

THE HISPANIC AND LUSO-BRAZILIAN WORLD

(De)constructing and (Re)negotiating Identities: (Re)dressing for Carnival in Fernando Trueba's *Belle Époque* (1992)¹

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Abstract: The function and centrality of the carnival scene in Fernando Trueba's Oscar-winning film *Belle Époque* (1992) leads to a topsy-turvy, upside-down world in which traditional political, religious and social institutions are systematically subverted. In simple terms, the costumes and masks customarily associated with carnival merely provide a means for participants to hide their true identities and become something they are not. In more complex terms, the very nature of carnival establishes a displaced time in which hierarchies are undermined and the possible is juxtaposed with the improbable. As the film's main characters "re-dress" for carnival, a new atmosphere is constructed and conservative 1931 Spain is stood on its head. The paper examines the Bakhtinian descriptions of carnival and how they relate to the town celebration in *Belle Époque* to show the intentional inversion and destabilization of conventional conceptions of gender, family, religion and politics.

Key Words: Trueba (Fernando), *Belle Époque*, Spanish Cinema, Bakhtin (Mikhail), *Rabelais and His World*, carnival, subversion, inversion

Fernando Trueba's Oscar-winning film *Belle Époque* (1992) flaunts an upside-down, topsy-turvy world within which traditional social institutions of authority are subverted and a nostalgic history of conservative 1931 Spain is (re)created. While historical accuracy was by no means important for this film, the socio-historical background does provide an interesting context for a series of ironic inversions of established political, religious and social institutions. And crucial to our understanding of how Trueba is able to destabilize these institutions of authority is the film's carnival scene. Midway through the picture the town *re-dresses* for the carnival festivities, embracing new and divergent identities for the celebration. By its very nature, carnival establishes a dislocated time and is the vehicle by which hierarchies are inverted, juxtaposing the pagan with the sacred, the improbable with the possible. In *Belle Époque* the carnival scene provides a framework within which various impossibilities play out, facilitating the deconstruction of customarily-held conceptions of men and women, for example. This essay examines how the carnival scene in *Belle Époque* substantially contributes to the overt subversion of traditional and established social institutions of family, matrimony, religion and politics.

Belle Époque takes place in the sunny countryside of 1931 Spain, between the end of the Alfonso XIII's monarchy and the time when the Second Spanish Republic began to challenge the authority of the king and the Catholic Church. In the film, the monarchy is facing its final days and during this time of confusion and shifting allegiances, Fernando (Jorge Sanz) deserts from the army and proclaims allegiance to the newly-forming Republic. After escaping a tricky situation in which he is arrested by a pair of *Guardias Civiles*, Fernando meets Manolo (Fernando Fernán Gómez), a retired painter who shares his political ideology with his new young protégé. The elder Manolo describes himself as "un rebelde, infiel y libertino por naturaleza y viviendo como un circunspecto burgués" but is chiefly a light-hearted anarchist who quickly befriends the young deserter. Fernando's immediate loyalty to Manolo is obvious: he spends time at the older man's house listening to his stories and cooking for him. When Fernando is to leave he is escorted to the train station, but as Manolo's four beautiful daughters arrive from Madrid, the young man decides

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it is in his best interests to remain a bit longer.

The four daughters represent very different social roles in the film. Clara (Miriam Díaz-Aroca) is a recent widow yearning for companionship. Violeta (Ariadna Gil) dresses as a man and will only consider sex if her partner is dressed as a woman. Rocío (Maribel Verdú), the playful and glamorous one, by turns fights off *and* embraces the advances of an awkward suitor, el *maestro* Juanito (masterfully played by Gabino Diego). And young Luz (Penélope Cruz) is continuously annoyed that she is not always privy to her older sisters' confidences, mainly because they wish to protect her innocence and virginity. During the course of the film all of the young women seduce Fernando, and as these seductions play out, it becomes fairly obvious from the beginning that the traditional roles ascribed to women are inverted as Fernando, the virile, dashing young soldier, falls prey in turn to each of the beautiful and audacious sisters.

