



THE NARRATOR'S PERSPECTIVE IN TRUE CRIME The Urban Guard Case in TV3 and Netflix Productions

MARTA SÁNCHEZ ESPARZA ¹
marta.sanchez@urjc.es

ALFONSO MÉNDIZ NOGUERO ²
amendiz@uic.es

¹Universidad Rey Juan Carlos, España

²Universidad Internacional de Calaluña, España

KEYWORDS

True crime
Narrator
Urban guard
Netflix
Crims

ABSTRACT

*True crime is currently experiencing significant fervour and controversy due to its ethical implications, particularly concerning the narrator's authority. This article examines how new diverse narrators in true crime alter audience perceptions of recounted events. Employing a threefold methodology—historical context, comparative analysis of three narrations of the same case, and interviews with creators—the study focuses on the Barcelona urban guard crime. Analysed productions include TV3's *Crims*, Netflix's docuseries *Las cintas de Rosa Peral*, and the fictional series *El cuerpo en llamas*. The findings test a proposed typology of narrators, revealing how narrative choices influence audience perception and emotional response.*

Received: 20/ 11 / 2024

Accepted: 17/ 01 / 2025

1. Introduction

True crime has become a goldmine for streaming platforms worldwide (Hobbs & Hoffman, 2022; Rickard, 2023). In Spain, the “growing fascination with true crime” (De Santos, 2024) is evident in its current status as the most sought-after audiovisual genre among subscribers to online platforms.

Although its consolidation in the audiovisual sphere is relatively recent (its origins are traced to the late 1980s), as a genre driven by fascination with the morbid and death, it has far older precedents. The blend of reality and fiction—or, more precisely, the “combination of documentary accuracy and fictional writing techniques” (Sánchez-Esparza et al., 2023)—has a long history in journalistic and literary narratives. The phenomenon continues to expand and far from being exhausted, true crime is constantly reinventing itself. In this reinvention, the transformation of the narrator’s role is particularly striking, evolving from the omniscient narrator—who recounted and interpreted events from an external perspective—to a multiplicity of voices narrating events from diverse viewpoints.

In some cases, the protagonists of police investigations (detectives, security forces) take on the primary narrative role. However, it is also common to give voice to family members, enabling audiences to empathize with the collateral victims of a crime and understand their suffering. This is seen in *Murder in Middle Beach* (Hamburg, 2020), produced by the victim’s eldest son, who interviewed all those considered suspects by the police and family. Similarly, *Carmel: Who Killed María Marta?* (Ragone & Besuievsky, 2020) incorporates testimonies from the victim’s family, blending compassion with suspicion that some may have been perpetrators or accomplices in the crime. In Spain, a comparable approach was taken in *The Alcàsser Case* (Campos, 2019), which gave voice to all involved parties: family members, friends, journalists, doctors, police, and others.

A novel approach has been to position the victim as the narrator, imagining how they might have told their story. Yet, the most innovative perspective is that which assigns the principal narrative role to the accused or convicted perpetrator. *I Was a Murderer: The Katana Crime* (Gonzalo, 2017) gives voice to José Rabadán, the perpetrator of a triple murder with a katana when he was a minor. *What the Truth Hides: The Asunta Case* (Campos, 2017) includes testimonies from Alfonso Bastera and Rosario Porto, the parents of the murdered girl, who were already convicted and imprisoned when recounting the events. Similarly, the series *Dolores: The Truth About the Wanninkhof Case* (Salvat & Kastelikova, 2021) grants the main narrative voice to Dolores Vázquez, initially accused and convicted of the crime, to rehabilitate her image and construct the story from her perspective (Méndiz & Sánchez-Esparza, 2024).

As evident, the evolving role of the narrator is an aspect of true crime that increasingly demands attention from researchers.

2. Theoretical framework: origins of true crime

2.1. Distant origins

Since time immemorial, humanity has been drawn to macabre events. From the broadside ballads of the Middle Ages to the crime chronicles of the 21st century, there is a clear narrative continuity. More precisely, the origins of true crime can be traced to the final decades of the 16th century. “During this period, hundreds of pamphlets on crimes circulated, short unbound booklets of approximately six to twenty-four pages, which typically detailed horrific murders” (Burger, 2016). These gruesome narratives appear to have focused on domestic crimes and sensational murders, though most had a moralizing intent (Antoniak, 2021). Curiously, many were read by bankers, industrialists, and upper-class individuals, as the lower classes lacked the means to purchase such pamphlets. Generally, the precursors of true crime aimed to promote punitive actions, foster civic morality, and reinforce social order.

During this era, verse ballads narrated from the perpetrator’s perspective also emerged, displayed on posters in various city locations. Pamphlets and ballads remained in circulation until the 19th century, particularly in Britain and the United States. This persisted even after the emergence of sensationalist journalism in 1820, driven by the so-called penny press. The affordability of newspapers—partly due to the inclusion of advertisements—enabled mass readership, with circulations rising from a few hundred copies to over 20,000 or 30,000 (Bruzzi, 2016). With the advent of this early “yellow journalism,” crime stories proliferated. In response to these

excesses, in 1827, Thomas De Quincey published his renowned essay *On Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts* in *Blackwood's Magazine*, which satirized the portrayal of perfect crimes in the press, focusing not on the act of murder but on how society perceived crime. De Quincey intended to change the way crimes reported in the press were discussed. To this end, he “urged readers to move beyond their fascination with the criminal act and reconsider how, as a society, we accept crime as something trivial or merely intriguing” (Burger, 2016).

