

The duality in fantastic TV fiction. An ideological analysis of *The Passage* and *The Society*

La dualidad en la ficción televisiva fantástica. Análisis ideológico de *The Passage* y *The Society*

A dualidade na ficção de TV fantástica. Uma análise ideológica de The Passage e The Society

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ABSTRACT | Duality emerges from literary or audiovisual fiction as part of a mythical mental construct present in the human psyche. This research aims to study how this dualism is reflected in contemporaneous television fiction through the critical analysis of the ideological discourse of two TV series: *The Society* (Netflix, 2019) and *The Passage* (Fox, 2019). The results indicate that both series are permeated with conservative values. This contribution makes visible the presence of ideological elements in fantastic TV series, as well as emphasizes the importance of their study and comparison with other TV productions within a specific broadcasting period.

KEYWORDS: TV series; ideology; fantastic narrative; cultural studies; duality.

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RESUMEN | La dualidad o tema del doble emerge de la ficción literaria, cinematográfica y televisiva como parte de una construcción mental mítica presente en la psique del hombre. Este trabajo se propone estudiar cómo se refleja esta dualidad en la ficción televisiva actual a través del análisis crítico del discurso ideológico de dos series: *The Society* (Netflix, 2019) y *The Passage* (Fox, 2019). Los resultados indican que ambas series se encuentran permeadas con valores conservadores. Con esta aportación se visibiliza la presencia de elementos ideológicos en las series de televisión del género fantástico, así como la importancia de su estudio y comparación con otras producciones de ficción dentro de un periodo de emisión específico.

PALABRAS CLAVE: series de televisión; ideología; narrativa fantástica; estudios culturales; dualidad.

RESUMO | O dualismo ou dualidade emergem da ficção literária, do filme e da televisão como parte de uma construção mental mítica presente na psique do homem. Este artigo tem como objetivo estudar como esse dualismo se reflete na ficção televisiva de hoje através da análise crítica do discurso ideológico de duas séries: *The Society* (Netflix, 2019) e *The Passage* (Fox, 2019). Os resultados indicam que ambas as séries estão permeadas de valores conservadores. Essa contribuição faz com que a presença de elementos ideológicos nas séries televisivas do gênero fantasia, bem como a importância de seu estudo e comparação com outras produções de ficção dentro de um período de emissão específica.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: séries de TV; ideologia; narrativa de fantasia; estudos culturais; dualidade.

INTRODUCTION

Television series are an interesting object of reflection on the society they show and in which they are inserted. In this regard, the viewing of series can establish a link with the world of politics (Nærland, 2019), not in the strict sense, i.e., strictly referring to the professional meaning of the term, but to the discourse that society maintains about how to organize and identify itself (Diken & Laustsen, 2017). In this case, we are all political subjects, and television series do not require to directly mention of specific political organizations to express ideas linked to a certain ideological spectrum. So much so that it has been proven that popular culture, in its various forms, offers young people points of identification with national and international affairs in a special way since they seem to establish connections between the private and the political much more easily through popular culture (Scott, Street, & Inthorn, 2011).

Therefore, examining the discourses that television series disseminate is not trivial, because their combination of media discourse, experiential knowledge and popular wisdom makes them a potential resource (van Zoonen, 2007) to transmit social values. In addition, as Henry Jenkins (2000) states, text plays a crucial role in shaping its reception because, although the audience can appropriate the textual content, there is an authority of the text and of the author that is difficult to evade, and although mass culture may contain within it discourses that occupy the entire ideological spectrum (Pineda, Fernández-Gómez, & Huici, 2018), it should be noted that most of those that belong to the mainstream commercial circuit are conservative (Chomsky & Herman, 2009).

The series analyzed in this research are *The Society* (Netflix, 2019) and *The Passage* (Fox, 2019). First, we will review the theories and concepts related to ideology and duality in the fantastic, which will allow us to study how they intervene in the narrative of the aforementioned television fictions. Subsequently, we will elaborate a discussion of the results obtained regarding different works on contemporary fantastic fiction. The achievement of the proposed objectives will allow us to answer a main question: how is human nature represented in *The Passage* and in *The Society*?

FANTASY AND IDEOLOGY

Fantastic texts, as highlighted by Ina Batzke, Eric C. Erbacher, Linda M. Heß, and Corinna Lenhardt (2018), reflect, strengthen, or confront cultural ideologies. In this regard, as Frédéric Martel (2011) points out, in the 21st century, the cultural productions of the United States represent a way to influence international

affairs and improve their image through the exercise of soft power¹, thanks to the distribution of its content enabled by globalization. This observation makes analyzing the content offered by an audiovisual industry such as the United States – marked by this search to exercise soft power in the rest of the world– an interesting question. In this regard, the fantasy genre molds, like other genres cultivated within the Hollywood industry, that American mythos that transcends internationally (Johnson-Smith, 2005).

