

# Remembering Home in a Time of Mobility



# Remembering Home in a Time of Mobility:

*Memory, Nostalgia and  
Melancholy*

Edited by

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Memory, Nostalgia and Melancholy

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Figures.....	vii
Preface.....	viii
Contributors.....	ix
Introduction .....	1
Remembering Home in a Time of Mobility Maja Mikula	
Chapter One.....	15
Return to Galicia: Nostalgia, Nation and Gender in Manuel Rivas’s Spain Lisa Renée DiGiovanni	
Chapter Two.....	35
Memory, Italianness and Borders in Istria in the Literary Work of Roberta Dubac Gabriele Paleari	
Chapter Three.....	53
Miniature Home Towns as Mnemonic Devices Maja Mikula	
Chapter Four.....	66
Choreographing Archaeology of the Self: Fatherland, Identity, Memory and Nostalgia in the Works of Three British Choreographers Galina Kaličin	
Chapter Five.....	95
Narratives of Decline in Contemporary France: Nostalgia, Melancholy and Selective Memory Jo McCormack	

Chapter Six.....	111
The Aesthetics and Politics of Melancholy in the Films of Aku Louhimies, <i>Frozen Land</i> and <i>Frozen City</i> Kaisa Hiltunen	
Chapter Seven.....	132
Home Sweet Home? <i>Orange is the New Black</i> and Narratives of Institutional (Be)Longing Ruth Griffin	
Chapter Eight.....	151
Fictitious Memories of the Nostalgic Past: Racialised Gender Melancholy in the Manosphere Tuija Saresma	
Chapter Nine.....	166
Shifting Geographies and the Rhetoric of Change in the Modern Irish Short Story Tea Raše	
Chapter Ten .....	182
Falling Ill in Paris: Nostalgia in the Works of Rainer Maria Rilke and Edgar Du Perron Christina Lammer	
Chapter Eleven .....	196
Representation of Nostalgia and Melancholy in Contemporary Artworks: Tacita Dean and Louise Bourgeois Domingo Martinez Rosario	
Appendix 1 .....	210
<i>Povratak u Mostar</i> by Marko Tomaš	
Appendix 2 .....	211
<i>Fairy Tale with a Happy Ending</i> by Galina Kaličin	
Appendix 3 .....	213
Extracts from <i>Gut Symmetries</i> by Jeanette Winterson (1997)	
Bibliography.....	215
Index.....	233

## LIST OF FIGURES

Fig. 2-1 Donna Elisabetta’s house in Kaštel/Castelvenere; also Dubac’s childhood home. ....	44
Fig. 2-2 A piece of Istrian folklore in Dubac’s Terra B: “This is also Slovenia.”.....	46
Fig. 2-3 Contested areas between Slovenia and Croatia (source: Panorama, 2011). ....	47
Fig. 2-4 Cover of Roberta Dubac’s book <i>Chiesa di nessuno</i> . ....	51
Fig. 2-5 Piran/Pirano: Venetian Ca’ d’oro on Trg/Piazza Tartini and St George’s bell tower.....	52
Fig. 2-6 “Italian” rural landscapes at Ronco, between Piran/Pirano and Izola/Isola.....	52
Fig. 3-1: Beniamino Favretto’s workshop, number 14 behind the cathedral tower. All images are by courtesy of Corrado Cattonar.....	56
Fig. 3-2: Front left, the Church of San Pellegrino. ....	63
Fig. 3-3: Miniature Umag/Umago before the installation of the plexiglass cover. In the forefront, the “magical objects”: soil, starfish, shells and rocks. ....	64
Fig. 4-1 Nic Green in <i>Fatherland</i> . ....	74
Fig. 4-2 Nic Green in <i>Fatherland</i> . ....	75
Fig. 4-3 Nic Green’s interpretation of Highland dances.....	77
Fig. 4-4 Nic Green in <i>Fatherland</i> . ....	79
Fig. 4-5 Galina Kaličin in <i>If atoms could tell stories</i> ... ..	86
Fig. 4-6 Fabrizio Amanajas and Galina Kaličin in <i>If atoms could tell stories</i> ... ..	87
Fig. 4-7 Galina Kaličin in <i>If atoms could tell stories</i> .....	88
Fig. 4-8 Galina Kaličin in <i>If atoms could tell stories</i> ... ..	89
Fig. 6-1 <i>Frozen Land</i> . © Solar Films / Sanna Hedström .....	122
Fig. 6-2 <i>Frozen City</i> . © Solar Films / Frozen City .....	128

## PREFACE

This book showcases a selection of essays originally presented at the academic workshop *Memory-Nostalgia-Melancholy*, hosted by the School of Arts and Humanities at Nottingham Trent University, and generously funded by the European Commission.<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to Professor Murray Pratt for his continuing support and encouragement. The workshop brought together international scholars coming from different disciplinary backgrounds—anthropology, history, art, literature, film, television and performing arts—interested in the intersections between memory, nostalgia and melancholy in contemporary culture, characterised by relentless mobility and radical displacement.

Some of the contributors to this volume are young scholars, emerging as authoritative voices in their areas of inquiry; others are well established academics and authors; finally, some are practising artists, whose work engages with memory, nostalgia and melancholy from a perspective of critical artistic practice. This multiplicity of authorial viewpoints, enriched through a stimulating debate that ensued during the workshop and in its aftermath, is the principal strength of this volume.

Finally, I would like to thank Mikko and Toivo Talikka for always being there for me and believing in what I do. My son Mikko, in particular, has spent many hours proofreading the final draft. His meticulous eye for detail has saved me from numerous potential errors and omissions.

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## INTRODUCTION

### REMEMBERING HOME IN A TIME OF MOBILITY

MAJA MIKULA

Memory, nostalgia and melancholy have featured prominently in the popular consciousness and scholarly literature over the past decades. The relentless tempo of social, political, technological and environmental change has given rise to a widespread feeling of “homelessness” across the globe. This feeling affects not only the people who have been displaced from their original home/lands, but also those who feel estranged from their places of origin due to rapid social change or environmental decline. “Only the exiled have a land,” Baudrillard professed in his *Cool Memories*. “The others are nomads chasing their shadows in the deserts of culture” (1990, 83). Arguably, homesickness is prevalent in today’s developed world, which can be—and sometimes indeed is—felt even for times and places unrelated to someone’s personal roots.

