

SPEECH AND *K*-DRAMAS: THE IMAGE AND THE SOUNDTRACK AS AN APPARATUS IN THE DISCURSIVIZATION OF EMOTIONS AND INFAMOUS SUBJECTS

SOBRE DISCURSO E *K-DRAMAS*: A IMAGEM E A TRILHA MUSICAL COMO DISPOSITIVO
NA DISCURSIVIZAÇÃO DE EMOÇÕES E SUJEITOS INFAMES

SOBRE DISCURSO Y *K-DRAMAS*: LA IMAGEN Y EL COMPONENTE SONORO COMO
DISPOSITIVO EN LA DISCURSIVIZACIÓN DE EMOCIONES Y SUJETOS INFAMES

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ABSTRACT: This article presents a segment of an ongoing study on the discursivization of infamous subjects in South Korean television productions (*K-dramas*), considering their entry into the sphere of international entertainment through the strategic configuration of the musical-cinematographic apparatus. This apparatus encompasses the regulation of image and sound in film and television productions to enunciate emotions, forms of knowledge, and subject positions. Grounded in the theoretical and methodological orientations of Foucauldian Discourse Studies, articulated with Deleuze's (2017) concept of the visible and the sayable, the analysis focuses on enunciative sequences composed of scenes from the drama *Doctor John*. The narrative proposes an

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intersection between medical and legal instances, delineating positions at the margins of the discursive order, governed by distinct regimes of truth. The study is based on the hypothesis that the history of infamy and the feelings associated with it are constantly updated through such filmic productions, and it pursues the objective of mapping how discourse on infamy and the emotions related to it are articulated through image and sound. It is argued that the regime that brings infamy into visibility is not given *a priori* but rather is open to description through the organization of the visible stratum, which enunciates subjects, forms of knowledge, and power within a historical moment that mobilizes distinct and particularized modes of addressing contemporary emotions.

KEYWORDS: Discursive apparatus. Soundtrack. Infamy. Emotions. K-dramas.

RESUMO: Este artigo compreende um recorte do estudo em curso sobre a discursivização de sujeitos infames em produções televisivas sul-coreanas (*K-dramas*), dada sua entrada na ordem do entretenimento internacional, a partir da configuração estratégica do dispositivo musical-cinematográfico, o qual compreende a regulação imagética e sonora em produções filmicas e televisivas para enunciar emoções, saberes e posições de sujeito. Com base nas orientações teórico-metodológicas dos Estudos Discursivos Foucaultianos, alinhavadas ao conceito de visível e enunciável de Deleuze (2017), são analisadas sequências enunciativas compostas por cenas do drama *Doctor John*, cujo enredo propõe um entrecruzamento das instâncias médica e jurídica que delimita posições à margem da ordem discursiva, regida por verdades distintas. O estudo se baseia na hipótese de que a história da infâmia e os afetos a ela associados têm uma atualização constante por meio dessas produções filmicas e persegue o objetivo de cartografar modos pelos quais o discurso sobre a infâmia e os afetos que a ela se relacionam está sendo proferido pela imagem e pelo som. Entende-se que o regime que lança luz sobre a infâmia não é dado *a priori*, mas passível de descrição pela organização do estrato visível, que enuncia sujeitos, saberes e poderes em um momento histórico que dispõe de modos distintos e particularizados para tratar emoções contemporâneas.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Dispositivo discursivo. Trilha musical. Infâmia. Emoções. *K-dramas*.

RESUMEN: Este artículo presenta un avance del estudio en curso sobre la discursivización de sujetos infames en producciones televisivas surcoreanas (*K-dramas*), a raíz de su consolidación en el ámbito del entretenimiento internacional, a partir de la configuración estratégica del dispositivo musical-cinematográfico, el cual articula la regulación imagética y el componente sonoro en producciones filmicas y televisivas para enunciar emociones, saberes y posiciones de sujeto. Con base en las orientaciones teórico-metodológicas de los Estudios Discursivos Foucaultianos, alineadas al concepto de lo visible y lo enunciable de Deleuze (2017), se analizan secuencias enunciativas compuestas por escenas del drama *Doctor John*, cuya trama propone una intersección de las instancias médica y jurídica que delimita posiciones al margen del orden discursivo, regido por verdades distintas. El estudio se basa en la hipótesis de que la historia de la infamia y los afectos asociados a ella poseen una actualización constante por medio de estas producciones filmicas, y tiene como propósito cartografiar modos por los cuales el discurso sobre la infamia y los afectos relacionados con ella está siendo proferido por la imagen y el sonido. Se entiende que el régimen que arroja luz sobre la infamia no es dado *a priori*, sino pasible de descripción por la organización del estrato visible, donde se enuncian sujetos, saberes y poderes en un marco histórico que despliega modos diversos y particularizados para gestionar las emociones contemporáneas.

PALABRAS-CLAVE: Dispositivo discursivo. Componente sonoro. Infamia. Emociones. *K-dramas*.

1 INTRODUCTION

At a historical moment in which we celebrate the centenary of Michel Foucault, the possibilities for studying discourse through his perspective more than ever reaffirm the breadth of his legacy for diagnosing the present. *Thinking with Foucault* allows us to apprehend what is produced daily in terms of discursivities, with attention to particularities that are at times discreet and at others public and widely articulated, concerning subjects, truths, and powers, regardless of their material nature.

Research conducted from a Foucauldian discourse-analytic standpoint urges us to observe distinct materialities, with particular attention to the non-discursive stratum, which nonetheless acts incessantly within the strategic interplay of discourse production. This interplay is driven by power relations that condition the emergence of forms of knowledge. In this sense, the field of entertainment mobilizes modes of enunciation through images, sounds, and elements that exceed the textual and/or spoken

domain. It is likewise governed by discursive orders whose rules define who or what may enter the order. As a result, the notions of regularity and discontinuity guide the treatment of discourse as a set of events (Foucault, 2014). What counts as truth in each period is thus defined in terms of the effects of truth produced by discourse, for instance, in cinematic and television productions.

It is paramount to consider the technological reality and the globalized context that characterize our present and challenge legal frameworks and modes of creation, data sharing, and copyright, particularly when an analytical gaze is directed at filmic products. Here, such products are understood as any other semiological production, regardless of format or medium of circulation (film, television series, documentary, and so forth). While technology facilitates access and shortens geographical distances, it also encourages increasingly prolific production. This dynamic allows — and indeed requires — us to question what is being enunciated within these numerous regimes of visibility, since these are discourses in which we actively participate and which constitute our subjectivity on many levels.

Against this backdrop, we contend that the technological advances permeating the film and television entertainment industry create conditions for a plurality of subject positions. Moreover, the theoretical framework adopted here supports investigative paths that value the singularity of materialities, enabling the description of the rules governing the formation of such positions through events that, at first glance, might seem dispersed. However, when considered in terms of their form, these events may reveal regularities in the ways they enact, conduct, and displace what counts as truth in a given historical moment, whether through a written manifesto, a film, or a piece of music.

