

FROM PAGE TO STAGE: PRINT JOURNALISM, COMMERCIAL  
THEATER AND THE BIRTH OF MODERN  
SPECTATORSHIP IN MADRID

By

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Dissertation

Submitted to the Faculty of the  
Graduate School of Vanderbilt University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

Spanish

May, 2011

Nashville, Tennessee

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For Chelsea, my inspiration

and

In loving memory of Pop Pop and Aunt Carrie

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A project of this magnitude does not emanate from the hand of an individual, but from the efforts of a community. Grants from the Northeast Modern Language Association and the Vanderbilt Graduate School facilitated research trips to the Fundación Juan March and the Filmoteca Española in 2009 and 2010, trips that provided invaluable richness and depth to this project. I owe a great measure of gratitude to the Robert Penn Warren Center for the Humanities, whose Graduate Student Fellowship program supported the completion of this dissertation. In particular I would like to thank James B. Johnson for his generosity in endowing the Mary and Joe Harper Fellowship at the Penn Warren Center, a fellowship I was proud to hold during the 2010–2011 academic year. I also would like to thank Professor Edward H. Friedman and Mona Frederick for their leadership at the Penn Warren Center and for making it such a vibrant and dynamic place for scholarly inquiry and investigation.

I am appreciative of the great efforts of the many people with whom I have had the pleasure of working on this dissertation and related projects. Having spent my entire academic career heretofore at Vanderbilt University, I am greatly indebted to so many of the wonderful people that work in the Department of Spanish and Portuguese. I am grateful to Professor Andrés Zamora for taking an interest in me as an undergraduate and for the close bond of scholarship and friendship that has developed between us, ultimately culminating in this project. His guidance and care has been so very important in my professional and personal development. Each member of my dissertation

committee—Edward H. Friedman, Earl Fitz, and Michael Bess—has played a vital role in my intellectual and professional growth here at Vanderbilt.

Beyond academic study, many friends and colleagues have been indispensable in motivating me and encouraging my work. Foremost among these is Todd Hughes, who has been nothing short of a wonderful friend and mentor. I am appreciative of the 2010–2011 Graduate Student Fellows at the Penn Warren Center and their willingness to help this project flourish. Jonathan Wade, David Wiseman, Pablo Martínez Diente, Anna-Lisa Halling, Cory Duclos, and James Krause all have been fellow students in the Department of Spanish and Portuguese to whom I am grateful for their friendship and support.

Finally, I would like to thank those who matter most: my family. My wife Chelsea's love and encouragement has been a constant source of motivation throughout this process. I thank my parents Charles and Pat Parker for sparking my love of reading and cheering me on every step of the way. I am also appreciative of the constant encouragement and love of Frank and Kayla Heresco. The Drs. Edmund and Lauren Jackson have been a steady source of optimism and commiseration, in spite of the distance. Mark and Amy Womack likewise have lightened the load every step of the way through their hospitality and support. To Zack, Hilary, Grant, and Courtney, thank you for your sometimes unique contributions to this work. To all of my magnificent family, thank you for your love.

Jason Thomas Parker

March, 2011

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## CHAPTER I

### NEW READERS, NEW VIEWERS: EVOLVING INTERPRETIVE STRATEGIES IN A DYNAMIC MEDIA LANDSCAPE

The confluence of interests and roles in the creation and production of dramatic works makes theater a genre whose trends and movements are difficult to summarize and categorize. Theater is a performance genre that consists not only of the dramatic text, but also its actualization through the staging of the work and its reception by an audience. The present study explores the interrelations among this trio of elements in the rise of the popular commercial theater in nineteenth-century Madrid and the ramifications of these interactions for twentieth-century artistic theater. The argument I present is simple: the development of the informative newspaper altered the mental frameworks of Madrilenian audiences and the business practices of theater operators; these changes ultimately led to new and drastically different conceptions of dramatic texts and performances.

The modern, informative newspaper changed the cultural landscape of contemporary Spain by offering new types of information to readers on a daily basis. By making new types of knowledge accessible to the citizens of developing urban spaces, the newspaper contributed to the formation of new means by which residents of the city identified with a larger social community. Newspapers' drive to inform readers necessitated formal innovation, leading to the development of new journalistic genres and styles of visual presentation that communicated specific types of information more effectively. The appearance of the newspaper changed drastically during this period as a greater number of news items crowded the page and thus produced a fragmentary effect



in the visual layout of the paper. This push toward greater variety reduced the length of the average news item so that a maximum number of stories and features could populate the limited space of each page.

A major argument of this essay will be that constraining the physical limits of a discursive practice dictates the need for formal innovation. This was a chief characteristic of nineteenth-century popular culture in Madrid, spearheaded by the rise of mass print daily newspapers. Theater entrepreneurs utilized similar tactics in the world of drama as they too sought to expand audiences and profits. The appearance of the *teatro por horas* production model and its accompanying corpus of dramatic works—the *género chico*—followed many of the patterns previously laid down by newspaper companies, and thus experienced a similar pattern of formal innovation made necessary by the need to create a variegated product within the boundaries of strict physical constrictions. The present chapter aims to set forth a number of theoretical concepts in order to consider how the development of the mass print industry affected and shaped the rise of commercial theater in Madrid.

### **Reconstructing the Past: the Field of Cultural Production**

Pierre Bourdieu's concept of the field of cultural production provides an excellent point of departure for our considerations of how, in broad terms, newspapers and theater operate as discursive agents within a matrix of socio-political, economic, and cultural relations that mold and shape modern society. This theoretical notion supplies a striking visualization of the intricate or invisible relationships between seemingly unconnected social institutions and cultural practices. Bourdieu's analysis of the literary field generally

focuses on an explanation of how artists' resistance to the dominance of economic power generated a form of cultural capital whose tendency is to invert the logic of the economic world. I choose to borrow Bourdieu's theoretical framework in a more expansive sense in order to establish a model that will allow us to observe how broad structural changes in the methods and modes of textual production have led to shifts and transformations in the mental habits of readers and the expectations of theater-going audiences.

Bourdieu's notion of the cultural field provides a complex, non-linear theoretical framework that rejects facile considerations of cause and effect in favor of more nuanced approaches to transformations of social institutions and discursive practices. Bourdieu uses the term 'position-taking' to refer to specific locations within the field, a term that emphasizes both a metaphorical spatial relationship and the dynamic qualities of individual agents in constant flux. Changes in a position-taking or in the relationship between two position-takings in the field produce reverberations felt throughout the entire matrix of possibilities. Perhaps a less apparent, although equally important, ramification of this model is that "a position-taking changes, even when the position remains identical, whenever there is change in the universe of options that are simultaneously offered for producers and consumers to choose from" (30). In other words, alterations occur throughout the cultural field not only when a single agent changes, but also when new options or possibilities emerge. For example, the decision to circulate a manuscript in the medieval period represents the most practical method for disseminating a text. In contrast, hand-to-hand circulation by manuscript in the nineteenth century among bohemian poets can be read as a gesture of cultural and socio-economic

resistance to the imposition of industrial literary production; the existence of the printing press changes the significance of a mode of distribution.

Analysis of the field of cultural production widens our critical purview to include not just the myriad socio-political, economic, and historical factors that contributed to the development of cultural phenomena, but also the range of alternative cultural histories that were possible during a specific historical moment but never came to fruition. Bourdieu remarks: “One of the major difficulties of the social history of philosophy, art or literature is that it has to reconstruct these spaces of original possibles which, because they were part of the self-evident givens of the situation, remained unremarked and are therefore unlikely to be mentioned in contemporary accounts, chronicles or memoirs” (31). Bourdieu characterizes “works of art as a *manifestation* of the field as a whole, in which all the powers of the field, and all the determinisms inherent in its structure and functioning, are concentrated” (37). The obvious consequence of such a formulation is that ideas, beliefs, superstitions, myths, and legends equally influence the structure and organization of the field of cultural production, regardless of their accuracy or truth-value. A major strength of this approach to culture is that it permits irreality to enter into our understanding of the dynamics of the cultural life of Madrid in the late nineteenth century. To give a concrete example, Spanish imperial presence in Cuba, Puerto Rico, the Philippines, and Africa was a concrete reality for the nineteenth-century Spanish theatergoer, a reality that offered both the possibility of the decline of empire and its continuation for the conceivable future. The dialectic between these two strikingly different possible futures informs much of the Madrilenian commercial theater of the

1880s and 1890s, and therefore must be incorporated into any serious critical approximation to the popular works enjoyed by Spanish audiences during this period.

By approaching culture as a field of interconnected signifying practices, we can recover and analyze a broad range of cultural activities in order to reconstruct the mental frameworks, ethical beliefs, and aesthetic sensibilities that characterized readers and theater audiences in Madrid in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This endeavor departs from an understanding of culture as the “description of a particular way of life, which expresses certain meanings and values not only in art and learning but also in institutions and ordinary behavior” (Williams, “Analysis” 48). Political speeches, technological invention, social conflict, a night at the theater: all of these activities and many others produce meaning for subjects in a given historical moment, and thus play a role in establishing the terms of the cultural field.

Consequently, the keys to the development of modern theater cannot be found in a purely formalist approach to the dramatic text or in a reception study of specific audiences reacting to a single performance of a play, but rather must be sought through a complex reconstruction of the discursive practices and social pressures that informed and framed its development. Mikhail Bakhtin and Pavel Nikolaevich Medvedev recognized this necessity in their response to the essentialist practices of the Russian Formalists in *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship: A Critical Introduction to Sociological Poetics* (1928), arguing that the production of a text depends on the dialectical confluence of internal and external factors in the work. They went on to assert: “The literary structure, like every ideological structure, refracts the generating socio-economic reality” (16). In his study of the postmodern mode of culture, Fredric Jameson offers a stark

example of the importance of this recognition of the work of art's place within a particular socio-economic, historical, and cultural context through his analysis of Vincent Van Gogh's painting "A Pair of Boots" (1887). Jameson asserts "[T]hat if this copiously reproduced image is not to sink to the level of sheer decoration, it requires us to reconstruct some initial situation out of which the finished work emerges," and goes on to suggest that in the absence of this critical gesture of mental restoration, "[T]he painting will remain an inert object, a reified end product impossible to grasp as a symbolic act in its own right, as praxis and as production" (*Postmodernism* 7). Jameson rightly implies that a complete understanding of the work of art as both aesthetic object and social discourse is only possible if the original terms of its production are rescued from the precipice of forgotten history. Without a full understanding of the broader field of cultural forms, socio-economic conditions, political institutions, and so forth, the work of art loses its unique history of social engagement.

### **Understanding the Reader's Role in the Field of Cultural Production**

A primary goal of this essay is to examine how extensive alterations in the cultural landscape of nineteenth-century Madrid led to changes in the way that *madrileños* read texts and viewed plays. Bourdieu ardently rejects the notion of ideological determinism or uninhibited social-class dominance within the cultural field, arguing that the vast array of factors and interactions that compose the field preclude a single source of rigid control over all modes of generating signification (34). In place of deterministic theories such as Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer's *Kulturindustrie* thesis that views the consumer of mass culture as a passive object immersed within a system of cultural

commodification, the notion of culture as a field of signifying practices grants an active role to the reader or spectator, whose habits, choices, and beliefs as a consumer of texts reflects and affects the field as a whole. This is particularly evident in the nineteenth century as mass media begin to emerge. The earliest newspapers throughout much of the Western world had been driven by political interests; the nineteenth century, in contrast, witnessed the rise of newspapers organized as entrepreneurial enterprises that sought to satisfy the demands of a newly industrialized and urbanized public in major cities. Although a few editors and owners did exercise immense control over newspapers by the latter decades of the century, their ascent to an economically advantageous position in the cultural landscape was only possible because they molded and shaped their products to fit the needs of their audience.

At the same time that Bourdieu's concept rejects the notion of economic or ideological determinism, it also disallows the tendency in literary studies of praising the individual artist as creator or genius. Bourdieu remarks of literary studies: "There are in fact very few other areas in which the glorification of 'great individuals,' unique creators irreducible to any condition or conditioning, is more common or uncontroversial—as one can see, for example, in the fact that most analysts uncritically accept the division of the corpus that is imposed on them by the names of authors [...] or the titles of works" (29). For Bourdieu, the artist or writer is not a 'unique creator,' but rather an individual agent of discourse enmeshed in a socio-economic, political, historical, and cultural reality who responds and reacts to a wide variety of external pressures and forces. Quite sensibly, this model demonstrates that artistic activity centers on a dialectical relationship between social reality and the author's understanding and interpretation of that reality via literary,

visual, or musical expression. Bourdieu seeks a judicious middle ground that recognizes the role of the artist's individual creativity and the influences of discourse without granting either the uncontested power to control the meaning of a text. This leads to a reformulation of the notion of 'genius' as an agent of discourse who realigns elements and relationships within the cultural field. The artist does not participate in an act of pure origination, but rather reorganizes existent genres, models, themes, and tropes according to a set of social and aesthetic criteria that respond to the realities of the cultural field while at the same time attempting to alter that set of realities.