Television, more than any other technology, materializes the immemorial human fantasy of transcending time and space limits in search of another reality (Loshitzky, 1996). More specifically, inserted in this format, television series have become its emerging product and to ignore them would be to look over one of the most important ways of telling stories of our time (Kallas, 2014). Like the social function of myth (Huici, 1996), television series can imply adherence to certain values, the explanation of certain questions that society asks itself about itself, and the institution of certain uses and customs. Thus, as argued by Milly Buonanno (1999), they play a fundamental role in the community: first, the series are storytellers, they talk about the viewer, providing experiences of everyday life. Second, they are familiarizers: they build a common sense of society and provide common values to its members. Lastly, they serve as maintenance of the community, considering gradually accepting new elements, but always rejecting everything considered radical.

Serial narratives, like any story created by human beings, are likely to carry ideological values, understanding ideology as the self-representation that humans make of themselves: the values and characteristics that make them relate to their environment in a certain way (van Dijk, 2000). I.e., as the author points out, “an ideology is a scheme that serves its own interests for the representation of Us and Them as social groups” (2000, p. 95). Therefore, “they have the format of a group scheme that reflects our fundamental social, economic, political, or cultural interests” (2000, p. 95). Ideology is a social element that permeates all the substrata of society at different levels, one of them, television series.

Framed in the fantastic genre, the ideological aspect adheres to fictions with various themes, carriers of connotations that evoke in the viewer the acceptance or rejection of the ideas presented to him. Additionally, the versatility that the fantastic genre presents to play with conceptual units of the political and ideological field

1. Soft power refers to a nation’s persuasion through the fascination it emits (Nye, 2005). In this regard, the audiovisual production plays an influential role in the rest of the countries that consume these products; the US content industry is an example.

through the otherness of the elements that constitute the viewer's reality is observed in the creative field. The irruption of the fantastic, as Teodosio Fernández points out,

[...] does not have to reside in the alteration by foreign elements of a world ordered by the rigorous laws of reason and science. An alteration of what is recognizable, of family order or disorder, is enough. The suspicion that another secret order (or another disorder) may endanger the precarious stability of our worldview is sufficient (2001, pp. 296-297).

Below, we will address the possibilities of the fantastic genre to introduce that disorder or alteration of the known through the application of certain thematic axes, focusing on the duality or the double theme as one of the main themes to induce the audience to sociopolitical reflection.

Duality as a theme of the fantastic

As Louis Vax points out, fantastic fiction, “delights in presenting us with men like ourselves in the presence of the inexplicable, but within our real world” (1965, p. 6). These inexplicable phenomena, however, are not usually meaningless within the narrative. On the contrary, as Gérard Lenne highlights, the fantastic scheme “summons meaning” and far from being “an empty structure”, it is always “significant, deliberately or fortuitously” (1974, p. 45).

To construct these meanings, the detection of certain themes and iconographies within the genre favors the study of the evolution of its meaning or representation within the different productions and periods. The “theme approach will help us understand the ways in which media culture, through its narrative figurations, contributes to building not only the memory of the past, but also the projections of the future” (Chillón, 2000, p. 154).

In *Le cinéma fantastique et ses mythologies* (1970), Lenne distinguishes between five main thematic axes —the duality or theme of the double, of evil, monstrosity, anthropomorphism, and alterations to the human body—, which will later be reviewed by other authors such as Joan Bassa and Ramón Freixas (1993), who conduct a transfer of these themes to the science fiction genre, incorporating as a result of this review two new thematic axes in the aforementioned taxonomy: survival and initiatory routes or trips, both through space and through time. Both axes can be extrapolated to the fantasy genre, especially considering travel as an initiation journey or adventure trip, and survival, the result of the alteration or irruption of the strange in the known. Derived from the fantastic literary production, these themes will also be transferred to the genre's television fiction content, as seen by other studies on the development of the fantastic and science fiction genre within cinema and television (Telotte, 2008, 2014; Geraghty, 2009;

Seed, 2011; Barceló, 2015). As João Antonio Nogueira Ramos Neto, and Marcio Markendorf (2018) point out, the reiteration within each genre and each medium of certain themes and iconography contributes to the formation of a collective imaginary shared by the audience.