From this perspective, beyond immediate continuities, we are confronted with a domain “constituted by the set of all effective statements [...], in their dispersion as events and in the specific instance of each one” (Foucault, 2022, p. 32). Within the triad of subject, truth, and power, different historical formations establish distinct rules for the formation of discourse. Such dispersion may thus be analyzed to identify regularities and processes of updating.

Accordingly, the study presented here constitutes a possibility for a discursive analysis of the present, grounded in the method and methodology proposed by Michel Foucault. This article is part of an ongoing doctoral¹ research and expands upon a previous master’s research, in which we investigated the musical score as a discursive apparatus in animations. Starting from an enunciative series composed of selected scenes from two film productions, the regularities observed in the master’s research enabled a description of the configurations of this apparatus that we called the *musical-cinematographic apparatus* (Jordão, 2022)². The apparatus is strategically constituted through different technical regulations, such as volume, intensity, and the use of instruments or voice, to produce meaning. It responds to historical urgencies and contributes to processes of subjectivation and to the constitution of collective forms of knowledge.

These regularities prompted us to question whether the functioning of the musical soundtrack as an apparatus might also operate in other contemporary materialities, and which additional forms of regulation it might assume to enunciate. This concern fostered the ongoing research, of which this article is part. It involves both theoretical expansion and a broadening of the analytical material to formalize the musical-cinematographic apparatus as an analytical tool.

Expanding the theoretical framework, Deleuze’s (2017) contributions concerning *the visible and the sayable* proved particularly productive for grounding the systematization of the musical-cinematographic apparatus. In parallel, the growing interest among Foucauldian scholars in the discourse of emotions and sensibility (Corbin; Courtine; Vigarello, 2020; Piovezani; Curcino; Sargentini, 2024) motivates an investigation into the discursivization of emotions through the musical soundtrack. Within this framework, the very treatment of emotions in filmic products constitutes a singular mode of rendering subjects visible, through image and sound, within a given historical moment.

1 This doctoral research is currently underway on the Programa de Pós-graduação em Letras, from State University of Maringá (PLE-UEM), along with the Grupo Interinstitucional de Estudos Foucaultianos (GIEF-UEM).

2 Master’s thesis developed on PLE-UEM: “Os acordes do cinema: a trilha sonora de filmes de animação como dispositivo discursivo e seus efeitos subjetivadores”. Among the regularities of the musical-cinematographic apparatus on this material, the use of theme songs, the soundtrack that contrasts with the imagery, and the synesthetic soundtrack stood out as immersing strategies for the audience to convey certain themes, such as death and mourning.

The discursive order, amid the strategic games that constitute it, organizes subject positions according to a will to truth (Foucault, 2014). As a thematic guiding thread, we identify a contemporary discursive context that favors the visibility of positions deemed infamous. Infamy thus is made relevant both to Foucauldian discourse analysis and to the current social context, once everyday events not only fuel the will to truth but may also define what lies outside it.

Investigating what gives conditions of existence to an infamous position, and what places subjects within it amid a dispersion of events, allows for a deeper understanding of contemporary processes of objectivation and subjectivation. These processes are shaped by institutions and apparatuses that reveal the microphysical exercise of power by intensifying or limiting discourse. In this respect, we argue that the cinematic domain constitutes a privileged space for the enunciation of infamous subjects. This enunciation occurs singularly through image and sound.

What is produced about infamy individualizes it in the present historical moment, placing it in contrast or continuity with what was once considered infamous in other periods. Who may occupy a position at the margins of a discursive order today? How have discursive practices defined infamous positions, and how is light cast upon these possible infamous subjects? There appears to be a movement toward foregrounding infamy in films and television series, such that the infamous subject is no longer restricted to the mad or the ill, or to those “lives destined to pass beneath any discourse and disappear without ever having been spoken” (Foucault, 2003, p. 207). As a result, multiple infamous subject positions are activated, as well as diverse related emotions.

This assumption underlies our hypothesis that the history of infamy and the emotions associated with it undergo a continuous process of updating through filmic productions that address the theme. Bringing together the questions previously outlined, we formulate the following research question: how does the musical-cinematographic apparatus organize itself to produce truths and visibilities concerning the subject(s) of infamy and the sensibility that surrounds them?

Intending to map how discourse on infamy and its related emotions are articulated through image and sound, and in pursuit of possible answers to this question, we construct an enunciative series to be analyzed through the analytical key of the apparatus, as proposed in Foucauldian theory and articulated with Deleuze’s (2017) reflections on the visible and the sayable. In line with the proposed expansion of the corpus, this series is composed of selected scenes from South Korean television series (K-dramas), whose popularization is understood as an event of the present historical moment within a multicultural reality — a topic explored in the following section. Subsequently, we summarize the theoretical framework underpinning the research and, finally, present an enunciative sequence that exemplifies our diagnostic approach to the present as articulated by the seventh art.

All theorists’ quotes present in this text have been freely translated into English by the authors of this article.

2 SENSIBILITY IN AND OF K-DRAMAS

The constitution of similarities and differences between fiction and reality in productions such as films or television series can be understood as one of the foundations of the artistic field. Such productions sensitize audiences at varying depths, and this effect results from the different ways in which a given subject is portrayed and addressed. When these works achieve international recognition within the entertainment industry, they also circulate the modes through which such subjects, and the emotions surrounding them, are treated.

Likewise, it is necessary to acknowledge that technological innovations in film and television production contribute to the increased depth of these products. This occurs both through the maintenance of visual and sound effects and through large-scale distribution, elevating them to the status of vehicles for diverse forms of knowledge and as constituents of the contemporary regime of visibility. Films and series addressing medical and legal themes, for instance, disseminate forms of knowledge that were once restricted to these discursive orders. In their cinematic form, such knowledge reaches non-specialist audiences in these fields. Alongside this

process is the speed at which information circulates through digital networks, a factor that enabled the large-scale popularization of South Korean television dramas, known as K-dramas, from which we draw our corpus of analysis.

The exportation of South Korean television dramas dates to the 1990s, when the term *Hallyu Wave*³ was coined to designate this form of cultural commercialization. According to Almeida and Nicolau (2018), not only do films and music become commodities, but also the artists and public figures involved in these productions acquire export value. This synergistic functioning of different cultural segments, such as music, film, television programs, and others (Madureira; Monteiro; Urbano, 2014), guided the national restructuring of East Asian countries after periods of political conflict. Today, it relies heavily on public engagement and media sharing.

The popularization of South Korean culture can be observed both in audience figures on streaming platforms that are currently among the primary operational modes of the cinematic industry and in academic research, particularly within communication studies. Notable examples include Almeida and Nicolau (2018) and Silva (2020), who examine the concept of soft power and its relationship to cultural hybridization and South Korea's development. Madureira, Monteiro, and Urbano (2014) and Silveira (2021) also focus on consumption practices and fan relations with products of K-culture. While recognizing the depth of these studies that attest to and investigate the growing popularity of South Korean cultural products, our interest lies in what K-dramas produce in terms of discursivities concerning subjects and their emotions.

