

***“Tócalo otra vez, Santiago.”* Mass Culture, Memory, and Identity in
Antonio Muñoz Molina’s El invierno en Lisboa**

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*A*ntonio Muñoz Molina’s El invierno en Lisboa (1987) recounts the tale of Santiago Biralbo, a jazz pianist that is hunted by Malcolm, a counterfeit art-dealer. Malcolm believes that the musician will help him locate his lover Lucrecia, who had tricked him and his crony Toussants Morton out of a Cézanne masterpiece that they had planned on selling. The pianist becomes involuntarily involved in a circle of intrigue and deception that reaches its climax when he kills Malcolm in self defense, runs from the authorities and changes his identity in order to avoid going to jail. At the end of the novel, just when Biralbo appears to have escaped the troubled events of his past, Morton reappears in his hotel room, still following the pianist and hunting Lucrecia. The novel closes with Biralbo’s renewed disappearance as his persecution continues with no suggestion of future resolution.

Throughout the novel, Biralbo relates his fragmented story to a nameless narrator, who in turn passes on his version of events to the reader, resulting in a non-linear and melodramatic text whose credibility is rendered questionable by a romanticized account of the protagonist’s life. The reader must attempt to decipher Biralbo’s real story from within the subjective context of the narrator’s version, which has many similarities to the plot of a *film noir* and appears to be largely a product of his creative imagination. The melodrama that characterizes the story exposes the influence that mass cultural conventions exert on the narrator’s thoughts and reveals the extent to which perception can be mediated by popular texts. The incorporation of various sources of mass culture alongside the novel’s subjective narration makes El invierno en Lisboa a thought provoking work that examines the mediation of perception while it simultaneously questions its own discursive authority.

This study explores the ways in which mass culture affects issues of hermeneutics, identity, and artistic creation throughout the novel in order to examine the relationship between textuality, memory and national consciousness in a new and democratic Spain. El invierno en Lisboa depicts a type of society that largely disregards historical discourse and whose inhabitants are primarily concerned with the satisfaction of individual desire. As such, the novel inscribes itself in a capitalist present where consumption is privileged and politics are often ignored. Within this context, this essay will show how Biralbo’s relationship with his sentimental history allegorically represents that of the contemporary subject who, while still haunted by memories of the past, struggles to redefine his identity in a newly democratic and consumerist society. Memory is shown to be mediated by mass cultural texts to such an extent that perception becomes inevitably influenced by fiction. The novel thereby questions whether mass culture can provide a satisfactory frame of reference in which the subject can establish an identity and interact with reality while it simultaneously reflects upon the importance of artistic creation to the development of the psyche.

Upon publication, El invierno en Lisboa won immediate praise and was awarded *el Premio de la Crítica Nacional de Literatura* in 1988, and critics were quick to point out its postmodern characteristics, incorporation of popular and cinematic conventions, and ambiguous

resolution. However, Gonzalo Navajas proposes that the novel should not be classified as strictly postmodern because in his view it has some closure that results in an affirmation of meaning. For Navajas, Biralbo's life takes on a new direction after Malcolm's death, and as such there is a consequent loss of ambiguity and confirmation of unity that distances the work from postmodern paradigms. Since the novelistic discourse shifts away from uncertainty and the protagonist ends up feeling the "certidumbre de una verdad incontrovertible" (230), Navajas concludes that the novel should be read as an "integrative postmodern text" in which some certainty is reached in the subconscious mind of the protagonist.¹

For her part, Ana Carlota Larrea has studied the filmic intertext of the novel by comparing it to the Hollywood genre of *film noir*, showing how Muñoz Molina incorporates some of its prevailing characteristics into his novel such as the dark atmospheres, focus on late night culture, urban settings, and basic story line of a man who is led towards his destruction because of his love for a woman.² Larrea suggests that the author not only uses this cinematic style as a frame around which to construct his novel, but adds to it an artistic sensibility and intellectualism which makes it a true piece of literature, superceding the conventions of a typical detective novel by choosing an intellectual musician as his protagonist. In her view, the novel challenges the stereotypes associated with best selling fiction by intellectualizing the popular to create a thought provoking text with various layers of meaning.

Along similar lines, Olimpia González has examined the use of music as a structural device throughout the text to propose that the repetition, rhythm, and circular vision of time in the work can all be related to musical technique. For González, the novel parodies the Orpheus myth, highlights the textual nature of reality and imitates the repetitious nature of jazz music, thus creating a circular temporality that deconstructs the notion of originality. Reality is characterized as a continuous present that produces a sensation of timelessness, a feeling of eternal return that reappears over and over again throughout. González suggests that the novel thereby questions the literary effort to abolish the differences between the imaginary and the real, ultimately depicting the concept of origin as essentially an act of imaginative narration.³

In his 1995 dissertation on mass culture and modernism, Richard Sperber proposes that in El invierno en Lisboa, mass culture acts as a vehicle of memory and is used to create a renewed collective vision of modernism. He views jazz as an older form of mass culture whose function in the novel is to reveal the hieroglyphics of a secret modernist language that "...illuminate[s] a modernist form of art, that is, a Cézanne painting... jazz reveals the epistemology of this painting... the epistemology of modernism lies in mass culture..." (87-88). Robert Spires also highlights the presence of mass culture in the novel, claiming that the protagonists achieve a certain degree of enlightenment through its consumption. In Post Totalitarian Spanish Fiction (1996), he explains that Muñoz Molina not only refers to multiple sources of mass culture throughout but also comments on its potentially empowering properties. The novel thereby attempts to show that agency can be achieved through the process of intertextual revisitation. By focusing on the imitative nature of modern life and underlining some of the possibilities offered by mass culture, Spires proposes that the text challenges the notion that art must include elements of surprise in order to effectively communicate its message.⁴