Certain high-profile cases highlighted the power of journalistic chronicles to sway public opinion for or against perpetrators. In 1892, the Lizzie Borden case became one of the most famous in history (Ayala, 2022). After a lengthy investigation, with Lizzie as the primary suspect in the deaths of her father (a wealthy businessman) and stepmother, public opinion was divided. Consequently, the trial received extensive media coverage and was followed across the United States. Ultimately, Borden was acquitted of all charges, despite evidence pointing to her guilt. Known as “the axe murderess” after the discovery of the bodies in her home, she was vilified by some and, curiously, celebrated by others (Robertson, 2020).

In Spain, the infamous Fuencarral Street crime marked a milestone in the history of journalism. The violent death of a wealthy widow in 1888 and the excessive media coverage generated an unprecedented social phenomenon, where the press not only reported but also influenced the judicial process and public opinion. The coverage of the crime shaped the evolution of journalism, anticipating narrative styles that would later consolidate in the non-fiction genre, as foreseen by the writer Benito Pérez Galdós.

2.2. Journalistic and literary origins of true crime

In the 20th century, the fascination with “real crime” stories led the renowned publisher Randolph Hearst to establish a group of reporters, dubbed the “murder squad,” to investigate criminal cases. According to Collins (2011), this group operated as an illicit police force. Crime scenes were being trampled on, evidence was being tampered with, and witnesses were being secured to provide accounts that suited the newspaper. This was undoubtedly an extreme case, but it contributed to the perception of crime reporting as morally questionable journalism. Consequently, such stories were relegated to sensationalist publications or those with limited circulation, often blending with pulp novels about gruesome crimes.

The first author to lend respectability to the true crime genre was the writer Edmund Pearson, who, influenced by De Quincey’s essay, published a series of narratives that combined literary sophistication with respect for victims. These stories appeared in reputable magazines such as *Liberty*, *The New Yorker*, and *Vanity Fair*, distinguishing them markedly from those in the “penny press.” Years later, they were compiled into books: *Studies in Murder* (1924) and *More Studies in Murder* (1936).

However, it was Truman Capote who definitively established and defined true crime as an authentic literary genre with his novel *In Cold Blood* (1966). This work, which he termed a “non-fiction novel,” played a pivotal role in elevating accounts of gruesome crimes to the status of “respectable journalism.” The product of six years of personal interviews and extensive data collection, Capote crafted a remarkable work about one of America’s most brutal murders: the shooting of a Kansas farming family on 15 November 1959. The book, a meticulous and faithful reconstruction of the events and a precise portrayal of the killers’ personalities, caused a sensation in literary and journalistic circles; it sold thousands of copies in a short time and, within months, was successfully adapted for the big screen. This marked a turning point for the nascent true crime genre, earning it a place in “high literature” and establishing its distinctive narrative: simultaneously journalistic and literary, a style advocated by the New Journalism movement for some years.

Nevertheless, real crime stories became a fully defined genre in their own right with their transition to audiovisual narrative.

2.3. The rise of audiovisual true crime

Aside from isolated cases—films such as *In Cold Blood* (1967), *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974), or *Helter Skelter* (1976), based on the infamous Charles Manson murders—prominent scholars (Ristroph, 2018; Curry, 1995) pinpoint the origin of audiovisual true crime to the documentary *The Thin Blue Line* (1988). This film was one of the first examples of true crime to directly influence a legal case. The director thoroughly investigated the murder of a police officer and reopened inquiries into the initial suspect, who had testified against another, leading the jury to believe his account. Through several recorded interviews, the director elicited a confession from this suspect, admitting to the homicide. When the documentary aired, the jury reviewed the case, resulting in the release of the convicted individual.

Another significant milestone in the history of audiovisual true crime is the podcast *Serial* (2014), which explored the murder of a young woman by her ex-boyfriend, who had been serving a life sentence since 1999. Each week, it meticulously analysed an aspect of the case: the boyfriend's alibi, their breakup, and so forth. The podcast sparked such interest that discussion groups formed across the United States to comment weekly on the latest episode, contributing to the humanization of the alleged perpetrator and the engagement of listeners (Jiménez, 2022; McCracken, 2017).

In Spain, true crime has also seen significant development, adapting to the country's cultural and social particularities. It had earlier television precedents, such as *Quién sabe dónde* (TVE, 1992–98), which investigated cases of missing persons and sought public cooperation. The genre gained prominence with *Caso abierto* (Telecinco, 2008), which revisited unsolved crimes, and *Equipo de investigación* (La Sexta, 2011–present), which examines murders and corruption cases through a journalistic lens. On Catalan television, *Crims* (2020–present) recounts weekly crimes committed in Catalonia and has become a benchmark for the televisual genre.