From the discursive perspective adopted here, we understand the dissemination of K-dramas as an event. Their entry into the global discursive order of entertainment mobilizes power relations in the constitution of subjectivities — that is, what is thought and what is seen in our historical present. This process unfolded through the event of the genre's international popularization. Through the adaptation and reappropriation of existing models, K-dramas positioned South Korean culture, from the standpoint of power, as an industry (Almeida; Nicolau, 2018) within the multicultural reality we inhabit. This aspect is particularly relevant insofar as these productions rely on specific modes of addressing sensibilities.

By taking these productions as research material and subjecting them to a discursive analytical gaze, we do not disregard the fact that historical reality produces truths that operate according to their own logic within the Eastern context in which they are constituted, differing from Western realities. In Foucault's terms (2019), truth is of this world and is therefore historically instituted, inseparable from the power relations at work in different societies. Consequently, the historical Eastern perspective that underpins the approaches to emotions and subjects in K-dramas should not be Westernized but rather understood in its singularity.

Within their distinctive narrative format, the long-duration episodes, particular shot compositions and sequences of focalization, and even scripting shaped by audience engagement⁴, South Korean dramas explore an essentially hybrid dimension that combines Asian and Western influences, modernity and tradition (Madureira; Monteiro; Urbano, 2014). This configuration establishes the bases upon which emotions are interpreted in these television dramatizations, as well as how truths about universal themes are instituted and normalized through a specifically Eastern historical gaze. Thus, we understand that such emotions are conveyed through elements particular to these productions.

Through these means, K-dramas function as potential producers of knowledge and subject positions, including infamous ones. This occurs through a twofold process: on the one hand, they circulate truths by discursivizing on screen both subjects and forms of knowledge that belong to the discursive order and those that lie outside it. On the other hand, they must subvert the logic of Hollywood productions to articulate their own discourses. From this standpoint, the South Korean film and television market itself once occupied a marginal position regarding what was recognized and evaluated as "famous." Today, however, the ease of digital access to these productions fosters discourse about the themes they address.

3 The movement, so named in the mid-1990s by the Asian media circuit, was responsible for exporting cultural elements from countries such as South Korea, Japan, and China to the international artistic scene, disseminating knowledge of the culture and customs of these places, in a kind of investment in soft power (a term from International Relations to describe movements of influence of a political body on the behavior and interests of other bodies, through culture). This action was an agent in the economic and social reconstruction, mainly of South Korea, after consecutive conflicts, such as Japanese domination.

4 Although mostly organized to conclude in a predetermined number of episodes, many K-dramas aired as open-ended works, with producers writing/sending scripts for finalization during the broadcast period to capture viewer reactions and shape the story. (Madureira; Monteiro; Urbano, 2014).

This entire process exemplifies one of the facets of productive power. As Foucault (2019, p. 45) notes, some procedures exercise power “in a continuous, uninterrupted, adapted, and ‘individualized’ manner throughout the entire social body.” In this sense, the microphysical mechanisms of power that led these productions to international popularity constitute a “machinery [that] was undoubtedly important for the constitution of new forms of knowledge” (Foucault, 2003, p. 207), including the dissemination of local culture on a global scale.

From a technical standpoint, K-dramas are characterized by a slower narrative structure when compared to North American productions, which tend to rely on objective sequential scenes and the simultaneous handling of multiple characters in action. According to Madureira, Monteiro, and Urbano (2014, p. 8), “Asian dramas stand out for telling stories with highly focused plots, dealing with a limited number of character nuclei,” in addition to extended focalizations at specific moments in the narrative. These moments often involve camera techniques that alternate between close focus on characters and wide shots of the environment. The prolonged and “dramatic” construction of scenes is typically accompanied by a melancholic musical soundtrack or theme song, which contributes to the emotional charge of what is on screen and engages emotions in the viewer.

Regarding the soundtrack, as previously noted, the South Korean cultural industry operates through a form of synergy that interconnects different sectors of entertainment. This dynamic makes it common for singers to transition into acting roles in dramas, as well as for actors to move into the music industry. Many Original Television Soundtracks (OSTs), particularly character-themed songs, are composed and performed by singers who make special appearances in drama episodes or who are protagonists of the narrative. This musical dimension thus contributes to the retention of the drama in spectators’ memory, as a song recalls a drama and vice versa, transforming the singer–song–drama assemblage into a product for cultural dissemination.

Although this context of production and circulation is not the primary focus of this article, it is highly relevant for understanding the conditions under which emotions are discursivized in South Korean dramas from a historical perspective. These productions have expanded across multiple levels of entertainment in the present and articulate the production of knowledge amid power relations. Concerning the discursivization of emotions, Braga and Sargentini (2024, p. 112) argue that “discourse functions as a universe that limits and establishes our mode of existence, insofar as it casts light upon certain surfaces.” This perspective allows us to understand K-drama narratives function simultaneously as spotlights on universal and personal emotions.

Within the scope of discursive studies of emotions, we therefore understand that manifestations of indignation, sadness, and love, among others, are particularized across different materialities. This does not entail a qualitative hierarchy of their forms of expression, precisely because sensibility exists collectively. Emotions are intrinsic to human history and

[...] do not manifest as an unaltered constant. Rather, they shift according to sensibilities, cultures, individuals, and the set of discursive practices implemented in each period. Despite their global character, the meanings of emotions, as well as their forms, nuances, and intensities, are continually displaced (Braga; Sargentini, 2024, p. 113).

Accordingly, the expression of emotion in a film or television scene mobilizes nuances and intensities through musical accompaniment, whether vocal or instrumental. Emotion can also be conveyed through music volume in relation to the image, rhythmic tempo to elicit specific feelings, or the exploration of harmonic fields in major or minor keys, alongside framing, focalization, scene duration, and sequencing. The technical variations intrinsic to the cinematic product and the external relations through which it is articulated, such as promotional strategies, public engagement, and international distribution, constitute the discursive ensemble that conditions emotions (Braga; Sargentini, 2024).

This broad visible stratum of emotions production and circulation in discourse — of which K-dramas represent only one facet selected for the delimitation of an enunciative series — enables us to describe one chapter in the history of emotions. As Courtine (2020, p. 505) observes, “one of the particularities of writing the history of emotions is to tirelessly echo the sensible universe that is ours today.” In this sense, we draw on the Foucauldian toolbox, which allows us to work from dispersion and to assume the task of

describing regularities (Foucault, 2022) in the formation of an object of interest. In what follows, we present the theoretical and methodological gestures that guide the present study of the micro-relations of power that permeate infamy.

3 DISCOURSE THEORY AND INFAMY

In Foucault's conception, power relations are inseparable from the production of knowledge. Discourse emerges precisely from the articulation between power and knowledge. As the philosopher states, "each society has its regime of truth [...] the discourse it accepts and makes function as true" (Foucault, 2019, p. 52). Discourses thus produce not only what counts as truth, but also what lies outside it. Considering the microphysical mechanisms of power allows us to understand power as productive rather than exclusively punitive or top-down, enabling the individualized circulation of what it produces.