If the author's act of creation in a text consists of a rearranging, reorganizing, and reconceptualizing the terms and relations that characterize the cultural field, then it stands to reason that the reader, in his or her act of consumption, also actively reconstitutes the cultural field by embedding the text and its "indefinite plurality of meanings" (De Certeau 155) within the field in new and unforeseeable ways. The reader does not only perform a position-taking within the field of cultural production, but also what we might call a 'positions-rendering.' The reader's response to a text necessarily entails a broad, interpretative process in which a broad range of the signifying practices available within a cultural field is brought to bear on the text in question. In Bourdieu's terminology, this is the habitus, which Scarlet Bowen usefully describes by positing that it both "works to shape the social field it comes in contact with" while it "is reconfigured over time as it responds to changes in the social field" (4). Every text or performance produces a version of the field refracted through its own position-taking while every reading represents a subjective reinvention of the field in the mind of the reader.

This focus on the role of the reader in the field of cultural production inevitably leads us to a fruitful consideration of how reception and reader-response theory can contribute to a greater understanding of the dynamics that characterize the field. Of particular interest here is the question of how and why readers' preferences and expectations change over time, and the concomitant question of what possible consequences such shifts produce within the overall field of cultural production. Hans Robert Jauss's notion of the changing horizon of expectation offers a model for approaching the act of reading as a historical and cultural phenomenon by asserting the dialogic relationship between past and present, other and self: "Literary understanding becomes dialogical only when the otherness of the text is sought and recognized from the horizon of our own expectations, when no naïve fusion of horizons is considered, and when one's own expectations are corrected and extended by the experience of other" (9). Every reading of a text implies the manufacture of new relationships between the various components of the cultural field in the mind of the reader, and these changes in the mental makeup of the reader in turn lead to shifts in his or her expectations and preferences. In the context of an industrial society in which literary texts circulate according to the logic of commodification,<sup>1</sup> alterations in the tastes of the reader filter throughout the entire system according to the economic logic of supply and demand. Even though the preferences of the reader or spectator are inscribed within an economic system most obviously governed by the producers of books, television, radio, and film,

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<sup>1</sup> Julian Stallabrass boldly asserts that "culture's status as a commodity is the most fundamental fact about it, deeply affecting its form and inherent ideology" (3). Although I believe such a statement to be hyperbolic and overly deterministic, Stallabrass is absolutely right to observe that the circulation and dissemination of cultural products according to the logic and structure of capitalist industrialism exercise an important influence over the terms of its production, its form, and its content.



the reader also influences the production decisions of producers through his or her choices as a consumer.

When speaking of the signifying practices and cultural field of an entire society, we cannot merely focus our attention on the vague, abstract concept of ‘the reader’ as an idealized receptacle of all knowledge; we must extend this critical framework to encompass entire populations of potential readers. Stanley Fish’s concept of interpretive communities departs from an understanding of texts as being embedded in linguistic codes and discursive formations. Fish argues that, for members of a particular linguistic community, “sentences emerge only in situations, and within those situations, the normative meaning of an utterance will always be obvious or at least accessible, although within another situation that same utterance, no longer the same, will have another normative meaning that will be no less obvious and accessible” (308). Recast in Bourdieu’s terminology, this observation suggests that different readers are familiar with the terms of the cultural field in which they exist and its inherent possibilities and limitations, and that this knowledge deeply informs any interpretation that these readers might offer for a linguistic utterance. Fish goes on to explain that the generation of meaning in a text is always social: “[I]f the self is conceived not as an independent entity but as a social construct whose operations are delimited by the systems of intelligibility that inform it, then the meanings it confers on texts are not its own but have their source in the interpretive community [...] of which it is a function” (333). Whereas the idealized, abstract reader represents a distillation of all the terms of the field of cultural production, actual readers and communities of readers are always imperfect and incomplete representations of the cultural field. Fish’s notion of interpretive communities

inherently recognizes the presence of a variety of communities of readers within a single linguistic community. Rather than a homogenizing theory, Fish's concept permits a wide array of knowledge and experience to influence the individual reader's membership in any number of different interpretive communities according to gender, ethnicity, age, level of education, social class, nationality, etc.

The coexistence of multiple, overlapping communities of readers and spectators is absolutely essential for any approach to literature or theater in Spain, or anywhere else in Western Europe for that matter, during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Different social classes, for example, were embedded in very different daily experiences and cultural practices and possessed highly divergent levels of education; it should come as no surprise, then, that the working-class populations of the *barrios bajos* in Madrid should approach the *folletín* novel and the *género chico* theater according to a distinct set of expectations and desires from those of the upwardly mobile bourgeoisie. I believe it would be a mistake, however, to carry this notion too far and to assert that distinct communities of readers or spectators belong to different or separate fields of cultural production. Although these groups consume cultural products according to diverse patterns of reading and interpretation, they all nonetheless find themselves enmeshed in the same matrix of signifying practices and modes of production. Perhaps more importantly, these groups are imminently aware of the presence of the other groups, thereby suggesting that the various interpretive communities in a society occupy different, but at times overlapping, sectors of the field of cultural production, and that the notions of national community, literary marketplace, or mass culture depend on the internal heterogeneity of the cultural field. In contrast to Dwight Macdonald's

characterization of popular culture as “a cancerous growth on High Culture” (23), Bourdieu’s model proposes a dialectic relationship typified by differentiation and tension between popular culture and ‘High’ culture, both of which exist as such due to collective beliefs generated by the constant give-and-take friction between the assorted communities of readers/spectators that reside within the field.

### **Media Convergence**

The concept of media convergence offers additional theoretical support to the idea of focusing on the role of the reader/spectator as a site of transformation in the field of cultural production. Although many scholars apply this term to contemporary phenomena involving the merging of different media in the audio-visual environment of the Internet or other electronic outlets, the basic concept just as easily refers to the interconnected media platforms in nineteenth-century popular culture in Spain. Those working in contemporary media industries see convergence as a business model that bridges the various forms of media they produce—video, recorded sound, printed words—into a cohesive whole in order to attract potential consumers to use their products across a range of platforms. This top-down approach to media convergence, however, fails to consider how such a strategy fits within the larger context of media consumption and responds to the developing demands and desires of the contemporary reader/spectator. In other words, the convergence business model is a symptom of a larger process of cultural transformation occurring in the minds of consumers.

The eminent media critic and scholar Henry Jenkins focuses on the reader as the site where convergence occurs. Jenkins tells us: “By convergence, I mean the flow of

content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries, and the migratory behavior of media audiences who will go almost anywhere in search of the kinds of entertainment experiences they want” (2). In the context of the cultural field, individuals are conscious of many of the position-takings available, and this consciousness means that many signifying practices, media outlets, structures, form, and modes of expression act upon and mold the consumer simultaneously. Many media critics and theorists are interested in how the movement between platforms alters content and information, but this focus mistakenly assumes that the formal qualities and expressive capabilities of different media remain constant and consumers themselves are static entities whose interpretive practices and strategies do not change.<sup>2</sup> Jenkins correctly, in my view, places the focus on the constantly-evolving reader: “Convergence does not occur through media appliances, however sophisticated they may become. Convergence occurs within the brains of individual consumers and through their social interactions with others” (3). Any study that hopes to identify broader structural changes in the cultural field over time must point to how the convergence of multiple media platforms at the site of reader/spectator produces important changes in the formal qualities of different media and in the consumer’s modes of perception.

The focus on media as forms that communicate information and structure to the reader/spectator offers a number of insights into how changing vehicles and mechanisms for communicating information function as part of a larger matrix of discourse and

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<sup>2</sup> David Thorburn and Henry Jenkins warn against any view of media as invariable, homogenous modes of information transmission, particularly if we wish to understand and appreciate the rise of new modes of expression over time: “To comprehend the aesthetics of transition, we must resist notions of media purity, recognizing that each medium is touched by and in turn touches its neighbors and rivals. And we must also reject static definitions of media, resisting the idea that a communications system may adhere to a definitive form once the initial process of experimentation and innovation yields to institutionalization and standardization” (11).

signifying practices. William Uricchio proffers a definition of media that echoes the non-linear characteristics of Bourdieu's formulation:

For the record, I understand media to be more than mere technologies, institutions, and texts—a statement I would think was obvious were it not for the substantial body of literature that holds otherwise. Instead, I see media as cultural practices which envelop these and other elements within a broader fabric offered by particular social orders, mentalities, and the lived experiences of their producers and users [...] Such an admittedly full definition of media requires an embrace of multiplicity, complexity and even contradiction if sense is to be made of such a pervasive cultural experience. (24)

Like literary texts and other cultural products, media cannot be understood as isolated form or structure, but only as social praxis that fits within the larger contours of discourse. In addition, the discipline of media studies implores us to see the difference between the physical or technical modes of transmission—delivery technologies—and the concept of media: “Delivery technologies become obsolete and get replaced; media on the other hand, evolve. Recorded sound is the medium. CDs, MP3 files, and 8-track cassettes are delivery technologies” (Jenkins 13). This perspective helpfully alerts us to the dangers of misidentifying a delivery technology as a medium, especially in an age in which we are witnessing the dramatic decline of the printed word as information and texts migrate en masse to the realm of electronic technologies. Delivery mechanisms are not media themselves, but exercise incredible influence over the manner in which readers, spectators, and consumers interact and understand texts. Printed books and newspapers are delivery technologies for the printed word that have decisively shaped how modern readers approach texts, and this general restructuring of human thought logically has wrought important changes throughout the cultural field.

## **Conduits of Mediation in the Field of Cultural Production**

Evidently, the nexus between readership and production occupies an important position as a conduit of constant exchange and transformation within the field of cultural production. Keeping in mind that any alteration in position-takings produces echoes and reverberations throughout the field, it seems highly likely that these changes flow from one area of the field to another via logical channels of mutual influence. Although the concept of the cultural field inherently resists simplistic portrayals of cause-effect causality by depicting a dynamic system of mutual pressures and adaptation, focusing on the relationship between two major poles within the field facilitates our understanding of how specific changes in one area of human endeavor alter the terms of other social enterprises. I propose that the relationship between the modes of cultural consumption (reading, viewing) and the modes of production (writing, printing, performing) functions as such an interface of exchange.

The development of stage lighting through the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in European theater is an excellent example of how the consumption/production conduit links various sectors of the cultural field and facilitates widespread changes in signifying practices. At the dawn of the nineteenth century, the most advanced lighting device used to illuminate the stages of Europe was the Argand lamp, an oil lamp developed by the Swiss chemist Ami Argand in 1783-1784 that consisted of a hollow circular wick and a glass chimney for enhanced combustion. Naturally, theater builders and stage designers could only use these lamps as footlights, sidelights, and in chandeliers, circumstances that limited artistic manipulation of lighting effects. By the 1810s, theater builders began incorporating William Murdock's ideas

about gas lighting into European playhouses. This technical advance permitted much greater control over light during performances because all of the lamps could be operated by a single set of control valves behind or beside the stage; this centralized regulation of all the lights in the theater hall opened a variety of expressive illumination possibilities—dimming, brightening, or extinguishing the lamps altogether—that contributed to the creation of the illusion on stage. In 1826, Thomas Drummond reported in *Philosophical Transactions* his discovery that lime glowed intensely when heated by a flame of hydrogen and oxygen, a technique he claimed capable of producing a light 83 times brighter than an Argand lamp could produce.<sup>3</sup> Limelight does not appear to have entered the theatrical world until 1856, when a lens was placed in front of a limelight to create a spotlight in the Princess Theater in London. The last major shift in theatrical lighting devices occurred after the experimental scientific ferment of the late 1860s and 1870s that led to the invention of the incandescent light bulb and its subsequent modifications to increase efficiency and sustainability by Herman Sprengel, Henry Woodward, Matthew Evans, Thomas Edison, and Joseph Swan. Unlike its predecessors, electric light was not generated by a flame source, which reduced the risk of fires—hundreds of playhouses in Europe and the United States burned during the nineteenth century alone—and increased the creative possibilities of light manipulation in the theatrical performance.

