creates a narrative tension that offers viewers a unique blend of admiration and denial. The author's reference to a "pleasure

---

[30] "En definitiva, el antihéroe no es ni héroe ni villano, sino el cúmulo de ambos representado por un personaje repleto de complejidad que lo convierte en un ser fascinante y completamente realista." (Galindo 2015, p. 7)

[31] "Los procesos de proyección e identificación imaginarias del sujeto-espectador/televidente se concentran en sujetos ficcionales que, mediante su desempeño en la trama, contradicen los tradicionales valores heroicos, cuando no representan justamente prototipos de abierta maldad (...) Personajes que son en igual medida héroes que villanos, de su villanía arranca una senda heroica cuyo arco de desarrollo ofrece al espectador, la satisfacción de una fantasía poblada tanto de admiración como de la negación de la misma por resultar esencialmente inmoral o repulsiva. Esta consumación de una suerte de placer morboso o gozo inconfesable escenifica, al mismo tiempo, un movimiento de atracción hacia la figura del monstruo". (Galindo, 2015, p. 14)

of the morbid" may suggest an exploration of darker themes and the allure of morally ambiguous characters. Their villainous traits initiate a heroic journey, providing the viewer with the gratification of a fantasy that involves admiration and, simultaneously, denial due to its inherently immoral or repugnant nature. As characters tend to be the main reason behind the enjoyment of a story, Galindo (2015) considers that

> [e]very visual story possesses the capacity to evoke feelings of sympathy, antipathy, alliances, and various physical and emotional responses towards the characters within its narrative realm, which plays a vital role in shaping the moral and ideological impact of the stories."[32] (Galindo 2015, pp. 14-15, my translation)

In this respect, Galindo (2015) explores Zillman and Cantor's Affective Disposition Theory (ADT) to try to explain that,

> Viewers emotionally engage with the events portrayed in audiovisual narratives, and that their reactions can be manipulated through cinematic and narrative techniques to make the audience sympathise with one character or another."[33] (Galindo 2015, p. 15, my translation)

---

[32] "Los personajes suelen ser la principal razón por la que se disfruta una historia, por ello toda narración audiovisual tiene la habilidad de crear simpatías, antipatías, alianzas y otras tantas respuestas físicas y emocionales hacia los personajes que habitan el mundo narrativo. Esto es trascendental para el impacto moral e ideológico de las historias." (Galindo 2015, pp. 14-15)

[33] "Los espectadores participan emocionalmente en los acontecimientos representados en los relatos audiovisuales y sus reacciones pueden manipularse a través de técnicas cinematográficas y narrativas para lograr que el público simpatice con un personaje u otro." (Galindo 2015, p. 15)

She goes on to briefly explain the seven steps involved in the formation of affective disposition:

(1) Perception and counselling, the viewer only observes the character's interpretation; (2) Moral judgement, the viewer judges the character's action; (3) Affective disposition, if the viewer considers that the character follows a moral behaviour, they will form a positive disposition, while if they do not consider the action to be moral, the disposition will be negative; (4) Anticipation and apprehension, the viewer wishes for their favourite character to succeed and fears a possible failure, unlike with their least favourite character; (5) Perception and evaluation, the result entails an emotion; (6) Emotional response to the outcome, the viewer decides how they feel about the story and its characters; (7) Moral judgement, the viewer decides whether they approve of the outcome of the story or not."[34] (Galindo 2015, pp. 15-16, my translation)

The author explains that "nonetheless, human social nature calls for a morally justified character selection process."[35] (Galindo 2015, p. 16, my translation). She adds that "it is our affective disposition together with our moral judgement that allow us, and

---

[34] "(1) Percepción y asesoramiento, el espectador solo observa la interpretación del personaje; (2) Juicio moral, el espectador juzga la acción del personaje; (3) Disposición afectiva, si el espectador considera que el personaje sigue un comportamiento moral formará una disposición positiva, mientras que si no considera que la acción sea moral, la disposición será negativa; (4) Anticipación y aprehensión, el espectador desea que su personaje favorito triunfe y teme un posible fracaso, al contrario que con su personaje menos favorito; (5) Percepción y valoración, el resultado conlleva una emoción; (6) Respuesta emocional hacia el resultado, el espectador decide cómo se siente sobre la historia y sus personajes; (7) Juicio Moral, el espectador decide si aprueba el resultado de la historia o no." (Galindo 2015, pp. 15-16)

[35] "Sin embargo, nuestra naturaleza social requiere que la selección de los personajes más y menos favoritos no sea caprichosa, sino que ha de estar moralmente justificada." (Galindo 2015, p. 16)

rules, our involvement with fiction."[36] (Galindo 2015, p. 16, my translation). The author concludes by posting a question: "How is it possible then that we like a character like Hannibal Lecter, Tony Soprano, Walter White, or Dexter himself?"[37] (Galindo 2015, p. 16, my translation). Therefore, why do we take to these characters?

The mentioned author presents a taxonomy of factors that she believes are pivotal to explain why the viewers allow themselves to be deceived and feel a connection with fictional characters. To begin with, the author turns to Raney (2004) to explore what the audience does when they experience moral disengagement:

> The narrative presents viewers with the opportunity to temporarily set aside their moral and social norms, interpreting immoral behaviours of their beloved characters as morally justifiable. This allows them to maintain a positive emotional connection with these characters and continue enjoying the storyline.[38] (Raney 2004 in Galindo 2015, p. 16, my translation)

Following this idea, Galindo (2015) concludes that "the process of identifying with characters may serve as a mechanism for moral disengagement, enabling audiences to

---

[36] "De este modo, la disposición afectiva y los juicios morales permiten y gobiernan nuestra participación en la ficción. Estos juicios se producen sobre las acciones en las que participa un determinado personaje y permiten que el espectador llegue a la conclusión de cuál cree que es el bueno y cuál el malo." (Galindo 2015, p. 16)

[37] "¿Cómo es posible entonces que nos guste un personaje como Hannibal Lecter, Tony Soprano, Walter White o el propio Dexter?" (Galindo 2015, p. 16)

[38] "Raney (2004) apuntó que lo mismo sucede con nuestros amigos ficticios, ya que la narración ofrece al espectador la posibilidad de dejar a un lado sus valores morales y sociales, interpretando comportamientos inmorales de sus personajes favoritos como correctos moralmente para justificar que le gusten esos personajes y, así, seguir manteniendo una disposición afectiva positiva hacia ellos y continuar disfrutando de la historia." (Galindo 2015, p. 16)

appreciate narratives featuring villains and antiheroes"[39] (Galindo 2015, p. 16, my translation).

Secondly, she explores the concept of identification, which she believes to be founded on the idea of allowing the audience to "identify" with one or more characters in the story in order to allow the viewer to forget about his daily life and problems for a period of time in which he is immersed in the lives, adventures and emotions of fictional characters.[40] (Galindo 2015, p. 17, my translation). Next, Galindo (2015) turns to Jonathan Cohen's (2001) ideas to better explain how the identification process works:

> To identify with a character means to feel such a strong affinity towards the character that we become absorbed in the text and reach an empathetic understanding for the feelings generated by the character's experiences, as well as their motivations and objectives. We experience what happens to the characters as if it were happening to us, while momentarily at least, we forget ourselves as spectators, which intensifies our experience.[41] (Cohen 2001 in Galindo 2015, p. 17)

---

[39] "La identificación con uno o varios personajes podría ser perfectamente el mecanismo a través del cual funciona la desconexión moral para disfrutar de las narrativas protagonizadas por villanos y antihéroes." (Galindo 2015, p. 16)

[40] "Uno de los objetivos primarios de las narraciones audiovisuales es arrastrar al espectador al universo de ficción y hacerle olvidar su vida cotidiana durante unas horas, en las que experimentará de primera mano las vivencias, aventuras, fortunas y desgracias de sus personajes favoritos y menos favoritos. Para que esto ocurra, el espectador ha de sentirse identificado con uno o varios personajes de la historia." (Galindo 2015, p. 17)

[41] "Identificarse con un personaje significa sentir una afinidad hacia el personaje tan fuerte que nos vemos absortos en el texto y llegamos a un entendimiento empático por los sentimientos que generan las vivencias del personaje, así como sus motivaciones y objetivos. Experimentamos qué les pasa a los personajes como si nos pasara a nosotros, mientras momentáneamente al menos, nos olvidamos de nosotros como espectadores, lo cual intensifica nuestra experiencia" (Cohen 2001 in Galindo 2015, p. 17)

It could be propounded that, in order to establish a connection with a character, the audience immerses itself in the storyline, adopting the character's viewpoint as if experiencing the events first-hand. This engagement may be understood to enable them to comprehend the motives guiding the character's actions and to anticipate the potential consequences within the narrative. According to Cohen (2001, in Galindo, 2015),

[t]he process of identification can be initiated by various factors, including the production's characteristics, such as the perspective determined by the camera, which directs the viewer's focus, or the viewer's affinity for a particular character.[42] (p. 17)

Additionally, Galindo (2015) affirms that "recognition of similarities between the viewer and the character can contribute to this identification process."[43] (Galindo 2015, p. 17, my translation), and the strength of identification may be said to be influenced by several factors, including the character's nature, the viewer's perspectives, values, and interests, and the textual elements such as direction, script, and performance. Additionally, when viewers identify with a character, they can be considered to merge with them and internalise their behaviours, which may alleviate self-criticism for accepting morally ambiguous actions, thus facilitating identification with characters of morally ambiguous or overtly malicious nature. This dynamic could be said to highlight

---

[42] "El proceso de identificación puede iniciarse por alguna característica de la producción, pues la cámara es la que determina el punto de vista desde el que se cuenta la historia y por tanto establece el objetivo con el que identificarse, lo que provoca que el espectador adopte la perspectiva de un personaje; por el cariño del espectador por un personaje en concreto." (Cohen 2001 in Galindo 2015, p. 17)
[43] "(...) o por la comprensión de que existe un parecido entre el propio espectador y el personaje." (Galindo 2015, p. 17)

the complex interplay between narrative engagement and moral evaluation in viewer-character relationships.

