

Irony, Nostalgia, and the Postmodern: A Dialogue

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Linda Hutcheon:

What follows¹ is a dialogue between colleagues that was initially provoked by some ruminations on my part over why, in all the work I had done on postmodernism over the years, ² I had resolutely insisted that the postmodern was more ironic than nostalgic. My resistance to dealing with the nostalgic was in part personal: I confess to suffering from an utter lack of nostalgia. But clearly there was also an intellectual issue at stake, since many had repeatedly insisted on the power of postmodern nostalgia.³ This dialogue with Mario Valdés represents my attempt to deal with this unfinished business, to try to understand why I had earlier chosen to all but ignore the nostalgic dimension of the postmodern in favour of the ironic. It also represents my colleague's response to this position and his critical testing of it on the field of contemporary Spanish cinema. His refinements and precisions have helped me think through this problematic in new ways.

The specific cultural forms of the postmodern are not our only focus here, because we also want to consider more broadly certain forms of contemporary culture, not all of which can be considered complicitously critical and deconstructing—that is, not all of them are postmodern. But it was postmodernism that brought the conjunction of irony and nostalgia quite literally into the public eye through the forms of its architecture. The early debates focussed precisely on that conjunction in response to postmodern architecture's double-coding, its deliberate (if ironized) return to the history of the humanly constructed environment.⁴ This return was in reaction to modern architecture's ostentatious rejection of the past, including the past of the city's historical fabric. The terms of the debate were basically as follows: was this postmodern recalling of the past an example of a conservative—and therefore nostalgic—escape to an idealized, simpler era of "real" community values? (See Tafuri 1980, 52-9.) Or did it express, but through its ironic distance, a "genuine and legitimate dissatisfaction with modernity and the unquestioned belief in ... perpetual modernization"? (Huysen 1993, 112) The question soon became: how is it that the same cultural entity could come to be interpreted (apparently) so widely differently as to be seen as either ironic or nostalgic? Or as both ironic *and* nostalgic?⁵

In general cultural commentary in the mass media—as in the academy—irony and nostalgia are both seen as key components of contemporary culture today (Rist 1989). In the 1980s, it was irony that captured our attention most; in the 1990s, it appears to be nostalgia that is holding sway.⁶ Perhaps nostalgia *is* given surplus meaning and value at certain moments—millennial moments, like our own. Nostalgia, the media tell us, has become an obsession of both mass culture and high art. And they may be right, though some people feel the obsession is really the *media's* obsession.⁷

The explanations offered for the recent commercialized luxuriating in the culture of the past have ranged from economic cynicism to moral superiority. They usually point to a dissatisfaction with the culture of the present—something that is then either applauded or condemned.⁸ However, it does appear that the "derogatory word 'dated' seems to have vanished from our language" (Rubens 1981, 149). It has been taken over by "nostalgic," a word that has been used to signal both praise and blame. But, however self-evident (on a common sense level) it may seem that an often sentimentalized nostalgia is the very opposite of edgy irony, the postmodern debates' conflation (or confusion) of the two should give us pause.

Before beginning to tackle this conflation, I need to lay out briefly the definitions of my principal concepts and the terms of my argument. I have already defined my particular usage of the term "postmodern"—which is *not* synonymous with the contemporary, but which does have some mix of the complicitous and the critical at its ambivalent core. And I am going to trust that readers will all have some sort of sense of what "irony" means—either in its rhetorical or New Critical meanings or in its more extended senses of situational irony or, with an historical dimension, of "romantic" irony. What exactly *is* "nostalgia," though? Or perhaps the first question really should be: what *was* nostalgia? With its Greek roots—*nostos*, meaning "to return home" and *algos*, meaning "pain"—this word sounds so familiar to us that we may forget that it is a relatively new word, as words go. It was coined in 1688 by a 19-year old Swiss student, Johannes Hofer, in his medical dissertation as a sophisticated (or perhaps pedantic) way to talk about a literally lethal kind of severe homesickness (of Swiss mercenaries far from their mountainous home). This medical-pathological definition of nostalgia allowed for a remedy: the return home, or sometimes merely the promise of it. The experiencing and the attributing of a nostalgic response appeared well before this, of course. Think of the psalmist's remembering of Zion while weeping by the waters of Babylon. But the term itself seems to be culturally and historically specific.⁹

This physical and emotional "upheaval...related to the workings of memory" (Starobinski 1966, 90)—an upheaval that could and did kill, according to seventeenth- and eighteenth-century physicians—was seen as a "disorder of the imagination" from the start (87). But by the nineteenth century, a considerable semantic slippage had occurred, and the word began to lose its purely medical meaning,¹⁰ in part because the rise of pathologic anatomy and bacteriology had simply made it less medically credible. Nostalgia then became generalized (Prete 1992, 17), and by the twentieth century, it had begun to attract the interest of psychiatrists.¹¹ But curious things happened in that generalizing process: nostalgia became less a *physical* than a *psychological* condition; in other words, it became psychically internalized. It also went from being a *curable* medical illness to an *incurable* (indeed unassuageable) condition of the spirit or psyche.¹² What made that transition possible was a shift in site from the spatial to the temporal. Nostalgia was no longer simply a yearning to return home. As early as 1798, Immanuel Kant had noted that people who did return home were usually disappointed because, in fact, they did not want to return to a *place*, but to a *time*, a time of youth.¹³ Time, unlike space, cannot be returned to—ever; time is irreversible. And nostalgia becomes the reaction to that sad fact.¹⁴ As one critic has succinctly put this change: "Odysseus longs for home; Proust is in search of lost time" (Phillips 1985, 65).

Nostalgia, in fact, may depend precisely on the *irrecoverable* nature of the past for its

emotional impact and appeal. It is the very pastness of the past, its inaccessibility, that likely accounts for a large part of nostalgia's power—for both conservatives and radicals alike. This is rarely the past as actually experienced, of course; it is the past as imagined, as idealized through memory and desire. In this sense, however, nostalgia is less about the past than about the present. It operates through what Mikhail Bakhtin called an "historical inversion" (1981, 147): the ideal that is *not* being lived now is projected into the past. It is "memorialized" as past, crystallized into precious moments selected by memory, but also by forgetting, and by desire's distortions and reorganizations (Phillips 1985, 66). Simultaneously distancing and proximating, nostalgia exiles us from the present as it brings the imagined past near. The simple, pure, ordered, easy, beautiful, or harmonious past is constructed (and then experienced emotionally) in conjunction with the present—which, in turn, is constructed as complicated, contaminated, anarchic, difficult, ugly, and confrontational. Nostalgic distancing sanitizes as it selects, making the past feel complete, stable, coherent, safe from "the unexpected and the untoward, from accident or betrayal" (Lowenthal 1985, 62; see also Miller and Nowak 1977)—in other words, making it so very unlike the present. The aesthetics of nostalgia might, therefore, be less a matter of simple memory than of complex projection; the invocation of a partial, idealized history merges with a dissatisfaction with the present. And it can do so with great force. Think of how visceral, how physically "present" nostalgia's promptings are: it is not just Proust for whom tastes, smells, sounds, and sights conjure up an idealized past.