Technological innovation throughout the nineteenth century in the field of illumination obviously opened new creative options for playwrights, stage designers, and producers. In 1849 in “The Work of Art of the Future,” Richard Wagner expressed his belief that the theatrical work should be a unified artistic whole, incorporating notions of

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<sup>3</sup> Drummond, a lieutenant in Britain’s Royal Engineers, originally conceived of this new light source as a signaling technique that had applications in geographical triangulation and lighthouses.

lighting as a major component of staging practice. One of the most important theorists for twentieth-century drama, Adolphe Appia, articulated similar concepts on the need for artistic unity through a critique of what he believed were failures to reconcile Wagner's theoretical ideas with the actual staging of his works. In *Music and the Art of the Theatre* (1899), Appia argues that disunity arises from the disjointed juxtaposition of moving actor, horizontal floor, and vertical scenery, a disunity he proposes to rectify through use of light and shadow: "[Appia] recognized that even three-dimensional elements may appear flat under general illumination. Consequently, he called for multidirectional lighting with strong contrasts to emphasize mass, shape, and plasticity" (Brockett and Findlay 202). Edward Gordon Craig also viewed the theater as an aesthetic enterprise that seeks to unify a variety of visual experiences, although he patently rejected Wagner's notions regarding the theater as a fusion of all art forms. For Craig, the theater was above all a visual experience, a belief that led him to develop non-realist staging devices such as the mobile setting and to consider light as a compositional element within the play. Due to advances in electric lighting, Craig was the first to eliminate footlights and to install lights in the ceiling of the theater, permitting the illumination of the stage from above rather than below. These techniques subsequently became indispensable tools for theater directors and have infiltrated almost every variety of visual spectacles the twentieth century has to offer: film, television, museums, political rallies, sporting events, etc.

The changing terms of theatrical production with the development of new lighting techniques effect a sea change in the means by which audiences make sense of the theatrical work in the twentieth century. Director Elia Kazan and designer Jo Mielziner's 1949 production of Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* provides a wonderful example



of how light has become an integral formal device in scene construction and stage division. They applied a production style that utilized “visual elements which eliminated nonessentials but retained realistic outlines. It combined near-naturalism in performance with stylization in settings” (Brocket and Findlay 573). Two platforms full of domestic furniture, connected by stairs, and complemented by lines representing typical features of an American home—a shingled roof, a chimney, etc.—dominated the physical space of the stage. Instead of changing the decoration during Willy Loman’s flashbacks or scenes that occur in other locations, Miller’s stage directions specify that lighting effects, as well as music, should be used to indicate shifts in setting and time. For instance, in Act 2 when Willy leaves home to go see his employer, Howard Wagner, about a new job, Miller describes the scene transition in the following manner: “Light slowly fades on Linda as it rises on Howard” (209). The mid-twentieth-century spectator—trained and conditioned by half a century of lighting effects in theater, film, and television—is fully capable of perceiving how the light dimming in one sector of the stage and rising in another indicates a change of scenic location within the story of the play rather than simply a room with faulty electrical wiring. I would suggest that an early-modern audience from the sixteenth or seventeenth century would have no conceptual framework through which to understand such a convention because the cultural field in that period did not offer such a possibility; in contrast, the expansion of expressive tools made possible by advances in illumination techniques produced not only changing models of staging and design, but also new conceptual structures through which the modern spectator can generate meaning and interpret drama.

I have dwelled on this rather extensive example in order to justify my decision in this study to prioritize the relationships between reading and writing and theatrical viewing and producing as primary conduits through which profound alterations in the cultural field occur. In this example, it is apparent that scientific inquiry and innovation in artificial lighting reverberates throughout the cultural field, but that these reverberations are shaped and transformed by the sectors of the field through which they pass first as they radiate outward. In other words, the electric light did not exercise a direct, unmitigated influence over the theater public, but rather this influence was mediated by any number of intermediary factors. By proposing the notion of conduits of mutual influence in the cultural field, I am suggesting that certain sectors of the cultural field almost always act as powerful mediating forces for other sectors. The modes of theatrical production color and mold the audience just as the demands and expectations of the heterogeneous public shape theatrical praxis.

The conduits linking the modes of production and the modes of reception is the principal locus of literary history and aesthetics, but now has been embedded in a larger field of signifying practices. The beauty of this model is that it permits us to identify changes in the two poles of this conduit in different historical moments and then work backwards from these changes in order to discover what alterations in the cultural field facilitated shifts in production and reception. A further advantage of this theoretical framework, however, is that it inherently rejects the vision of a powerless consumer whose participation is “limited to the choice between buying and not buying” (Macdonald 23). To the contrary, the constant evolution of the “codes of perception” (Certeau 156) or “systems of intelligibility” (Fish 333) of the reader or spectator

functions as a major driving force behind theatrical and literary innovation precisely because authors, playwrights, and producers are also readers themselves. The irreconcilable division between production and consumption posited by theorists such as Macdonald in his theory of mass culture or Adorno and Horkheimer in the *Kulturindustrie* thesis is a false one. Writing on the institution of the newspaper in 1934, Walter Benjamin was a bit more optimistic in his understanding of the relationship between production and consumption: “The reader is at all times ready to become a writer—that is, a describer or even a prescriber” (359).<sup>4</sup> These words inherently recognize that there exists no clear distinction between readers and writers or viewers and producers: those involved in the production of theatrical works, novels, poetry, newspapers, and the like are in fact a specialized subset of readers and spectators. This rather obvious observation implicitly fortifies the primacy of the reader/writer and viewer/producer conduits’ role in the evolution of culture over time.

### **A Shift in the Cultural Field: the Printing Press and the Economic Imperative**

With these theoretical considerations in mind, we can begin to explore the development of print culture in the Western world and how this method of dissemination of texts radically changed the constellation of available position-takings available in the cultural field, thereby profoundly altering the reading and viewing practices of the modern spectator. Naturally, the rise of print culture is intimately connected with technological change and sophistication. Too often, critics view technology and its concomitant influence on the modes of production as external forces that affect the

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<sup>4</sup> Benjamin’s comments come from an article he published in *Der öffentliche Dienst* (Zurich) in March, 1934, translated by Rodney Livingstone.

development of culture. Raymond Williams has identified this view as ‘technological determinism’ and sees it as a simplistic interpretation of technology as a realm of human endeavor far removed from the rest of cultural activity. Instead, we must consider technical innovation as a set of signifying practices within the cultural field that influence the rest of the field and at the same time are changed by it. This is more along the lines of what Williams termed ‘symptomatic technology,’ a view of technology that understands scientific inquiry and innovation as part of a larger social process (*Television* 13). In this sense, Gutenberg’s experimentation with moveable type and its subsequent adoption as a print technique throughout Europe are not simply acts of inspired genius destined to change the world of books forever, but rather are responses to the general need for access and dissemination of information and knowledge in fifteenth-century Europe.

The arrival of moveable type and the widespread use of the printing press as a means of (re)producing texts marked a moment of huge expansion within the field of cultural production by offering an alternative to the established mode of scribal copying that had dominated Europe for all of the medieval period. The printing press did not immediately take the place of scribes and manuscripts, but instead coexisted alongside this form of textual production for centuries.<sup>5</sup> Elizabeth Eisenstein focuses on this coexistence in her analysis of how the printing press did not merely serve as a tool for the emergence of the Renaissance intellectual movement, but actually enabled a flowering of European scholarship and innovation by offering a new model of collective learning and research. Eisenstein aptly observes that early printers were using radically new methods

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<sup>5</sup> David McKitterick observes that printing techniques were adopted unevenly throughout different fields of scholarly, religious, and cultural interest. Small audiences and the technical difficulties of producing Hebrew, Greek, and musical scores led to the persistence of manuscript culture in these fields well into the nineteenth century (11).

of textual production in order to fulfill functions identical to those of scribes.<sup>6</sup> She gives Peter Schoeffer, who had worked as both a manuscript copyist and apprentice under Gutenberg, as an example: “Peter Schoeffer, printer, was following different procedures than had Peter Schoeffer, scribe. The absence of any apparent change in product was combined with a complete change in methods of production, giving rise to the paradoxical combination, noted above, of seeming continuity with radical change” (51). Although scribal copying and mechanical printing appeared to yield identical products, this shift in the cultural field opened the way for massive changes in the decades and centuries to come.

The appearance of the printing press facilitated the expansion of capitalism into the production and dissemination of texts.<sup>7</sup> In contrast to the free labor of monks working in monasteries, printers either had to do the work themselves or pay wages for employees; in either case, economic viability remained at the core of the printing business (Eisenstein 12–13). Monks copied manuscripts according to the needs of ecclesiastical scholarship while lay copyists reproduced texts for aristocrats or universities; the scribe generally produced copies of different texts for a very limited

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<sup>6</sup> In spite of the great technical shift presented by the printing press, many printers continued to follow the formal and aesthetic patterns of the previous centuries of manuscript culture by having texts intricately illustrated and embellished. Scott D. N. Cook states: “The same standards of craftsmanship and aesthetics associated with manuscripts were applied to printed books for at least two generations beyond the Gutenberg Bible” (71). Clearly, the arrival of new techniques and delivery technologies did not lead to a complete and decisive reevaluation of the written word, but rather initiated a process of modification and adjustment in both the physical production of texts and the mental attitudes with which they were conceived and received.

<sup>7</sup> That printing was embedded in the economic world of capital and exchange is apparent in the story of how Gutenberg was able to finish his work on moveable cast type in the first place. In October of 1448 in Mainz, Gutenberg borrowed 150 gulden to put into his experiments; then, in 1450, he borrowed 800 gulden from a lawyer and member of a wealthy banking family, Johann Fust. Two years later Fust loaned Gutenberg another 800 gulden with the provision that Fust became Gutenberg’s partner, which clearly indicates that Fust envisioned his loans to Gutenberg not as bourgeois cultural patronage, but as a business investment (Kilgour 85). Frederick G. Kilgour estimates that the debt owed to Fust exceeded the equivalent of one million dollars in 1990, which extrapolates to an amount in excess of \$1.7 million today. Clearly, from its inception as a viable technological process, printing was closely tied to business interests.

audience.<sup>8</sup> In contrast, the printer's technical skill set and mechanical apparatus permitted a single person to manufacture a theoretically unlimited number of copies of the same text. By extension, the printer was not working for a specific patron or institution; he was working for an abstract, undefined reading public. The invention and refinement of the printing press created an impersonal relationship between the modes of physical reproduction and the act of reading. The medieval scribe could know exactly for whom he was copying a particular manuscript; such knowledge is not possible in a system characterized by the ability to produce copies for a numberless audience. Although the full ramifications of this seismic shift in the cultural landscape would not be felt until the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, evolving modes of production already were stimulating new mental and social frameworks for the relationship between author, printer, and reader from the earliest days of mechanical printing.

The less definite relationship between printers and readers served as an immense motivating factor in the development of publicity and advertising techniques in order to notify potential customers of the existence of products as well as to gauge interest in forthcoming titles and offerings. This adaptation to the economic realities of selling books and other publications tied advertising to the emergent forms of mass communication, particularly in the mid- to late-nineteenth century. While advertising in printed materials initially served to solidify and expand the printer's business, other entrepreneurial enterprises eventually saw the promise of this new means of generating

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<sup>8</sup> Hipólito Escobar Sobrino explains this initial disjuncture between the centers of scholarship or theology and the rise of mechanical printing in economic terms: "Fue una aventura industrial y comercial llevada a cabo por hombres avispados que buscaban un procedimiento para enriquecerse reproduciendo libros con mayor rapidez de la usual y a precios inferiores a los de un Mercado con una demanda creciente. No es sorprendente, por lo tanto, que la imprenta no naciera en un centro religioso o en una universidad" ("Introducción" 11). For secular and religious scholars, the book had practical use as a tool of scholarship; for the printer, it had value as a commodity that could be exchanged for economic capital.

interest and began purchasing space in publications to enlighten readers about their own products. To a certain degree, the advent of mechanical printing in Western Europe facilitated the rise of advanced capitalism and industrialization by offering a new means by which to circulate information about products, knowledge that was crucial in the creation of a commercial marketplace for a range of goods and services. Of the printers themselves, Eisenstein notes: “Their control of a new publicity apparatus [...] placed early printers in an exceptional position with regard to other enterprises. They not only sought ever larger markets for their own products; but they also contributed to, and profited from, the expansion of other commercial enterprises” (60). From a very early moment in its history, print culture expanded its sphere of influence over a wide array of social and economic activities by mediating the interaction between consumers, products, and manufacturers in emergent capitalist society. Even in historical moments when print culture impacted only a small proportion of the population of a given society, mechanical printing deeply affected the logic, structure, and methods of both the commercial and cultural marketplace.