Thirdly, Galindo (2015) discusses character engagement and relies on Murray Smith's definition of the concept as "the emotional reaction of a viewer due to the actions of a character in an audiovisual narrative, which leads to their engagement with the story."[44] (Murray Smith 1995 in Galindo 2015, p. 18, my translation). Next, Galindo (2015) observes that Murray Smith's model presented in his essay 'Engaging characters' (1995), identifies two different types of emotional responses in the viewer:

Sympathy and antipathy - which refer to positive or negative feelings triggered by a character; and empathy - which he presents as feelings shared by the character and the viewer.[45] (Murray Smith 1995 in Galindo 2015, p. 18, my translation)

All these concepts have been discussed earlier in this dissertation and, as has already been mentioned, are key to the research intended. Nonetheless, it seems relevant to delve into Murray Smith's (1995) classification as, within the realm of sympathy, he identifies three more specific processes: *recognition* (reconocimiento), *alignment* (alineamiento) and *allegiance* (alianza). According to Galindo (2015), Murray Smith (1995) places the

---

[44] "La reacción emocional de un espectador a causa de las acciones de un personaje en una narración audiovisual, lo cual produce la fidelización a la historia." (Murray Smith 1995 in Galindo 2015, p. 18)
[45] "La simpatía/antipatía, referidas a los sentimientos positivos o negativos que genera un personaje (sentir algo por un personaje); y la empatía, los sentimientos compartidos entre el personaje y el espectador (sentir con el personaje lo que él siente)." (Murray Smith 1995 in Galindo 2015, p. 18)

viewer as "a central element in the process of engagement."[46] (Galindo 2015, p. 18, my translation)

Recognition, in Smith's (1995 in Galindo 2015) words, consists of "the spectator's construction of the character: the perception of a set of textual elements, in film typically cohering around the image of a body, as an individuated and continuous human agent" (Smith, 1995, in Galindo 2015, p. 19, Galindo's translation). Therefore, Galindo (2015) observes that "viewers are capable of labelling good and bad characters, or main and secondary ones almost immediately through the recognition of narrative schemes at play."[47] (Galindo 2015, p. 20, my translation). This, according to Galindo (2015), may be said to pertain to

> …frameworks composed of a predictable sequence of events, scenes, and plotlines that furnish the viewer with a set of rules and narrative grammar, leading them to comprehend and construe the unfolding action. Consequently, the more coherent a story adheres to an established narrative pattern, the quicker and easier its structure is assimilated by the viewer.[48] (Galindo 2015, p. 21, my translation)

In addition, according to the writer, one of the main narrative schemes is morality:

---

[46] "Smith coloca, de este modo, al espectador como elemento fundamental para que la fidelización (engagement) pueda producirse." (Galindo 2015, p. 18)

[47] "Los espectadores de drama son capaces de clasificar a los personajes como buenos o malos o como protagonistas o secundarios casi instantáneamente a través del reconocimiento de los esquemas narrativos utilizados." (Galindo 2015, p. 20)

[48] "Nos referimos con esto a las estructuras formadas por un patrón predecible de eventos, escenas y argumentos que proveen al espectador de una serie de reglas y gramática de la historia que los guía hacia la comprensión e interpretación de la acción. Por ello, cuanta más lógica sea una historia con un esquema narrativo existente, su estructura será procesada con mayor rapidez y facilidad por parte del espectador." (Galindo 2015, p. 20)

Viewers learn to develop schemas based on what they have seen in other series or movies, with recurring structures, themes, or characters that fulfil a set of established stereotypes. This serves as a guide for viewers, enabling them to interpret the ongoing narrative when processing a narrative schema and to make an initial assessment and classification of the characters.[49] (Galindo 2015, p. 21, my translation)

The author can be said to highlight how viewers construct mental frameworks based on their exposure to recurring elements in television series and films. These frameworks may help viewers navigate and understand the narrative by providing a reference point for interpreting character dynamics and storylines. Galindo (2015) may also be said to be emphasising the role of familiarity and repetition in audience engagement and highlighting the importance of recognizing established patterns in storytelling for effective communication with viewers.

The author seems to sustain that understanding a character might involve more than just grasping their personality and general traits; it seems to encompass a broader comprehension that integrates various elements from the narrative and beyond. Moreover, it can be considered that the viewer draws on diverse sources of information, including the character's physical appearance, behaviour, dialogues, the environment they inhabit, the image projected by the actor portraying them, knowledge of social roles

---

[49] "Los espectadores aprendemos a elaborar esquemas de acuerdo con lo que hemos visto en otras series o películas, con estructuras y temas que se repiten o personajes que cumplen una serie de estereotipos establecidos. Esto sirve de guía para los espectadores, de forma que cuando procesen un esquema narrativo serán capaces de interpretar la narrativa en curso y de realizar una valoración y clasificación inicial de los personajes". (Galindo 2015, p. 21)

and genre conventions, as well as other narrative norms. Interestingly, through this process, the viewer seems to be able to construct a coherent mental model of the character, attributing to them a relatively consistent combination of physical, psychological, and social attributes.

To round off the concept of recognition, Galindo (2015) considers the fact that sometimes narratives do not provide the viewer with an easily understandable narrative scheme, which "may force the viewer to build his own scheme from scratch by using mental simulations and their own memories as a guide, which may slow down the process but will result in a more detailed and intense character model."[50] (Galindo 2015, p. 21, my translation)

Alignment, according to Galindo (2015), is

> …a response triggered by the series or film itself, generated through a spatiotemporal relationship with the character or a subjective access to the narrative. A narrative can either reveal or conceal a character's private life, which influences the viewer's level of understanding and their disposition towards that character.[51] (Galindo 2015, p. 21, my translation)

---

[50] "Sin embargo, si la narración no le ofrece al espectador un esquema narrativo que este pueda procesar rápida y fácilmente, tendrá que construir su propio esquema desde cero, usando simulaciones mentales y sus propios recuerdos como guía, lo cual puede ralentizar el proceso pero provocará que el modelo de personaje sea más detallado e intenso." (Galindo 2015, p. 21)

[51] "El alineamiento es una respuesta provocada por la propia serie o película producida mediante una relación espacio-temporal con el personaje o un acceso subjetivo a la narración. Una narración puede enseñar o esconder la vida privada de un personaje, lo cual influye en el grado de conocimiento del espectador y en su disposición hacia ese personaje." (Galindo 2015, p. 21)

Therefore, it could be postulated that through camera work, the narration can show the viewer what the character does and his surroundings, thus allowing the viewer to generate sympathy with the character because of the time they "spend together":

> The POV structure mimics our natural perceptual behaviour when we are empathically interested in someone. If you and I talk together, for example, and you suddenly stop and look at something, the natural way for me to find out what you're thinking and feeling is to track your gaze to see what you're looking at and use your facial expression to understand what you are feeling about what you see. Simon Baron-Cohen (1995) discusses this as the shared attention mechanism, one of our basic mechanisms for understanding others. The POV structure is a cinematic elaboration of our natural tendency to explore another's gaze and facial expression for information. (Galindo 2015, pp. 22- 23)

The author tries to explain the mimetic nature of the point of view (POV) structure in cinema, which appears to mirror our innate perceptual behaviours when we are empathetically engaged with someone. The comparison drawn between cinematic POV, and real-life interactions appears to explore how viewers naturally seek to understand others by tracking their gaze and interpreting their facial expressions. What is more, Simon Baron-Cohen's concept of the shared attention mechanism further elucidates this, emphasising it as a fundamental aspect of human understanding. The POV structure in cinema, therefore, can be seen as an elaboration of our instinctive inclination to glean

information from another person's visual cues, enriching the viewer's experience by aligning it with real-world empathetic interactions.

According to Galindo (2015), "subjective access can be achieved using different film techniques, including voice-over narration, subjective camera angles, or close-ups focusing on characters' facial expressions."[52] (Galindo 2015, p. 23, my translation). These methods may be said to allow viewers to engage with the narrative from the characters' subjective perspectives, enhancing their emotional connection to the story.

Allegiance, on the other hand, in Galindo's (2015) words,

…consists of the attitude shown by a viewer in favour of a character, produced when the latter earns the moral approval of the former after evaluating the moral traits of the character. It is a response that builds as the narration progresses, giving rise to a deep and lasting psychological relationship with the character. Therefore, when we form an alliance, we sympathise with him and wish good things to happen to him.[53] (Galindo 2015, p. 23, my translation)

---

[52] "El acceso subjetivo puede establecerse a través de distintas técnicas cinematográficas, como la narración en voice over, los planos desde un punto de vista subjetivo o los extensos primeros planos en los que se muestran expresiones faciales de los personajes." (Galindo 2015, p. 23)

[53] "La alianza, por otra parte, consiste en la actitud que muestra un espectador a favor de un personaje, producida cuando este último se gana la aprobación moral del primero tras realizar una evaluación de los rasgos morales del propio personaje. Se trata de una respuesta que va construyéndose mientras avanza la narración, dando lugar a una relación psicológica profunda y duradera con el personaje, por lo que cuando formamos una alianza, simpatizamos con él y deseamos que le ocurran cosas buenas." (Galindo 2015, p. 23)

In other words, the concept of alliance in viewer-character relationships may be said to highlight the dynamic nature of audience engagement with fictional characters. It can be inferred to emphasise how viewers invest emotionally in characters based on their moral assessments and how this investment shapes their expectations and desires regarding the character's journey within the narrative. It can be suggested that alliance is not merely a passive response but rather an active process influenced by ongoing character development and narrative dynamics. What is more, current fiction, as has already been discussed, makes use of moral ambiguity, a factor that could be said to require a series of moral and emotional responses from the viewer that will shape their moral judgement, and which, as has already been discussed, are easily manipulable through cinematographic techniques.

To conclude this section, we will turn to Galindo's (2015) work again. By considering García's (2013) work, who argues that

> …[a] dramatically rich character will do good, bad, or debatable things; the key to the alliance with the viewer-protagonist lies in the fact that we always judge the character with a certain benevolence. We create our own value system to engage with a fictional story. We establish a different moral pact because sympathy towards a character does not necessarily arise from exhibiting ethically upright behaviour. This pact also operates in the audiovisual form: contrapuntal music, revealing dialogues, intimate voice-overs, epic

slow-motion shots, close-ups, symbolic lighting, exultant angles, magnetic performances,

etc.[54] (Garcia, 2013, in Galindo 2015, pp. 23-24, my translation)

It can be observed that although emotions play a central role in the viewing experience, it is also the craft of writers, producers, directors, and cinematographers' work that influences the relationship with the characters. A process which can be said to take time and effort, and which is by no means a linear one. All things considered, these concepts allow us to delve into this complex relationship between the viewer and the characters. The physical and emotional responses that the narrative manages to evoke in the viewer through the technical resources inherent to the audio-visual medium, the charisma of the characters, the actors who portray them, or the viewer's own personal situation at the moment they immerse themselves in the story, all these elements work together. However, insofar as we willingly give up control and allow ourselves to be immersed in the narrative, it could be said that we are completely aware that it is fictional and that we can opt out whenever we want.

