The Ancients Ironic Nostalgia

John D. Lyons

The Ancients' Ironic Nostalgia

John D. Lyons

'All is said, and we come too late after more than seven thousand years of men thinking', wrote La Bruyère at the beginning of *Les Caractères* (1688).[1] The vacuity of the present, the fullness of the past, the writer's apparent recognition that he cannot be an author but only repeat, or glean, fragments from antiquity — all these traits mark La Bruyère, like his fellow Ancients, as nostalgic. By remarkable coincidence, at the moment *Les Caractères* appeared in Paris, the term *nostalgia* was created by an obscure Swiss physician, Johannes Hofer. Hofer's book, *Dissertatio medica de nostalgia, oder Heimwehe* appeared in Basel. Homesickness, or *Heimweh*, was a malady well known in popular culture, but it had previously not been given medical recognition until Hofer described it as a disease of the imagination.[2] Forming the word from the Greek *nostos* and *algos* ('return' or 'travel' and 'pain'), Hofer emphasized the characteristic symptoms of the victims he had seen but also gave a 'Greek', and therefore scientifically dignified, translation of the Swiss folk name for the condition.[3] It seems strange that the longing to return to a lost home, a longing that mobilizes memory and imagination, should have entered intellectual history at the very moment when Europe saw writers in significant numbers take up their quills to extol the glories of ancient civilization and its literary culture. The Ancients of the Quarrel — Boileau, La Bruyère, Huet, Bouhours, the Daciers, Longepierre — may indeed, according to a very influential recent critic, have won the Quarrel.[4] Is there anything useful in the concept of 'nostalgia' that can contribute to understanding the Quarrel and its outcome? Can an understanding of this term allow us to situate early-modern culture with respect to the culture of the early twenty-first century, a postmodern or post-postmodern one?

The longing for the past might not have received such rapid recognition if Hofer had not had an ear for euphonious names. He considered using the alternative *philopatridomania*. The name he chose suffered the fate of many medical, and particularly, psychological terms. Its use spread outside of the original medical context and its meaning became broader and looser. 'Its success has, in the end,

robbed it of all its technical significance; it has become a literary term, thus vague,' wrote Jean Starobinski.[5] Yet, while it is true that most of us, in using the term nostalgia, do not take into account the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century medical tradition in which this condition was diagnosed particularly in conscripted soldiers, workers, and slaves, it is also true that the term did not simply become literary, it was literary from its very inception. In returning to the humanistic education of post-Renaissance Europe to create a dignified and not simply 'popular' name for *Heimweh*, Johannes Hofer himself performed a kind of *nostos*, a return to the ideal lost home of European culture. He gave a modern illness an ancient — or neo-ancient — name, and in doing so he did what the Ancients were doing in Paris at the very same time: he was creating a *new* past by playing with the present.

To be sure, Boileau, Fénelon, and La Bruyère did not know and did not use the word nostalgia to describe their position in favour of the aesthetic values of Antiquity, though they would certainly have made sense out of Hofer's simple neologism. Nor did La Bruyère, as far as we know, seek the attention of a physician to help alleviate the sense that all had been said. Instead, the Ancients embraced the 'already said' and used this consciousness or this attitude as a creative rhetorical game.

Linda Hutcheon has suggested that nostalgia and irony are neighbouring modes within postmodern thought. Both nostalgia and irony are widely perceived as major characteristics of late twentieth-century thought, she notes, but views have differed on the relationship between these two intellectual and aesthetic attitudes:

it was postmodernism that brought the conjunction of irony and nostalgia quite literally into the public eye through the forms of its architecture. The early debates focussed precisely on that conjunction in response to postmodern architecture's double-coding, its deliberate (if ironized) return to the history of the humanly constructed environment (. . .). The terms of the debate were basically as follows: was this postmodern recalling of the past an example of a conservative — and therefore nostalgic — escape to an idealized, simpler era of 'real' community values? Or did it express, but through its ironic distance, a 'genuine and legitimate dissatisfaction with modernity and the unquestioned belief in (. . .) perpetual modernization'?[6]