There are, of course, many ways to look backward. You can look and reject. Or you can look and linger longingly. In its looking backward in this yearning way, nostalgia may be more of an attempt to defy the end, to evade teleology. As we approach the millennium, nostalgia may be particularly appealing as a possible escape from what Lee Quinby calls "technological apocalypse" (194, xvi). But there is a rather obvious contradiction here: nostalgia requires the availability of evidence of the past,¹⁵ and it is precisely the electronic and mechanical reproduction of images of the past that plays such an important role in the structuring of the nostalgic imagination today, furnishing it with the possibility of "compelling vitality" (Lowenthal 1985, 30). Thanks to CD ROM technology and, before that, audio and video reproduction, nostalgia no longer has to rely on individual memory or desire: it can be fed forever by quick access to an infinitely recyclable past.

That original theory of nostalgia as a medical condition was developed in Europe "at the time of the rise of the great cities when greatly improved means of transportation made movements of the population much easier" (Starobinski 1966, 1001-2); in other words, you would be more likely to be away from home and thus yearn for it. The postmodern version of nostalgia may have been developed (in the West, at least) at the time when the rise of information technology made us question not only (as Jean-François Lyotard told us we must) what would count as knowledge, but what would count as "the past" in relation to the present. We have not lacked for critics who lament the decline of historical memory in our postmodern times, often blaming the storage of memory in data banks for our cultural amnesia, our inability to engage in active remembrance. But, as Andreas Huyssen (1995, 253) has convincingly argued, the contrary is just as likely to be true: "The more memory we store on data banks, the more the past is sucked into the orbit of the present, ready to be called up on the screen," making the past simultaneous with the present in a new way.

Nostalgia, however, does not simply repeat or duplicate memory. Susan Stewart's provocative study, *On Longing* suggestively calls nostalgia a "social disease," defining it as "the repetition that mourns the inauthenticity of all repetition" (1984, 23). The argument is that, denying or at least degrading the present as it is lived, nostalgia makes the idealized (and therefore always absent) past into the site of immediacy, presence, and authenticity. And here she approaches one of the major differences between nostalgia and irony. Unlike the knowingness of irony—a mark of the fall from innocence, if ever there was one—nostalgia is, in this way, "prelapsarian" and indeed utopian, says Stewart (23). Few have ever accused irony (even satiric irony) of successfully reinstating the authentic and the ideal.

Nostalgia has certainly not lacked for defenders, most of whom are psychoanalytically-oriented. (See, for example, Peters 1985; Fodor 1950) This is not surprising if you think of the significant relationship psychoanalysis posits between identity and the personal psychic past unearthed by memory. This relationship becomes the model for the link between collective identity and memory for those who see a move to nostalgic transcendence and authenticity as a positive move. As one person in this camp has put it: "Longing is what makes art possible" (Lerner 1972, 52). By "longing," he means the emotional response to deprivation, loss, and mourning. Nostalgia has, in this way, been deemed the necessary inspirational "creative sorrow" for artists (Mason 1989, 23).¹⁶ This position draws on the original seventeenth-century meaning of the word; it sees nostalgia in our century as the positive response to the homelessness and exile of both private "nervous disorder and [public] persecution of actual enslavement and barbaric cruelty" (Harper 1966, 21). When I think of the displaced homeless peoples of Rwanda or Bosnia, however, the more trivialized, commercialized connotations of the word "nostalgia" do stand in the way for me. My feelings when experiencing those lushly nostalgic Merchant/Ivory film versions of earlier novels must be different (in kind and not only in degree) from the experience of political refugees yearning for their homeland. But perhaps not.

In other words, despite very strong reservations (based in part on personality limitations), I do know that I should never underestimate the power of nostalgia, especially its visceral physicality and emotional impact. But that power comes in part from its structural doubling-up of two different times, an inadequate present and an idealized past.¹⁷ But this is where I must return to that other obsession of mine—irony—for irony too is doubled: two meanings, the "said" and the "unsaid," rub together to create irony—and it too packs considerable punch. People do not usually get upset about metaphor or synecdoche, but they certainly do get worked up about irony, as they did a few years ago in Toronto, where I live and work, when the aptly named Royal Ontario Museum put on an exhibition that used irony to deal with the relationship of Canadian missionaries and military to Empire in Africa. Sometimes, as we all know well, people get upset because they are the targets or victims of irony. Sometimes, though, anger erupts at the seeming inappropriateness of irony in certain situations. Witness the remarks of the Curriculum Advisor on Race Relations and Multiculturalism for the Toronto Board of Education at the time: "The implied criticism of colonial intrusion and the bigotry of the white missionaries and soldiers relies heavily on the use of irony, a subtle and frequently misunderstood technique. In dealing with issues as sensitive as cultural imperialism and racism, the use of irony is a highly inappropriate luxury"

(1990, 4)—especially, I might add, when condemnation is what is expected and desired.

What irony and nostalgia share, therefore, is a perhaps unexpected twin evocation of both affect and agency—or, emotion and politics. I suspect that one of the reasons they do so is that they share something else—a secret hermeneutic affinity that might well account for some of the interpretive confusion with which I began, the confusion that saw postmodern artefacts, in particular, deemed simultaneously ironic and nostalgic. I want to argue that to call something ironic or nostalgic is, in fact, less a *description* of the *entity itself* than an attribution of a quality of *response*. Irony is not something *in* an object that you either “get” or fail to “get”: irony “happens” for you (or, better, you *make* it “happen”) when two meanings, one said and the other unsaid, come together, usually with a certain critical edge. Likewise, nostalgia is not something you “perceive” *in* an object; it is what you “feel” when two different temporal moments, past and present, come together for you and, often, carry considerable emotional weight. In both cases, it is the element of response—of active participation, both intellectual and affective—that makes for the power.