In the realm of series, the first major example of true crime was *Lo que la verdad esconde* (Antena 3, 2017), which meticulously reconstructed the infamous “Asunta case”: the murder of the girl Yong Fang, known as Asunta Basterra, and the high-profile trial in which her parents accused each other. This was followed by *El caso Alcàsser* (Netflix, 2019), also of significant media impact, covering the kidnapping, torture, and murder of three girls in a Valencian town. Other popular series include *Lucía en la telaraña* (Netflix, 2021), which explored the unsolved murder of Lucía Garrido and related cases of police corruption and drug trafficking, and, more recently, *El cuerpo en llamas* (Netflix, 2023), which is addressed in this article.

In summary, true crime is currently experiencing a period of great creative effervescence, coexisting with significant controversy due to the ethical implications of its narrative. One of these aspects relates precisely to the role of the narrator in these accounts, the second point this article seeks to explore.

3. Objectives and Methodology

Building on these precedents, the primary objective of this article is to analyse the extent to which the new and diverse typology of true crime narrators alters the meaning of the events being recounted and, concurrently, the extent to which the choice of one narrator over another elicits audience empathy with the individuals involved in the case.

As instrumental objectives, we outline three:

- To identify the precedents of true crime and the key milestones in its development.
- To develop a typology of the narrator in true crime that accounts for the relevant aspects of this new audiovisual genre.
- To test the validity of this typology in a case study and examine the varying influence of the narrative based on the narrator constructing the account.
- To achieve these objectives, we have developed a methodological triangulation based on the synergistic combination of three approaches:
- Historical method: Within this method, we aim to establish two fundamental aspects of true crime: its periodization (the stages in its evolution) and the genre's milestones that mark its development.

- Comparative analysis: Specifically, we will conduct a comparison of three true crime versions of the Barcelona urban guard crime: the documentary series *El crim de la guardia urbana* (Feliu & Estapé, 2021), from TV3's *Crims* programme; the dramatic series *El cuerpo en llamas* (Torregrossa et al., 2023), produced by Netflix; and the documentary *Las cintas de Rosa Peral* (Agulló, 2023), also produced by Netflix.
- Focused interviews: We will carry out interviews with the creators of these true crime productions to explore the decisions they made regarding the narrator's role: narrative focalization, distribution of narrative voices, organization of events, and structure of the account.

We will begin by addressing the first instrumental objective: the development of the precedents of this distinctive audiovisual genre.

4. The role of the narrator

4.1. The significance of the narrator in true crime

The narrator's perspective is essential in shaping the meaning of the story within the narrative of the true crime genre. The narrator is not neutral, as their selection, ordering, and presentation of material influence the development of the account and its rhetorical effects on the audience. This narrator may adopt various roles, such as a direct or indirect witness or a protagonist in the events.

This stance shapes the construction of the narrative, as the narrator's perspective entails a specific viewpoint and value judgements, determining whether to reveal or conceal the characters' thoughts. This enables the audience to engage with the narrator's particular conception of the killer's motivations and the true unfolding of events.

According to Romero (2020), true crime has traditionally tended to present a simplistic opposition between "good and evil," with goodness prevailing in the end. This perspective aligns with an ideology of order and control, deemed the most suitable for depicting evil. However, in the 2010s, productions such as *Serial* (2014), *Making a Murderer* (2015), and *The Staircase* (2018) subverted this order by giving voice and prominence to the accused, portraying their stories and lived experiences rather than relying on official accounts. In these cases, the narrator's perspective often seeks to assert the innocence of the accused, questioning the official narrative and the ways in which criminals and justice are represented.

Buozis's (2017) research on the narration of the accused in the popular podcast *Serial* highlights how the possibilities of the true crime genre can be used to challenge the representation of truth, emphasizing the importance of allowing the accused to present their perspective in the narrative.

The opportunity for the accused to offer their own version affects the construction and reconstruction of the story and the public image of the suspect or convict. In some instances, this reversal of the narrative serves to understand the alleged criminal, foster empathy with their story and motivations, redeem someone falsely convicted in the eyes of the public, or depict a story of rehabilitation.

A clear example is provided by the production *Dolores: The Truth About the Wanninkhof Case* (Salvat & Kastelikova, 2021), produced by HBO. In this, the narration of the story does not derive from official, judicial, or investigative sources, nor from the circle of the murdered young woman. The primary voice is that of the accused, who engages the audience through her life and emotions, supported by journalists, her lawyer, her family, and various authorities. This shift in narrator transforms the true crime narrative into a critique of the initial journalistic account, resulting in the redemption of the villain, whom the genre allows to explain and contextualize the events (Méndiz & Sánchez-Esparza, 2024).

The perspective of the investigated or guilty party, currently embraced in true crime narratives, impacts how the genre is presented and consumed. Firstly, it challenges the official truth constructed from institutional information. Additionally, the voice of the accused heightens the emotional impact of the story, infusing it with greater drama and allowing the audience to access the criminal's mind and better understand their motivations (Romero Domínguez, 2020).

