

RAMÓN DEL VALLE-INCLÁN, *LUCES DE
BOHEMIA (BOHEMIAN LIGHTS)*, AND THE
DEVELOPMENT OF THE ESPERPENTO

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Ramón del Valle-Inclán,
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CHAPTER I

Introduction

Spanish theatre flourished during the *Siglo de Oro (Golden Age)*, a period during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries when the Spanish Empire was at the apex of its power. Financial coffers were full of booty from the New World; Spain was a dominant player in global politics. The outpouring of dramatic literature from Spanish playwrights was astounding. Scholars conjecture that Lope Félix de Vega Carpio (1562-1635) wrote approximately 700 plays (more than 300 extant) and a significant treatise on playwrighting, *El arte nuevo de hacer comedias (The New Art of Writing Plays)*. Pedro Calderón de la Barca (1600-1681) is believed to have written more than 200 plays (over 100 extant), including his masterwork, *La vida es sueño (Life is a Dream)*. *Las mocedades del Cid (The Youth of the Cid)*, written by Calderón's lesser known contemporary, Guillén de Castro (1569-1631), provided the source material for Corneille's *Le Cid*, and Tirso de Molina's (1584-1648) *El burlador de Sevilla (The Trickster of Seville)* bequeathed Don Juan to the world. Estimates of the total number of

plays produced during the Spanish Golden Age range from 10,000 – 30,000 (Brockett 139-45; Brown 142-58).¹

Sometimes it seems that a tacit agreement exists among American theatre scholars and practitioners that the Golden Age is the only period of international significance in the history of the Spanish stage. Though the fertility of the Golden Age has not been replicated in modern Spanish history, there have been periods and individuals of international import in the Spanish theatre since the death of Calderón. A pre-Civil War period stretching from about 1920-1936 produced two of Spain's most significant playwrights: Ramon del Valle-Inclán and Federico García Lorca. Valle-Inclán and Lorca created major works of dramatic literature in an era of regeneration and renewal in Spanish letters that was truncated abruptly by civil war.

The Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) culminated with the defeat of the Second Spanish Republic (1931-1936) in April of 1939 and the subsequent installation of a military dictatorship led by General Francisco Franco (1892-1975). The many international ramifications of this conflict included providing a training ground for Nazi troops who were aiding the *Falangist* forces associated with General Francisco Franco during the Civil War. As Commander-in-Chief of the Luftwaffe, Hermann Goering "was thrilled at the idea of testing his 'young Luftwaffe in this or that technical respect.' [. . .] The variety and quantity of material increased rapidly, to include the Panzer Mark I, 20

¹ "The *Siglo de Oro*, begins when Spain is at the height of her power and influence under the Emperor Charles V and ends when she is entering the last stages of decay and inanition. Art and literature, which for obvious reasons lag behind their political and social stimuli, are for a time more brilliantly displayed than ever" (See Brenan 146-74). For the Spanish Theatre, the end of the Golden Age is generally marked by the death of Calerón in 1681. The significance of the Golden Age with respect to the 'Generation of 1898' and Ramon del Valle-Inclán is addressed below. Unless noted otherwise, translations throughout the study are my own.

mm anti-aircraft batteries, and later the famous 88 mm gun” (Beevor 113).² Hitler’s move to aid Franco in Spain provided more than an opportunity for various branches of the Nazi military to hone their skills:

Hitler’s real reasons for helping Franco were strategic. A fascist Spain would present a threat to France’s rear as well as the British route to the Suez Canal. There was even the tempting possibility of U-boat bases on the Atlantic coast. The civil war also served to divert attention away from his central European strategy, while offering an opportunity to train men and to test equipment and tactics. (Beevor 113-14)

Some scholars argue that without the strategic advantages provided to Germany by the Spanish Civil War the entire course of World War II would have been altered; perhaps world war could have been averted.

With the aid of Mussolini and Hitler, Franco and his “Nationalist” armies “occupied all their final objectives on 31 March [1939]” (Beevor 258). Prior to March 31, 1939, Franco had signed various treaties and pacts with Japan, Germany, and Italy. A Nationalist victory parade was staged in Madrid on May 19, and Franco was “undisputed master in his own house” (Beevor 259).

Franco’s close ties with Hitler and Mussolini, his early association with the *Falange* party of Spain, and the repressive, far right nature of Franco’s regime have led

² The forces fighting opposite each other in the Spanish Civil War were ideologically loose-knit amalgamations of many smaller parties (e.g. the “right-wing” consisted of Monarchists, Carlists, *Falangists*, etc., and the “left-wing” consisted of Republicans, Socialists, Communists, etc.). Franco “refused to become involved in the chaotic political machinations of the various parties. The Monarchists could not claim him, nor could the Republicans. He was certainly not a Socialist, nor was he a Falangist. [. . .] He was drawn to the right wing of Spanish politics by the naturally conservative heritage of army life, by his belief in the older traditions of Catholic Spain, and by his disgust with the anarchy into which the country seemed to be drifting” (See Goldston 1-50). Both the Nazis in Germany and the Fascists in Italy were providing material support, militarily and financially, to the rebels associated with Franco.

many to classify the post-Civil War Spanish government as fascist, but scholars of fascism generally agree that Franco's government was not truly fascist: "Franco acted against the fascist-style *Falange* militia to preserve the dominance of the military in his regime, essentially incorporating the movement into his regime but silencing its earlier radical message" (Davies 134). According to Roger Eatwell, "perhaps Franco implied [Eatwell is attempting to explain Mussolini's decision to militarily aid the *Falange* party] that he would set up a radical fascist regime – though in reality he was more an authoritarian conservative" (Eatwell 92), and Walter Laqueur states that "the church had a position of considerable strength in Franco's Spain. Although it was reactionary, it was only one of several political factors in a regime that was a conservative, military dictatorship rather than a fascist state" (Laqueur 45).³ Regardless of whether or not Franco and his regime were fascist by definition, the post-Civil War government in Spain copied fascism (to some degree) in an attempt to "placate hardcore fascists or to impress Nazi Germany" (Davies 3).

This 'aping-fascism', combined with a virulent attempt by the far right to annihilate all remaining vestiges of the left, proved dire for the intelligentsia and enervated an early twentieth century cultural flowering:

Culturally, the Civil War meant the end of a rich intellectual period, a period in which movements such as the Institución Libre de Enseñanza (Free Teaching Institution), the Junta para la Ampliación de Estudios e

³ The lack of any objective, universally-agreed-upon definition of "fascism" hampers efforts to determine the extent to which any political formation is "fascist." In *The Routledge Companion to Fascism and the Far Right*, Davies and Lynch argue that "the problem of definitions has been further complicated by the widespread, but often careless or inaccurate, use of the word as a pejorative term of abuse directed at people who are conservative, right wing or authoritarian in the traditional sense. It can be used even more widely to refer to simply disagreeable people or opinions. Such extremely loose usage does no justice to the historical record and conflates important concepts whose nuances should be of concern to the serious observer of history and politics" (2).

Investigaciones Científicas (Committee for Scientific Study and Research) as well as the so-called 'Generation of 1898' and the 'Literary Generation of 1927' had clearly established a Spain committed to renovation, openness, and cultural progress. All this began to wither away after 1939. It was these intellectual forces which, together with political forces of a similar ideology, were most active in the establishment of a democratic and enlightened political regime [the Second Spanish Republic] intent on freedom and social progress and stood out as a promoter of education and culture. By the time the Civil War ended in 1939, though, most of the intelligentsia from this period had been removed, killed, exiled, or otherwise silenced.⁴ (Rubin 783)

Awareness of the Spanish Civil War, its role in preparing the way for Germany's early military victories in the Second World War, and the existence of a 'para-fascist,' authoritarian regime in Spain until 1975 seem to be fading from American consciousness. This lack of awareness is replicated today by American theatre's present ignorance of twentieth century Spanish theatre. As Phyllis Zatlin notes, this wasn't the case prior to the Civil War:

Early in the twentieth century in the United States, especially on the New York stage, Spanish plays enjoyed an extraordinary wave of popularity.

⁴ Raymond Williams argues that "culture is one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language. This is so partly because of its intricate historical development, in several European languages, but mainly because it has now come to be used for important concept in several distinct intellectual disciplines and in several distinct and incompatible systems of thought" (Qtd. in Gies 4). In *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Spanish Culture*, Gies frames the book's use of the word 'culture' on Williams's definitions: "'Culture' will be used here in a restricted sense, one referring to 'the general body of the arts' and to 'the intellectual side of civilization,' meanings also ratified by Williams, who does however warn against trying to select 'one 'true' or 'proper' or 'scientific' sense and dismissing other senses as loose or confused'" (See Gies 4). This paper, too, in its use of 'culture,' will focus on the 'intellectual side of civilization.'

Works by [Jacinto] Benavente, Gregorio and María Martínez Sierra, the Alvarez Quintero brothers, and, somewhat later, Federico García Lorca, reached the English-language stage quickly and often with considerable success. (*Twentieth*, 69)

While this paper does not attempt to explore all of the reasons for the general lack of American interest in Spanish plays, one potential explanation of interest is that “when Franco won the Spanish Civil War, American theatre responded by abandoning Spanish culture” (Lima, E-mail).⁵

In 1936, as Spanish society degenerated into civil war, Spain lost two of the most significant playwrights in her history, both of whom had been central figures in the renewed vitality of Spanish theatre prior to the Civil War: Ramon del Valle-Inclán (1866-1936) died on January 5 and Federico García Lorca (1898-1936) on August 18. Valle-Inclán was a central figure of the ‘Generation of 1898’, and Lorca was a member of the ‘Literary Generation of 1927’.⁶

Lorca (the younger of the two in death at age 38), like scores of other members of the intelligentsia, was murdered by the Nationalist’s para-military forces shortly after the outbreak of war (Beevor 76-7).⁷ Lorca has been the most celebrated Spanish dramatist (in America, and to a large extent in Western Europe) in the intervening decades between the Spanish Civil War and the present: “The record for speed and endurance [in reaching

⁵ I examine below potential explanations for American theatre’s lack of interest in Valle-Inclán’s works.

⁶ The ‘Generation of 1898’ and the ‘Literary Generation of 1927’ are explicated below. It should be noted that another Spanish playwright, philosopher, and member of the ‘Generation of 1898’, Miguel de Unamuno (1864-1936), died in 1936. However, Valle-Inclán and *Bohemian Lights* are the subjects of this paper, and Lorca is discussed because of his connections with Valle-Inclán and the fact that he is one of the most internationally recognized Spanish playwrights from the twentieth century.

⁷ Aware of his precarious situation after the execution of his socialist brother-in-law and five professors from the University of Granada (Lorca traveled to Granada shortly before the uprising), Lorca sought refuge with a friend who was a member of the *Falange*, but this provided no protection (See Beevor 75-8).

the American stage], however, clearly belongs to Federico García Lorca. Following his assassination in 1936, his dramatic works acquired almost mythic stature. A half century later, they became firmly entrenched in world theatre” (Zatlin, *Twentieth* 72). Many scholars argue that the reason for such great interest in the work of Lorca (as opposed to other Spanish dramatists of the twentieth century) stems from a mythology that grew out of the tragic circumstances surrounding his early death (sometimes portrayed as martyrdom) at the hands of fascists.⁸

On the other hand, in spite of growing European recognition of Valle-Inclán’s significance as a playwright, he remains virtually unknown to theatre scholars in America. In conversations with professors of theatre at various institutions in several states, I have met very few who possess an awareness of Valle-Inclán.⁹

Because of Valle-Inclán’s inimical relationship with the commercial theatre in Spain during the most seminal years of his life, his dramatic works didn’t reach America until well after the end of the Civil War. If Lima and those of a similar opinion are correct in their argument that the victory of Franco in the Spanish Civil War led to a wholesale rejection of Spanish culture, then perhaps the same Civil War that bolstered Lorca encumbered Valle-Inclán. The lack of recognition of Valle-Inclán becomes more striking when one considers that Valle-Inclán had been a significant influence on Lorca, and that Valle-Inclán’s major contribution to the theatre, the *esperpento*, was arguably one of Spain’s most innovative twentieth century dramatic creations (Lima, *Dramatic*

⁸ Many scholars, like Lima, dispute Lorca’s affinity for the leftist cause in Spain.

⁹ I address below the fact that outside of theatre and drama studies (e.g. in departments of Spanish), studies of Valle-Inclán and his accomplishments as a playwright have become entrenched. It is common to find entries for both Lorca and Unamuno in general literary reference books, while entries for Valle-Inclán are rare (e.g. *The New York Public Library Literature Companion*). The results are mixed in reference books specific to the theatre.

47). Of Valle-Inclán's *esperpentos*, *Bohemian Lights*, the first to use the subtitle, is widely considered his masterwork.¹⁰

Purpose of Study

An interesting progression in the treatment of Valle-Inclán can be observed in theatrical reference books: He is not included in the 1951 edition of *The Oxford Companion to the Theatre*, but covered cursorily in the 1967 edition; briefly in Esslin's *Theatre of the Absurd* (1969); at length in the *International Dictionary of Theatre – 2: Playwrights* (1994); and in relative detail in *The Cambridge Guide to Theatre* (1995). *Oxford* notes that Valle-Inclán's plays were “currently [1967] enjoying a long overdue revival,” although it wasn't until the 1960s that many of his major works premiered (Hartnoll 980). *Cambridge* refers to Valle-Inclán as a “playwright, novelist and aesthetic theorist whose stature in world theatre has grown considerably since his death,” and goes on to note that his “*esperpentos* were once thought unperformable but are now compared to Artaud, Brecht and the Theatre of the Absurd” (Banham 1158). The *International Dictionary* attributes Valle-Inclán's “current” stature as one of the greatest twentieth century Spanish dramatists to successful, international productions of the *esperpentos* (Hawkins-Dady 991-92).

In *Plays: One*, a compilation of Maria M. Delgado's English language translations of *Divine Words*, *Bohemian Lights*, and *Silver Face* (1993), Delgado begins with the following:

Ramón María del Valle-Inclán is one of the most significant 'anti-naturalistic' playwrights and novelists of the early twentieth century,

¹⁰ The concept of the *esperpento* and its theoretical implications (as major thrusts of this paper) are explicated below.

though until recently much of his work has remained largely unknown outside his native Spain. In recent years, however, Europe, in particular, has witnessed a major reappraisal. Lluís Pasqual, now Artistic Director of Paris's Theatre de L'Odéon d'Europe, staged *Bohemian Lights* in 1984 and 1987, claiming it to be the greatest work in Spain's twentieth century dramatic literature. Only Britain has remained largely ignorant of Valle-Inclán's work, failing to accord him the status he deserves as *one of the great innovators of twentieth-century theatre* [emphasis added]. (Delgado, Plays xiii)

Unlike the listings from theatrical reference books examined above, Delgado argues Valle-Inclán's significance as an innovator and "anti-naturalistic" playwright on an international scale rather than specifically correlating to Spain (Pasqual's claim that *Bohemian Lights* is the greatest twentieth century Spanish dramatic work is equally remarkable). Somewhat confusing, however, is Delgado's claim that until "recently" Valle-Inclán has remained unknown outside of Spain; many of Valle-Inclán's major works premiered outside of Spain in the 1960s and 1970s, and every decade since the 1960s has produced at least two major European stagings of Valle-Inclán's works—outside of Spain. Furthermore, an anthology entitled *Valle-Inclán* (1969) edited by A.N. Zahareas includes this passage:

Interest in Valle-Inclán has risen precipitously during the last decade, with theatrical productions in Paris and Madrid, some translations and an increasing number of literary interpretations of some works. Above all, many of his works came out of eclipse, while some of them, notably

Divinas Palabras, the *esperpentos* and the later historical novels, nudged little by little into the periphery of standard modern Spanish works in the 1960's and now – with numerous essays collected during the centenary in 1966 – are beginning a full-scale Valle-Inclán boom. (*Valle-Inclán* xii)

Another American scholar, Robert Lima, frames his most recent book-length study of Valle-Inclán, *The Dramatic World of Valle-Inclán* (2003), in this way:

The Dramatic World of Valle-Inclán presents a broad historical and critical study of Ramón del Valle-Inclán's increasing recognition as one of the greatest writers in Spanish literature, as well as for his role in the intellectual and artistic life of Europe *and the Americas* [emphasis added], and because of his important place in Spain's famed 'Generation of 1898.'

(xv)

In 1969, Zahareas references a "full-scale Valle-Inclán boom." In 1993, Delgado describes a Eurocentric reappraisal of Valle-Inclán's works in "recent years" while arguing his place as one of the most significant anti-naturalistic playwrights of the twentieth century. *The Dramatic World of Valle-Inclán* (2003) addresses "Valle-Inclán's increasing recognition as one of the greatest writers in Spanish literature" (x). These claims are the rule rather than the exception when examining available English-language criticism of Valle-Inclán; for decades scholars have been proclaiming the importance of Valle-Inclán. Other indicators of his recognition in the United States as a significant dramatist, however, are less positive.

In 1967, *Theatre Journal* published its only full-length article dealing directly with Valle-Inclán. Neither *The Drama Review* nor *Theatre Topics* has published such an

article. In my research I have located records for only three significant stagings of Valle-Inclán's plays in the United States: *La cabeza del bautista* (*The Head of the Baptist*) and *La rosa de papel* (*Paper Rose*) at La Mama, NYC, in 1970, *Divinas palabras* (*Divine Words*) at Columbia University in 2000, and *Bohemian Lights* at the Repertorio Español, NYC, in 2003. Nevertheless, "Twentieth-Century Spanish Theatre on the American Stage," Phyllis Zatlin's attempt to explore the causes of the dearth of Spanish dramatic literature on the American stage, addresses Benavente, Lorca, Arrabal, and Unamuno at length, yet Zatlin mentions Valle-Inclán only once, and this serves the sole purpose of illustrating how a poorly translated title can inhibit the success of a play.¹¹ I would argue that the Valle-Inclán "boom" has yet to materialize, and that the American theatrical community has either not been properly exposed to his talent or has simply not taken heed.

One potential explanation for this seemingly paradoxical situation is that recognition is coming from scholars of the Spanish language rather than from scholars of the theatre, and, in fact, the great preponderance of English language scholarship on Valle-Inclán has been produced by professors of Spanish (many of the studies conducted by these scholars, regardless of their departmental affiliations, examine Valle-Inclán's dramatic works).¹² Furthermore, courses that address Valle-Inclán and his works have become commonplace in departments of Spanish at universities across the country, and many of these courses deal directly with Valle-Inclán's plays: e.g. departments of

¹¹ Zatlin notes that Cyril Bertram Lander's translation of Valle's *Romance de Lobos* was translated as *Wolves! Wolves!* A literal translation of the title would be *Romance of Wolves*.

¹² Lima and Dru Dougherty, the most prolific scholars of Valle-Inclán writing in the United States, are both professors of Spanish, and, of twelve contributors to *Ramón María del Valle-Inclán: Questions of Gender*, a compilation of essays on gender studies in the works of Valle-Inclán (including his plays), not one is a scholar of the theatre. Delgado, though not an American scholar, is one of the few examples of scholars of the theatre studying Valle-Inclán. Daniel Gerould, professor of theatre--CUNY, includes *Comedia de ensueño* (*Dream Comedy*) in *Symbolist Drama: An International Collection*.

Spanish at Penn State University, University of Michigan, University of Texas, and University of Colorado all offer one course that addresses Valle-Inclán. Of the four listed, both the University of Texas and University of Colorado have courses that dedicate substantial time to *Bohemian Lights*. All the same, the fact that scholars of Spanish are paving the way in studies of Valle-Inclán's dramaturgy does nothing to exculpate American theatre—both universities and professional theatres—of its seemingly blithe disregard for Spanish theatre, generally speaking, and Valle-Inclán, specifically. On the contrary, the ongoing work of scholars of Spanish in the study of Valle-Inclán and his dramaturgy should serve as a forceful impetus to scholars of the theatre.

At the 1950 Madrid premiere of Antonio Buero-Vallejo's *En la ardiente oscuridad* (*In the Burning Darkness*), Jacinto Benavente (Nobel Prize winner) told Buero-Vallejo that “the advantage of being Spanish has its drawbacks,” implying that if Buero-Vallejo weren't Spanish, *In the Burning Darkness* would have been celebrated internationally (Zatlin, *Twentieth* 1). Many students of Spanish theatre echo Benavente's sentiments. It is imperative that the American theatrical community recognize the existence of bias against Spanish drama in order to rectify the situation. The Hispanic population of the United States is growing exponentially. Although this segment of the population is admittedly not from Spain, their increasing presence as a cultural force produces a need for fresh explorations of contemporary Spanish language theatre and drama produced in the United States, Latin America, and Spain. Additionally, in order to inform these explorations, substantial new studies of Spanish theatre—past and present—must be initiated.

It is with these issues in mind that I approach this study. Of the noteworthy Spanish dramatists yet to receive substantial recognition in the United States, Valle-Inclán is arguably the most significant. On the balance of evidence, it is clear that Valle-Inclán's dramaturgy warrants the attention of American theatre scholars. Studies of Valle-Inclán's theatre take on greater significance when one considers the particularly volatile political climate in which Valle-Inclán was writing; Franco and the far right's ascent to power and their institution of a repressive, authoritarian regime warrant greater scholastic investment in studies of the theatre of this era of Spanish history.

My primary goal with this study is to increase recognition of Valle-Inclán and *Bohemian Lights* and, in the process of doing that, to call attention to Spanish theatre. I also hope to establish the significance of *Bohemian Lights* as a cultural artifact and as an innovative step in the evolution of Spanish dramaturgy. In order to do this, it is necessary to understand the crisis ridden society of Spain to which *Bohemian Lights* was reacting or, as Valle-Inclán and his peers referred to it, the 'Problem of Spain.' Furthermore, with regard to the status of *Bohemian Lights* as an innovative step in the evolution of Spanish dramaturgy, it is necessary to examine the general trends of Spanish dramaturgy, as viewed from a historical long-perspective, in order to apprehend the ways in which Valle-Inclán broke with that history to produce a unique work of dramatic literature.

Method of Approach

In Chapter Two I will examine Spain's precipitous rise to power and the role this played in the creation of a national identity. Then I will address the decline of Spain, the subsequent way in which Spain's loss of power left the country vulnerable to other more powerful European nations, and the attending reaction of the Spanish people to this

change in fortunes. An understanding of this rich history is essential to ascertaining the 'Problem of Spain' as viewed by Valle-Inclán and plays into an appreciation of Valle-Inclán himself. Finally, the period from 1800-1936 when Spain lost her colonial possessions culminating in a period of decline that reached critical mass at the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War will be analyzed briefly in order to understand the psychology of the Spanish people, Valle-Inclán, and other members of the 'Generation of 1898' during the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century.