---

[54] "Un personaje dramáticamente rico hará cosas buenas, malas o discutibles; la clave de la alianza con el espectador-protagonista radica en que en todo momento juzgamos al personaje con cierta benevolencia. Creamos un sistema de valores propio para acercarnos a una historia de ficción. Establecemos un pacto moral diferente, porque la simpatía hacia un personaje no pasa necesariamente porque exhiba un comportamiento éticamente cabal. Este pacto también opera en la forma audiovisual: música contrapuntística, diálogos reveladores, voz en off intimista, ralentizaciones épicas, primeros planos, iluminación simbólica, angulaciones exultantes, interpretaciones magnéticas, etc." (Garcia 2013 in Galindo 2015, pp. 23-24)

3.1.4.- The romanticisation of criminals

3.1.4.1.- Evil and the anti-villain

The concept of evil, and consequently that of the villain, has existed since the inception of human civilization. Throughout history, humanity has persistently pursued the origins of malevolence in the world, along with the enduring belief that righteousness will ultimately triumph in the perpetual conflict. It seems relevant to this dissertation to go back to the origins of such concepts. In his book *The American Villain* (2020), Richard Hall explores a myriad of villains and presents different theories on these controversial characters through history. To begin with, the author posits that the serpent from the Bible and, later, Satan could be considered to be the originals. Nevertheless, he affirms that

> [r]egardless of origin, however, human society since ancient times has been centred on the idea that there exists some supernatural villain out to hurt humankind as part of a millennia-old conflict with the heroic God. (Hall, 2020, p. xxii)

He further explains that from the supernatural villains in stories, these characters evolved and continue to do so. Powerful people, foreigners, our friends, and cowboys, among others are given as examples by the writer. However, what seems more relevant to this paper is that, according to Hall (2020), the twentieth century witnessed the emergence of the most nefarious villains in human history, shaping the archetype of the villain for the contemporary era. It seems pertinent to narrow these concepts down to the USA. In the 1930's, the Nazis and Hitler were the most prominent enemies of the

Americans. Later, as from World War II, fascists such as the Germans, Japanese, and, to a lesser degree, the Italians "were all portrayed as villains in movies and comic books throughout the duration of the war." (Hall, 2020, p. xxiii). The next milestone in history was the Cold War, which presented the Russians, and therefore dictatorships, as the enemy. In Hall's (2020) words, "[f]rom World War II and the Cold War, what appears most evident is that what Americans viewed as truly villainous was any attempt to stem personal freedom." (Hall 2020, p. xxiii).

In addition, Hall (2020) explains that there was another change in the image of the villain after the 9/11 terrorist attack on the World Trade Centre in New York City. Immediately, the global community embraced a uniform understanding of "evil" and "villainy". According to Hall (2020), hatred became synonymous with villainy, a topic perpetuated throughout American popular culture in the ensuing decades. Villains are currently defined by indiscriminate killing, while the antihero has emerged as a prevalent response to this menace. This archetype, which gained popularity during the 1970s and 1980s, features protagonists who frequently employ villainous methods to overcome adversaries. In conclusion, it could be observed that villains have adapted to societal changes, expanding the concept of wrongdoing. Throughout history, villains in narratives may be said to have embodied our fears of who we might become, reflecting a recognition of our own potential for darkness.

In the first essay from Hall's book, *'"In the Beginning…": The Origins of Villains in the Western World'*, a very interesting quote from Mike Alsford (2006), the cinema critic, is presented to illustrate and support the above discussed ideas:

> The person who operates according to their own rules, who refuses to conform or be limited by convention or taboo has a strength and presence that it is hard to ignore and in some ways is hard not to admire. . . . It seems to me that at the very heart of the notion of the villain is a refusal to submit to the social contract—for whatever reason—and a wilful attempt at exploiting the fact that the rest of society chooses to be bound by it. The simple fact of the matter is that, for the most part, villains do not play by the rules. (Alsford, Heroes & Villains, 2006, in Hall 2020, p. 11)

It seems important to note that the character who is going to be explored in this dissertation can be said to do precisely that, he does not live by societal rules; he has his own set of rules and moral values which include both good and bad deeds. Therefore, it is, among other factors, this characteristic which fosters empathy and connection in the viewers.

In the second essay, '*Tarantino and the Anti-villain'*, the figure of the anti-villain is presented as the converse of an anti-hero. According to the writer, "an anti-villain is an antagonist who isn't purely evil nor entirely unsympathetic" (Hall 2020, p. 34) and does not seem to deserve the label of "villain" entirely. In this essay, examples of anti-villains are introduced. The most prominent ones are Billy the Kid, Don Corleone and his son, Michael Corleone, and Tony Soprano, among others:

The Corleones were villains, by any definition of the term; however, they become sympathetic characters due to their dedication to family and the Dons' willingness to proverbially sell their own souls to keep their family safe. (Hall 2020, p. 38)

Another example from modern TV presented in the essay is a modern time mobster. Hall (2020) affirms that "the ultimate example of an anti-villain, again often mistakenly labelled an antihero, is Tony Soprano." (Hall, 2020, p. 39). In Hall's words,

Tony is a mob boss. He kills. He is involved in the drug trade and other nefarious activities. He possesses no qualms about killing relatively innocent people. His love for his family and his obvious regrets for his decisions (made clear to the audience through his psychiatric sessions) make him sympathetic to the audience, and, as the protagonist of the series, he is considered an antihero. Like the previous examples, however, Tony Soprano is clearly a villain, murdering with abandon, consumed by personal gain, and an unapologetic enemy to all that society deems right or good. (Hall, 2020, p. 39)

In short, it could be suggested that the allure of both antiheroes and anti-villains lies in their capacity to explore the darker aspects of human behaviour while retaining a degree of moral complexity. Apart from that, while the antihero may be said to embody a fundamentally good character who engages in morally questionable actions, the anti-villain might be understood to represent the opposite archetype. Anti-villains, according to Hall (2020), embody the conventional definition of villains in contemporary Western culture; however, narratives featuring anti-villains delve into deeper examinations of

human psychology, as we have seen in previous sections, suggesting that even individuals with villainous tendencies can harbour virtuous qualities and perform heroic deeds without forsaking their darker inclinations. They encompass a spectrum of roles, including murderers, criminals, and swindlers, who are unapologetic about their identities. In doing so, they could be argued to epitomise the notion of "honour among thieves", a concept rarely observed in modern society, even outside criminal circles.

In his book *'Heroes, Villains and Fools - The Changing American Character'* (2014), Sociology Professor Orrin Edgar Klapp deals with social typing in American culture, literature, and media. He describes the ever-changing portrayals of heroes, villains, and fools, examining the evolution of these archetypes in American society. The analysis explores their reflection of wider cultural values, beliefs, and shifts in societal dynamics across different periods. He begins the section on villains by providing the example of Billy the Kid, whom he claims did not make a good villain because of his attractiveness, personality, and deeds, which made women fall in love with him. He maintains that "a pure villain lacks redeeming traits that confuse him with a hero" and that "a proper villain has the opposite traits of a hero and threatens the group the hero serves." (Klapp 2014, p. 50). However, he says, many well-known villains, namely Billy the Kid, fail to follow these characteristics. The author affirms the following:

> The villain is a functional character[...]. He often serves society, for example, as a scapegoat or safety valve for aggression, or as a perfected hate-symbol building morale for law enforcement and other actions. Oddly, he serves society by deviating from its mores. (Klapp, 2014, p. 51)

Therefore, it could be said that Klapp underscores the complex role of villains in storytelling and society. It could be suggested that villains serve several functions beyond merely being antagonists in narratives. They often act as scapegoats, absorbing societal aggression or representing elements of hate that unite communities against them. Paradoxically, according to the author, their deviation from societal norms helps reinforce those norms by highlighting what is considered unacceptable behaviour.

Klapp (2014) also points out that villains as they were crafted in the nineteenth century would fail in today's culture. He also adds that education has contributed to dispelling many simplistic ethnic and national stereotypes. However, according to him, counterbalancing these advancements is the alarming level of aggression witnessed throughout the twentieth century - a moral cruelty unmatched in previous eras. This form of moral aggression, marked by self-righteousness, Klapp (2014) observes, often designates the other as the villain, disregarding reasonable perspectives. He then moves on to develop his criteria behind the villain taxonomy he created. It seems relevant to note that the author believes that a character can fall into more than one category. The main categories in his classification are:

(1) types violating order or status (desperado, rebel, flouter, rogue, and troublemaker); (2) types usurping power, authority, or status (oppressor, authoritarian, selfish grabber); (3) villainous strangers (intruder, suspicious isolate, monster); (4) sneaks and traitors representing disloyalty, both flagrant and secret; and (5) miscellaneous social undesirables. (Klapp 2014, p. 52)

3.1.4.2.- Evil in Film and Television

In the book *'International Perspectives on Rethinking Evil on Film and Television'* (2021), Dilan Tüysüz (ed.), presents a series of articles that discuss the role of evil in fiction. The author posits that in everyday life, the viewer's relationship with evil assumes a predominantly passive stance. Evil is often encountered as a force causing suffering or witnessed through narratives featuring those affected by it. However, according to the author, individuals typically distance themselves from any association with evil actions, relegating the role of perpetrator to others. These "others", in the writer's words, are often portrayed as terrifying figures, depicted as demonic or pathological, while our sympathies lie with the victims. In fictional realms, evil takes on an imaginary and frequently aestheticized form. Tüysüz (2021) asserts that "aestheticization of evil is a frequently used formula in cinema and television (p. xiv). Yet, he affirms that it tends to detach evil from moral frameworks. When evil is presented aesthetically in films or TV series, he believes that moral judgments can be set aside due to the absence of real victims. Consequently, acts such as murder or war may be viewed as sources of aesthetic pleasure.

In the first article in the series, *'Sympathy for the Devil: Psychology of Evil From Milton's Satan to the Joker'*, written by Tüysüz himself, he explores different concepts

related to psychology which lead him to conclude that, as has already been discussed in this dissertation, in fiction, once the reader/viewer understands the objectives of the evil character, what is to say, the motivations behind their evil deeds, as they empathise with that character, his or her actions become unimportant as the end seems to justify the means.