At the same time, incorporating the accused as a narrator raises numerous ethical questions. Is it ethical to give a potential murderer a platform to lie? Is it ethical for a criminal to profit from their

crime's story? How should the privacy and dignity of victims be safeguarded? In this regard, the voice of the accused can raise awareness about unjust convictions and systemic flaws but may also distort the truth and revictimize the families of the murdered. Creators must make a concerted effort to provide accurate and contextualized information, balancing captivating narratives with respect and sensitivity towards victims.

In summary, the perspective of the killer in a true crime narrative can be a key element in creating a more impactful and emotional account, revisiting old stories, correcting mistaken versions, and redeeming some convicts in the court of public opinion. However, professionals must undertake meticulous work to avoid sensationalism or deception and respect the dignity of affected families.

4.2. Typology of the true crime narrator

Typologies of the narrator have traditionally been developed in the field of literature. Scholars of narratology, such as Genette and Gullón, have conducted extensive analyses of the types and functions of narrators based on their point of view and their involvement or perspective in the narrated story. These typologies are particularly relevant for non-fiction narratives and have been used to create similar classifications in various areas of communication.

Genette (1970) classifies the narrator, the voice responsible for the utterance of the narrative, as heterodiegetic, homodiegetic, or autodiegetic, depending on whether they recount the story as an external observer, a character or witness to the events, or the protagonist of the story. Gullón (1987) proposes another classification based on the narrator's point of view, which may be observational, imaginative (adding their own elements to the story), mythopoeic (creating myths), didactic (imparting a lesson), or moralizing (seeking to influence the audience's behaviour).

Drawing on these scholars and the synthesis by Martínez-Costa (1998), this study proposes a typology of the narrator in the true crime genre, combining informational, explanatory, and fictional elements. To complete the proposal, the category of the performative narrator is added, one who seeks to effect change in the audience through their narration of the story. The proposed typology is as follows:

- **Informational Narrator:** Similar to the heterodiegetic narrator, this narrator provides data and facts objectively, without personal involvement in the story. Their primary function is to inform about the details of the crime and the investigation. Their style is direct and clear, focusing on an impartial presentation of facts and testimonies. Voice-overs, journalists, writers, documentarians, and historians fall within this category.
- **Witness Narrator:** Like the homodiegetic narrator, this narrator recounts the story from the perspective of someone who has witnessed the events or been involved in them. Their style may be more personal and emotional. Investigators from law enforcement, detectives, family members, or friends of the main individuals involved would belong to this category.
- **Protagonist Narrator:** Similar to the autodiegetic narrator, this narrator recounts their own experiences related to the crime. In this case, the accused, suspects, or victims of the events would form part of this category.
- **Moralizing Narrator:** Inspired by the didactic and moralizing narrator, this narrator not only recounts the facts but also offers judgements and reflections on the crime, aiming to influence the audience's perception and behaviour.
- **Performative Narrator:** This type of narrator intervenes in the narrative to alter versions, audience impact, and the social and media effects of the story. This narrator operates with an intentional approach, seeking to effect change, using the narrative as a tool.

Considering the three dimensions of Aristotle's rhetorical triangle (present in all discourse and developed in *The Rhetoric*), these dimensions can be identified in each narrator type. Thus, the persuasive power of the informational narrator primarily stems from logos, through the construction of a coherent and logical narrative supported by solid evidence. However, their authority may also relate to their role (e.g., expert, journalist, analyst), implying a significant presence of ethos in the narrative's credibility. For the witness and protagonist narrators, there is a high degree of subjectivity and emotional elements, appealing to pathos. Ethos is also significant for certain witnesses and protagonists, such as judges, police investigators, or victims. The moralizing narrator, meanwhile, is predominantly characterized by ethos, often coinciding with the role of investigators who establish their credibility and

reliability through active participation in the investigation. The performative narrator presents data and perspectives subjectively, as they are involved in the story. Their style is partial, often personal and direct, utilizing emotions and thus pathos, but also strives to project verisimilitude through a logically constructed narrative, lending an appearance of rigour and challenging the credibility of alternative versions, thereby engaging logos. Given that the purpose of their discourse is to alter the initial version, they do not hesitate to attack the credibility of those supporting other versions, targeting their ethical integrity (ethos). Table 1 provides a synthesis of the main types of true crime narrators, their functions and style, and their relation to the rhetorical triangle.

Table 1. Types of narrator in true crime: functions, style and rhetorical triangle.