After reviewing the evolution of nostalgia from its original medical origin into a general longing for an imagined past that the thinker may never have experienced in any way, Hutcheon points to a major difference between irony and nostalgia: irony has a 'knowingness' that

is usually not granted to nostalgia (4). She goes on to suggest that for those intellectuals on the left who deplore the longing for, and glorification of, an unreal past 'the knowingness of (. . .) irony may be not so much a defence against the power of nostalgia as the way in which nostalgia is made palatable today: invoked but, at the same time, undercut, put into perspective' (8). In Hutcheon's view, then, nostalgia and irony remain separate attitudes or discursive ploys that can be used against one another with variations in dosage and timing. One may use one's irony against another person's nostalgia, use one's irony against one's own sincerely felt nostalgia (a kind of *autocritique* or self-medication), exploit nostalgia cynically for commercial gain while refusing to surrender to it, etc. Yet throughout, the two modes are antagonistic and are related — at least in the postmodern culture studied by Hutcheon — in a hierarchy. Irony is superior to nostalgia by its quality of knowing detachment, while nostalgia — if unleavened by irony — remains simply naïve and unaware.

Flashback to Paris, 1688. In the streets of the Marais or near the Louvre, where the Académie met, some of the forty members of this illustrious but polarized body surely passed people suffering from the very affliction diagnosed by Hofer. Those suffering, we remember, came often from Switzerland to serve in lowland cities as domestic servants or in armies, and their symptoms could be traced to their imagination and could also be treated by a modification of their imaginative outlook:

not long since it was told me by a Parisian that he himself had an Helvetian bound servant who was sad and melancholy at all times so that he began to work with lessened desire; finally, he came to him and sought dismissal with insistent entreaties, of which he could have no hope beyond him. When the merchant granted this immediately, the servant changed from sudden joy, excused from his mind these phantasma for several days, and after while remained in Paris, broken up no longer by this disease. (Hofer, 390)

So it is very possible that some such Swiss servant, longing for the simple and happy life of his village, and Boileau, thinking about the lost world of Longinus, may have crossed paths in Paris in the 1680s. What they had in common was a sense of a lost past and an unfavourable view of contemporary Paris. They both looked backward for the good, and they both found that good in their imagination. Between the woeful servant and the irascible satirist, however, there was clearly a difference, a difference of more than their purses (Boileau's was fattened by the tokens — *jetons de présence* — that he collected every

time he went to the Académie). Already in 1688 there were two ways to be nostalgic, for nostalgia is a condition of the imagination and the imagination can be controlled.

The term nostalgia can properly be applied to the Ancients if we accept the possibility of a nostalgia that is voluntary and inherently ironic. By 'inherently ironic' I mean that this attitude does not simply frame a past-oriented longing and distance the ironist from that longing but rather that truly ironic nostalgia is already a perfect awareness of distance — in fact, because distance is a *requirement* of nostalgia, irony and nostalgia are, at the highest intellectual level of the latter, entirely fused and interdependent. This paradoxical ironic nostalgia, in my view, gave the Ancients such an advantage over the Moderns that it is not surprising that later scholars such as DeJean would conclude that the Ancients won.

The Ancients, venerating the aesthetic superiority of antiquity, placed themselves in the position of the philosophical *eiron*.[7] Irony places its user in an apparent situation of inferiority vis-à-vis the interlocutor. In the case of the Ancients of 1688, the paradox was that they located the glory of writing not in their own achievements but in works of the distant past. This is a gesture of aggressive humility that had the great advantage of freeing them of responsibility to write dazzling works. La Bruyère's *Caractères*, published in January 1688, exemplifies perfectly the irony of this rhetoric that from the outset displaces all responsibility from the author:

I return to the public what it has loaned me; I borrowed from it the matter of this work: it is appropriate that, having completed it with my utmost attention to truthfulness, which the public deserves from me, I pay my debt.[8]

Nothing could be more typical of an *eiron* than the claim to originate nothing, to possess nothing that is his own, and simply to reflect the words of his interlocutor. When La Bruyère begins the first chapter of the *Caractères*, 'On literary works', with the celebrated proclamation 'All is said. . .', he demonstrates the convergence of nostalgia and irony: in both cases the speaker asserts that there is *nothing new*. The ironist claims that he is not actually saying anything but merely echoing, as faithfully as possible, the words or the thoughts of the person with whom he speaks. These thoughts are already part of the past; they are on the record. Frequently the ironist will make the conversational partner, whom Jankélévitch calls the *ironisé*, regret what he has said when confronted with the thought rephrased or simply with the words emphasized and thus displayed, but in any event the ironist