Among the topics mentioned, the presence of duality within this collective imaginary is a common element in the binomial monstrosity/normality, normality/abnormality or good vs. evil. "In short, it can be said that duality is an element present in human nature and this has been manifested in mythical and religious narratives since the beginning of time" (Pérez de Algaba Chicano & Rubio-Hernández, 2015, p. 188), being widely studied as a "mythical mental model" configured in the psyche of the human being as an "original universal mechanism" (López Saco, 2008, p. 98). Within the binomials detected in the narrative constructions of the fantastic, the dichotomy good vs. evil lies in the need for the two axes to understand the presence of the "other". The existence of evil is not understood if it is not confronted with its inverted image, the good. Bassa and Freixas (1993) point out that evil will be equated with disorder, fear, restlessness, or chaos produced by disturbing agents embodied around two fundamental pathways that correspond, in a general sense, to the two aspects of danger differentiated by Lenne (1974).

In the first way, the danger or representation of evil comes from elsewhere, it is something external to the individual. In this regard, beings typical of the fantastic such as monsters, mutants, giants, or aliens will break with what has been known or considered normal within a society until now. However, this duality corresponds, on a large number of occasions, to the projection of ourselves from different perspectives, taking the form of supernatural characters. This projection, however, is always presented within the fictional story as the "other", relegating all responsibility for the deterioration of our society or the change generated in it.

A second path focuses on the dangers that come from man or that turn against him, with the earthlings being responsible for the propagated threat, embodied in figures such as the scientist or the government institutions that sell themselves to the enemy. At other times, the individual will feel that he is being punished for something resulting from his misconduct (individual or as a society), as we will see later in *The Society*.

The confrontation or overcoming of these dangers directly integrates the thematic axis of survival, which can be presented individually, "represented in the struggle of the individual or of a small group for survival in a hostile world, trying to return to civilization or to reconstruct it" (Bassa & Freixas, 1993, p. 55). In this first aspect, the group of survivors will be guided by a "positive hero" who will help them overcome "the dangers coming from dissident remnants of society"

or horrible biological mutations “towards the new horizons of the promised land, where the society will be reborn again” (Bassa & Freixas, 1993, p. 55).

Collective survival, on the other hand, is when an entire community faces a biological, geological, or extraterrestrial threat. Society, as one man, will rise up in arms under the leadership of one or more positive heroes, who will direct the battle against that element that destabilizes their security or survival. Given the date of their work, Bassa and Freixas emphasize in this type of situation the trust of the people in their rulers to solve their conflicts, conveying victory to their efficient technicians and scientists: “it is the triumph of the bureaucratic caste” (1993, p. 55). Likewise, they point out that this collective aspect presents fewer radical features than the individual one, as humanity finds itself not before a consummated catastrophe, but warned of its possible advent.

Regarding the origin of the threat, Bassa and Freixas focus on the danger caused by external agents, reducing it to “two alternatives: aliens and biological invasion” (1993, p. 57). On other occasions, danger comes from man, a danger that Gérard Lenne (1974, pp. 71-74) subdivides into three sections:

- a. The first encompasses the alterations experienced by man involuntarily, which are produced externally, as is the case of zombies or men without identity. Apart from other figures such as man as a wild entity or the undead, 21st century fiction will cultivate changes linked to mutations or extrasensory powers not controlled by the individuals who have them.
- b. There is also the threat from civilized man, a category that includes the persecution and attempted annihilation to which the protagonists of the series or film are subjected at the time of their flight or confrontation with the society of which they belong.
- c. In the maximum stage of internal danger, the entire production would be starring, almost always, by a scientist with the intention of a Demiurge who brings together madness and genius in one person, seasoned with cruelty and sadism. In *The Passage*, the figure of the scientist will be addressed as the introducer of the supernatural and the external threat under a pandemic created by him.

The different types of threat encourage a defensive reaction in humanity; once the risk is overcome, it allows the human race to reaffirm its essence and supremacy:

In the theme of survival, the central axis of action is Man, as he is the object of aggressions that disturb his acquired status, that can potentially be lost. It is a battle waged by Man against a series of disturbing elements: ideological and physical supremacy –survival– is settled (Bassa & Freixas, 1993, p. 57).

In short, the dangers and threats that confront values under this prevailing duality in the genre will be essential to articulate an ideological discourse that will charge the fantastic text with significance.

METHODOLOGY

We will now study the irruption of the strange and the thematic axis of duality through two recently created television fictions: *The Society* (Netflix, 2019) and *The Passage* (Fox, 2019). The sample has been chosen according to their premiere (first season in 2019) and the leading role of characters of maturing age (adolescence). In this regard, in the socialization stage, people are developing their identity (Myers, 2008). This characteristic will allow us to analyze a point of discussion of all ideology: the innate human nature.