Narrator Type	Functions	Style	Use of rhetorical triangle
Informative narrator	Provides data and facts in an objective way, without getting personally involved.	Direct and clear, focusing on unbiased presentation of facts and testimony.	Logos: Construction of a coherent and logical narrative, supported by solid evidence. Ethos: Role-based authority (expert, journalist, analyst).
Eyewitness narrator	Tells the story from the perspective of someone who witnessed the events, but was not part of them.	Personal and emotional, shares opinions and emotions about the crime.	Pathos: High component of subjectivity and emotional elements. Ethos: Important in witnesses such as judges, police investigators or victims.
Protagonist narrator	Relates his or her own experiences related to the crime.	Subjective and emotional, focused on their own experiences.	Pathos: High emotional and subjective component. Ethos: Relevant in protagonists such as victims or investigators.
Moralising narrator	Offers judgements and reflections on the crime, seeking to influence the audience.	Didactic and moralising, with a judicial style.	Ethos: Clear dominance, establishing credibility and reliability through participation in the investigation.
Performative narrator	Aims to change the situation. To do so, he offers data and visions in a subjective way.	Their style is partial and often personal and direct.	Pathos, Logos and Ethos: He uses emotions, but tries to offer an image of verisimilitude by giving the appearance of rigour. He does not hesitate to attack the credibility of those who hold other versions, attacking their ethical personality (ethos).

Source: Own elaboration, 2025.

With the development of this typology of the narrator in *true crime*, we are in a position to address the third objective of our work: its verification in a concrete case.

5. Case Study: The urban guard murder

The case study under analysis is the “urban guard crime,” an event that garnered significant media attention and shocked Barcelona and the whole of Spain between May 2017 and March 2020.

In the early hours of 4 May 2017, the body of a man was found inside a burnt vehicle on a forest track near the Foix reservoir in the municipality of Castellet i la Gornal. The victim was identified as Pedro Rodríguez, an officer of the Barcelona Urban Guard, who had begun a romantic relationship a few months earlier with Rosa Peral, also an officer in the same force. The investigation uncovered a complex and macabre web of relationships involving another officer, Albert López, who had been Rosa’s lover for years and lived a parallel relationship with her while she was married. A combination of personal

tensions, jealousy, and professional failures culminated in the murder of Rodríguez by Peral and López, who were arrested shortly thereafter. Suddenly, the two accused—previously lovers and accomplices—turned on each other, each blaming the other for the crime. In the subsequent trial, held in March 2020, both were convicted of premeditated murder, receiving sentences of 25 and 20 years in prison, respectively. In Rosa's case, an additional 5 years were added to her sentence due to the aggravating factor of her familial connection to the victim.

This highly publicized case inspired the three true crime productions analysed in this study:

- a) The documentary series *El crim de la Guàrdia Urbana*, premiered in January 2022 on TV3's *Crims* programme.

Director: Carles Porta. Producer: True Crime Factory

Synopsis: This documentary delves into the investigation of the murder, presenting interviews, reenactments, and detailed analyses of the events and relationships among those involved. Carles Porta, renowned for his work in the true crime genre, provides a comprehensive and well-documented perspective, supported by a narrative structure that offers up to four viewpoints on the events recounted.

- b) The dramatic series *El cuerpo en llamas*, premiered on 8 September 2023 on the Netflix platform, starring Úrsula Corberó and Quim Gutiérrez.

Directors: Jorge Torregrossa and Laura Mañá. Producers: Arcadia Motion Pictures and Nasa Producciones

Synopsis: This fictional series dramatizes the events surrounding the murder of Pedro Rodríguez, exploring the complex dynamics between Rosa Peral and Albert López. With a narrative approach blending elements of thriller and psychological drama, it delves into the dark recesses of the motivations and passions that led to the crime.

- c) The documentary *Las cintas de Rosa Peral*, also premiered on the Netflix platform concurrently with the aforementioned dramatic series.

Director: Manuel Pérez. Producer: Brutal Media

Synopsis: This documentary offers an intimate and direct perspective through exclusive interviews with Rosa Peral—who speaks via video call from prison, providing her version of events—alongside other testimonies from key figures in the story. The production examines the evidence, statements, and controversies of the trial, presenting a complex portrait of Peral and her involvement in the crime.

These productions, studied from the perspective of mainstream television consumption (Lando, 2024), not only recount the events as compelling and suspenseful elements but also explore the psychological implications of a crime committed by those tasked with upholding the law, raising questions about trust in institutions, betrayal driven by jealousy, and the possibility of achieving justice.

The following table (Table 2) outlines the predominant narrator types in the three audiovisual productions concerning the case and their relation to the rhetorical triangle formed by ethos, logos, and pathos.

Table 2. Types of narrator in the productions on the case of the urban guard.