Because people do not talk about this element of *active attribution*, the politics of both irony and nostalgia are often written off as quietistic at best. But irony is what Hayden White calls “transideological”: it can be made to “happen” by (and to) anyone of any political persuasion. And nostalgia too is transideological, despite the fact that many would argue that, whether used by the right or the left, nostalgia is fundamentally conservative in its praxis, for it wants to keep things as they were—or, more accurately, as they are imagined to have been (Bennett 1996, 5; 161, n.4). But, the nostalgia for an idealized community in the past has been articulated by the ecology movement as often as by fascism (Arblaster 1992, 180), by what Jean Baudrillard calls “[m]elancholy for societies without power” (1993, 361). From the seventeenth century on, nostalgia seems to have been connected to the desire to return specifically to the *homeland*. In nineteenth-century Europe, that homeland became articulated in terms of the nation state, and nostalgia began to take on its associations with nationalism—and chauvinism (Jankélévitch 1974; Parthé 1992). Even its more innocent-seeming forms—such as the preparing and eating of familiar foods by immigrant groups—can be seen as a nostalgic enactment of ethnic group identity, a collective disregarding, at least temporarily, of generational and other divisions (Raspa 1984).

One brave anthropologist has claimed that, unlike such searches for ethnicity, *feminism* has “no tendency toward nostalgia, no illusion of a golden age in the past” (Fischer 1994, 92). It has been suggested that this lack of nostalgic response is because the *narratives* of nostalgia—from the Bible onward—are *male* stories, Oedipal stories which are alienating to women (who usually remain at home like Penelope, while men wander the world and risk getting homesick) (see Brown 1989). And, in support of such a theory, literary and film critics alike have located strains of a current antifeminist, nostalgic retreat to the past,¹⁸ in the face of the changes in culture brought about by the rise of feminism.¹⁹ And, in a parallel fashion, the post-colonial focus of attention recently has been on the nostalgia of the (usually) European colonizers, on their sense of loss and mourning for the cultural unity and centrality they once had (Ang 1992). But, as Frederic Jameson has said, “a history lesson is the best cure for nostalgic pathos” (1991, 156).

But it is postmodernism that Jameson and others accuse of being nostalgic. The postmodern does indeed recall the past, but always with the kind of ironic double vision that acknowledges the final impossibility of indulging in nostalgia, even as it consciously evokes nostalgia's affective power. In the postmodern, in other words (and here is the source of the tension) nostalgia itself gets both called up, exploited, *and* ironized.²⁰ This is a complicated (and postmodernly paradoxical) move that is both an ironizing of nostalgia itself, of the very urge to look backward for authenticity, and, at the same moment, a sometimes shameless invoking of the visceral power that attends the fulfilment of that urge.

Perhaps the history of the wider cultural entity called postmodernity would help explain this paradox. If, as it has been argued often, nostalgia is a by-product of cultural *modernity*—with its alienation, its much lamented loss of tradition and community (Chase and Shaw 1989, 7)—then *postmodernity's* complex relationship with modernity, a relationship of both rupture and continuity, might help us understand the necessary addition of irony to this nostalgic inheritance. It has become a commonplace to compare the end of the nineteenth century to the end of our own, to acknowledge their common doubts about progress, their shared worries over political instability and social inequality, their comparable fears about disruptive change (Lowenthal 1985, 394-6). But if nostalgia was an obvious consequence of the last *fin-de-siècle* panic—"manifest in idealizations of rural life, in vernacular-revival architecture, in arts-and-crafts movements, and in a surge of preservation activity" (396)—then some, not all (not the commercial variety, usually), but *some* nostalgia we are seeing today (what I want to call postmodern) is of a different order, an ironized order. Gone is the sense of belatedness of the present *vis-à-vis* the past; the act of ironizing (while still implicitly invoking) nostalgia undermines modernist assertions of originality, authenticity, and the burden of the past, even as it acknowledges their continuing (but not paralyzing) validity as aesthetic concerns.

Our contemporary culture is indeed nostalgic; some parts of it—postmodern parts—are aware of the risks and lures of nostalgia, and seek to expose those through irony. Given irony's conjunction of the said and the unsaid—in other words, its inability to free itself from the discourse it contests—there is no way for these cultural modes to escape a certain complicity, to separate themselves artificially from the culture of which they are a part. If our culture really is obsessed with remembering—and forgetting—as is suggested by the astounding growth of what Huyssen calls our "memorial culture" with its "relentless museummania" (1995, 5),²¹ then perhaps irony is one (though only one) of the means by which to create the necessary distance and perspective on that anti-amnesiac drive. The knowingness of irony may be not so much a defense against the power of nostalgia as the way in which nostalgia is made palatable today: invoked but, at the same time, undercut, put into perspective, seen for exactly what it is—a comment on the present as much as on the past.

From that position, I now turn this debate over to Mario Valdés for his response, critical testing, and refinement.

Mario Valdés:

In response to this position I will begin with some general considerations and then turn to Spanish contemporary culture, especially Spanish cinema. To do that, I recall one section of Hutcheon's argument:

What irony and nostalgia share, therefore, is a perhaps unexpected twin evocation of both affect and agency—or, emotion and politics. I suspect that one of the reasons they do so is that they share something else—a secret hermeneutic affinity that might well account for some of the interpretive confusion with which I began, the confusion that saw postmodern artefacts, in particular, deemed simultaneously ironic and nostalgic. I want to argue that to call something ironic or nostalgic is, in fact, less a description of the *entity itself* than an attribution of a quality of *response*. Irony is not something *in* an object that you either “get” or fail to “get”: irony “happens” for you (or better, you *make* it “happen”) when two meanings, one said and the other unsaid, come together, usually with a certain critical edge. Likewise, nostalgia is not something you “perceive” *in* an object; it is what you “feel” when two different temporal moments, past and present, come together for you and, often, carry considerable emotional weight. In both cases, it is the element of response—of active participation, both intellectual and affective—that makes for the power.

She then adds this key paragraph for comparative study:

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Hutcheon's position sets off a reflective reconsideration of both my thinking on hermeneutics and on the specific case of twentieth-century Spanish literatures and cinema. In contemporary hermeneutics the open dialectic inquiry developed by Gadamer and Ricoeur from Heidegger's philosophy has become the principal means of exploring cultural history and it is this approach I shall use here in my commentary on the recent cultural history in Spain.²²

In the open dialectic the emphasis is on the mediating functions of language between the poles explicitly or implicitly involved in narratives that rewrite the past. We know these narratives under different names, but we rarely consider their kinship. For example, parody as a basic element of comic effect in literature is as old as Greek and Roman comedy and was

greatly enhanced by Cervantes in the seventeenth century but is nevertheless based on the dialectic of the new text and the text that is the object of the ridicule. We recognize that for parody to work both texts must be present in the imagination of the reader so that the mediating functions of the mimicry is developed. It is also common knowledge that irony both as an oral trope and as a sophisticated literary device is also fundamentally a dialectic representation: the literal meaning and the implied or ironic meaning must be present at the same time for the cutting ironic edge to have effect. The play of opposites is never greater than in irony.²³ This is so to such an extent that it presents the primary example of complete failure or success in language usage. If listeners or readers cannot read the irony, they are left only with the literal meaning, with no clue that there is anything more. Of course, we have numerous examples of writers who have combined parody and irony thus giving the humour an aggressiveness not always carried in parody alone.²⁴