The study of the two television series will be conducted by applying a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), so that discourse will be observed as a social practice through which ideological connotations are reflected (van Dijk, 2000). It should be noted that the enunciation does not have to be limited to the word, and it is possible to examine everything that has a semiotic character, such as images (Wodak, 2003). Consequently, this article will combine two areas of study: Critical Discourse Analysis (van Dijk, 2000; van Dijk, 2009) and audiovisual analysis (Casetti & di Chio, 2010). The first will be used to determine the construction of political discourse in fiction (i.e., to establish the ideological elements of the series through the characters' semiotics). The audiovisual analysis will set some main parameters for the study of the fictional product and the genre structure; especially relevant is the study of the themes, characters, and spaces that populate the two fictional products. Thus, the audiovisual material will be decomposed for a better description and interpretation; a fragmentation in which different sequences will be analyzed, i.e., content units within the whole that have their own history within the general theme of the audiovisual product (Casetti & di Chio, 2010). Consequently, "[t]he reactions of the characters, their way of speaking or moving, [because these] are essential resources for the externalization of their psychology and their characterization" (Galván Fajardo, 2007, p. 3).

DUALITY IN FANTASTIC TELEVISION FICTION: IDEOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF THE PASSAGE AND THE SOCIETY

The Society: the exploration of abnormality as a reconstruction of the system

What would happen in a society if the people who watch over keeping the system that supports it in order and in good working order disappear? This question

serves as the premise of the ten-episode teen mystery drama *The Society*. In it, the mysterious irruption of a nauseating smell in the small town of West Han (Connecticut) results in the transfer, by decision of the Federal Government, of high school students on a camping trip while the problem is solved. However, the teenagers will return to the city earlier than expected due to a cut in the access road to the camp, discovering that the rest of the inhabitants of their population have disappeared. The strange circumstances that the young people will detect after their arrival makes them wonder if the rest of the population has really disappeared or if they are the ones who have been transferred to a parallel universe.

According to Heywood (2012), all people are political thinkers, because whether they are aware of it or not, they use political ideas and concepts when they express their opinions. An example of this can be found in *The Society*, where the group of teenagers isolated from the world begins to discuss what form of social organization they want for their new community. A series that, due to its premise, evokes *The Lord of the Flies* (William Golding, 1954), an English novel in which a group of children ends up surviving on a desert island without the company of adults. Why choose infants for a political story? Probably because Golding thought that kids, as semi-formed beings, could be perfect symbols of the central conflict between civilization and barbarism (Diken & Laustsen, 2004). In this regard, both children and adolescents are fully developing their cognitive and social faculties: “adolescence is a time of separation from parents, learning to depend on oneself and defining an identity” (Myers, 2008, p. 27). In this specific case, the group in the series under analysis must learn to transfer that learning to an exponential level: what society are they going to define? Thus, the main binomials that articulate the group of adolescents are balanced between civilization or barbarism, order or chaos, and adulthood or childhood.

What do we want as a society? What do we achieve as a group or as individual subjects with our actions? These are the first questions that haunt the community of *The Society* once they assimilate they will not return to the city they know for a while: civilization or barbarism? The concepts of the barbaric and the civilized will have a specific meaning. In this regard, away from the clash of civilizations proposed by Huntington (2006), this work is interested in Todorov’s (2008) proposal, who states that a barbarian is one who is cruel and ferocious, the person who denies the humanity of the other and who, therefore, treats him without the slightest respect for his integrity, physical or moral. On the contrary, civility is a gift that recognizes the differences of the opponent and accepts his humanity, treating him as such, with respect and understanding. In short, two aspects of human nature that serve as a substrate for different ideologies and whose compliance is of interest to detect, or discard, their branches.

Therefore, on this first basis, the human nature that the series exposes is conservative, understanding that conservatism considers that human beings are essentially limited creatures that seek security, attracted by the known, the familiar, the proven (Heywood, 2012). Once alone in the universe, the kids of the new society try to form the known social structure, understanding that the traditional institutions will help preserve the morality of the new social organization. According to Heywood (2012), conservative ideology understands that human rationality is not reliable and moral corruption is implicit in each individual. In this framework, the adolescents in *The Society* do not stay at the extreme of fiercely despising everyone who is different, but the intrinsic goodness of the human being defended by anarchism (Goldman, 2008) has no place in this narrative. Violence is sensed in the environment and comes to light at key moments: looting, murder, and death sentences. The fear of disorder, meanwhile, makes them need a leader to guide them along the way. A leader who plans workdays where everyone helps and who rations food supplies, facts that make young people question whether they are experiencing a revitalization of socialism. According to Sotelo, the crucial point of socialism is “the satisfaction of human needs” (2008, p. 94) where the interests of the community prevail. Here, a priori, with the first initiatives, a certain community and solidarity appears, but personal benefit, the cornerstone of capitalism (Sotelo, 2008), does not take long to flourish. In this regard, the separation between the groups of the privileged and the marginal-working class of the previous world reappears: those who possessed more do not consider it fair to share their belongings. Society, they consider, is held together by the bonds of tradition, authority, and a common morality (Heywood, 2012): the past matters, they must restore the social system of their parents and, also, their privileges.