Chapter Three addresses Spanish dramaturgy which has not, historically speaking, been particularly innovative. For this reason, playwrights that are representative of general trends will be analyzed in order to gain a sense of the history of Spanish dramaturgy. This will aid in establishing the ways in which Valle-Inclán broke with a long and somewhat uniform tradition in the creation of *Bohemian Lights*. Also, Francisco de Quevedo and Francisco Goya, artistic influences to whom Valle-Inclán increasingly looked in his latter years, will be considered briefly.

Chapter Four serves as a brief biography of Valle-Inclán. I will address, among other topics, Valle-Inclán's rocky relationship with Spain's professional theatre and the ways in which certain notions held by Valle-Inclán affected his political affiliations, early plays, and association with the 'Generation of 1898.' Finally, I will consider the ostensible change in Valle-Inclán's political ideology that led to his abandonment of closely held traditional beliefs and consequently fomented an evolutionary step in his dramaturgy.

In Chapter Five I will analyze *Bohemian Lights* with particular attention paid to the ways in which Valle-Inclán subverted classical models of Spanish dramaturgy and

cherished ideals derived from the country's mythology in order to undercut Spanish society. Examining the subversions of classical models (models that highly influenced Valle-Inclán's early work) will aid in understanding the significance of these changes with regard to his early plays. Finally, the relationship between *Bohemian Lights* and the Madrid contemporary to Valle-Inclán will be briefly examined in order to establish the importance of *Bohemian Lights* as a cultural artifact that provides a specific and accurate window into pre-Civil War Madrid society.

In Chapter Six I will summarize the findings of the study and briefly consider Valle-Inclán's legacy. Finally, I will address potential directions that could be taken in further studies of Valle-Inclán's dramaturgy.

Chapter II

The 'Problem of Spain' and 'Spanish Identity'

Any attempt to apprehend the 'Problem of Spain' as viewed by Valle-Inclán and his 'Generation of 1898' contemporaries requires an appreciation of the extraordinary manner in which Spain rose to global dominance and the equally shocking rapidity with which it fell from power. As the period in Spanish history from 1492-1700 contains both the rise of the Spanish Empire and the decline of Spain, the bulk of this study is dedicated to that era.¹³ In this study, the period from 1700-1800 is the most summarily addressed century. While the period from 1800-1936 is synopsized, sufficient information is provided to apprise the reader of the volatile climate which ultimately played a major role in the creation of *Bohemian Lights*.

For Valle-Inclán, the long succession of triumphs made by Spain between 1494 and 1700 (combined with a fixation on his supposed noble heritage) served as proof that a return to the societal foundations of that period was the only path to regeneration and renewal. On the other hand, the seemingly infinite number of breakdowns and failures endured by the Spanish people after 1600, and specifically during his lifetime, eventually divorced Valle-Inclán from his delusions about the inherent nobility of the Spanish people. What Valle-Inclán saw around him did not mesh with the ideals he nursed on the mythology of Spain's glorious past.

¹³ While Spain continued in its downward spiral well beyond 1700, the seventeenth century is generally viewed as the century of Spain's decline.

At the age of eighteen, Isabella I of Castile (1451-1504) strategically moved to secure her ascendancy to the Castilian throne upon the death of her half-brother, King Henry IV, by secretly marrying her cousin, Ferdinand II, King of Sicily and heir to the throne of Aragon. This move allowed Isabella to render immaterial any claim Ferdinand might make to the throne of Castile and shored up the support of Aragon for the inevitable conflict with the supporters of Henry's daughter, Juana (1462-1530).¹⁴ Shortly after Henry's death in 1474, Isabella was named queen:

The marriage was celebrated on 18 October 1469, in a simple ceremony at Valladolid. For some time to come, Ferdinand had little political power, since the realms he subsequently inherited in Catalonia were also involved in civil war (1462-72). Isabella was recognized as queen of Castile in 1474, but the military struggles [with Juana's supporters] continued up to 1479. In this year Juan II of Aragon died and Ferdinand succeeded him on the throne. The young monarchs were at last able to set about pacifying their realms. (Kamen 6)

In addition to ensuring the Castilian throne for herself, Isabella's strategic move of marrying Ferdinand ultimately unified the two primary kingdoms of what was known as 'Spain.'

Though Castile and Aragon comprised what was referred to as 'Spain' in the late fifteenth century, these kingdoms, at the time of Ferdinand and Isabella, were neither prosperous nor major players in European politics. The lands of the Iberian Peninsula were impoverished territories with frequently harsh and unpredictable weather, few natural resources, and underdeveloped infrastructure. Spain lacked adequate means of

¹⁴ At this time 'Castile' included Leon and Galicia while 'Aragon' included Catalonia and Valencia.

communication and transit. Although the ‘Spaniards,’ who for hundreds of years were relegated to the northern frontier of the peninsula, had been steadily pushing the al-Andalus Empire and its Muslim “occupiers” further south over the preceding centuries, large portions of the peninsula were still under Islamic control at the time of Ferdinand and Isabella’s union. The future for the newly united kingdoms seemed uncertain at best. In spite of this, the couple quickly began tireless work to consolidate power and unify the country:

During her reign she visited every corner of the kingdom, covering in some years well over two thousand kilometres of terrain. Few residents of Castile did not see her directly at some time in their lives. She dispensed justice personally, even in small towns and villages. Both rulers used their presence to impose their authority and pacify the country. The rulers used their presence to build up alliances, and nobles who had warred against each other were encouraged to sink their differences in a common cause.

(Kamen 8)

The “common cause” under which the nobles were united was the effort to push the Muslim invaders back into northern Africa. Christian Europe, which saw the campaign against the Islamic population in Spain as a crusade, lent its support; the effort was “blessed by the papacy and with funds from all over the continent. The popes, from 1482 onwards, granted generous funds” (Kamen 16).

With great perseverance the feat was accomplished on January 2, 1492, “when in a glittering ceremony the king and queen, attired in Moorish dress and at the head of their assembled host, accepted the keys of the Alhambra from its last Muslim king” (Kamen

19). Isabella and Ferdinand's entrance into Granada in 1492 marked the end of more than 800 years of Islamic hegemony in Granada, pushed the borders of the al-Andalus empire back to the north shore of Africa, and brought Granada under the dynastic empire of Isabella and Ferdinand.¹⁵

A messianic wave of optimism swept through Spain after the final expulsion of the Muslims. This victory for Catholicism, combined with Isabella and Ferdinand's persecution of 'enemies of the faith' (the beginnings of the Inquisition within Spain and the impetus for subsequent international wars to stamp out Protestantism), won the Pope's forgiveness of their unsanctioned marriage and the honorary title of 'the Catholic Monarchs' for the young royals in 1494.¹⁶ The rulers capitalized on the country's optimism and their newfound clout as protectors of the faith by expelling Spain's Jews on 30 June 1492, though many had already converted or emigrated. Of those still living in Spain, many chose conversion over exile.

The clergy began to impose Christianity by coercion. Muslims were systematically baptized, denied the right to carry arms, and pressured to abandon their culture (a large bonfire of Arab language books was executed by royal decree in October of 1501 in Granada): "Gradually the minority Muslims found themselves being deprived of their identity, culture and religion; they were the earliest victims of the new imperial attitude. [These actions] reinforced the vision of the king as champion of Christendom,

¹⁵ That same year Isabella fortuitously commissioned Christopher Columbus's journey in search of a quicker route to the Orient. The term "dynastic" implies that their rights to these territories were based on their names and inheritance as opposed to military control.

¹⁶ These are the formative years of what was to become the Spanish Empire. It would be incorrect to claim that Ferdinand and Isabella's "protection" of the Catholic faith in this time period was a struggle against heresy, because the Reformation had yet to take place. Under the strong guidance of these two quintessential Spanish monarchs, the territories of the Iberian Peninsula moved toward greater unification in a buildup to what would be the explosive growth of the Spanish Empire in the sixteenth century.

who would extend further the battle against Muslims and Jews and eventually liberate Jerusalem from its oppressors” (Kamen 21).

In January of 1493, by terms set forth in the Treaty of Barcelona, France ceded two occupied Catalan counties, Cerdanya and Rosselló, to Aragon. Within nineteen years of Isabella’s ascendancy to the throne of Castile, Ferdinand and Isabella had secured dynastic authority over all the lands of the Iberian Peninsula (with the exception of Portugal). While in Barcelona that same year, the king and queen received Columbus and the news that he had discovered a new route to the Orient.

Through a series of shrewd moves in 1492, 1502, and 1503, Isabella seized the titles to Cadiz, Gibraltar, and Cartagena, respectively, from their noble owners, thereby establishing firm Spanish access to the Mediterranean. By 1497, the three larger of the Canary Islands had been conquered in the name of the Spanish crown, and by 1504 the monarchy achieved a lasting victory over France in its dominion of Naples. France’s surrender to the Castilian forces fostered legends about Castile’s military prowess. This series of remarkable achievements fostered a new image for the Spanish people:

[Antonio de] Nebrija, a persistent spokesman for kingly power, wrote that ‘though the title of Empire is in Germany, in reality the power is held by the Spanish monarchs who, masters of a large part of Italy and the Mediterranean, carry the war to Africa and send out their ships, following the course of the stars, to the isles of the Indies and the New World’. The imperial idea took root firmly in Spain’s history, side by side with an imperishable legend about the greatness of the monarchs. It seemed, from

the Castilian point of view, to be a unique achievement, unequalled by any other nation in Europe. (Kamen 9-10)

Spain's expansion was by no means solely a product of power. Much of its growth and security was secured by royal marriage: "Alliances were made with the Tudors of England [Catherine of Aragon was Henry VIII's first wife]. Attempts were made to ally with Portugal. [. . .] Links were sealed with the Habsburg dynasty: in October 1496 the infanta Juana married the archduke, Philip ('the Fair') of Burgundy, son of the Holy Roman emperor Maximilian I" (Kamen 37).

Spanish exploits in the New World, in spite of a rocky start, became more central to the successes of the monarchy early in the sixteenth century, and the notion that the Spanish were God's new chosen people thrived. It is estimated that, in the first two decades of the sixteenth century alone, more than fourteen tons of gold were panned from streams on Spain's Caribbean possessions, but this came at a high price to the native populations that Spain had subjugated for manual labor. To no avail, many clergymen publicly denounced the treatment of the Indians by Spanish conquistadors. Part of the problem stemmed from the existence of the *reuiremiento*, a document produced sometime around 1512 that founded Spanish rights to the New World in papal orders. The papacy determined that God had given to it the New World, and the Pope subsequently gave the New World to Spain. Many of the conquistadors saw their exploits in this light, too, and their chroniclers "combined to foster a myth of a successful God-given conquest" (Kamen 98).

Upon the death of Ferdinand in 1516, the thrones of Aragon and Castile passed to Charles of Habsburg, the son of Juana and Philip the Fair.¹⁷ As the grandson of Maximilian I, Charles was heir-apparent to the Holy Roman Empire (his father, Philip I, died in 1506). Following the death of Maximilian in 1519, Charles acceded to yet another throne. The combined inheritance was staggering: Burgundy, centered around the Netherlands; the Habsburg lands, including Hungary and Austria; peninsular Spain; Naples and Sicily in Italy; and Spanish possessions in the New World. Accustomed to the rule of omnipresent Ferdinand and Isabella, Spaniards were slow to warm to the idea of a king with such broad and demanding obligations, but, with time, the Spanish people came to identify themselves with the vision of the “humanist circle around Charles V [that] embraced the imperial theme with enthusiasm and represented him as being on the way to achieving universal empire” (Elliott 8).

The enterprises of Charles were as extensive as his kingdom, but Spanish involvement was minimal. Charles used relatively small numbers of Spanish soldiers (he relied most heavily upon the German populations he controlled), and Spain was not directly involved in any military conflicts during his reign. Spanish noblemen were reticent when called upon to contribute (though they were compelled to share their New World booty with the emperor). This era of internal peace and relatively insignificant international obligations coincided with flourishing prosperity in Spain:

In the middle years of the sixteenth-century Spain was basking in the warm sunshine of success. Thanks to the link with America and to its key

¹⁷ When Isabella died in 1504, the throne of Castile passed to Ferdinand and Isabella’s daughter, Juana. Juana’s mental instability impeded her ability to rule, and, in 1507, Ferdinand resumed his role as ruler of Castile. Although Juana remained officially the queen of Castile until her death in 1555, after 1507 her position was solely titular.

position in the European political system, Castile was enjoying an unprecedented expansion. Between 1530 and 1580 the population levels in Castile in both town and country rose by some fifteen per cent; Seville, exceptionally, tripled its population between 1534 and 1561. Production rose. To the demand created by expanding population was added the demand from America for food and manufactured goods. Treasure when it arrived gave merchants more cash to invest in trade, manufacturers more money to invest in production. Agriculture expanded. Half a century of internal peace—Spain took little direct involvement in the wars of the emperor—helped to consolidate the gains made by the economy. (Kamen 154-5)

Although Spain enjoyed domestic tranquility during Charles's reign, the exploits of the conquistadors in the New World continued. It must be noted, though, that the groups of men referred to as "conquistadors" were not Spanish military forces. In fact, they frequently were not even soldiers. Some of the "conquering" groups, composed of writers, artisans, merchants, etc., resembled a cross-section of Spanish society. They conquered in the name of Spanish crown, which, in turn, required them to give one-fifth of all gold and silver to the monarchy (but were only nominally controlled by the monarchy).

Nevertheless, their "successes" (if they can be called as such, in light of the atrocities committed against native populations) were remarkable. Cortés conquered Mexico in 1521 with a band of approximately 800 Spaniards and scores of natives. In 1532, Pizarro captured Atahualpa, the supreme Inca, in Peru, thereby securing inevitable

(though lasting victory would take more than 35 years) dominion over Inca-dominated realms: “The capture of Atahualpa was a unique event in the history of the Spanish empire. For the first and last time, a small band made up almost exclusively of Spaniards, and without any help from native allies, managed to carry out an incredible feat against overwhelming odds” (Kamen 108). Of the 360 Spaniards involved in the conflict, only one died. Thousands of Incas perished. The triumphs of Spaniards in the New World were chronicled and ultimately became legend:

An official historian, Gómara, continued in his *History of the Indies* continued with the same extravagant story, written for the eyes of the emperor: ‘never has a king or a people ventured so far or conquered so much in so small a time as our people have done, nor have any others achieved or accomplished what we have done, in feats of arms, in navigations, and in the preaching of the holy gospel’. Virtually all the chroniclers of the period exercised their imaginations in playing the numbers game. In doing so, they created for their fellow countrymen (and for many historians even today) an ineffaceable image of Spanish valour, prowess and racial superiority. (Kamen 113)

During Valle-Inclán’s lifetime, there was a popular notion that the conquistadors were *hidalgos*, or hereditary nobles. As a Traditionalist and a man who relished his supposed hidalgo heritage, Valle-Inclán looked to these men and their “valour, prowess and racial superiority” as paragons of Spanish nobility. However, it is unlikely that Valle-Inclán was aware of the incomprehensible acts of brutality committed by the conquistadors:

The examples of cruelty were endless. During the war against Manco Capac in 1536 the Spaniards in the Jauja district, according to one who took part in the action, ‘captured a hundred Indians alive; they cut off the arms of some and the noses of others, and the breasts of the women, and then they sent them back to the enemy’. In retaliation [for a Maya attack in 1546] the *encomenderos* killed hundreds of Maya, enslaved an estimated two thousand, burned six of their native priests, and hanged the women. (Kamen 126)

As the ruler of a vast empire, Charles had “three fundamental priorities: for money to be obtainable when and where necessary, for reliable communication of his orders and correspondence, and for fighting men to be made available” (Kamen 53). Charles accomplished these things and, consequently, is credited with having constructed the framework upon which the Spanish Empire was built. As aforementioned, the soldiers on whom Charles relied were predominantly Germans, but the emperor always maintained strong, well-trained Castilian forces. Both of these practices continued well beyond the end of Charles’s reign.

Gold and silver from the New World played a major role in financing the emperor’s activities, but not always as direct sources. The masses of gold obtained in the Caribbean were quickly dwarfed by the mining of gold in Peru, which stimulated further exploration. Beginning in the 1540s, silver mines were developed in Mexico and Peru, but they were not of significance in terms of production until advances were made in the methods of extraction at mid-century. Charles was in need of this wealth, as he was persistently unable to pay his bills. Charles used both precious metals and the promise of

precious metals to secure larger lines of credit from the international bankers in Augsburg, Genoa, and Antwerp.

As one of his last major acts as emperor, Charles attempted to form one last political alliance (and consequently check the forces of heresy) by arranging the marriage of his son, Philip, to Mary Tudor in July of 1553. Though the English feared Spanish dominance, Charles “felt that he had completed the arrangements for an orderly transfer of power to members of his family” (Kamen 91). In October of 1555, at an emotional ceremony marked by profuse weeping in Brussels, Charles abdicated his rule over the bulk of his possessions and divided his kingdoms between his brother, Ferdinand, and Philip. The Germanic territories of the Habsburgs were left to Ferdinand, while Philip took control of the Netherlands, peninsular Spain, Spain’s New World territories, Milan, Naples, Sicily, and other Mediterranean islands.¹⁸ For the first time in almost fifty years, Spain had a ruler who resided in Spain and whose chief concerns lay with his Spanish kingdoms:

Spain was now separated from the Germanic Empire, and struck out on its own. It was an inheritance to stagger the imagination. Ruler by right of inheritance and not through any conquest, he stepped tranquilly into the place prepared for him by his father. It was the beginning of the most ambitious and creative phase of Spain’s encounter with the world outside.

(Kamen 92)

¹⁸ Philip, through his marriage to Mary Tudor, also had rights to England and its associated territories. These are not included in the list, however, because Mary died childless in 1558, thereby dissolving any claim Philip had to England. Philip expressed strong interest in marrying Queen Elizabeth, but was unsuccessful.

During the reign of Philip II, Spain was arguably the most powerful country in the world. Scholars generally conclude that Spain reached the apex of her power during this time period. The only major addition to the empire came with the death of the last member of the Portuguese royal family in 1580, an opportunity which Philip seized to claim rights to the Portuguese throne based on the fact that his mother had been a Portuguese princess. With rights to the Portuguese crown came Portugal's New World possessions in Africa, Brazil, and the Far East.

One of the most noted aspects of Philip's Spain was the overwhelming bureaucracy. The obstacles of managing such a vast empire produced a cumbersome bureaucracy, an effect that has been studied extensively. In spite of its shortcomings, the Spanish Empire made monumental achievements:

The Spain of Philip II was the most advanced state in sixteenth-century Europe. Apart from the struggle between the crown and the followers of Pizarro in the aftermath of the conquest of Peru and the abortive conspiracy by Martín Cortés in Mexico in 1566, there was no major open challenge to the crown in the nearly three hundred years of Spanish rule before it was overthrown by the independence movements of the early nineteenth century. Considering that it might take as much as two years for a message to travel from Madrid to Lima and the reply to come home, this is an extraordinary achievement. (Elliott 14)

In just over a century Spain had gone from being a loose confederation of the relatively insignificant kingdoms of Aragon and Castile to an empire that "surpassed in

extension, and in the number of inhabitants, the greatest empire in the history of Europe, that of Rome” (Elliott 8-9). The effect on the Spanish identity was monumental:

Sixteenth-century Castilians looked upon themselves as the heirs and successors of the Romans, conquering an even more extended empire, governing it with justice, and laying down laws which were obeyed to the farthest ends of the earth. It was a potent myth, and it had important psychological consequences for those who believed in it. The sixteenth-century Castilians saw themselves as a chosen, and therefore superior, people, entrusted with a divine mission which looked towards universal empire as its goal. This mission was seen as a higher one than that of the Romans because it was set into the context of Catholic Christianity.

(Elliott 8-9)

In spite of the achievements made during and prior to the reign of Philip II, the same process of empire building that had brought glory to Spain, was, simultaneously, sewing the seeds of Spain’s decline. The lines of credit made available to Charles by the vast quantities of gold being shipped from the New World were further extended to, and abused by, Philip:

The imperialism of Charles V, and then of Philip II, was financed by borrowing, and neither of these monarchs would have been able to borrow for so long, or on such a massive scale, if they had not been able to attract the international financial community with the lure of New World silver. Even when the silver of the Indies was flowing into Seville in enormous

quantities, it still hardly reached 25 percent of Philip's total revenues.

(Elliott 23)

Philip's financial predicament was exacerbated by military conflicts in Europe. While the reign of Charles had been one of relative peace and tranquility for Spain, the reign of Philip more than made up for the previous lack of military commitments. A proper attempt to address the military engagements of Philip is an endeavor unto itself; for this reason, only a brief synopsis can be included in this study.

Spain faced expensive conflicts with numerous enemies at home and abroad: Philip, self-proclaimed leader of the Counter-Reformation, embarked on a prolonged and bloody crusade in 1567 to stamp out heresy in the Netherlands; at the behest of the Pope, the Spanish king helped secure victory over the advancing Ottomans in the Mediterranean (though he would continue to be challenged by the Turks throughout his reign); the 'Invincible Armada' was defeated by the English in 1588, an event that aided the Dutch rebellion. Spain faced multiple Muslim invasions and domestic rebellions of the Moriscos and intermittent conflicts with France. The financial burden of these engagements, and particularly the struggle against Calvinism in the Netherlands, crippled Spain, which had already faced bankruptcy in 1557 as a result of the strains placed on Spanish resources by Charles's military engagements: "It was because the [financial] resources of those [Madrid, Seville, Lisbon, and Genoa] centres were accessible to him that Philip II could attempt with some success over half a century to check and throw back the forces of heresy and disorder which threatened to engulf the orderly, hierarchical world that was the only world he understood" (Elliott 23). The price ultimately became too much for Spain to bear:

The cost to the empire in terms of men and money was in any case unupportable. The spiralling costs were the despair of Philip's financial advisers. Juan de Ovando, president of the council on Finance, drew up an estimate in August 1574 which showed that current annual income of the Castilian treasury was around six million ducats, while obligations came to eighty million. (Kamen 188)

In 1598, two years after Spain's second bankruptcy, Philip II died suddenly and unexpectedly. He was succeeded by his only male heir, Philip III.¹⁹ As Philip II suspected, his son was incapable of running the empire. Unlike Philip II, who had meticulously monitored the activities of his empire, Philip III, upon accession to the throne, immediately ceded control of the empire to his closest advisers (specifically the Duke of Lerma and, later, Lerma's son, the Duke of Uceda) and busied himself with religious devotion and prodigal spending (that Spain couldn't afford) on a lavish lifestyle.