In The Narrative of Antonio Muñoz Molina, Lawrence Rich explores the subjectivity of a narrator who reconstructs the protagonist's life story by piecing together news of his past accessed through newspaper clippings, recordings, and conversations with the musician himself. Rich asserts that while recounting the pianist's adventures, the narrator and Biralbo's identities blend into one, blurring the distinction between the two and making it difficult for the reader to know whose versions of events is being told. The narrator becomes both an author and an interpreter of ambiguous events, forced to piece together the details of Biralbo's life from disjointed and unreliable sources. In this way, he is similar to the actual reader of the text, who must also construct his own version of events out of the unreliable and biased version of the narrator.⁵ Rich also examines the significance of the various filmic intertexts throughout to claim that all such references underscore the cinematic nature of the characters themselves and of the world in which they live. He thus concludes that it is not a detective novel but rather one of development that examines the textual nature of reality. His analysis upholds Muñoz Molina's own claim that El invierno en Lisboa is not in any way a *novela negra*, but is instead a type of work that avoids generic classifications.⁶

Cinema, Imitation, and Narrative Agency

If cultural theorists have criticized aspects of mass culture for being temporal, deceptive, and manipulative, then how does Muñoz Molina use and incorporate them into his novel? Does he attempt to vindicate mass culture from its negative connotations or is he also critical of its detrimental qualities? On a first reading, mass culture in El invierno en Lisboa seems to be positively regarded by different characters who delight in the music, movies and popular texts that they consume. As has been noted by the aforementioned critics, references to the cinema appear throughout and the protagonists often compare themselves to film characters. On numerous occasions their dialogue imitates that of movie scenes, underlining the connection between their reality and the cinematic world while suggesting that they consciously strive to be like their filmic counterparts in both speech and behavior. As Rich observes, this reflects Muñoz Molina's belief that the contemporary subject is greatly influenced by film.⁷

It is important to note that the cinematic vision of the entire novel originates from a narrator who invents many of the dialogues of his protagonists and presents them as if they really happened; since Biralbo's story is incomplete and fragmented, the narrator fills in its missing gaps with imagery and dialogue that he borrows from the cinema. The reader is thereby confronted with an inexact story filtered through the narrator's subjective interpretation of events, which in turn is mediated by ideas and imagery derived from films. The narrator's appropriation of cinematic imagery reveals his appreciation of the narrative function of the cinema and also suggests that he considers it to be a legitimate and empowering tool of writing, an appropriate way to recreate a reality that is significantly mediated by mass culture. The narrator thus seems to regard it as a meaningful entity and uses it to help construct his tale as he attempts to achieve agency through the act of narration.

However, other allusions to mass culture undermine its authority as a narrative device. From the outset, the cinema is related to forgetfulness, inebriation, and to an unreal sensation of

living in an alternate reality. Describing his first encounter with Malcolm, the narrator associates deception with the cinema as he depicts himself as an actor with no explicit direction (25). He acknowledges that many of his thoughts seem to originate in movie scenes and admits that he sometimes has trouble distinguishing between reality and the cinema.⁸ Many other passages also blur the boundaries between the two, raising questions about the narrator's ability to accurately describe events and suggesting that much of what he passes on to the reader did not really happen. This highlights the fictitious nature of his narration and reinforces the cinema's influence on his discourse, rendering it untrustworthy because his "text" turns out to be largely an imitation of different cinematic conventions.

In particular, conventions of *film noir* abound as the main characters are depicted as types associated with this genre, including the cynical musician, the femme fatal, the street-wise bartender, the criminal mastermind and the hit man. They are flat Hollywood figures that are described in a movie-like fashion: Biralbo is the pessimistic hero who must constantly escape danger: "...[Biralbo salía] como salían los héroes de las películas..." (141) Lucrecia is a dangerous and mysterious woman always on the move, a "...mujer fantasma. Muy impaciente. Enciende muchos cigarrillos y los abandona a la mitad. *Phantom Lady*. ¿Has visto esa película?" (82) She is portrayed as an impatient ghost or a shadow that disappears as quickly as it appears. Malcolm is like an obsessed private investigator that relentlessly pursues Biralbo in order to find Lucrecia, and Toussaints Morton is described as a cinematic gangster through his rough demeanor and curious manner of speech. These and other descriptions reveal that the narrator's characterization of the protagonists is mostly derived from the movies. His efforts to create an autonomous text are thereby undermined as the characters are generally depicted as one-sided personalities that rarely demonstrate qualities atypical of their models.⁹

The narrator's descriptive passages are also characteristically cinematic and he often describes everything as if he were looking through the eye of a camera. He portrays the protagonists as being fans of the movies, and so doing projects his affinity for the cinema onto others. He thus tries to create a collective recognition of the importance of film in order to help him establish a more authorial and convincing tone in his own narration.

Music and cinema are also associated with each other throughout the novel and influence the narrator's perception. Music often functions as a spark that ignites the narrator's cinematically mediated memory:¹⁰

Constantemente la música me acuciaba hacia la revelación de un recuerdo, calles abandonadas en la noche, un resplandor de focos al otro lado de las esquinas, sobre fachadas con columnas y terraplenes de derribos, hombres que huían y que se perseguían alargados por sus sombras, con revólveres y sombreros calados y grandes abrigos como el de Biralbo.

Pero ese recuerdo que agravaron la soledad y la música no pertenece a mi vida, estoy seguro, sino a una película que tal vez vi en la infancia y cuyo título nunca llegaré a saber. Vino de nuevo a mí porque en aquella música había persecución y

había terror, y todas las cosas que yo vislumbraba en ella o en mí mismo estaban contenidas en esa sola palabra, *Burma...* (21-22)

The narrator again recognizes that the images that music provokes in his mind pertain to the films that he has seen rather than to his own experience, which reaffirms the cinema's influence over his perception and casts doubt over his ability to accurately remember the past. As before, images from *film noir* fill his thoughts as music recalls the persecution, terror, abandonment, guns and clothing typical of this genre. He acknowledges this phenomenon and ponders the textual and fallible nature of memory, questioning his recollection and undermining his credibility as storyteller in the process.