Homo homini lupus (a man is a wolf to another man), said Hobbes (1980): in a natural state, man’s nature pushes him to fight against his fellow men. However, through a social contract it would be possible to harmonize the parties; a system that establishes order and discipline, some norms that these young people yearn for; as Campbell said: “they don’t give a shit about democracy, they just want to be sure” (Keyser & Webb, 2019b, 39:52). Here, the government is what is longed for, no matter the failures of the previous one or what may be the cause of their being there: disorder is disaster. In short, the society they propose does not envision a very flattering horizon. In Golding’s words, the fact that prevails is the attempt to trace the defects of society from the deficiencies of human nature (Golding, in Coy Girón, 1986).

And what role do the fantastic elements play in the fall and reconstruction of this society? In *The Society*, natural elements linked to the mystical and inexplicable appear in the city with a double objective. On the one hand, we find an alteration

of nature, turning the natural into strange given its decontextualization. Nature's deviations function in the series as a danger or representation of an evil external to the individual (Lenne, 1974). In this way, along with the nauseating and unknown smell that devastates the city before the disappearance of the rest of the population, the young people of West Han are witnesses of the anticipation of a solar eclipse not expected until five years later, or of the attack of dangerous animals not previously present in the town's forest, specifically a poisonous snake that ends the life of one of the characters. These elements act as indicators that something is not going well, and its organic and biological dimension acquires a symbolic dimension. In this regard, "things, more than defenseless humans, are bearers of values, because we feel them, more than people, as sources of power" (Sontag, 2008, pp. 32-33).

It is precisely in this fantastic fiction where the irruption of the strange acts for this group of young people as a space or time to grow up to desirable adulthood (Waller, 2009). The confrontation with death, darkness or the unknown are dragged by these elements, introducing uncertainty and destabilization of the group of adolescents. However, in more advantaged young people, such as the character of Gordie, these signs trigger the questioning of their reality and the possibility of finding themselves in a parallel universe, initiating a process of exploration and inquiry about how to return home by creating a dedicated committee.

The confrontation with this experience is presented in the series not only as an exploration of the environment and an attempt to understand this parallel reality, but also as a process of self-exploration of the limits and strengths of each member of the group. In this way, as María Luisa Rosenblat points out, based on the work of classic authors of the genre such as Poe or Cortázar, nature is conceived under a double perception:

The interior of exterior nature is intimately related to the interior of our own nature, because in us and outside of us, nature forms a unity with the Divine, root and source of the creative force that brings out in us the consciousness of thoughts, and that makes the things of life arise outside of us (1997, p. 66).

Applying what Rosenblat expressed to the analyzed fiction, a second appreciation regarding the fantastic is observed within the series in the punctual manifestations of the divine, not with supernatural elements such as visions or miracles, but through material expressions painted with Bible verses on power buildings within the town (town hall and church). With the irruption of the bad smell, a first verse appears painted in red letters: "You have been weighed in the scale and found wanting" from the book of Daniel (Keyser & Webb, 2019a, 51:49), anticipating that the mysterious phenomenon may be linked to a divine judgment of the population of West Han; this is not taken seriously by the young people who

discover it, calling it a mere graffiti made by someone from the town. As Gloria Elena Betancur Jiménez (2016) points out,

The fall of religion, and with it the detachment from Christian dogmas, leads to the search for multiple truths that govern the designs of man; there is not only one answer to define what is good and what is bad, what we should be is modified when one goes from God's designs, from duty to God, to a human rationality far from religious principles and to a culture without God or with multiple gods (2016, p. 111).

In *The Society's* first episode, this uprooting and loss of religious spirit in the youth is manifested through the celebration of a party in the church the night they discover that the adults are not in town, thereby breaking the most important sacred pillars that support their town. The ideological weight of religion in the series is addressed through the character of Helena, whose commitment as a believer leads her to feel the duty to instill hope and strength in the rest of the group through sermons in the city parish, introducing her political ideas about the leader that she considers should be supported by the majority. In the rest of the companions, the moral dilemma, the revision of the values that they prioritize, and the dichotomy between the binomial individualism/common good will be the main axes that serve as a starting point for ideological reflection within the series, as detailed previously.