As de facto ruler of Spain, Lerma persisted in conflicts with the Netherlands (and consequently England), even after Spain was forced into its third bankruptcy in 1607. Spain's military troops and naval fleets fell into disrepair. Finally, in 1609, a twelve year truce was signed with the Netherlands, but Lerma vehemently refused to recognize its independence. Hoping to ensure the country's security, Lerma arranged several marriages to the Habsburgs and the Bourbons. Under the guidance of Lerma's policies, the Spanish crown expelled hundreds of thousands of Moriscos between 1609 and 1614, a move which earned Lerma the praise of clergymen but further decimated the population, and consequently the economy, of a country that had already suffered the ill-

¹⁹ Philip II's first son, Don Carlos, with whom Philip II had a hostile relationship, died mysteriously after being imprisoned by the king himself for suspicion of thwarting the king's efforts in the Netherlands. Many Spaniards believed that Philip II had Don Carlos murdered.

effects of depopulation due to colonization and war over the course of several decades and oppressive famine and plague (estimated to have killed up to 500,000 people) at the turn of the seventeenth century.

Spain's descent from power was underway: "As early as 1600, twelve years after the defeat of the Invincible Armada, Martín González de Cellorigo, an acute observer of the economic and social problems of his native Castile, used the word *declinación*—'decline'—in relation to its condition" (Elliott 264). This term would be used repeatedly by Spanish intellectuals and officials in the decades to come. Spain's financial resources were depleted. The population could no longer sustain a thriving economy or a strong army, and the crown's inability to pay hired troops led, at times, to mutiny.

Remittances of gold and silver from the New World were beginning to taper off. While Philip II could consistently count on an income of at least two million ducats a year from American mines, Philip III consistently received one million ducats or less. Spain was in crisis:

The principal beneficiaries of this crisis were the foreigners—the hated Genoese, the Portuguese Jews and the heretical Dutch. Foreign bankers ran the crown's finances; foreign merchants had secured a strangle-hold over the Castilian economy, and their tentacles were wrapping themselves round Seville's lucrative American trade. Castile's sense of national humiliation was increased by the truce with the Dutch in 1609, and bitterness grew as the Dutch exploited the years of peace to prise their way into the overseas empires of Spain and Portugal. (Elliott 236)

For the Spanish people, who had accustomed themselves to success over the preceding century and had come to believe in their own superiority and favor in the eyes of God, this seemingly cosmic change in fortunes was insupportable. Ultimately, there was a resurgence of Castilian nationalism during the first two decades of the seventeenth century, and some scholars trace the roots of this resurgence to Castile's growing sense of inferiority: "The humiliating awareness of the sharp contrast between the dying splendour of Castile and the rising power of the foreigner is one of the most important clues to the psychological climate of Philip the III's Castile" (Elliott 235).

Spain, which had never been blessed with natural resources, floundered in its inability to procure raw materials, and technological advancement had become sufficiently retarded as to be obvious to foreign visitors. Elliott notes that:

They [technical deficiencies] should also be related to the whole climate of Castilian intellectual life. Early sixteenth-century Spain was enjoying close cultural contacts with the most active intellectual centres of Europe. From the 1550s there was a chilling change in the cultural climate. Spanish students were forbidden to attend foreign universities, and Spain was gradually sealed off by a frightened monarch from contact with the contagious atmosphere of a heretical Europe. The conscious transformation of Spain into the redoubt of the true faith may have given an added intensity to Spanish religious experience under Philip II, but it also served to cut Spain off from that powerful intellectual current which was leading elsewhere to scientific inquiry and technical experiment. (Elliott 234)

In taking a long perspective of Spain's history, it becomes apparent that this movement toward isolation continued to impede Spain's development well into the twentieth century. After Philip II, there were monarchs (and others) who tried unsuccessfully to open Spain to outside influence. These attempts inevitably met with failure, frequently because they were initiated by Bourbon monarchs who were, rightly or wrongly, considered by many Spaniards to be unduly influenced by France. Spanish reactionaries who feared corruption from the outside world repeatedly used Catholicism to bolster their positions, and many attempts to loosen the strictures of isolation that were strangling Spanish progress were followed by resurgences of nationalism, a nationalism interwoven with the Catholic faith. This process can be seen, as is addressed below, repeatedly in the nineteenth century before it culminated with the Spanish Civil War in 1936.

The forces of liberalism were ultimately (though temporarily, given the socialist government of contemporary Spain) defeated, as evidenced by the Franco regime, a regime that lasted until 1975, and its mandated return to traditional Spanish values.²⁰ A struggle between progress and regression, it seems, is a hallmark of the Spanish people, and in few Spaniards is it more evident than in Valle-Inclán. As a Carlist-Traditionalist prior to the 1910s, Valle-Inclán embodied, much to the chagrin of his contemporaries, these beliefs in the old ways and the Catholic faith. However, sometime after 1916, Valle-Inclán broke with this worldview, ostensibly adopting Marxist views, and began to caustically attack Spain's inability to progress. *Bohemian Lights* marks the beginning of this change for the artist in the dramatic mode.

²⁰ A quintessential example of this process in the nineteenth century is the way in which oscillations of power between conservatives and liberals were marked by bans on and reinstatements of the Jesuits, who had been expelled under Charles III in 1766.

It was in this climate of increased isolation and reaction, after Philip III's sudden death in 1621, that Count Duke of Olivares came to power at the side of Philip IV to whom Olivares had pandered for years in hopes of securing a future position of power. As the sixteen year old king's strongest influence, Olivares was Spain's new de facto ruler. Though excessively ambitious, Olivares was, by all accounts, in pursuit of power in order to restore Castile to its former glory. Further fuelled by his piety and devotion to the Catholic faith, Olivares, after the expiration in 1621 of the twelve-year truce that had been signed with the Dutch in 1609, resumed hostilities in hopes of capitalizing on the gains of the Austrian Habsburg's in the Thirty Years War and also engaged in fresh conflicts in Italy.

In an attempt to provide the funding for his military exploits and programs to restore Spain's economy, Olivares raised taxes and attempted to seek a more equitable distribution of the tax burden by developing methods by which he could extract money from the exempted nobility. As regards his attempts to extort money from the Castilian nobility, Olivares was successful, but Castile's ability to fund the monarchy was rapidly dwindling. Olivares was forced to look outside of Castile for ways in which he could raise capital.

Olivares was, perhaps incorrectly, operating under the belief that other semi-autonomous Spanish provinces like Aragon, Valencia, and Catalonia, provinces that had traditionally enjoyed lower tax burdens, were in less dire economic circumstances. Olivares implemented new taxes for Castile's neighbors. The extent to which Olivares's notion that the other Spanish provinces were more able to satisfy the crown's needs is debatable, as these provinces suffered from their own hardships:

Aragon: a dry, impoverished land. Valencia: its economy dislocated by the expulsion of the Moriscos. Catalonia: its population growth halted in 1625, its traditional trade with the Mediterranean world contracting after the plague of 1630. Portugal: its Far Eastern empire lost to the Dutch under Philip III, its Brazilian empire in process of being lost to the Dutch under Philip IV. (Elliott 238-9)

Nevertheless, Spain's dire need for victory over France, which had entered the Thirty Years War in 1634, intensified his efforts to institute "oppressive" new taxes.

A shortage of manpower compounded the monarchy's financial crisis, and a desperate need to fill the ranks of Spain's armies hampered Olivares's plans:

All that can be said at present with any certainty is that Olivares was making heavy demands on the manpower of a country whose population had lost its buoyancy and resilience, and had ceased to grow. In so far, then, as Castile's primacy rested on its reserves of manpower, there was a marked downward turn in its potentialities after the 1590s. (Elliott 226)

Olivares attempted to force Catalonia's direct support for his war efforts by building there an army of conscription. This was, in fact, part of a larger plan: Prior to Olivares, Spanish provinces, with the exception of Castile, were not compelled to contribute to the military. Olivares instituted the Union of Arms in 1626, whereby he hoped to raise a national army supported by all of Spain's provinces. Like many of Olivares's measures, this, too, met with defeat. The Catalonians rebelled and enlisted the aid of France in 1639.

In spite of Olivares's efforts, French forces defeated the Spanish army at Corbie in 1636. This proved to be a turning point in the war and a major blow to the faltering empire:

The Franco-Spanish war turned after Corbie into the kind of war which Spain was least able to stand: a war of attrition, tedious and prolonged. Such a war was bound to place heavy strains on the constitutional structure of the Spanish Monarchy [. . .] which was particularly vulnerable, since both Catalonia in the east, and Portugal in the west, were uneasily and unsatisfactorily yoked to the central government in Madrid. When the pressure became too great, as it did in 1640, they rose up in arms against that government, and Castile suddenly discovered that it no longer possessed the strength to impose its will by force. (Elliott 239)

In 1643, three years after Catalonia and Portugal rebelled, Olivares was forced from power: "The gift of empire had proved a poisoned chalice, which had sapped their vigour [sic] and aggravated their ills. The sad history of the Spain of the middle and later seventeenth century is the history of a people and a ruling class which failed to rid themselves in time of imperial delusions" (Elliott 25).

Upon Philip IV's death in 1665, the throne passed to Carlos, the last Habsburg to rule over Spain. Like other Habsburgs before him, Carlos suffered from a variety of mental and physical disorders caused by rampant inbreeding within the Habsburg family. Spain continued in its decline. Many Spaniards felt that their country had been the victim of a wasting disease. As Elliott notes, the decline was already evident to greater Europe, "The Spain of Murilo [a seventeenth century Spanish artist]—the Spain visited by

Samuel Pepys in 1683, the year following the artist's death—was a once-great imperial power reduced to a second-class status, an object of European derision” (Elliott 266).

Though tragic, it seems oddly befitting that the final Spanish Habsburg, the last Spanish monarch to rule during the century of Spain's decline, died deaf, lame, blind, bald, almost completely toothless, and without having produced an heir to the throne in 1700.

At the turn of the century, with the succession to the Spanish throne of a new monarch, Philip V, and a new royal family, the Bourbons (along with increasing French influence), many questions remained to be answered:

Seventeenth-century Spaniards felt an urgent need to explain to themselves what was happening to them. During the sixteenth century Castile had developed a powerful strain of messianic nationalism. The achievement of a world-empire and an extraordinary run of victories had helped convince the Castilians that they were the chosen people of the Lord, especially selected to further His grand design—a design naturally cast in cosmic terms as the conversion of the infidel, the extirpation of heresy, and the eventual establishment of the kingdom of Christ on earth. But if Castile was indeed the right arm of the Lord, how was the sudden series of disasters to be explained? Why did God now seem to have abandoned His own? (Elliott 246)

During the reign of Philip III, increasing awareness of the decadence and degradation to which the empire was falling prey spawned attempts by many Spaniards to address the ills of the nation. *Arbitristas*, as they came to be known, vociferously

attacked the government, the monarchies, and society at large.²¹ While the prognoses and corresponding prescriptions were many, no one seemed to have the solutions to Spain's problems. The Spanish people's belief that they were God's chosen ones led them to the conclusion that Spain's decline was a product of God's judgment for a weakening of their moral fiber. If only they would return to the principles of the true faith, God would return to them. Spaniards nursed hopes of a return to God's favor, but no such return was forthcoming.

In spite of the continuation of Spain's decline in the hands of a series of largely inept monarchs between 1700 and 1898, the time period also contains periods of reform and domestic advances. Examples of these include social, religious, governmental, and societal reforms under Charles III during his reign from 1759-1788. Nevertheless, as the goal is an examination of the 'Problem of Spain,' as seen in retrospect by Spanish intellectuals at the turn of the twentieth century, this section of the study serves to briefly orient the reader to the way in which Spain lost her empire and was subjugated by other European powers.

With the installation of Philip V, the grandson of French King Louis XIV, on the Spanish throne in 1700, the French monarchy hoped to extend its dynastic control to include Spain so that France could reap the benefits of Spain's American colonies. Opposition by other European powers led to the War of Spanish Succession from 1701-1713. Though Spain was spared, for the time being, from subjugation to the French, the conflict ultimately cost Spain Minorca in the Balearic Islands and the Strait of Gibraltar. Ferdinand VI, who succeeded his father to the throne in 1746, steadfastly refused

²¹ This process directly corresponds to the intense introspection of Spanish intellectuals and the 'Generation of '98' following Spain's loss of the Spanish-American War.

involvement in the conflict between France and England. Fuelled by his resentment of the English, Charles III, who ascended to the throne in 1759, was not as judicious in his foreign policy. Charles sided with France towards the end of the Seven Years' War and with American revolutionaries in their struggle for independence from Great Britain. Spain's involvement in the Seven Years' War, while costly to the Spanish, was of little benefit to the French, and American independence prepared the way for revolution in Spain's colonies.

During the reign Charles IV, "a dull, amiable, and indifferent monarch wholly ruled by his ambitious wife, Maria Luisa of Parma, and her lover," Spain sank to new depths (Goldston 17). Godoy, who hoped to benefit from the arrangement, allowed French armies in conquest of Portugal to pass through Spain. In 1808, with more than 100,000 troops already garrisoned in Spain, French forces seized Madrid, and Napoleon subsequently placed his brother, Joseph, on the Spanish throne. The famous *Dos de mayo* (2 of May) rebellion in 1808 marked the beginning of a Spanish insurrection that ended the same summer with Joseph fleeing over the Pyrenees. Nevertheless, Napoleon returned two months later with 300,000 troops and reinstated Joseph's authority. In desperation the Spanish enlisted the aid of their former enemy, England. With the help of the English, Spain permanently expelled Joseph in 1813.

Upon the first expulsion of Joseph in 1808, Charles IV's son (and heir to the throne), Ferdinand VII, had assumed the role of king in the misled hope that Napoleon, to whom Ferdinand looked for favor, would honor his right to the crown. When Napoleon regained control of the country later that year, Ferdinand was forced to abdicate and move to France where he was held prisoner until Napoleon's defeat.

Although the French military was unable to maintain its control over Spain, French ideas of popular sovereignty took root. In the absence of a king, Spaniards enacted *juntas*, or local governing councils, and, in 1812, drafted a constitution that limited the powers of the monarchy and gave the *Cortes* legislative powers.²² Ferdinand returned to a welcoming Spain in 1814 and assured the nation that he would honor Spain's first written constitution.

Within weeks of his return, Ferdinand, with the support of church leaders, retracted his assurances, ordered liberal leaders arrested, and refused state sovereignty in favor of sovereignty that lay solely in his person. These actions sparked a string of rebellions among liberal members of the army that continued until 1823 when Ferdinand's Bourbon allies sent 100,000 French troops to crush the resistance and ensure Ferdinand's sovereignty. Ferdinand's equally provocative policies in America quickly led to revolution. Within nine years Spain had lost all of her continental South and Central American possessions (Goldston 15-20).

Ferdinand's reign proved insufferable for the Spanish people.²³ Many conservatives, located predominantly in rural areas of the Basque Country, Navarre, Aragon, and Catalonia, desperately hoped for the crown to pass to Don Carlos, Ferdinand's brother, upon the king's death. The supporters of Don Carlos, who came to be known as Carlists, demanded autonomy, "the restoration of Church influence, chiefly through the re-establishment of the Inquisition, the purging of liberals from the Army, and the reversal of even the most timid reforms. It was a programme designed to take

²² *Juntas* were first used in Spain's American colonies, which were forced to govern themselves in the absence of an imperial government.

²³ This was especially the case in the provinces of Catalonia, Aragon, and the Basque territories, as Don Carlos had promised to give them autonomous rule once in power.

Spain back to the seventeenth century” (Ross 12). Furthermore, these troglodytes ferociously opposed the ascendancy of a female to the throne. Ferdinand’s only heir was his daughter, Isabella.

Shortly before his death, Ferdinand guaranteed the ascendancy of Isabella II to the throne. When Ferdinand died in 1833, his wife, Maria Cristina, was declared regent for Isabella who was too young to rule. The Carlists revolted, thus igniting a series of civil wars fought in the name of Don Carlos and his descendents. The First Carlist War began in 1839, lasted for seven years, and impacted every region of the country at one time or another. The war severely weakened but did not eradicate the Carlist movement, as Carlists provoked fighting again in 1846 and 1849.²⁴

Between 1839 and 1902, official control of Spain passed among many. In addition to the official changes of power, there was persistent and pervasive local insurrection, insubordination of generals in the Army, unprofitable wars with Peru, Civil War in Cuba, the Spanish-American War which dispossessed Spain of her last three colonies, assassinations, and a myriad of intrigues and plots. A brutal and malignant struggle between conservatives and liberals, troglodytes and progressives (though they took many guises) was the force that bitterly divided the country.

In the same way that, upon the rise of the empire in the 1500s, Spain was divided between those who “opened their minds to the possibilities of an open discourse with other cultures” and “others [who] clung to their ancestral heritage,” Spain remained divided at the dawn of a new century (Kamen 159). Like the Spaniards of 1622, when a “violent polemic” over whether St. James or Teresa of Avila should be the patron of

²⁴ Though these relatively mild insurrections were referred to as Carlist Wars, they were, in reality, of minor significance.

Castile betrayed “a deep underlying disagreement over national identity itself,” the Spaniards of 1900 looked to a new century uncertain of themselves and unsure of where their country was going (Elliott 260-1). It was a dilemma that would continue to plague the country:

Spain’s history is riddled with conflict, with tension springing from the confrontation of the old with the new, of tradition with progress, of conservative with liberal, of Spain with ‘anti-Spain,’ of modern with post-modern. This duality has been known as ‘las dos Españas’ (the two Spains), that is, a mindset formed in the late eighteenth century which dominated the country’s development for generations (the writers of the Generation of 1898 termed it *españolizantes* [Spaniards] vs. *uropeizantes* [Europeanizers]). (Gies 4-5)

Spain began the twentieth century much like it had begun the sixteenth century, with few possessions: “Spain found herself, after a century of incessant disorder, bloodshed, and civil war, reduced to a third-rate power internationally and suffering from unhealed wounds internally” (Goldston 22). Yet the struggles, shifts of power, and bloodshed were far from over. Several more decades of attempted solutions, followed quickly by failures, culminated in the Civil War for which Spain has become known: “The year 1936 marked the obvious and undeniable beginning of a bloody civil war which in reality was merely the culmination of tensions and tears which had rendered Spanish society unworkable by the mid-1930s” (Gies 23).

While the history of Spain’s triumphal years and subsequent fall significantly informed Valle-Inclán’s early worldview, a worldview eventually changed by his re-

evaluation of Spanish society in light of the undeniable and persistent ‘Problem of Spain,’ the influence of Spain’s Golden Age writers was equally forceful in forging Valle-Inclán’s early identity as a writer. As Valle-Inclán’s worldview evolved, so did the nature of his writing, a shift marked by *Bohemian Lights*.

In the next chapter, I will examine the development of Spanish dramaturgy with primary emphasis on the traditions of Spanish Golden Age writers and secondary emphasis on the dramatic traditions of Spain during Valle-Inclán’s lifetime (prior to *Bohemian Lights*). Finally, Francisco de Quevedo and Francisco Goya, the artistic inspirations to which Valle-Inclán increasingly looked in the latter years of his life, will be addressed briefly.

Chapter III

Spanish Dramaturgy and Quevedo and Goya

A strong theatrical tradition was formed during Spain's Golden Age of literature, and Spaniards since have, for the most part, remained strong supporters of the theatre. Because of this strong national affinity for drama, Spanish playwrights have written literally thousands upon thousands of plays. However, the works of many Spanish dramatists have not been considered by posterity to be of high quality (many playwrights and works of the Golden Age being the notable exception).

Due to the fact that this study relies upon English language criticism which is frequently incomprehensive with regard to Spanish drama, relatively few dramatists will be covered, and some in little detail. The specific tastes of the Spanish audience (which changed very little for much of the country's history) and the lack of Spanish contact with wider European intellectual trends have led to a lack of innovation in the Spanish theatre. Consequently, though lacking in some respects, a general sense of Spanish dramaturgy can be gleaned from an approach that examines relatively few highly influential playwrights. Furthermore, insofar as this chapter serves to orient the reader to general Spanish dramaturgical traditions in order to demonstrate the innovation of *Bohemian Lights*, coextensive theatrical topics will only be addressed when necessary, and few specific plays will be considered.

When examining the foundations of the theatre in Spain prior to the end of the fifteenth century, the two provinces with which scholars generally concern themselves

are Catalonia and Castile. While Catalonia, once re-conquered from the Muslims around the turn of the second millennium, developed a rich tradition of liturgical drama, in both the vernacular and Latin, the rest of the peninsula produced relatively little liturgical drama. Castile, though the dominant province in terms of politics, produced no native liturgical drama in Latin and very little vernacular liturgical drama. This is a curious fact, given the preeminence of the Catholic Church in Castile (Brown 142-3).

As the country and the monarchy in the hands of Ferdinand and Isabella flourished, so did a nascent Spanish theatre. Mirroring the trends of greater Europe, the earliest theatrical entertainments were provided by traveling troupes, balladeers, and poets. As interest in entertainment rose among the nobility, a generation of young playwrights emerged to supply the court's needs. Men like Juan del Encina (1469-1529), Gil Vicente (1453-1537), and Bartolomé de Torres Naharro (c. 1485-c. 1520) grappled with the dramatic form and created an array of dramatic pieces that ranged from "liturgical parodies and [irreverent] pagan invocations" to "shepherd plays, moralities, and allegories" (Brown 143).

Around the 1550s, professional companies began to appear amidst the amateurs who had provided Spain's only theatrical offerings for decades. These professional companies were traveling troupes that presented minimalist productions of original works anywhere they drew a crowd. *Commedia dell-arte* troupes from Italy became commonplace at about the same time. Though itinerate like the professional troupes led by men like Lupe de Rueda (c. 1510-c. 1565), the Italian troupes, which brought the stock characters and situations of traditional Italian *commedia* and the occasional "erudite

comedy,” performed almost exclusively for the nobility and at religious celebrations (Brown 145).