Our society is in constant motion; footholds of any kind are increasingly hard to come by. Flows of humans represent only one type of contemporary mobilities. They go hand in hand with the movement of financial capital and services, of commodities, of technological know-how, media content and ideas. This pervasive mobility—framed metaphorically as “liquidity” (Bauman 2000) or “flow” (Appadurai 1996; Hannerz 1997)—is typically seen as a key effect of modernisation. We are so mobile, geographer Yi-fu Tuan has asserted in his classic book *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (2011, 183), that we simply lack time to establish roots. According to Tuan, our experience and appreciation of place can be nothing but superficial.

Furthermore, contemporary mobilities have defied the deep-seated sedentarist bias prevalent in Western metaphysics. Mobility—personified in the figure of the gypsy, the foreigner, and more recently, the refugee—has been seen as a threat (Cresswell 2012, 26-7; Malkki 1992). According to this sedentarist outlook, fixity guarantees world order; identities rooted in soil are more manageable within territorial units such as nation-states

and their administrative sub-divisions. Yet, scholars have argued that, “however mobile people become, some sense of home often remains as the ‘sacred’ or central location, from which they still map and measure their advances and travels” (Morley 2000, 40). In a world dominated by mobility and displacement, people increasingly “invent homes and homelands in the absence of territorial, national bases—not *in situ*, but through memories of, and claims on, places that they can or will no longer corporeally inhabit” (Malkki 1992, 24).

Arguably, one of the most enduring memories in many people’s lives is that of the house of their childhood and its surrounding landscape, which is the starting point of all their later meanderings. Picturing that landscape in one’s mind, with all its colours, shapes, textures, sounds and fragrances, can be a grounding and deeply satisfying experience. In one of his essays, titled “Imaginary Homelands,” Salman Rushdie describes his own yearning for his childhood home in Bombay, accessible to him during the decades of his living elsewhere only via an old black-and-white photograph. When he eventually visits Bombay after many years of absence, he goes to the house in the photograph and is dazzled by the power of the full sensory experience he undergoes there. His eyes are “assaulted by colours, by the vividness of the red tiles, the yellow-edged green of cactus-leaves, the brilliance of bougainvillea creeper.” It is only then that he realises how much he has always wanted to restore his past to himself, “not in the faded greys of old family-album snapshots, but whole, in CinemaScope and glorious Technicolor” (1991, 9-10).

Similarly, the sensorial dimension of home is foregrounded in Chapter 7 of this book, written by Ruth Griffin. When Piper Chapman, the protagonist of the Netflix series *Orange is the New Black* (2013 to date), is granted temporary release from prison to attend her grandmother’s funeral, she goes to see her erstwhile home. In a manner reminiscent of Proust’s well-known *madeleine* experience, Chapman revels in the smells of home, the tactile comfort of the upholstery, the taste of coffee, and the crunching sound of food in her mouth.

The past, Proust said, cannot be recaptured through rational endeavour; rather, it is hidden “beyond the reach of the intellect, in some material object (in the sensation that material object will give us) which we do not expect” (1950, 61). The material thing becomes a mnemonic device, or—even more poignantly—it turns into what Baudrillard has called a “mythological object,” a thing that suppresses time by transforming a former being into something “immemorial” (1996, 75). In a world of mobility and flow, a material thing defies ephemerality and offers an illusion of grounded authenticity. It acts as a tangible remnant of a present

that no longer exists, fully engaged in bringing together and hybridising different temporal layers.

The use of material things for mnemonic purposes in creative prose and poetry is well documented (Nalbantian 2002). The carpenter's pencil in Manuel Rivas's eponymous novel, examined by Lisa DiGiovanni in Chapter 2, is a quintessential "mythological object": in the hands of prison guard and executioner Herbal, a pencil once belonging to an artist and political prisoner in Francoist Spain becomes invested not only with the soul of its former owner, but with the spirit of the Republican resistance as a whole. Material things figure as crucial mnemonic devices in the memory-saturated dance performances described by Kaličin in Chapter 4, and in the nostalgic artworks created by Louise Bourgeois, Tacita Dean and others, examined in Chapter 11 by Domingo Martinez. "Banal and discarded objects," Martinez writes, "are among the best tools for processing memories and emotions, helping us retrieve and re-read the past."

Heritage scholar Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett distinguishes between *souvenirs and mementos*, which are "from the outset intended to serve as a reminder of an ephemeral experience or absent person," and *memory objects*, which are produced retrospectively in order to endow internal images of the past with a material form (1989, 333). The creation of memory objects may involve playful alterations in scale, whereby entire remembered worlds are reduced in size to facilitate a holistic review.

There is an oneiric painting by the Croatian naïve artist, Ivan Rabuzin, called *My Son* (1966). In it, a gigantic boy appears towering over a stylised landscape of green hills, against the background of a cloud-studded blue sky. The boy is holding a glass dome containing a miniature model of his home village. Inside the dome, the hills are covered with blossoming trees, fields have been freshly ploughed, and neat little houses are enclosed within a white picket fence. Like in most paintings by Rabuzin, everything is out of scale: a colossal human figure and two landscapes, one tiny and safely enclosed inside the glass dome, and the other larger and sprawling beyond the image frame. Both landscapes represent home: one offers the boy a physical ground to stand on at this point in time, but is open to outside influences; the other is idealised, frozen in time, and—most importantly—it is portable. Similarly, Chapter 3 by Maja Mikula looks at a miniature replica of the town of Umag/Umago in Istria, created as a memory object by a former resident of the town, displaced during the post-World War II exodus of the Italian population from that area. Microcosms, says Mikula, "offer the viewer a unique vantage point, from which it is

possible to view the entire world both phenomenologically and conceptually.”