The allusions to cinema throughout the novel help create the figure of a storyteller that attempts to decipher the mystery of Biralbo's tale by reinventing it and filling in its missing gaps with content and imagery taken from the movies. The narrator seems to consider elements of mass culture to be legitimizing devices with which he can create an appealing and credible work of his own. However, his narrative is shown to be so derivative and dependent upon other texts that its credibility is compromised and the process of narration is ultimately depicted as an act of imitation. The novel's lack of resolution also suggests that mass cultural conventions are invalid narrative codes that cannot accurately decipher reality or recognize truth, but rather only lead to the proliferation of more fictions that may or may not be misleading. The use of a drunk, unreliable, and memory-less narrator who embraces them may thus be interpreted as a reflection on this type of discourse: even as he attempts to create an autonomous text by incorporating it into his narrative, mass cultural discourse, rather than enlighten the narrator, only alienates him further from the truth as he loses track of the real events of his protagonist's life.

By portraying an unreliable narrator who seeks agency through the process of writing, Muñoz Molina inscribes his text in a postmodern context in which the notion of literary credibility is challenged. In regards to the narrator, the novel portrays mass culture to be a fictitious construct that is ultimately incapable of seeking out and defining truth. The work thus asks whether narrative fiction has any discursive validity, or if it is simply another form of art that has no epistemological legitimacy. In this work Muñoz Molina seems skeptical about literature's power to decipher reality and therefore points out that all styles of writing are in fact textual fabrications. His uncertain narrator thereby exemplifies many of the limitations of written discourse and metaphorically represents literature's inability to convey or define truth.

Mass Culture, Love, and the Illusion of Happiness

Besides being depicted as an unreliable mode of narration, mass cultural discourse is also shown to be problematic in terms of the novel's representation of love. A shared affection for cinema and popular music distances Lucrecia and Biralbo from the other characters and becomes one of the pillars on which they form their relationship. Malcolm jealously declares that Lucrecia's high regard of the fictional world of movies, books and music united her with Biralbo and compromised her marriage:

Hablabais mucho, lo hacíais para poder miraros a los ojos, conocíais todos los libros y habíais visto todas las películas y sabíais los nombres de todos los actores y de todos los músicos, ¿te acuerdas? Yo os escuchaba y me parecía siempre que estabais hablando en un idioma que no podía entender. Por eso me dejó. Por las películas y los libros y las canciones. (133)

He compares these texts to a language that he cannot understand, claims that Lucrecia left him because he does not fit into her cultural world, and later suggests that she and Biralbo consider themselves superior to others due to their knowledge and love of this indecipherable code. Their relationship is thus constructed around different texts of mass culture that in Malcolm's view forms a special bond between them and alienates others. He also asserts that they seek out the fantasy offered by mass culture because they consider their own reality to be unattractive and poor (141).

Throughout the novel Biralbo and Lucrecia actively try to incorporate mass cultural texts into their lives because they seem to believe that they make their existence more meaningful. For them, mass culture is a constructive entity, an important part of their daily lives and a staple that binds them together. It provides them with a common interest around which they can form a relationship, offers a temporary escape from reality, sets them apart from others, and increases their sense of self-definition.¹¹ In this manner, their attraction to each other echoes Fredric Jameson's assertion that popular texts can provide a foundation around which social relations and identities can be developed. In Biralbo and Lucrecia's case, the novel appears to paint a positive portrait of the association between mass culture and the construction of identity.

Nevertheless, aspects of mass culture are also portrayed as problematic throughout the text, for they do not provide the protagonists with security or stability and only fill their minds with delusions of unrealizable dreams. Both Biralbo and Lucrecia harbor romanticized visions of love that they cannot experience, never spend much time with each other, and can only establish transient friendships and temporary relationships that have fleeting significance. While separated, both characters idealize their time together in such a manner that their recollection is tainted and their memory becomes fictionalized. When they finally meet in Lisbon after having spent a few years apart, they discuss the impossibility of ever again achieving the happiness that they once knew together:

Porque sólo buscábamos cosas imposibles. Nos daba asco la mediocridad y la felicidad de los otros. Desde la primera vez que nos vimos te notaba en los ojos que te morías de ganas de besarme.

--No tanto como ahora.

--Me estás mintiendo. Nunca habrá nada que sea mejor que lo tuvimos entonces.

--Lo será porque es imposible.

--Quiero que me mientas—dijo Biralbo—. Que no me digas nunca la verdad. — Pero al decir esto ya estaba rozando los labios de Lucrecia. (167)

The night that they spend together in Lisbon is a momentary realization of a fantasy that Biralbo had dreamed about for several years. However, it is short-lived because he claims that his continued presence would endanger her life and insists on leaving the next morning. Biralbo asks Lucrecia to lie and to never tell him the truth, and so doing implies that he does not want to experience the reality of her presence even though he finally has the chance to stay with her for a prolonged period of time. In this manner he visualizes their relationship as a fiction, as a dream or a fantasy that adds an element of intensity and passion to his life that might disappear if they were to stay together. Even though he is aware of its falsity, he seems to prefer this dream over the possibility of confronting the monotony of an inferior reality. His decision to leave Lucrecia after having finally found her reflects his predilection for illusion and reinforces his attempt to ignore truth by embracing fantasy. His affinity for fiction (mass culture/ fantasy/ melodrama) thus becomes a filter that displaces reality and renders their chances of definitively staying together impossible.