In 1552, Lupe de Rueda’s popularity garnered him an offer from the city of Valladolid (where Rueda later planned to construct a permanent theatre) to “direct” and act in the city’s Corpus Christi plays, after which he seems to have shifted from his former popular entertainments to religious dramas. This development is indicative of the church’s increased interest in the dramatic form; plays were promoted in order to draw people to religious festivals and ceremonies on sacred days. Plays were, during this time period, associated most strongly with Corpus Christi. Though what religious drama as existed in Spain prior to the sixteenth century resembled religious drama of the rest of Europe, after 1500 Spain’s religious plays took their own flavor. While saint and martyr plays were frequently performed before a variety of audiences at Jesuit universities, the *auto sacramentale* was standard fare for religious purposes.²⁵ All celebrated Golden Age playwrights, in addition to their secular dramas, wrote numerous *autos*, in which “human and supernatural characters were intermingled with such allegorical figures as Sin, Grace, Pleasure, Grief, and Beauty. Stories could be drawn from any source, even completely secular ones, as long as they illustrated the efficacy of the sacraments and the validity of church dogma” (Brockett 140).

At other universities, specifically in Alcalá and Salamanca where there were regular performances of the works of Plautus and Terence, a native, humanistic drama in the neo-classical form began to evolve.²⁶ Attempting to “stem the tide of popular drama,” about a dozen writers between 1575 and 1590 composed numerous pseudo-

²⁵ The strong ties between religion and theatre lasted for centuries in Spain, as illustrated by the fact that *autos* were not banned until 1765 (while Elizabeth, for example, banned similar plays in 1559).

²⁶ Close ties with Italy fomented this development.

classical tragedies (something Miguel de Cervantes [1547-1616] also attempted).

Though theatre began to thrive throughout the Iberian Peninsula, these learned plays were destined to fail, as they did not appeal to the distinct tastes of the Spanish people:

Three critical factors led to the crystallization of what was to be Spain's most characteristic and dominant form of drama: the evolution of permanent professional theatres; the establishment of the seat of government, in 1561, at the oversized village of Madrid, and its mushrooming growth thereafter; and the birth there the following year of a writer [Lope de Vega] who (like Shakespeare) was a genius both as a poet and as a playwright. (Brown 145)

As addressed in Chapter II, the sixteenth century was Spain's Golden Age as a world power and the seventeenth century contained her decline, but, if the seventeenth century for Spain's economy and power was "an age of iron," it was "an age of gold" for theatre and the arts (Elliott 216). During the seventeenth century, theatres, especially in Madrid where most plays premiered, consistently drew large crowds, and, with few exceptions, the government didn't interfere with their operations (in spite of the standard complaints voiced by moralists such as the argument that theatre would undercut the moral fiber of Spanish society). This was due to the link between the theatre and hospitals: Plays were initially performed in hospital courtyards. Later, plays were moved to purpose-built *corrales* (the prototypical Spanish theatre, which resembled a courtyard) which were funded by the same charitable brotherhoods that ran the hospitals. These charitable brotherhoods benefited greatly from the relationship, and, consequently, moralists generally failed in their attempts to close Spain's theatres.

Spanish interest in drama rose precipitously during the last two decades of the sixteenth century, but there were no dramatists who could satisfy the public's constant demands for new and exciting plays. Cervantes, who wrote approximately 30 plays, directed his writing at an aristocratic audience. Although he achieved a modicum of theatrical success, his style didn't appeal to the Spanish public. Nevertheless, both his dramaturgy and fiction impacted Spanish theatre; Cervantes's view of "literature as something that expresses ideal states" became a hallmark of Spanish drama (Brenan 176).

Don Quixote made Cervantes famous, and, though it was not a play, the story of the chivalric knight-errant and his romantic exploits became the quintessential Spanish character and the quintessential Spanish story in both novels and plays. The chivalric ideal, which was prominent throughout Europe, has its foundations in medieval knighthood and the crusades and was originally a mixture of such concepts as loyalty, courage, wisdom, charity, courtesy, humility, and honesty. However, chivalry found its most fertile grounds in Spanish literature where it became more extreme than in other European countries. Spanish chivalric literature ultimately came to focus on bravery, honor, and the seduction of women. While Don Quixote was a man who "ruin[ed] himself and others by his romantic and generous illusions," the chivalry of Spanish characters was, with time, neither illusory nor ruinous (Brenan 179). Spanish dramatic literature is teeming with examples of chivalry, and Valle-Inclán's early work, too, is rife with chivalry. Although Cervantes was supplanted as the preeminent Spanish dramatist by the beginning of the seventeenth century, "like the University Wits in England, Cervantes, and other educated dramatists of the 1580s provided the link between academic drama and the professional stage" (Brockett 143).

Spanish Golden Age drama “was dominated by a sense of confidence in the state, energy, expansiveness, [and] faith in God and church,” and didn’t begin in earnest until Lope de Vega (1562-1635) turned his full attention to the theatre in the late 1590s (Brockett 139). Unlike Spain’s previous *comedias* (the Spanish equivalent to the word “play”), which used Plautus and Seneca as models and consequently developed too slowly and were altogether too literary to suit Spanish tastes, Lope created the “exciting, quick-moving, romantic drama that the Spanish people wanted” (Brenan 203). In doing so, he “was the creator of a Spanish national drama, which is to say that once this dramatist began writing, Spanish drama acquired a definitive character” (Diaz-Plaja 155).

The *comedias* were divided into subcategories by type: *Comedias de capa y espada* (cape and sword plays); *comedias de costumbres* (comedies of manners); *comedias pastoriles* (pastoral plays); and *comedias de teatro, de ruido, or de cuerpo* which generally required special scenic effects and dealt with kings, mythological characters, and other high personages (there were other types of plays, including subdivisions of the *autos*, but they are outside the scope of this paper). The subject matters were generally love, honor, patriotism, and religion (Brockett 143).

The word *tragedia* was, at one time, used in Spain, too, but the term denoted plays which dealt with sublime subjects rather than specifically signifying that the play was a tragedy. Traditionally speaking, Spanish playwrights have not been well-known or celebrated for their tragedies. Some of Lope de Vega’s tragedies, for example, are considered to be some of the worst ever written. One potential explanation for this is that

Spanish audiences have traditionally not been fond of any play without a happy ending, and Spanish playwrights are known for writing to please their audiences.²⁷

Lope de Vega's *El arte nuevo de hacer comedias* (The New Art of Writing Plays), written in 1609 and his only theoretical treatise (and predominantly devoted to comedy), details the writer's thoughts on playwriting and gives insight into the whims of Spanish audiences. Though Horace and Aristotle are directly referenced, along with such playwrights as Sophocles and Aristophanes, Lope disregards many of the "rules" of "good" theatre while acknowledging the validity of others. Replete with references to his own time period and to antiquity, Lope's sarcasm and erudition shine through in the whimsical treatise, as when he claims that, when writing plays, he locks away the works of Plautus and Terence with "six keys" and still fears that their cries will reach him.

Once he has exiled the works and rules of the ancients from his mind, Lope claims that he writes for the audience, remembering that "it is the crowd who pays, why not consider them when writing plays?" (Qtd. in Gerould 137). Lope offers his advice on decorum, verisimilitude, and the use of time. Much of what he says directly contradicts the prescriptions of Horace, and Lope claims (perhaps with tongue in cheek) that were it not for the tyranny of the audience, he, too, would write in accordance with the rules. The Spanish audience, according to Lope, wishes to see "everything in mumming from Genesis to the Second Coming" in two hours time, a demand to which Lope suggests any playwright acquiesce (Gerould 139). Lope also sets out his case for the three act play: "In the first he presented the situation, in the second he complicated the action and not till

²⁷Valle-Inclán, beginning with *BL*, seems, at times, to be trying to incense the audience. This is just one example of how he broke with many Spanish dramatic traditions.

the middle of the third did he allow anyone to guess the dénouement. For as soon as this was known the audience walked out” (Brenan 203).

Lope’s plays are characterized principally by themes of love, a subject that greatly pleased Spanish audiences: “He writes of love, and this is his favourite subject, without profundity, but with a freshness and enthusiasm that do not exclude a good deal of exact observation. No one, not even Shakespeare, has conveyed the intoxication of first love better” (Brenan 206). It is in Lope’s characters’ pursuits of love that questions of honor, another preoccupation of Spanish audiences, arise: “Dishonor may be checked by silence but it can be washed away only in blood. Honor is not the exclusive prerogative of the aristocracy as some nobles believed. Lope shows how men of low estate can energetically defend their honor against the abuses of noblemen” (Diaz-Plaja 159).

An avid supporter of the monarchy and the church, Lope avoids social criticism: “Nothing that is ugly or sordid is allowed to protrude itself. The pain and suffering that appear are shown in the pure tints of his poetic language and then, for he disliked tragic endings, resolved away in the course of the action. One rises from one of his plays with a renewed sense of the charm and variety of life” (Brenan 205). The noble and generous always triumph over the base and dishonorable. Lope de Vega’s plays proved to be the paradigm for centuries of Spanish dramatists.

Though familiarity with Lope’s style is sufficient to gain a sense of wider Golden Age dramaturgical trends, two other playwrights must be mentioned. Tirso de Molina (1580-1648), a disciple of Lope’s, was, according to some critics, Lope’s equal (though no one matched in sheer bulk and variety the vastness of Lope’s opus), and Pedro

Calderón de la Barca (1600-1681), who was younger than both Tirso and Lope, had, by the end of his career, supplanted Lope as Spain's dominant playwright.

Tirso's dynamic plays, like most Golden Age plays, deal with themes of love and honor. Arguably more poorly constructed than Lope's plays, many of Tirso's *comedias* develop unevenly. Tirso frequently used unusual characters, and some of his female characters, in particular, violate gender stereotypes common at the time: "Some of his heroines are endowed with great intelligence and resolution" (Brown 157). With a range almost as expansive as Lope's, Tirso wrote religious plays, biblical plays, romantic comedies, and plays that border on the political.

El burlador de Sevilla (The Rogue of Seville), probably the most well-known and celebrated of Tirso's works, introduced Don Juan to the world and betrays Tirso's identity as a moralist. Don Juan, the consummate Spanish lover, is shown seducing on four occasions, each of which begin with Don Juan remarking that "this is going to be the best joke of all" (Molina 83-133). Although Don Juan sees himself as a harmless prankster, his multitudinous amorous adventures come to an abrupt conclusion when the fires of hell consume him after he is unable, because of his honor, to shirk an invitation to dine in the chapel of Don Gonzalo. Don Juan had previously killed Don Gonzalo after seducing his daughter.²⁸

Calderón, whose death in 1681 is generally regarded as the end of the Golden Age in Spanish literature, wrote plays similar to those of both Tirso and Lope. For Calderón, whose works are, for the most part, better constructed and more philosophical and didactic, "everything that makes up life can be put into two categories: (a) Material

²⁸ This type of scene, where the protagonist is forced to either kill the father or brothers of the woman whom he is seducing, or be killed by them, is common to Golden Age drama. These scenes illustrate the patriarchal dominance of and the status of women within Spanish society.

things, which should be at the disposal of the king, to whom one must be wholly loyal, and (b) Spiritual things, which are for the service of God” (Diaz-Plaja 196). Brennan argues that, as regards the opus of Calderón:

The most convenient way to approach the study of Calderon’s drama is to make a division between the realistic plays and the poetical plays which he wrote before he was forty, and then to go on to a study of his later work. The great majority of his realistic plays are comedies of cloak and sword, which deal in a light way with contemporary life. Their subject is always the love intrigue of two pairs of lovers, and the business of the playwright is to introduce such a succession of obstacles and misunderstanding that the situation appears quite irretrievable—until, at the very last, it is retrieved. The concept of honour provides an added complication. Calderon did not of course invent his genre: he took it from Lope de Vega, from whom he often borrowed his plots as well. But he perfected it. (Brenan 278-79)

The notable exception to the general trends of Golden Age drama that persist in the works of Calderón are Calderón’s tragedies of jealousy and honor, in which the theme of honor takes on tragic dimensions (Diaz-Plaja 197).

While Spanish Golden Age plays, for the most part, give “very much the kind of enjoyment one expects from a good film—that is to say, entertainment and a heightened sense for life,” another Spanish writer, Francisco de Quevedo (1580-1645), wrote in a markedly different style. Though Quevedo was not a dramatist, he must be addressed

briefly because of the fact that Valle-Inclán, prior to *BL*, increasingly looked to Quevedo as an artistic inspiration.

Quevedo was a reactionary, and, as such, he was initially a strong supporter of Philip IV and the policies of Olivares. As noted above, there was a group of Spaniards known as *arbitristas* (generally akin to political commentators) during this period who produced written tracts criticizing, in one way or another, virtually every aspect of Spanish society.²⁹ Though some Spaniards were aware of the country's decay, many, including Spain's dramatists, either didn't acknowledge (that is to say in their dramatic works) or refused to address the country's decline:

The general temper of the country was one of intoxication with the thought of its national greatness, and few were capable of seeing that this was rapidly vanishing. The outstanding exception to this was Quevedo. He chose the painful course of living in the present by a steady stream of satires and denunciations of the ruin that was awaiting them. (Brenan 258)

As Valle-Inclán's frustration with Spanish society, exacerbated by continued insurrection and ineffectual government, grew, he looked to Quevedo, a novelist, and Francisco de Goya, a painter, to find native examples of the caustic satire he wished to create. Though this change in style is evinced in Valle-Inclán's dramaturgy, Valle-Inclán

²⁹ The efforts of the *arbitristas* continued throughout the seventeenth century, and, by the end of the century Spaniards were increasingly aware of the country's decline.

was unable, it seems, to find a Spanish playwright who had achieved the level of biting pessimism he sought.³⁰

Upon the death of Calderón, “Spanish literature entered on a long decline. For nearly two hundred years no writer of major importance, unless we include Moratín, made his appearance” (Brenan 315). This general trend in literature is mirrored by Spanish theatre which continued to present plays in the tradition of Lope and Calderón with little innovation throughout the eighteenth century.

Leandro Fernández de Moratín (1760-1828) was, according to Brenan, “a genius in the art of writing comedies” (Brenan 324). Moratín’s father, also a playwright, greatly admired French neoclassical plays and wrote a small number of tragedies in the style of Racine and Corneille in an attempt to prevent the trivialization of Spanish drama, but “beyond the observation of the unities and a certain new concentration on the triumph of love over honour his tragedies did little to alter the prevailing style” (Brown 277).

Leandro Moratín, also strongly influenced by French ideas, further sought to fuse neoclassical precepts with native Spanish drama, but he, unlike his father, wrote comedies.³¹ Brenan argues that Moratín’s plays are:

As different as possible from the old drama. The plots are simple, the unities are observed and the dialogue is condensed and brilliant. The characters too are realized with extraordinary vigour: they live with every word they utter and the best of them have that terrifying exuberance that is

³⁰ This parallel between Valle-Inclán and Quevedo (and below with Goya) is not drawn to suggest that their views and goals were necessarily the same; rather, it is included to illustrate the stylistic antecedents of the *esperpento*.

³¹ Moratín was instrumental in securing a ban on the *auto sacramentale* which had continued to thrive in Spain until 1765.

known as comic force. The influence is Molière, but it is Molière adapted to the feeling of the age. (327)

While Brenan goes on to argue that Moratín could have reached greater heights as a playwright were it not for weaknesses within his character and a relatively short and unproductive career as a dramatist, Diaz-Plaja directly contravenes this view: “These works [of Moratín], written in verse, inspired by French works and rigorously heeding the three unites, lack life and interest” (214).

French influence, which was evident in both Spain’s literature and governmental policies during the latter half of the eighteenth century, ultimately produced “a vigorous national reaction against [French ideas]. This is the age of the growth of the bull-fight, of the flowering of the minor arts and handicrafts and above all of popular music and dance. The Spanish people fell in love with themselves and their national customs” (Brenan 333). This movement resembled other reactions, like the German Storm and Stress movement, to what was viewed as the stultifying dominance of French neoclassical precepts. Because in Spain this trend served to the detriment of the drama in favor of other forms of spectacle, there are no Spanish playwrights or plays which serve as strong examples. The work of poet José Cadalso y Vásques, however, exemplifies the trend: “All the work of Cadalso is pervaded with his preoccupation with things Spanish. He praises the riches of his native land and defends its history, in particular the colonization of America” (Diaz-Plaja 230).

It was also during this period that Francisco Goya (1746-1828), one of Spain’s most celebrated artists, created a series of etchings that, though expansive in their treatment of several subjects over the course of approximately 83 etchings, are included

under the title *Desastres de la guerra* (*Disasters of War*). It was in these grotesque and satirical representations of Spanish society that Valle-Inclán found inspiration. Goya's uses of the grotesque piqued Valle-Inclán's interest in the grotesque, which ultimately became one of the characteristic aspects of Valle-Inclán's most seminal plays—the *esperpentos*. It seemed to Valle-Inclán that Goya had perspicaciously seen into the fundamentally manipulated condition of modern Spain; the gulf between the ideals of Spanish man and Spanish society as promulgated by the glorious mythologies of the Golden Age and the condition of modern Spanish society had created crippling dissonance within modern Spaniards.

While most of Goya's etchings in this series deal specifically with the consequences of Spain's struggles against the forces of Napoleon, the first image in the series, *Tristes presentimientos* (*Sad Forebodings*, 1863), is not one of war:

It shows a single emaciated man kneeling on the bare earth, dressed in prophetic rags, his breast bared, his arms extended in surrender and supplication. His face, eyes rolled to the sky, bears an expression of strain and inconsolable despair. Behind him, everything is roiled in darkness, and what there is of landscape is reduced to a few dimly perceptible rocks. He is alone in the universe, and he has been granted, as Goya's title puts it, 'Sad forebodings of what is going to happen.' There will be no relief, no lightening, either for him or for us. He is Job on the dunghill of Spain; he is also taken from the familiar pose of Christ in his agony in the olive grove of Gethsemane, kneeling to beseech God the Father to let the cup of sacrifice pass from his lips and spare him the torments of crucifixion—a

pose familiar to every Spaniard who had seen the familiar effigies of the Passion narrative in his or her church. (Hughes 274-5)

The return of Spanish writers (almost all of whom were liberals) from exile upon the death of Ferdinand VII resuscitated Spanish literature after what had been “a long eclipse during the Napoleonic War and the clerical reaction that followed it” (Brenan 338). After 1833, poets, rather than those familiar with the stage, dominated Spanish dramaturgy:

The drama of this period is romantic in feeling. It opens with a tragedy by the Duque de Rivas. This was *Don Alvaro o la Fuerza del Sino*, which was first performed in 1835 with the same sort of demonstrations as five years before had accompanied the performance in Paris of Victor Hugo’s *Hernani*. In Spain as in France the Romantic Movement fought its battles on the boards of the theatre rather than in books. (Brenan 342)

Don Alvaro, a typical romantic play of the age, clearly shows the influence of Shakespeare and Calderón and, as yet another example of a Spanish honor play, illustrates continued Spanish interest in that theme.

In addition to the romantic drama of the period (high drama which was generally presented in *élite* theatres) there was the realistic or *costumbrista* drama which belonged more clearly to the masses: “Paralleling this grandiose and tragic theater there existed a minor theatrical school, the observer of the social reality of the middle and lower classes, which carried on the realistic traditions of Spanish literature” (Diaz-Plaja 256).

Generally comedic and lacking in substantive content, *costumbrista* plays frequently

relied on ridiculing social types like the gossip, the conceited dandy, and the gloomy lover. This form evolved into one-act plays that generally ran about an hour in length:

The invention of hourly sessions brought the price of entertainment down while it created a market for short plays. Thus arose a theatrical industry whose dynamism drove the stage for half a century. In the 1870s Madrid had seventeen theatres devoted to hourly sessions, and in 1909, 377 of 411 plays premièred in the capital were of the one-act variety. (Gies 214)

To imply however, that these two trends, the neo-romantics and the *costumbristas*, were the only currents within Spanish theatre between the 1870s and the 1920s, would be misleading. However, as I am trying to establish the general trends of the commercial theatre immediately preceding the publication of *Bohemian Lights* (hereafter *BL*), much of the obscure theatrical activity during this period lies outside of the scope of this paper. Some of the most innovative theatre was emanating from Valle-Inclán's 'Generation of 1898' contemporaries, and their contributions will be briefly considered in the next chapter. Nevertheless, it is necessary to briefly consider some other characteristics of the drama and the theatre of this period.

The intense class struggle and social insurrection that plagued Spain between 1870 and 1924, when *BL* was published in its definitive version, engendered interest in socialist material. Socialist ideologies found voice in Spain's brief and unproductive experiments with naturalism. As one might expect, in light of the characteristic Spanish struggle between conservative and progressive that reached a high pitch during this period, there were, pitted against the plays with socialist themes, plays that represented contemporary reality and foreign ideas as attacks on the fundamental institutions of

Spanish society like the church, monarchy, family, and military (which had risen in significance within Spanish society during the nineteenth century). Reaction to “foreign” ideas like positivist materialism, fuelled by a resurgence of nationalism in the wake of the Spanish-American War, also spawned a return to the classical models of playwrights like Lope and Calderón. Early in his career, Valle-Inclán, as a Traditionalist/Carlist, sought to emulate these models, too.

Finally, the rising popularity of film and other popular entertainments increased pressure on Spain’s commercial theatre. Although theatre remained the mainstay of entertainment in the early 1920s (there were more than twenty theatres in Madrid that premièred over 200 plays per season with approximately 1000 performances a month), by 1923 audiences had begun to drop off:

Theatres closed or were converted into cinemas, and appeals to the government for relief went unheeded. The consequence was an adjustment in the repertory: serious comedy and drama were pushed to the margin as musical spectacles, the cabaret and the *cuplé* (popular music-hall songs) choreographed according to Parisian models found a powerful audience in the urban *petite bourgeoisie*. Mass entertainment thus invaded the stage in the 1920s, bringing with it a feverish display of modernity’s dazzling, external signs. (Gies 218)

It was in this environment that Valle-Inclán first published *BL*. In the next chapter I will provide a brief biography of Valle-Inclán, examine his relationship with the ‘Generation of 1898,’ and briefly examine the dramaturgy of other representatives from this group.