Sensory experience is at its most salient in the corporeal re-enactments of home described in Chapter 4, written by dance artist and choreographer Galina Kaličin. In Kaličin’s own work, it is the soft sound of the Bosnian language in a well-loved *sevdah* song that transports her and her audience to Mostar, the place of her childhood memories. Another dancer and choreographer whose work bears a strong imprint of his displacement, Akram Khan, conjures up the streets of his native Bangladesh through a medley of sounds such as car horns, bicycle bells and children’s voices, and the dance movements that reveal a fusion of the traditional Indian Kathak and contemporary dance styles. For Kaličin, memories “reside in the body and are often triggered by sensations like smell, taste or sound.”

The power of sensorial re-enactments does not, however, point to any primordial links between the “body” and the “soil,” a person and a territory. Home has no stable meaning and is always socially constructed, enacted and reproduced through everyday life practices and creative endeavour. It is not only a place where we live, but also an ideal invested with emotion, a structure of feeling and the lynchpin of our individual and collective identities. It always has aesthetic and moral dimensions for those who inhabit it, either physically or symbolically (Douglas 1991, 289). Home is thus a crucial site where space turns into place, and boundaries of self are configured and negotiated. In the words of Edward Relph, it is the “foundation of our identity as individuals and as members of a community, the dwelling-place of being” and an “irreplaceable centre of significance” (1976, 39).

Home is the place where we first learn to set apart the “inside” from the “outside,” “self” from the “other.” In Ruth Griffin’s chapter, the feeling of belonging among the prison inmates is strengthened by the unsurmountable divide between those on the outside and those on the inside of the prison walls. As Mary Douglas has argued, the home structures our experience by apportioning time and space to cater for a great array of our needs. In doing this, it often exerts a dictatorial control over its denizens’ “acceptable behaviours.” The exemplary home described by Douglas “emerges as the result of individual strategies of control defended respectively in the name of the home as a public good” (1991, 306).

At different points in our lifetime, we may inhabit spaces that function in ways similar to that explained by Douglas. Griffin’s chapter offers two examples: a nursing home from Camus’s novel, *The Outsider* (1963 [1942]), and the women’s federal prison from the series *Orange is the New*

*Black*. In both of these examples, once the new arrivals “settle in” and adjust to the rhythms and structures that govern life inside the institutional walls, they begin to accept their new homes as surrogates for the domestic ones they no longer have regular access to. Griffin shows that representations of domestic and institutional homes partake in a shared cultural imaginary, dependent on space arrangements, displays of objects, and daily routines that signify stability, security and community. According to Mary Douglas, home is brought into existence by bringing some space under control.<sup>1</sup>

Both the nursing home and the prison seem to be paramount examples of un-homely spaces, uncanny in the sense of the Freudian *unheimlich*, familiar and terrifying at the same time. Heidegger explains the uncanny as that which throws us out of the “homely, the accustomed, the usual, the unendangered,” that which “does not allow us to be at home” (2000, 161). Foucault included both of these institutions among what he called “heterotopias of deviation,” that is, places “in which individuals whose behaviour is deviant in relation to the required mean norm are placed” (1986, 25). Old age, he explained, can be understood as a deviation since “in our society where leisure is the rule, idleness is a sort of deviation” (Ibid.). For Foucault, heterotopias—places of otherness and transgression—function as such only provisionally and within a particular context. Heterotopia in one set of circumstances can work quite differently in another: this is how “non-homes” such as prisons or nursing homes can be “domesticated” and turned into places of home, and how we can be at home in several places at the same time.

Like the Russian *matryoshka* dolls, our homes can be nested one inside the other. The size of the largest doll is a matter of our politics and values, and depends on how far can we stretch the boundaries of our “imagined communities.” But, what happens when our ties to a physical place we call home or homeland become ruptured through forced displacement, and the spatio-temporal unity of home can no longer be taken for granted? The idea of home can be an enduring project, motivated by both loss and a desire for stability.

Loss of homeland is likely to cut deeply into the collective psyche of the uprooted community, engendering trauma and bereavement that can extend over several generations. Severed from the physical landscape that was once integral to their everyday lived experience, individuals and

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<sup>1</sup> This meaning, it is worth noting, is also inherent in the semantic evolution of the Latin noun for home, “*domus*,” into one of its derivatives, the verb “to dominate.”

communities continue to create a spatial imaginary of home across distances, generations and temporal layers.

Imaginative homebuilding involves active memory work, and is typically associated with a nostalgic or melancholic mindset. In the past decades, memory has been mobilised to justify recent conflicts, to question mainstream interpretations of past events, or to demand compensation for the suffering of earlier generations. Both linked to emotional disorders and often conflated in everyday parlance, the terms nostalgia and melancholy have distinct genealogies and have indeed been theorised as related, overlapping or semantically opposed to one another. Nostalgia has been employed as a “utopia in reverse” (Huysen 2006), revealing more about our unattainable “ideal present,” than about the elusive “lost” past it invokes. A corollary of nostalgia in the late modern politics of loss, melancholy has channelled people’s disidentification from the horrors of recent history and from the insecurities of the present.

This book is about homes and homelands, lost or no longer recognisable, mourned, remembered or invented. It raises complex questions related to the ways people have coped with displacement and time-space compression, arguably the two most manifest symptoms of late modernity. How do we grapple with the traumatic experience of home loss? What strategies do we use, and what is their underlying politics? How do they intersect with identity positions, such as gender, class and sexuality? How might they contribute to the preservation of national cultures, most particularly in areas that in recent past experienced an extreme volatility of borders?

## **Book Synopsis**

Facing the rising fascination with the meaning and manifestation of nostalgia, Chapter 1 by Lisa DiGiovanni addresses the relationship between nostalgic memory and identity positions including gender, class, and sexuality in the context of contemporary Spain. Since the late 1990s, a new generation of Spanish authors and directors have produced an extraordinary number of films and novels that seek to tell the silenced stories of the Second Spanish Republic (1931-1939), the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) and the Franco Regime (1939-1975). In response, many cultural critics have focused on how such works have contributed to the recuperation of progressive voices previously repressed by Franco’s National Catholic machine.