In the third article, *'Change of Good: Evil Concepts in Fantasy Genre.',* Selvi Şenel delves into postmodernity to discuss the interplay between good and evil. To begin with, the author affirms that there can be evil in good and good in evil and relates this idea with the fact that, according to her, the roles known as hero, villain, anti-hero, anti-villain are no longer clear-cut. This idea parallels the one presented by Hall (2020) above. In addition, Şenel asserts that the postmodern individual, transcending the individualization of the modern era, interprets and defines concepts based on their internal perspectives. She adds that, unlike individuals in the modern era who often conformed to societal structures, contemporary individuals seek a multidimensional existence centred around themselves. This seems of utmost importance since this shift may be said to prompt them to construct their identities through consumption, selecting from the array of lifestyles offered by contemporary capitalism. In consuming popular cultural texts, according to the writer, they adopt a multidimensional approach that shapes their perception of everyday life. Consequently, individuals increasingly identify with texts devoid of singular truths, falsehoods, or clear distinctions between good and evil. Therefore, it could be affirmed that this trend has normalised the presence of multidimensional portrayals of good and evil in cultural texts.

It seems relevant to note that this author delves into the Affective Disposition Theory (Raney, 2006; Zilmann&Cantor, 1976), which has already been introduced in this dissertation by Galindo (2015), to explore one of the most important conditions for the viewers to feel a connection with the character. In this case, Şenel (2021) deals with the ethical judgments about the character's behaviours and motivations.

> While the audience loves and identifies characters who act in accordance with their ethical judgments, the villains representing immorality are condemned to lose. In modern texts where good and bad are clearly defined, this process is easy for the audience. (Tüysüz, 2021, p. 29)

This easiness that the author presents in modern times is contrasted with postmodern characters who, according to her, have become fragmented in tandem with the societal structure. In order to support her claim, the writer presents an argument by Kellner (1995) who asserted that,

> [i]n postmodern culture, the subject has disintegrated into a flux of euphoric intensification, fragmented and disconnected (...) and no longer possesses the depth, substantiality, and coherency that was the ideal and sometimes achievement of the modern self. (Kellner 1995 in Tüysüz, 2021, p. 30)

Hence, in the writer's view, the postmodern individual's interpretation of morality within cultural narratives diverges from that of the modern counterpart, who typically views concepts of good and evil through established moral frameworks. Moreover, Şenel

(2001) believes that the distinct delineations between these concepts have blurred; akin to the yin and yang philosophy, there is recognition of the presence of both good and bad elements within each. It could be inferred that in the postmodern context, narratives have surfaced wherein audiences encounter the vulnerabilities of characters typically portrayed as morally upright, alongside insights into the motivations of those typically depicted as antagonists.

Şenel (2021) expands her point of view by affirming that this intertwining of moral concepts in the postmodern era has also led to the prominence of morally complex characters within cultural narratives. The author adds that recent empirical research examining the portrayal of such characters confirms their appeal, often surpassing that of conventional virtuous heroes (Raney & Janicke, 2013). Individuals, Şenel (2021) maintains, no longer reliant on external moral frameworks, have begun to assess these characters based on their internal ethical compass. She is of the opinion that, as postmodern subjects, they relate to characters embodying the complexities mirrored within themselves. Finally, these individuals, capable of navigating the nuances of morality, action, fragmentation, and vulnerability within their own psyche, seek similar depth and complexity in the characters presented within cultural narratives they engage with.

More relevant to this investigation is the fact that in his article within the collection encompassed in '*International Perspectives on Rethinking Evil on Film and Television*' (2021) by Dilan Tüysüz. In this edited text, Eşref Akmeşe (2021) asserts that, in

cinematic narratives, when evil is desensitised and even romanticised, the philosophical distinction regarding whether acts like killing are deemed "evil" is elevated to a new level of discourse:

> When evil is anaesthetised in films, the dynamics arising from the nature of fiction carry the experiences of evil into an exalting dimension at violation level and the possibility of adapting them to the frequency of identification of the audience and taking them into a glorifying nature. In this regard, the aestheticization of evil performed on the fictional plane in films offers favourable opportunities for the re-discussion of real evil experiences on the philosophical plane and for the re-evaluation of evil. Evil experiences in films have features that can contribute to the audience's repositioning themselves about good and evil and giving meaning to their own lives. (Eşref Akmeşe, 2021, p. 208)

It might further be added that the romanticisation od the villain may also include a certain degree of vigilantism, a very popular —albeit criminal— element in the media. Vigilantism can be defined as "the extra-legal prevention, investigation, or punishment of offenses" (Bateson, 2021, p. 926), whether it concerns crimes or violations of authoritative standards, at the hands of citizens that appropriate state authority, therefore supposedly moving in the same direction as the law that they think they enforce, but beyond its reach or severity (Pineda & Jiménez-Varea 2022). The authors affirm that, apart from the real implications of crimefighting outside the law, vigilantes are also major figures of popular culture, including a series of genres such as the Western, the superhero vigilantes, and even digital vigilantism.

It is suggested that the romanticisation of evil and its subsequent evildoers elevates experiences of evil to a heightened dimension, potentially leading to a glorified interpretation by the audience. Also, through the aestheticization of evil in films, there may be an opportunity to reconsider real-life evil experiences on a philosophical level and to reassess the concept of evil itself. More importantly, the portrayal of evil in films can prompt audiences to re-evaluate their perceptions of good and evil, thereby imbuing their lives with deeper meaning.

3.1.5.- Some final reflections

As has been discussed, the romanticisation of criminals on screen is a recurring motif in literature, film, and television, where creators often portray individuals engaged in illicit activities with a certain allure, charm, or sympathy. In addition, this artistic choice can have various implications and effects on the audience's perception of crime and morality. Portraying criminals in a romanticised manner may obscure the distinction between what is morally right and wrong, potentially shaping the audience's views and attitudes towards criminal behaviour and ethical uncertainty.

There seem to be several key aspects to consider when talking about this phenomenon. To begin with, as presented in the section pertaining to the role of producers, writers and cinematographers, it could be inferred that filmmakers make use of this technique to create more complex and multidimensional characters. One of the ways in which they

can craft such personas is by highlighting the motivations, struggles, and humanity of these characters, therefore, evoking empathy from the audience, challenging conventional notions of good and evil. Another relevant characteristic is the introduction of moral ambiguity into the narrative. This seems to foster sympathy in the viewers towards characters whose actions would typically be condemned. As discussed above, this blurring of moral boundaries prompts audiences to question societal norms and explore the shades of grey in ethical considerations. Furthermore, the romanticisation of criminals can serve as a form of catharsis for audiences. By engaging with the stories of complex, morally ambiguous characters, viewers may find an outlet for exploring their own suppressed desires or questioning societal norms within the confines of fiction, which makes the story more compelling, as we have already seen. Finally, the idea that these criminals mirror societal features and beliefs along with a desire to challenge established norms, seems central to the concept of romanticisation of criminal characters. Professor M. Bokiniec (2010) has made all this very clear:

What we have witnessed in last few years is a change in the most popular TV shows: some of its main characters are [...] clearly villains, yet placing them as main, most developed characters around which the whole story evolves, we automatically adopt their point of view and want them to succeed in whatever it is they are doing. This undermines and distorts the traditional and common-sense differences between heroes and villains. (Bokiniec, 2010, pp. 121-122)

4.- Research

4.1.- Brief description of *The Blacklist*

4.1.1.- The plot

Jon Bokenkamp's *The Blacklist* (henceforth *BL* for citation purposes) is a ten-season long American crime thriller series, which premiered in 2013 and ended in 2023, starring James Spader as Raymond Reddington and Megan Boone as Elizabeth Keen. The show starts with Raymond 'Red' Reddington, former government agent and now number four (later number one) on the FBI's Most Wanted list, giving himself up to the FBI. He wants to strike a deal which consists of giving up the names of the most wanted criminals, such as terrorists or people the FBI is not aware exists so that the FBI can track them down and apprehend them, in exchange for immunity. The first requirement is to work only and directly with the newly assigned special agent Elizabeth Keen. Yet, the viewer is not informed of his intentions and motives. In the same way, he strategically omits certain details from the cases he brings to the FBI. This sets the tone for the entire series as he appears to be in charge. Although at times challenged by Cooper, the FBI's task force Captain, he has the last word. Nonetheless, The FBI cannot really complain about Reddington's behaviour and underlying personal interests as the symbiotic relationship between the force and the criminal is marked by tension, but it remains productive, indicating that despite the strain, they are able to collaborate effectively and achieve positive results.

Raymond takes the viewer on a journey of mystery, crime, and half-revealed secrets as he makes his way through *The Blacklist*, his version of the FBI's most wanted list. Each episode is devoted to one criminal although sometimes there are some criminals worth two episodes. As Reddington and the agents go through the blacklist, the viewer learns about him and the other characters, the relationships among the characters evolve, and the series delves into themes of trust, betrayal, and morality. The series is packed with narrative arcs which present questions that are partially answered as the story progresses. It involves the audience, compelling them to contemplate and address the questions posed by the series through its reflexivity, temporality, and robust focalisation. In this scenario, a viewer functions not solely as an observer but actively takes part in the narrative by engaging in the processes of thought, problem-solving, and making connections. Despite making some morally ambiguous choices and leaving a trail of dead bodies behind him, most of which are craftily disposed of by Mr. Kaplan, his loyal cleaner, Reddington manages to persuade the viewers to root for him and his plan as he hands out other criminals to the FBI and carries on with his criminal life. Travelling around the world on his private jet and with many associates and employees at his service, Raymond does not shy away from making the most gruesome decisions.

4.1.2.- Central characters

Elizabeth Keen grew up on her own, after being abandoned by her criminal father and the loss of her mother. Liz's personal history is complex and marked by mysterious

circumstances, including her adoption and a fire that took place when she was a child. She is an FBI profiler whose life radically changes on her first day at the Washington DC's FBI headquarters as Raymond Reddington gives himself up to the force and demands to work only with her. Elizabeth is married to Tom, allegedly a school teacher, and wants to adopt a child. Through the series the viewer learns much more about Tom's identity and her life. She also wants to understand why Reddington is obsessed with her, but he seems to know her better than she knows herself and has a conflicting bond with him from the very beginning. The nature of their relationship and the reasons behind Reddington's interest in her are explored throughout the show. She is a pivotal character in the series. Her qualification in criminal psychology become a valuable asset to the task force when she is assigned to work with Raymond Reddington. Over the course of the series, Liz faces numerous moral dilemmas that challenge her sense of right and wrong. Her actions and decisions often fall into morally ambiguous territory, adding depth to her character.