Nostalgia has been another matter. As an affliction of the spirit it has always been part of literature; as a medical matter, it has its own peculiar history. But as a central feature of a period aesthetics it has had a limited history, one that particularly marked the end of a reign, century or cultural configuration. Nostalgia is certainly a major player in postmodern aesthetic modes and styles; nevertheless, it was not until Hutcheon's article that my attention was drawn to the central observations that it also has a fundamental dialectic within, for the nostalgic look back depends on the rejection of the present for its power and effectiveness. The more the present is found wanting, the stronger will the desire grow to revisit a past that is, in the mind of the time traveller, everything the present is not. There is, of course, a curious urge to create a highly selective luxuriating in a world that never was. How often have we read how Berlin Jews look back lovingly to their city in the 1920s in spite of the fact that it is precisely this period that saw the rampant growth of violent anti-Semitism.²⁵

Once again it was Hutcheon who pointed out that not only have nostalgia, irony and parody all taken up a good part of the postmodern aesthetics, but they have sometimes collapsed into one another in the same text. On the surface it would appear that nostalgia and ironic parody are as incompatible as oil and water; one looks back lovingly and disparages the present; the other makes fun of the older text in order to create the newer, supposedly superior one. Yet as Hutcheon has argued, the look back can retain its sentimental power and yet give in to an ironic rejection. I want to explore this unique phenomenon in some twentieth-century Spanish texts and films.²⁶

In Spain today most observers agree that both ironic parody and nostalgia are manifestations of the (culturally and politically) dynamic, chaotic 1990s. If we consider that this phenomenon is in marked contrast to the 1970s when nostalgia and irony co-existed, but far removed from each other for ideological reasons, we have a prime indicator of rapid cultural change. And if we cast our look further back to the beginning of the twentieth century, it was nostalgia that dominated. Consider, for example, the poetry of Unamuno, the short narratives of Azorín and the novels of Gabriel Miró.²⁷ Parody was also present here and there, usually ridiculing modernity as, for example, in Unamuno's *Amor y pedagogía* but it was never linked to nostalgia or to the exploring of the imaginative creation of a past that never existed.²⁸ Today it appears that irony has given way to ironic parody of the past and, at the same time, there is a widespread expansion of a nostalgic look back to pre-civil war Spain. The paradox of

the conjunction of these two very different ways of treating the cultural imaginary of the past are not only present at the same time but often in the same work; this is what I want to address in this response.

Unamuno's first book of poetry, *Poesías*, was published in 1907 and has a number of poems that express the notion of a noble past and a longing for it—foremost among these, the poem titled “Castilla.” The nostalgia for the noble past, I would claim, was in no way confined to Unamuno at the beginning of this century.²⁹ But now let us contrast the poem entitled “Histeria de España” by Jesús López Pacheco, published in 1970, while the Spanish writer was in exile in Canada, less than a decade after he was released from a political prison. The poem establishes the parodic intent from the outset, and the epigraph is the first line of Unamuno's poem.³⁰ The parody of Unamuno's nostalgic poem spits out, in violent confrontation, a rejection of every sentiment of the earlier work. It establishes Unamuno as its parodic target both textually and individually. The first three stanzas make Pacheco's poem not only one of anger but, primarily, one of rejection. The fourth to the seventh stanzas are almost a line for line parody of “Castilla.” Unamuno ends his poem in exaltation of the noble heritage of Castilla. López Pacheco responds: “Castilla is not a holy altar, it is the torture chamber of all of holy Spain” (my translation). The target is the history of Spain and what the lyric voice identifies as its religious fanaticism. Unamuno says, “Castilla, mother of our hearts, the present takes in you the old standards of our noble past” (my trans.). López Pacheco's invective continues to pour out: “You are a furious and caged mother who devours her children and is devoured by them to your mutual pleasure and in the name of God” (my translation)—an image that evokes Goya's terrifying “Saturn Devouring his Children.” And, finally, returning to Unamuno's poem, “Castilla, the noble” lifts the lyric voice up toward a sense of greatness, and López Pacheco responds with “Castilla, you lift us up to crush us between the sky and the earth and all of Spain yells in pain” (my translation), as the Spanish people twist and turn in agony as they are crushed.

The nostalgia of the 1907 poem and the parody of the 1970 work are at opposites of the spectrum of poetic remembering, but these poems are from different times, and different aesthetics. We might well ask whether it could be any other way, for both are powerful forces in the cultural imaginary.

As Hutcheon notes, we should not underestimate the power of nostalgia, especially its emotional physicality and impact. That power comes from its structural doubling-up of two different times, a purportedly inadequate present and an idealized past. This is where I want to return to parody, for parody is also doubled and if we mix in irony, as we have seen in the López Pacheco poem, still another level of doubling is added for there are two meanings, the said and the unsaid, but also implied are the parody and the text that is parodied. Therefore, if we consider a text that is nostalgic and, at the same time, has elements of ironic parody, it would be quite unsettling to say the least; it is the very paradigm of indeterminate openness.

If the early twentieth century turned nostalgically to the poems of Unamuno, the lingering caress of the past in Azorín's novels, the romantic hero of Valle Inclán's *Sonatas*,³¹ the meditations on idyllic scenes by Gabriel Miró or to the familiar revelling in the neo-classical form of architecture,³² the late twentieth century has combined nostalgia with irony to

produce the historiographic metafiction of Antonio Muñoz Molina³³ and, above all, the nostalgic parodic cinema of the best of Spanish directors.³⁴ In an example of Hutcheon's argument, here too the sense of belatedness of the present *vis-à-vis* the past is gone; here too the act of ironizing (while still implicitly invoking) nostalgia again undermines "modernist assertions of originality, authenticity, and the burden of the past, even as it acknowledges their continuing (but not paralyzing) validity as aesthetic concerns." Contemporary culture in Spain is indeed nostalgic; and most writers and artists are aware of the risks and lures of nostalgia, and seek to expose those through irony, to have their cake and eat it. Given irony's conjunction of the said and the unsaid—in other words, as Hutcheon argues, given its inability to free itself from the discourse it contests—there is no way for these cultural modes to escape a certain complicity. If Spanish culture too is really obsessed with remembering—and forgetting—as is suggested by the astounding growth of a Spanish memorialist culture with its relentless revision of the past, then perhaps irony is one of the means by which it creates the necessary distance and perspective on that drive to remember. There is little irony in most state memorials in Spain, but there is a great deal of ironized nostalgia in Spanish cinema today.³⁵

The hermeneutics of representation I have been exploring have led us to some preliminary observations. While irony, parody and nostalgia, all function in a dialectic play between polarities and thereby create a tensional experience of rejection, they have all stood quite separate from each other. And there is good reason for this. While rejection abounds both in irony and parody, it involves a put-down of the former text or the literal meaning in favour of the purportedly more honest and present one that, at the very least, claims superiority. In contrast, in nostalgia the dialectic takes an opposite direction: the present is rejected in favour of the imagined past which is more often than not sentimentalized—the ever-present mirage of the past's golden age never seems to dim.