With a disorderly world the director seems to establish a general tone of mockery whose intent is destabilizing the existing political and social order. This sort of overt undermining of traditional political structures is related to an historical setting that helped to sustain and reinforce the long-established view of the monarchy and the dictatorship—only to be subverted later. Specifically, Trueba uses the backdrop of the republican revolution to highlight a shift away from the mostly Catholic Spain (and the consecutive dictatorships of Primo de Rivera and Berenguer), eventually succeeded by the much more liberal Second Republic. As the film so enthusiastically shows, it was thought that under the progressive Republic there would be free love, divorce and a general relaxation of stringent patriarchal values. This novel idea of new liberal freedoms is indicated by Rocío who tells her sometime-boyfriend Juanito that she would prefer to wait until the Republic has arrived to marry, “[...] porque cuando venga la República habrá divorcio, así podemos divorciarnos.” While these liberal thoughts help make possible the carefree attitude and innocence as depicted in the film, history has shown that the establishment of the Republic led to disorder, violence, anarchy, and greater interest in communism. However, director Fernando Trueba and screenwriter Rafael Azcona were not really interested in historical accuracy. In one interview, Trueba declared that the failed Jaca military plot and revolt at the Cuatro Vientos airbase which helped to spark the Republican uprising in December, 1930 served as a background on which to project the story of Fernando, the young deserter: “I’m not crazy about period movies, but sometimes I like to escape from the present. This was the case with *Belle Époque*. We chose this short period of agitation and freedom in Spain’s history because it was perfect background for Fernando’s story. But it is just background, I hate historical movies. I don’t want to give anybody history lessons” (qtd. in Jordan 302). Thus, within the confusing and quickly changing political landscape, it makes sense that the film centers on Fernando, who can be viewed as the “focus and locus of *Belle Époque*’s festive inversions and potential subversions of systems of desire, control, power and authority” (Perriam 36), while history serves only as a backdrop.

And this backdrop nurtures a variety of subversions of authority. One need only look at the film’s opening scene when Fernando is captured by two *Guardias Civiles* who know that the young man is a deserter from the Jaca uprising. The Civil Guards, often seen as a symbol of repression and authority (especially during the later Franco dictatorship), are here parodied. Whereas one might expect the younger Guard to be the more open-minded and easy-going, like the younger Fernando, he instead conforms to what could be expected of the rigid military during the time. On the other hand, it is the elder Guard, Juan (the younger man’s father-in-law), who declares that since a Republic is on the way, there is little sense in detaining the deserter, especially in light of the progressive attitude that will soon engulf the countryside: “[...] y a mí me da en la nariz que el gobierno va a cambiar. [...] Y cuanto antes nos pongamos al servicio de lo que parece que va a venir, mejor.” When the younger Guard shoots his father-in-law in protest, then turns the gun on himself, the audience is made acutely aware of the high stakes involved in upholding law and order during this chaotic time. Nonetheless, the ridiculousness of the scene is not lost on the audience. Because Spanish viewers would expect these characters symbolic of repression to be very tyrannical, the film’s contrasting portrayal renders them almost caricaturesque. Is the audience supposed to be surprised when the younger man kills his father-

in-law? Yes. But, is it easy to find humor or laughter in the outrageousness of the scene? Also yes. And, is Trueba himself poking fun at these institutions of authority, showing them to be unreasonably severe—albeit in a humorous but critical way? Yes again. As Jordan has pointed out, the divided view of the despotic Civil Guards is Trueba's way of expressing his own personal views about authority in Spain: "This murderous, macho outlook arguably corresponds to Trueba's own view of traditional patriarchal (and Francoist) Spain: dogmatic, repressive, violent, incapable of dealing with intellectual argument or allowing people to live their lives freely. *Belle Époque* proposes a radically alternative, libertarian social and family model for Spain [...]" (292–93). Responding to his own experiences under Franco, Trueba seems to have set out to alter drastically the traditional political and historical landscape.