Harold Cooper is the Assistant Director for Counterterrorism at the FBI and is later promoted to the position of Director. On his arrival at the FBI's headquarters, Reddington asks for him by name. He plays a pivotal role in overseeing the special task force assembled to work with Reddington. As the series develops, he strikes a strong but complicated bond with Reddington. When Elizabeth Keen dies, he and his wife adopt Elizabeth's daughter, Agnes, which shows the deep relationship the two characters developed through the years. Cooper is portrayed as a highly principled and disciplined law enforcement official. He upholds a strong sense of ethics and is dedicated to serving

justice through lawful means. His character brings a sense of stability and ethical grounding to the FBI task force, contributing to the complex and multifaceted nature of the series.

Donald Ressler is Elizabeth's professional partner. He can be said to be the most human-like character in the series. He has been through a lot in life, including the loss of his loved ones, which have turned him into a workaholic. He is righteous, adamant about the law and what is right and what is wrong. Ressler is characterised by his strong sense of duty and professionalism. He is often portrayed as by-the-book and driven by a desire to apprehend criminals through legal means. However, his relationship with Elizabeth tints his beliefs and, sometimes, makes him bend the laws, and has him second guessing himself. Similarly, he starts off on the wrong foot with Raymond but, as the story moves forward, their dynamics are modified and it seems like Ressler understands Reddington, or at least tries to.

Dembe Zuma, former freedom fighter from South Sudan, is Reddington's sworn bodyguard and one of his few and closest friends. He has a strong connection with Raymond as he was rescued from human trafficking as a child by the master criminal. He spent 8 years in the world of human trafficking and was enslaved until the age of 14, when Reddington found him half-dead and chained to a pipe in the basement of a brothel in Nairobi. Reddington took care of him, nursed him back to health, and made sure he got an education. Dembe eventually earned a bachelor's degree in English Literature, learned to speak 4 languages fluently and learned 6 others well enough to get by.

Dembe's loyalty to Reddington is unwavering, and he plays a crucial role in supporting and protecting him throughout the series (see image 1). Dembe is characterised by a calm and composed demeanour. Despite his imposing physical presence, he often communicates with subtlety, adding an air of mystery to his character. He is depicted as a man of strong moral principles. His actions are often guided by a sense of righteousness, and he serves as a moral compass for Raymond Reddington.

Image 1

4.1.3.- Raymond Reddington

Raymond 'Red' Reddington is portrayed as a ferociously intelligent man, deviously cunning and irresistibly charming. He serves as the central figure around whom the entire narrative revolves. As the series progresses, the viewer learns that he has been off the grid for twenty years, he has no home and is always on the run. An international criminal mastermind, he possesses a skewed sense of morality and is known as 'the concierge of

crime' due to his countless contacts and abilities to navigate the underworld, he is a resourceful individual with an intricate knowledge of criminal operations worldwide. His criminal enterprises and connections make him a formidable force. Raymond dresses smartly, with fedora hats, tailor-made suits made of the finest fabrics in order to be taken seriously; he travels on a private jet, is escorted by Dembe, stays at the best hotels, indulges in haute cuisine and fine wines, unlike mundane criminals who are usually depicted somewhat dirty or unkempt . He is always classy and well-mannered; he carries himself with elegance and dignity, giving him an air of importance (see image 2).

Image 2

Reddington can be said to be a morally grey character because of his impeccable combination of charm, intellect, and mysterious demeanour. His allure is rooted in his skill to effortlessly navigate the delicate boundary between being a hero and a villain to serve his own agenda. Besides, his intricate motivations and occasional glimpses of concealed compassion render him a captivating mystery, compelling viewers to reassess their moral principles and question conventional ideas of justice. He prides himself in being honest following his own concept of honesty, that is. His loyalty to those he cares

about, his protection of Elizabeth, his willingness to do whatever it takes to protect those around him are key to his appeal. However, he does occasionally find himself cornered or in situations where there seems to be no way out and yet he remains calm and collected. Reddington is always three steps ahead of everyone else and is determined to keep himself a mystery. As he puts it, "I'm a criminal. Criminals are notorious liars. Everything about me is a lie" (*BL*, Pilot Episode). This obsession with remaining a mystery can be said to be his biggest flaw as it leads him to betray and hurt many people that care about him, it often leads to tension and conflict. Even though some of the heinous crimes he conducted are hard to justify or forgive, the viewer feels tempted to look the other way.

4.2.- The categories: likely romanticising elements

4.2.1.- Reddington's enigmatic background

Reddington's past is a mystery that is slowly unravelled throughout the seasons. As the story evolves, the viewer gets bits of his life in the shape of monologues, scars, anecdotes and other characters' interventions. In addition, the reasons behind his criminal deeds are slowly revealed. Together, all these elements help the viewer create a background story for the main character. However, one never truly gets his whole back story and, to a certain degree, it can be said that this adds to his appeal. It can be observed that the ambiguity surrounding his true identity and motives adds a layer of suspense and keeps viewers engaged. This characteristic is skilfully crafted by the writers of the series

and is portrayed through the lens of the camera work and Spader's magnificent interpretation of Reddington. Going back to Ferri's (2007) ideas, the work of authors and filmmakers can be said to evoke genuine emotions and inspiration. This author presents a list of elements that can be argued to add depth and complexity to the character in question. Such elements include visual storytelling, camera angles, pacing, visual aesthetics, cinematography, dialogues, plotlines and character development, among others. It seems important to note that Reddington's mysterious backstory adds to his characterisation as the layer of the unknown fosters the viewer's imagination and mental schemas to add layers to his persona.

In Fisk and Taylor (1991)'s work, we explored the idea that schemas were conceptual expectations regarding individuals, circumstances and our own identities. Therefore, it can be understood that the viewer has certain expectations regarding the main character and remains gripped with the series in order to unravel the mystery behind his identity and motives. However, the fact that Raymond is played by the amazingly talented actor James Spader is not to be overlooked since his voice and his interpretation add more layers to the characterisation. For instance, in an episode Reddington says, 'The true measure of a man isn't what he reveals to the world but what he hides from it' (*BL*, Season 8, Episode 20), which is perfectly aligned with the fact that as a viewer, one seems to understand that Red could tell Lizz everything but he knows that if he were to do that, it would come with a hefty price for both of them. In another episode, Raymond can be seen removing his clothes and the camera is behind him, so the viewer can see

that his back is full of burn marks. Although not clearly stated, it can be inferred that he was in the fire when Elizabeth was a child (see image 3).

Image 3

Another clear example of this characteristic is the following dialogue in the pilot episode:

> RESSLER (O.S.) Raymond "Red" Reddington grew up the son of an army brat...
>
> INT. WAR ROOM - SAME Ressler briefs a packed room of agents, analysts and legal staffers.
>
> CLASSIFIED IMAGES fill giant monitors overhead.
>
> RESSLER ...he attended West Point. Top of his class. By thirty he was an intelligence officer in the Army. Made Captain. Military Liaison Officer to the N.S.A. It's a life in photos, the American Dream.
>
> RESSLER Then, in 1990, Reddington headed home to see his wife and daughter for Christmas. He never arrived.

We see CRIME SCENE PHOTO of a snow-covered hatchback on a desolate mountain road.

RESSLER His vehicle was discovered along a stretch of highway thirty-three in the Allegheny Mountains. Christmas gifts for his wife and kid in the back of the car.

We see snapshots of SEARCH PARTIES and NEWSPAPER HEADLINES.

RESSLER There were searches. Candle light vigils. No answers. This guy up and disappeared from the face of the earth...

The screens go dark, then reignite with a single surveillance photo of a GHOSTLY IMAGE; a bearded shadow of a man.

RESSLER ...until four years later when U.S. military secrets started turning up in South Asia. The leak was traced to Reddington. Turns out he was trading military strategies with New Delhi; brokering arms deals for the North Koreans. Four years after going AWOL, this decorated soldier re-emerges as an enigma.

We're struck with a barrage of CLASSIFIED PHOTOS. Red in secret meetings and exotic countries. The birth of a legend.

RESSLER His military background would lead you to believe he's some sort of spy, but he's not. This guy's an equal opportunity offender; a "facilitator" of sorts who's built an enterprise brokering deals for fellow criminals. We know he's orchestrated the assassinations of federal inmates, laundered money for the mob, and bought judges only to have them killed. Last year, he personally negotiated a month- long cease-fire between the la Familia drug cartel and the Calderon government. He has no country. No political agenda. Best we can tell Reddington's only allegiance is to the highest bidder.

AGENT They call him something. In the papers.

RESSLER The Concierge of Crime.

(*BL*, Pilot episode)[55]

It can be said that the fact that Reddington's past is shrouded in mystery adds depth to his character and that his complexity makes him more appealing. In addition, his enigmatic nature appears to allow for multiple interpretations and gradually reveals facets of his personality and past. What is more, Reddington is constantly reminding the other characters and, therefore, the audience that he is a mystery. In one episode Raymond says, "Let me put your mind at ease… I'm never telling you everything." (*BL*, Pilot episode). According to Galindo (2015), a narrative may expose or obscure a character's personal life, shaping the viewer's comprehension and attitude towards the character. What is more, filming techniques, including subjective point of view, close-ups on Reddington's facial expressions, and lighting, among other elements, may be asserted to contribute to the characterisation. This can also be related to Sánchez Casarrubios' (2012) ideas, who explores contemporary, post-modern, cinema in order to delve into the changes in ideology and in the political and cultural areas of society. With the rise of mass culture and consumerism, this new era in the cinema industry can be said to embrace experimentation, innovation and diversity; mirroring the eclectic and pluralistic nature of contemporary society. In addition, as creators now have more creative freedom, they are able to explore new narrative forms and character building. Reddington seems to be a suitable example for the new "evil character", which occupies a central slot in the latest cinematic era. In Sánchez Casarrubios' (2012) work we have seen that the villain not only shapes the trajectory of the storyline but that it also seems

---

[55] Note: All the quotes from the show's scripts were retrieved from https://subslikescript.com/ series/ and https://assets.scriptslug.com.

---

to undergo significant evolution within the narrative arc, as is the case of Reddington, who evolves throughout the seasons and whose fragmented identity is put together as pieces of a puzzle.