In Spanish cinema of the 1980s there are good examples of both nostalgia for the 1930s and cutting parody of the 1980s as contemporaneous, but separate, representations. Consider the 1982 film *Volver a empezar* (*To begin again*) by José Luís Garcí.³⁶ Everything from the sound-track, to the characterization and the plot is a sentimental return to pre-civil war Gijón by the terminally-ill Nobel Prize professor of Spanish literature from Berkeley. This is the nostalgia of the exiled who does not so much reject the present as reconstruct the past—but in terms that leave out the negative side of the Spanish civil war and luxuriate in the remembrance of youth in not only another Spain, but very clearly a Spain that never was. Only three years separate Garcí's film and *¿Qué he hecho yo para merecer esto?* / *What Have I Done to Deserve This?* by Pedro Almodóvar,³⁷ but in aesthetic terms there is a clear break. This is an outrageous parody of every stereotype and cliché about Spain ranging from personal relationships to ideology. Spanish Germanophilia, machismo, veneration of the village as superior to the city, homophobia, as well as the abnegated mother, all receive full treatment. Pedro Almodóvar is today one of the most successful Spanish directors since Luis Buñuel, primarily because of his extraordinary skill in creating parody and nostalgia at the same time. *¿Qué he hecho yo para merecer esto?* was released in 1984 and was Almodóvar's fifth film. It is the depressing, bleak story of Gloria, a pathetic, illiterate, poor, and sexually-frustrated cleaning woman from Madrid's outer fringes. She is married to an abusive macho taxi driver who has never given her sexual satisfaction. She has two sons: one is a teen-age prostitute, the

other is a drug dealer. She lives in a squalid forty-square-meter apartment with her husband, sons and an abusive mother-in-law. She works eighteen-hour days, cleaning offices and homes, and then doing everything for her own family. She is an amphetamine addict; the drug helps her get through each day. This extreme situation is, however, presented through a series of ironic takes on everything from the attraction of village life to prostitution and the sexual impotence of the police investigator.

Television commercials are presented in an outrageous parody.³⁸ The one key musical scene is also presented on television in the film. Gloria and her husband are in the midst of 'bang-bang' sexual intercourse in the bedroom much to Gloria's frustration. Meanwhile, in the next room, the mother-in-law is watching a performance of a popular song of the 1930s. Almodóvar himself, dressed-up like a cavalry officer, mouths the words of "La bien pagá." The character is singing to his mistress who is being upbraided for her infidelity. The parody is multiple. The mistress in this scene is a man in drag, the gestures of the Almodóvar character express the pompous self-congratulation of the lyrics, as he dismisses the well-paid mistress. The scene returns to Gloria in the bedroom as, once again, she is deprived of even minimum sexual satisfaction. The irony is also historically significant since the singer whose voice we hear, Miguel de Molina, was exiled from Spain at the end of the Civil War because of his Republican sympathies but also because of his homosexuality.

Almodóvar uses filmic parody as well as ideological reduction to the absurd. Among the films he parodies is Alfred Hitchcock's teledrama, *Lamb to the Slaughter*, the story of the perfect murder of a husband by his wife—with a frozen leg of lamb: she then cooks it and serves it to the investigating police. But the principal parodic target is traditionalist Spain, its social codes and the "españoladas" of the 1940s. As Marsha Kinder aptly notes: "Almodóvar subverts dominant ideology by realigning the centre with the margin" (254).³⁹

Another recent film that exemplifies the postmodern dialectic of nostalgia and parody is *Belle Époque* by Fernando Trueba. Some of the most vaunted institutions of repression and violence, the Guardia Civil and the Carlist movement, are reduced to comic caricature in the person of the guardia who kills his superior and father-in-law because of his pragmatism, or Doña Son, Juanito's mother, who characterizes the Carlistas, the most fanatic members of the nationalist forces, as a sect of buffoons. This is all immersed in a lush portrayal of a joyous family of free thinkers clothed in the quotidian representation of 1931 Spain. The remembrance of Ortega y Gasset, Marañón, Pérez de Ayala and, especially, Unamuno, add the historical ideologies of the moment when the second republic is proclaimed. The ironic nostalgia of impending violence as an evasion is countered by the suicide of the local priest, Don Luis, who hangs himself in the church clutching his signed copy of *Del sentimiento trágico de la vida* (*The Tragic Sense of Life*). At once Trueba presents the imminent threat behind the living lie of Manuel Bueno, the priest who does not believe, yet goes through the motions so that others might believe, and the foreshadowing of the collective suicide of a Spain that would emerge less than five years later.⁴⁰ Trueba's film has all the power of nostalgia of an ever more distant time before the civil war, and parody that serves to reduce the future enemies to comic figures, thus making the past very attractive for the audience immersed in today's concerns about drug addiction, unemployment and the threat of being made redundant by a machine. Yet this film also rejects the very idealization of the past, pointing to the consequences of living a lie.

The co-existence of opposites in the Spanish cultural scene creates completely unpredicted results. The union of opposites occurs in the most unexpected cinematic sub-genre: the musical (see Morgan 1995; Pineda Novo 1991). In Spanish cinema there has been a virtual explosion of films that exploit a nostalgic retrospective, whether explicitly historical or not. A good example is the revival of the Spanish musical coming at a time when the genre is almost completely absent in Hollywood. This starts with the pioneer retro-musical, José Luis García's *La corte del Faraón* (1985), followed in 1989 by *Las cosas del querer* by Jaime Chávarri, *Yo soy esa* by Luis Sanz (1990), *El día que yo nací* by Pedro García (1991), and the extremely successful *La Lola se va a los puertos* by Josefina Molina (1993). *Yo soy esa* brought in 230 million pesetas in two weeks, the entire cost of production—an unprecedented return for a Spanish film. But these films are both nostalgic and parodic. *Las cosas del querer* (1989) showcases the popular songs of the 1930s with a polished and loving retrospective of the period, yet ridicules the pretensions and supercilious hypocrisy of the aristocracy and the sordid life of abuse and prostitution that even the best performers had to live with. The Spanish cinema critic, Sánchez Biosca, sums it up admirably: "This is the way in which the paradoxical historical revisionism of the 1990s is realized: a mixture of nostalgia, melodrama and irony" (1995, 191; my translation).