In general, the film is framed between the opening scene when Fernando is taken prisoner by the two Civil Guards and finds himself in shackles, or "esposas," and the final scene when the young deserter is married to Luz who becomes his "esposa." Between these two extremes, Fernando takes on a somewhat submissive role: he is seduced in turn by each of the sisters, is happily dressed as a maid, shows himself to be an excellent cook, and in the shuffle loses his masculine voice. Under what conditions might such inversions take place? The answer is found in the film's carnival scene which is almost exactly in the middle between these framing scenes. The carnival celebration facilitates the inverted plot structure and skewed character development that distinguishes the entire film. In carnival anything is plausible. It is a holiday when social norms are turned upside down, inside out. Generally, it is a time of the occult, the grotesque, and of confusion and opposites. Since party-goers are dressed in costumes, normal identities are blurred—even altered. It is this sort of suspension of normal behavior provided under the guise of carnival that allows Trueba poetic license to present a somewhat unbelievable story. The most well-known examination of carnival can be found in Mikhail Bakhtin's *Rabelais and His World*. According to Bakhtin, the ancient rite of carnival in early modern Europe involved fascinating traditions that mocked those in authority and parodied official beliefs about society and tradition showing this mockery to be a way of life and an expression of universal freedom: "Carnival is not a spectacle seen by the people; they live in it, and everyone participates because its very idea embraces all the people. While carnival lasts, there is no other life outside it. During carnival time life is subject only to its laws, that is, the laws of its own freedom" (7). For Bakhtin, carnival was a popular form of social participation, a seemingly irrational time of festive celebration that purposely defied accepted social norms. In short, carnival blurs the border between art and life, between reality and fantasy, and between life and death. However, carnival is not illogical. The carnival celebration is simply a suspension and subversion of conventionally accepted hierarchies: "[...] one might say that carnival celebrated temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order; it marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions. Carnival was the true feast of time, the feast of becoming, change, and renewal. It was hostile to all that was immortalized and completed" (10). As Bakhtin points out, during carnival everyone can be seen as equal: a man can become a woman, the old may be young again, the poor are rich, the spiritual can be sacrilegious, and vice versa. In simple terms, the costumes and masks customarily associated with carnival celebrations up to the present day merely provide a means for participants to hide their true identities and become something else.

In *Belle Époque*, the carnival scene takes place almost exactly midway through the film and occupies only about 10 minutes of the action. The mere chronological placement of the carnival festivities suggests the scene's centrality and significance to plot, structure and characterization. Just as carnival is a means to invert and destabilize, the placement of the celebration in the middle of the film suggests an intent and ability to undermine traditional film-making from the inside out. It should come as no surprise that the carnival celebration draws the entire town, all of whom wear some sort of masks, costumes or other disguises. For example, Rocío dresses as a beautiful, proper and innocent *señorita*, complete with tiara—characteristics that embody the opposite of her usual behavior. Her clumsy suitor, Juanito, is dressed in his grandfather's military uniform—complete with prestigious medals—no doubt qualities he cannot really acquire on his own. Even Luz is

dressed as a black maid, a disguise that may symbolize her subservience, but is at odds with her skin color.²

The most poignant example of the effects of carnival pits Violeta, dressed in Fernando's soldier uniform—the manliest of male attire—against Fernando who has assumed a docile maid's outfit. This exchange of clothing foreshadows other moments of gender inversion in the film.³ Indeed, Fernando's attire was jointly designed by all of the sisters, making it possible for them to choose the outfit and define the role he is to play (Jordan 297). Fernando does not seem the least bit dissatisfied with the outcome, perhaps because he is willing to do just about anything to impress the sisters, including wearing make-up, a wig and high heels. With some truly great acting, both Fernando and Violeta succeed in convincing the audience of their gender swap. In fact, during the carnival festivities, when they dance the tango, a very sensuous dance that symbolizes male potency and the culture of brothels (Jordan 297), they both subscribe to their new roles.⁴ As the subordinate partner, Fernando looks as if he appreciates the strong guidance from Violeta, until he realizes that the entire party is focused on him, at which point he storms off the dance floor. As Fernando flees the party, one reversal follows another, including the loss of his shoe in the street. Instead of going back for it himself he mentions the loss to Violeta, who, acting out the role of the gentleman, retrieves the shoe, bends down, and places it on Fernando's foot, thus playing out the inverted Cinderella story. Moreover, Fernando is captivated by Violeta's masculine behavior. When he declares, "¡Joder! Te has portado como un tío de verdad," the expression on his face appears to be one of intrigue, not shock; Fernando remains silent and docile as she places the shoe on his foot, running her hand along his leg. And when she kisses him, his only reply is an excited "Joder..." and a lunge toward her for another embrace, an energized motion that receives a cautious "¡Quieta!" from Violeta. It is worth pointing out that Violeta has clearly associated Fernando with the feminine maid's costume, even using the feminine form of the adjective "quieto." For his part, it is clear that Fernando is as much involved in the charade as she is.