Another very interesting observation is connected with the fact that audiences often project their own interpretations onto mysterious characters, filling in the gaps with their imaginations. This, as explored before in the work of Tüysüz (2021), seems to allow for a more personal connection with the character as viewers or readers try to understand their motivations and actions. As viewers progress in this quest, they empathise with the character and his evil deeds become insignificant as the end appears to justify the means. Finally, mysterious characters, like Raymond Reddington, often challenge conventional norms and expectations. They may defy stereotypes or exhibit unconventional behaviour, which adds to their allure and makes them stand out from more predictable characters.

4.2.2.- Reddington's charm, charisma and wit

Strongly linked to the first element, Reddington's physical description and clothes, manners, and language use are central to his characterisation and appeal. As previously stated, Reddington is charming, smart and charismatic. It can even be affirmed that he can be affable and amiable, even in the most intense situations. In addition, his wit and clever dialogue, delivered with actor James Spader's distinctive style, contributes to the character's likability despite his criminal background. Even in captivity, Reddington

carries himself with unquestionable presence. It seems relevant to note that Raymond's monologues are a central part of his characterisation, especially the ones on the value of loyalty (with some very peculiar exceptions, perhaps unclear to the audience). For instance, there is one in which he recalls working in an arduous job for the summer when he was a young kid earning a bonus at the end. This story concludes with the execution of one of his men as a traitor. This shows his complex morality and his esteem for loyalty. Some of his most recurrent statements include: 'Value loyalty above all else.' (*BL*, Season 2, Episode 6) and 'My word is my bond. My currency.' (*BL*, Season 5, Episode 16). Another example taken from Season 2, when he is about to kill Geoff Perl, "You see that Geoff, that is what a good man does. That is what separates men like him from men like you…and me," (*BL*, Season 2, Episode 6) Reddington affirms.

In addition, Reddington is renowned for his distinctive style and natural knack for commanding respect wherever he goes. He exudes an aura of fierceness and intimidation (in the most admirable sense), consistently proving himself as the most astute individual present, while never divulging his strategies. What follows is another example from the pilot which illustrates this characteristic:

— Meet RAYMOND "RED" REDDINGTON Dignified. Worldly. He wears a perfectly tailored suit and carries himself with a sense of purpose. Red smiles. His confidence is magnetic. As the agent STAMPS his passport, Mel Torme's driving "Comin' Home Baby" sends us hurtling through:

EXT. WASHINGTON, D.C. - DAY

We dance through the capitol city. The National Mall. The Lincoln Memorial. The pace is energetic and bright as ---- Reddington is chauffeured through the city by A MAN IN A GREY FLANNEL SUIT. Passing monuments reflect in the glass of his limo as Reddington rolls down the window, drinks in his hometown. (*BL*, Pilot Episode)

However, it is not his wealth only that makes him so attractive. As has been discussed before, it can be asserted that he is unlike the classic villain portrayed on TV or film, which may be said to break, to some extent, with the schemas in our brains regarding evil characters. Following schema theory as seen in Pankin (2013), it can be asserted that viewers have a structured body of knowledge which is shaped by prior experiences and used to process and understand new input. Such schemas help audiences to process and interpret the plot of the series. Therefore, it could be affirmed that Raymond is a villain and, as such, he should be detested and morally judged. Nonetheless, as schemas are dynamic, which is to say that they are constantly changing and evolving, they allow the writers to infer what the audience already knows, be it from previous villains they have encountered on TV or whatever the source, and they allow the creators to craft a character which breaks away from the traditional and captivates audiences with characteristics of postmodern evil characters. More importantly, Sánchez Casarrubios (2012) posits that magnetic characters are bound to captivate the audience mainly due to the fact that they possess qualities that resonate deeply with the viewers. In addition, as seen when delving into González Torres (2017)'s ideas, individualism, strong personal magnetism, an overwhelming ambition to command knowledge, the expression of continual personal discontent, or the drive to exert control over one's surroundings by dominating others, are all characteristics of the modern villain. It can be seen that Reddington (see image 4)

is individualistic, magnetic, ambitious, knowledgeable on many topics and seeks to control others by persuasion or even by force if necessary.

Image 4

Interestingly, almost all the villains that he has to face throughout the series seem to fall within the traditional idea and characterisation of such characters as presented in this dissertation following Hall (2020) and Klapp (2014). These villains include spies, terrorists, selfish grabbers, traitors, hackers, mobsters, serial killers, outsiders, deformed, monsters, among others. For instance, notorious black listers like Tom Connoly, Alan Fitch and all the high members of the cabal fall into the powerful, rich elite who seek power and do not care who or what is in between their ultimate goal and themselves. These selfish grabbers may be said to be in opposition to Reddington because even though he has a lot of money and is a very powerful man, he seems to have a moral code and certain values, especially loyalty.

This 200-episode series includes a myriad of examples that support the fact that Reddington does not fall within the category of a "regular" villain. Hackers like Andrew

Patterson or Wujing; Berlin, and many others, who represent the foreigner and the one driven by vengeance; the infamous Dr. Perillos, expert in torture; and other villains like Anslo Garrick (Image 5), "The Stewmaker" (Image 6), and Miton Bobbit (Image 7) who may be said to fall within the deformed or monster categories, are just some of the most evident examples of the opposition.
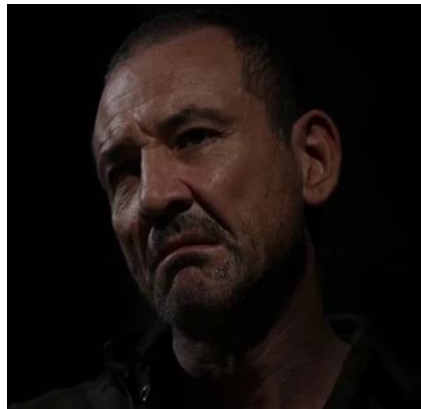

Image 5

Image 6

Image 7

Regarding his use of language, it can be affirmed that scriptwriters use several techniques that create his persona. Among those techniques, monologues, question avoidance and topic change, and withholding of information seem the most recurrent. Reddington's most remarkable moments unfold during his memorable monologues, where he skilfully distracts, educates, or delivers verbal blows to those in his vicinity. One of his initial memorable retorts transpired in Season 1, when he engaged with Milos Kirchoff, who professed revenge as his "passion." Yet, Reddington astutely reminded Milos of the futility of his pursuits: "What a terrible waste. Time, blood, money. And in the end, for what revenge isn't a passion. It's a disease that eats at your mind and poisons your soul," (*BL*, Season 1, Episode 22) Reddington said.

According to Smith (1995), the spectator has the ability to construct the character, and Galindo (2015) believes that viewers have the ability to distinguish good characters from bad ones almost instantly since they can recognise the narrative schemes at play. Taking into consideration that one of those narrative schemes is morality, it seems important to note that Raymond's physical appearance, behaviour, dialogues, and all the qualities

previously discussed on his character; together with Spader's acting, the plot, the genre of the series and other narrative norms, work together to create the image of Reddington in the viewer's brain.

4.2.3.- Reddington: a masterful criminal

The third element worth exploring is the fact that Reddington is a highly intelligent and resourceful individual with an intricate knowledge of criminal operations worldwide. His criminal enterprises and connections make him a formidable force. Known as the 'Concierge of crime', Raymond can be said to be a mastermind criminal. Nonetheless, despite his criminal activities, Reddington often operates with a sense of moral ambiguity, sometimes assisting law enforcement in taking down more dangerous criminals. To begin with, in the pilot episode, Reddington turns himself in to the FBI by casually striding into the FBI building. Nonchalantly, he identifies himself and peacefully removes his hat and kneels down showing that he is ready to be arrested. Notwithstanding, it also seems obvious that he has a plan in motion. This can be said to show that even at his most vulnerable self, he is in control.

In the same vein, also in the pilot episode, the audience confirms that Reddington is a criminal and that nothing about him is clear cut from his own mouth:

LIZ And how do you know this?

REDDINGTON Because I'm the one who got Zamani into the country.

LIZ I should believe you?

REDDINGTON Of course not. I'm a criminal. Criminals are liars. Everything about me is a lie. (then) But if anyone can give me a second chance, it's you. The two of us have overcome so much. (*BL*, Pilot episode)

Similarly, he asserts his position and dominance in the following dialogue with the FBI:

COOPER What's... the Blacklist?

REDDINGTON It's why we're all here, of course. My wish list. A list of names I've been cultivating for over twenty-five years; politicians, mobsters, hackers and spies.

RESSLER We have our own list.

REDDINGTON Please, Agent Ressler, we all know your "Top Ten" is little more than a publicity campaign. Junior high bullies at best. I'm talking about the criminals who matter. The men I've spent my life protecting -- ones you can't find because you don't know they exist. Zamani was a small fish. I'm Ahab. But if you want the whales on my list, you gotta play by my rules.

Cooper sits, intrigued. Liz lingers.

REDDINGTON One: I never stay in the same location two nights in a row. Two: I want security. I've already vetted a list of twenty-four Secret Service agents, pick two from my list. Three: I want an RFID tag embedded in my neck -- not that garbage from VeriChip you stuck in my arm, I want the DARPA tested, fully encrypted, 8-millimeter tag. Four: whatever I tell you falls under an immunity package that I negotiate myself. And finally... most importantly... (flat) I speak only with Elizabeth Keen. (*BL*, Pilot episode)

In the same episode, Raymond Reddington asserts his authority yet again. He does so by putting Harold Cooper in a position in which he has to admit that he had made a mistake and that Reddington was right:

Agent Cooper sits down across from Reddington. Every camera in the nest is rolling.

COOPER

You have my attention.

REDDINGTON

Will you admit you were wrong?

COOPER

I was wrong.

REDDINGTON

Yes, you were wrong. Certainly not the first time. Now, I'll give you

Zamani, but first –

COOPER

No 'but firsts'. You don't decide anything. I'm in charge. All you do is talk.