The postmodern aesthetics of nostalgic irony in Spain produces a roller-coaster effect of refiguration of the past because the ultimate dialectic in this art form is the dialectic of the past as present. As Hutcheon notes, from a postmodern point of view, the knowingness of this kind of irony "may be not so much a defense against the power of nostalgia as the way in which nostalgia is made palatable today: invoked but, at the same time, undercut, put into perspective, seen for exactly what it is—a comment on the present as much as on the past."

Seen in this way, however, not only have irony and nostalgia gone hand in hand in Spanish postmodern film, but perhaps today's creative tension has returned to its historic source in *Don Quijote*. Don Quijote gave us those timeless ironies of incongruity and inappropriateness precisely through his nostalgia for a chivalric past. The nostalgia on the part of don Quijote is genuine; the irony on the part of the narrative voice is relentless, for this is the same man who has just been characterized as both a hero and a madman.

In like vein, the all too ready attribution of irony to one of Carlos Saura's most successful films, *Ay, Carmela!*, cannot really be separated from nostalgia. Carlos Saura is, of course, one of the most distinguished film directors in Spain. His first film was *Los golfos*, released in 1959. *¡Ay Carmela!* came out in 1990, his twenty-third film. Although the first time Saura touched on the Spanish civil war was in 1973, in *La prima Angélica*, not until *¡Ay Carmela!* did he feel that he could fully engage the brutality of the war in the lives of ordinary people. The film is based on a play by José Sanchis Sinisterra. The leading parts are played by Andrés Pajares and Carmen Maura, who won the best actor awards, respectively, in the Montreal Film Festival and the European Academy of Cinema. The film adaptation is only remotely related to the stage play. The film adheres to a strict linear chronology in order to focus on the comical and, even at times, farcical scenes and yet present the tragic situation of a fanatical nationalist officer who shoots Carmela at point blank range. The musical interludes by Carmen Maura are complete and without interruption and are replete with Saura's customary close-ups of the actor's face.

It will be recalled that the irrepressible Carmen and her vaudeville companions have to try to survive during the Spanish Civil War when they are caught between enemy lines. Along with the clear nostalgic exploitation of a period piece, there is also a cutting satire of the ideology of both sides, but especially of the self-glorification of the Fascists. This inseparability may in part be, as Hutcheon notes, because irony and nostalgia are not qualities of *objects*; they are responses of *subjects*—active, emotionally, and intellectually-engaged subjects. The ironizing of nostalgia—in the very act of its invoking—may be one way, she argues, that the postmodern has of taking responsibility for such responses by creating a small part of the distance necessary for reflective thought about the present as well as the past. It is films like this one that made me think again about the postmodern tension between nostalgia and irony.

The comic lightness in these films cannot hide the irony that displaces the rhetoric of the ideologies that so dominate us in our concern for living. The answer to the question of what remains of the nostalgic remembrance is now complicated by a corollary question: what matters? There is one answer to both questions, and that answer carries the full weight of a past remembered and an ironic dismissal of hyperbole. What remains and what matters is what I can say that becomes yours. The union of the opposites of nostalgia and irony in present-day Spanish cinema must therefore be seen as a return to creative power after a long exile. The globalization of culture notwithstanding, there is a peculiarly Spanish quality to this ironic nostalgia.

Emile Benveniste described order in culture as having a dynamic polarity, which can best be depicted as a rhythm of cultural expression, offset by an opposite static order we can recognize as schema; although Spanish culture was not being addressed, he gave us an effective means of approaching its history with its ups and downs, its peaks and valleys—as so many cultural historians have stated. Can we not recognize the general attitude and formal quality of today's cinema in Spain as one comparable to the baroque? If we can accept Severo Sarduy's description of baroque art as an emphasis on differentiation, a polycentrism that subverts all attempts to maintain a centre and, finally, a play of opposites, I would suggest that postmodernity in Spanish cinema is the rhythmic upswing of what we have been calling the baroque sensibility of Spain over the last three hundred years but with a radical difference: this time it hurts.

But how is it and why is it that this postmodern hybrid form nostalgic irony has so much power and has such broad appeal. Linda Hutcheon is the first critic to call attention to the tensional duality operating in nostalgia, irony and parody and to recognize this hybrid form as a quintessentially postmodern creation. She also examines what, in her terms, is the “terrific punch” of nostalgic irony. My contribution to this discussion, besides introducing the Spanish texts and films, is to offer the following hermeneutic analyses as a temporary conclusion—one that will clearly be revised and contested.

The hypothesis I propose is that, because there are elements of utopia in nostalgic representation and because ironic parody commonly expresses aspects of ideology, the dialectic process in nostalgic irony can easily become a dialectic of utopia and ideology. These two are opposites but they are also deeply interrelated. While utopia is profoundly hypothetical

and ethical, ideology is critical and sociological. Yet, as I have suggested, they are also bound up together. If we remove the negative stigma the young Marx put on ideology, we can consider it to be a system of social and public values in a perpetual state of contestation with other systems, both those in power and out of power. The ideology seeks dominance and legitimisation and is opposed and resisted on these grounds by others systems. A utopian presentation is a projection toward an ideal future and, just as it assumes certain systems of values (i.e. ideologies) and rejects others, utopia itself becomes the aim and goal of the ideology it has accepted. Therefore, we can say that a classless society is a utopian concept that serves as the goal of a Marxist ideology.

But there is also a profound difference between utopia and ideology, and that is that we can easily find societies that back systematic encoding of values, but we cannot think of any human group that does not have some dream, ideal or goal toward which it is oriented. I concur with Karl Mannheim when he wrote: ".whereas the decline of ideology represents a crisis only for certain state and the objectivity which comes from the unmasking of ideologies always takes the form of self-clarification for a society as a whole, the complete disappearance of the utopian element from human thought and action, would mean that human nature and human development would take on a totally new character" (1936, 262).

The power of nostalgic irony lies in the fact that it can be an expression that is at once charged with the utopian remembrance of a world that never was (except in the fervent desire that it should have been) and at the same time with the critical rejection of all that which made it not be. Nothing is stronger than a dream that the dreamer knows is but a dream and yet this does not lessen its magnetic pull of appeal; simultaneously, there arises the seething anger against the ideas, persons and incidents that have not permitted the dream to enter reality.