CHAPTER IV

Ramón del Valle-Inclán and the 'Generation of 1898'

Ramón del Valle-Inclán was a highly paradoxical and theatrical person. Because of the fact that the boundary between reality and fiction seems to have been blurred for Valle-Inclán, many of his biographers have come to emphasize what Lima, in his aptly entitled *Valle-Inclán: The Theatre of His Life*, refers to as the indissoluble triumvirate of "Man, Artist, Mask" (vii). While Ugarte discusses the "fusion of Valle-Inclán's life with his cultural production," Zahareas described this noted characteristic of Valle-Inclán more extensively:

Valle-Inclán was a closely integrated and self-conscious personality, who expressed himself equally in his life and his work, and whose life and work are therefore necessarily interrelated. Artists of this type create their art out of themselves; their art is a spontaneous outpouring, not to be considered as separate from the rest of their activities. (133; Zahareas 40)

For this reason, in addition to standard biographical fare, explication of the 'Generation of 1898,' and an examination of Valle-Inclán's supposed ideological change that occurred sometime after 1915, I have chosen to include anecdotal evidence from Valle-Inclán's life in this study. I hope that this will provide further insight into this enigmatic playwright.

On October 28, 1866, Ramón del Valle-Inclán was born in a large, ancient house in the Galician fishing village of Villanueva de Arosa to Don Ramón Valle and Doña

Dolores Peña, both of whom could claim noble ancestry, a fact that significantly impacted the development of Valle-Inclán's identity (Zahareas 3). Although Valle-Inclán's father had squandered the family's inheritance on unprofitable journalistic endeavors, he earned his living as a coastguardsman. His real interests lay in writing. Though Don Ramón Valle never earned an appreciable income from his writing, he did, by all accounts, achieve recognition for his talent as a poet and historian within Galicia (Lima, *Valle-Inclán* 11).

Although there is a dearth of information about Valle-Inclán's adolescent years, it is known that the family had, prior to Valle-Inclán's birth, inherited a sizeable library from an unspecified ancestor which was continually added to by Valle-Inclán's father. The collection contained, in addition to the writings of many French, Italian, and English authors, a wealth of Spanish works, and it seems that from a young age Valle-Inclán devoted much of his time to literary pursuits (Lima, *Valle-Inclán* 13).

In spite of the family's *hidalgo* heritage, Don Ramón Valle's inheritance, and a large house, financial difficulties increasingly plagued the family. Zahareas speculates that "in spite of this, young Ramón and his brothers must have grown up like the young dandies of the town, quite sheltered and withdrawn from the commonness and vulgarity of street youngsters so as to keep up the assumed social superiority of the family" (Zahareas 3).

At the urging of his father, Valle-Inclán enrolled to study law at the prestigious University of Santiago de Compostela in preparation for a career in politics. While at the university, Valle-Inclán's interest in poetry and journalism distracted him from his studies. He was incapable of executing formal studies; although he read voraciously, the

texts he read did not pertain to his coursework. Nevertheless, under the tutelage of Alfredo Brañas, a professor and friend whom he greatly admired, Valle-Inclán began to develop strong political views. Opposing the views of his mentor, Valle-Inclán came to embrace the idea of an “enlightened monarchy that would unite Spain spiritually as well as physically in an attempt to regain its past greatness. He saw Carlism as the ideology that could effect this end and from this time espoused its cause with intellectual fervor” (Lima, *Valle-Inclán* 17). After only three years at the university, Valle-Inclán abandoned his studies and moved to Madrid following the death of his father in 1890.

Valle-Inclán’s move to Madrid in 1890 proved to be the first of many attempts to make a life for himself in the capital. With little financial support from his family, he began to publish newspaper articles and some literary works including short stories, poetry, and the serialized beginnings of some novels. Perhaps due to a lack of financial and critical success, it turned out to be only a two-year stint in the capital; in 1892 Valle-Inclán quit Madrid and embarked on an adventure to Mexico where he continued to publish poems and articles in Mexico City.

As Valle-Inclán had a penchant from a very young age for creating fanciful stories about himself, separating fact from fiction has been an onerous task for biographers. Valle-Inclán created entirely fictitious stories, stories marginally grounded in truth, and multiple conflicting stories about actual events. Once he had created a story, he would passionately defend its validity as long as it amused him.³²

³² Valle-Inclán even provided conflicting reports for why he chose to travel to Mexico. One story has it that he chose Mexico because it was the only country with an “x” in its name while on another occasion he claimed that he had wanted to take part in a revolution and become a general. In yet another version, he claims to have been driven from Spain by the deleterious effects of youthful love gone awry (See Lima, *Valle-Inclán* 23).

In one entirely fictional account, Valle-Inclán claims to have enlisted in the army in Mexico: “I was a soldier for five years in the 7th Cavalry. I could not help but be a soldier in Mexico. Everything there smells of war, of death, and of adventure, and that perfume enchanted me” (Qtd. in Lima, *Valle-Inclán* 26). While he didn’t serve in the Mexican army, Valle-Inclán seems to have been obsessed with war during much of his life. In journal entries dating to this visit to Mexico, he discusses specific feats of conquistadors and proudly describes how he had cultivated friendships with several high-ranking Mexican officers (Lima, *Valle-Inclán* 24-8). Although the opportunity to fight with honor in a revolution didn’t present itself, Valle-Inclán did get the chance to defend his precious honor (something with which he was preoccupied):

On May 12, 1892, the Mexican newspaper *El Tiempo* published a letter, signed with the pseudonym ‘Oscar,’ that could be considered offensive to the Spaniards living in that country. Valle-Inclán went to the newspaper offices to find out the identity of the author. When the publisher refused his request, Valle-Inclán challenged him to a duel. (Zahareas 5)

It was also during this trip to Mexico that Valle-Inclán developed an interest in Native Americans. (After a change in political views that occurred later in his life, Valle-Inclán took up the cause of Mexico’s natives). His wanderlust led him to ancient villages where rural, indigenous Mexicans introduced him to marijuana. In numerous lectures and writings over the course of his life, Valle-Inclán hinted at, and occasionally admitted to, the use of cannabinoids; on at least one occasion he attempted to trace the effects of marijuana use on his writing (Lima, *Valle-Inclán* 27).

Early in 1893, Valle-Inclán left Mexico and, after a short visit to Cuba, returned to Spain. After passing three years in his native Galicia, Valle-Inclán returned to Madrid where he hoped to earn a living either as a writer or as an actor. Living off the meager support provided by his family, he found an inexpensive place to live and spent the rest of his time in cafés. By this time, his appearance had undergone a radical transformation. With long hair and beard, Valle-Inclán traded in the conventional clothes of the period for a *hopalanda*, a “poncho-style” form of dress which dates to the fourteenth century, and a *chambergó*, a soft, brimmed hat popular in Spanish America during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. A pair of tortoise-rimmed glasses completed the outfit. Valle-Inclán’s dress earned him the derision of *Madrileños* who “would stop in the street to look at him and some even dared make funny remarks as he passed by, forcing him occasionally to lose his temper although never his arrogant air” (Zahareas 6). People began to refer to him derogatorily as “the son of Jules Verne” (Lima, *Valle-Inclán* 34).

Through a family connection, Valle-Inclán secured a government job that would have required him to move to León. While most biographers posit that Valle-Inclán refused the job of his own accord (perhaps because he preferred to stay in Madrid, Spain’s intellectual and literary hub), Lima adds the possibility that the job offer was rescinded because of Valle-Inclán’s strange dress and demeanor. Regardless of which is the more accurate explanation, Valle-Inclán never began work at his assigned post. Lacking gainful employment, Valle-Inclán lived in such financial straits that for long periods of time he was unable to feed himself. Many scholars like Lima believe that this period contains the roots of Valle-Inclán’s persistent health problems: “Responsible for the commencement of his physical deterioration was the interminable fast that his penury

forced on him. He created an advantageous situation out of adversity; fasting became the means toward aesthetic completeness” (*Valle-Inclán* 33). Valle-Inclán later detailed his belief in the spiritual and artistic benefits bestowed by fasting in *La Lampara Marvillosa* (*The Lamp of Wonders*, 1916).

In spite of physical deterioration brought about by fasting, Valle-Inclán continued his faithful attendance at the *tertulias* in Madrid’s cafés and salons.³³ Cafés were public places where anyone could attend and join the discourse; salons were private and varied in comfort based on the host’s affluence. Shortly after his re-establishment in Madrid, Valle-Inclán was invited to the weekly *tertulia* of Luis Ruiz Contreras, an important publisher who patronized the young writers of Valle-Inclán’s generation. This presented the opportunity to meet and become familiar with a number of established and emerging literary figures. Valle-Inclán and many of the intellectuals who met at Contreras’s *tertulia* ultimately moved to the cafés which provided them with a larger forum. By 1897, Valle-Inclán’s association with the *tertulias* had firmly established him in the cultural life of Madrid:

During his lifetime, except for spells occasioned by ill-health or absences from the city, Valle-Inclán was a daily visitor at one café or another. At all these gatherings his voice, high-pitched and characterized by a lisp [that he claimed marked his aristocratic ancestry], could be heard – reciting incredible anecdotes about himself and others, dissecting established reputations, pretending to have at his command a thorough knowledge of every subject, monopolizing the attention of his listeners,

³³ *Tertulias* were meetings in the cafés of Madrid that drew intellectuals from the arts, journalism, politics, etc. From the *tertulias* was born the ‘Generation of 1898,’ which is addressed below.

and showing by frequent outburst of bad temper his lack of patience for interruptions. On the other hand, those who knew him intimately testify that he was basically a very modest, kind, and timid man. (Zahareas 7-8)

Spain's defeat at the hands of an increasingly expansionist United States in 1898 and the resulting loss of her colonies galvanized the country and specifically the men who participated in the *tertulias*. By 1913 a select number of these intellectuals came to be known as the 'Generation of 1898.' The name was coined by José Martínez Ruiz (later known as "Azorín"), a fiction writer and essayist, and applied to a group of writers that included himself, Valle-Inclán, Jacinto Benavente (playwright and journalist), Antonio Machado (playwright and poet), Miguel de Unamuno (playwright and philosopher), Pío Baroja (novelist), and Ramiro de Maeztu (journalist and sociopolitical theorist) (Lima, *Theatre* 45-9).

Like the *arbitristas* of the seventeenth century, the shame felt by these men in the aftermath of the Spanish-American War provided a strong impetus to seek the source of Spain's deterioration:

The national soul-searching in Spain at the turn of the century, was, of course, brought on by the loss of its colonies and a felt inadequacy when faced by the modernization of the rest of Europe. It was reinforced or influenced, as well, by the European preoccupation with the scientific description and interpretation of national characters and mentalities. The defeats of the Spanish, and of the French and Italians in Sudan and Ethiopia, and the triumphs of Bismarck's Germany and Victorian England

led to the diagnosis, in some quarters, of the decadence of the Latin nations and races and the superiority of the others. (Gies 31-2)

However, concerns of concerns of the 'Generation of 1898' went far deeper and generally addressed what they came to term the 'Problem of Spain' as they "grappled with the idea of 'Spain,' of what it was, where it had come from, and where it was going" (Gies 3). It is important to note that this was not an ideologically homogenous group. At least some "members" ultimately hoped for the extermination of decadent Spanish society, political and religious reform, and renewal in the arts:

Miguel de Unamuno noted gravely and with shame the crisis of Spanish life in "Sobre el marasmo actual de España" (On the Current Atrophy in Spain), and José Martínez Ruiz contrasted Spanish laggardness and European progressiveness in "El tema de España" (The Subject of Spain). Ramiro de Maeztu qualified the theme with the phrase "Parálisis progresiva" (Progressive Paralysis). Pío Baroja claimed that current problems growing directly out of Spain's history as a colonial power were well deserved. Valle-Inclán did not publicize his views on the 'Problem of Spain' in the obvious ways of his co-generationists. While his contemporaries expressed themselves in articles and pamphlets, he chose to maintain his writing on the level of art—his principal concern always. But because he elected not to expound his reaction in writing at that time does not mean that he lacked opinions on the subject. Vocal exclamations in cafés, interviews, and lectures, as recorded in his biographies, indicate

his great concern with Spain's political development. (Lima, *Valle-Inclán* 44)

Because of ideological differences between Valle-Inclán and other members of the 'Generation of 1898,' some scholars consider his inclusion misleading and problematic. Lima points out that "the concept of generation is difficult to establish under most circumstances. Only through redefining the term is it possible to place this group of highly individualistic creative men in such a category" (*Valle-Inclán* 46). While some of the men included by Azorín questioned the concept of the 'Generation of 1898,' Valle-Inclán readily accepted its validity and his position within it. This is an odd fact, given that Valle-Inclán's professed solidarity with the Carlist cause countervailed the beliefs and concerns of other "members" of this loose-knit group. Verity Smith argues:

It is unwise to connect [Valle-Inclán] with the so-called generation of '98. In the 1890's Unamuno looked on himself as a Marxist; Azorín as an Anarchist, whilst both they, Baroja and Maeztu militated for social reforms and sought remedies for the mental and spiritual stagnation of their countrymen. Valle, on the other hand, buried his head in the sand like the traditional ostrich and refused to come to terms with the unpalatable facts. (18-19)

John Lyon corroborates this view: "Some of his '98 contemporaries expressed surprise that at a time when Spanish writers and intellectuals were engaged upon a relentless examination of themselves and their society, Valle should be indulging in the 'escapist'

literature of the early *Comedias bárbaras*” (108).³⁴ Nevertheless, misleading or not, Valle-Inclán remains strongly associated with the coterie.

As addressed above, many of Valle-Inclán’s cohorts during this time were playwrights. Benavente, who won the Nobel Prize in 1922, created “a stage language suited to the passage from one century to another. Benavente’s plays from the 1890s systematically deconstruct the stage language of melodrama, substituting irony for passion, witty conversation for verse and a Nietzschean disdain of society for benighted wishes to reform it” (Gies 215). In spite of Benavente’s innovations success in dissecting the very social class who patronized his plays, “the passage of time has revealed Benavente’s innovations as a mere ripple on the surface, a tailoring of dramatic technique and social moral attitudes to suit a particular section of the Spanish public at a particular point in its history” (Lyon 2).

Although Miguel de Unamuno was, after Benavente, arguably the most critically successful playwright from the ‘Generation of 1898,’ contemporary scholars consider his essays and philosophical meditations his most significant contributions to Spanish letters. His plays, which have fallen into relative obscurity, tended to be vehicles for philosophical ideas: “Unamuno’s bare dialogues on the tortured divisions within the modern self harkened back to Calderón’s *autos sacramentales* while simultaneously echoing Pirandello’s favorite themes” (Gies 218).

³⁴ Lyon is using this point of view as expressed by other members of the ‘Generation of 1898’ to juxtapose Valle’s choice of setting for *Bohemian Lights* with the settings for some of his previous works. While much of Valle-Inclán’s early work is set in a distant, idealized past (most commonly in Galicia), *BL* is set in 1920s Madrid. The *Comedias bárbaras* (*Barbaric Comedies*) is a trilogy of plays set in a feudal Galicia. Lyon also refers to the “deliberate” and “aggressive” topicality of *Bohemian Lights* and posits that writing it “must have been a descent into Hell for Valle-Inclán” (108). The title translations used here are Maria M. Delgado’s.

As he was becoming familiar with Benavente and Unamuno at the *tertulias*, Valle-Inclán began his own career in the theatre.³⁵ He debuted as an actor in 1898 in Benavente's *La Comida de las fieras* (*The Banquet of the Beasts*). Although the play turned out to be Benavente's first commercial success, there was some light criticism of Valle-Inclán's portrayal of Teófilo Everit, a minor character. After the opening night's reviews, Valle-Inclán decided to quit the play, but Benavente persuaded him to continue with the role until a replacement could be found. Valle-Inclán continued for two more performances (Lima, *Valle-Inclán* 52-3). The following year he performed another small role for one night and served as "director" for a production of *The Taming of the Shrew*.

After two insignificant engagements as an actor, the amputation of Valle-Inclán's left arm forced him to abandon his dreams of becoming a professional actor. An argument with Manuel Bueno, a fellow *tertulia* attendee, about a pending duel between two well-known men escalated to fisticuffs. In the ensuing scuffle, Valle-Inclán's cufflink pierced his arm and the wound soon led to a gangrenous infection. While recovering in the hospital, Valle-Inclán vowed to avenge the loss of his arm, but the machinations of friends loyal to both Bueno and Valle-Inclán averted any further violence and secured reconciliation between the two that ultimately engendered a strong friendship that endured for the remainder of Valle-Inclán's life. Teatro Artístico, a company to which many of Valle-Inclán's friends belonged, presented Valle-Inclán's first play, a melodrama entitled *Cenizas* (*Ashes*, 1899), as a benefit to purchase a prosthetic arm. Although the proceeds were sufficient to purchase the prosthetic limb, the play was a failure (Zahareas 9).

³⁵ Lyon notes that, while Valle-Inclán came to be respected as a writer, few of his contemporaries would have foreseen that his reputation would come to rest on his contributions to the theatre (2).

Deprived of the ability to earn an income from acting and earning paltry sums for his writing, Valle-Inclán's destitution forced him to become more desperate in his efforts to make money. After hearing that the Romans had abandoned mines in La Mancha because of an inability to extract the desired minerals (a problem that had been solved by scientific advances in the intervening centuries) Valle-Inclán decided to take up mining. Armed and in the company of Ricardo Baroja, an artist, Valle-Inclán struck out on horseback to examine the abandoned mines. The mission, however, ended disastrously when Valle-Inclán's gun accidentally discharged and shot him in the foot and arm. While recuperating in the hospital, Valle-Inclán joked about the incident with friends: "One-armed like Cervantes, lame like Lord Byron, Valle-Inclán told his visitors that the only other requisite to greatness he had yet to attain was to be blind like Homer" (Lima, *Valle-Inclán* 61). Although blindness never struck Valle-Inclán, the writer did create blind characters, the most notable of which is Max Estrella, the protagonist of *Bohemian Lights* (hereafter *BL*).

As interest in Valle-Inclán's short stories and poetry increased, the burden of his financial situation eased, which allowed him to move into a more comfortable dwelling. His involvement with the theatre between 1899 and 1906 was limited to working on a stage adaptation of Lope's *Fuenteovejuna* in 1903.

In January of 1906, *El Marqués de Brandomín* (*The Marquis of Brandomín*), his first play to be staged since *Cenizas*, opened to favorable reviews. Brandomín, the protagonist, is fashioned in the style of Don Juan and appears throughout Valle-Inclán's novels, poems, and plays. *Cenizas* exhibited Valle-Inclán's interest in the chivalric ideal and an "ahistorical" approach to literature that sought "stasis or permanent essence in art

through a stylized vision of the past or through myth and legend.” This trend continued in the playwright’s next two plays, *Aguila de blasón* (*Eagle of Honor*, 1907) and *Romance de lobos* (*Ballad of Wolves*, 1908), both of which are set in feudal Galicia and depict the problems of the noble Montenegro family (Lima, *Dramatic* 33-40).

As Valle-Inclán’s involvement in the theatre increased, he met Josefina Blanco, a popular actress, whom he married in 1908. The same year, Valle-Inclán and his wife attended the premiere of Benavente’s *Señora Ama* (*The Woman of the House*). In spite of the fact that Benavente was a close friend, Valle-Inclán had no qualms about expressing his distaste for the play’s style:

I don’t like this kind of theatre. With the staging techniques that the theatre has available, chunks of reality are being thrown in our faces. Art exists only when it has become superior to its living models through an ideal elaboration. Things are not as we see them but as we remember them. In literary creations, the word must always be transferred to that plane on which the world and human life are idealized. There is no poetry without that process. (Qtd. in Lima, *Valle-Inclán* 95)

The portrayal of an idealized world through art, a characteristic of the works of Cervantes and other Golden Age dramatists, defines Valle-Inclán’s dramaturgy until *BL*.

As Spaniards began to recognize Valle-Inclán’s talents as a writer, members of the Carlist party developed a new interest in their increasingly famous supporter. Consequently, Valle-Inclán became more involved with the party around 1908.³⁶ In spite of the death in 1909 of Don Carlos, the pretender to the throne behind whom the Carlists

³⁶ Although I use the term ‘Carlism’ throughout this paper to prevent confusion, the ‘Carlist’ party was also referred to as the ‘Traditionalist’ party by the early 1900s.

were united, party members continued to run for office in hopes of gaining political leverage. Valle-Inclán himself unsuccessfully attempted to run as a Carlist candidate in 1910. The following year he released *Voces de gesta* (*Voices of the Cause*), a pastoral tragedy with overtly Carlist themes.

Voces de gesta opened to great critical acclaim in Valencia. Audiences in Madrid, including King Alfonso XIII and his family, lauded the play, too. However, in 1912 when *Voces de gesta* was taken to Barcelona, a Carlist stronghold, controversy ensnared the play. Although the play clearly affirmed Valle-Inclán's dedication to the Carlist cause, it also carried an indictment of the Carlist party. The play seemed to suggest that the majority of Carlists and their leader, Don Jaime, the son of Don Carlos, had effectively abandoned the cause. In spite of the fact that it had been Valle-Inclán's first critical success in the theatre, the play was pulled from the repertory under the pretexts of preventing demonstrations planned by Carlists in Barcelona.³⁷ In the ensuing row, Valle-Inclán terminated his and Josefina's relationship with the Guerrero-Díaz de Mendoza Troupe (Lima, *Valle-Inclán* 101-5).

The termination of his working relationship with the Guerrero-Díaz Company resulted in scrapping plans for the premiere of a new comedy, *El embrujado* (*The Bewitched*, 1912). Valle-Inclán contacted Benito Pérez Galdós, director of the Teatro

³⁷ The validity of this reason is debatable. Valle-Inclán was notorious for micromanaging the rehearsals of his plays and harshly criticizing the actors' performances, behaviors that had led to the termination of his and his wife's relationship with the company of Francisco García Ortega in 1910 during a South American tour. The play in question with Ortega's company was *Cuento de abril* (*April Story*, 1910), a play that "provided a panorama in which the topics of national decadence and regeneration were taken up in rich, *modernista* verse, a turning away from realism in an avatar of symbolist aesthetics that would lead to avant-garde experiments with spectacle in the 1920s" (See Gies 216-7). Some scholars like Zahareas argue that Valle-Inclán's volatile, cavalier behavior played a role in the decision to cancel the planned presentation of *Voces de gesta* in Barcelona (Zahareas 13-15). *La marquesa Rosalinda* (*The Countess Rosalind*, 1912), a children's play that was Valle-Inclán's first foray into the use of puppets on stage, also belongs to this period.