REDDINGTON

Agent Cooper, you've overestimated your authority. I don't trust you. I don't even like you said I'll help you find Zamani, and I will, but from his point forward there's one very important rule:

(fearless)

I only speak with Elizabeth Keen. (*BL*, Pilot episode)

4.2.4.- The demolition of moral barriers

As has already been described in this study, postmodernity fosters anti-heroism. The notions of Good and Evil seem to be proscribed and it appears that 'the bad guys' are taking over. Therefore, it can be said that a pessimistic, defeatist, and self-flagellating intellectual environment has become mainstream, which has also splashed onto high-quality audio-visual fictions in this third Golden Age of Television. To this we must add a business addendum: cable television has always wanted to differentiate itself from traditional networks and creating characters like Reddington seems to have given them an advantage over regular television networks. This character's complex morality, characterised by a somewhat contradictory and intricate moral compass seems to appeal to the viewers in a similar manner as Dexter Morgan from 'Dexter' (Showtime), Frank Underwood from 'House of Cards' (Netflix), and Walter White from 'Breaking Bad' (AMC). Raymond exhibits a sense of loyalty to certain individuals while remaining ruthless towards others. The most obvious instance being that he would go to any extent to keep Elizabeth safe. Similarly, his bond with Dembe is to be emphasised as Raymond, on several occasions, goes out of his way to rescue and save Dembe.

In addition, he challenges conventional notions of morality, fostering in the viewers feelings of identification, empathy, allegiance, and alignment among others, as we have discussed in the section pertaining to empathy. Particularly the ideas of Murray Smith (1995) and Galindo (2015), who posit that moral ambiguity prompts a sequence of moral and emotional reactions from the audience, influencing their moral assessment, which can be easily manipulated through cinematic techniques (see image 8). Therefore, the individual seems to question whether Reddington is a hero, a villain or something in

between. Related to this, it can be asserted that a dramatically rich character will do things that are good, debatable, bad, or even mediocre; the key to the viewer-protagonist alliance appears to lie in consistently judging the character with a degree of benevolence, as Garcia (203) explains. The audience creates their own value system to engage with a fictional story. Ultimately, the individual establishes a different "moral pact." Interestingly, Şenel (2021), in a similar vein to Hall (2020), asserts that there no longer exists a clear-cut dichotomy between good and evil. She adds that the roles of heroes, villains, anti-heroes and anti-villains are blurred, which can be said to be in line with what is being discussed in this section.

Image 8

The idea of poetic faith presented by Coleridge (1817, Roberts, 2014) and revisited by Ferri (2007) and Holland (2009) seems of utmost relevance to this element. The fact that audiences experience genuine emotions in response to individuals like Reddington and to situations that we are fully aware are imaginary seems central to this discussion. It appears that because we possess poetic faith and a willing suspension of disbelief, we are able to feel real emotions towards unreal things represented in fiction, dramas and

poetry. Holland (1975) presented the idea that a spectator uses 'imaginative involvement' in a work of art through an 'as if' process. He added the notion of inactivity on behalf of the spectator by presenting evidence of what happens in the brain of the viewer when immersed in a work of fiction. It can be affirmed that the spectator temporarily immerses into the fictional narrative and does so with profound engagement to such an extent that it allows for the viewers to empathise with the evil character. As discussed when the works of Coplan (2004) and Baila-Bigné (2020) were explored in this dissertation, Reddington seems to be the target of the audience's empathic understanding as he forces the individual to overcome their moral barriers in order to, somehow, justify Raymond's doings as most of his other traits outweigh the negative side to his character construction. This goes in line with Coplan (2004)'s assertion that empathy is a 'complex imaginative process involving both cognition and emotion' as, despite the fact that we connect with him, we retain a distinct awareness of our separate identity. In other words, as the viewers understand that Reddington is character in a TV series and not a real criminal, they can allow themselves to be immersed in the plot and connect with the protagonist, particularly due to the fact that they are aware that they can disconnect from the series anytime they feel like and go back to their real lives.

This idea is strongly linked to the concepts of willing suspension of disbelief and poetic faith that were discussed in the first section of this work. Interestingly, Baila-Bigné (2020)'s empathic builders and Morton (2011)'s ideas, serve as evidence that with Raymond Reddington, the viewer's empathic capacity is not constrained; on the contrary, the viewer's code of behaviour, which should morally restrict his or her

imagination, is tampered to the extent that Reddington is humanised as the process of 'negative empathy' overcomes the viewer's moral barriers taking his or her empathic capacity to its moral limits.

One of the main characteristics that fosters feelings of alignment, empathy and identification in the audience can be said to be the fact that Raymond stands for minorities. Whenever he encounters child labour, homophobia, domestic violence or animal abuse, among other scenarios, he diverts from his path to "set things right" or to protect those who are being harmed. For instance, in the final episode from Season 1, while holding a pet dog and eating together, he says, "I'm not a monster. Do you really think I'd harm a dog? You on the other hand" (see image 9). Later in Season 3, he is telling the story of how he saw a beautiful elephant once and Elizabeth asks him if he had killed it. Raymond says that he would never do such a thing and concludes by saying that he killed the poacher who was after the elephant. In Season 3 (episode 4), Raymond says the following:

> "Honestly, is it just me, or is the human race, armed with religion, poisoned by prejudice, and absolutely frantic with hatred and fear, galloping pell-mell back to the dark ages? Who on earth is hurt by a little girl going to school or a child being gay? Let's be frank, Bahram. You didn't change your son to protect him. You changed him because he disgusted you." (*BL*, Season 3, Episode 4)

Therefore, making it transpire that he is against homophobia and that he does not understand extreme religious practices. Also, even though Reddington is recognised as one of the world's most perilous criminals, he remains vigilant about helping those in

distress. During his low-profile period from the authorities in Season 3, Liz Keen visited him at a diner. In this setting, Reddington observes a man at a nearby table mistreating his girlfriend, prompting the criminal mastermind to intervene and take action. He stands up and sits next to this violent man, points his gun at him and forces him to apologise to the woman he was mistreating.

Image 9

As discussed when exploring Bateson (2021) and Pineda & Jiménez-Varea (2022), vigilantism —popular yet criminal in pop culture— seems to apply as one of Reddington's traits. He more often than not takes matters into his own hands and seeks justice, applies his own law, and punishes others. In other words, Raymond operates outside traditional law enforcement channels, he often engages in morally grey activities to achieve his goals. In addition, he follows his own set of rules and principles, often seeking justice according to his personal sense of morality rather than adhering strictly to legal standards. He frequently takes matters into his own hands, bypassing legal

procedures and acting independently to pursue his own version of justice. Reddington challenges established authority figures and institutions, positioning himself as a vigilante figure fighting against corruption and injustice within the system. Interestingly, however, despite his ambiguous motives, Reddington demonstrates a protective instinct towards certain individuals, often acting as a guardian or mentor to characters he deems worthy of his assistance.

Zillman and Cantor's Affective Disposition Theory (ADT) has been explored in this dissertation, however, it seems relevant to the discussion to delve into Galindo (2015)'s seven steps involved in the formation of affective disposition and connect it with the character explored in this work. To begin with, the viewers observe the character's interpretation, they get familiar with Reddington and his story; then they judge Raymond's actions and if they consider that his moral conduct aligns with theirs, they will form a positive disposition. On the other hand, if they do not consider his deeds to be moral, the disposition will be negative. The next step would be to wish for Reddington to succeed in his quest and every time something goes awry, the viewers experience fear of failure, unlike with the other villains in the story, whom they do not stand for. After that, emotions are triggered. As we have seen, empathy, alignment and allegiance are central, among other possible feelings. Step six has to do with the outcome of such emotions. This is when the audience decides how they feel about the narrative and the main character. Finally, the audience's moral judgement takes place and the viewers decide whether they are satisfied with the outcome of the story or not. All this process is related to the fact that the spectator immerses into the work of fiction, allows himself to

be deceived and feels a connection towards the characters, which are all ideas and concepts that have already been explored in the present study.

In addition, the emotional power of moving images can be considered immense. As discussed above, the identification/moral judgement present in audiences does not seem to only originate within the plot, but also seems to operate within the realm of audio-visual form: contrapuntal music, revealing dialogues, intimate voice-overs, epic slow-motion shots, close-ups, symbolic lighting, exultant angles, magnetic performances, and so forth. The audio-visual narrative can be asserted to deploy a variety of formal resources that catch the spectators off guard and thereby secure their attachment to one character or another.

4.2.5.- The impact of a finale

The final episode of the series builds up to Raymond's death, a man who will not allow himself to be killed by any creature that might pride him/herself on being human. In the last minutes of the last episode, Raign's (Rachel Rabin's) version of Dylan's song *Knocking on Heaven's Door* plays in the background and Dembe delivers a speech praising Reddington's courage when confronting death and his belief that one's manner of living holds greater significance than the certainty of death. Throughout, Dembe expresses admiration for Reddington's steadfast refusal to succumb, or as he says, to "go

quietly into that good night", which is part of a poem by Dylan Thomas. Tearing up, Dembe speaks about Reddington choosing to embrace life.

> We can imagine Raymond, a man surrounded by death in so many ways, so passionately committed to embracing life. He could have surrendered a thousand times over in the end, some end. But instead he chooses to rage. To rage against the dying of the light. To rage against the bad guys that would do us all harm. Rage to protect those people he loves. To find moments of peace and joy and fun, even though he knows the light is still dying. To live a most passionate life, knowing it will still lead to the same inevitable end is perhaps the most deeply moving choice one can make. It is the lesson at the very core of my time with him. (*BL*, Season 10, Episode 22)

Added to this is the camera and photography work which make the viewer accompany Reddington on his final adventure. When Raymond decides to go for a walk, for the last time, the camera goes behind him (see image 10). Then, we see Reddington enjoying himself and drinking in the scenery (see image 11). After that, the climax is marked by his encounter with the bull who is to take his life (see image 12). At the same time, Agent Ressler is right behind Raymond on a helicopter. Unfortunately, he is too late and Reddington is killed by the bull (see image 13). There is a shot of his well-known fedora hat and then, we see Ressler picking the hat up to cover Raymond's face. It seems to me that Raymond Reddington could not have died any other way (see image 14). It may even be considered Reddington's demise to be a Shakespearean finale for such a powerful character.

Image 10

Image 11

Image 12

Image 13

Image 14

Image 15

As regards the technical details, Sánchez Casarrubios (2012) highlights the role of the camera placement to influence the viewer's engagement and emotional investment in the story (see image 15). She posits that the subjective point of view, obtained by placing the camera on the villain, creates a level of intimacy and immediacy that intensifies suspense and an emotional response on the viewer. Therefore, the camera work in *The Blacklist* can be said to be paramount to the engagement and affiliation of the audience with Raymond Reddington, especially at the end of his life.

It should be noted that the final hours of Raymond Reddington in the very last episode might not help create the romanticisation of a character, which is supposed to have occurred long before. We are exploring a hero that undoubtedly engaged audiences long before this closing moment which, on the other hand, cannot be ignored.