In line with this perspective, Deleuze (2017, p. 22) observes that "power is perpetually through which we are seen and spoken. Power speaks us and sees us." We are therefore faced with a problematization of power that methodologically guides the delimitation of our objects of interest. Still drawing on Deleuze (2017, p. 8), "experience is always conditioned and organized by power relations. [...] Wild experience will be the experience we have of centers of power when they interpellate us." This interpellation, we stress, does not operate in an oppressive sense, but rather through efficiency in the formation of knowledge about specific subjects.

The historical conditions of the present and continuously productive power relations enable the constitution of different profiles of infamous subjects and forms of knowledge about them. Emphasis on infamous men makes it possible to elucidate the regime of power exercised in disputes over truth, since these men were only recognized as such when they collided with power. As Foucault (2003) demonstrates, references to infamous lives were made solely through what was said about them rather than what they did, through the "few dreadful words that were destined to make them forever unworthy in the memory of men" (Foucault, 2003, p. 210). Access to these words, and thus to infamous lives and to power at the level of everyday life, occurred through the ritual of confession, which instituted an administrative assemblage governing daily life

[...] the passage from the everyday into discourse, the trajectory from the insignificant universe of minor irregularities and disorders. [...] For this framing, ancient but previously localized procedures were systematically employed: denunciation, complaint, inquiry, report, surveillance, interrogation. Everything thus said was written down, accumulated, and constituted dossiers and archives. The single voice [...] was henceforth replaced by multiple voices deposited in an enormous documentary mass (Foucault, 2003, p. 213).

Through this framing, power centered on a single point dissipates into multiple voices and can be exercised through diverse instruments. Among these, Foucault (2003) identifies the *lettres de cachet* as early means of demands coming "from below," in which surveillance operated horizontally, allowing individuals to be placed in infamous positions and, in turn, to exercise sovereignty over others. In contemporary historical formations and power configurations distinct from those studied by Foucault, this object remains relevant, as new visibilities are cast upon potentially infamous subjects.

Under current historical conditions of globalization and accelerated information circulation, supported by technological means that shape multiple verbal and non-verbal materialities, the mechanisms through which a subject comes to occupy the position of the infamous appear to multiply. Beyond discourse about what makes someone infamous, subjects may place themselves in this position, while others label them as such, alongside institutions that may frame them accordingly. These conditions can only be delineated and described within power relations, within a grid of intelligibility (Foucault, 2003) applied to our being and our saying.

To advance within this grid that configures contemporary positions of infamy, we consider the existence of *being of language*. As Deleuze (2017, p. 9) argues, "the being of language, the 'it is spoken,' is inseparable from this or that historical mode it assumes in relation to a given formation. It is inseparable from its historical modality." From this perspective, there is no founding subject, but rather a vast anonymous murmur equipped, in each formation, with specific instruments for distributing, organizing, and grouping

knowledge. This understanding supports a study of emotions articulated with an investigation of discursive elements of the “being of language”, a necessary endeavor once each emotion is mutable in relation to the subject/institution/truth that motivates it.

According to Foucault (2003, p. 218), “a society lends words, turns and phrases, and linguistic rituals to the anonymous mass of people so that they might speak about themselves [...] circulating within a well-defined apparatus of power.” This underpins our hypothesis that infamy circulates and is continuously updated within what we call the musical-cinematographic apparatus. In other words, infamy is *seen* in television productions, and this “being seen” concerns a regime of light that is not given *a priori* but open to description. From it, we extract what is seen, heard, and felt, since today the anonymous mass disposes not only of words, but also of image and sound as instruments for producing emotions at different levels.

Within the corpus under analysis, the positioning of infamy as a protagonist's condition gives rise to different sensibilities, such as empathy toward a character, anger, and establishes a relation between characters and viewers, so the visibility of infamy may be actualized. We gain access to these modes through an analytical gaze directed at the materialities that organize visibilities. For Deleuze (2017, p. 18), these materialities are “multisensory complexes, optical, auditory, tactile [...] complexes of actions and reactions, actions and passions.” To analyze these complexes and the discourses they convey, we do not seek neutralization, but

rather to replace the enigmatic treasure of ‘things’ prior to discourse with the regular formulation of objects that are delineated only within discourse; [...] relating them to the set of rules that allow them to be formed as objects of discourse and thus constitute their conditions of historical emergence. (Foucault, 2022, p. 58).

In the task of mapping how discourse on infamy and its associated emotions is articulated through image and sound — that is, in describing these conditions of historical emergence — we must fill the space between the “it is spoken” and the corpus around which language gathers. As Deleuze (2017, p. 17, emphasis added) states, “to find visibilities, one must split things and open qualities. [...] **What emerges is the encounter between a corpus of things and qualities and being-light.** Visibilities are lines of light.” Just as statements are neither fully hidden nor fully given, visibilities are not the things seen or heard themselves but rather constitute a stratum between materialized elements (words, songs, scenes, etc.) and the regime of light that determines how such materialities could be produced.

Accordingly, our method focuses on an enunciative series composed of excerpts that may initially appear dispersed within the television production, but are contextualized within a historical formation governed by a set of rules. From the sense formulation of conditions and rules, we can describe how television series speak about infamy, not as something given *a priori*, but as configured under specific conditions: a multicultural reality supported by international streaming technologies, upon which the entertainment industry relies to engage audiences and amplify what is said and seen.

Furthermore, the malleability of image and sound, organized and regulated to produce meaning, allows us to assert that filmic and television productions convey discourses, knowledge, and subject positions. Through their analysis, we may also trace a visibility that “is referred to the eyes, but not without also being referred to the other senses” (Deleuze, 2017, p. 20). In this sense, the musical-cinematographic apparatus constitutes a means of directing visibilities toward the senses, a “disposition” that actualizes visibilities, or infamy, in the case that concerns us.

Considering that an apparatus introduces subject positions into the discursive game with specific modes of operation, the selection of a particular material to compose an enunciative series does not limit discursive analysis. Rather, it demonstrates its productivity in mapping the present. Given the discursive-event character of the popularization of K-dramas discussed in the previous section, one of the productions from which we extract scene excerpts is *Doctor John*, first broadcast between July and September 2019⁵, by SBS TV in South Korea.

⁵ The drama is currently available on streaming platforms - Netflix, Prime Video, and Rakuten Viki.