DiGiovanni argues that depictions of “lost” pasts implicitly or explicitly convey discourses of gender and class relations. By bringing together



memory studies with feminist studies, she offers an intersectional approach to the topic of nostalgia with a focus on contemporary Spain. In doing so, she foregrounds the complexity of nostalgic representation that is often ignored.

Using a novel written by Manuel Rivas, originally published in Galician as *O lapis do carpinteiro* (1998) and later translated into Castilian as *El lápiz del carpintero* and English as *The Carpenter's Pencil*, DiGiovanni shows that nostalgia for a lost revolutionary epoch hinges upon the reconstruction of oppositional feminine identities and the subversion of traditional gender norms. Her attention to the concrete ways in which the critical may sit alongside the wistful in nostalgic cultural production signals a step in an overlooked direction for research seeking to overturn assumptions about nostalgia as a simplistic conjuring of a distant past. Moreover, DiGiovanni's chapter urges a reflection upon how nostalgic narratives might link struggles against unequal power relations in the past with a criticism of systems of oppression today.

In Chapter 2, Gabriele Paleari examines place memory in relation to Italianness and borders in the literary work of Roberta Dubac. Dubac, who was born in Koper/Capodistria in 1974, is a member of the autochthonous Italian minority in Istria, a region straddled between Italy, Slovenia and Croatia. Dubac's home town of Kaštel/Castelvenere, right on the border between Croatia and Slovenia, changed state five times over the space of a century: Austria-Hungary, Italy, Zone B of the Free Territory of Trieste, Yugoslavia and Croatia. The frequently changing political landscapes of her native Istria are those of a border region shaped by Venetian, Germanic, Italian, Croatian and Slovenian cultures, vernaculars and languages. Cross-pollination of cultures across borders emerges in Roberta Dubac's first published work, *Chiesa di nessuno* [*Nobody's Church*] (2012). *Chiesa di nessuno* is a collection of fourteen short stories set in rural Istria between the 20th and the 21st centuries, published by EDIT, the publisher of the indigenous Italians from former Yugoslavia. This book is important because Dubac breaks away from the theme of the memory of the post-World War II Istrian-Italian exodus, which dominated the Italian literature of Istria in the second half of the 20th century. Moreover, *Chiesa di nessuno* is interesting because it is like an old film where Dubac's fictionalised family memories of Istria in the 1930s, 1960s, 1990s and 2000s are juxtaposed like photographs. Each short story, like a photograph, captures a different Istrian *lieu de mémoire* (Nora 1989). Paleari's analysis of Dubac's work shows how, thanks to their literary culture, Italians from Istria preserve, enrich and cherish the memory of their plural cultural identities.

The following chapter by Maja Mikula also deals with memory and nostalgia in the context of the Istrian peninsula, focusing on the memory practices among the displaced Italian population. In her study of a miniature replica of the town of Umag/Umago in Istria, made in 1970 by exiled master craftsman Beniamino Favretto (1901-1986) and currently exhibited at the Civico Museo della civiltà Istriana, Fiumana e Dalmata in Trieste, Mikula argues that miniature town models can be highly engaging pedagogical tools that help reproduce communal values among the descendants of displaced populations. Taking cue from Arjun Appadurai (1986), Mikula considers the “social life” of Favretto’s miniature, and its fortunes within the community it was produced for, and which it itself helped produce.

Intricate town models designed and crafted by highly skilled artisans are never merely static replicas of the urban environments they embody. Treasured possessions in museums and private collections, these miniature towns typically blend hyper-realism and a high degree of intimacy, thereby conveying compelling stories, eliciting affect and simultaneously “teaching and delighting” their audiences. With their economies of scale and their iconic character, miniatures can help people rescue their memory worlds from fading away (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1989). They are comforting because they offer a hermetically enclosed, safe and manageable universe. They are particularly appealing if the objects they represent no longer exist, or if they are physically beyond our reach.

In Chapter 4, Galina Kaličin investigates the issues of identity, memory and nostalgia through the socio-cultural and socio-political analysis of dance theatre works by three UK-based choreographers of dual/mixed nationality: Akram Khan, Nic Green, and Kaličin herself. In their autobiographical performance work—Khan’s *DESH*, Green’s *Fatherland* and Kaličin’s own *If Atoms Could Tell Stories...*—all three choreographers deal with issues of identity and memory through the concept of fatherland. The chapter examines how they address the embodied experience of memory, nostalgia and self, and how they construct narratives of place through their relationships with their fathers and fatherlands.

Bhabha defines the “third space” not as identity but identification, which “is a process of identifying with and through another object, an object of otherness, at which point the agency of identification—the subject—is itself always ambivalent, because of the intervention of that otherness” (Rutherford 1991, 211). Kaličin applies Bhabha’s concepts of the “third space” and the “process of cultural hybridity” to examine the three performances as representations of the choreographer/performers’

hybrid identities and their sense of memory and nostalgia. She argues that interdisciplinary dance theatre can be employed to effectively interrogate and re-examine the concepts of national and cultural identity, and to embrace the liminality of the “third space” as a space of potential.

Bhabha explains that “the process of cultural hybridity gives rise to something different, new and unrecognisable, a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation” (Ibid.). This “new area” of cultural hybridity is where Khan, Green and Kaličin find themselves, and which allows them to question the meanings of ethnic/national belonging through the relationships with their fathers and fatherlands. By using different dance forms, music and stories from different cultures, their works illustrate the interpellative practice of cultural hybridity that Bhabha propounds. For Bhabha, hybridity is the “third space,” which “enables other positions to emerge.” In doing so, this third space “displaces the histories that constitute it, and sets up new structures of authority, new political initiatives, which are inadequately understood through received wisdom” (Ibid.). Despite different cultural elements identifiable within the performances, all of them represent the hybridity of their creators, who are themselves displaced and at the same time displace those elements that constitute them.