Even so, on several occasions Biralbo also describes his attempt to get beyond his love for Lucrecia. When he recounts his story to the narrator, he maintains that he has finally gotten over his addiction to illusion and defines both happiness and perfection as popular superstitions:

—Me he librado del chantaje de la felicidad—dijo Biralbo tras un breve silencio, mirando a la camarera, que nos daba la espalda. Desde que empezamos a beber en la barra del Metropolitano yo había estado esperando que nombrara a Lucrecia. Supe que ahora, sin decir su nombre, estaba hablándome de ella. Continuó--: De la felicidad y de la perfección. Son supersticiones católicas. Le vienen a uno del catecismo y de las canciones de la radio. (14)

Claiming to no longer believe in such things, Biralbo criticizes religion and popular songs for creating deceptive ideals, distorting reality and encouraging people to develop unreliable systems of belief. He leads his interlocutor to believe that he has reevaluated the role of popular culture in his life and is now trying to forget about his romanticized past: he thereby attempts to reject his cult to fantasy in order to seek out a new and more realistic existence. However, his efforts are undermined as the ending of the work reveals that he cannot really escape from history as Toussaints relentlessly pursues him: he is trapped in a circle that connects him to his former identity and is ultimately forced to accept the fact that he cannot really forget about his past.

The novel's representation of the negative connotations of mass culture lies mainly in its promotion of an alternate and illusory reality that separates the subject from the truth and leads him into a cycle of unrealized desire. Some ideas of the Frankfurt theorists who thought that mass culture unified thought and filled the mind with delusions of false ideals are thus represented in the novel by both the characterization of the protagonists and by the way in which the narrator attempts to appropriate mass culture as a discursive tool of writing. Even though Lucrecia and Biralbo appreciate mass culture early on in their relationship, their inability to establish a permanent relationship and their constant displacement nullifies its favorable depiction. El invierno en Lisboa may therefore be read as a novel in which the protagonists

maintain an ambiguous relationship with mass culture, for even though they embrace the illusion that it offers, they also realize that it is a misleading and deceptive form of discourse.

Cinema, radio songs, and the fantasy associated with mass culture are thus depicted as potentially harmful constructs due to their deceiving nature that distances the subject from objective reality. Music also has a significant presence throughout the text. The analysis of music's role in the novel provides insight on artistic production, explores the essence of art as an oral or a written phenomenon, and also examines the problematic relationship between fiction and memory. The representation of music in El invierno en Lisboa highlights the protagonist's attempts to achieve agency through performance as well as mass culture's connection to memory, resulting in more reflection on the mediation of perception and on the various influences that pop culture can have on the conscious.

Music, Escapism, and Alienation

References to music and popular song throughout also have a significant role in the novel's exploration of the relationship between memory and artifice. The story centers around jazz, a musical genre that dwells somewhere in between high and low classifications. Although jazz is generally considered to be an evolved type of mass culture characterized by repetition and improvisation, it began to acquire a new status as a highly stylized and intellectual music in the second half of the twentieth century and is now considered by many to be an exceptional form of high culture. Muñoz Molina believes that authors and jazz musicians alike must meticulously study their art in order to present an appearance of spontaneity in their work that conceals their expertise. He has written about the impulsiveness and ingenuity of jazz musicians to suggest that writers also must experience a similar type of inspiration when they compose literature, maintaining that the creative drive requires a special kind of aesthetic sensibility that both kinds of artists must choose to embrace: "Del jazz pueden aprenderse algunos secretos y algunos comportamientos muy útiles para la escritura, pero no es obligatorio escribir sobre jazz para cultivarlos: lo que hace falta es ser íntimamente un *jazzman*, y esa elección estética implica sin remedio una actitud moral." (*Jazz* 23) This moral attitude involves the incorporation of the spontaneous emotion and "swing" typical of jazz music, qualities that can make their texts meaningful and turn them into better works of art. Nevertheless, he also asserts that both musician and writer realize that their art ceases to exist as soon as its production ends, and as such its beauty lies in the fleeting moment of an unrepeatable present:

Cuando sucede el *swing*, al músico y a quien lo oye lo exalta una simétrica sensación de presente que es irrepitible. Lo que está sonando ahora mismo nunca más sonará igual que ahora, y quien toca esa música sabe que nunca volverá a tocarla, y quien la oye es trastornado por la certeza de que ese instante nunca volverá. El *jazzman* trabaja a este lado de la frontera del silencio, y cuando se encienden las luces de la sala el público se retira y enciende cigarrillos y ya nadie podrá repetir lo que ha sucedido, pero ese es el privilegio de las artes cuya materia es el tiempo. El escritor escribe, y sus palabras serán impresas y parecerá que duran, pero también eso es mentira: las palabras no existen más allá del momento en que se las escribe, no valen cuando uno ha dejado de leerlas, a no ser que sigan

existiendo en la memoria y en el corazón del lector como el recuerdo inexacto de una música. (*Jazz* 24)

In this manner the author links music and literature together to suggest that both are regulated by the emotional pulse of the artist and significantly lose presence after the moment in which their production ceases. He thus views them as temporal arts that leave only fragmented images in the mind of the reader/ listener, and asserts that their beauty can only be truly experienced by witnessing their spontaneous composition. Memory is thereby incapable of accurately capturing the entire meaning or intensity of any performance. This correlation of music, writing and recollection has an interesting manifestation in *El invierno en Lisboa*, for Biralbo's discourses on the temporal nature of music and memory echo the author's deliberations concerning the impossibility of remembering the experience produced during a live performance.

El invierno en Lisboa presents jazz as if it were a form of high culture, evidenced by the narrator's idealization of his musical hero and by its appreciation by a select group of characters. For Ana Carlota Larrea, by centering his novel on a jazz musician, the author creates a unique kind of text that lies somewhere between the traditional classifications of high and low literature. (208) Music throughout the text is indeed favorably depicted on several occasions. From the beginning, the narrator admires Biralbo's ability to play apparently without thinking or demonstrating technique as his music floats along and changes shape, creating an illusion of randomness that conceals his experience and preparation. The narrator also believes that Biralbo's songs often tell stories (10), suggesting that music itself has an inherently narrative function. As previously discussed, music helps form images in the narrator's mind that awaken his memory and activate his cinematic imagination, allowing him to dramatize and reconstruct the plot of his own text.