will claim to be saying, in effect, nothing new. This is precisely La Bruyère's claim in 1688 when he simply *returns* to the public what he has taken from it and when he stresses that he has striven to the utmost to pay attention to the *truth*. In this context to say that one respects truth is a reminder of the essentially passive position of the speaker. The truth is the absence of creativity, invention, or modification. It may very well be the case that some members of La Bruyère's public find discomfort or even pain in the image of themselves to which they are forced to return. But in this case the pain of return will be the pain of the listener and not that of the speaker. Admittedly this particular application of Hofer's expression is not what the physician had in mind, for the persons he studied were expressing the pain they felt, the longing they felt, for a lost place and way of life. Their speech was an expression of pain and not a cause of pain. However, the juxtaposition of La Bruyère's rhetorical position with the medical nostalgia that appeared in European culture in the same year has the advantage of revealing the movement backward that is involved in irony and nostalgia and the shift in perspective that consequently occurs. This shift in perspective happens in irony when the speaker claims to have done nothing. This 'false', that is, ironic, claim to have done nothing is coded in the use of the word 'truthfulness' (*vérité*) in La Bruyère's text. It is because I have done nothing, he seems to say, that what you, the public, have said and done, appears with perfect fidelity in my absence.

This prefatory negotiation of the author of the *Caractères* with his readers is an example of what we could call a micro-irony. It narrowly concerns the relations between speaker and listener in a text that emphasizes the contemporaneity — or the ever-so-slight lapse of time — between the description and the described: these are the 'manners of this century' (*mœurs de ce siècle*), according the subtitle of the book. This irony is that of an echo, an utterance that requires the slightest of pauses between the word and its return. But like the mythical Echo, La Bruyère is present but passive, sonorous yet mute, full of speech yet silent. La Bruyère is simply borrowing from his readers, and his only responsibility is to return without adding or subtracting anything.

The micro-irony of La Bruyère's preface is conceived within the raging Quarrel, where the position of the Ancients is founded on a larger-scale irony that we can easily recognize as such, and for which La Bruyère's first fragment serves as a slogan, 'All has been said. . .'. That everything has been said — everything that needs to be said — is

the position of the micro-ironist, but it is also the position of the Ancients, as La Bruyère makes explicit by enlarging his time frame to two thousand years. The Ancients thus disburden themselves of the need to make literary works that would prove the assertion of the superiority of their vision. Indeed, they took pleasure in the *absence* of the very literary production on which they based their case, for much of the work of antiquity had disappeared, leaving fragments. These fragments were offered as a stimulus for conceptions of what had been possible. Hence Boileau, in the preface to his translation of *On the Sublime*, begins by accentuating the incompleteness of the work of Longinus:

The little Treatise, a Translation of which I now present to the Publick, is a small Piece which escap'd the Wreck that befell several other Books composed by Longinus (. . .). Nevertheless, as disfigur'd as it is, there's enough still to give us a very great Idea of the Author, and make us heartily sorry for the Loss of his other writings.[9]

Boileau gives *only* a translation, a translation of a work that *only* exists in part, by an author whose other works are *lost*, and this part incites in us *regret*. In this nostalgic statement, Boileau need not make claims on his own behalf. He presents himself as the conduit to a lost culture which we can *conceive* but not know in any direct way.

There is something about irony that privileges gaps and empty spaces, casting the interlocutor into the position of having to try to fill the void: 'Silence, reticence and allusion give irony a distinct look. Irony is *laconic*. Irony is *discontinuous*. (. . .) It knows that one need not say everything and it declines to be exhaustive'.[10] Boileau gives us pieces of Longinus while La Bruyère claims to create nothing, but merely to have lodged, temporarily, within the receptacle of his book, a portion of that fullness that is the world of his readers. As ironic nostalgist, La Bruyère and his fellow Ancients make double use of emptiness. They see themselves in a world that is empty of the genius of antiquity but they do not claim to have the gift of equalling antiquity. Aesthetic fullness has been moved into a past that leaves the Ancients themselves the guardians of a precious void. The Ancient Dominique Bouhours argued for the superiority of Virgil over Tasso, often cited as a great writer among the Moderns, by saying that Virgil had not attempted to describe the ruins of Troy but merely said 'that nothing remained of Troy but the place where it had been'. What could be greater than this 'nothing'?[11]