Español, in an attempt to find a new place to stage *El embrujado*. Although Galdós initially expressed mild interest in the play, it was ultimately rejected. Valle-Inclán reacted in characteristically explosive fashion: He wrote an excoriating attack on Galdós and two of Galdós's leading actors. Determined to produce the play, Valle-Inclán arranged a public reading for February 26, 1913, at the Ateneo of Madrid. The liberal audience received Valle-Inclán, a Carlist, and his new play with hostility (Zahareas 16). Indignant at the audience's reaction, Valle-Inclán had to be forcibly removed from the building by police. In spite of a glowing reception of the play when it was fully read at the Ateneo a few days later, "these negative occurrences imposed on the sensitivity of the playwright a new disgust for the establishment theatre. So pronounced was his reaction that Valle-Inclán separated himself not only from the stage but also from the writing of plays over a considerable period" (Lima, *Valle-Inclán* 109).

Depressed and defeated, Valle-Inclán returned with his family to Galicia. A short time later his second son, Joaquín María, was killed by a cabana door that struck him on the head while the family was vacationing at the beach. These were unproductive years (1913-1920) for Valle-Inclán. Smith speculates that "having purged his soul of the two fundamental preoccupations of his earlier works, namely Carlism and the circumstances of the Galician squirearchy, and having outgrown the *modernist* credo, Valle needed a respite in which to rethink his position as a writer" (22). Although he published no new plays during this time, Valle-Inclán negotiated a contract in 1915 with a publishing company that would continue to publish his works until the company's bankruptcy in 1922. The relationship proved lucrative for the writer.

In 1916, the same year that Ruben Darío, Valle-Inclán's close friend and admirer, died, Julio Casares produced the first significant criticism on Valle-Inclán's works: "[Casares] recognized the manifest artistry of his subject but chastised unequivocally what he held were instances of direct plagiarism, intellectual laziness, or artistic deception. He proceeded to castigate the forgery that he deduced in Valle-Inclán's works" (Lima, *Valle-Inclán* 117).³⁸ In a move not in keeping with his standard mode of operation, Valle-Inclán opted to not respond directly to Casares's attack. Rather, Valle-Inclán finished work on *The Lamp of Wonders*, a book in which he attempted to explain his aesthetic positions.³⁹

Valle-Inclán visited France in May of 1916 where, as a correspondent for *El Imparcial*, a Madrid newspaper, he was flown over the Western Front.⁴⁰ Given his prior interest in war (in some early poetry Valle-Inclán praises the brutality war), it seems likely that witnessing firsthand the devastation and misery wrought by modern warfare would have had a major impact on the writer, and scholars generally trace the change in his dramaturgy that is marked most clearly by *BL* to his trip to the French battlefields.⁴¹ However, attempts to ascertain the extent to which Valle-Inclán's experiences in France impacted him personally are muddled by interviews given after 1917 in which the author seems to maintain his defense (if not admiration) of war. Other events that are generally

³⁸ "Years later, writing in the prologue to the second edition of the same book, Casares recognized his youthful impetuosity and repealed its unfounded opinions" (See Lima, Valle-Inclán 117).

³⁹ *The Lamp of Wonders* intimates Valle-Inclán's growing disillusionment with Spain: "We are no longer a race of conquerors and theologians. We no longer master the routes to the Indies or are the Pope's Spaniards, yet our tongue retains Baroque hyperboles in imitation of ancient Latin when it was sovereign of the world. Gone is that Hispanic vigor in which fortune in war, the Catholic faith, and the call to adventure throbbed like three hearts; but the deceit of the throbbing continues in bland echoes [. . .] no longer is our posture for the world" (See Valle-Inclán, *Lamp* 46-7).

⁴⁰ Lima claims that Valle-Inclán's visit to the Western Front was in response to an "invitation by the government of France, through his long-time friend Jacques Chaumié" (Valle-Inclán 121). It is most likely that Valle-Inclán's visit was both as a correspondent and at the request of the French government.

⁴¹ *BL* was the first play that Valle-Inclán referred to as an *esperpento*, but some characteristics of *Divinas palabras* (*Divine Words*) mirror the innovations of the *esperpentos*.

credited with playing a role in the creation of the *esperpento* include the Russian Revolution of 1917 and continued strife and insurrection in Spain:

Valle-Inclán, who had been to the front lines in France and reported on the bombardment of troops from the air, who had seen a succession of inept and corrupt governments that could neither better the miserable state of the peasant in the countryside and the worker in the city, nor rectify the many inequities of daily life [. . .] and who had experienced Madrid's artistic life in all its absurdity, could not help but be concerned over the plight of modern Spain. He perceived his life and times as too absurd, grotesque even, to join in the mindless games of the Dadaists. Just as he had avoided the frivolities of Dada, Valle-Inclán felt the need to forgo the evasions of reality promoted by Surrealism. (Lima, *Dramatic* 132-3)⁴²

As Spain's government persistently failed in its attempts to revive the economy and stabilize the country, Socialist and Communist movements gained momentum. In the elections of 1918, six Socialists were elected to the *Cortes*. Sometime during this period Valle-Inclán purportedly converted from Carlism to Marxism. This supposed change in his worldview, like the impact of seeing the Western Front, is contradicted by later statements. At varying times throughout the remainder of his life, Valle-Inclán seems to have appreciated both Fascism and Communism. Doubts about the genuineness of this change were as strongly debated among Valle-Inclán's contemporaries as they are today.

In an interview given in 1920 to a Madrid newspaper, Valle-Inclán stated that the job of the artist is to fight for social justice, a development that indicates his evolving

⁴² Lima does not provide source information for the claim that Valle-Inclán consciously rejected Dada and Surrealism, and in my research I have not seen the claim replicated.

views on art. In a volley of new plays published the same year, Valle-Inclán lashed out at Spanish society: *Farsa italiana de la enamorada del rey* (*Italian Farce of the King's Lover*), *BL*, *Farsa y licencia de la reina castiza* (*The Licentious Farce of the Castilian Queen*), and *Divine Words* (*Divinas palabras*).⁴³ Scholars have yet to agree on exact dates of completion for some of these plays, but it is generally assumed that all are post-1913 works. All of these plays, with the exception of *Farsa italiana de la enamorada del rey*, a light-hearted satire, signaled a new era in Valle-Inclán's writing that was to produce many excoriating attacks on Spanish society. *BL* is the cornerstone of this new stylistic approach, the *esperpento*.

In 1921, he published his second *esperpento*, *Los cuernos de don Friolera* (*The Grotesque Farce of Mr. Punch the Cuckold*) and participated in Mexico's Independence Day celebrations at the behest of the Mexican government. In statements made about the plight of Mexico's indigenous peoples and the country's need for agrarian reform, Valle-Inclán offended Spanish land-owners: "The Indian in Mexico, whom Spain emancipated and to whom were granted all the rights of a free man after the conquest, has now lost his freedom and is the victim of an exploitation worse than that of the slaves" (Qtd. in Lima, *Valle-Inclán* 136). Like his statement about the job of the artist a year before, the statements Valle-Inclán made in Mexico about landowners, descendants of an aristocracy with which Valle-Inclán wished to identify himself years before, betrays his changing views.

⁴³ I list all of the 1920 publications here in order to emphasize the force with which Valle returned to the theatrical mode, but, for the purposes of this study, I will be dealing almost exclusively with *BL*.

Shortly after his return to Spain, a banquet was thrown in Valle-Inclán's honor. Most of Spain's significant writers attended.⁴⁴ In a speech at the event, he finally responded to the critic who had impugned his integrity as a writer some six years before:

If I utilized some pages of the *Memoirs* of Casanova in my *Sonata de primavera*, it was to put the atmosphere of my work to the test. Had I not conceived it correctly, the interpolation would be terribly out of place. Shakespeare placed speeches in his *Coriolanus* that he took from historians of antiquity, and the success of the tragedy is proved in that, far from rejecting such foreign texts, it demands them. (Lima, Valle-Inclán 141)

To the same banquet belongs the statement that “el signo de los intelectuales españoles es idéntico al de los gitanos: vivir perseguidos por la guardia civil [The mark of Spanish intellectuals is identical to that of the gypsies: To live persecuted by the civil guard]” (Qtd. in Zahareas 19-20). It proved to be a portentous observation. In September of 1923, General Primo de Rivera overthrew the constitutional government and established himself as dictator under the auspices of the king; Valle-Inclán was an enemy of Primo de Rivera's regime.

Almost immediately upon the release of *La hija del capitán* (*The Captain's Daughter*, 1927), all copies were removed from stores by the authoritarian government of Primo de Rivera which considered the play offensive to the government and the military. Valle-Inclán was ostensibly arrested for failure to pay a fine in 1929, though “it was

⁴⁴ This increased recognition of the writer by his Spanish peers paralleled trends in the non-Spanish speaking world: “The international reputation of Valle-Inclán took a definite upward swing in this era. Increasingly, his works were being translated into Russian, Italian, French, and English” (See Lima, *Valle-Inclán* 142).

common knowledge that the dictator wanted to punish him for his opinions and his stand against the regime” (Zahareas 23). Undaunted, Valle-Inclán ratcheted up his rhetoric when he commented on his sympathies with the Socialist ideology to a newspaper reporter.

Fortunately for Valle-Inclán and many other Spanish writers who were either imprisoned or exiled, Primo de Rivera’s regime dissolved in 1930 with the dictator’s death in Paris. The Spanish people overwhelmingly voted in 1931 to install a republic, the Second Spanish Republic. In another attempt to win an elected office, Valle-Inclán was defeated as a democratic candidate in an election that turned out to be a “landslide in favor of the Republican and Socialist parties” (Zahareas 24).

In a 1931 interview, Valle-Inclán argued that Spain needed a dictatorship like “the type imposed on Russia by Lenin,” and the Ateneo of Madrid, “the hard core of Spanish liberalism, elected him president in May, 1932” (Zahareas 24). Zahareas goes on to note that “to this period belongs Valle-Inclán’s letter to the International Association of Revolutionary Writers in Moscow asking to be considered a member. A little later there took place in Paris a Communist-organized Congress in Defense of World Culture, to which he lent his support” (Zahareas 25).

Valle-Inclán was appointed Director of the Spanish Academy of Fine Arts in Rome in 1933, but his poor health interfered with his ability to serve in the post. He left Rome permanently in 1935 to return to Galicia where he died of cancer of the bladder on January 5, 1936, just months before the Spanish Civil War began. A few days prior to his death, Valle-Inclán responded to the entreaties of a devoutly Catholic friend by saying, “No quiero a mi lado ni cura ni fraile humilde ni jesuita sabihondo [Not a priest, not a

lowly friar, not a know-it-all Jesuit do I want at my side]” (Qtd. in Zahareas 26). It was a simple affair, as per his request to be buried in a modest casket at an unannounced, non-Catholic funeral:

It was raining and almost dark when the procession reached its destination. As the coffin was being lowered into the grave a young man noticed that a crucifix had been placed on the coffin in opposition to Valle-Inclán’s last wishes. He snatched the crucifix and, in so doing, tripped over the open coffin, pushing it into the grave and tumbling alongside the body in a macabre scene parallel to many in Valle-Inclán’s own *esperpentos*.

(Zahareas 26)

In the next chapter I will address *BL* and the *esperpento*. In addition to examining the ways in which Valle-Inclán turned from his previous style and subverted the classical models to which he looked for inspiration throughout the early years of his career as a dramatist, I will explicate the theoretical implications of the *esperpento*.

Chapter V

Bohemian Lights and the *Esperpento*

From the publication of Valle-Inclán's first play, *Cenizas*, until his re-emergence as a playwright in 1920 after a seven-year hiatus marked by his visit to the Western Front, violent civil unrest in Spain, and the Bolshevik revolution, the playwright's dramaturgy exhibited a historical orientation in terms of style, form, and content (some scholars have referred to his early writings as "anachronistic"). *Bohemian Lights*, first published in 1920, marked a major shift in his development as a playwright and heralded the creation of a new dramatic style which he christened the *esperpento*, an innovation that potentially places him among the great theatrical innovators of the twentieth century.⁴⁵

Bohemian Lights (hereafter *BL*), the first Spanish play of the twentieth century to be set in "contemporary Spain, clearly identifiable as post-World War One Madrid," did not premiere until 1963 when it was presented in French by the Théâtre National Populaire in Paris (Delgado, *Plays* xxxii). Because of the commercial theatre's rejection of Valle-Inclán and subsequent objections to *BL* by the Franco regime, the play didn't receive its Spanish premiere until 1972 when it was produced by Madrid's Teatro Bellas Artes.

⁴⁵ The first version contained only twelve scenes, while the definitive version, published in 1924, has fifteen scenes. These three additional scenes significantly impact the notion of the *esperpento*, and the bulk of material objected to by censors during the Franco era is contained in them. As it is not within the scope of this paper to address the significance of these alterations, I will be dealing with the 1924 version on its own terms.

The play, in a clear departure from Valle-Inclán's previous *modus operandi*, contains "specific allusions to streets, cafés and monuments, as well as to historical figures—politicians, writers and artists" (Delgado, *Plays* xxxii). Many characters are directly modeled on actual individuals that Valle-Inclán knew. The play's protagonist, Max Estrella, is the principal example:

It is acknowledged fact that the eccentric and prototypical Bohemian, Alejandro Sawa, was the model for both Villasús, a minor character of Baroja's *El árbol de la ciencia* and Max Estrella, the protagonist of *Luces de bohemia* by Valle-Inclán. Both writers were personally acquainted with Sawa, and the circumstances of his death—his penury, blindness and madness—are recorded in their respective works. (Servodidio 11)

There is also a great deal of similarity between Valle-Inclán and Max, a fact that has led some scholars to believe that Max serves as an autobiographical character, too.

As a by-product of the highly specific topicality exhibited by *BL*, the text is laden with references to Spanish events and figures of the early twentieth century. This characteristic is paralleled by a multitude of literary references to both Spanish and international traditions. Many of the references are so obscure that they go unrecognized by contemporary Spanish audiences. These complexities are aggravated by what many Spanish scholars, as Lyon notes, consider to be Valle-Inclán's greatest contribution to Spanish dramaturgy: "The invention of a dramatic language capable of reflecting broad cultural identities, a language which avoided both the pedestrian flatness of imitative naturalism and the self-conscious rhetoric of poetic drama" (*Theatre* 6). Brennan echoes this point of view: "In our emasculated times anyone who can use language as richly and

arrogantly as he does—and with such flashes of imaginative power—deserves to be highly regarded” (Brenan 449). In spite of such accomplishments, Valle-Inclán’s rich and imaginative use of language has proven impossible for translators to convey. Consequently, I am relying on the three existing English language translations of *BL*, and I use them interchangeably in an effort to capture the vibrancy of the original. This approach is augmented by extensive explanations following each textual passage which serve to apprise the reader of the extensive web of associations that the playwright evokes.

BL is the story of Max Estrella, a poet blinded by syphilis who has fallen into penury. The play opens with Max, his wife (Collet), and his daughter (Claudinita). Max, lamenting a letter of rejection from an editor, suggests to Collet that the family commit group suicide, but the conversation is interrupted by the arrival of Don Latino, Max’s shady, alcoholic literary agent. Latino regrettably tells the family that he was only able to procure a paltry sum for Max’s recent writings. (Latino is actually defrauding Max, something Collet and Claudinita already know.) Max and Latino strike out to confront the buyer and end up on a night long adventure teeming with prostitutes, animals, police, bohemians, poets, and a host of other colorful characters set against the backdrop of a violent, cold Madrid.

Max and Latino’s first stop is at the cave-like bookshop of Zarathustra: “Inside the cave are gathered the cat, the parrot, the dog and the bookseller. Zarathustra, beetle-like, hunchbacked, with his face the colour of rancid bacon fat and his scarf of serpent green, strikes a poignantly discordant and contemporary note with his grotesque puppet-like appearance” (Lyon, *Lights* 45). Upon entering the store, Max “removes his arm from

the folds of his cloak and raises it majestically, in perfect coordination with his classical blind head” (Delgado, *Plays* 100). This is one of many descriptions of Max that harkens back to classical figures like Oedipus and Homer.⁴⁶

Max immediately calls Zarathustra a thief, impugns his ethics as a business, and tells the bookseller that he wants to return the money and retrieve his writings. With the tacit approval of Latino, Zarathustra takes advantage of Max’s blindness by removing the writings from the counter and placing them at the back of the store. When Zarathustra returns, he claims that the books were sold for a minimal profit just moments prior to Max and Latino’s arrival. Although disheartened, visitors to the shop distract Max and the confrontation quickly degenerates into an erudite discussion on variegated topics (something that happens repeatedly throughout the play):

DON GAY. One should be afraid to admit it. There’s no country to compare with England. There, religious sensibility is expressed with such dignity and decorum that the families held in most esteem are indisputably the most religious. If Spain were capable of such religious standards, she’d be saved.

MAX. We’ll pray for her! Here, the real puritans are the demagogues of the extreme Left. Perhaps, they’re the new breed of Christians, although they don’t yet realize it.

DON GAY. My dear gentlemen, in England I found myself a convert to

⁴⁶ For an interesting exploration of the ways in which Valle-Inclán subverts the mythology of Oedipus in *BL*, see Orringer’s “*Luces de bohemia: Inversion of Sophocles’ Oedipus at Colonus.*”

the iconoclastic faith, to a true Christianity of prayers and hymns, free from the perverse worship of illusory relics. And to see the idolatry of this land!

MAX. When it comes to religion Spain is like an African tribe.

DON GAY. Maestro, we must reshape our idea of religion, using as our focus the idea of God as Man. Our Christian revolution must have its birth in the rhetoric of the Gospels.

DON LATINO. A greater rhetoric than Lenin's.

ZARATHUSTRA. Without religion, business transactions could never be trusted.

DON GAY. Maestro, we must establish the Independent Church of Spain.

MAX. With our Vatican City in El Escorial.

DON GAY. Perfect!

MAX. And hard as granite.

DON LATINO. You will end your days lecturing in Theosophy.

MAX. We must resurrect Christ the King.

DON GAY. In all my travels across the globe I have found that great nations only emerge when there is a national church at their side. Political development is worthless if it is deprived of a religious conscience, one with a guiding ethic superior to man-made laws.

MAX. I agree, illustrious Don Gay. The misery and great moral affliction of the Spanish people resides in the lack of sensibility with which they face the great enigmas of life and death. For them, Life is a watery

stew: Death, an ugly old hag masked in a sheet who smiles obscenely:
Hell, a simmering cauldron filled with boiling oil where sinners are
fried like anchovies: Heaven, a scandal-free bazaar where, with the
prior permission of the priest, virtuous young virgins may give
assistance. This despicable country transforms every elevated concept
into the type of fairytale told by sanctimonious seamstresses. Its
religion successfully reduced to the puerile chatter of senile biddies
who dissect the cat when it dies on them.

(Delgado, *Plays* 103-5)

Here, Valle-Inclán takes advantage of the scene, as he does throughout *BL*, to address a specific topic: Religion. The characters recognize the potential value of religion but fully reject religion as practiced in Spain. This is illustrated by Max's call for the resurrection of Christ the King, a reference, like the reference to Lenin, which is rooted in social currents of the day:

Belief in and practice of a purer, more primitive way of Christian lifestyle, a sort of Christian socialism, was identified with Leo Tolstoy's attempt to lead what he called the pure, simple kind of life that Christ himself or his apostles had led. It was a move away from ecclesiastical rules or from excessive Church practice and a return to the basic tenets of love, good work and simple desires. Some Spanish anarchists, with whom Max is often identified, preached the same ideas. (Gillespie 227)

Accentuating what he saw as the religious hypocrisy of his fellow Spaniards, Valle-Inclán includes Latino and Zarathustra in the conversation, both of whom were

seen defrauding Max moments before. In a line that illustrates the type of comedy Valle-Inclán was seeking in his *esperpentos*, the thieving Zarathustra goes so far as to address the integral role of religion in developing a trustworthy business atmosphere.

Valle-Inclán attacks both the government and the church with his allusion to ‘El Escorial’ as a potential Vatican City for the characters’ imaginary new church. One of the most impressive architectural landmarks in Spain, El Escorial serves as church, convent, palace, and royal mausoleum and was considered by Spaniards during Valle-Inclán’s lifetime to typify the “identification of Church and State in Spain” (Lyon, *Lights* 158). Since its construction under Philip II to commemorate his victory over France in 1557, the dominating, austere structure has displayed the statues of six kings of Judah (including David and Solomon). The fact that these were commissioned by the king to adorn the building betrays the belief held by Spaniards in the Golden Age that they were God’s new chosen ones. Completing the scene is Max’s sarcastic tirade, which “is a burlesque version of Spanish catechism and a parody of Sunday sermons, especially the vulgar simplicity of certain notorious lay preachers and their sensational fear-mongering” (Gillespie 227).

Immediately following this sequence, a little girl “peeps through the main door. Her hair is tied in pigtails, her stockings have fallen to her ankles and she has a hungry look about her” (Delgado, *Plays* 105). The girl inquires as to whether or not the latest installment of a popular, serialized melodrama has been released. After being told that the book is in distribution, the girl asks about recent developments in the storyline. In an evasive answer aimed at maintaining the profitability of one of his few highly-demanded items, the bookseller asks the girl why she wishes to know. The girl retorts, “I don’t give

a shit either way. It's Doña Loreta, the colonel's wife who's asking" (Delgado, *Plays* 105). The girl's reply illustrates the peculiar way in which Valle-Inclán employs language:

[Valle-Inclán's] language defies any simplistic categorization—it does not adhere to any specific set of speech patterns or any tangible idiom. Nothing proceeds quite as expected, and our expectations as readers and spectators are constantly frustrated. The comic and the erotic are unexpectedly juxtaposed; characters speak 'out of character', in a mode counter to what we expect—prostitutes and low-life figures declaim in elevated Spanish, anyone and everyone quotes from some literary source or other when least expected. (Delgado, *Plays* xxxviii)

Max and Latino leave the bookstore and continue on to Tight Arse's Tavern where Max is spotted by a prostitute named Enriqueta (derisively referred to as "Her Ladyship") who takes back a lottery ticket that her mother sold to Max on credit. Hoping to get money to buy the ticket, Max instructs a bar boy to take his cape and sell it in the street. Max portentously responds to Latino, who is ridiculing Max's decision to sell the cape, by saying, "If I die tomorrow my wife and daughter will be left relying on pennies from heaven" (Delgado, *Plays* 108).