Music is also related to escapism as Biralbo experiences a kind of therapeutic power while performing that distances him from the exterior world and enables him to explore unknown regions of his psyche. He describes the sensation of playing to the narrator:

Aquel verano, me explicó dos años después, había empezado a darse cuenta de que la música ha de ser una pasión fría y absoluta. Tocaba de nuevo regularmente, casi siempre solo y en el Lady Bird, notaba en los dedos la fluidez de la música como una corriente tan infinita y serena como el transcurso del tiempo: se abandonaba a ella como a la velocidad de un automóvil, avanzando más rápido a cada instante, entregado a un objetivo impulso de oscuridad y distancia únicamente regido por la inteligencia, por el instinto de alejarse y huir sin conocer más espacio que el que los faros alumbran, era igual que conducir solo a medianoche por una carretera desconocida. (54)

Music is now characterized as a cold and absolute passion that flows through Biralbo like the current of a river. Overcome while performing, he is swept away in its fluidity and escapes into an unexplored space metaphorically compared to a dark highway. On one hand, this escapism seems to be beneficial for performance allows him to enter an alternate reality described as fluid

and serene like the passage of time, unreserved yet controlled by intelligence. On the other hand, it is also directed by a dark impulse that increasingly gains velocity, implying that danger is intrinsically connected to the artistic impulse. Biralbo's passion for performance represents the actualization of his unrestrained emotion and it thus becomes the vehicle through which he attempts to escape from the negative realities of his world. However, the novel also implies that the release of such emotion can be potentially damaging if it starts to spin out of control.

Biralbo's attraction to Lucrecia also has a significant influence on the development of his musical talent. When he tells the narrator of his decision to abandon teaching and return to performing, he recognizes that Lucrecia not only inspires his erotic desire but is also the primary reason that he attempts to perfect his musicianship:

... Pensó que únicamente había aprendido a tocar el piano cuando lo hizo para ser escuchado y deseado por ella: que si alguna vez lograba el privilegio de la perfección sería por lealtad al porvenir que Lucrecia le había vaticinado la primera noche que lo oyó tocar en el Lady Bird, cuando ni él mismo pensaba que le fuera posible parecerse algún día a un verdadero músico, a Billy Swann.
--Ella me inventó—dijo Biralbo una de las últimas noches, cuando ya no íbamos al Metropolitano--. Yo no era tan bueno como ella pensaba, no merecía su entusiasmo. Quién sabe, a lo mejor aprendí para que Lucrecia no se diera cuenta nunca de que yo era un impostor... (74)

Lucrecia embodies what Biralbo perceives to be the ideal listener whose presence encourages him to refine his skill and strive towards perfection. His desire to be appreciated as an artist inspires him and he falls in love with Lucrecia because she listens to and understands his music. In this sense her character functions as a catalyst of artistic creation, but, due to her consistent absence and ambiguous relationships with Malcolm and Billy Swann, she is also connected to the potentially perilous nature of passion as described in the previous citation. She thus turns into a muse that arouses Biralbo's passionate but dangerous artistic impulse, and as time goes by, he gradually becomes more and more obsessed with her image.

Despite the enthusiasm that it inspires in its creators, music itself is portrayed as apathetic and devoid of all sentiment throughout the novel. Billy Swann tells Biralbo that the feeling that artists invest in their music has no lasting significance and that the only real compensation to the musician is the temporary satisfaction and escapism experienced during the act of performance. (72) This separation of music from emotion nullifies the possibility of achieving enduring meaning through performance as musicians are inevitably alienated from their art. This kind of alienation is also reflected in the novel by Biralbo's criticism of recordings and by the ongoing separation of the lovers, who despite Malcolm's death are unable to realize their love and get caught up in an unending cycle of displacement and isolation. Music is thereby generally characterized as a powerful and impersonal force that can inspire great passion but can also estrange the artist. Lucrecia's association with passion, elusiveness, and her role as a potentially destructive muse also recalls some theoretical characteristics of mass culture and reinforces the alienating nature of music.

Live Performance, Recordings, and the Repression of Memory

Biralbo's discourses on the value of music as a live phenomenon throughout the novel also suggest that recorded music can be detrimental to the subject. His appreciation for live performance and professed disdain for recordings inverts the traditional binary that characterizes high and low art as permanent or temporary entities. Biralbo's idea of valuable music is precisely that which has no ties to the past, expresses the emotion of the present, and disappears the moment that the concert ends. Commenting on the temporal nature of music, he tells the narrator:

—Pero un músico sabe que el pasado no existe... Esos que pintan o escriben no hacen más que acumular pasado sobre sus hombros, palabras o cuadros. Un músico está siempre en el vacío. Su música deja de existir justo en el instante en que ha terminado de tocarla. Es el puro presente.

--Pero quedan los discos.—...

--He grabado algunos con Billy Swann. Los discos no son nada. Si son algo, cuando no están muertos, y casi todos lo están, es presente salvado. Ocurre igual con las fotografías. Con el tiempo no hay ninguna que no sea la de un desconocido. Por eso no me gusta guardarlas. (13)

Biralbo believes that recordings are nothing more than relics of the past, are associated with death, only represent a captured time frame and are far removed from the reality of current experience. Recorded music thereby has little significance for it only recollects by-gone meanings that are no longer relevant to the present. This underscores music's nature as a temporal signifier and suggests that performance is more valuable than written texts. The act of recording is thus presented as a stale method of expression with little importance, inferior to the spontaneity and emotional intensity of live performance.