The attitude of the ironic nostalgist is not limited to the Ancients of 1688, and in fact two of the most successful practitioners of this stance do not use it in an overtly polemical way, but like Boileau or La Bruyère they choose the freedom from the present that nostalgic imagination offers them. Montaigne illustrates very well the position of the ironic nostalgist. He proclaimed himself so immersed in the life of antiquity as he imagined it that he claimed:

I knew the Capitol and its location before I knew the Louvre, and the Tiber before the Seine. I have had the abilities and fortunes of Lucullus, Metellus, and Scipio more in my head than those of any of our men.[12]

He was aware that this attachment to a non-existent past permitted him the pleasure of detachment from the present. This chosen past offers an aristocratic freedom from the present and from chance: 'I am content to be in Fortune's grip by the circumstances strictly necessary to my existence, without extending her jurisdiction over me in other directions' (764). By engaging in a playful relationship to both present and past, neither of which fully possesses the ironic nostalgist, such a writer can remain, in a certain way, without responsibility. It is thus fully appropriate that these remarks of Montaigne's about imaginary relationship to the past should be located in the chapter 'Of Vanity', culminating in his verbatim, ironic display of the bulla of Roman citizenship granted to him in 1581. Montaigne so well illustrates the ironist's use of emptiness by emphasizing his imagination of the past within a chapter explicitly called 'on emptiness' and concluding with the image of a bubble.[13]

If Montaigne is one of the earliest of the ironic nostalgists, Baudelaire, in 'The Swan' ('Le Cygne'), is at the other end of the chronological range of this æsthetic. In 1859, when medical interest in nostalgia had peaked, Baudelaire united the medical and the literary traditions to draw a parallel between his imagination of Andromache, an idea that would be perfectly within the range of the Ancients of 1688, and a case that could be taken directly out of the tradition of Hofer's afflicted exiles, the African woman in Paris, 'cherchant, l'oeil hagard/Les cocotiers absents de la superbe Afrique' (seeking, with haggard eye/The absent palms of superb Africa).[14] Baudelaire specifically mentions the 'empty tomb' by which Andromache grieves for Hector, the most literal form of emptiness in a poem which evokes the way nostalgia, like irony, empties the present world so that fullness can only be located within the mind.

The refusal to be captivated by the present time and place, the need for lapse of time is an inherent feature of ironic nostalgia and makes the position of the Ancients mobile and applicable to any moment.[15] They need not prove that any given year of any given century has produced more intellectual works of merit than 1687 or 1688 in order to beat the Moderns. They simply put forth an attitude of ironic humility that has always and everywhere been superior. Longepierre's *Discourse on the Ancients* (1687) is clear about this: 'The Romans of the century of Augustus admired the Greeks; the Romans of the following centuries admired both their ancestors and the Greeks, just as our forefathers admired all of these. . .'.[16]

The nostalgic irony of the Ancients backs the Moderns into a rhetorical corner. If the latter are not to concede that the literary accomplishments of previous generations are superior to current production, the Moderns have little choice other than to pronounce earnest praise of their contemporaries, including themselves. This leaves them in the graceless and somewhat suspect position of praising themselves or their fellow-Moderns, for if they begin to praise their contemporaneous Ancients they will simply be subscribing to the superiority of an aesthetic based on antiquity. Here is, for instance, the enthusiastic account that the Modern Houdar de La Motte gives of his fellow academicians in 1709:

Historians of elegant simplicity, of neat precision, and of interesting disposition, no less capable of discerning character than of discovering motives, and who by the charm of their expression seem rather to bring events to life than to tell them; orators who chose and set forth their thoughts in a felicitous manner, who never stir the passions except to favour virtue and whose ornaments are of all places and of all times, because reason is universal and never changes; poets who are clear without being cold, who are sublime, but always understandable (. . .).[17]

The Modern position, as given by Houdar, clings to the moment. It has no distance. It has a certain static quality in its refusal of variation across time. In its praise for permanent, unchanging beauty, this æsthetic can only view divergent tastes as manifesting a pathological and illusionistic fixation on other times. To Houdar, the Ancients would have appeared 'nostalgic' — if he had known the term — in Hofer's sense. The Ancients have just failed to get on with culture and to come out of their mental reclusion. The Modern position is post-nostalgic, as we could say to summarize Starobinski's account of the changes in late twentieth-century psychological descriptions: 'We no longer speak of disease but of reaction; we no longer underline