Moving between the medical and legal fields, the drama follows the narrative thread of two physicians, Cha Yo-han (played by Ji Sung) and Kang Si-young (played by Lee Se-young), while also developing character groups connected to them — other doctors, family members, and patients. Yo-han is known for his precise diagnoses and for resorting to any means necessary to alleviate patients' pain, even when transgressing medical hierarchies and professional conduct. Later in the narrative, it is revealed that he suffers from Congenital Insensitivity to Pain with Anhidrosis (CIPA), a condition that prevents him from perceiving symptoms of illness. This leads to a strictly monitored lifestyle and motivates his dedication to pain treatment. Si-young, in turn, is a resident who abandons medicine after failing to save her father from an accident that leaves him in a coma. She later returns to practice after working as a physician in a prison, where she meets Yo-han and has her moral assumptions about medical practice challenged.

Over the course of sixteen episodes, Yo-han leads a group of anesthesiology residents at the Pain Management Center, handling diagnostically complex cases and confronting specialists from other fields. At the same time, the group faces professional and public distrust due to the protagonist's three-year prison sentence for performing euthanasia⁶. Moral and legal dilemmas surrounding medical practice permeate each case the group treats and shape Si-young's narrative arc, particularly in relation to her father's condition — which fuels divided opinions regarding life support withdrawal — and her professional and personal proximity to Yo-han.

The discursive perspective adopted leads us to observe specific contexts of medical practice constructed in the drama with each new patient. These contexts foreground a set of morally charged and already-said elements that hover over treatment decisions, as well as command hierarchies that result in frequent transfers of responsibility among professionals. Under the general notion that medicine must save lives, several medical characters refuse to "take the blame" in moral impasses involving terminal patients. When diagnoses are unlikely or treatments uncertain, they seek to exempt themselves from responsibility for surgical procedures and medication administration.

Moreover, the legal sphere within the drama's primary setting, the hospital, is repeatedly mobilized and intertwined with the medical field, particularly in relation to Yo-han's narrative. His position as a former inmate raises doubts about his professional competence, despite the success of his treatments. His medical conduct is also shaped by legal constraints: he is instructed to "avoid drawing attention" or removed from specific cases because his past actions may predispose him to repeat what was considered a crime, casting negative judgment on the hospital as an institution committed to saving lives. In this way, the topic of pain control brings into dialogue ethical forms of knowledge driven by distinct wills to truth.

This sharing of various forms of knowledge guides the interpretation of the protagonists' actions, both by characters within the narrative — such as hospital administrators questioning Si-young's professional competence due to her association with Yo-han — and by viewers, as different emotions are elicited. By mobilizing discursive elements of the already-said, such as the idea that doctors must save lives, while simultaneously confronting alternative realities of what is ethical or humanely responsible, the narrative alternately generates empathy, disagreement, or frustration toward the characters' actions, alongside other emotions as it explores personal relationships within the professional space.

Considering this general information about television production, it is important to highlight that the scenes selected here, and the choice of the K-drama *Doctor John* itself constitute excerpts from a broader archive of the institutional cinematic space. This space operates as a kind of machinic process that makes visible what might otherwise remain at the margins of the light of grand history, through the singularity of an Eastern historical perspective now disseminated globally. According to Courtine (2020, p. 527), "the reconstruction of these subterranean histories [...] is an essential apparatus for a history of emotions 'from below.'" Thus, these excerpts are embedded within the apparatus, and their analysis leads us to the singularity of the power focal points through which the history of infamy is possibly updated.

⁶ South Korea was the first country in East Asia to approve a law on passive euthanasia, in effect since 2018, but in 2009, there had already been judicial authorization of a "dignified death" for a patient in an irreversible coma, which formed the basis for the norms under which passive euthanasia was authorized. In general terms, this refers to the suspension of treatment that keeps a patient alive under conditions such as suffering and lack of prospect of improvement. In any other cases, euthanasia is termed active and considered homicide in the country (Bandeira; Moniz-Bandeira, 2017).

4 POSSIBLE INFAMOUS SUBJECTS IN *DOCTOR JOHN*

The analysis of filmic/televisual material undertaken in this study considers technical details such as framing, sound volume regulation, and intensity, as well as other elements that may be described as constitutive of statements, here, statements concerning infamy. In other words, the discursive description of scene composition enables us to understand the conditions of enunciation produced by a given scene: How is what is said formulated? How are the elements arranged to enunciate and elicit emotions?

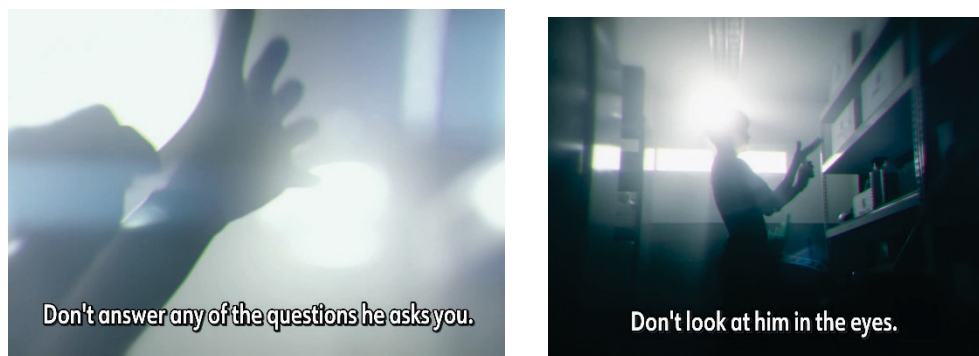
In accordance with the guidelines prescribed for the preparation of this article, and to ensure an adequate approach to the material of analysis, video excerpts of the scenes are made available through footnote links, along with selected frames that compose the enunciative sequences (hereafter ES). These sequences were extracted from the early episodes of the K-drama⁷ *Doctor John*.

Given the plurality of characters in the drama, as many of them occupy peripheral positions in relation to the protagonists' narrative arc or whose storylines are not sufficiently developed, we chose to analyze excerpts more closely related to the arc of the character Cha Yo-han. Beyond his status as protagonist, this narrative thread is analytically productive because the character moves between different subject positions (physician, professor, inmate), such that each enunciation acquires distinct meanings according to the position assumed.

The drama opens by alternating between two settings: the prison, where Yo-han (as an inmate) and Si-Young (as a physician) first meet, and the hospital, where they later work in anesthesiology as professor and student. When Si-Young first hears about Yo-han from the prison director, he describes the inmate as "crazy" and "strange," while warning Si-Young not to get involved with him, saying, "don't look at him in the eyes" and "don't let him follow you."

The visual sequence of this scene, in ES1, is composed of blurred images that conceal the character's face, revealing only shadowed contours. Simultaneously, as the director dictates rules, Si-Young questions the inmate's identity and uses additional terms such as "evil spirit," "murderer," and "criminal." Her speech, which places words almost at random as if attempting to guess the appropriate designation for Yo-han, signals a certain curiosity in contrast to the fear the director's discourse seeks to instill.