Chapter 5 by Jo McCormack moves towards examining the intersections between nostalgia and melancholy in contemporary French literature. Since Nicolas Baverez’s ground-breaking book *La France qui tombe* (*France in Freefall*, 2003), a new genre of writing has appeared in France, writings which have been grouped under the term “*les déclinologues*”/ “*le déclinisme*.” They tend to be polemical essays that argue France is in decline and is no longer the country/nation (home) it used to be. They analyse why this is the case and strongly criticise those they consider to blame. In addition to *La France qui tombe*, other representatives of the genre include Jean-Pierre Chevènement’s *La France est-elle finie?* (*Is France Finished*, 2011), Alain Finkielkraut’s *L’identité malheureuse* (*The Unhappy Identity*, 2013), and Eric Zemmour’s *Le suicide Français* (*The French Suicide*, 2014). McCormack’s chapter examines this latter work in particular, due to its major impact (four hundred thousand copies sold by December 2014) and the controversy surrounding its publication. He argues that these works can be understood through the lens of nostalgia and melancholy. They do highlight how there is a strong sense of loss in late modern France (Mathy 2011). The chapter asks: What is remembered and what is forgotten in these narratives? What are they nostalgic for, and why? However, the chapter also shows that, although this feeling of homesickness certainly now extends far beyond migrants or exiles to a

much larger swathe of the French, concomitant with reactions to late capitalism in France, such feelings are actually less novel than we might think.

Chapter 6 by Kaisa Hiltunen explores the aesthetics and politics of melancholy in contemporary Finnish society, through an analysis of two films by filmmaker Aku Louhimies, *Frozen Land* (2005) and *Frozen City* (2006). In both films, life appears precarious and protagonists are powerless in the face of life's many difficulties. The insecurities of working life and problems in human relationships drive the protagonists into desperation, crime and violence. The films can be interpreted as criticising the contemporary welfare state and as suggesting that there is a lack of empathy and people are increasingly forced to cope on their own.

In the course of its long history, the concept of melancholy has acquired a poetic interpretation. Melancholy has come to be understood as a (subjective) mood that can find expression in art. The chapter examines the cinematic means Louhimies uses to express melancholy in the two films. The films' bleak aesthetics support the view that the present situation is depressing: for example, the way human encounters are shot emphasises separation and a lack of connection.

The chapter, however, goes beyond analysing the manifestation of melancholy in Louhimies as an aesthetic phenomenon, to point out its political dimensions. Another aim of the chapter is to examine the films in the framework of modern melancholy as understood by Walter Benjamin and other thinkers after him. The Finnish aspects of melancholy are explored through the works of Finnish historian Juha Siltala (1992), who has analysed Finnish mentality and working life. The article argues that Finnish melancholy, as depicted in the films of Louhimies, is linked to neoliberalism, market forces and feelings of estrangement. A short comparison with other Finnish films that deal with similar themes is added to point out the idiosyncrasies of Louhimies's pessimism and his apparent lack of nostalgia.

Chapter 7 by Ruth Griffin explores a range of questions which revolve around the cultural significance of belonging to, and longing for, home. Griffin argues that fictional representations of institutional homes, primarily US Netflix series *Orange is the New Black*, draw upon a shared cultural imaginary and thus offer an insight into the concept of "home" in its fullest sense, by throwing into sharp relief the essential constituents of home which they so evidently lack.

By drawing on a range of themes such as freedom, autonomy, and identity, Griffin considers the ways in which specifically existentialist understandings of melancholy and nostalgia help to shed light on the

nature of longing, and belonging, to home, however illusory such longings might ultimately be. Is the concept of home essentially an object of desire, ultimately an imaginary psychic construct that is inevitably forever out of reach, the Lacanian symbolic object of our desire premised on lack, the *objet petit a*? Or does it make more sense to view the notion of home as an aspect of our shared cultural imaginary, reflected in the cultural forms that immerse us?

The chapter concludes that home is a creation of the popular imagination as much as it is an actual place, whereby home becomes an object of aspiration and desire captured by the clichéd yet evocative phrase, “home sweet home.” Although *Orange is the New Black* is a prison drama apparently far removed from the everyday sphere, its narrative demonstrates the power of the popular cultural imagination, for fictional characters, producers and viewers alike.

Chapter 8 by Tuija Saresma examines the fictitious memories of the nostalgic gender order circulating on the Internet. Since social media function as a space for connecting with the similar-minded, they may serve for the dissemination of anti-progressive ideologies, such as traditionalism, anti-feminism, racism, and xenophobia. The blogosphere has become an influential site for constructing collective, more or less imaginary memories of the traditional gender order. Performing the fictitious memories of the nostalgic gender order takes place, e. g., in the internationally networked men’s rights activists’ (MRA’s) blogs, or, the Manosphere.

Saresma analyses the nostalgic narratives about the traditional gender order, which draw from and promote the intersecting repressive ideologies of (hetero)sexism, misogyny, and ethnic othering. She shows how collective (false) memories of the lost gender order are created by circulating certain stories in the blog by a well-known Finnish men’s rights activist, or, as he calls himself, a masculinist. She takes the “memories” presented in the blog as produced performatively, and acknowledges that the production and disseminating of (false) memories is especially powerful in the digital age.

Saresma reads a famous Finnish masculinist blog, called *Writings about Men’s Equality and Pairing* (Laasanen 2010), as a cultural text that reproduces a certain gendered, (hetero)sexualised and racialised social reality (Lowe 1996). Simultaneously, this blog represents an affective community, thick with populist rhetoric on bi-polar and hetero-sexist “natural” gender order and affective expressions of resentment. Saresma is especially interested in the ways gender and ethnicity intertwine in a blog entry on Thailand and sex tourism, and in the discussion that follows. She

focuses on the power of stereotyped representations of women—both of demonised Finnish feminists and exoticised Thai women—in the blog, to performatively construct the imaginary past as a collectively shared nostalgic memory.