Within the process by which the economic demands of printing’s status in the emergent commodity culture led to the development of advertising and publicity techniques, the concept of the individual author as the creator of a text arose as a means of differentiating and promoting the variety of products offered by the printer.<sup>9</sup> Eisenstein remarks that early printers “also extended their new promotional techniques to the

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<sup>9</sup> This transformation in the concept of the author in the wake of the printing press is easily observable in the innovation of the title page around the turn of the sixteenth century. The first title page to include the title of the works, its author’s name, the publisher, location of publication, and date was in Venice in 1476, but this practice did not become standard until the 1530s (Kilgour 94). Eisenstein observes that this new publicity technique signalled a fundamental shift in both the form and conception of publication: “[Printers] put their firm’s name, emblem and shop address on the front page of their books. Indeed, their use of title pages entailed a significant reversal of scribal procedures; they put themselves first. Scribal colophons had come last” (59).

authors and artists whose work they published, thus contributing to the celebration of lay culture-heroes and to their achievement of personal celebrity and eponymous fame” (59). In contrast to the collaborative mode of authorship and textual production that characterizes the scribal culture of the medieval period, the intertwining of printing with capitalism permits a logic of intellectual property and its relationship to economic capital to dominate the manner in which authorship is understood in the wake of the printing press. While many scholars and critics identify Romanticism as the moment when notions of individual creativity and genius come to dominate conceptions of artistic creation, the seeds for this Romantic belief were most certainly planted—though perhaps unintentionally—by the advertising practices of early printers in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

Early printers’ realization of the possible benefits of marketing strategies and advertising for the economic viability of their businesses indirectly confirms another, more significant reorganization of the cultural field in the wake of the printing press: the reading public was no longer seen by producers of texts as static and unchanging, but rather as dynamic and expanding. The addition of advertisements in books and other publications along with the rise of pamphlets and broadsides as vehicles for communicating news and current information moved reading’s focus from the abstract world of academic and theological scholarship toward the quotidian reality of the broader population. If not the beginning point of modern media convergence in Western society, this transposition of daily life into the earliest form of mediatized representation certainly signals a shift in the available means of negotiating the relationships between individual identity and collective social experience.



Marshall McLuhan's influential monograph *The Gutenberg Galaxy* elaborates a compelling argument that the phonetic alphabet enabled the creation of the printing press and paved the way for new mental frameworks of thought and perception. McLuhan's goal in this text is "to trace the ways in which the *forms* of experience and of mental outlook and expression have been modified, first by the phonetic alphabet and then by printing" (1), a change which, he argues, initiated a process of fragmentation of sensory experience in the Western world (42–43). This consideration of the senses and the channels through which the individual subject experiences the world is very much steeped in the same logic of a matrix of mutually-influential agents and factors that characterizes the notion of the cultural field. McLuhan states: "It would seem that the extension of one or another of our senses by mechanical means, such as the phonetic script, can act as a sort of twist for the kaleidoscope of the entire sensorium. A new combination or ration of the existing components occurs, and a new mosaic of possible forms presents itself" (55). McLuhan's thesis corroborates the concomitant commercialization of printing as an entrepreneurial venture and the rise of authorship as an important locus in the emergence of the literary marketplace: "[I]t is a consumer-oriented culture that is concerned about authors and labels of authenticity" (131). Perhaps McLuhan's boldest claim is to suggest that the phonetic alphabet and the means of its mechanical reproduction are the key factors in transforming texts and discourse into a commercial good to be bought and sold: "Typography tended to alter language from a means of perception and exploration to a portable commodity" (161). As a pioneer in media studies, McLuhan's work represents an early mapping of the complex intersections of language, discourse, technology, and economics that have characterized the cultural

field of the Western world since the arrival of print culture in the fifteenth century. Whether or not we accept the specific arguments made by McLuhan regarding the relationship between the alphabet and modern print culture, at the very least his work steers us toward recognizing the correlation between human mental processes and the development of mediatized forms of communication. Media do not arrive fully formed, ready for use by humans; they are extensions of the methods humans use to organize and communicate their thoughts in social settings.

### **The Constitution of the Public Sphere(s)**

The *Sinodal de Aguilafuente*, printed in Segovia in 1472, is widely considered the first book printed in Spain using Gutenberg's typographical printing method. Hipólito Escolar Sobrino interprets the apparent geographical oddity of the initial appearance of mechanical printing in Spain by placing it within the larger context of social and political power: "Puede parecer sorprendente que este honor le corresponda a Segovia, en el interior de Castilla, alejada de Italia y de Alemania. Pero hay que tener en cuenta que Castilla era el reino más poderoso de España y que por esos años Segovia [...] era la ciudad preferida de Enrique IV, a cuyo lado se educaba su hermana, la futura Isabel la Católica" (95). The rise of mechanical print throughout the peninsula coincided with the consolidation of the Spanish crown under the "Catholic Kings" Isabel and Fernando in the late-fifteenth and early-sixteenth centuries.<sup>10</sup> During the final two decades of the

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<sup>10</sup> Escolar Sobrino includes the development of typographical printing in Spain as one of the most important social, political, economic, and cultural events to occur under the reign of Fernando and Isabel, alongside the union of the crowns of Aragón, Navarra, and Castilla; the initial contact with the Americas; and the defeat of the Moors in Granada. The "Catholic Kings" themselves demonstrated the immense potential they associated with the printed word when they eliminated all import taxes and restrictions on books imported into their kingdoms in 1482 ("Introducción 13).

fifteenth century, printing arose as both scholarly endeavor and business enterprise in the major cities and regional capitals throughout the kingdoms that would become Spain. If media function as extensions of humans' mental engagement with the world, then it stands to reason that major alterations in the media landscape of a given society indicate significant changes to the underlying socio-economic order and the relationships between members of that society.

Jürgen Habermas views media through such a lens in his study of the emergence of the public sphere in Western society. He identifies the intimate relationship between early capitalism and the flow of information as a major factor in the transition from the community-based feudalism of medieval European society to the intertwining genesis of early capitalism and the modern nation-state. Habermas succinctly points out: "With the emergence of early finance and trade capitalism, the elements of a new social order were taking shape" (14); the transmission and dissemination of information through media was a vital component of this transformative process. In other words, the changing media landscape of Europe in general and Spain in particular between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries contributed to a broader series of structural changes in the social order that modified the way individuals understood their relationship to the community.

Habermas points to the appearance of scholarly and literary journals in the eighteenth century as a pivotal moment because these publications opened a public forum for rational-critical debate on the governance and administration of society in which the official discourse of the state was contested by private persons. Thomas McCarthy summarizes Habermas's argument: "In its clash with the arcane and bureaucratic practices of the absolutist state, the emergent bourgeoisie gradually replaced a public

sphere in which the ruler's power was merely represented *before* the people with a sphere in which state authority was publicly monitored through informed and critical discourse *by* the people" (xi). In essence, the rise of the periodic press created a new cultural, intellectual, and even emotional space where members of a society could interact and engage with one another outside the authority of the government or the church, a circumstance that facilitated new forms of sociability among members of a geographic, linguistic, or cultural community.<sup>11</sup> The king's decree or a papal edict were no longer held to be self-evident enunciations of unquestioned reality, but were seen as participants in a debate of rational discourse where they were to be examined, debated, and scrutinized, reflecting a wider "move from authoritative, privileged forms of truth to a skeptical, reasoning, empirically based conception" that characterized the Enlightenment (Deacon 293). This new set of circumstances fundamentally rearranged the arena of public interaction by encouraging the existence of multiple points of view and the public use of reason in order to defend them.

The arrival of enlightened ideas in Spain in the last decades of the seventeenth century marks the beginning of the rise of a modern, bourgeois public sphere characterized by rational debate. Medical and scientific minds such as Diego Mateo Zapata (1664–1745) and Juan Muñoz Peralta (born circa 1665) sought to reject inherited, traditional beliefs in medicine in favor of a more scientific, empirical approach, but this increasingly secular worldview brought them into conflict with the authorities of the Inquisition (Deacon 296). At this point, rational discussions of governance and society

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<sup>11</sup> Benedict Anderson even goes so far as to suggest that modern nationalism is a product of this new mode of sociability, arguing that the simultaneity of newspaper consumption among people pertaining to a particular set of social, economic, geographic, political, linguistic, and cultural realities forges a conceptualization of national belonging.

remained within the private *tertulias* organized by a group of unorthodox thinkers known as the *novatores*. The triumph of the Bourbons in the War of Spanish Succession ushered in a period of empirical thought and critical inquiry that drove governmental practices, permitting the rational debates of people like the *novatores* to move to public institutions such as universities and medical establishments. Enlightened rule in Spain reached its zenith during the reign of Carlos III (1759–1788), and it is no coincidence that this was precisely the moment of a veritable explosion of intellectual activity in literary and philosophical journals.<sup>12</sup>

In Habermas’s formulation, rational scholarly dialogue resulted from the status of news as a commodity available for purchase almost from its inception as an entrepreneurial venture and intellectual institution. It is precisely the condition of the news, books, and other cultural products as commodities that facilitates universal access to them via economic exchange. The logic of commodification emancipated literature and art from the private collections of aristocrats, cathedrals, and universities by making them available to those with the means to pay for them (36). Equally important in Habermas’s conception is that the standing of information and culture as commodities permitted—in theory, although certainly not in practice—anyone to participate in the rational public debate of culture and government: “The issues discussed became ‘general’ not merely in their significance, but also in their accessibility: everyone had to *be able* to participate” (37). Habermas recognizes the ironic consequences of this democratization of access to

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<sup>12</sup> For an extensive overview of eighteenth-century periodicals, see Inmaculada Urzainqui’s “Un nuevo sistema de escritura y de lectura: la prensa periódica” in Infantes, Lopez, and Botrel’s *Historia de la edición y de la lectura en España, 1472-1914*. J. J. Sánchez Aranda and C. Barrera del Barrio give a useful account of the distribution, format, content, and history of a number of significant periodicals from this period in their *Historia del periodismo español desde sus orígenes hasta 1975* (49-78).

information and culture by arguing that it was both the crucial precondition for the creation of a public sphere in which private persons could exercise the use of their reason in a rational debate and the origins of what he conceives of as the passive consumer of modern mass media: “When the laws of the market governing the sphere of commodity exchange and of social labor also pervaded the sphere reserved for private people as a public, rational-critical debate had a tendency to be replaced by consumption, and the web of public communication unraveled into acts of individuated reception, however uniform in mode” (161). In agreement with his mentors at the Frankfurt School, Habermas sees the introduction of market economy into the cultural realm as a splintering process that negates the dialectical qualities of the public sphere and produces a mentally inert mode of reception in contemporary mass culture.

A limitation of Habermas’s articulation of the transition from rational-critical debate to passive consumption—at least in the Spanish context—is that it relies on a chronological progression of the agents within the public sphere from engaged participants to inactive customers, a sequence that uncritically assumes uniformity in the reading practices of diverse populations. To suggest that the rational-critical debate characterized the whole of the emerging public sphere of the bourgeoisie in the eighteenth century is an exaggeration. Habermas’s ruminations offer a possible solution by reflecting on the dynamic qualities of the bourgeois public sphere as composed of individual agents constantly circulating between the public spaces of social engagement through discourse and the domestic, private realm of property-holding. In other words, the bourgeois public sphere is a fluid site of exchange in which individuals bring their lived experiences from the private realm to bear on society as a whole while at the same

time returning to the home having been changed by public modes of social and intellectual interaction.

### **Theater in the Public Sphere**

In order to incorporate Habermas's thoughts into the critical framework of this study, we must acknowledge a number of limitations that become apparent once we attempt to apply these ideas to the development of the public sphere in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. First, while Habermas's concept of the bourgeois public sphere may be an accurate description of a narrow sampling of Madrilenian society—to say nothing of Spain as a whole—during the late eighteenth century, in my estimation his theory unnaturally divorces the limited reading public of this period from the considerably more sizeable theater-attending public, and consequently fails to account for the main public cultural venue of the emerging public sphere. In the second place, the growth of literacy and readership throughout the nineteenth century, combined with the rapid expansion of print runs in the latter decades of the century, indicates a steady extension of the 'public sphere' and of the sectors of the population who participated in these public debates, either as contributors or readers. Although Habermas's theory focuses primarily on the socially engaged, active reader pertaining to the bourgeoisie, members of society that remain at the periphery of literate culture still play an active role in the happenings of modern public life through their consumer habits, attendance at public events such as political demonstrations or theatrical performances, conversation with others on current events, etc. Third, the ephemeral nature of the periodicals of the eighteenth century prevented them from producing widespread changes to the organization and mental

frameworks of society as a whole. Even Englishmen Joseph Addison and Richard Steele's influential paper *The Spectator* was published for less than two years in 1711 and 1712, and few papers in Spain appeared for more than five years during the eighteenth century.<sup>13</sup> Lastly, the public sphere was never as neat as Habermas presents it during the Enlightenment period, but rather was a site of contested social, intellectual, and political practices where ideologies and worldviews collided.