In *El jinete polaco* by Antonio Muñoz Molina, there is a first-person narrator who nightly dreams of making love to a beautiful girl he met eighteen years before and has never seen since that first encounter. Every night it is the same dream, as he looks on the girl, noting every gesture, every detail of her body, every inflection of her voice. The dream girl has had a real-life model, just as Dulcinea del Toboso had Aldonza, but the girl in the dream is the creation of desire, and the utopian drive to relive the past. She no longer resembles the girl he met, in the same way that Aldonza is unrecognizable as Dulcinea. The dream-girl has been clothed in the colours of his desire. This is nostalgia pure and simple as a middle-aged man relives his youth. If the real woman were to appear suddenly, of course she would be eighteen years older, but even if she were still a reasonable older version of the girl, the dreamer would never recognize her. He has slowly, night after night, undressed and made love to the young woman whom he hardly knew and with whom he was never alone, and in this process the sexual imagination has had to make-up what he never saw but wanted desperately to possess. This nostalgia becomes ironic, however, as he begins to resent all the obstacles that kept him from making love to her. First and foremost, he flagellates himself for his own stupidity, his inexperience, his timidity; but also begins to hate all the ideological restrictions of the Franco era surrounding sexuality. He has known for some time that the girl of his dreams wanted very much to make love with him on the occasion of their last meeting. At the same time that he is full of rancour against Spanish society in the 1960s and the man he thinks that they made him become, he luxuriates in a fantasy sexual encounter with this ideal loving, gentle, passionate,

seductive girl he has created. They go together: nostalgic remembering of Spain in 1960s and a torrent of ironic rejection of it.

To a certain extent this situation is the common ground of an entire generation who is drawn to nostalgic re-remembering of a Spain that never was but should have been and a seething anger at having wasted their youth serving the ideological ghosts of the Spanish Civil War (1936-39) which had ended long before they were born. The generation of Muñoz Molina and Almodóvar was born in the 1950s. The Spanish love of the baroque has taken a highly charged postmodern turn in the manifestations of nostalgic irony.

Notes

- ¹ My first attempts to work through this issue were given as conference papers to the University of Toronto Department of English and to the International Comparative Literature Association Congress in Leiden, the Netherlands in August 1997. An electronically published version of this talk is available on UTEL (<http://www.chass.utoronto.ca/english/>).
- ² See *Poetics; Politics; Canadian Postmodern*.
- ³ The list would be endless, but let me simply note the most cited opponent of the postmodern, Fredric Jameson, whose 1984 essay on "Postmodernism, Or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism" in many ways provoked my own work in the field.
- ⁴ See Jencks, *Language and Post-Modern Classicism*.
- ⁵ Of course in the 1960s Susan Sontag characterized camp in precisely these terms in her "Notes on 'Camp.'" The American television series "All in the Family" was one example of this conflation. Despite its allegedly progressive intent--what its creators intended as ironic de-bunking--it seems that Archie Bunker was popular in large segments of various populations because of the show's conservative, indeed openly nostalgic, appeal to attitudes perhaps consciously denied but deeply felt. See Rosenthal.
- ⁶ Lowenthal has even asserted that, while "[f]ormerly confined in time and place, nostalgia today engulfs the whole past" (6).
- ⁷ See Lasch 68; Lowenthal 29; Moriarty and McGann 85 on the impact of nostalgic professional design magazine advertisements on the media.
- ⁸ Leading the applause, an apocalyptic George Steiner claims that the decline in formal value systems in the West has left us with a "deep, unsettling nostalgia for the absolute" (50).
- ⁹ This is in spite of early medical attempts to universalize it into something felt by all beings--of all ages and temperaments--anywhere on the face of the earth. E.g. Philippe Pinel's nostalgia entry in the *Encyclopédie Méthodique: Médecine*, 10 (Paris, 1821). See also Ruml 656-7.
- ¹⁰ The medical meaning did see a revival, evidently, during the American Civil War. See J. Theodore Calhoun, "Mostalgia as a Disease of Field Service," *Medical and Surgical Reporter* 11 (27 February 1864); DeWitt C. Peters, "Remarks on the Evils of Youthful Enlistments and Nostalgia," *American Medical Times* (14 February 1863).

¹¹. See the discussion of, among others, Karl Jaspers' *Heimweh und Verbrechen* (1909) in Starobinski 99-101.

¹². For more on the medical and psychological angle on nostalgia, see McCann, "Nostalgia--A Review" and "Nostalgia: A Descriptive and Comparative Study;" Rosen.

¹³. Immanuel Kant, *Anthropologie in pragmatischer Hinsicht* (1798). More recently, it has been argued that the appeal of the comic strip in French culture today is nostalgia for childhood. See Pennacchioni.

¹⁴. See Jankélévitch's meditation on this.

¹⁵. Chase and Shaw make this point (4) and also point out that the photograph is the "paradigm case of the moment of nostalgia" (9).

¹⁶. It has also been called our "moral conscience" for it is said to let us know what values we hold most dear and help us fight "the sickness of despair" (Harper 28).

¹⁷. All nostalgia, then, would be what Davis (25) calls "interpreted nostalgia" wherein an analysis of an experience, however brief or mistaken, comes to be fused with that primary experience and thus alters it.

¹⁸. Humankind has not infrequently responded with a nostalgic defensive retreat into the past when feeling threatened: for example, despite its forward-looking ideology, the late nineteenth-century United States gave great new value to its Colonial past--as an "exclusive WASP [White Anglo-Saxon Protestant] heritage"--in part to combat the mass immigration that was accompanying industrialization and that felt so new and so un-"American." See Lowenthal 121.

¹⁹. See Doane and Hodges xiii; Creed 47-67 on film nostalgia and issues of gender which Jameson does NOT deal with. For a discussion of the condemnation of utopian "future nostalgia" by feminist writers, see Finney 31-40. For a general critique of various kinds of utopian thinking, including nostalgic ones, see Pecora.

²⁰. This is one step beyond what has been called the ironic nostalgia of, say, post-Soviet artists who, according to Svetlana Boym, "reconfigure and preserve various kinds of imagined community and offer interesting cultural hybrids--of Soviet kitsch and memories of totalitarian childhood" (151).

²¹. See Lasch for contrasting view: "If Americans really cared about the past, they would try to understand how it still shapes their ideas and actions. Instead they lock it up in museums or reduce it to another object of commercialized consumption" (69).

²². Ricoeur sums up the unfolding of this mode of enquiry in the first volume of *Time and Narrative*: [concerning the Heideggerian analysis of temporality, in *Being and Time*] "I take as one invaluable result . . . its having established, with the resources of a hermeneutic phenomenology, that our experience of temporality is capable of unfolding itself on several levels of radicality, and that it belongs to the analytic of Dasein to traverse them, whether from above to below, in the order followed in *Being and Time*, from authentic and mortal time

toward everyday and public time where everything happens 'in' time (85). See also the direct application of this philosophical position to the human sciences in "The Task of Hermeneutics" where he argues that the consciousness of effective history contains within itself an element of distance (61).