When the bar boy returns, he announces that there is trouble in the streets. In the resultant chaos, Enriqueta slips out of the bar before Max can retrieve the lottery ticket. Max and Latino suspect that Enriqueta has moved on to a hangout popular among the *modernistas*. Determined to get the ticket back, they strike out in that direction.

As Max and Latino stagger arm in arm through the deserted streets past broken streetlamps, locked doors, and shuttered windows, Max repeatedly complains about the broken glass that litters their path. Latino responds by ridiculing the socialists: “The honourable masses have done a very good job of destroying the city” (Delgado, *Plays* 113). Moments later they encounter Enriqueta, and Max tells her to give him the ticket:

ENRIQUETA THE STREET WALKER. Here we all are together again,
three sad drop-outs! Don Max, a quick flash of my tits. It’s on the
house.

MAX. Give me the lottery ticket and go to Hell.

ENRIQUETA THE STREET WALKER. Don Max, tell me first whether
you’ve got the money to pay for it in that old wallet of yours.

MAX. You’re a true daughter of our Conservative Government!

ENRIQUETA THE STREETWALKER. If I had as much money as this
Government, I’d be made!

DON LATINO. I’d be happy with just the interest on it!

MAX. The revolution is as unavoidable here as in Russia.

DON LATINO. We won’t live to see it!

MAX. Well, then, we haven’t very long left. (Delgado, *Plays* 114-15)

History has proven Max right about the revolution, but his belief that the future belonged to the progressives (if not the communists) was proven wrong by Franco’s victory. During the discussion several key figures of the *modernist* movement come out of a nearby café, “bringing with them the stale stench of cooking oil” (Lyon, *Lights* 163). After an effusive series of accolades shouted at Max, the writers (and Latino) discuss a

variety of literary topics ranging from current trends to Ibsen and Molière's *Tartuffe*. Just before being detained by a passing police patrol for raucous, disrespectful behavior, Max exclaims, "I am the greatest poet in Spain! I say the greatest! The greatest! And I'm dying of hunger. But I will not grovel for the crumbs of charity! I'll be damned if I will" (Lyon, *Lights* 65). The proclamation belies Max's steadfastness, for as he "evolves from the supreme poet standing upon his own dignity to a bemused extra on the great stage of life" through the course of the play, he is ultimately reduced to accepting charity (Parker 469).

A drunk and hysterical Max is dragged into the police headquarters with Latino and the *modernista* crew at his heels. Here again Valle -Inclán provides highly detailed stage directions:

The airlessness of a cave and the cold smell of stale tobacco. Sleepy policemen. Detectives in plain clothes. There's a clumsy old man—a wig on his head and shiny sleeve cuffs—who writes; and a sporty coxcomb—with a glittering hair-do, reeking of perfume—who paces to and fro and dictates something while inhaling American tobacco. (Gillespie 125)

In spite of Latino's pleas with Max for calm, Max's insolence leads to being officially placed under arrest while the *modernistas* fill the background with protests and Latino asserts that Max is Spain's Victor Hugo (who was considered by many Spaniards during this time period to be a paragon of literary excellence).⁴⁷ When asked his name during the booking procedures, Max, spoofing on the fact that Estrella means "star," states that

⁴⁷ Hugo, who is referenced through *BL*, wrote on the use of the grotesque in the "Preface to Cromwell" (1827). See Gerould, *Theatre*, 227.

he goes by the pseudonym “Ill-starred Max.” The poet “is beginning to mock the tragic role he has been playing” (Gillespie 238).

After being violently tossed into a cell, Max is approached by a blood-soaked prisoner who emerges from the shadows. The ensuing conversation evinces Valle-Inclán’s sympathetic view of Spain’s anarchists:

MAX. Who are you, comrade?

PRISONER. An outcast.

MAX. From Barcelona?

PRISONER. From everywhere... and anywhere.

MAX. Outcast!... Only Catalan workers would use such a term to paraphrase their struggle. Outcast, on lips like yours, is an incitement. Your time is coming.

PRISONER. You can see further than most. Barcelona is a bonfire, smouldering with hate and ready to burst into flames. I am a Catalan worker and I’m proud of it.

MAX. Are you an anarchist?

PRISONER. I am what the law has made me.

MAX. Then we belong to the same Church.

PRISONER. But you wear an artist’s cravat.

MAX. The yoke of the most abject servitude! I’ll tear it off, so that we can talk.

PRISONER. You’re no proletarian.

MAX. I’m the pain from a waking nightmare.

PRISONER. You sound like an educated man. You talk as if you were from another era.

MAX. I'm a blind poet.

PRISONER. Then you've got problems too! In Spain, work and the intellect have always gone despised. Everything is ruled by money here.

MAX. We should install an electric guillotine on the streets of Madrid for publicconsumption.

PRISONER. That's not enough. The revolutionary ideal must be the destruction of wealth, as in Russia. It's not enough to chop the heads off all the rich people. Somebody'll always turn up to inherit and even if you do away with inheritance, you won't stop all the disinherited from plotting to get it back. No. We've got to make the old order impossible and you can only do that by destroying money. The whole of industrial Barcelona must be destroyed and rise from its ashes with an entirely new concept of labour and property ownership. The Catalan is the blackest bastard of any employer in Europe. I say Europe because there are always the Spanish colonies in Latin America. (Lyon, *Lights* 79)

One of the interpolations added by Valle-Inclán to the definitive 1924 text, this scene's overt indictment of traditional Spain proved to be one of the key aspects objected to by censors during the Franco era, delaying *BL*'s Spanish première for almost 40 years. The allusions to Barcelona and Catalonia are historically accurate, as the insurrection that

plagued Spain during the early part of the twentieth century was most severe in Madrid, Andalusia, and Barcelona, and Max's call for an electric guillotine placed in a busy thoroughfare is a transparent reference to the 'Reign of Terror' during the French Revolution.

Although Valle-Inclán's cellmate is a professed anarchist, his ideas carry Bolshevik residue: "Anarchists were generally in sympathy with Lenin's Bolshevik revolution, despite their ideological rejection of the Communist state and the dictatorship of the proletariat. Here the Catalan echoes the widely-held belief that only through violent revolution and the destruction of the old social order could a new 'natural' order emerge" (Lyon, *Lights* 165).

Rounding out Valle-Inclán's list of allegations is a reference to the treatment of Latin America natives by Spanish settlers, a concern that was voiced by the playwright on several occasions during and after his 1921 visit to Mexico: "Around 1924 Valle-Inclán said in a letter that the Spanish settlers in America represented the very essence of Iberian savagery, that they owned 70% of the land and that in their hands land had become the most pernicious kind of property. He suggested expelling them unless they could be put to the sword" (Gillespie 239). The views expressed by Valle-Inclán in this scene illustrate the drastic changes manifested in *BL* as compared to the playwright's pre-1913 plays that held up the traditional social hierarchy and traditional Spanish values and were set in the remote locales of a mythological and usually feudal past.

Max's reference to himself as the pain from a waking nightmare points to parallels that can be drawn between the *esperpentos* and the wider continental movement of expressionism (with which, by all accounts, Valle-Inclán had no direct experience).

Many characteristics of *BL* carry resonances of expressionism: “It is possible to see the play as an expressionistic projection of Max’s experience of reality. His blindness would thus account for the apparent deformities in that reality, as well as allowing a symbolist reading of blindness as a kind of superior vision” (Parker 469). The fact that the action plays out through the course of one night evokes the world of dreams, a characteristic enhanced by the pervasive use of chiaroscuro effects that sometimes leave characters groping in darkness to find their way and allow for shadows and silhouettes to dart in and out of the *mise en scène*.

As the scene progresses, Valle-Inclán heightens the rhetoric:

PRISONER. The only hope for Barcelona lies in its destruction!

MAX. And yet Barcelona is dear to my heart!

PRISONER. I remember it too.

MAX. The only moments of joy in my hours of darkness I owe to her.

Every day a dead capitalist, sometimes two... That comforts me.

PRISONER. You don’t count the workers who fall...

MAX. The workers multiply like flies, in their thousands. Whereas the

bosses are more like elephants and all powerful, prehistoric beasts.

They procreate slowly. Saul, we must preach the new gospel
throughout the world.

PRISONER. My name is Matthew.

MAX. I baptize thee Saul. I’m a poet and the alphabet is my prerogative.

Listen and remember for when you're free again, Saul. A really good hunt could put the price of employers' hides higher than Calcutta ivory.

PRISONER. We're working on it.

MAX. And if it's any consolation, by exterminating the workers, they're also helping to exterminate the employers.

PRISONER. And by destroying the city, we shall destroy the Judaic spirit of commercialism that goes with it.

MAX. I have no objection. Let Semitic Barcelona perish, like Carthage and Jerusalem! *Alea iacta est!* What are they accusing you of?

PRISONER. It's a long story. I'm branded as a rebel... I refused to leave my job at the mill to go to war and started a riot in the factory. I was shopped by the boss, did my time and then tramped the country looking for work. Now I'm being shifted from one court to another, summoned by some judge or other. I know how it will all end: a couple of shots in the back for 'attempting to escape'. Well, it wouldn't be so bad, if that was all...

MAX. Why, what are you afraid of?

PRISONER. That they might amuse themselves by torturing me.

MAX. Barbarians!

PRISONER. I know how they work.

MAX. Bastards. And they are the ones who protest against the Black Legend of Spain!

PRISONER. So, for a handful of pesetas, in some deserted spot, they'll finish me off. That's the defenders of the people for you! And that's what the rich bastards call justice!

MAX. The rich and the poor. The barbarism of Iberia is unanimous.

PRISONER. All of them.

MAX. All of them, Matthew. Where is the bomb that will blow this Spanish shit-heap to hell?

PRISONER. You are a poet, sir, and can see many things. Have you not seen a raised fist in the darkness? (Lyon, *Lights* 79-81)

The prisoner's name, Mateo Morral, references a "young Catalan anarchist who in Madrid threw a bomb at King Alfonso XIII and Queen Victoria Eugenia on their wedding day" (Gillespie 239). Lyon notes that the name 'Saul' is used in both the Old and New Testaments to indicate "conversion, seeing the light and preaching the new gospel" (*Lights* 165). This is, however, an unsatisfactory explanation of Max's "baptizing" Mateo with the name of 'Saul.' By renaming the prisoner Saul, Valle-Inclán actually reverses the name change attributed to 'Saul' who became 'Paul' upon his conversion to Christianity in Acts 9:1-22 of the New Testament. In either case, the "new gospel" in Max's case seems to be either the ideology of anarchism or a more general fight against capitalists.

Further drawing on religious associations, the anti-Semitic rhetoric present in the scene provides insight into the anarchist movement in Spain. The goals of Spanish anarchists (as opposed to the seemingly puerile goals associated with contemporary

anarchists) were moral and utopian rather than economic, and therefore fundamentally different from the goals of other working class movements like Bolshevism:

Their fundamental aims were not higher wages or better working conditions, but the complete eradication of capitalist structures that enslaved the proletariat. Their attitude could be described as anti-Semitic only in so far as Jews were traditionally associated with the commercialism and profit motive to which anarchists were ideologically opposed. (Lyon, *Lights* 165)

With the prisoner's prediction that he will be shot while "attempting to escape," Valle-Inclán foreshadows the impending execution of the prisoner and calls attention to the pernicious practices of the police and civil guard in Spain during the early twentieth century. The practice of executing those opposed to the government under the pretense of attempted escape was so common from 1915-1922 that it was referred to as the *ley de fugas*, or the "law of fugitives." A similar fate befell Lorca twelve years later at the hands of *Falangists*. Valle-Inclán identifies the people who practice this type of barbarism with those who protest the 'The Black Legend of Spain,' or "the reputation which Spain acquired abroad during the sixteenth century for cruelty and fanaticism, particularly in connection with the treatment of the Latin American Indians" (Lyon, *Lights* 165).

As Max voices his desire for the destruction of Spain, the prisoner points out the metaphorical vision with which the blind poet sees. The scene concludes with the prisoner being taken from the cell to his inevitable execution as Max cries with "impotence and rage" (Lyon, *Lights* 81). Valle-Inclán emphasizes the powerlessness of

his protagonist in the face of an indifferent world through the following highly cinematic stage directions: “Max Estrella gropes about him feeling for the wall and sits down with his legs crossed in an attitude of oriental religious meditation. The shadowy form of the blind poet is an expression of unspoken grief” (Lyon, *Lights* 81).

In the following scene, set in the office of a Madrid newspaper which Valle-Inclán’s stage directions indicate should evoke images of “a seedy gambling saloon,” the pleas of the *modernistas* and Latino for help in securing Max’s release disintegrate into pretentious displays of erudition and wit (Delgado, *Plays* 129). In addition to chastising the media, the scene sets into motion the mechanisms by which Max is released from jail (the editor calls the Minister of the Interior, a friend of Max’s, who arranges for Max’s release) and serves to remind the audience that “the play is not only about Max Estrella and his attitudes, but about the response of the social context to him, how his image is reflected in that social context” (Lyon, *Lights* 166). The ease with which the supplicants are distracted from saving the poet also highlights Max’s irrelevance to society.

One seemingly unnecessary sequence from the scene seems to illustrate Valle-Inclán’s desire to incense the audience. The playwright includes a blithe reference to abortion that would have been anathema to Spanish audiences had the play been performed during Valle-Inclán’s lifetime:

DORIO DE GADEX. I don’t smoke.

DON FILIBERTO. You must have some vices.

DORIO DE GADEX. I like to rape servant girls.

DON FILIBERTO. Is it fun?

DORIO DE GADEX. It has its moments, Don Filiberto.

DON FILIBERTO. You must be a father several times over?

DORIO DE GADEX. I make them have abortions.

DON FILIBERTO. A childkiller to boot!

PÉREZ. A jack of all trades! (Delgado, *Plays* 132-3)

Once freed from jail thanks to the machinations of his friends, Max visits his childhood friend, the Minister of the Interior, to thank him and to seek redress for unjust treatment at the hands of corrupt police officers. In another scenic description that serves to visually illustrate *BL*'s indictment of Spanish society, the setting, like that of the newspaper office, is described as evoking images of a seedy gambling hall. After being denied the occasion to talk with the Minister, Max's threat to make a scene is met with the derision of the Minister's secretary who calls Max "mad." Max replies that he is "mad from being forgotten, ignored and denied" (Lyon, *Lights* 95). The Minister, who treats Valle-Inclán with both condescension and pity through the course of the scene, asks about Max's blindness:

MINISTER. Are you blind?

MAX. Blink like Homer and like Belisarius.

MINISTER. Temporarily, I trust...

MAX. Definitely and irrevocably. A gift from the goddess Venus.

MINISTER. Good Heavens! And why didn't you think of coming to see me before now? I scarcely see your name in the papers these days.

MAX. I live in oblivion! You had more foresight when you abandoned the Arts to make us all happier by governing. You can't eat art, Paco. Under the tinsel, Art is all rags and starvation.

MINISTER. The Arts don't get the consideration they deserve, that's true, but nonetheless they are a marketable commodity. Max, my friend, I must get back to my work. Just leave a note of what you want with this young man... though you have come a little late.

MAX. I have come when I had to. I'm not here to ask for favours. I have come to demand satisfaction and justice. I am blind. They call me a poet. I live by making verses and I live like a pauper. You may think that I'm a drunk. It's just as well, because if I weren't a drunk, I'd have blown my brains out long ago. (Lyon, *Lights* 95-97)

Valle-Inclán uses the scene to comment on the philistine view of the arts espoused by Spain's bourgeoisie in particular and the Spanish populace in general. In spite of the undeniable political bent of *BL*, many scholars, like Sumner Greenfield, consider the play to be first and foremost an exploration of the "confrontation between the poet and the institutionalized world" (46). If one sees *BL* as an exploration of the artist's role in a society that views him/her contemptuously, then the play, regardless of its 1920s Madrid topicality, has something to say to contemporary America.

As Max is about to leave, the Minister takes pity on him and offers to pilfer money from funds allocated for other purposes in order to provide a pension for Max that would last as long as the Minister is in office (a subtle reference to the political volatility of the period). Max knows that the money will come from what he refers to as the "Reptile's slush fund," a name popular in Spain at the time for secret funds available to government officials for "unofficial purposes such as paying informers, bribing witnesses and buying favours or goodwill. They were also used, as in Max's case, for unofficial

payments to friends” (Lyon, *Lights* 96, 169). Nevertheless, after stating that his only purpose in coming was to seek “some kind of just punishment for the bastards” who arrested him, Max accepts the offer: “You offered me money and I accepted because I too am a bastard. I couldn’t leave this world without sinking to the depths of depravity at least once. I have truly earned Your Excellency’s embrace” (Delgado, *Plays* 143). Max is degraded by a society which forces him to play the role of the fool and the villain, and thereby implicated for playing his own part in the degradation of society. In his impotence and shame, Max is forced to accept alms from a man who is several notches his inferior. Valle-Inclán’s stage directions complete the scene visually:

Máximo Estrella, with arms flung wide, his head high, his dead eyes tragic in their stillness, advances like a zombie. His Excellency, pot-bellied and larded with greasepaint, responds with the effusive alacrity of a ham actor in a French melodrama. The two embrace. When they separate, a tear has welled in His Excellency’s eye. He clasps the bohemian’s hand and presses some banknotes into it. (Lyon, *Lights* 101)

There is a grotesque quality to the embrace of the “ragged and blind but dignified poet by the overweight, foppish Minister who presses money into his hand” (Parker 467).

With money in hand, Max and Latino go to an opulent café where “a piano and violin are playing. Shadowy figures drift in the smoky atmosphere and the music pulsates in the pale, flickering light of the arc lamps. The multiplying mirrors add a note of melodramatic interest as the café recedes into infinite depths of extravagant geometric forms” (Lyon, *Lights* 103). Although Max and Latino are referred to in the stage

directions as “outsiders,” once inside they encounter a friend, Ruben Darío.⁴⁸ In the rambling banter that ensues, the conversation touches on such disparate topics as Pythagoras’s ‘Music of the Spheres’ and Karma. Max’s impending death is foreshadowed by talk of death and Max’s insistence on spending the Minister’s money on fine wines and foods without concern for the future.

Having sated their appetites food and alcohol, Max and Latino return to the streets of Madrid where “ragged young tarts and old hags painted like masks maraud furtively in the shadows of the bushes. Sleeping forms lie dotted about the park benches” (Lyon, *Lights* 111). Valle-Inclán undercuts this setting by calling for “a springtime fragrance of lilac [that] embalms the dewy night” (Lyon, *Lights* 111). Two prostitutes, one young and one old, accost Max and Latino:

With an obscene laugh, the girl takes the poet by the hand, makes him feel her shoulders, then presses it hard against her breasts. The old hag, under her white-leaded mask, displays her toothless gums and entices Don Latino. With a smile of ghostly pallor, she leads him off into the night. Whispers as they disappear amongst the trees. A grotesque parody of the garden of Armida. (Lyon, *Lights* 113)

Spain’s drama, as addressed above, has an illustrious tradition of romance, seduction, and love. This scene, the only scene of seduction in *BL*, clearly undercuts that tradition. Valle-Inclán substitutes toothless, grotesque prostitutes for beautiful young maidens. A blind bohemian poet and a pathetic social parasite replace the valiant, courageous, honor-obsessed Spanish alpha-males of the Golden Age. Valle-Inclán

⁴⁸ Darío, a Nicaraguan poet, is one of the play’s characters that has a direct historical counterpart. Darío was a close friend of both Valle-Inclán and Sawa.

accentuates the subversive nature of the scene by referring to the location as a grotesque parody of the garden of Armida, a reference to “an episode from Tasso’s *Jerusalem Delivered* in which Armida, a beautiful sorceress, seduces her victims in the voluptuous atmosphere of her palace and gardens. The scene is thus conceived as a degraded modern travesty of a classic literary episode” (Lyon, *Lights* 173). As the young prostitute, who smells of the orange blossoms she has been selling, attempts to sell her services to Max, the poet treats her with tenderness: “With the special fingering of a blind man, [Max] moves his hand over her round face, her neck and shoulders [while she instructs him to touch her body]. The little tart laughs with an abandon of ticklish sensuality. She removes a gypsy comb from her bun and while combing her hair, she quickens her laughter and grows languorous” (Gillespie 175). The scene ends abruptly with the approaching glow from Latino’s post-coital cigarette, leaving the audience wondering whether the poet satisfied his lust, too.

Continuing their somnambular adventure, Max and Latino walk again on broken glass through the streets of Madrid to a serenade of police patrols, cars, and distant shouting. As the two stand next to the walls of a convent with the facade of an aristocratic mansion in the distance, a woman with her breast bared wails as she carries in her arms a dead child that has a bullet-hole in its temple. In the distance a series of shots is heard: “The hoarse cries of the mother rise higher as, on hearing the shooting, she presses her dead child against her breast” (Gillespie 179). An onlooker asks a passing night watchman what happened, to which the night watchman replies, “It was a prisoner attempting to escape. Some Catalonian fellow” (Gillespie 181). Making the connection to his Catalonian cellmate, Max says:

Latino, I can't even scream anymore . . . The rage inside here is killing me! My mouth is filled with poison. That dead man knew what was coming . . . And yet he did not fear death. Our life is a Dantesque Inferno of shame and anger. I am dying of hunger and yet I am content, content at not having played a part in this tragic masquerade. (Delgado, *Plays* 159)

Max's reference to Spanish life as a "tragic masquerade" gives insight into the concept of the *esperpento*: "This paradoxical phrase is a key definition of the *esperpento*, which captures the tragic dimensions of farce or the farcical aspects of tragedy" (Gillespie 254). While Gillespie observes the theatrical implications of the phrase, Lyon exposes the underlying reference to the chasm that lay between Spanish reality as seen by Valle-Inclán and the glorious mythology of Spain's past:

As Valle's awareness of and disenchantment with contemporary social and political life in Spain increased, his work took on a more subversive character. He became less content with impassive contemplation and angled his vision to bring out the jarring contrasts between myth and reality in Spanish life. The characteristic humour of the *esperpento* focuses precisely on the discrepancy between man's heroic self-image and his essentially manipulated condition. (*Theatre* 7)

By disclaiming any responsibility for the tragic masquerade that Spain has become, Max signals that he is fully aware of his irrelevance to society. Max concludes the scene by asking Latino to lead him to the Viaduct, a place popular in Madrid for suicides:

In such a contemptible, uncaring society, Max cannot assume the tragic role which would have been his in a previous era. Although presented to

us as a classical hero in the opening scene, he is made progressively aware of his own insignificance as the play progresses. There is an incongruity in the tragic role that Max has been allocated. Like a puppet, Max acts out a tragic role created by others which has no place in such a dehumanized society. (Delgado, *Plays* xxxiii)

In scene twelve, as the sun begins to rise and the sounds of chirping birds fill the air, Max and Latino stop to talk on the stoop of Max's tenement. In the ensuing conversation, Max presents his idea of the *esperpento*. Because the scene presents the most thorough analysis ever presented by Valle-Inclán of his new style (yet still an inadequate explanation), it has received more critical attention than any other sequence in the playwright's opus:

MAX. Don Latino of Hispalis, grotesque personae par excellence! I shall immortalize you in a novella!