In the world of theater, a raucous debate raged in the pages of literary journals and in the stalls of the playhouses in Madrid as the *ilustrados* clamored for artistic adherence to Neoclassical principles and acerbically criticized popular theatrical forms of the period. Ignacio de Luzán's *La poética* (1737) was a seminal text in the establishment of literary Neoclassicism in Spain and argued that the function of dramatic poetry was to lead the spectator to a deeper understanding of moral and philosophical issues through appreciation of an aesthetic object. Luzán quotes Aristotle's definition of tragedy, the preferred genre of enlightened theater: "La tragedia [. . .] es imitación de una acción grave, o (como otros quieren) ilustre y buena; entera y de justa grandeza, con verso, armonía y baile (haciéndose cada una de estas cosas separadamente), y, que no por medio

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<sup>13</sup> Enlightened rule in Spain reached its zenith during the reign of Carlos III (1759–1788), and it is no coincidence that this was precisely the moment of the first veritable explosion of intellectual activity in periodical publications such as literary and philosophical journals. José Clavijo y Fajardo (1728–1808) produced *El Pensador*, certainly the best-known journal of this period, between 1762 and 1767, publishing on subjects ranging from literature, religion, education, society, and politics through a range of styles and formats. The political instability of the era, however, led many of the periodicals from the mid-eighteenth century to be ephemeral enterprises, sometimes lasting only a few months or even weeks. The final two decades of the century witnessed another spike in periodical publications of high quality, such as Luis García del Cañuelo and Luis Pereira's *El Censor*, which published 167 numbers between 1781 and 1787 that included articles by the likes of Gaspar Melchor Jovellanos and Juan Meléndez Valdés. The *Correo de los ciegos de Madrid* (1786-1791) circulated original works—such as José de Cadalso's *Carta marruecas* four years after his death—during this period, while *Memorial literario* (1784-1808) offered a review of the Madrid cultural scene and *Espíritu de los mejores diarios literarios que se publican en Europa* (1787-1791) provided Madrid readers with a panoramic vision of the broader cultural trends throughout the continent. All of these publications, and many more, "stimulated cultural life and provoked responses in pamphlets or rival journals, creating intellectual dialogue" (Deacon 299).



de la narración, sino por medio de la compasión y terror, purgue los ánimos de ésta y otras pasiones” (289). He then rearticulates this definition by updating it to fit into the enlightened worldview:

[L]a tragedia es una representación dramática de una gran mudanza de fortuna, acaecida a reyes, príncipes y personajes de gran calidad y dignidad, cuyas caídas, muertes, desgracias y peligros exciten terror y compasión en los ánimos del auditorio, y los curen y purguen de éstas y otras pasiones, sirviendo de ejemplo y escarmiento a todos, pero especialmente a los reyes y a las personas de mayor autoridad y poder.  
(290)

Luzán implicitly includes the figures of State power and authority in his description of tragedy, thereby inscribing the genre within a larger socio-political commentary on the functioning of the modern nation-state.<sup>14</sup> For the *ilustrados*, catharsis was an aesthetic response to drama that should function within the rational-critical debate on efficient, effective government and the role of the individual citizen within society. Uninhibited by the hostility of enlightened playwrights and thinkers, a whole range of commercial theater practices flourished during the eighteenth century in spite of the widespread

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<sup>14</sup> Many of the most famous Spanish neoclassical tragedies used well-known historical events as their starting point in order to dramatize the fundamental struggle between tyranny and liberty (Ruiz Ramón, I 291-92). Nicolás Fernández de Moratín, Cándido María Trigueros, José de Cadalso, Gaspar Melchor Jovellanos, and Cristobál María Cortés all followed this model in their approximations to tragedy. Sometimes this pattern yielded bizarre results, as in Cortés's *Atahualpa* (1784), in which Cortés presents the fratricidal war of succession between Huáscar and Atahualpa as a battle between liberty and tyranny; when Atahualpa defeats Huáscar through deception and trickery, Pizarro and Almagro feel compelled to right the balances of justice by establishing Spanish rule and, according to the logic of the play, ushering in an age of justice and freedom under the auspices of an enlightened monarchy. A more typical inflection of the model is Vicente García de la Huerta's much-lauded *Raquel* (1778), which presents the revolt of a number of Castilian noblemen against Alfonso VIII as the result of the king's increasingly absolutist wielding of royal authority under the influence of his Jewish lover. The fusion of national history with a frustrated sentimentality wrought with political undertones marks a singular achievement within the neoclassical tragedy in Spain.

resistance of the intellectual elite and some measure of official censorship.<sup>15</sup> Magic comedies, baroque-inspired spectacles, *comedias de figurón*, and *sainetes* all enjoyed popularity and were complemented by theatrical pieces that combined visual spectacle, comic dialogue, and musical elements in *tonadillas*, *finés de fiesta*, and the emerging Spanish opera, or *zarzuela*. The success of these popular theatrical forms and the failure of neoclassical tragedies to earn currency with critics or the public imply that the active engagement of individuals in a logical public discussion on community and national life was not the dominant mode of cultural reception during this period.<sup>16</sup>

Patterns of readership and spectatorship from the eighteenth century to the present have not developed from a uniform mode of rational-critical engagement to passive consumption, but have remained throughout this period as a blend and balance of readerly and writerly—to borrow Barthes’s terms in a loose sense—modes of reception. In the medieval and early-modern periods, the theater played a role as the public cultural medium *par excellence* that brought together people of vastly different intellectual and social backgrounds, and thus operated on multiple levels to keep the attention of viewers seeking pure entertainment and those who actively sought to ascertain deeper meaning

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<sup>15</sup> Juan Pedro Viqueira Albán’s fascinating case study of the Bourbon reforms of theater in his book *Propriety and Permissiveness in Bourbon Mexico* provides tremendous insight into the various pressures that informed both official theater policies and commercial practice in the eighteenth century. He summarizes that “During the period of the Enlightenment, both officials and intellectuals protected and championed the theater more than any other public diversion. [. . .], they believed that the theater was an efficient medium for the refinement and edification of the common people” (27). Viqueira Albán goes on to demonstrate that government officials and theater impresarios constantly attempted to strike a balance between so-called ‘edifying’ works for public instruction and offering a dramatic product for which people were willing to pay the price of the ticket. In the end, almost all of the Bourbon theatrical reforms in Mexico failed because, in the final analysis, economic and entrepreneurial concerns outweighed ideological goals, a description that just as easily could be applied to the status of theater in eighteenth-century Madrid.

<sup>16</sup> Joaquín Álvarez Barrientos argues that the theater reflected greater turmoil than other sectors of the cultural field as new, enlightened ideas were implemented because “[I]t was the public forum with the deepest ideological significance, enjoying the widest popular favor” (333). Doubtlessly, the greater popularity of the theater originated in both Spain’s rich theatrical tradition and the immediate accessibility of audio-visual spectacle for those who lacked the formal education to enter fully into the realm of literate culture.

and insight from the dramatic presentation. In this way, works such as Lope de Vega's *Fuenteovejuna* and Calderón's *El mágico prodigioso* crafted appealing visual displays while offering thinly-veiled socio-political commentary or theological meditations.

The advent of periodical print media in the latter half of the eighteenth century transformed private conversations about a theatrical piece among family and friends into a publicly scrutinized forum of argument and debate. No longer left alone with his or her own ideas about the merits or shortcomings of a play, the theatergoer now obtained access to a larger meeting of minds and opinions in the mediated, virtual space of the literary journal. This change in the relationship between watching theatrical works and discussing them thrust the so-called 'passive' spectator into contact with engaged aesthetic or socio-political responses to the theatrical offerings of a particular season via the periodical publication. Over the course of the late-eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, print media developed a symbiotic relationship with theatrical enterprises, as the press depended on articles about the theater to attract would-be readers and theaters relied on positive reviews and advertising for artistic confirmation and financial success. The middle-class theatergoer of the nineteenth century looked to the papers for orientation and guidance in determining which dramatic offering would maximize his or her limited disposable income allocated for leisure and entertainment. By the mid-nineteenth century, newspapers and magazines dedicated pages, sections, and at times supplementary numbers to the major stars of the era and emerging talents, hence playing an important role in creating the earliest generation of modern celebrities and *stars* in Spain. No longer limited by the geographical or temporal space of a theatrical

performance, the stage became a ubiquitous feature of Spanish cultural life and entertainment through the mediation of the periodical press.

### **New Knowledge, New Vision**

The social and mental spaces created by the constant interaction between modern print media and public events—especially the theater—constitute the modern public sphere. This psychic space expands during the nineteenth century due to improvements in the print industry and other forms of technology-facilitated communication—the telegraph, the telephone—and a tremendous leap in the twentieth century with the rise of film, radio, and television. Although the concept of an abstract audience began to guide commercial uses of mechanical printing from its origins in the fifteenth century, the regular schedule of enlightened periodicals and their more commercially-minded nineteenth-century successors created a constant flow of attention between the newspaper and the events on which it reported. Instead of focusing primarily on reproducing copies of ‘timeless classics’ from Antiquity, for example, beginning in the eighteenth century presses worked on an accelerated timetable in order to maintain an immediate, up-to-date relationship with the social, political, and cultural context of their audience. Inmaculada Urzainqui claims that the periodical press represents a completely new cultural form in comparison with previous modes of production: “[S]u vocación de continuidad mediante la dosificación periódica, el tipo de contenidos por los que se decanta (difusión de noticias, transmisión de ideas y conocimientos, orientación de la opinión pública, crítica y reseña de libros...), y la constante renovación de los mismos hacen de ella una entidad cultural y editorial completamente nueva” (378). This new, modern public space exists as

a constant flow of knowledge and information between different centers of society—producers and consumers, government and citizens, etc.—in which the here-and-now is constantly presented, represented, and mediated.

The growing importance of the newspaper in Madrid and other major urban centers of the Iberian Peninsula altered the basic knowledge of the average citizen, regardless of their education or social status. No longer limited by word-of-mouth or private correspondence to transmit knowledge, the speed with which familiarity with current events circulated increased exponentially as the newspaper replaced several ‘links’ in the chain of communication.<sup>17</sup> The regular periodical also created an environment in which a person with no possible direct contact to an event could nonetheless be intimately aware of it. In a word, the newspaper was the ultimate paratext during this period, an external commentary on the myriad socio-political issues, economic concerns, and cultural events that constituted the subject matter of public discourse and dialogue. Gérard Genette’s comments on the public epitext, a type of paratext, aptly describe the newspaper: “[T]he addressee is never only the reader (of the text) but is some form of the public, including perhaps nonreaders of the text” (*Paratexts* 345), which is to say that the newspaper as epitext is larger than any individual text and fashions the collective mental space in which any number of other texts are understood, interpreted, and negotiated.

In his classic survey of the development of Western thought since the Renaissance, Michel Foucault explores the matrix of intellectual conditions and cultural

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<sup>17</sup> American sociologist Robert Park, in his essay “The Natural History of the Newspaper,” was among the first to suggest that the newspaper signaled a shift from traditional social formations to modernity by replacing person-to-person gossip and conversation as the principle source of information with an industrially produced commodity.

assumptions that constitute knowledge and discourse. Part of his argument is that there always exists a set of basic organizational structures within discourse that condition the articulation of knowledge. According to Foucault, all attempts at categorization or classification ultimately depend on these underlying structures of knowledge:

[T]here is no similitude and no distinction, even for the wholly untrained perception, that is not the result of a precise operation and of the application of a preliminary criterion [...] The fundamental codes of a culture—those governing its language, its schemas of perception, its exchanges, its techniques, its values, the hierarchy of its practices—establish for every man, from the very first, the empirical orders with which he will be dealing and within which he will be at home. (xx)

This observation appears to echo Nietzsche's contention in *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872) that there is an inescapable disjuncture between the modes of thinking that informed classical tragedy and those that are dominant in modern society. Both Foucault and Nietzsche recognize the constant evolution of subjectivity and the parameters within which humans make sense of the world that surrounds them. I contend that developments in the regularly-published newspaper, particularly in the mid-nineteenth century, engender new cultural codes or 'schema of perception' for the modern public.