ES1 – Episode 1 (8min45s – 10min15s)



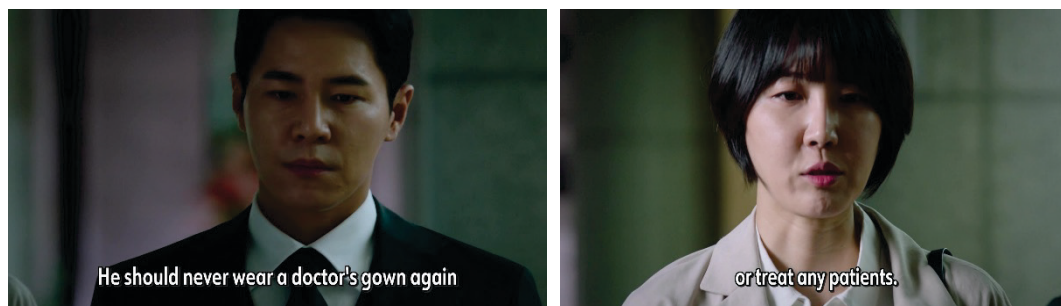
Source: prepared by the authors based on *Doctor John* (2019)

At this initial stage of character construction, the organization of images and the utterances of both the director and Si-Young position Yo-han as a dangerous individual. This visibility, combined with his condition as an inmate, assigns him a subject position to be avoided and isolated so that he may not cause harm to others. Before their personal encounter, other characters talk about Yo-han's being a physician, almost always as secondhand knowledge. The face-to-face meeting occurs during emergencies in which Si-Young was uncertain about how to proceed, so she received precise instructions from Yo-han, who employs technical terminology and demonstrates mastery of medical knowledge, despite being in a prison environment.

⁷ The frames were selected for illustrative purposes only. All production and distribution rights are reserved for SBS and Netflix.

Still in the first episode, a dialogue between two other characters involved in the trial that led to Yo-han's imprisonment assigns him a similar position:

ES2 – Episode 1 (33min20s – 34min10s)

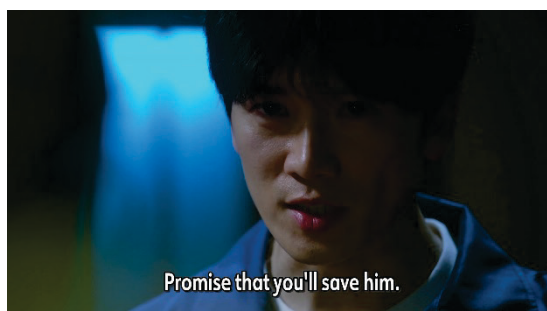


Source: prepared by the authors based on *Doctor John* (2019)

The utterance “he should never wear a doctor's gown again or treat any patients,” together with the fact that, up to this point, Yo-han appears exclusively in an inmate's uniform, visually organizes a position of infamy. A physician without a lab coat and dressed in a prison uniform is placed at the margins of what is considered legitimate or worthy medical practice. As in ES1, these definitions are produced by others, concentrating the loci of judgment and power in third parties who delimit the protagonist's infamous position.

This arrangement is slightly altered by an emergency involving an inmate, when Si-young asks Yo-han for instructions on how to save him. Yo-han's response articulates his conception of the profession: “The disease is despair, and the doctor is hope.” This utterance contributes to the construction of his credibility as a physician, even though the visual composition of ES3 maintains the contrast between his inmate uniform and the directive “Promise that you'll save him,” addressed to Si-young.

ES3 – Episode 1 (57min45s – 59min20s)



Source: prepared by the authors based on *Doctor John* (2019)

On the sonic level, the scene is accompanied by background music composed of two repeating four-note variations in a minor key, at a volume that does not overlap the dialogue. This configuration reinforces the scene's tension, both in relation to the patient's condition and to the relationship that begins to form between Yo-han and Si-young. By seeking guidance from an inmate physician, Si-young partially reveals her moral orientation, interpretable as “doing whatever is necessary to save a life.” The visible stratum of image and musical background enunciates concern and a sense of professional duty.

In the following episode, a different scene construction presents Yo-han's relationship with the prison director and police officers. The character celebrates having managed to transfer the emergency patient to the hospital with the help of Si-young. He sits at the prison doctor's desk while a police officer serves him coffee and addresses him as “sir.” The director anxiously asks whether the inmate will survive, as a piano sequence plays in the background.

ES4 – Episode 2 (1min56s – 2min35s)

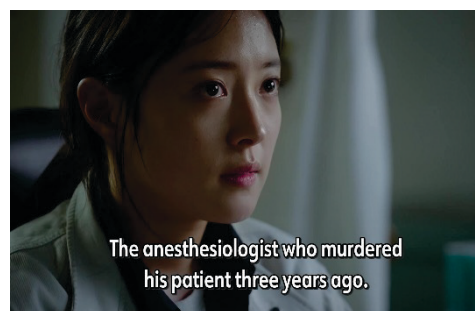
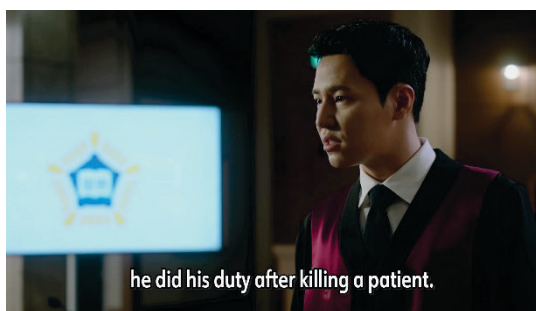
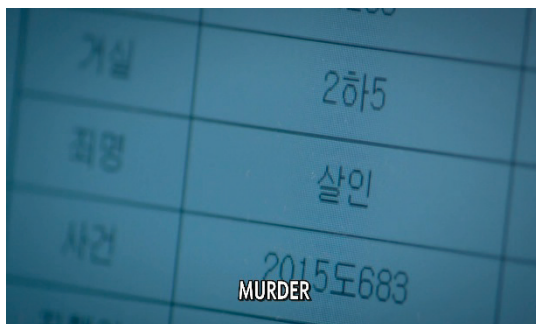


Source: prepared by the authors based on *Doctor John* (2019)

This configuration lends a comedic tone to the scene, given the visual arrangement of an inmate occupying a doctor's seat, one of the positions through which power is exercised in that space, while police officers, previously responsible for surveillance and punishment, grant him recognition. Visibility based on fear (ES1) and unworthiness to practice medicine (ES2) is countered by this scene, in which the character proves his expertise by indirectly conducting a diagnosis.

The next sequence frames the moment when Si-young discovers why Yo-han was imprisoned. Here, the regulation of the apparatus strategically invests in dramatization through overlapping images that combine previously shown moments with others not yet revealed. The scene intercuts Si-young accessing Yo-han's records, flashes of the patient whose euthanasia led to his conviction, and a brief excerpt from the courtroom trial.