Biralbo's criticism of recorded music also partly stems from the sentimental experience that he associates with not performing, listening to albums and writing letters. When Lucrecia leaves San Sebastián, he stops playing in clubs and teaches music for a period of three years. It is during this time that her memory haunts him as he daily awaits the arrival of her next letter. Her prolonged absence starts to make him feel like he no longer really exists (19), and as her correspondence begins to arrive less and less frequently, he gradually secludes himself at home and spends most of his time writing letters and listening to records: "...se encerraba con llave y ponía discos. Había comprado a plazos un piano vertical, pero lo tocaba muy poco. Prefería tenderse y fumar oyendo música. Nunca en su vida volvería a escuchar tantos discos y a escribir tantas cartas." (43) The emotions experienced while waiting for Lucrecia to contact him again are thus connected to written culture (recordings and letters), distance and passivity as he takes refuge in listening, reading, and writing letters to while away his time. These texts become the physical reminders of his relationship to Lucrecia, the only concrete objects linking him to the past, and he eventually learns to distrust them as he realizes that they never make him feel any better. When his last letter comes back to him postmarked "return to sender," he thinks that their relationship is over, resolves to put the past behind him and starts performing again.

Nevertheless, Biralbo's passion is awakened anew after Lucrecia eventually returns from Berlin and asks him to help her flee San Sebastian. The narrator links recorded music and memory together when his two protagonists drive away from the city together, suggesting that Biralbo purposely brings tapes with him in order to help rekindle their former love:

...miraba de soslayo sus manos que manejaban la radio o subían el volumen de la música cuando sonaba una de aquellas canciones que otra vez eran verdad, porque habían encontrado en el automóvil de Floro—también es posible que él las dejara premeditadamente allí—antiguas cintas grabadas en el Lady Bird de los mejores tiempos, cuando aún no se conocían, cuando tocaron juntos Billy Swann y Biralbo y ella se acercó al final y le dijo que nunca había oído a nadie que tocara el piano como él. Quiero imaginar que también oyeron la cinta que fue grabada la noche en que Malcolm me presentó a Lucrecia y que en el ruido de fondo de las copas chocadas y las conversaciones sobre el que se levantó la aguda trompeta de Billy Swann quedaba un rastro de mi voz. (98)

The music of the tapes evokes a nostalgic image in the narrator's mind that does not correspond to the reality of the present, a present in which Lucrecia is decidedly cold and uninterested in engaging in another romantic encounter with Biralbo. This scene constitutes another imaginative creation of the narrator in which he attempts to impose his opinion of recorded music as a meaningful form of expression onto his protagonist. By speculating on the possible significance of the tapes and inventing the details of the action, the narrator once again fictionalizes the discourses of the other characters and undermines the credibility of his text.

Biralbo's reaction against the "written" and recorded music in general may thereby be related to his alienation from Lucrecia during the period of her absence: as her presence fades, he attempts to wipe away her memory by discarding written culture and returning to the world of performance. In an attempt to erase her from his recollection, he begins to repress his sentimental memories and tells the narrator that he aspires to be like a movie hero that has no personal history.¹² When Billy Swann later encourages him to forsake his sedentary lifestyle and go on tour with him, he decides to give up teaching and start playing again. His decision to leave the past behind and return to performing reveals his persistent appreciation for the temporality, focus on the present, escapist nature, and lack of historical consciousness associated with mass culture, and he in turn becomes a metaphorical representative of these qualities. This "return to performance" also reflects his desire to live in an eternal present with no significant ties to the past.

Nevertheless, Biralbo's attempts to forget the past are eventually undermined as he realizes that memory can never be completely repressed:

Entendió que era mentira el olvido y que la única verdad, desalojada por él mismo de su conciencia desde que abandonó San Sebastián, se había refugiado en los sueños, donde la voluntad y el rencor no podían alcanzarla, en sueños que le presentaban el antiguo rostro y la invulnerable ternura de Lucrecia tal como los

había conocido cinco o seis años atrás, cuando ninguno de los dos había perdido aún el coraje ni el derecho al deseo y a la inocencia. (151)

He recognizes that his attempts to ignore the past are futile and that he cannot truly overcome his persistent feelings for Lucrecia. He discovers that dreams can give some meaning to his existence as they enable him to temporarily re-experience some of the amorous feelings that he has lost touch with over time. Biralbo ultimately understands that memory can be partially recovered through such fictional simulations: even though dreams are fantasies, the illusion that they offer still allows him to momentarily experience love. Dreams are thereby characterized as kinds of fictions that can create meaning and temporarily improve the present.

The novel's examination of memory's ability to accurately represent truth indeed forms the crux of its subject matter. Memory throughout is generally portrayed as fallible and mediated by different genres of mass culture (cinema, music, and recordings). Recognizing dreaming as a meaningful creative process undermines Biralbo's previous discourse on the suppression of memory, and also implies that some existential comfort may be secured through fictional production. The work can thereby be read as a novel of development in which the protagonist evolves from trying to repress history to acknowledging the benefits of its fictional recuperation: memory and fiction are thus inevitably intertwined and can have a positive influence on present experience. The treatment of history and memory throughout the novel thereby suggests that all acts of recollection are necessarily influenced by fictions, but that they are nevertheless still valid ways of revisiting the past and attempting to decipher reality. In accordance with Gianni Vattimo's assertion that history is made up of a never ending series of intertexts, the novel proposes that even though perception is always mediated by textuality, fictional creation is still a viable way for the subject to achieve some sense of agency and spiritual comfort.