The proliferation of newspapers, magazines, feuilleton novels, and other products of mass print culture in the nineteenth century facilitates shifts in reading practices and modes of reception alongside the social and cultural transformations implicit in the rise of the public sphere. The contingent emergence of the public sphere and the newspaper created new objects and loci of knowledge for the modern subject and consequently demanded the development of new visual reception strategies and mental frameworks to negotiate meaning within this new context. In *Techniques of the Observer*, Jonathan Crary locates a reorganization of modes of seeing and knowledge of vision in the early

nineteenth century, particularly in the 1820s and 1830s. Crary explores intellectual trends in the study of sight from the early Renaissance through the nineteenth century to trace how earlier concepts of the eye as a pure transmitter of information to the brain—elaborated by thinkers such as John Locke and René Descartes through the model of the camera obscura—gave way to more nuanced models that recognized the subjective nature of all sensory experience and the physical realities of vision, most notably in the writings of Arthur Schopenhauer, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, and François Pierre Gonthier Maine de Biran. Crary describes this shift in the understanding of vision as a consequence of Kant’s critique of the human subject as objective, rational observer by calling it “a moment when the visible escapes from the timeless order of the camera obscura and becomes lodged in another apparatus, within the unstable physiology and temporality of the human body” (70). In other words, vision is not a matter of piecing together information transmitted by the image or the printed word, but rather a process of reconstructing visual data according to cultural codes and frameworks of knowledge.

Crary revises the general approach European visual culture as a continuous progression from Renaissance perspectivism to photographic realism, arguing that such hypotheses “suffer from an exclusive preoccupation with problems of visual *representation*” (3) instead of vision itself and the frameworks of knowing in which it operates. He chooses to examine a series of devices from nineteenth-century European visual culture—such as the phenakistiscope and stereoscope—that, in his view, have been erroneously and uncritically interpreted as imperfect apparatuses leading to the culmination of European perspectivism in photography, when in fact they should be understood as objects that “*preceded* the invention of photography and *in no way*

*required* photographic procedures or even the development of mass production techniques. Rather they are inextricably dependent on a new arrangement of knowledge about the body and the constitutive relation of that knowledge to social power” (17). Crary bases his theoretical considerations of modern visuality in European culture on the distinction between the terms ‘spectator’ and ‘observer’; while, in Crary’s formulation,<sup>18</sup> a spectator passively receives visual information, the observer is more than one who simply sees because he or she is one “who sees with a prescribed set of possibilities, one who is embedded in a system of conventions and limitations” (6). In other words, the observer actively creates meaning and significance through a process of contextualizing visual information within a set of cultural knowledge.

A component of Crary’s investigation of European visual culture revolves around a rejection of a number of standard assumptions and biases that promote what he calls “a confusing bifurcated model of vision in the nineteenth century” (4). Notions of a continuous march from Renaissance perspective to nineteenth-century realism assumes a simplistic understanding of vision along the lines of the camera obscura model throughout the period and leads to “the erroneous notion that something called realism dominated popular representational practices, while experiments and innovations occurred in a distinct (if often permeable) arena of modernist art making” (4). This notion presupposes that the advances of Modernist art implied a rupture with the visual practices of an unchanging observer whose status as a producer of meaning is never examined. Crary asserts that “[i]t is not enough to attempt to describe a dialectical relation between

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<sup>18</sup> I have used and will continue to use the term ‘spectator’ in this study, though I wish to emphasize that my usage of the term in no way coincides with Crary’s. I do not use the term ‘spectator’ to refer to a passive receiver of information, but rather to speak of the active observer in the context of a theatrical or cinematic work. Whereas the two terms are in opposition in Crary’s theory, in this essay the word ‘spectator’ is used to denote a subset of actively engaged attendees at certain types of visual spectacles.



the innovations of avant-garde artists and writers in the late nineteenth century and the concurrent 'realism' and positivism of scientific and popular culture. Rather, it is crucial to see both of these phenomena as overlapping components of a single social surface on which the modernization of vision had begun decades earlier" (5).

The fragmentary visual aesthetic of the modern newspaper is a major, influential force in the creation of the modern reader and spectator—both of which are subsets of Crary's notion of the active observer. During the nineteenth century, the circulation and dissemination of newspapers steadily expanded in all of the major European urban centers and into the smaller provincial capitals. The range of reading practices and social uses of the papers permitted them to infiltrate the daily cultural life of all social sectors. Access to the products of mass print culture was not as limited by literacy as one might initially imagine. It was common practice, for example, for a group of people to gather together and listen to the *feuilleton* novels or articles published in the daily newspapers, read by a literate member of the group. Speaking of the Anarchist press at the turn of the twentieth century, Lily Litvak explains that writers were conscious of communitarian reading practices and paid attention to rhyme and meter in order to make articles or concepts more memorable for illiterate listeners (268). In effect, the experience of interacting with the newspaper—either by reading it or looking at its myriad of images, drawings, cartoons, and other printed visual delights—'levels the playing field' so to speak and provides a common ground for understanding new visual practices in the nineteenth century, regardless of socio-economic status or education level.

## **Immediacy/Hypermediacy: the Dialectic of Media Culture**

Paradoxically, journalistic writing is often viewed as an objective window into the events, circumstances, places, and people it describes, even though it is inscribed within a format of visual presentation that does very little to mask the artifice and terms of its production. To understand the events portrayed, the reader must be aware of the medium that transmits this information. Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin describe this apparent cognitive dissonance as the mutual dependence of immediacy and hypermediacy in communication media. Although their work centers on the development of digital media, they outline general processes that apply to a range of communication practices, beginning at least with the Medieval period in the history of Western media. Immediacy strives to present the reader or spectator with apparently unmediated access to a real event, while hypermediacy highlights the act of mediation itself. Bolter and Grusin point out that the desire to present information in an immediately accessible mode often requires hypermediated structuring and formal devices, and further state that both tendencies are “opposite manifestations of the same desire: the desire to get past the limits of representation and to achieve the real. They are not striving for the real in any metaphysical sense. Instead, the real is defined in terms of the viewer’s experience” (53). Contemporary television news networks such as CNN, MSNBC, or Fox News endeavor to give viewers immediate access to live, breaking news through an aesthetic of fragmentation: multiple camera angles, voice commentaries from anchors, a constantly updated ticker at the bottom of the screen, and so forth. By attempting to present simultaneously as many facets and aspects of the live event as possible, the goal of immediacy relies on hypermediated visual and aural presentation.

Hypermediated, formal heterogeneity is the hallmark of the modern, mass-produced newspaper. The physical appearance of the modern paper is mixed and diverse, consisting of fonts of differing sizes and styles, lines separating various sections of the page, drawings and etchings that either function as self-contained texts or operate in conjunction with other items, and eventually photographs. The relationship between these visual components of the newspaper page is uneven and only implied rather than explicitly stated. It is incumbent on the reader to navigate the menagerie of stylistic decisions and impose order on this concoction of news, analysis, and editorial through her or his selection of readings, the order in which they are executed, the context in which they are read, and so on.

At the level of content, thematic disjointedness characterizes the modern newspaper. Instead of unified texts with a consistent tone and narrative voice, the articles that constitute a single issue of a newspaper are marked by differences of style, form, tone, diction, etc. Just as importantly, the subject matter of articles in close proximity on the physical page often diverges wildly. The intense heterogeneity among the progression of items in the newspaper requires the reader to navigate many subjects and styles with neither transitions between articles nor any explicit explanation of the rationale behind the juxtaposition of such seemingly disparate entries. Hypermediation, most apparent in the heterogeneity and fragmentation of the paper, informs the logic and structure of the newspaper as editors attempt to include greater and greater quantities of information and types of features into the limited physical space of the printed page (Mitchell 8).

A brief analysis of a few newspapers from the eighteenth and nineteenth corroborates the gradual introduction of fragmentary visual presentation in the periodical

press in Spain. Consider the *Diario noticioso, curioso-erudito, y comercial público, y económico*, founded by Manuel Ruiz de Uribe in Madrid and first published on February 1, 1758. The front page of this paper enjoys a measure of typographic variety for its title and publication information. Simple decorative elements and bars mark off the title from the body of the paper. Nonetheless, the majority of the paper consists of two articles presented in two-column format. Ruiz de Uribe's paper underwent several iterations with different titles and presentation styles. The first issue of *Diario curioso, erudito, económico y comercial*, printed on July 1, 1786, boasts a header consisting of an allegorical image of Hermes avoiding the long arm of the law and disseminating the *diario* throughout the city. Presumably due to the expense of publishing such an image, it only adorns the first number. The remainder of the paper is even simpler than its predecessor, resembling eighteenth-century novels' sober visual presentation consisting of a single column of text that occupies the width of the page. A shift occurs on September 2, 1786, when the editors introduce a table beneath the title that gives weather forecasts for Madrid and the surrounding trade routes. This paper's successor, *Diario de Madrid*, adopts an identical structure and visual layout, which it will keep nearly intact from its first number on January 1, 1788, till its last on December 31, 1825.

In contrast to the limited visual variety of the *Diario noticioso* of 1758 and its progeny, by the mid-nineteenth century Madrilenian daily newspapers used visual presentation strategies that set the newspaper apart from other prose texts. The first number of *El Clamor Público*, from May 7, 1844, includes many of the formal characteristics typical of the early generation of modern newspapers: a strong sense of blocking to guide the reader through the four columns of text on each page, typographic

variation for titles and subtitles, and a distinctive font in bold typeface for the title and related publication information. The first number of *El Imparcial* from January 1, 1868, demonstrates a number of innovations that already had taken place only twenty years later. Perhaps one of the most significant features of *El Imparcial* is something we do not see: its subtle use of white space. Instead of cramming information onto every square inch of the page, *El Imparcial* creates a visual break between one article and the next, visually preparing the reader for the changes in style, tone, and content that occur between articles. The differences between these papers that were firmly embedded in the visual strategies of modern journalism in the nineteenth century and their eighteenth-century predecessors is striking, and without question confirms that the nineteenth-century reader was negotiating meaning in new ways.

The disjointed nature of the paper emerges from the industrialized production process that developed in the nineteenth century. The division of labor model utilized by mass media entrepreneurs differed greatly from the newspapers of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, which often were the products of a single author/editor who solicited the collaboration of friends and colleagues. The nineteenth-century mass dailies established bureaucracies that directed the pursuits of writers and collaborators, all working for wages rather than the opportunity to promote an ideological vision of society. The scale of these enterprises required the cooperation of many people, a reality that decisively affected the form and content of the textual object. Hence, stylistic, formal, and thematic variation emerged as salient qualities of the collectively produced mass daily newspaper of the nineteenth century.

Visual, stylistic, and thematic fragmentation is a ubiquitous trait of media culture in the twenty-first century to such a degree that it is difficult for twenty-first-century readers to appreciate the novelty of these features for a nineteenth-century audience. Web 2.0 sites, e-readers, smart phones, and other electronic media devices depend on the visual patterns and structures that are typical of newspapers, a reality of the modern media landscape that helps to explain newspapers' precipitous decline in recent years as newer delivery technologies replace the informative and interactive functions that vaulted papers to the pinnacle of mass media for well over a century. The gradual introduction of visual fragmentation and the juxtaposition of text and images into the pages of the newspaper were major contributions of nineteenth-century mass print dailies to the development of contemporary visual culture. These formal innovations wrought far-reaching changes on the field of cultural production throughout Western Europe in the nineteenth century.

The modern newspaper initiated major transformations in the reading habits of the Madrilenian public, a shift in mental frameworks and cultural codes that modified the spectatorial strategies and demands of the theater-going public. The newspaper trained readers to navigate and organize multiple storylines, temporalities, styles, and tones within the same textual experience, and it would be nonsensical to deny that these modes of reading escaped the boundaries of print culture and entered into the rest of the cultural life of the Spanish capital. By using the theoretical model of the cultural field as a starting point, we begin to appreciate how social interactions, technological innovation, political institutions, and economic development converge at the sites of cultural practice. As we will see in the next chapter, the emergence of the daily newspaper and mass print culture

in tandem with political and economic upheavals led to a reorganization of social and cultural life in Madrid, a convergence of factors that gave rise to a new form of commercial entertainment that would forever change the history of the Spanish stage.