To this point in the film, both Violeta and Fernando willingly shed the gender roles traditionally ascribed to men and women. Indeed, Fernando is essentially transformed into the ultimate erotic stereotype and object of desire. But even before re-dressing for carnival, Fernando had already occupied the role of family cook, an activity traditionally thought to belong to women.⁵ While it would seem that Violeta is the strongest example of this sort of sexual subversion, interestingly, Perriam maintains that Fernando—not Violeta—is the center of this subversive sexuality in the film: "Sanz's [Fernando's] body is the focus and locus of *Belle Époque*'s festive inversions and potential subversions of systems of desire, control, power and authority" (36). Similarly, Fernando's feminine appearance becomes the focus for Violeta who gives direction and dictates to the young man. To Fernando's—and our—astonishment, he not only revels in the attention but actually is rewarded for his effort in the following scene in the hay-loft when Violeta practically forces herself upon the young man and completes her masculine role by having intercourse with him, crowning her achievement by literally blowing his soldierly trumpet. Drawing on comments made by Paul Julian Smith, we could say that this love scene exhibits the bakhtinian combination of carnival and laughter: "This episode [...] is perhaps the film's most successfully *comic* and erotic moment. One suspects, however, that the many awards garnered from the role derived from her [Ariadna Gil's] perceived courage in Spain in playing a lesbian at all" (38, emphasis mine).⁶ Violeta's latent lesbianism can be fully appreciated keeping in mind the central carnival scene. While she dresses in men's clothing and performs normally "masculine" duties such as chopping wood or fixing the vacuum cleaner, it seems that she performs these tasks only because someone in the house must do them. That is to say, the femininity of the other sisters is strongly contrasted with the androgynous Violeta, but until the carnival scene, we never have enough clues to determine why. A closer look, however, shows that Violeta's entire life revolves around her role reversal. For example, when she is inside the house, she wears overalls and a beret, considered to be male attire. When outside, she dresses as a woman, unless she is near the family home where no one can see her—in which case she resorts

to male attire such as her hunting outfit. Furthermore, it is not until later in the film that we are told by Clara that as a child, the sisters' mother was so infatuated with having a boy in the family, instead of all girls, that she dressed the young Violeta in boy's clothes (including a sailor's uniform, another example of masculine attire), and treated her as a son.

In Spanish film of the 1990s, the portrayal of lesbianism is really nothing new but Smith's comments about the amount of rewards garnered by Ariadna Gil's rendering of Violeta do point to the excitement generated by such a role. However, such conduct by women in 1931 Spain was not common in public; thus Violeta only overtly displays her true spirit inside the house. Only in the carnival festivities would she dare dress as a man. It is worth mentioning that Violeta is a veterinary surgeon, traditionally a male profession, and her employment in Madrid helps her express her desire to dress as a man.

Another explanation for Violeta's role reversal comes from the director himself. Trueba deliberately portrayed the characters in this inverted fashion—both Violeta and Fernando—by taking a page from Billy Wilder's famous cross-dressing masterpiece *Some Like It Hot*. We know this because as Trueba accepted the 1993 Oscar for best foreign film, he clearly stated his allegiance to Wilder: "Quisiera creer en Dios para darle las gracias, pero sólo creo en Billy Wilder. Gracias, mister Wilder" (*Diario de Navarra*, 2 April 2002).⁷ Trueba's allegiance to Wilder aside, the public gender-bending and clothing exchange can be considered a construct that better reflects present-day Spain, even though women may have had the opportunity to express their sexuality in private. This is affirmed by Colmeiro and Jordan and Morgan-Tamosunas who believe that the reversal of sexual roles and identities really reflects 1992—the time that Trueba made the picture—and not 1931, the supposed time of its plot (Colmeiro 135; Jordan *et al.* 58–59).⁸ However, it is important that the pervading feeling of open-mindedness that encompassed much of Spain in these early days of the republican "revolution" was meant to be reflected in the film in such characters as Violeta. Her cross-dressing and gender re-initiation might just be exactly the type of behavior that occurred during the time simply because, as we know today, the time of Second Republic was Spain's most liberal period prior to the 1980s. Was Trueba's intent to demonstrate just how free-thinking the time was?