ES5 – Episode 2 (22min11s – 25min37s)



Source: prepared by the authors based on *Doctor John* (2019)

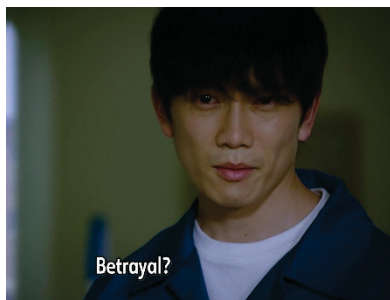
The soundtrack heightens tension through low-register and high-register string instruments. On the sonic level, we also hear the patient's sobs and the beeping of a monitor indicating cardiac arrest. Headlines and fragmented phrases appear on Si-young's screen, when she searches for "euthanasia", informing viewers that the patient was a murderer of two children.

This assemblage of information, organized by the musical-cinematographic apparatus, destabilizes prior ethical judgments about the protagonist. When Si-young refers to Yo-han as "the anesthesiologist who murdered his patient," the definite article evokes the already-said that defined him within the legal order, confronting her trust in him. The alternation of flashes from the patient and

the trial anticipates a dispute over truth, situating the protagonist between an in-order position (physician) and a marginal one (convicted criminal).

Following this discovery, a discussion unfolds, and the information about the patient's criminal past is momentarily suspended. Si-young's words are accusations against Yo-han — "you administered a lethal amount of painkillers," "you gave up on your patient," "you stopped his heart" — and construct Yo-han as infamous through verbs that attribute agency and responsibility. In response, Yo-han dismisses the discussion as "meaningless" within medicine, asserting that one is either for or against euthanasia. He attempts to discredit Si-young by attributing her stance to emotions she may have felt upon learning the truth.

ES6 – Episode 2 (26min28s – 28min59s)

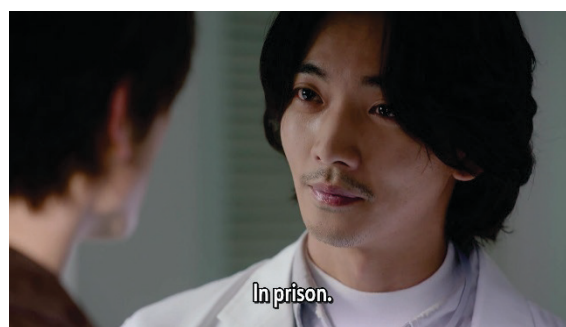
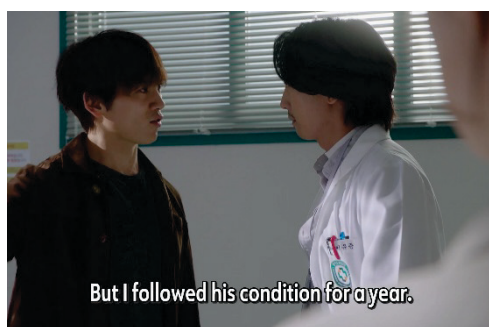


Source: prepared by the authors based on *Doctor John* (2019)

The evocation of emotions works as a strategy in defense of Yo-han's will to truth, enabling him to justify Si-young's accusations as if they were emotionally motivated. Even while occupying a potentially infamous position, he retains discursive agency by shifting the focus of power from the actions that sentenced him to prison to Si-young's reaction. This constitutes an updating of infamy: the regime of light in the drama allows the infamous subject to speak and to occupy a protagonist position, differing from the regime of light described by Foucault (2003) regarding the subject's position.

When the treatment of the inmate transferred to the hospital is resumed, a dialogue between Si-young, Yo-han, and the attending physician reveals another truth dispute regarding diagnosis:

ES7 – Episode 2 (45min44s – 46min15s)



Source: prepared by the authors based on *Doctor John* (2019)

Here, we observe a process of legitimation tied to the modalities of enunciation (Foucault, 2022). Drawing from the Foucauldian perspective, the categories used for accessing the operative will to truth in power relations are decided based on who speaks, from which institutional position, and the subject's position. For example, the protagonist questions the other physician's certainty, claiming his knowledge and authority from having accompanied the patient. His discourse, however, is delegitimized by the invocation of institutional space, "in prison", which is constructed as lacking medical credibility, since a prison is not a place for such practice.

This excerpt illustrates the intersection of the medical and legal instances, as medical licensure cited in the dialogue simultaneously authorizes professional practice. However, when revoked, it results in prison-based medical actions being illegitimate, as well as the

doctor's expertise. Institutional validation thus configures subject positions on screen: the unlicensed physician, knowing the patient's record and symptoms, yet silenced, and the institutionally backed physician whose uncertain diagnosis is validated. Considering these discursive movements regarding institutions, this dispute over truth also shapes Si-young's subject position. As a resident, she resists institutional legitimacy by trusting Yo-han's diagnosis. On the same scene, when she attempts to administer medication, she is physically restrained by the hospital physician, who declares, "You're not a doctor."

ES8 – Episode 2 (46min20s – 47min40s)



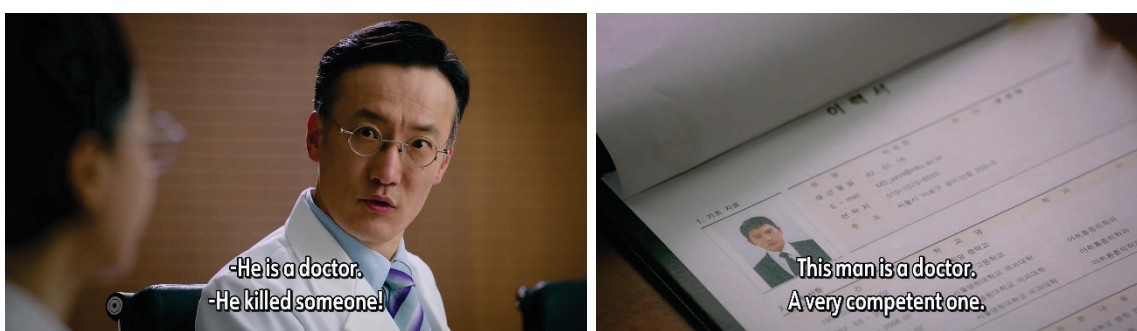
Source: prepared by the authors based on *Doctor John* (2019)

The statement "You're not a doctor!" places the character in an infamous position and interrupts the action. Camera work alternates between a trembling hand holding the medication and close-ups of his and Si-young's faces as he asks, redundantly, "Dr. Kang, are you a doctor?". In the redundancy of the questioning, having already used the designation "doctor," Yo-han also resists the order that prevents him from administering the medication due to his position. Facing Si-young's affirmative response, preceded by a close-up of her swallowing nervously, he passes the task on to her, who is legally entitled to perform the procedure, as she affirms her position as a doctor.

The apparatus's use of shifting focal points, sometimes focusing on the characters' faces, sometimes a wide shot with the other people in the environment, sometimes on the medication, are characteristics of the extended narrative style that lingers on the smallest reactions of the characters, such as swallowing nervously. It contributes to the visibility of an identity conflict affecting both protagonists. The dispute over diagnosis and legitimacy, condensed in the accusation and questioning "You're not a doctor" / "Are you a doctor?", formulates uncertainty regarding the positions the characters themselves believe they occupy. This formulation of the visible stratum in the way the scene is constructed sheds light on the possible enunciations of the infamous positions.