## CHAPTER II

### READ ALL ABOUT IT, SEE ALL ABOUT IT: CONTEMPORARY LIFE IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY COMMERCIAL THEATER AND JOURNALISM

The introduction of new theatrical practices in the latter decades of the nineteenth century signaled a moment of transition as the entrepreneurial interests of playhouses and theater companies evolved in response to new social and economic circumstances. As an entrepreneurial venture, the production system of the commercial theater is reactionary, continually responding to the evolving demands and desires of its audiences in order to please customers and attract the attention of new spectators. The periodical press experienced spectacular growth at mid century as major daily papers such as *La Correspondencia de España* and *El Imparcial* pioneered formal innovations and refined business practices in order to satisfy the changing needs of residents of the rapidly-urbanizing Spanish capital. The vitality of the emerging mass print media was perhaps one of the most astonishing qualities of cultural life in Madrid during this period and offered a strong recipe for success for other sectors of the entertainment industry. In this chapter, I will consider the rise of the *género chico* in comparison with the rapid growth of the newspaper industry in Madrid in order to identify alterations in the structure of daily life and reading habits that wrought powerful changes on the cultural practices of nearly all *madrileños* during the last decades of the nineteenth century.



## The Profit Motive

Scholars that dismiss the commercial theater as unworthy of serious critical attention fail to recognize that drama always has been a business. Public theater in the Western tradition has depended on the patronage of the audience for its survival and success as an artistic and entrepreneurial enterprise. The extant works of the ancient Greek theater are known to have been presented during the festivals of Dionysus in Athens, beginning in the fifth century BCE, in the context of theatrical competitions. Private citizens served as producers, or *choregoi*, for the work of a single playwright and bore the expenses for the costumes and training of the chorus while the state paid the salaries of the principal actors (Ley 7–9). Much of the surviving dramatic works from the Medieval period in the Iberian Peninsula were inscribed within the religious festivals and holidays of the Catholic Church (Stern 115–23), indicating the dependence of playwrights and performers on the patronage of either the Church or local nobility to fund the performance and pay the troupe for their services. The most popular playwright of early-modern Spain, Lope de Vega, famously explained in his *Arte nuevo de hacer comedias en este tiempo* (1609) that he wrote not in order to satisfy the demands of art, but rather to please those who paid him for his labors: “[Y] escribo por el arte que inventaron / los que el vulgar aplauso pretendieron, / porque, como las [comedias] paga el vulgo, es justo / hablarle en necio para darle gusto.” Lope’s words imply at least the beginnings of a major shift in the economic terms of the theater in the cities, which is that the financial and popular success of the work no longer depended solely on aristocratic patronage, but on popular approval of the work. In rural areas, however, the local elite still exercised power over the financial fortunes of playwrights and actors, as Miguel de

Cervantes portrayed in *El retablo de las maravillas*,<sup>19</sup> in which the members of a traveling theater troupe regularly demand payment for their efforts from the local elite. The failures of many eighteenth-century enlightened playwrights in Spain were due to the inability of works written within the formal and ideological parameters of the neoclassical theater to interest either the popular audiences or the earliest exponents of an emerging bourgeoisie. In contrast, it is no coincidence that the most famous works from the Romantic period are those that were the greatest commercial successes of the era: Francisco Martínez de la Rosa's *La conjuración de Venecia* (1834), Ángel de Saavedra's *Don Álvaro o la fuerza del sino* (1835), and José Zorrilla's *Don Juan Tenorio* (1844).

Many critics from the nineteenth century up to our time have understood the meteoric rise of the *género chico* as a cultural phenomenon that reflected the tumultuous political events of the so-called 'Glorious' Revolution of 1868 and the changing habits of a society moving toward a new conception of itself as a modern, democratic state (Yxart 79, Zurita 9, García Templado 71, Íñiguez Barrena 13). This narrative of the history of nineteenth-century commercial theater misrepresents the beginnings of the *género chico* by positing it as a political act that mirrored the mood of society during a moment of transition. Such a correlation between the changing terms of commercial theatrical production and the rise and fall of political regimes overly emphasizes the influence of politics on the world of theater while implicitly assuming that major structural changes in dramatic praxis occur rapidly. More importantly, this interpretation ignores the fact that, in spite of its beginnings in the mid 1860s, the *género chico* did not arise as the dominant entertainment of Madrilenian audiences until the 1880s, firmly within the context of the

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<sup>19</sup> This *entremés* was originally published in a volume titled *Ocho comedias y ocho entremeses nunca representados* in 1615. The publication of these dramatic works, which according to Cervantes were never performed, signifies a new means by which playwrights could garner profits and fame from their work.

Restoration monarchy. Instead of privileging political history as an indicator of cultural change, shifts in the field of cultural production—political, social, economic, cultural, etc.—in nineteenth-century Madrid better help us to interpret the progressive emergence of new forms and formats in the world of theater and journalism at mid-century.

If at all, political events help to explain why the vibrant commercial theater that became known as the *género chico* did not develop earlier. The first harbingers of democratic rule during the turbulent years of the Napoleonic occupation of Spain, the repressive policies enacted by Fernando VII upon his return to the throne, the political power vacuum created by his death, and the ensuing civil war between the conservative Carlist movement and the more progressive groups that carried the banner of Fernando's heir Isabel all indicate a state of constant civic crisis in the early decades of the century. This was hardly an environment in which long-lasting social institutions or sophisticated business enterprises could be established and sustained. The rise of relatively stable mass-circulation daily newspapers and enduring theater companies and playhouses coincides with the foundation and progressive consolidation of the Restoration monarchy. In spite of manifold imperfections, Mary Vincent observes: "The Restoration system was workable, and it attained sufficient social consent to last for over forty years" (5). Stability was good for business, and mass print culture and the commercial stage in the late nineteenth century were guided by the economic imperative above all else.

### **The Rise of the Entrepreneurial, Informative Newspaper in Madrid**

The nineteenth century in Spain marks a decisive period that made possible the future proliferation of mass print media in the Iberian Peninsula. Mirroring the patterns of

development occurring in Europe and the Americas, the production of periodicals underwent a series of shifts during this period that gave rise to a new textual object that permeated the urban landscape of Madrid on a daily basis. Spanish newspaper entrepreneurs led the way in developing the modern entertainment industry in Madrid by re-imagining the commercial possibilities of newspapers and aggressively pursuing radical changes in their production and dissemination.

The socio-political disarray of early nineteenth-century Spain left an indelible mark on the development of newspapers in Madrid. The so-called War of Independence against the French from 1808 to 1814 influenced the content of Spanish periodicals, especially in the appearance of an explicitly political press and dedication of most of the paper's content to up-to-date information, qualities that contrast significantly with the previous century (Sánchez Arranda and Barrera 83). The war solidified the role of the newspaper as a popular conduit of information: "La prensa, en el momento de la guerra, vino a satisfacer la necesidad de tener noticias. De hecho adquirió un sentido más amplio, de ser conductora de las masas políticas" (Sánchez Arranda and Barrera 95). The content of papers moved away from esoteric discussion of philosophy, literature, and pedagogy and toward the visceral realities of the events unfolding in the peninsula.

The political free-for-all following Fernando VII's death in 1833 represents a second inflection point in nineteenth-century Spanish history in which politics and ideological positioning penetrate a major portion of the daily and weekly papers in Madrid. The arrival of party politics under the Liberal regency of María Cristina (1833–1840) necessitated the development of mechanisms by which to disseminate political information and activism to the broader population. Although ideology and politics had

held an important place in the creation of Spanish periodicals for at least a century, it was during this moment that the *periódico partidista* became a fixture of Madrid in response to the demands of an increasingly politically-conscious public. For political papers: “El factor económico no poseía apenas protagonismo, en el sentido de que lo que se buscaba era, fundamentalmente, una rentabilidad política o ideológica” (Sánchez Aranda and Barrera 128). By the 1840s, nearly all newspapers in Madrid were vehicles for political groups to spread their message to readers with similar views as their own.

The affiliation of newspapers with political parties and ideological points of view meant that these periodicals rarely enjoyed long print runs and never gained the extensive popular status of the commercially-driven papers that arose later in the century. During the “ominous” decade from 1823 to 1833, Fernando VII’s attempts to reinstate the absolute power of the monarch led to a stifling of the press through censorship. Even though censorship eased under the regency of María Cristina, the association of papers with politicians often meant that a paper’s limited popularity rose and fell with the fortunes of its primary public sponsor. Since a paper served the interests of its promoter, according to Sánchez Aranda and Barrera (127), it is no surprise that readers felt no compunction to continue supporting a publication once its promoter was no longer an important or popular figure on the national stage.

Conceptions of newspaper began to change in 1850, when Ángel Fernández de los Ríos founded *Las Novedades*. Unlike other papers in Madrid at the time, the primary goal of *Las Novedades* was to collect and disseminate news items of interest. By making information available and affordable, *Las Novedades* rose to the pinnacle of journalism in Madrid for over a decade. In 1853, the paper’s circulation reached 13,000 copies per

number and increased to 16,000 in 1854, the year in which it knocked *La Esperanza* out of the top position (Cruz Seoane 207). While the content of *La Esperanza* continued to focus on political essays that communicated the absolutist, monarchist ideology adopted by the paper since its founding in 1844, *Las Novedades* placed its progressive political views in the background as a framing device while concentrating on the dissemination of news items as its principle mission. Equally important to the dominance that *Las Novedades* achieved among Madrilenian dailies was a creative reorganization of its distribution policy. Rather than relying solely on subscriptions, *Las Novedades* was the first newspaper to sell copies by the issue. Although the annual subscription rate made the cost of each number cheaper, identical to newspapers and magazines today, the possibility of purchasing an individual number lowered the minimum price for access to the information available in daily newspapers for those who could not afford yearly subscriptions. Cruz Seoane argues that this confluence of flexible pricing structure and emphasis on reporting the news made *Las Novedades* the top paper in Madrid (201–02).

The tempestuous political environment of the 1850s and 1860s ironically drove further demand for informative newspapers as readers tired of the endless polemic that dominated the pages of the political papers. Henry F. Schulte observes that “[t]he press became more than a collection of vehicles for transmitting messages about conflicting political philosophies: it became a symbol of that conflict itself” (204). Journalism served only as an extension of the ferocious partisan politics and ideological clashes in this period. Consequently, the rise of informative newspapers in the wake of Fernández de los Ríos’s *Las Novedades* represented a concession to the growing demand for papers that claimed to rise above party politics to report the news in a more objective fashion. Cruz

Seoane observes: “Abrumados, desconcertados y perdidos en la floresta ideológica, muchos lectores debieron respirar aliviados con un periódico que les ofrecía simplemente hechos, noticias” (246). The political daily paper and the emerging informative newspaper coexisted throughout the remainder of the nineteenth century in Spain, but in the end the model of the informative paper was to triumph completely in attaining the greatest circulation and readership by the 1870s.

The founding of *La Correspondencia de España* in 1859 by Manuel María de Santa Ana marks the arrival of both a wholesale dedication to the transmission of information and the entrepreneurial model of newspaper administration. While party papers sought to generate political favor among readers, *Las Novedades* and *La Correspondencia* were business enterprises that intended to garner profits for stakeholders. *La Correspondencia* further modified the pricing structure and distribution practices of *Las Novedades* by establishing street vendors as a cornerstone of the paper’s business model. Cruz Seoane and María Dolores Sáiz explain that a process of transformation occurred over a long period of time and entailed essential alterations in the nature of the newspaper:

En el primer tercio del siglo XX la prensa española continúa el proceso, iniciado en el último cuarto del XIX, de conversión desde el modelo de periódico de opinión, de predominio ideológico, dependiente de partidos, movimientos o personalidades políticas, al de periódico de empresa, concebida como un negocio, sostenida por el lector y el anunciante y con una variedad temática de carácter enciclopédico que pretende satisfacer los más diversos intereses de los lectores [...] Son los grandes diarios, sostenidos por empresas sólidas, que siguen una marcha ascendente, aumentando sus tiradas, su paginación, diversificando sus secciones, haciendo su discurso más ambiguo, para captar a un público amplio y heterogéneo. (23–24)

As part of this larger process, *La Correspondencia* responded to the economic conditions of the city, constantly searching for new methods to attract more subscribers and appeal to all members of the traditional family. The prioritization of the profit motive led to a trend of toning down overt ideological statements directly connected with the proprietors of the paper, instead displacing this type of polemic into opinion columns that interested readers without politically compromising the newspaper company.