the desire to return but, on the contrary, the failure of adaptation' (Starobinski, 101). The Moderns present themselves as those who have adapted to their time, but the rhetorical downside of this adaptation is a certain lack of flexibility. They are stuck with the present, which they catalogue and enumerate in the hope of a cumulative triumph. Irony, on the other hand, as Jankélévitch notes, 'casts off the obsession with giving lists; it prefers to be suggestive rather than thorough; its manner is not encyclopædic but elliptical' (Jankélévitch, 91). The Ancients can base themselves on a fragmentary legacy, one that permits the freedom to conceive, to retrieve, to translate, to speculate. The Moderns find themselves caught in the logic of chronological and environmental determinism in praising *The Century of Louis the Great*. Homer would have written better if he had written in 'a wiser Century'.[18] Not able to stimulate the imagination of his listeners with tantalizing allusions, as does Boileau, Perrault advances his case by heaping up the evidence that he considers obvious, that is, the great superiority of his contemporaries:

> of what great reputation will they not become
> in the holy festivals of the centuries to come,
> Our Regniers, our Maynards, our Gombauds, our Malherbes,
> Our Godeaus, our Racans, whose writings are superb. (9)

Even more in his 1688 *Parallel of the Ancients and the Moderns* than in his 1687 poem, Perrault is trapped by the somewhat mechanical logic of the Moderns, a position that would later appear positivist. The brilliant writers of the seventeenth century are more knowledgeable and refined than Homer and Menander simply because the likes of Gombaud come later and benefit from cumulative material and intellectual progress. When the *Century of Louis the Great* and the *Parallel* are set side by side, however, it becomes evident that Perrault's praise of Louis is undercut — and unfortunately without any intentional irony — by the inexorable movement of progress on which Perrault's Modernism is based. Perrault never directly admits the result: the century of Louis will be surpassed in a blind, historical process.[19]

How much more skillful and fortunate were the Ancients by virtue of their position as ironic nostalgists. The mechanical, the earnest, and the complete are traits of non-ironic discourse, the attitude that Jankélévitch calls the 'serious':

The height of seriousness would be to live purely and simply, without asking any questions, and believing completely in the evidence of one's senses. Such

an ecstatic consciousness, with complete absorption in the beating of one's own heart — can we even call this a serious consciousness, except as a form of analogy? Seriousness is defined by reference to the possibility of mirth, just as the 'evident' designates what has been rescued from doubt; a person clings to his seriousness when confronted by ironic glances, a person has difficulty staying serious when things happen to make him laugh.[20]

The Moderns are serious, and, indeed, they have good political reasons for being serious, since Perrault attached their claim to the praise of the reigning monarch. Their rhetoric is based on attachment, rather than detachment. Oddly enough, the ironic nostalgists prospered during that very reign, but they had the advantage of being difficult to pin down. They did not denounce the contemporary cultural production, for which they were largely responsible, but they placed themselves in a position of detached playfulness.[21] Everything had already been said, yet they continued to write. To ironize, wrote Alexandre Blok, is to make oneself absent, to be somewhere else.[22] The Ancients did not locate the source of their production in a mechanical process, nor in a reflection of the world in its reality.[23]

In Hofer's examples of victims of nostalgia, as in many later medical accounts of this condition, most of the sick belonged to the economically disfavoured classes. They were often mercenaries, conscripted soldiers or sailors, indentured servants, and even slaves. It could surely be argued that the cause of the disorder was not some excessive fixation of the imagination but rather the lack of freedom. Cures varied from brutal techniques for inciting terror in the soldiers who wished to return home, on one hand, to the more subtle creation of an illusory hope that they would soon be released from their duties.[24] This does not mean that there were not upper-class cases of nostalgia, but it does suggest that nostalgia might differ in its manifestation and its evolution among individuals who were, first of all, relatively free from physical or economic coercion, and, secondly, possessed of the educational resources to make some other use of their imagination of the past. This type of nostalgia could thus be a form of self-therapy through imagination rather than a pathology of the imagination.[25] As the Ancients, as Montaigne, and as Baudelaire show, however, ironic nostalgia has been an aesthetic stance long before postmodernism.

The ironic nostalgist distances himself from the present without hope of return to the past and even without need to return to the past because he realizes that the 'past' is his creation and resides in him. Even Johannes Hofer was, in part, an ironic nostalgist of this type

because he knew that he was creating a pseudo-old word that would exist only in the discourse of the present even though it stood apart from the languages of the present. 'Nostalgia' was thus new and yet non-modern in its very form; it was Hofer's way of creating a past that had never been.