Production	Predominant narrator type	Functions	Style	Rhetorical triangle
Crims	Informative narrator: programme director, voice-over, graphic timeline. Witness narrator: investigating police officers, prosecutor, lawyers and journalists involved in the case. Narrator protagonist: the versions of the defendants in the trial.	Presenting the data and facts objectively, showing each of the versions of the case and finally offering the jury's conclusions. The director, Carles Porta, maintains a neutral and informative stance.	Direct and clear, focused on the presentation of facts and testimonies.	Logos: Construction of a coherent and logical account, supported by solid evidence. Ethos: Authority based on the role of the person who presents the facts (expert, journalist, analyst).
The Rosa Peral tapes	Protagonist narrator (Rosa Peral and lawyers). There is intentionality: to review the jury's version and refute it. In this sense it could be considered a performative narrator. Witness narrator: journalists and investigators. Moralising narrator: in a way the vision of Rosa's lawyer tries to denounce a kind of machismo in judging her sexual behaviour.	Offering the perspectives of different witnesses to the case, and adding that of Rosa Peral, the main character and main convict for the crime. Each of the interviewees tells their version and their experiences.	Subjective and emotional, focusing on their own experiences of the case.	Pathos: The use of protagonists and witnesses appeals to the emotional and subjective components. Ethos: The presence of investigators and victims or relatives is invested with moral authority. The ethos of the condemned woman is dubious, and her version is not prioritised above the rest.
The body in flames	Heterodiegetic narrator. He is outside the story, but he knows it and narrates it in an informative way (informative narrator), through the characters' dialogues, the use of mobile phone messages in the summary and the different scenes and sequences. The use of fictional resources and the performance of the actors gives the narration a dramatic character that also seeks to impress and move the audience.	Dramatising the story and entertaining the audience.	Personal and emotional, shares opinions and emotions about the crime.	Pathos: High component of subjectivity and emotional elements. Ethos: Important in witnesses such as judges, police investigators or victims.

Source: Own elaboration based on the analysis of the three series. 2025.

The comparative analysis reveals distinct narrative approaches that correspond to the specific functions and styles of each production, as well as their communicative intent. In *Crims*, an informational narrator predominates, aiming to present the facts objectively and neutrally, relying on a direct and clear style. This narrative is primarily grounded in logos, constructing a coherent and logical account

based on solid evidence, while ethos manifests through the authority conferred on the director and the experts presenting the facts.

In contrast, *Las cintas de Rosa Peral* adopts a more subjective and emotional approach, with a protagonist narrator seeking to challenge the official jury verdict. Here, pathos plays a central role, appealing to emotions and the subjectivity of testimonies, particularly that of Rosa Peral, the main convict. However, moral authority (ethos) rests more with witnesses and investigators than with the protagonist, whose account is not prioritized over others.

Finally, *El cuerpo en llamas* is characterized by a heterodiegetic narrator that dramatizes the story to entertain and move the audience. This approach employs a personal and emotive style, with a strong emphasis on pathos, using fictional techniques and dramatic representations to impact viewers. Ethos, in this case, is significant in establishing the credibility of the depicted witnesses, such as judges and police investigators.

These productions illustrate how the choice of narrator and narrative style not only shapes audience perception but also reflects different rhetorical strategies aimed at influencing the interpretation of events and the emotional response of the public.

6. The narrative approach of the creators

The creators of the three productions made a series of decisions regarding the narrative approach that influenced the construction and effects of the narrative. These decisions vary across the TV3 docuseries, the fictional series, and the Netflix documentary.

In the case of the series *El crim de la Guàrdia Urbana*, produced by the team of TV3's *Crims* programme, the primary objective was to make a highly publicized and controversial case comprehensible to the audience, one in which many misunderstandings had been disseminated and a clear, didactic explanation of the facts was lacking. The series balances information and entertainment, but its main premise is to unravel the tangle of messages and interwoven plots that could confuse the public (Foguet, Laia, personal interview, 5 July 2024).

The complexity of the story led to the decision to present it across four episodes, whereas *Crims* typically uses only two episodes for a single case. However, this case was different, as two individuals who had been accomplices now accused each other, offering contradictory versions, while a third version, that of the prosecutor, sought to provide a coherent account by highlighting the inconsistencies in the previous two. "We didn't want to re-judge the case; we wanted people to experience, to some extent, what was experienced: the difficulty of judging this crime and the extent of the complexity of the human mind," explains Foguet (personal interview, 5 July 2024).

In narrating the story, the aim was not to determine whether any of the characters were lying but to offer a composition in the form of puzzle pieces. With this idea of assembling a puzzle without judging those involved, the *Crims* team decided to dedicate the first episode to the facts the audience needed to know objectively. From there, the goal was to play with these pieces, structuring the second and third episodes around the versions of the two accused, and the final one with the version provided by the verdict. The prosecutor's character provides coherence to the entire narrative, with the scriptwriters considering their account the true one, used to present the story in a more "digestible" way for the audience. Graphics and the most striking images were key pieces of the case, used across all episodes to organize the narrative material, even as the story was approached from different perspectives. This was the case, for example, with the timeline used to move the narrative forward or backward, the photographs and mobile phone chats, or the iconic images of the victim's burning vehicle. "The aim was to ensure that, visually, everyone had the same scenes and images in mind," Foguet notes. The narrator in *Crims* also employs elements of fictional dramaturgy, avoiding a purely informational linear narrative. It is not so much about distinguishing between informational or fictional narrative. "Reality has twists far better than fiction. Everything that keeps the audience hooked can be used in reality," Foguet emphasizes (personal interview, 5 July 2024).

Regarding respect for the case's victims, the scriptwriters believe the best approach is "being very rigorous, avoiding sensationalism, and doing the work as seriously as a prosecutor would" (Foguet, 5 July 2024).