Nonetheless, Fernando's and Violeta's role reversal is symptomatic of many other inversions in the film. Besides the pair's latent sexuality revealing itself through their cross-dressing, the town priest, don Luis (Agustín González) also expresses his suppressed self and contributes to the overall inversion of religious and social institutions in the film. In almost all ways, he symbolizes the constantly-shifting ideological attitudes toward Spain's Catholic Church and its clergy during the time period up to present-day Spain. For example, doña Asun (Chus Lampreave), Juanito's Carlist and very Catholic mother, labels him "un cura heréjima" and Juanito calls him a disgrace to the church. Yet Don Luis is appreciated by everyone in the film because he lives like they do: he delights in swearing, gambling, smoking, drinking and feasting and is noted for his liberal attitudes—actions and attitudes not necessarily befitting someone of the cloth. There is little doubt that he is clearly Trueba's preferred version of a Catholic priest, easy-going, open, liberal, and tolerant (Jordan 295). In this fashion, don Luis is analogous to other characters in the film, given that his behavior is essentially the opposite of what one would expect of a priest during mostly-conservative 1931 Spain, a time when liberals, anarchists and communists generally opposed the authority of the conservative church.⁹ But, while don Luis's behavior can be deemed somewhat radical for the times, it cannot be said that he was alone. Not all clergy were rigidly dogmatic and some may even have been liberalized by the oncoming Republic, though probably not to the point that don Luis was.

Just as we become acquainted with the liberal-minded, friendly priest, and begin to appreciate his confidence and honesty, his character is once more overturned. In one of the film's final scenes, just as Fernando and Luz are to marry, the wedding party arrives at the church to find Don Luis has committed suicide by hanging himself from the rafters. For the audience that has come to appreciate the priest for his contentment and stability, Don Luis's suicide is surprising. The happy ending with Fernando's and Luz's wedding day is marred by the image of the likeable

priest dangling from the ceiling, his eyes partially crossed and his tongue protruding from his mouth. An unexpected twist transpires when the camera pans from Manolo to the dead priest whose clamped hand holds an autographed copy of Miguel de Unamuno's recently published *El sentimiento trágico de la vida* in which the Basque writer sets forth the reasons for his waning religious faith. We are led to believe that the priest's reading of the text pushed him over the edge to suicide, which, as Jordan states, perhaps indicates Don Luis's inability (like Unamuno's), to live with the contradiction between faith and faithlessness (295). The contradiction is further played out by the two opposing belief systems embodied in the characters of Doña Asun and Manolo. For Doña Asun, the suicide is a "castigo de Dios," for having been an unfit priest, while for Manolo his death is the liberation of the soul and a solution to the trepidation of death: "Quien se quita la vida, se quita el miedo a la muerte."

Within the rite of carnival, the priest's death should not come as a surprise. Indeed, carnival was as much a celebration of life as it was a commemoration of death. As Morson indicates, within the carnival framing, death is not death—it is not an end—but instead is a form of renewal because carnival "[...] understands the human body not as the mortal husk of an individual bound to suffering and articulated to end, but as the collective great body of the people destined to continue through all change, all history" (93). And the threat of death is no great enemy to carnival time, for death will always be superseded by everlasting life. Such is the case with Don Luis's suicide: his death is really a sort of resurrection of thought and spirit; namely, his actions in life live on after his death in the sense that it is thought that the liberal ideology of the coming Second Republic will ultimately release society from the stringent belief system imposed by some Catholic clergy, an ideological system of authority that Don Luis was fond of flouting.