NOTES

1 'Tout est dit, et l'on vient trop tard depuis plus de sept mille ans qu'il y a des hommes, et qui pensent' (Jean de La Bruyère, *Les Caractères ou les moeurs de ce siècle*, 'Des ouvrages de l'esprit', 1, in *Œuvres complètes*, edited by Julien Benda, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade (Paris, Gallimard, 1951)), 65. Unless it is otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

2 Johannes Hofer, 'Dissertatio medica de nostalgia, oder Heimwehe,' edited and translated by Carolyn Kiser Anspach, *The Bulletin of the Institute of the History of Medicine* 7 (1934), 379–91.

3 'The very name presents itself for consideration before all things, which indeed the gifted Helvetians have introduced not long since into their vernacular language, chosen from the grief for the lost charm of the Native Land, which they called *das Heimweh*; just as those stricken with this disease grieve, either because they are abandoned by the pleasant breeze of their Native Land or because at some time they picture themselves enjoying this more. And hence, since the Helvetians in Gaul were taken often by this mood, among that same nation it merited the name *la Maladie du Pays*' (Hofer, 380).

4 Joan DeJean, *Ancients Against Moderns: Culture Wars and the Making of a Fin de Siècle* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1997), 138.

5 Jean Starobinski, 'The Idea of Nostalgia,' translated by William S. Kemp, *Diogenes: An International Review of Philosophy and Humanistic Studies* 54 (1966), 85.

6 Linda Hutcheon, 'Irony, Nostalgia, and the Postmodern,' in *Methods for the Study of Literature as Cultural Memory*, edited by Raymond Vervliet and Annemarie Estos, Proceedings of the Fifteenth Congress of the International Comparative Literature Association (Amsterdam, Rodopi, 2000), 189–207. I have used the on-line version of this text (Linda Hutcheon, 'Irony, Nostalgia, and the Postmodern' [1998], University of Toronto English Library: http://www.library.utoronto.ca/utel/criticism/hutchinp.html). The quotation is from pages 1–2 of this version.

7 Vladimir Jankélévitch describes irony as the great gift of Socrates and perceives it as an attitude or strategy that had already become foreign to Aristotle. Hence the playful, subversive, and often manipulative Socrates can run and dodge and leave his interlocutor to shoulder the burden of seriousness. In contrast, Aristotle must labour to produce encyclopædic works, with definitions and

lists (*L'Ironie* (Paris, Flammarion, 1964), 81). Aristotle sees assuming a position of inferiority as ethically defective: 'With regard to honour and dishonour the mean is proper pride, the excess is known as a sort of empty vanity, and the deficiency is undue humility' (*Nicomachean Ethics*, translated by W.D. Ross and J.O. Urmson, in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, edited by Jonathan Barnes, 2 vols. (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1984), II, 1749 (1107b)). Jankélévitch draws a parallel between Aristotle's comments on pusillanimity (a clear defect) in 1107b and on the merely tactical stance of irony in 1108a.

8 'Je rends au public ce qu'il m'a prêté; j'ai emprunté de lui la matière de cet ouvrage: il est juste que, l'ayant achevé avec toute l'attention pour la vérité dont je suis capable, et qu'il mérite de moi, je lui en fasse la restitution' (La Bruyère, *Les Caractères*, Préface, 61).

9 'Ce petit Traité, dont je donne la traduction au Public, est une pièce échappée du naufrage de plusieurs autres livres que Longin avoit composés (…). Néanmoins, tout défiguré qu'il est, il nous en reste encore assez pour nous faire concevoir une fort grande idée de son Auteur, et pour nous donner un véritable regret de la perte de ses autres ouvrages' (Nicolas Boileau-Despréaux, *Œuvres complètes*, edited by Antoine Adam and Françoise Escal, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade (Paris, Gallimard, 1966), 333). The English translation is from Nicolas Boileau-Despréaux, *The Works of Monsieur Boileau*, with a comment by N. Rowe, Esq. (London: N.p., 1736), vol. 2, 1–2, Gale Group: Eighteenth Century Collections Online).

10 Jankélévitch, *L'Ironie*, 91. Emphasis is in the original.

11 Dominique Bouhours, *La Manière de bien penser dans les ouvrages de l'esprit* (Hildesheim, Georg Olms Verlag, 1974), 134.