Further instances in which secondary characters debate whether the protagonist should be recognized as a physician reinforce this regime of light on infamy, based on what others say about the subject. In a hospital leadership meeting, members discussed whether Yo-han should be accepted as a professor once he has got his medical license back. The statement "He is a doctor" followed by "He killed someone!" exposes discursive tension surrounding his reintegration into the medical order, with licensure, along with his proven competency, serving as a legitimizing argument.

SE9 – Episode 3 (4min53s – 6min38s)

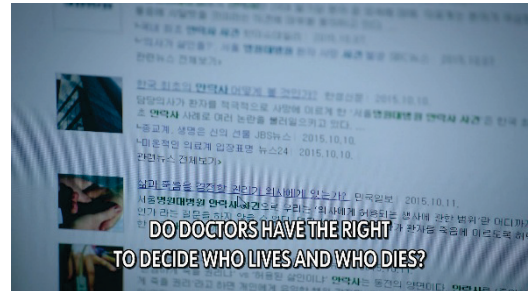


Source: prepared by the authors based on *Doctor John* (2019)

Once the protagonist is readmitted to the hospital environment as a physician, a discursive movement begins to take shape alongside the one that, up to this point in the drama, relied on third-party statements and on the legal sphere to objectify the character as infamous.

In the following sequence, accompanied by the series' theme music played instrumentally and structured around a minor tonal progression that lends it a melancholic tone, Si-young reflects on the emotions Yo-han may have experienced when carrying out euthanasia, raising the hypothesis that fear may have outweighed a sense of ethical duty. The dialogue is interwoven with Si-young's online searches, in which titles such as "*Do doctors have the right to decide who lives and who dies?*" and "*medical arrogance*" appear on screen.

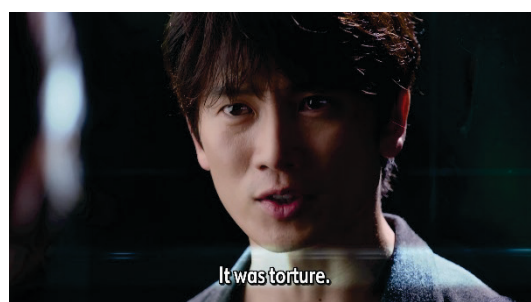
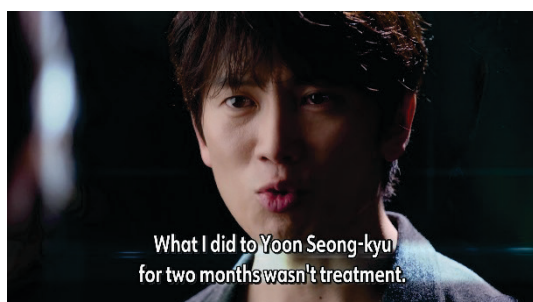
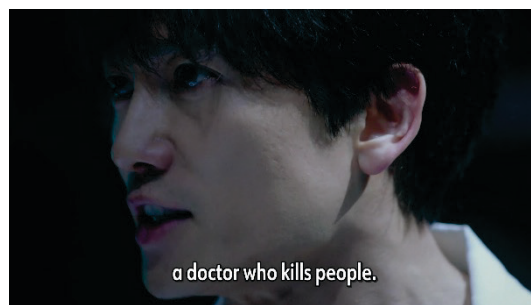
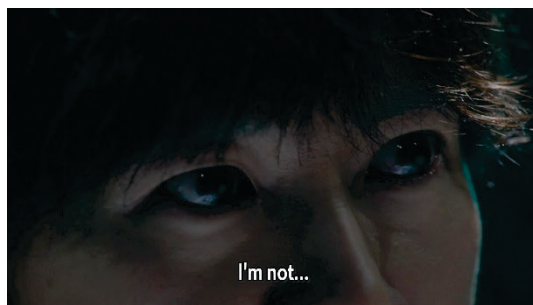
ES10 – Episode 3 (59min52s – 1h1min30s)



Source: prepared by the authors based on *Doctor John* (2019)

The focus on emotions alters the mode through which the protagonist is objectified in the discourses on the screen. Later episodes increasingly allow him to express himself, supported by an emotional factor aligned with a professional who must save lives. In episode 4, confronting a patient who wishes to die, Yo-han delivers fiery speeches about selfishness while resisting the clichés surrounding his past. He states, "I'm not a doctor who kills people," and when Si-young questions him about regret, he intimately discusses his thoughts during the treatment of the criminal.

ES11 – Episode 4 (19min30s – 20min28s and 43min9s – 47min40s)



Source: prepared by the authors based on *Doctor John* (2019)

Through discourse on pain management and the physician's role, infused with emotional references, we access the perspective of an infamous medical subject held responsible for a patient's death. By opposing "treatment" (pro-life) and "torture" (against life),

Yo-han articulates the fragile boundary between legal and moral conduct, and this discursive positioning is supported by the character, as, visually, his memories of the event alternate with his interpretation.

This expressive possibility, coupled with attention to fear, regret, and other feelings related to the profession, seems to contribute to the process of humanization of the character. He remains marked by infamy for being linked to a crime, even after returning to his doctor's duties. However, his position now differs from the one shown previously on the first ESs, which depicted him as dangerous and fearsome. Gradually, emotional construction humanizes the character through the focus on his sensibility, either through his own speech or through other people's definitions of him.

Considering the aim to map how infamy is updated in the present, these excerpts from *Doctor John* reveal an oscillation between exclusion and protagonism of an infamous character. Something lying between fear and the relation of sensibility and trust towards a subject that occupies a marginal position but is not segregated all the time. The ESs presented here are only one facet within this regime of light, composed of visibility of punishment and recognition. The infamous subject is designated both by himself and by others, motivated by the already-said that circumscribes power relations within the institutions they participate in.

6 CONCLUSION

This brief diagnosis of the present, considering the international consolidation of K-dramas, was based on the description of how the musical–cinematographic apparatus organizes the production of emotions surrounding infamous subjects through selected scenes from a television production, thereby strategically fulfilling its role as a mechanism within the contemporary discursive machinic process. As previously stated, this study is ongoing and aims to argue that semiological discourse has produced an updating of the history of infamy and of the emotions that discursively surround it, such that, according to our hypothesis, it reconfigures what it means (or does not mean) to be on the sidelines today.

We have undertaken the description of the set of rules of the regime that currently sheds light on the conditions of enunciation of infamy, while also eliciting emotions around infamous subjects. To this end, the archaeogenealogical method, whose purpose is to identify regularities within dispersion, has guided us in understanding and describing such rules in ongoing research, within an enunciative series that encompasses many other excerpts beyond those presented here. In this way, whether through similarity to or difference from Foucault's infamous figures, the study of the musical–cinematographic apparatus and its regulatory mechanisms to produce discourse leads us toward a diagnosis of the present as articulated by the seventh art.

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