Beyond challenging the established political and religious institutions, the film also subverts traditional concepts of marriage and the family, as seen in the relationship between Manolo, his daughters and their absent mother. Manolo's family make-up, unique for the 1930s, could still be considered contrary to societal expectations in present-day Spain. Besides the fact that the four daughters live a very free life-style in Madrid where they work in varied occupations, the girls' mother is practically invisible until her triumphant entrance near the end of the film. Whereas Manolo has the opportunity to take a lover during his wife's absence, he clearly states early on to Fernando that "Resulta que como sólo me empalmo con mi mujer, no he podido conculcar el matrimonio." Manolo represents another character inversion in that Spanish men in his situation in patriarchal Spain would often take a lover. But this is not the case in *Belle Époque* as Manolo is seemingly content with his wife's absence.

When one sunny morning Manolo's wife, Amalia (Mary Carmen Ramírez), finally makes her entrance in the film, the others express no surprise whatsoever that she has brought along her manager Danglard (Michel Galabru), who is also her lover. Amalia and Danglard have just returned from a less-than-successful tour of opera houses in the Americas where, strangely, she was booked as a singer of *zarzuela*, which was, at that time, largely defunct as a musical genre. Still more interesting is that she has chosen to take a rich lover, and there is little doubt that she fully controls the relationship. For their part, the sisters are fully aware and accepting of the unconventional marriage of their parents. In fact, when Amalia and Manolo slip away to the bedroom for their yearly sexual interlude, Fernando asks why Danglard is crying, to which Luz replies matter-of-factly: "¿Eres tonto? ¿No ves que es el amante de mamá?" The situation is both funny and perplexing. While the audience might be prepared to accept one man as Amalia's lover, we are not quite ready to accept both of them, especially in light of the fact that the central partner is not the husband. Such audience reaction to Manolo's family is based upon a faithful reflection of traditional views of the family unit of 1931 Spain. Indeed, as Colmeiro has pointed out, this film deviates from traditionally-ascribed roles for mothers and fathers during this period: "In *Belle Époque* the tyrannical patriarchal mother is replaced by an impotent and anarchist patriarch. The figure of the overpowering absent father is reversed by the indulgent absent mother (independently living abroad)" (137). Basically, the roles are switched, creating a powerfully amusing feature of the film that is neither expected nor easily explained except via the role of

carnival that pervades all scenes.

One might think that the unconventional relationship shared by Manolo and Amalia is directly opposed to the more traditional bond shared by doña Asun and her son, Juanito. However, their characters are as much inverted as the others: doña Asun is a waffling Carlist who turns Republican only to turn Carlist again. And while her Catholic belief is symbolic of a powerful sector of Spain during the period preceding the Second Republic, her continuous changes of political allegiance point to a much larger public whose shifting allegiances are emblematic of the drastic transformations taking place throughout the film. This is also true of Juanito who, in an effort to free himself from his overbearing mother in order to marry Rocío, decides to renounce his Catholic faith and seek excommunication from don Luis, only to rescind his renunciation later when Rocío kicks him out of her bed. Do the constantly changing religious, political and social belief systems on which the film is based faithfully express the historical background? Certainly doña Asun and Juanito, like many others in the film, are representative of character types found in Spain during the time period, just as Violeta's lesbianism or Amalia's marital arrangement certainly had precursors as well. Moreover, being Spain's most liberal time prior to the present also means that the director and screenwriter must find ways to express that progressive attitude, even by taking it to extremes. However, it is worthwhile to point out that *Belle Époque*'s history is mostly nostalgia for a time that was certainly displaced from present-day perspectives on the liberal period: "In the end, after the carnival is over, with the unmasking and removal of costumes, there only remains the memory of a time that may have seemed like paradise, but clearly is only nostalgia" (Colmeiro 139). If *Belle Époque*'s time is nostalgic, then the historical fall of the dictatorship and the realization of the Second Republic serve as reminders of a period of crisis for which carnivalesque laughter and celebration constitute an escape from reality, perfectly suited to the various character and plot inversions.