In the case of *Las cintas de Rosa Peral*, the intent of the Brutal Media production team was markedly different from that of the *Crims* team. "What we wanted was to tell a story that hadn't been told until then," stated Carles Vidal, co-director of the documentary, in an interview (Cruz, 2023). Indeed, the

premiere of this production was accompanied by controversy, as it featured interviews with Rosa Peral herself, conducted via video call from prison, without prior notification to other participants, who later expressed their displeasure and disagreement. The goal was to revisit the character of the accused and show, according to Vidal, who she was, moving “from the monster that had been created” to “who the mother, daughter, sister was...” In other words, the film aimed to tilt the story toward the perspective of the main accused, highlighting her human side (Cruz, 2023). Indeed, it portrays Peral as a victim of institutional sexism (Prieto, 2023). This approach places this documentary in the category of performative documentary, as its creators seek to steer the audience’s judgement toward a thesis to be proven (Lando, 2024).

The documentary *Las cintas de Rosa Peral* premiered on Netflix in September 2023, simultaneously with the fictional series *El cuerpo en llamas* on the same platform. This decision was driven by a commercial strategy aimed at maximizing audiences, employing mainstream narratives through disturbing, transgressive, and unsettling elements, as Lando (2024) notes. Thus, while the documentary suggests that Peral was a victim of sexism and parallel trials, attempting to redeem her character, the fictional series emphasizes her lascivious and sinister behaviour. Both angles serve the platform’s purposes, which, according to journalist and case expert Toni Muñoz, were solely to “bolster the launch with more products,” without regard for the truth of the story (Prieto, 2023).

7. Conclusions

The recent surge of the true crime genre on major streaming platforms and its success among audiences is rooted in the historical fascination that real crimes have elicited among the public, consumed through oral or written narratives (Middle Ages), scandalous pamphlets (16th and 17th centuries), or early “yellow” journalism (late 19th century). In the 20th century, following the novel *In Cold Blood* (Truman Capote, 1966), audiovisual media added the allure and spectacle these stories demanded, creating specific formats in podcasts, fringe cinema, and crime documentaries. The narrative approach employed by these media has influenced public perceptions of the protagonists in these stories, generating a parallel, media-driven judgement.

True crime has proven to be an insightful revisitation of the initial accounts disseminated by the media about these real stories, with narratives that shed new light through the perspective of time and the inclusion of numerous expert or protagonist voices. In this revisitation, the narrative of the narrator or narrators (detectives, witnesses, victims’ families) plays a fundamental role, reconstructing the story anew in the eyes of the public and imbuing it with new meaning.

The ability to revisit past stories has led to the inclusion of some of the main accused, convicted, or investigated individuals as narrators in true crime, enabling them to assert their voice against incriminating accounts and attempt to redeem themselves publicly, with varying degrees of success.

The analysis of the three productions by TV3 and Netflix concerning the urban guard crime in Barcelona reveals the significance of who bears the narrative weight, their role in the story, and their intent. After developing a typology of true crime narrators and their objectives, it can be concluded that these productions pursued diverse goals: informational and explanatory (*Crims* on TV3), performative or transformative of public opinion (*Las cintas de Rosa Peral*), and primarily commercial (*El cuerpo en llamas*). These purposes have influenced the type and style of the narrative.

The choice of narrator and narrative style not only shapes the audience’s perception of the case but also seeks to influence the interpretation of events and the audience’s emotional responses, aligning with rhetorical strategies. These strategies result in some productions emphasizing logos (*Crims*), ethos, or pathos (*Las cintas de Rosa Peral*, *El cuerpo en llamas*). In cases where the accused is elevated to the role of narrator, there is a pronounced reliance on pathos, showcasing their family and emotional world to encourage audience empathy and even to view the story from their perspective.

This raises a significant ethical debate regarding these productions, whose creators and distributors should consider the social effects of these stories and their potential impact on victims before undertaking any true crime project, no matter how sensational or commercially appealing it may be.