Finally, the confrontation of these ideals will form the second danger path manifested by Lenne (1974): the dangers that come from man or that turn against him, of great weight within the ideological reading of the series. In this regard, *The Society* rescues basic patterns within the fantastic such as the figure of the "other" and the detection of this presence based on the binomial good vs. evil, considering evil everything that threatens the established values or transgresses social order. In this way, in *The Society* we see an example of how the fantastic genre has generated worlds where adolescents can experience a sense of progression or power, but where at the same time these are limited by their temporary nature, their ideology and their dependence on the idea of normality (Waller, 2009).

The Passage: the scientific experiment at the service of social-darwinism

Based on the book trilogy of the same name created by Justin Cronin, *The Passage* explores the limits of scientific experimentation through Project NOAH, a US government medical facility. This project stems from the discovery made by a group of doctors in a Bolivian cave of a millennial being whose blood contains the cure for diseases that humanity still cannot escape (HIV, Ebola, etc.). For the protagonist group, however, fate does not keep that reward, because something goes wrong and the creature rebels against them with a bite that initiates the creation of a new species through the so-called Patient 0: Tim Fanning, a neurologist who leads the

expedition along with doctor Jonas Lear. Scientists discover that immortality comes at a price: humanity. However, to escape death proves to be too tempting and, to get the reward without paying the price, the NOAH Project uses Fanning's blood to start a series of experiments on humans of marginal classes and prisoners on death row that allows eternal life to be achieved without consequences: to examine the causes of life, we must first resort to death (Shelley, 2016). In this way, *The Passage* reinterprets Shelley's work, where Victor Frankenstein plays with science and, ultimately, fearful of the monster that he had created from death, refuses to give him a partner; such an abominable being must be destined for solitude: Frankenstein's "being" is produced under specific socio-natural relations. Surely these relationships, mixed, interwoven and disordered, must draw our attention in Frankenstein and lead us to ask ourselves about what kind of society we want to be produced (by whom, for what purposes, and under what conditions) (Hammond, 2004).

However, in *The Passage* the ambitious scientist is not a singular person, but a government corporation that, anxious to remain the leading international power, sets aside ethical values and experiments with humans in search of antibodies and biological weapons. In this regard, the first objective ceases when they discover that antibodies can be used as tools of war. Thus, the creation of a remedy against deadly diseases that threaten humanity leaves room for the creation of a new variant of human being, immortal, with telepathic powers and invincible. In this way, human nature is observed from a liberal perspective, where humans are conceived as selfish and self-sufficient creatures that are not conditioned by the sociohistorical context (Heywood, 2012).

In this vein, although in the discourse of *The Passage* the interest of creating better general conditions for the entire population comes to light on certain occasions, the dynamics of the plot revolve around more selfish interests: for example, the obsession of the lead scientist (Jonas Lear) for curing his wife with Alzheimer's. A goal that even made him ignore the prayers of his friend infected with the virus (Tim Fanning) and keep him alive in a cage to observe his evolution. In addition, the mechanics do not stop there, because linked to the above, it is worth highlighting a specific variant of liberalism in the series: social-Darwinism. Why does this ideology stand out? This question is answered throughout the entire first season of the series with the stories of the subjects who serve as guinea pigs: people disowned by the system who, for one reason or another, find themselves in prisons waiting for lethal injections. It is by using the society's weakest where one of the most distinctive features of classical liberalism is developed; i.e., contempt for poverty and social equality. It should be remembered that classical liberalism maintains an individualistic creed and tends to explain social circumstances in terms of the talents and hard work of each human being (Heywood, 2012).

The survival of the strongest, i.e., those with more economic resources and, therefore, the most power in the social hierarchy, is a maxim expressed by Amy Bellafonte in her presentation: “I am the girl from nowhere [...] That’s why they chose me” (Heldens, Ensler, & Siega, 2019, 10:41). Thus, the government makes use of the politically and economically weak to achieve its ambitious goals: inequalities of wealth, social position, and political power are therefore natural and unavoidable, and the government should not attempt to interfere with them (Heywood, 2012). It is precisely this emphasis on government as capable of everything, up to the last consequences, that makes the tone of classical liberalism more palpable, from which social-Darwinism emerges in *The Passage*. Because in this vein the State, to function effectively, must limit itself to protecting the rights of individuals; i.e., protection without social intervention, which can lead to despotism (Rivero, 2008). This reflects how far an uncontrolled government can go: in its obsession with Project NOAH, it puts the entire country at risk and exposes it to nuclear bombs by former allied countries that see a mortal risk in its pandemic. The conversion of the United States into the figure of the “other”, repudiated at the international level, is manifestly expressed in the series: “We’re facing a diplomatic crisis. The virus started here in the U.S [...] They’re having meetings and we’re not invited [the World Health Organization]” (Heldens & Ensler, 2019b, 10:44).