The inside-out world that carnival facilitates may appear unbelievable or illogical, but closer examination reveals that precisely that atmosphere of absurdity facilitates an entire series of plot, structure and character inversions. By its very nature, carnival constructs an imaginary world where women dress as men, conservatives become liberals, women hunt while men cook and clean, men do not have lovers, but women do, etc. And the entire range of identity restructurings is symptomatic of a larger inverted social, political and religious context that questions authority, rendering it unbelievable at times, but always entertaining. In *Belle Époque* the result is a topsy-turvy world that helps us question prevailing attitudes about men and women and which, for a time, destabilizes traditional hierarchies of power and authority. The result is a playful and interesting view of 1930s Spain, providing a means to question authority.

NOTES

¹Production: Lola Films / Animatógrafo / French Production (Spain-Portugal-France, 1992). Producer and Director: Fernando Trueba. Screenplay: Rafael Azcona, José Luis García Sánchez and Fernando Trueba. Cinematography: José Luis Alcaine. Music: Antoine Duhamel. Art Direction: Juan Botella. Editor: Carmen Frias. Featuring Penélope Cruz, Miriam Díaz-Aroca, Gabino Diego, Fernando Fernán Gómez, Michel Galabru, Ariadna Gil, Agustín González, Chus Lampreave, Mari Carmen Ramírez, Jorge Sanz, Maribel Verdú. Color – 109 minutes.

²In "La pintura española en la estética del cine: *Belle Époque*," an interesting article comparing Spanish painting to scenes in *Belle Époque*, Moreno-Nuño writes that the carnival scenes exhibit many of the same artistic qualities for which such artists as Picasso or Dalí were famous: "En el carnaval aparecen lo grotesco y lo esperpéntico adueñándose de una concepción del tiempo ahistórica, cíclica y global: [...] el maestro con el uniforme de su abuelo, [...] Luz disfrazada de criada negra, y Rocío con mantilla y peineta, en un plano medio similar a la obra de Picasso *Mujer vestida a la española* (*La Salchichota*) (1917)" (621).

³Also visible in this carnival scene, although easy to miss, are people dressed to show literary figures of the day including a man who carries another in a wheelbarrow. It seems to me that this pair is acting out the protagonists of Ramón del Valle-Inclán's *Divinas palabras*, a play in which a couple earns money by showing off their dwarfed and deformed child. However, it could also allude to Fernando Arrabal's *Fando y Lis*.

⁴Juanito reminds us that the tango has been prohibited by the Pope Pius X to which Luz replies: "Pero el Papa, ¿qué sabe de bailes?" Juanito's response is humorous: "El Papa sabe de todo. Por eso es infalible."

⁵Even the girls' mother, Amalia, wonders out loud who is such a wonderful cook since none of the sisters has

culinary talent.

⁶An important tool of carnival, laughter provides a release from official norms and values, “a special type of communication impossible in everyday life,” with “special forms of marketplace speech and gesture, frank and free, permitting no distance between those who came in contact with each other and liberating from norms of etiquette and decency imposed at other times” (Bakhtin 10). Carnavalesque laughter expresses freedom from official customs and stands in binary opposition to the authority of church and state. Laughter allows us to express amusement throughout the film—even during its most tragic moments.

⁷The following day Wilder phoned Trueba to thank him for including the elder filmmaker in his acceptance speech. Trueba recalled the moment in the following way: “Hoy, además, me ha llamado Billy Wilder y me ha dicho: ‘Fernando, soy Dios’” (*Diario de Navarra*, 2 April 2002).

⁸Collins and Perriam go a bit further to propose that the revolutionary openness suggested by Violeta’s behavior predates the film and alludes to sexual liberation in Spain which started in the 1970s, inspiring some of the most advanced representations of lesbianism in Spanish films: “With regard to the character Violeta (Ariadna Gil), she transcends the lesbian sexualities prevalent in the 1970s and 1980s, to represent an even more contemporary lesbian sexuality that is located in the queer/post-lesbian theory of the 1990s” (217).

⁹Following the argument here that characters and plot have been keenly subverted, Jordan has noted a sort of femininity about the priest, based mostly on his dress: “By his dress, i.e. by being a man in a skirt, Don Luis is to some extent already ‘feminized’; and by his very vocation, he is also neutered, having renounced sexual activity in the name of the Church” (295).

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