DON LATINO. In a tragedy, Max.

MAX. Our tragedy is no longer a tragedy.

DON LATINO. But it has to be something!

MAX. *An Esperpento*.⁴⁹

DON LATINO. Stop twitching, Max!

MAX. I'm freezing to death!

DON LATINO. Come on, get up! Let's go for a walk.

MAX. I can't.

⁴⁹ "Max rejects tragedy as a literary genre because its manner of depicting morally significant struggles ending in ruin or profound unhappiness cannot in modern times accurately represent the situation of Spaniards. Their tragic situation, he suggests, is too calamitously absurd to have the nobility of traditional tragedies" (Gillespie 254).

DON LATINO. Stop this farce. Let's get going.

MAX. Breathe on me. Where have you gone, Latino?

DON LATINO. I'm right beside you

MAX. Now that you've been transformed into an ox, I can't recognize

you. Breathe hard on me, illustrious ox from Bethlehem's stable.

Bellow, Latino! You are the bell-ox and if you bellow hard enough

Buey Apis, the Sacred Bull will appear. We shall fight with him in the
bullring.

DON LATINO. You're beginning to frighten me. This joke isn't funny
anymore.

MAX. The avant-garde are deceiving themselves. It was Goya who
invented the Grotesque. Our classical heroes have gone to *Calle*
Alvarez Gato; Cat's Alley.

DON LATINO. You're completely drunk!

MAX. Classical heroes reflected in concave mirrors give us the Grotesque
or *Esperpento*. The tragic sense of Spanish life can only be rendered
through an aesthetic that is systematically deformed.

DON LATINO. Rubbish! Don't be so pompous!

MAX. Spain is a grotesque deformation of European civilization.

DON LATINO. It may well be, but I'm not getting involved!

MAX. In a concave mirror, even the most beautiful images become
absurd.

DON LATINO. I agree. But I do enjoy looking at myself in the hall of mirrors in the Calle Alvarez Gato.

MAX. So do I. Distortion ceases to be distortion when subjected to a perfect mathematic. My present aesthetic approach consists in the transformation of all classical norms with the mathematics of a concave mirror.

DON LATINO. And where is this mirror?

MAX. At the bottom of an empty wine glass. (Delgado, *Plays* 160-61)

Exposed to the cold after having sold his cloak, the defeated poet seeks warmth by asking Latino to blow on him, which engenders a series of abstruse analogies:

Here he is freezing to death and needs someone's breathing, like that of the ox in the manger of Bethlehem. Latino, at his side, is thus transformed into this ox. Max next suggests that his guide-dog, Latino, should be the leading ox that carries the bell, and if he bellows the other oxen will follow, among them perhaps the Sacred Bull, that is, the [editor] Buey Apis [sometimes translated as "Bull" Apis] who took his livelihood away [in the first scene]. Finally, since Mr. Big Shot [Buey Apis] is only a bull, Max suggests teasing him, and thus becoming a bullfighter showing off before a crowd. (Gillespie 254-5)

Latino, who has been treating Max's behavior as an absurd joke, tells Max that the farce is losing its humor. The statement points directly to one of the inherent qualities of the *esperpento*: Comedy and tragedy, indissoluble partners in the *esperpento*, are tenuously balanced. The difficulties faced by Latino in interpreting Max's behavior are the same as

those faced by the audience. At what point does the joke—the absurdity and the grotesque deformation—lose its humor and become frightening or tragic?

Prior to the publication of *BL*, the word *esperpento* was used to denote an ugly thing or person or something that is absurd. Scene twelve marks the first time that the word *esperpento* was used to “denote a particular category of literary composition, one in which events are characterized by ludicrous or incongruous distortion” (Gillespie 254). Max acknowledges that the avant-garde has experimented with the absurd and the grotesque.⁵⁰ Nevertheless, he asserts that the initiator of these methods, and therefore of the *esperpento*. Valle-Inclán believed that he, like Goya, was depicting “the conduct of a degraded society in which all pretensions to the ‘higher values’ of the former Enlightenment have become ludicrous or inoperative under the impact of later historical developments” (Lyon, *Lights* 176). Max claims that the artist’s reactions to modern society should be to “distort systematically, that is, abandon the classical concepts of beauty, harmony and proportion and reflect discord with discord, fragmentation with fragmentation” (Lyon, *Lights* 175).

Concave mirrors exemplify the type of distortion Valle-Inclán seeks, and Max refers to an actual locale in contemporary Madrid that engendered the idea: “Alvarez Gato is the name of a real alley next to the Puerta del Sol. In front of a hardware store there were, in the 1920s, some distorting mirrors, like those found in fairs and carnivals, and the passers-by would stop and amuse themselves by being reflected” (Gillespie 255). Modern Spanish society, as Valle-Inclán saw it, functioned in a manner similar to that of a concave mirror: Classical heroes and classical precepts, when removed from the social

⁵⁰ The word used in the Spanish text is *ultraístas*. “The *ultraístas* were an avant-garde literary movement, related to Dadaism and Cubism, grouped around a poetry magazine called *Ultra*” (Lyon, *Lights* 176).

context for which they were created and re-inserted into Valle-Inclán's Spain, appear deformed, absurd, and grotesque.

Valle-Inclán boldly kills his protagonist three scenes before the play ends. Suffering from hallucinations, Max "sees" a funeral that he concludes is his and subsequently lays himself out as the corpse. Moments before Max dies, a dog zigzags into the scene, hikes a leg, and urinates in the street:

Max responds to his circumstances by 'acting out' his death scene as if he were playing an elaborate joke [a deliberate choice of farce over tragedy]. The macabre charade that Max goes through—laying himself out in preparation, ordering the funeral dirge to be sung and uttering the anti-tragic last words of 'good night'—is Max's self-travesty, a deliberate distortion of his own ultimate tragedy. (Lyon, *Lights* 175)

Latino, unaware that Max is actually dead, whispers to him that remaining there alone invites trouble from thieves. Ostensibly looking out for Max, Latino takes and promises to safeguard Max's wallet, which opportunely contains a winning lottery ticket. Two neighbors discover Max and assume that he is drunk again. When one of the two realizes that he is dead, she yells to the other that, as she's already wasted half the day, she doesn't have time to deal with the dead poet: "Valle-Inclán surrounds Max's death with deliberately anti-tragic circumstances—Latino denying the truth of the situation and refusing to lend his overcoat, a dog urinating nearby, Latino relieving Max of his wallet, the callous indifference of the Concierge and the Neighbour" (Lyon, *Lights* 175). These anti-climactic and anti-tragic devices are of great theoretical interest. They seem to be deliberate attempts to destroy the potential for catharsis or any other type of tragic

reaction to Max's death. If they serve to alienate the audience, then perhaps they serve to force objectivity through the creation of aesthetic distance. Valle-Inclán uses similar devices in the next two scenes.

A journalist at Max's wake attempts to convince Collet and Claudinita that Max is not dead but catatonic. The hearse driver, frustrated by the delay this is causing, sardonically resolves the issue by placing a match between Max's fingers and allowing it to burn to the end. In a twist that puzzles scholars, El Marquis de Brandomín turns up in the following graveyard scene that is complete with two gravediggers and overt references to Yorrick, Ophelia, and Hamlet.⁵¹

BL ends in Tight Arse's tavern, where a heavily intoxicated Latino is seen spending the money he won with Max's lottery ticket. After Enriqueta realizes that Latino has won the lottery with the ticket she sold to Max, she begins to seduce Latino. As Tight Arse, the bar's owner, is telling Latino to pay for Max's debt, a local thug approaches with knife in hand and says that everyone deserves a share of the loot. The conflict reaches a stalemate when Enriqueta reveals her knife, too. Alliances quickly shift as Enriqueta, Latino, and Tight Arse all turn against the thug. When a newspaper seller delivers the paper, Latino breaks away from the group and inquisitively scans the headlines:

DON LATINO. 'Coal Fumes. Two Women Gassed. According to a
neighbour. Doña Vicenta Knows Nothing. Crime or Suicide?
Mystery Continues!'

⁵¹ Lyon's explanation of this buttresses the notion that *BL* marks a radical shift for Valle-Inclán: "If we see *Luces de Bohemia* as stemming, in part at least, from disillusionment with previous artistic creeds, it goes some way towards explaining the appearance of the aged Marqués de Brandomín in scene 14 of the final version" (Lyon, *Theatre* 110-11).

THE YOUNG BARMAN. Check if the paper gives the women's names,

Don Latí.

DON LATINO. I'm looking.

PAY PAY THE POSER. Don't try too hard, pea brain!

ENRIQUETA THE STREETWALKER. Let's go, Don Latí.

THE YOUNG BARMAN. I bet you those two women are Don Máximo's
wife and daughter!

DON LATINO. That's absurd! Why would they kill themselves?

TIGHT ARSE. They were having a rough time!

DON LATINO. They were used to it. There could only be one logical
explanation. Grief at the loss of such a distinguished figure!

TIGHT ARSE. And just when you could have given them a hand.

DON LATINO. I intended to! I have a heart of gold, Venancio!

TIGHT ARSE. It's a crazy world!

DON LATINO. A grotesque esperpento! (Delgado, *Plays* 174-5)

This ambiguous ending illustrates a characteristic of Valle-Inclán's theatre that Delgado sees as a challenge to the still popular well-made play: "The open-ended nature of his theatre questions the fundamental notion of the 'well-made' play with its single, closed ending by offering a possibility of openings to the reader: a multiplicity of voices jostling with each other to produce a decisive rupture with the dominant dramaturgical structures" (Delgado, *Plays* xxvi).

While statements made by Valle-Inclán can be used to explicate the theory of the *esperpento*, it proves to be a tricky endeavor.⁵² The playwright's practice of explicitly contradicting himself impedes the process. Several of his short plays printed after 1920 are specified by the playwright to be intended for marionette theatre.⁵³ While the *esperpentos* were not officially sanctioned for marionettes, Valle-Inclán's extensive stage directions in *BL* frequently create marionette-like images of the characters, and some are explicitly described as puppet-like: "Characters often appear distinctly unhuman, as if they were puppets—stunted, awkward, mechanized figures with distinctive traits singled out for the reader's attention" (Delgado, *Plays* xxxiv).

Scholars have traditionally traced Valle-Inclán's interest in marionettes to the presentation of Vittorio Podreca's Teatro di Piccoli—an Italian company dedicated to the use of marionettes—in Madrid in 1924. However, Valle-Inclán stated during an interview in Mexico in 1921 that his *esperpentos* were intended to be performed by marionettes and went on to cite examples of segments from both *BL* and *Los cuernos de don Friolera* which he felt could best be performed in the style of Teatro di Piccoli. This strongly suggests that Valle-Inclán had contact with Podreca's company prior to 1924 (Lyon, *Theatre* 105). It is, however, possible that the playwright had heard of but was not familiar with the company, which was formed in 1913.

Questions about the use of marionettes in the *esperpentos* are further confused by two irreconcilably conflicting statements made in 1927:

⁵² Any attempt at a definitive conclusion about the genuineness of Valle-Inclán's conversion from traditionalism to materialism meets the same frustration.

⁵³ Other plays, like *Sacrilegio* and *Ligazón*, though not expressly sanctioned by the playwright for puppets, exhibit a dehumanization that mutates the characters into little more than shadows (Smith 90). The use of shadows darting in and out of scenes, as addressed above, characterizes *BL*, too.

For the stage? No, I haven't written, do not write, nor do I intend to write for the stage. I'm very fond of dialogue, as my novels show. And, of course, I like the theatre, and have done theatre, always trying to overcome the difficulties inherent in the genre. But I haven't written, nor will I write, for Spanish actors. Spanish actors haven't as yet learned to speak. They babble. And as long as there isn't one who knows how to speak, it seems to me ridiculous to write for them. (Qtd. in Lima, *Dramatic 44*)⁵⁴

Later the same year, Valle-Inclán, in characteristic fashion, contradicted himself: "I believe my plays to be perfectly stageable. I feel that my *Esperpentos* could be done to perfection by our actors since the plays possess something akin to popular farce, between the tragic and the grotesque. I can imagine Bonafé, for example, performing *Luces de bohemia*" (Qtd. in Lima, *Dramatic 44*).

Regardless of whether or not Valle-Inclán intended the *esperpentos* to be performed by marionettes, aesthetic ramifications of the *esperpento* more than likely imply that they were intended to be performed in, at the least, a puppet-style of performance. Valle-Inclán's "professed" intention with the *esperpentos* was to bring out the comedic aspects of tragic situations, a dramatic technique that requires aesthetic distance and the elimination of empathy and identification, all of which can be

⁵⁴ These two statements are indicative of the discordant relationship Valle-Inclán had with the commercial theatre: "On the balance of evidence, it seems that Valle disclaimed any connection with the theatre not because he thought his works were unsuitable for the theatre as he conceived it could become, but because the theatre as it existed was unsuitable for his works" (Lyon, *Theatre 6*). This is reminiscent of Brecht's *The Modern Theatre is the Epic Theatre*: "For by imagining that they have got hold of an apparatus which in fact has got hold of them they are supporting an apparatus which is out of their control, which has become an obstacle to output, and specifically to their [the avant-garde] own output. And this leads to a general habit of judging works by their suitability for the apparatus without ever judging the apparatus by its suitability for the work" (Qtd. in Gerould, *Theatre 447*).

accomplished through a less “realistic” performance style (Lyon, *Theatre* 105-6). The notions of creating aesthetic distance and the implied destruction of empathy and identification carry the most significant theoretical implications of the *esperpento*.

During an interview with Martínez Sierra in 1928, Valle-Inclán, commenting on the use of absurdity and the grotesque in his *esperpentos*, provided further insight into the relation of aesthetic distance to his new style:

There are three ways of seeing the world artistically or aesthetically: from the knees, standing, or from the air. When one adopts the kneeling position – and that’s the oldest stance in literature – the characters, the heroes, are given a condition superior to that of human beings or, at least, to that of the narrator or poet. There is a second way, which is to consider fictional protagonists as if they were of our own nature, as if the character duplicated our essence, with its very virtues and defects. This is the way of Shakespeare. And there is a third way, which is to see the world from a superior plane and to consider the characters of the plot as beings inferior to the author, with a touch of irony. This is a very Spanish manner. This is the manner of Quevedo. This manner is definitive in Goya. And it was this consideration that moved me to take a new course in my literature and write the *Esperpentos*, the literary genre that I baptize with the name of *Esperpento*. (Qtd. in Lima, *Dramatic* 135)

Valle-Inclán’s perspective of seeing his characters as unequivocally inferior requires a detachment in the way they are treated from his point of view as their creator: “What is radically different about Valle-Inclán’s theatre is his point of view, the detached, non-

didactic, slightly ironic stance in his perception of human affairs, from which everything else – including technique – flows” (Lyon, *Theatre* 6). This detachment further enhances the aesthetic distance created in the *esperpento*.

In the same interview from 1928, Valle-Inclán comments on the essentially manipulated condition of modern man:

Life – its events, sorrows, loves – is always the same, fatally so. What changes are the characters, the protagonists of life. Those roles were previously played by gods and heroes. In the past, destiny fell on the shoulders – haughtiness and sorrow – of Oedipus or Medea. Today, destiny is the same, fate is the same, greatness is the same, pain is the same, but the shoulders that bear them have changed. Actions, concerns, recognition are the same as yesterday and forever. The shoulders are different, too miniscule to support that weight. Out of that are born contrast, disproportion, and the ridiculous. Blindness is beautiful and noble in Homer. But in *Luces de bohemia* that same blindness is sad and lamentable because it concerns a bohemian poet, Máximo Estrella. (Qtd. in Lima, *Dramatic* 144)

Of great importance in this particular quote is the use of the word “ridiculous.” When considered in concert with the use of “farce” and “joke” in scene twelve and the aforementioned statements regarding marionettes, it seems clear that Valle-Inclán predicated his new style on the destruction of empathy and distorted his characters to highlight the absurdity of modern existence: “At least two important principles emerge from the theoretical exposition of the *esperpento* in *Luces* (scene 12). These are the

rejection of tragic emotion in favour of systematic distortion and the maintenance of the artist's impassivity" (Lyon, *Theatre* 114). These innovations aided Valle-Inclán in creating a theatrical style based on paradox that, had it been produced during the playwright's lifetime, would have in all likelihood challenged audiences no less than the innovations of the Brecht, Ionesco, and Artaud:

The *esperpento* reorientates the reader/spectator, calling into question the possibility of a clear distinction between the tragic and the comic, the bizarre and the conventional, the real and the unreal, fiction and history. Thus we laugh at what, in different circumstances, would produce awe and pain. Max's funeral-wake is therefore not the solemn occasion one would expect but a catalogue of chaotic misunderstandings which proves both embarrassing and ridiculous and an unnecessary prolonging of the suffering of his widow and daughter. The play is full of such incongruous situations—the tragic and the comic existing uncomfortably side by side in a world where characters do not behave in the manner expected of them. If, as Ionesco claims, the absurd is that devoid of purpose, then Max's life is absurd. (Delgado, *Plays* xxxiv)

CHAPTER VI

Conclusion

Cast in the light of twentieth century theatrical innovations, Valle-Inclán's latter plays appear curiously modern and antiquated at the same time. In spite of the *esperpentos'* modernity, productions remain rare. There are good reasons for this. *BL*, for instance, is far too dense, political (especially considering its specific topicality), and highbrow to be appreciated widely, and, although Valle-Inclán's use of language is remarkable in Spanish, the dialogue frequently appears stilted, cumbersome, and awkward in English. As a writer, Valle-Inclán was more a quilter than a weaver, and, at times, the patchwork of his episodic structure is poorly pieced together.

Lack of interest in Valle-Inclán's work plagued the playwright during his own lifetime. Consequently, his plays were rarely (if at all) produced:

Lacking a director in his own times of the stature and imagination of Meyerhold or Piscator to realize the spectacular world of his texts, Valle was never in a position to direct his own work on a regular basis. The detailed, allusive nature of his stage-directions—a poetic guide to the surrounding dialogue and an intrinsic component of the dramatic text—has often led to a perception of the plays as failed cinema scripts rather than works for the stage.” (Delgado, *Plays* xxv)

Prior to the rise of interest in Valle-Inclán's dramaturgy, many of his works were commonly regarded as novels in dialogic form.

When they are given seminal stagings, however, Valle-Inclán's plays can elicit very strong reactions:

Ben Barne's stirred controversy by producing for the Edinburgh Festival the *Barbaric Comedies* of the Spanish writer Valle-Inclán, which portrayed rape and sexual intercourse on stage. It provoked phone calls and a petition prior to its October, 2000, Dublin opening at the Abbey after being described by British newspapers as 'the most shocking production in the [Edinburgh] festival's 54 years.' Yet Barnes's boldness garnered the Abbey eight out of thirteen awards at the Irish Times/ESB Theatre Awards on February 11, 2001" (O'Donnell 135).

Interest in Valle-Inclán's dramaturgy among theatre scholars remains virtually non-existent. While the general lack of interest in and/or bias against Spanish theatre plays a role in this, there are other factors to consider. Valle-Inclán was, by nature, a dilettante, and, consequently, he appears sophomoric and even charlatanical at times. Furthermore, many scholars question the use of "borrowed" material in some of his works. Ironically, Valle-Inclán's "resourcefulness" has also led to parallels with Derrida's concept of intertextuality:

The intertextual resonances present in the texts – the incorporation and deployment of techniques from melodrama, cinema, *commedia dell' arte*, the drama of the Golden Age and the theatre of Shakespeare – gives his plays the appearance of a mosaic, a literary anarchy of sorts which renders them awkward to classify. By drawing on a wide body of texts, Valle-

Inclán made constant references to the intellectual tradition he was a part of, thus reflecting the fundamental post-structuralist notion that all plays are only ever about other cultural artifacts, literary or otherwise. (Delgado, *Plays xxv-xxvi*)

What is needed is an initiative on the part of the American theatrical community to address Valle-Inclán's legacy. His work demands it. Common comparisons of the *esperpentos* with epic theatre, theatre of the absurd, theatre of cruelty, and expressionism need to be explored. Expressionist, as well as Marxist and semiotic, readings must be executed. Finally, ongoing work exploring Valle-Inclán's influence on film, including his relationship with Luis Buñuel, needs to be expanded.

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Scope and Method of Study: The purpose of this study is to examine *Luces de bohemia (Bohemian Lights)* as a cultural artifact from pre-Civil War Spain and as a significant step in the development of Spanish dramaturgy. The role of the rise and fall of the Spanish Empire in the development of 'Spanish Identity' and the question of the 'Problem of Spain' as viewed by Ramón del Valle-Inclán and other members of the 'Generation of 1898' will be examined as a prerequisite to any substantive exploration of *Bohemian Lights*. In order to establish *Bohemian Lights* as an innovative step in Spanish dramaturgy, a brief examination of the history of Spanish dramaturgy is provided in order to examine the ways in which Valle-Inclán subverted traditional Spanish dramaturgical methods to create *Bohemian Lights* and develop the concept of the *esperpento*.

Findings and Conclusions: *Bohemian Lights*, as a cultural artifact, is laden with references to a variety of literary traditions and with cultural, political, and social references to Spanish history. *Bohemian Lights* exhibits innovative techniques not previously seen in Spanish dramaturgy. These innovations are more generally characteristics of the *esperpento* and resemble, to varying degrees, anti-Aristotelian innovations developed throughout Europe following World War One.

ADVISER'S APPROVAL: Jeffrey Stephens