In her reading of the blog conversation, Saresma pays attention to using affective rhetoric in performing (imaginary) sites of memory of the past. She bases her analysis on the ideas of J. L. Austin on constructing reality through speaking (1962), and Judith Butler's influential theorising of performativity and "doing" gender by repetition (1997). Methodologically, the chapter is based on internet ethnography. The author, however, acknowledges that blogs are both cultural spaces of interaction and visually, verbally, and graphically constructed artefacts. She utilises textual, rhetorical and contextual analysis, taking into account the societal and structural level.

A strong continuity of the theme of emigration in the modern Irish short story points to ways in which diaspora works as a community of nostalgia and exposes the home rhetoric of othering and exclusion, which stems from Irish colonial history. By applying a range of theories of the production of space to the early twentieth-century works by Irish writers such as George Moore, Liam O'Flaherty and Frank O'Connor, as well as the more recent ones by Neil Jordan, Philip O'Ceallaigh, Hugo Hamilton and others, Chapter 9 by Tea Raše seeks to determine to what extent the politics of mobility exercised through the discourse of difference brings about social change.

Emigration has been a recurrent theme across different media depicting Irish experience ever since the Great Famine. A departure from and return to Ireland have thus become key elements of Irish identity, reflecting Ireland as a culture built on the poetics of imagination, hovering between realities inhabited by characters experiencing both home and a foreign space as a sort of a non-place. The question Raše poses is whether emigration at different moments in history (the time when Ireland achieved independence versus the period when it became known as the Celtic Tiger) only goes to show that one does not have to leave in order not to feel at home in one's homeland. By looking at the complex interplay between expatriates' homesickness in exile and their melancholy in homecoming, she examines how physical displacement leaves a sense of lasting dislocation in time, a relentless longing for the internalisation of all the values ascribed to a culture that is ultimately unable to fulfil the promise of an organic community.

Svetlana Boym states that "[n]ostalgia can be a poetic creation, an individual mechanism of survival, a countercultural practice, a poison, or a

cure” (2007, 18). Chapter 10 by Christina Lammer examines nostalgia through a comparative analysis of the prose poem *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge* by Rainer Maria Rilke (2008 [1910]) and the Dutch novel *Country of Origin* by Edgar du Perron (1984 [1935]). Both novels thematise the narrators losing themselves in memory while living in Paris.

Issues of longing and belonging lie at the core of both of these texts. In Rilke’s work, the lost status of Danish aristocracy is the subject matter of childhood memories narrated by the main character, Malte Laurids Brigge. Edgar Du Perron’s main character, Arthur Ducroo, revisits the Dutch-Indies colonies at the time of their decline. The Dutch literary scholar Hans van Stralen has argued that these authors look back to gain knowledge about themselves and to understand the present through the past (1990). Taking Van Stralen’s view as her starting point, Lammer analyses Rilke and Du Perron’s works taking into account a range of contemporary theories of nostalgia and cultural memory. She argues that both main characters try to construct their identity by “leaving” their life in Paris behind. They do so by remembering their past. Drawing on cultural memory theory, Lammer suggests that their attempts to remember create a vicious circle: the more Brigge and Ducroo observe and remember, the less they are able to root themselves in Paris.

The author argues that Brigge and Ducroo have nothing to rely on in terms of cultural memory. They are not used to urban space and they live through the modernist alienation of contemporary society. Since they live in the gap, their memories create a poetics of nostalgia, showing how a loss of clear-cut surroundings, in which one’s memory could be embedded, may lead to a past-driven identity search.

Finally, Chapter 11 by Domingo Martinez examines the links between contemporary art practice and cultural memory, nostalgia and melancholy. In recent decades, memory has become an essential tool for denouncing human rights abuses and uncovering victims’ experiences of traumatic events in the past. Visual arts, oral testimonies, nostalgia, melancholy and commemoration have been fused together in contemporary artworks by international artists, including Christian Boltanski, Miroslaw Balka, Krzysztof Wodiczko, Rachel Whiteread, Jane and Louise Wilson, and Kara Walker.

The chapter identifies a range of common patterns employed by artists in their works dealing with memory, such as the ways in which the “absent” and the “void” are represented, be that by way of re-appropriation or collection of discarded objects or historical amateur photographs. Martinez focuses on the work by British artist Tacita Dean; in particular, on her collection of old family photograph albums purchased at flea

markets, and her use of audio-visual technology to encourage the viewer's engagement with an "analogue" past, no longer present in our digital era.

The chapter also addresses the melancholic approach of the late French-American artist Louise Bourgeois, who used her art to confront the traumatic events of her past, in particular her memories of humiliation inflicted upon her by her chauvinist father. By recounting her memories repeatedly, Bourgeois aimed to control her fears of the present. Her artworks were abstract objects inspired by body shapes and domestic items, which worked both as reality and as a metaphor for melancholy. Based on these examples, Martinez argues that memory—as a continuing theme in contemporary art—allows artists with no real sense of home or belonging to place themselves in a specific time and place.



## CHAPTER ONE

# RETURN TO GALICIA: NOSTALGIA, NATION AND GENDER IN MANUEL RIVAS'S SPAIN<sup>1</sup>

LISA RENÉE DIGIOVANNI

Since the 1990s, Spain has seen an outpouring of memory works—novels, feature films, documentaries, graphic novels, short stories—produced by a new generation of authors and directors. These texts look to the Republican past of the 1930s as a source of cultural and political renewal. In an attempt to contest the ultra-conservative discourse of the long-lasting Franco regime, they seek to tell the silenced stories of the Second Spanish Republic (1931-1939), the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) and the Franco dictatorship (1939-1975). Against the backdrop of what might be called a “memory boom,” many cultural critics have focused on how such memorial production has contributed to the recuperation of progressive voices previously repressed by Franco’s National Catholic forces. Yet, insufficient attention has been paid to the topic of nostalgia. More