12 Michel de Montaigne, 'De la vanité', *Essais*, III.9, in *The Complete Essays of Montaigne*, translated by Donald M. Frame (Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1976), 726.

13 Mary B. McKinley, 'La Bulle de la Vanité', in *Les Terrains vagues des 'Essais': Itinéraires et intertextes* (Paris, Champion, 1996), 105–26.

14 Charles Baudelaire, 'Le Cygne,' in *Œuvres complètes*, edited by Claude Pichois and Yves Le Dantec, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade (Paris, Gallimard, 1961), 81–3. The poet had himself been considered the victim of medically dangerous nostalgia (W.T. Bandy and Claude Pichois, *Baudelaire devant ses contemporains* (Monaco, Éditions du Rocher, 1957), 51; cited by Starobinski, 'The Idea of Nostalgia', 86). Baudelaire is marked in this poem by the Romantic idea of suffering as ennobling, a thought that would have been ridiculed by most earlier ironic nostalgists like Montaigne or Boileau but would have found some sympathy in La Bruyère.

15 Jankélévitch points out that antiquity had already copiously illustrated an awareness of an illusory quality to nostalgia, and thus an awareness, perhaps ironic, that is not assigned to the characters who feel the nostalgia, but at

least to the narrators who tell of nostalgia, e.g. Ulysses' return (Vladimir Jankélévitch, 'La Nostalgie,' in *L'Irréversible et la nostalgie* (Paris, Flammarion, 1974), 285).

16 Hilaire Bernard de Requeleyne de Longepierre, 'Discours sur les Anciens,' in *La Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes*, foreword by Marc Fumaroli, afterword by Jean-Robert Armogathe, edited by Anne-Marie Lecoq, Folio Classique (Paris, Gallimard, 2001), 286.

17 Antoine Houdar de La Motte, 'Remerciement à l'Académie,' in *Textes critiques: Les Raisons du sentiment*, edited by Françoise Gevrey and Béatrice Guion (Paris, Honoré Champion, 2002), 113–14.

18 Charles Perrault, 'Le Siècle de Louis le Grand. Poème,' in *Parallèle des Anciens et des Modernes en ce qui regarde les arts et les sciences* (Geneva, Slatkine Reprints, 1979), 7.

19 Pierre-Daniel Huet seized on this hole in Perrault's argument, asking him 'Êtes-vous bien assuré qu'il ne viendra pas un siècle où toute la magnificence du nôtre passera pour pauvreté (...)?' (Are you quite sure that an age will not come in which all the magnificence of ours will count as poverty?) (Pierre-Daniel Huet, 'Lettre à Monsieur Perrault sur le *Parallèle des Anciens et des Modernes*,' in *La Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes*, 389).

20 Jankélévitch, *L'Ironie*, 19.

21 A similar contrast between the 'serious' and the 'ironic' can be found in Pascal's criticism of Montaigne in passages of the *Pensées* dealing with the social imagination where Pascal represents Montaigne as not knowing why one should honour a man dressed in brocade and followed by seven or eight lackeys (L 89/S123). Pascal represents Montaigne's earnest expression of indignation as laughably naïve, in contrast to the knowing detachment of the ironist who goes through the motions of respect while understanding the absurdity of the social order. Pascal's rhetoric activates a strategy of fragmentation, therefore, on numerous levels. It is not simply the surface of the *Pensées* that is fragmented. On this point Michael Moriarty has cogently observed, with regard to the social imagination, that Pascal operates 'while maintaining intact the particular insights into human futility, to prevent these cohering into a purely philosophical wisdom' (Michael Moriarty, *Early Modern French Thought: The Age of Suspicion* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2003), 111). Pascal's irony is not nostalgic in the way Boileau's or La Bruyère's is, yet in the broadest sense his whole anthropology is based on the phantomatic awareness of the pre-lapsarian idea. See Sara E. Melzer, *Discourses of the Fall* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1986).

22 Cited by Jankélévitch, *L'Ironie*, 21.

23 For the complex and interesting ramifications of this deceptively simple premise, see Thomas Pavel, *L'Art de l'éloignement: Essai sur l'imagination classique*, Folio Essais (Paris, Gallimard, 1996).

24 Hofer, 390; Starobinski, 'The Idea of Nostalgia', 95–7.

25   On the tradition of deliberate imaginative practice in the early–modern period
see John D. Lyons, *Before Imagination: Embodied Thought from Montaigne to
Rousseau* (Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2005).