Conclusions

The meanings stemming from the various manifestations of mass culture throughout *El invierno en Lisboa* primarily draw attention to the author's preoccupation with the mediation of perception. Biralbo's psychological progression from rejecting history and embracing the anti-historical nature of mass culture to acknowledging the role that it can have in the process of recollection marks his implicit approval of the use of fiction in the recuperation of lost memory. Viewed in relation to the historical context of Spain's transition to democracy, the novel allegorically represents the mentality of a neo-democratic society that repressed some aspects of its political past in order to facilitate the establishment of the new democracy, addresses the significant presence of the various mass cultural texts that appeared alongside the country's rapid immersion in a global consumerist economy, and examines some of the positive and negative consequences that these changes may have had on the general public psyche. In aesthetic terms, Muñoz Molina incorporates different elements of mass culture into his novel in order to question the possibility of representing truth through the act of narration. The novel asks whether true agency can be achieved through the creative process even though it recognizes that perception is inevitably mediated by culture.

The narrator, Biralbo and Lucrecia embrace mass culture in various ways and seem to believe that it has a beneficial presence in their lives. However, positive representations of mass culture are also undermined as it is consistently linked with uncertainty, illusion, and displacement throughout. The narrator uses imagery derived from popular texts in an attempt to establish his authorial voice and legitimize his narration, but the imitative nature of his descriptive passages, the stereotypical characterization of the protagonists, and the recognition of his cinematically mediated thought also emphasize the derivative character of his narrative and thus weaken its credibility. His admitted confusion over what is real and what is not leads the reader to question the veracity of the entire narration, which undermines his authority and casts doubt on fiction's ability to accurately represent truth. The ambiguous resolution and the continued persecution of the protagonists at the end of the novel only further highlight the inability of mass cultural discourses to resolve conflict and provide narrative closure.

Even though they construct their relationship around a shared affection for films and music, Biralbo and Lucrecia's inability to establish a permanent union along with their continuous displacement strengthens the connections between mass culture, alienation and instability. Both characters possess qualities similar to those theoretically attributed to mass culture: Lucrecia, (the feminine), is portrayed as a femme fatal who inspires a dangerous passion that infatuates Biralbo and instigates his artistic drive. When she is with him, time passes in an intense present that recalls the temporality and lack of historical consciousness of mass culture, and she becomes a symbol of the passion, desire, and fantasy that Biralbo seeks. Significantly, he seems to prefer the values that she represents over the reality of her presence and keeps her image mentally alive by romanticizing their sentimental history. A modified image of the past thus affects his behavior as he consistently runs away from the actuality of the present.

Biralbo is portrayed as an adventurous and cinematic hero who is admired by a narrator that wants to take part in his life experiences. At first, Biralbo embraces popular texts and performance because they enable him to forget about the past and exist in a dream-like present. His criticism of recorded music parallels his desire to repress memory, and for most of the novel he actively suppresses the recuperation of the negative emotions associated with his sentimental history. Believing that the present is more meaningful than the past, he shuns his former identity and strives to live only for the moment. His behavior reflects *el pasotismo* of the era and his character accordingly may be seen as a metaphorical representative of a Spanish public that largely ignored political discourse during the initial years of the Transition. However, by the end of the novel Biralbo realizes that memory cannot truly be forgotten and he starts to selectively fictionalize his recollection. His renewed acknowledgement of the importance of memory suggests that although history cannot be totally disregarded, it can be mediated by fiction in order to improve present experience.

The temporal discourses throughout the text also provide insight on the relationship between types of culture and artistic agency. The present is depicted as a meaningful time frame in which subjectivity can be achieved through the act of creative production. In the novel, the dichotomy between past and present parallels the separation of high and low culture in which the former is associated with permanence and the latter with changeability. Here, the more passive

actions of listening and reading are delegated to the realm of written culture and the active measures of performing and creating to the oral, implying a rejection of the stability of the high in favor of the temporality associated with the low. As such, performance and narration ultimately give some meaning to the protagonists' lives in spite of their essentially illusory and transitory natures.

When viewed in relation to some of Molina's other novels that also challenge the accuracy of historical memory (*Beatus Ille*, *Beltenebros*, and *El jinete polaco* among others), this analysis shows how *El invierno de Lisboa* examines the same theme through the exploration of the affiliation between the process of narration and some of the values theoretically associated with mass culture. Biralbo's animosity towards the past and his deliberations on memory may be interpreted as a metaphor for Spain's problematic relationship with historical discourse during the first few years of the political transition. Seen in this manner, he becomes symbolic of a newly democratic society that struggles with its own history as it fictionalizes some aspects of its past in an attempt to create a new and progressive present.

The various discourses related to mass culture throughout the novel do not overtly criticize it as an artistic genre, for it is represented both positively and negatively and also forms an integral component of the work's identity. Instead, they highlight the growing influence that all kinds of cultural texts can have on people and communities across the western world. The novel focuses on mass culture's role in the fictionalization of memory and on the consequences that such mediation can have on the conscious. Exposing the affinities between art and reality in a typically postmodern fashion, *El invierno en Lisboa* blurs the boundaries between them to heighten the reader's awareness of the textual nature of perception. Muñoz Molina's text also reveals mass culture's increasing presence and influence on literary works, which suggests that the author may be intentionally deconstructing the theoretical divisions between high and low culture in his novel in order to show that such terminology is no longer a legitimate means of defining contemporary art. As such, *El invierno en Lisboa* implies that the frontier between the high and the low no longer exists, and thereby calls for the reevaluation of all fictions that make up the collage from which contemporary history and knowledge are constructed.