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Keene State College for providing me with an Arts and Humanities faculty course reassignment grant during the spring of 2016, which allowed me time to produce this essay. I would also like to thank the editor of this volume for organizing the forum in Croatia and for following up on such an important interdisciplinary discussion on memory and nostalgia. I would also like to thank my Fall 2015 Honors 290 course at Keene State College, *Revolution, War and After in Spain*. In particular, I thank Jewel Bean, whose thoughtful prose sparked several lines in this piece. Janet Albarado, Emily Robins Sharpe and Laura Premack also provided valuable feedback that helped me sharpen my arguments. I am always grateful for the insights of Gina Herrmann and Michael Lazzara. Conversations with Leopoldo Sousa (primo Leo) and Carlos Vicente about Galicia, then and now, have impacted my thinking and for that I am grateful. Finally, I thank my daughters, whose wisdom goes far beyond their years and who often inspire my thinking about the relation between art and social justice.

specifically, what needs further consideration is the way in which the nostalgic search for roots in a previous moment of Republican resistance to fascist forms of culture is shaped by issues of gender, class, and nation. This chapter elucidates the relationship between nostalgic longing and these socially constructed structures of identity. Nostalgic return is framed here as a voyage in time and place that is inevitably intersected by the remembering subject's understanding of hierarchies of power. To long for certain places and milieus—and the people that once inhabited them— involves perceptions of times unavoidably embedded in political struggles to either uphold or upend unequal power relations. In other words, when it comes to nostalgia, gender matters, as do other categories of identity. Such longing also bespeaks the remembering subject's sense of dissatisfaction with the power relations and social conditions of their own present. This research suggests that nostalgic discourses either conjure classist, sexist and nationalist visions of roots and nation or, conversely, appeal to unfinished dreams of revolutionary structural change.

A range of novels and films could be used in this analysis, such as the narrative of Almudena Grandes, Dulce Chacón, and Javier Cercas, among others. However, for this chapter, I have narrowed the scope to a novel written by Manuel Rivas that constitutes an antecedent for many works of its kind. It was originally published in Galician as *O lapis do carpinteiro* (1998) and later translated into Castilian as *El lápiz del carpintero* and English as *The Carpenter's Pencil*. Other critics have studied the theme of memory and mythification in this highly acclaimed novel (Gabilondo 2011, Harney 2007, Jünke 2006, López-Quiñones 2006, Ribeiro de Menezes 2014, Tasende 2001, Tronsgard 2011)). Perhaps the most compelling interpretation is by Jessica Folkart, who addresses the question of gender by analyzing how the male characters react to the identity imposed by nationalist discourse. Folkart argues that “*El lápiz* responds to the right-wing dominated politics of post-Franco Galicia by positing identity as a process of perpetual mediation” (2006, 312). Folkart's reading is insightful, but what remains unarticulated is the concept of nostalgia in relation to the intersecting categories of gender, class and nation.

I use Rivas's novel to make a larger claim about the multiple dimensions of nostalgia. Rivas's novel acknowledges differences in men's and women's experiences of the Spanish Civil War and the Franco regime and how those differences were further complicated by class and nation. Rivas offers a compelling criticism of an oppressive ideal of manhood that requires the capacity for violence and a religious zeal for the patriarchal nation. Negative characterizations of militarized figures function as a counterpoint to the idealized characterizations and plotlines of the

Republican opposition. Although Rivas remains within a heteronormative framework and arguably falls short of a radical break in socially imposed boundaries, his portrayals urge readers to imagine how intersecting forms of gender, class, and political oppression have been defied. When due attention is paid to its complexity, nostalgia might become not merely an affective form of memory, but a tool working against the violence of patriarchal political projects. If we mistakenly read nostalgic works under the rubric of universal narratives of loss, ignoring the specific systems of power that they render visible, we are missing their full implications.

To anchor my approach, I draw from research on nostalgia by Fred Davis and Svetlana Boym. In *Yearning for Yesterday* (1979), Davis laid the foundation for different types of nostalgia. Over two decades later, Svetlana Boym reanimated the debate in *The Future of Nostalgia* (2001), conceptualizing the critical potential of “reflective nostalgia” in contrast to the “restorative” form. For Boym, restorative nostalgia unconsciously ignores memory gaps and assumes shared political beliefs and values. Boym associates right-wing politics with the longing for essentialism and stereotyped identities. But she also recognizes that despite nostalgia’s apparent absence from the revolutionary lexicon, Marx himself drew from the restorative nostalgic mode through an “attachment to ‘primitive communism’ before capitalist exploitation, and to the heroes of the past, Spartacus and Robin Hood” (59). Boym observes the use of restorative nostalgia in left-wing discourses as a catalyst to inspire revolutionary backing. However, she also identifies an alternative critical nostalgic mode that she links to progressive politics. “Reflective” nostalgia casts aspersions on national myths and absolute truth and instead meditates on history and passage of time (49). While I agree with Boym’s argument that nostalgia is much more than the uncritical idealization usually identified with it, this essay challenges readers to broaden their perception of nostalgia to consider how it is shaped by structures of identity. It implores a consideration of how gender, class and nation permeate the nostalgically imagined past. By combining discussions of nostalgia with the transnational feminist analyses of Chandra Mohanty (2003), Marianne Hirsch and Nancy K. Miller (2011), I provide a lens that joins ideas in memory studies and feminism. If feminist research probes the constructed nature of identity, and memory studies takes into account the relationship between memory and identity, then it seems pertinent to consider them in tandem. In this case, we cannot fully understand the subjugation and resistance of oppositional voices in Spain without looking at the construction of their identities.

Ultimately, this essay calls for an examination of memory narratives that question hierarchies of power and overturn reductive universal narratives (Hirsch and Miller 2011, 7). Given that a more precise lexicon allows for a new appreciation of the dimensions of nostalgia, this essay proposes the notion of left-wing “unsettling” nostalgia. The term implies that the memory-maker’s gaze at once idealizes pieces of the past and disquiets the readership by provoking thought, in this case on the unfinished revolutionary struggles of the Second Republic. By linking insights from multiple fields, this study shows that to better conceptualize the workings of nostalgia, we must address its intersections with gender, class, and nation.