In this way, through ten chapters, individual failures give way to regrets and humanitarian ties that are cut by a despotic government focused on making its investments as profitable as possible, leaving the consequence of the project in the background. The protection that a priori it seemed to offer easily turns into authoritarianism. Thus, the transfer of the NOAH Project from the Health Delegation to the US Department of Defense offers a confrontation of interests between various characters. For Defense, embodied by Secretary of Defense Horace Guilder, the mutations experienced by the humans in the experiment are an unexpected but positive result that they must adapt to and re-evaluate to get the most out of the project; for Health, represented by Dr. Major Nichole Sykes and scientist Jonas Lear, these mutations embody the failure of their research, giving them the duty to reverse the horror created and recover, beyond the economic cost, the human nature of these patients.

As a result of this process, the fear generated by scientific experimentation also falls into the possible secondary effects derived from the products and inventions developed in this field. In *The Passage*, the result is some human patients who have physically and psychologically mutated into a new species that they call “virals” in the laboratory, but which different characters in the series call vampires due to their sensitivity to sunlight and their uncontrolled desire for human blood. Regarding this viral mutation, the duality of normality versus monstrosity is raised through

this thematic axis that addresses the creation of these monsters or beasts because of this scientific manipulation. As an alteration of nature, their destiny is linked to their extermination or concealment of the established order. As Bassa and Freixas point out, “the monster’s *raison d’être* is to expose the contradictions of an order accepted by all. Its non-acceptance and much less, integration, leads to its irremediable elimination”, thus fulfilling the appetites of the viewer, “who identifies the monster with the negative and chaotic side of both human beings and society” (Bassa & Freixas, 1993, pp. 46-47). The figure of the monster provokes a confrontation between normality and abnormality. The latter is due to its singularity compared to the homogeneity of the group, and the impossibility of its integration into society since the differences are greater than the common features with what is rigidly understood as normal (Bassa & Freixas, 1993). The duality causes that it is also used within the genre to represent the “other”, the being that disturbs everyday life.

The similarities of the virals with the mythical figure of the vampire, protagonist of multiple literary, cinematographic, and television creations that arouses “a deep fascination” in the public (Raya Bravo, 2014, p. 141), allows addressing other issues more intertwined with the coexistence of the human and the monstrous in the same creature. Likewise, who is the monster within those medical facilities will be questioned. As Tim Fanning, Patient 0 of the experiment, points out, “the monsters are the doctors that imprison us [...] We started off as victims. But now... now we’re the lucky ones” (Heldens & Ensler, 2019a, 24:54). With the last sentence he anticipates his plan to leave government facilities to continue spreading the virus, thus expanding the new viral species. In this regard, Patient 0 acquires a quasi-divine role, since the rest of the infected patients derive from his blood, establishing at twelve –like the Twelve Apostles– the number of virals that he needs to start his escape plan. Unlike the others affected, he was infected outside the laboratory, “the Chosen One” to lead these new species and, thanks to scientific malpractice, he has been gaining new members with whom to live and strengthen his group.

In *The Passage*, through the figure of the virals we find another of the audiovisual representations of the fantastic character of the vampire. According to Rosemary Jackson, compared to other symbolic figures within cultural productions, such as the zombie, the myth of Dracula “is much more difficult to ‘contain’, much more disturbing in its countercultural lunge. He is not confined to *an* individual: he tries to replace cultural life with a total and utter otherness, a completely alternative self-sustaining system” (1981, pp. 56-57).

DISCUSSION

There are several features of current American television that make it a perfect breeding ground for the preponderance of the fantastic genre: the reinterpretation

of literary novels and the possibility of making plots more complex are two of them (López Rodríguez, 2016). In this study we find these two premises: the monster that rebels against its creator in *The Passage*, returning to the leading figure of an empowered vampire who does not deny his new nature and refuses to re-enter the system of which he was a part, and the creation of a society from scratch in *The Society*, with the challenge of establishing rules of coexistence and control of the rights and duties of the inhabitants of the same town. Two stories that become more complex in the audiovisual narrative, intertwining their characters with contemporary transfers: the concern of a society that knows that it destroys itself, but does not want to change what is established. Thus, the duality manifests itself ideologically by unraveling the system's contradictions: the known against the strange. The first, the one that with all its faults is appropriate; the second, which provokes fear and horror. In the case of *The Society*, what is known and longed for is the government organization in which they lived with their parents, far from perfect, but orderly and stable. On *The Passage*, the strange directly attacks social structures and the supernatural creatures created threaten the established order and rebel against a system that was becoming authoritarian. However, in both series the nostalgia for a better past, provider of calm and tranquility, stands out.