8. References

- Agulló, C. (Executive Producer) (2023). *Las cintas de Rosa Peral* [TV series]. Netflix Spain.
- Antoniak, J. (2021). A guarantee of safety, a cautionary tale or a celebration? Popularity of true crime narratives through the lens of Mary Douglas's concepts of pollution and defilement. *Journal of Folklore and Popular Culture*, 65(2), 83-95. <https://doi.org/10.12775/ll.2.2021.006>
- Ayala, R. (2022, June 24). When crime becomes entertainment: the history of the "true crime" genre. *Muy Interesante*. <https://bit.ly/3VRbPsb>
- Bruzzi, S. (2016). Making a genre: The case of the contemporary true crime documentary. *Law and Humanities*, 10(2), 249-280. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17521483.2016.1233741>
- Burger, P. (2016). The bloody history of the true crime genre. *JSTOR Daily*, 24. <https://bit.ly/3Csyo6>
- Buoziš, M. (2017). Giving voice to the accused: Serial and the critical potential of true crime. *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies*, 14(3), 254-270. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14791420.2017.1287410>
- Campos, R. (Executive Producer). (2017). *What the truth hides: El caso Asunta* [Television series]. Atresmedia Televisión; Bambú Producciones.
- Campos, R. (Executive Producer) (2019). *El caso Alcàsser* [Television series]. Bambú Producciones; Netflix Spain.
- Campos, R., Neira, G., De la Cuesta, J., & Orea, D. (Executive Producers) (2024). *El caso Asunta* [Television series]. Bambú Producciones.
- Capote, T. (1966). *In cold blood*. Penguin (Trans.: *A sangre fría*, Anagrama, 2006).
- Collins, P. (2011). *The murder of the century: The Gilded Age crime that scandalized a city & sparked the tabloid wars*. Crown.
- Cruz, D. (2023, September 18). Is it true that the creator of *The Rosa Peral Tapes* cheated the interviewees in the Netflix documentary? *Área Jugones*. <https://bit.ly/4g16B8H>
- Curry, R. R. (1995). Errol Morris' construction of innocence in *The Thin Blue Line*. *Rocky Mountain Review of Language and Literature*, 49(2), 153-167.
- De Santos, Á. (2024, June 4). The growing fascination of 'true crime'. *Faro de Vigo*. <https://bit.ly/46gbwOB>
- Feliu, G., & Estapé, X. (Executive Producers) (2021). *El crim de la guardia urbana (Crims)* [Television programme]. TV3; A Punt.
- Genette, G. (1970). Frontiers of the narrative. In R. Barthes et al. (Eds.), *Análisis estructural del relato*. Buenos Aires: Tiempo Contemporáneo.
- Gonzalo, J. R. (Executive Producer) (2017). *Yo fui un asesino: El crimen de la catana* [Television series]. Cuarzo Producciones; Discovery MAX.
- Gullón, R. (1987). *Teoría y práctica de la novela [Theory and practice of the novel]*. Alicante: Biblioteca Virtual Miguel de Cervantes.
- Hamburg, M. (Executive producer and director) (2020). *Murder in Middle Beach* [Television series]. Armian Pictures; Blue Day Films; HBO Documentary Films; Jigsaw Productions.
- Hobbs, S., & Hoffman, M. (2022). True crime and...: The hybridisation of true crime narratives on YouTube. *Crime Fiction Studies*. <https://doi.org/10.3366/cfs.2022.0058>
- Jiménez, M. (2022, September 22). *Serial*, last chapter: the podcast that has managed to overturn a life sentence. *El País*. <https://bit.ly/3CsEvRC>
- Lando, A. (2024). Mainstreaming and social representations: Netflix and the Rosa Peral case. *Journal of Socio-Educational Studies. ReSed*, 1(12), 198-209.
- Martínez-Costa, M. P. (1998). Tipología y funciones del narrador en los relatos radiofónicos. *Comunicación y Cultura*, 5/6, 97-104.
- McCracken, E. M. (Ed.) (2017). *The Serial podcast and storytelling in the digital age*. Routledge.
- Méndiz, A., & Sánchez-Esparza, M. (2024). Recurring frames in 'true crime': comparative analysis of the Wanninkhof case: Narrative patterns of the newspaper story and the HBO documentary *Dolores*. *Visual Review*, 16(3), 49-62.

- Pearson, E. (1924). *Studies in murder*. Garden City Publishing Company.
- Pearson, E. (1936). *More studies in murder*. Harrison Smith & Robert Haas.
- Prieto, C. (2023, September 20). Murderous cop by day, victim of machismo by night: Netflix squeezes Rosa Peral. *El Confidencial*. <https://bit.ly/3AGfPXI>
- Ragone, V., & Besuievsky, M. (Executive Producers) (2020). *Carmel: ¿Quién mató a María Marta* [*Carmel: Who killed María Marta*] [TV series]. Haddock Films.
- Rickard, D. (2023). *The new true crime: How the rise of serialized storytelling is transforming innocence* (Vol. 30). NYU Press.
- Ristroph, A. (2018). The thin blue line from crime to punishment. *The Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology*, 108(2), 305-334.
- Robertson, C. (2020). *The trial of Lizzie Borden*. Simon & Schuster.
- Romero Domínguez, L. R. (2020). Crime narratives in non-fiction documentaries: Success of true crime on VOD platforms. *Panamerican Journal of Communication*, 2(2), 11-20. <https://doi.org/10.21555/rpc.v0i2.2332>
- Salvat, M., & Kastelikova, H. (Executive Producers) (2021). *Dolores: The truth about the Wanninkhof case* [TV series]. Unicorn Content; HBO Spain.
- Sánchez-Esparza, M., Méndiz, A., & Berlanga, I. (2023). Transmedia narrative in 'true crime': From journalistic storytelling to screens. The case of Lucia in the spider's web. *Literatura y Lingüística*, 48, 19-46. <https://doi.org/10.29344/0717621x.48.3255>
- Torregrossa, J., Cormenzana, I., & Martínez Muñoz, A. (Executive Producers) (2023). *El cuerpo en llamas* [Television series]. Arcadia Motion Pictures.