### Narrating Nostalgia

Born in 1957, Manuel Rivas came of age two decades after the Civil War. Authors like Rivas experienced directly “*el segundo franquismo*” (1959-1975), or the second phase of the dictatorship, characterized by a sustained public campaign to normalize the criminalization of the remaining leftist opposition and to depict them as “anti-Spanish.” It was a time in which monoculturalism and monolingualism continued to be the chief strategic policy that the regime enforced to seize the political freedom, cultural diversity and economic means of the defeated Republicans. Such monoculturalism was based upon the promotion of an ultra-conservative form of Catholicism, patriarchal values, an imperialist reading of history and a conviction that Castilian was the unifying language to transmit such values. This lens was simultaneously gendered; it framed men as soldiers, nation builders and scholars, while women were cast as wives, bearers of children and caregivers.<sup>2</sup> The regime remained in power for four decades, in which time generations of Spaniards came of age in an educational system that sought to solidify hegemonic narratives of gender, class, and nation.

It is precisely the nationalist narrative described above that Manuel Rivas sets out to dismantle in his narrative fiction. His characters are often proponents of the Second Republic who conceived of a social agenda aimed to overturn exploitative power structures, patriarchal forms of culture, and the hegemony of the Catholic Church. Rivas imagines fictional figures that participated in the social reforms that granted women the right to vote, stand for parliament, divorce, sign contracts, and

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<sup>2</sup> This paragraph draws from the article “Masculinity, Misogyny and Mass in *Los girasoles ciegos*” by Alberto Méndez” by Lisa DiGiovanni (2012).

administer estates. His plotlines show that such reforms did not result in an overnight shift in patriarchal mentalities, and that such reforms were often met with hostility. The conservative military and economic elites also figure prominently in his narrative, responding to the loss of power with violence and a discursive backlash emphasizing Spain's decay due to its abandonment of the "virtues" which had once made it a world power. Rivas shows that the Civil War that followed deepened the ideological divides that would later endure throughout the ensuing dictatorship.

*O lapis do carpinteiro* is set in Galicia during the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939), as well as the post-Franco present. The story revolves around two main characters: Daniel Da Barca, a progressive doctor and political activist who is imprisoned for his defense of the Second Republic; and Herbal, an uneducated man from rural Galicia who serves as a spy and a prison guard for Franco's fascist forces. It is the contrast between the negative portrait of the authoritarian militarized male figure that accentuates the positive light with which the author paints the oppositional Republican male character. To be sure, the discourse that Rivas conveys in *O lapis do carpinteiro* is explicitly political, juxtaposing right and left-wing bands; however, it vindicates a somewhat amorphous Republican identity rather than a single party line. Anti-fascism in general, or the shared rejection of authoritarianism, misogyny, militarization, nationalism and class hierarchies, is what brings the Republican characters together and ultimately underpins the author's message.

The narrative's point of departure is around 1998, at a time in which the number of first-hand witnesses of the Second Republic and the Civil War began to dwindle. In that context, a Galician journalist named Carlos Sousa receives an assignment to interview the aging Dr Daniel Da Barca, now in his eighties. Sousa's political disenchantment and utter ignorance of the Spanish Civil War set up what becomes his own process of critical consciousness through attentive listening.<sup>3</sup> The pretext of the imminent death of a Republican survivor gives way to a journey in time and a transgenerational dialogue that calls attention to the experience of rupture and commemorates the resilience of the vanquished. But Rivas shows that

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<sup>3</sup> *Soldados de Salamina*, written three years later by Javier Cercas (2001), also features a disillusioned journalist who develops in the course of the narrative through a number of transgenerational dialogues about the Spanish Civil War. I agree with Alison Ribeiro de Menezes that, "[t]his device of using a journalist to investigate a forgotten matter relating to Spain's Civil War recalls *Soldados de Salamina*, and it is clear that both the fictional Cercas of that book and the Sousa of Rivas's novella are meant to be representatives of a contemporary society instilled with disenchantment and a sense of insecurity" (2014, 128).

memorial reconstruction is not a simple task. The novel highlights the ambivalences and gaps in memory through temporal shifts from the present to the past and through differing perspectives of alternating narrators. The juxtapositions and contrasts of those shifts free the reader from chronology and linear history and encourage a different understanding of the past. Rather than a set of experiences unchanged over time, memories are rendered as a recreation from the point of remembering. Such narrative shifts that convey this notion of memory involve a third-person omniscient narrator that relays the present-day interactions between Sousa and Da Barca, as well as a third-person narrator set during the civil war that narrates events as they unfold. The author uses this narrative strategy to consciously explore how memory and nostalgia develop and transform over time in a creative and collective process of reconstruction.

The complexity of the narrative structure is matched, to a degree, by its portrayal of a range of characters that embody competing notions of gender, class and national identity. The leading Republican character, Dr Da Barca, is characterized to represent pluralism and political consciousness. After coming of age in Cuba within a middle class family of progressive emigrants, Da Barca returns to Galicia during the Republic to join with others fighting for radical social change. He soon becomes a target of surveillance and confounds the secret agents overseeing his scrutiny: “He is a close friend of the pro-Galician painter [...], he meets with Republicans, Anarchists, Socialists, Communists... what the hell is this guy?” (34). Indeed, Da Barca represents an amalgam of the political parties of the left. During the war, he is imprisoned by the right-wing insurgents and psychologically tortured for his transgressions. After the war, he is exiled to Mexico, then finally returns to Galicia during the transition to democracy. It is through this character that the author projects a positive vision of the Republic. Rivas imagines the possibility of dialogue across party lines and men and women dedicated to the belief that transnational movement was an enriching act of cultural exchange and connection. The author’s depiction of the main character shows an objection to any notion of a “pure” Galician identity, since Da Barca is as much a Jewish intellectual from Cuba as he is a Galician Republican.

To add nuance to this portrayal, Rivas also develops a range of Galician characters that identify with the fascist oppressors and subjugate their fellow Galician brothers and sisters. Of course, it would be vastly ahistorical to suggest that Galicia was dominantly progressive, since, shortly after the military coup in July 1936, conservative rebel forces captured the Galician city of Ferrol with local support, and the entire