In this way, compared to other series such as *Vampire Chronicles* (The CW, 2009-2017) and following the story of others such as *True Blood* (HBO, 2008-2014), in *The Passage* we observe through the figure of Tim Fanning a recovery of the vampire as an outsider governed by his own rules, not being possible to involuntarily submit him to a process of acculturation or "movement of acculturation" (Derrida, 1995, p. 386) that balances his inverted binomial of abnormality/normality. While in *Vampire Chronicles* humanity and vampires coexist harmoniously and even the latter develop more community values than in their human life (Santandreu Aranda, 2015), in *True Blood* the discourse becomes more complex and the various vampire realities (the consumption of blood of deceased humans, synthetically or through the traditional way) confront the viewer with what should be considered a right and what should be the process of acculturation with the "other" (Wright, 2014). As in *True Blood*, in *The Passage* the vampire is aware of his dual nature but, unlike series like *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (The WB, 1997-2003) or the aforementioned *Vampire Chronicles*, where solidarity values prevail (Wright, 2014; Raya Bravo, 2019), in *The Passage* the individuals (be they human or vampires) are characterized by selfish individualism and a competitive desire to achieve superiority over the "other".

In *The Society*, the anxieties shared within the fantastic genre since the 1950s are also observed, such as nuclear catastrophes or the effects derived from overpopulation and the lack of resources for the maintenance of humanity (Memba, 2008, 2011). Specifically, the series takes on a post-apocalyptic setting where the teenagers

seek to restore the institutions prior to the supernatural disaster, but the world will never be the same and conflict breaks out between the youngsters. In the words of Andrew Tate (2017), contemporary apocalyptic fiction reflects the contradictory desires for self-destruction and survival that torment human beings. The reflection is shared with other contemporary series with apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic themes, such as *Jericho* (CBS, 2006-2008) or *The 100* (The CW, 2014-2020), fictions that take advantage of their bleak scenarios to ramble on the new coexistences to which the surviving groups would face each other in extreme situations. In the case of *Jericho*, the crisis is linked to a conservative message that looks nostalgically at pastoral America (Santaulària, 2014). In *The 100*, the individual problems of the survivors overshadow the ideological positioning of the series with the theme of nuclear weapons, which, according to Steven Holmes, is approached with considerable indifference (2019). With a premise similar to *The Leftovers* (HBO, 2014-2017), in *The Society* there is an inexplicable mass population disappearance, and the sudden evaporation, according to Tate (2017), is a divisive event, a temporary rupture that does not destroy civilization but that still changes everything. In Golding's (1996) novel, Piggy's violent death implied, in Todorov's (2008) terms, the victory of the barbarian over the human; in *The Society*, Cassandra's murder caused the temporary rupture to become permanent, and the emerging solidarity of the early post-apocalyptic days to disappear forever from the new social organization.

In short, television series can offer links to political ideas (Nærland, 2020; Diken & Laustsen, 2017). Specifically, as Silva (2018) points out, in the fantasy genre, as in reality, strange phenomena break out, generating situations of perplexity that alter the "normal" development of a society. In this work, we have corroborated that the fantastic narratives of *The Society* and *The Passage* invite the individual, and by extension the audience, to become aware of the weight of their Self in the world. Faced with strange phenomena, in *The Society* young people can take on the challenge of choosing other pillars for the reconstruction of the society they share. However, traditional institutions and values are those that acquire a predominant role in the new society. Nevertheless, traditional institutions and values are those that acquire a predominant role in the new society. The inversion of the value of the individual versus the collective, for example, implies a conflict with a part of the wealthy population that wishes to recover the right to private property. As Julio López Saco points out, "[t]he valiant attempts to neutralize the opposition will generate other bipolar distinctions that will reproduce and perpetuate the initial one" (2008, p. 98). The alteration of the dual elements, health/disease, in the case of *The Passage*, modifies the established biological order and generates creatures that reflect the horror of the project that has created them. Both series analyzed

are permeated by conservative values (respect for traditional institutions and a negative perception of human nature). However, the figure of Amy Bellafonte in *The Passage* questions the innate immorality of human beings and leaves open the possibility of establishing solid ethical criteria that transcend the exclusively monetary or weapons. Unlike in *The Society*, in *The Passage* the man does not have to be a wolf to the man.

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