5.- Conclusions

The present paper was aimed at exploring the elements and the extent to which the discussed elements aid in the transformation of a villain into a highly romanticised hero. Given the richness and complexity of the topic discussed in this dissertation, the intention has only been to attempt to answer the questions postulated in the introductory section, far from any claim that the answers might prove to be exhaustive and/or definitive.

However, it can be concluded that there exist some key elements that contributed to the romanticisation of Raymond Reddington, the main character in the TV series *The Blacklist*. In the first place, Reddington's past proves to be a mystery that is very (and perhaps partially) uncovered throughout the seasons. The different components of the protagonist's life help viewers create a background story for the main character which, given its suspense, adds to the appeal of the character. Perhaps the ambiguity built around the character's identity also helps keep viewers engaged.

Secondly, Raymond Reddington is endowed with certain characteristics, such as his physique, attire, manners, and use of language (sometimes in direct physical and moral counterfigure to some "blacklisters") which undoubtedly add to his appeal. As we know, Reddington is charming, shrewd and magnetic, even warm and amicable in situations that might not harmonize with these personal traits. In addition to this, the script displays a brilliant use of dialogue, which surely contributes to Reddington's attraction, although we all know that his criminal background may contain some shockingly heinous details. Needless to say, this character's intellect shows his intricate moral sense, which includes his cherishing of loyalty, not without some very odd exceptions.

A third element that cannot go unexplored is Reddington as a highly intelligent and resourceful individual with a solid knowledge of criminal operations on a worldwide basis. His criminal endeavours and connections make him an awe-inspiring character. This 'Concierge of crime' is no doubt a master criminal. Nonetheless, as stated above, despite his crimes, the character often acts with a sense of moral ambiguity, even aiding law enforcement in taking down some dangerous criminals, which may begin to establish some degree of empathy with the audience. An interesting detail can be seen at very start, as he turns himself in to the FBI by walking into its headquarters. Dispassionately, he identifies himself and peacefully accepts his arrest. However, the viewer senses that Reddington has a plan and that he is in control. Again, the man exudes his aura of fierceness and intimidation (in an admirable sense), never failing to prove himself to be the most astute individual in within the highest echelons of the FBI. This undoubtedly garners viewers' sympathy and alignment.

An indisputably fourth element is the impact of postmodernity helping 'the bad guys' take over. In the third Golden Age of Television, the cable system has created characters of complex morality. Raymond exhibits a sense of loyalty to certain individuals while remaining ruthless towards others. The most obvious instance being that he would go to any extent to keep Detective Elizabeth safe. Similarly, his bond with Dembe is to be emphasised as Raymond, on several occasions, goes out of his way to rescue and save Dembe. Also, he defies conventional notions of morality, fostering in the viewers' feelings of identification, empathy, allegiance, and alignment among others, as we have discussed above. Again, Smith (1995) and Galindo (2015), state that ethical ambiguity elicits a series of reactions from the audience, which can influence their moral assessment, under the manipulation of cinematic techniques. The viewer seems to question whether Reddington is a hero, a villain or something in between. Additionally, it is known that a dramatically rich character will do things that are good, debatable, bad, or even mediocre, all this always resting on the (perhaps manipulated) benevolence of the viewer (Garcia, 2003). Postmodernity has blurred the roles of heroes, villains, anti-heroes and anti-villains, and this can be the case of Reddington.

Although this study concerns a character that no doubt engaged an audience from the beginning of the first season, its powerful finale cannot be ignored as a fifth, clinching element. The episodes of the season slowly build up to Raymond's death, the demise of a man who will not allow himself to be killed by any creature that might pride him/herself on being human: after a powerful stand-off sequence, he is killed by a Miura Spanish

fighting bull (a powerful scene shot in the south of Spain). In the last minutes of the last episode, Raign's (Rachel Rabin's) version of Dylan's song *Knocking on Heaven's Door* plays in the background and Dembe (elsewhere, in a hospital bed) delivers a speech praising Reddington's courage when confronting death and his belief that one's manner of living holds greater significance than the certainty of death. Throughout, Dembe expresses admiration for Reddington's steadfast refusal to succumb or, as he says, to "go quietly into that good night.", which is part of a poem by Dylan Thomas. Near the very end of the last season, Dembe —in a remarkable sequence running parallel to Reddington's final moments— eulogises Reddington's unswerving resolve to embrace life:

> "More than anyone I've ever known he's always been at peace with death. He says, 'Death is inevitable. It will come for us all. And that inevitability robs death entirely of its significance. What matters are the things that are not inevitable. The things we create, the things we find, the left we take when everything in our life is leading us right. How we live.' I've always loved him for that. For his remarkable refusal to go quietly into that goodnight." (*BL*, Season 10, Episode 22)

This impactful finale cannot fail to have completed the viewers' full engagement, although it is surely an engagement that had been created and sustained since the very beginning of the first season.

6.- Endword

The treatment of *willing suspension of disbelief* in its full substantivity is, to some extent, beyond the scope of this dissertation because there are some elements that belong to the field of psychology and, therefore, call for a vast background in its experimental procedures. Although there have been many references to psychological processes, we cannot make any claim to exploring into all the complexities of an audience's psychological traits in a professional way, as the present study was never planned as a psychological exploration by an expert in the field. This said, it should also be repeated that neither the results nor the final conclusions will make any claim to any universal validity, as it is clear that there may be numberless psychological factors intervening in the audience's response to a character on a television series. Although the study might boast some external validity, there will always remain a part of tentativeness in practically all concluding statements.

Of course it should be clear that the construction of a character who bears the complexities of Raymond Reddington is not the work done by an author writing in complete solitude: It is the complex task of a multidisciplinary team consisting of psychologists, sociologists, experts in criminology and so forth. Undoubtedly they are experts in profiling and crafting a character that may create a bond with potentially faithful audiences. If one thought about this sole fact, a study like the present exploration would never be attempted. However, no matter how many experts work on the complex creation of a character, there are series that never see the light beyond a sombre pilot, soon doomed into oblivion (and this pilot's characters may well have been profiled and

crafted by the same talented multidisciplinary group). The complex process of appealing to an audience and sustaining the programme's ratings surely begs further research.

Furthermore, the main concepts, development and conclusion of the present work may also suggest the strong presence of Hollywood as a "colonising" force in the areas of content and rhetorical schemata (Rumelhart, 1980). This presence is also undoubtedly in need of further examination.

References

Akmeşe, E. (2021). 'Discussing Abstraction of Evil in Concreteness of Murder: Elena.' In Tüysüz, D. (2021).

Baila-Bigné, S. (2020). 'Negative Empathy in Narrative: Humanizing Evil in In Cold Blood and Les bienveillantes.' Universitat de Barcelona.

Bateson, R. (2021). 'The politics of vigilantism'. *Comparative Political Studies*, *54*(6), 923–955. https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414020957692.

Bokenkamp, J., Eisendrath, J., & Davis, J. (Executive Producers). (2013–2023). *The Blacklist* [TV series]. Sony Pictures Television.

Bokiniec, M. (2010). 'Who can Find a Virtuous CTU Agent? Jack Bauer as Modern Hero, Antihero and Tragic Villain.' https://www.academia.edu.

Coplan, A. (2004). 'Empathic engagement with narrative fictions.' *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*. Blackwell Publishing and The American Society for Aesthetics.

Encyclopedia Britannica (2024). https://www.britannica.com.

Ferri, A. (2007). *Willing Suspension of Disbelief - Poetic Faith in Film*. Lexington Books.

Galindo Furió, L. (2015). 'El atractivo del mal: la figura del villano en la ficción televisiva actual' (tesis no publicada). Universidad Politécnica de Valencia.

Gonzalez Torres, J. (2017). 'El villano es hoy el héroe - Apuntes iconográficos sobre el protagonismo del mal en los medios audiovisuales'. Fundación Victoria – Universidad de Málaga.

Hall, R. (2020). *The American Villain. Encyclopedia of Bad Guys in Comics, Film, and Television.* Greenwood.

Holland, N. N. (2009). *Literature and the Brain.* The PsyArt Foundation.

Holland, N. N. (1975). *The Dynamics of Literary Response*. Norton.

Hurtado de Barrera, J. (2012). *El proyecto de investigación: comprensión holística de la metodología y la investigación* (7ma edición). Quirón Ediciones.

Klapp, O. (2014). *Heroes, Villains and Fools - The Changing American Character.* Taylor & Francis Group.

Neftali Fernández, S. (2013). 'Amado Monstruo: Lo heroico y lo monstruoso en Walter White'. En Cobo, S. y Hernández-Santaolalla, V. (Coor.) (2013). *Breaking Bad: 530 gramos (de papel) para serieadictos no rehabilitados* (pp.105-122). Naturae Editores.

Pankin, J. (2013). 'Schema Theory'. https://web.mit.edu.

Pineda, A. & J. Jiménez-Varea (2022). 'Crime, hooded crusaders, and (private) justice: *arrow* and the exoneration of vigilantism in contemporary popular media.' *Comunicação e Sociedade, vol. 42, 2022, pp. 133–156.* https://doi.org/10.17231/comsoc.42.4013.

Roberts A. (Ed.) (2014). *Biographia Literaria by Samuel Taylor Coleridge*. Edinburgh University Press.

Rumelhart, D. E. (1980). 'Schemata: the building blocks of cognition.' In R. J. Spiro, B. C. Bruce, & W. F. Brewer (Eds.). *Theoretical issues in reading comprehension*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Sánchez Casarrubios, M. (2012). 'Narración y sociedad: El villano en el cine contemporáneo (2000-2010)'. *Aequitas,* vol. 2, pp. 189-224.

Şenel, S. (2021). *'Change of Good: Evil Concepts in Fantasy Genre.'* In Tüysüz, D. (2021).

Stanford, R. (1968). 'The romantic hero and that fatal selfhood.' *The Centennial Review.* Vol. 12, No. 4 (FALL 1968), pp. 430-454. Published By: Michigan State University Press

Suárez Iñíguez, E. (2013). '¿Es realmente necesaria la hipótesis al inicio de la investigación?' *Estudios Políticos* (5). Https.//doi.org/1022201/fcpys.24484903.

Tüysüz, D. (2021). 'Sympathy for the Devil: Psychology of Evil from Milton's Satan to the Joker.' In Tüysüz, D. (2021).

Tüysüz, D. (ed.) (2021). *International Perspectives on Rethinking Evil on Film and Television*. IGI Global.