²³. Hutcheon makes this point with clarity: "Irony is a relational strategy in the sense that it operates not only between meanings (said, unsaid) but between people Ironic meaning comes into being as the consequence of a relationship, a dynamic, performative bringing together of different meaning-makers, but also of different meanings" (*Irony's Edge* 58).

²⁴ 3. There are numerous examples of highly effective irony in Spanish literature ranging from the Lazarillo de Tormes' famous last lines: "Y así quedamos todos tres bien conformes" with reference to the "ménage à trois" established between his master, the alguacil, Lazaro's wife and himself. As far as parody is concerned few can equal Cervantes' use of the novels of chivalry. It is not until the twentieth century that we find extensive use of irony and parody together as for example in Unamuno's *Amor y pedagogía* with its parody of Comte and Hegel and its cutting irony of the followers of the religion of science.

²⁵. One of the most remarkable commentaries on German national stereotypes and selective remembering is by Theodor Adorno "On the question: What is German?" in *Stichworte*.

²⁶. Although there is no doubt that the end of the Franco regime in 1976 marks the end of a particularly difficult period for Spanish life, we should not assume that the literature and cinema of the 1960s did not participate in the revolutionary tendencies of that decade. Writers like Luis Martín Santos, cinematographers like Erice and Saura and poets like Blas de Otero participated in spite of the state censorship.

²⁷. José Martínez Ruiz, best known by his pseudonym of Azorín, cultivated a nostalgia not for the past itself, but for the books of the past. His nostalgia is that of the bibliophile who creates a continuous stream of nostalgic loving remembrances of the incidental aspects of life especially in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, yet his imagination has not been inspired by visiting the towns of Castilla or the ruins of a monastery, but by reading about them. Gabriel Miró was a writer living in a time warp. He looked at the world through the eyes of a painter of still life. The material objects of the world do not exist until the artist gives them form and colour. He did not participate in the intellectual life of Madrid, but preferred to remain in Alicante, lovingly creating his nostalgic still-life narratives of the past of his imagination. Finally, Unamuno, who greatly admires both Azorín and Miró was the complete opposite. He was a man of passion and controversy and even his nostalgic poems of Spanish glory are imbued with enormous power that creates what he assures is the national imaginary of Spain.

²⁸. Parody in Unamuno's *Amor y pedagogía* is not so much textual, as it was with Cervantes, but rather a parodic make-over of the intellectual genius especially, as mentioned above, Auguste Comte and Wilhem Hegel. For recent commentary see my *Hermeneutics of Poetic Sense*.

²⁹. The most important aspect of Unamuno's nostalgia in poetry is that he turn it into a quest for

greatness of the past in the present. For example #363 in the *Cancionero* reads in part:

Mi íntimo abrigo, lengua castellana,
recio romance de iberos con celtas,
mantiene en mí la santísima gana
de escudriñarte escondidas revueltas.

³⁰. Unamuno's poem reads as follows:

Tú me levantas, tierra de Castilla,
en la rugosa palma de tu mano,
al cielo que te enciende y te refresca,
al cielo, tu amo.

Tierra nervuda, enjuta, despejada,
madre de corazones y de brazos,
toma el presente en ti viejos colores
De nobel antaño.

Con la pradera cóncava del cielo
lindan en torno tus desnudos campos,
tiene en ti cuna el sol en ti sepulcro
y en ti santuario.

Es todo cima tu extensión redonda
y en ti me siento al cielo levantado
aire de cumbre es el que se respira
aquí, en tus páramos.

¡Ara gigante, tierra castellana,
a ese tu aire soltaré mis cantos,
si te son dignos bajarán al mundo
desde lo alto! 176

³¹. Ramón del Valle Inclán's four "sonatas": primavera, estío, otoño and invierno are the purported memoirs of a decadent Casanova character, the Marques de Bradomin. The nostalgia for the past glories of Spain is replete with *sensualismo* as in the "fin de siglo" aesthetics, with a nostalgia for a code of honour and the ruins of glory. These short novels are lyrical escapist nostalgia of the first order.

³². Buildings like Charles Garnier's Opéra in Paris became the model for turn of the century architecture in both Madrid and Barcelona as the new middle class' thirst for neo-classical art prevailed.

³³. The novel *El jinete Polaco* (1991) by Antonio Muñoz Molina constructs a fictional

account of Spanish history from 1870 to 1981 like a puzzle of fragments that can or cannot be connected into a coherent story. It moves life stories from the mimetic of modernity to the indeterminacy of postmodernity.

³⁴. With regard to contemporary films among the most significant studies is the work of Vicente Sánchez-Biosca and Vicente J. Benet. Two recent articles by both scholars appears in “Mundos contemporáneos en el cine español e hispanoamericano” a special issue of *Revista Canadiense de estudios hispánicos*, XX, I, 1995, 167-177 and 179-193 respectively. Also in this issue is the informative study by Rikki Morgan on nostalgia in contemporary Spanish musical film, pp 151-166.

³⁵. The turn of ironized nostalgia is not unprecedented: it was clearly foreshadowed in such notable films as *Peppermint frappé* (1967) by Carlos Saura and *Mi querida señorita* (1971) by Jaime Armíñan.

³⁶. It is important to note this sentimental and openly patriarchal treatment of a republican exile's return to Spain was recognized in Spain not for its intrinsic merit but as a political statement that, in 1982 with the election of a socialist government, the first since the civil war, the exile was no longer a subversive but a nostalgic old man wanting to make his peace with the post before dying. See Kinder 282.

³⁷. Almodóvar's films offer us the unusual case of being highly marketable outside of Spain and at the same time important in Spain. It may well be that the irony the Spanish spectators “read” into the films is not usually apparent to the non-Spanish public.

³⁸. Almodóvar is the leading Spanish director who has turned to television commercials as a major source of parody of contemporary life in Spain. Almost all of his recent films have made some use of television spots.

³⁹. Kinder's section entitled “Reinscribing the Marginal as the Center” (429-440) is one of the most intelligent overviews of contemporary Spanish cinema.

⁴⁰. Unamuno's work has been used before as a reference to his intellectual status in pre-civil war Spain, and especially his *Agony of Christianity* (*Agonía del cristianismo*), but this is one of the first explicit references to his agnostic priest who feels that he must hide the truth from his people if they are to be saved from despair. Even sixty-three years after his death Unamuno remains a powerful symbolic force in the Spanish cultural imaginary.

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