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¹ Navajas comments: "De modo paralelo, en *El invierno en Lisboa*, el tratamiento irónico concluye en una visión integrativa. Hay también una resolución del enfrentamiento de figuras contrapuestas con la muerte violenta de Malcolm en su disputa en el tren con Biralbo, que cita escenas similares del cine de Hollywood.... (228-29)

² Larrea describes the influence that film noir has on the novel: "Apart from several intratextual references to movies and movie going, the genre of *film noir* provides the novel with its narrative framework. Traces of *film noir* can be found both in the type of story told, and in the way the story is told. The story unfolds as a flashback, told by a first person narrator whose name is never mentioned.... In the tradition of *film noir*, Biralbo becomes involved in a series of situations that will put his life in danger because of his relationship to the woman... Like *film noir*, the novel is characterized by a feeling of suspense and threat, and a sense of doom hovers over the protagonist." (31-32)

³ González concludes: "En resumen, la repetición de palabras y situaciones en esta novela corresponden a la construcción de una parodia del mito de Orfeo. La ambivalencia del narrador y su peculiar interpretación de los hechos logran revelar el texto como una construcción artística. Un triángulo de muerte, arte y amor articula las bases del mito de Orfeo. La obsesiva ordenación de la novela a partir de una personalidad solitaria, aunque sus episodios aparezcan de manera fragmentada en la memoria del narrador, simula el movimiento reiterado de la música en la que no puede detectarse el sentido sin la repetición. Aunque se ha dicho que en nuestro siglo la

mayoría de las versiones del mito órfico se reducen a una historia de amor, Muñoz Molina ha elaborado un texto que, parodiando la relación amorosa, se proyecta con la imagen del músico que imita a otro músico, sin trascender las limitaciones del crimen y la muerte. La trama no está sujeta al cierre final, como si el narrador quisiera que la carrera infernal de Biralbo no terminara nunca. La novela consigue alcanzar, como la música, un presente continuo que puede concebirse como interpolación de la atemporalidad dentro del tiempo, una noción muy parecida al eterno retorno, donde las diferencias tienden a repetirse infinitamente.” (52)

⁴ Commenting on the author’s examination of the concept of originality, Spires proposes: “Muñoz Molina may be suggesting that what is needed in literature are linguistic constructs that de-emphasize the importance of information based on new plots or surprising twists. The unexpected turn of events was not a part of oral literature, and he seems to be striving for a minstrel effect by relying on familiar intertextual models in *El invierno en Lisboa*.” (222)

⁵ According to Rich, “The narration of Biralbo’s actions and thoughts is inevitably contingent on both Biralbo’s and the narrator’s imagination and memory. The narrator may attempt to “disappear” by dropping references to his “I,” but the reader is continually reminded that the account of Biralbo’s adventures is in fact the product of two limited narrators’ imaginative fantasies and subjective memories. When the narrator insists that he “sees” rather than “imagines” events, he is self-consciously and ironically pointing out that the opposite is really the case.” (27)

⁶ In an interview about the novel, Muñoz Molina asserts: “No se trata en absoluto de una novela negra”. (no page number) Salabert, Juana. “Anonio Muñoz Molina califica El invierno en Lisboa, su última novela, de ‘jam-session’. *El País* 27 May 1987: n. Pag.

⁷ Lawrence Rich explains: “The narrator’s imaginative vision reflects Muñoz Molina’s belief that cinema has profoundly affected the modern psyche: “nuestra imaginación [está] contaminada por el cine” (“La cara del pasado”), given that we interpret the world through a filter of our previous “readings,” which include the films we have seen. The narrator’s memory and imagination are indeed “contaminated by the cinema” for he admits that his “recuerdo ...pertenece...a una película” (21) and the images that he evokes are typical motifs of *film noir*: abandoned streets, a stark contrast between light and dark, and men with revolvers dressed in hats and overcoats.” (82).

⁸ A good example of the blending of reality and cinema is when Biralbo describes his break-up with Lucrecia, and the narrator replies that it must have been raining: “Me dijo: <<¿Has visto cómo llueve?>> Yo le contesté que así llueve siempre en las películas cuando la gente va a despedirse... Me preguntó por qué sabía yo que aquel encuentro era el último. <<Pues por las películas>>, le dije, <<cuando llueve tanto es que alguien se va a ir para siempre>>.” (38)

⁹ Other passages also describe the characters as Hollywood types: Lucrecia is compared to an “unreal” magazine model: “Asintió, mirando los cajones abiertos, la turbia luz de la mesa de noche. Iluminada por ella, por el fervor vacío del bourbon, la cara de Lucrecia tenía esa cualidad de perfección y distancia que tienen las mujeres en los anuncios de las revistas de lujo. Parecía

más alta y más sola que las mujeres de la realidad y no miraba como ellas.” (187) The narrator describes seeing Malcolm outside of his window: “—Malcolm nos espiaba... Alguna vez lo vi rondar el portal de mi casa, como un policía torpe, ya sabes, parado con un periódico en la esquina, tomando una copa en el bar de enfrente. Esos extranjeros creen mucho en las películas.” (32-33). Toussaints Morton “Hablabo como ejerciendo una parodia del acento francés. Hablabo exactamente igual que los negros de las películas y decía ameguicano y me paguece y nos sonreía...” (52)

¹⁰ The novel begins when the music of a piano activates the memory of the narrator: “Yo estaba sentado en la barra, de espaldas a los músicos, y cuando oí que el piano insinuaba muy lejanamente las notas de una canción cuyo título no supe recordar, tuve un brusco presentimiento de algo, tal vez esa abstracta sensación de pasado que algunas veces he percibido en la música, y cuando me volví aún no sabía que lo que estaba reconociendo era una noche perdida en el Lady Bird, en San Sebastián, a donde hace tanto que no vuelvo.” (9)

¹¹ An example of their self-identification with their cinematic heroes happens when they go to the Lady Bird after Lucrecia’s return from Berlin: “...Porque habían nacido para fugitivos amaron siempre las películas, la música, las ciudades extranjeras. Lucrecia se acodó en la barra, probó el güisqui y dijo, burlándose de sí misma y de Biralbo y de lo que estaba a punto de decir y amándolo sobre todas las cosas: --Tócalo otra vez. Tócalo otra vez para mí. --Sam—dijo él, calculando la risa y la complicidad--. Santiago Biralbo.” (80)

¹² The narrator comments: “...Decía que no se acordaba nunca de San Sebastián: que aspiraba a ser como esos héroes de las películas cuya biografía comienza al mismo tiempo que la acción y no tienen pasado...” (40-41)