The commodified newspaper sought to expand its readership into all demographics, and hence sacrificed fiery political rhetoric in favor of broad commercial appeal. According to José-Carlos Mainer: “Resultaba patente que la gestión empresarial y el aumento de las tirades reclamaban reglas propias: mayor estabilidad editorial, información más copiosa y tonos más eclécticos” (168). Limiting the ideological and informative purview of the newspaper to a single political party simply could not attract sufficient numbers of readers to make a paper profitable. Sánchez Aranda and Barrera, however, remind us that the interests of even the informative newspaper could never be fully disentangled from the political system of the period:

Frente a la politización, se produjo una reacción contraria, de cansancio, que cuajó en una nueva fórmula periodística: el periodismo noticiero. Este, por el contrario del político partidista, trataba de dar lo que interesaba al público: noticias. Puso su afán en no aparecer unido a un grupo concreto, pues convenía aparecer como independiente, para así desarrollar mejor su tarea, aunque la verdad fue que no lo era tanto ya que las principales fuentes de información eran gubernamentales y no convenía enemistarse con ellas. (128)

The new informative papers were first and foremost business enterprises, and as such needed a working relationship with the government in power in order to avoid censorship problems and maintain open lines of communication with potential sources of information. The change in the structure, form, and philosophy of these papers is not so



much a matter of abandoning politics as it is adopting a new relationship and role with respect to the reading public. Whereas previously newspapers operated in favor of a political or ideological position to reinforce a targeted readership's allegiance to a particular political party, the informative newspaper abandons the function of overtly pushing a perspective on the reader and instead presents an array of information and opinions in order to interest readers across political, social, or economic demographics and thereby increase the circulation and profitability of the enterprise.

### **New Forms of Leisure Require a New Kind of Newspaper**

The intensifying political atmosphere of the 1850s and the reduction in prices in the new informative newspapers are interesting political and economic factors in the shift toward the new paradigm of informative papers run in accordance with the capitalist business principles of opening new markets and meeting the demands of consumers. Neither of these factors, however, can fully account for why the residents of Madrid responded in such an overwhelmingly positive way to the arrival of papers such as *Las Novedades* and *La Correspondencia de España*. Efficient distribution and inexpensive prices in and of themselves do not drive demand for a particular product; that product must somehow meet the needs and expectations of its purchaser in ways that predecessors could not. A stronger explanation resides in the social changes underway in Madrid throughout the nineteenth century, a series of profound transformations that would deeply influence the development of the modern entertainment industry in Spain.

Although industrialization occurred at a slower rate in Spain than in France, England, and the United States, by the mid nineteenth century work and social life in the

Spanish capital was changing in tandem with the rise of industrialized models of labor and production. Gary Cross, in his *A Social History of Leisure Since 1600*, contends that industrialized labor models in Europe and the United States forever altered the concept of leisure. Placing the reduced prices of the informative paper alongside the changes in entertainment and leisure that Cross illuminates provides a clearer picture of why this innovative production practice was so successful. The removal of work from the home and the need for efficiency in the industrial factory purged leisure activities from work, generating a division between the two activities that sharply contrasted with traditional village culture (57). The new model of labor recasts time as a quantifiable measure of work tied to the wage system: “More and more, a day’s work meant merely the selling of time rather than a ‘way of life’” (74). The notion of quantifying labor according to time seeped into leisure as well. While the employer maintained control over the worker’s time in the workplace, the worker enjoyed power over his or her time for leisure: “Leisure time was radically segmented from work and packaged into predictable frames of time. Leisure was distributed into long blocks of free hours extended over the day, week, year, and life span. This new approach to time contrasted with the traditional pattern of irregularity and the intertwining of work and leisure” (75). This segmentation of time in the workplace strongly influenced the types of entertainments and pastimes that developed to occupy the leisure time of an increasingly industrialized society.

A consequence of this growing dichotomy between quantifiable work and leisure time, according to Cross, is the dispersal of the modern family. Cross notes that the separation of work from the home led to fragmentation of family life as parents and children spent the majority of their day at workplaces or schools, leaving only the

evening for time spent together. In Cross's formulation, one of the most significant consequences of this gradual disintegration of traditional family life was the growing rift along lines of gender: "[T]he industrial system separated female from male experiences. While men increasingly became 'outside' breadwinners, women gradually lost contact with the world of business and labor" (62). While this observation seems more suited for English and North American contexts in which the confinement of women to the home and hearth was more pronounced than in Spain, the idea of a growing fragmentation of the family according to both gender and generation fits within the rise of consumer society and the creation of specific commodities and entertainments designed for particular population demographics.

The atomization of time in both the industrial workplace and contemporary leisure activities contributed to the development of the new delivery format of the informative newspaper. Changing features of the Madrilenian dailies demonstrate how new conceptions of time provoked innovation in the visual confection of the newspaper. Cruz Seoane summarizes the contrasts between a paper from mid-century and one from the beginnings of the twentieth by looking at a representative sampling of papers from 1850 and 1900, making an important distinction in the mode of consumption:

En el aspecto material llamará sin duda nuestra atención el contraste entre las páginas grises, monótonas, amazotadas, sin relieves, con titulares sólo para las diversas secciones [. . .] de los primeros y las mucho más movidas y dinámicas de los segundos, en las que los titulares, en distintos tipos de letras y tamaños, a una o varias columnas, gritan, atrayendo la atención del lector hacia un artículo o una noticia determinados, anticipando su contenido o despertando su curiosidad por conocerlo. Los periódicos de 1850 hay que <<leerlos>>. Con limitarse a <<ojear>>,

<<echar un vistazo>> a los de 1900, se podía salir a la calle sabiendo cuál era la noticia del día, el tema de actualidad. (220)<sup>20</sup>

This distinction between reading the paper and browsing or flipping through it is fundamental in understanding the development of visual culture in nineteenth-century Madrid. Newspapers depended less and less on slow, meditative reading of dense political tracts as they moved toward a visual aesthetic that encouraged the reader to quickly absorb the news of the day through headlines and sensationalized lead paragraphs. The fascination with sound bites and slogans in the charged political climate of our own day owes much to the formal innovations in journalistic presentation carried out in the nineteenth century.

A quick perusal of the front page of the first issue of *El Clamor Público*, published on May 7, 1844, confirms Seoane's observations and speaks to the visual poverty of Spanish newspapers during the middle of the nineteenth century. A single font is used throughout the paper, varying only through the use of three different sizes and the occasional paragraph in bold typeface. Thin lines serve as borders to differentiate the columns, while sub-headers with bland titles such as "Sección política" or "Folletín" distinguish the few sections that make up the paper. In contrast, a modern newspaper such as *El Liberal* from May 25, 1899 uses a range of fonts, sizes, and typefaces to variegate the visual effect of the text, while also employing a number of other elements to organize the reading experience: headlines to introduce content, sub-headers to further contextualize the piece, and images to illustrate articles in the paper and increase the efficacy of the advertisements on the last page of the paper. In fact, the last page of *El*

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<sup>20</sup> The papers Cruz Seoane analyzes in her comparison of these two historical moments are as follows: from 1850, *El Heraldo*, *La Esperanza*, and *El Clamor Público*; from 1900, *El Imparcial*, *El Liberal*, and *El Heraldo de Madrid*.

*Liberal* is perhaps the most significant element of the paper, as the visual variety of the advertisements underscores the need to distinguish a company, product, or service through visual creativity to garner the reader's attention. *El Clamor Público* lacks an advertisement page, a signal of the different conception of profitability of political papers at mid-century and the significantly altered economic environment at the turn of the century as consumer capitalism firmly had taken hold in the Spanish capital.

The transition from a paper for reading toward a paper for browsing brought with it manifold challenges for the editorial process and production of material for a single issue. Space, which had been the greatest benefit for aspiring political figures seeking a vehicle through which to spread their ideas and increase the familiarity of their name, became both a conceptual and practical problem for editors that could no longer rely on asking acquaintances to write essays that would occupy the vast majority of the first two pages. A browseable paper had to present a variety of information that readers could grasp quickly in order to orient themselves regarding the social, political, economic, and cultural issues of the day. These new editorial needs created the bureaucratic hierarchies of modern journalism, as reporters began to specialize and gather relevant news items of the day within the parameters of categories such as politics, public safety, transportation, business, culture, and so forth. The telegraphic form utilized by *La Correspondencia de España* explicitly reflects the importance of telegraphs for the new informative papers as they gathered information from the rest of Europe and overseas through the use of communications technologies. In other words, the need to fill space on the page with a variety of items led editorial staffs to find new ways to conquer the space of the modern

city and the distance separating Madrid from foreign lands as they strove to accelerate the process of newsgathering to meet the demand for up-to-date and breaking news.

The economy of space that characterizes modern newspaper writing wrought important changes on the style and formal qualities of journalistic prose. As editors developed a formula for the sensible presentation of heterogeneous information on a single page, they imposed strict limitations on reporters and authors regarding the length of their articles and news items because each page could only hold a limited amount of text within the typographic parameters of a paper's style. These restrictions forced writers to adopt a prose aesthetic that prioritized the economical use of language in order to achieve the maximum effect possible through use of a limited number of words. Over the course of the nineteenth century, the distillation of language in the newspapers contributed to the decline of embellished rhetoric that characterized the literary language of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and encouraged the more sober, prosaic narrative tone that permeates journalistic writing and realist fiction in the latter decades of the nineteenth century. In his memorable essay "La crisis del cuento nacional," Horacio Quiroga attributes his merits and successes in writing short stories to the discipline imposed on him by the spatial constraints of periodicals. He writes that Luis Pardo, the editor of the famous Argentine magazine *Caras y Caretas*, rigidly enforced a one-page limit for the text and accompanying illustrations of all short stories. Quiroga writes, "No es menester ser escritor para dares cuenta del tremendo martirio que representa hacer danzar muñecos dramáticos en esta brevísima cárcel de hierro. En tales condiciones de ejecución, no debía al cuento faltar ni sobrar una sola palabra" and goes on to say that "[t]al disciplina, impuesta aún a los artículos, inflexible y brutal, fue sin

embargo utilísima para los escritores noveles, siempre propensos a diluir la frase por inexperiencia y por cobardía” (388–89). The limited physical space of the newspaper exercised a powerful influence over the style and aesthetic options of its writers.

The status of the modern newspaper as a leisure item produced by a sector of the entertainment industry is significant and bears further consideration. The growth of new forms of journalism and the implantation of innovative publishing practices in the early decades of the nineteenth century mark an important step in the transition from the limited, enlightened reading public of the eighteenth century toward a conception of the reading public that permitted the entry of the popular classes. Publications available for purchase no longer were limited to academic journals and intellectual discussions of philosophy, philology, and economics, but increasingly expanded to meet the needs of broader segments of the population. During this period, political papers included the popular *novelas por entregas* as a means by which to attract readers in order to spread their political platform more effectively. The terrific success of the *novela por entregas* amongst Spanish readers in the 1840s and 1850s stands as a testament to the new focus on entertainment in journalism.<sup>21</sup> As the informative newspaper rose to prominence, papers increasingly marketed themselves for the workers rather than only the bosses and further pursued the logic of entertainment. The pragmatic, informative function of the papers fit into a larger project of constructing a large and dedicated readership. This new focus on entertainment and structural changes in the form of the newspaper gradually

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<sup>21</sup> In his study of the *novela por entregas*, Juan Ignacio Ferreras highlights the economic factor of this publishing practice, noting that the expansion of the literary marketplace to include sectors of the population that could not afford to acquire a complete volume in a single purchase was ultimately a shrewd business decision that benefited the publishers (24-30). Obviously, the matter of expanding the potential audience through reorganized delivery formats and pricing structures in the *novela por entregas* offers a number of points of contact with the rise of the *teatro por horas* production system in the commercial theater in the latter decades of the century.

opened the world of print to an ever-growing portion of the population, a steady shift that the English novelist Wilkie Collins memorably noted in his essay “The Unknown Public,”<sup>22</sup> in which he considers the socio-political and cultural ramifications of such a change:

Do the customers at publishing houses, the members of book-clubs and circulating libraries, and the purchasers and borrowers of newspapers and reviews, compose altogether the great bulk of the reading public of England? There was a time when [. . .] I, for one, should certainly have answered Yes. I know better now. So far from composing the bulk of English readers, the public just mentioned represents nothing more than the minority. (217)

Although perhaps not so drastically in Spain, where literacy rates lagged behind much of Europe until the twentieth century, Collins’s observation reveals a clear awareness of how the emergence of the mass print industry created a new, modern public sphere.

As the newspaper matured, it brought together diverse themes, subjects, political figures, historical events, artistic works, and cultural attitudes for the first time in a single mental space for the modern reader at an affordable price. Knowledge, no longer confined to privileged spaces—engravings, scrolls, codices, books—passed into the realm of public debate and conversation. As Peter Walsh tells us: “[I]nnovations in technology tend to break down and transform existing expert paradigms” (367). The liberation of knowledge in the nineteenth century was not confined to modern newspapers, as the founding of major museums and libraries reveals a general push toward a free transmission of information and learning to all sectors of society. This dissemination of knowledge altered modern audiences, now equipped with a greater variety of information and, consequently, a wider range of expectations and demands. The variety aesthetic that would come to dominate public entertainments during this

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<sup>22</sup> The essay was originally published in Charles Dickens’s periodical *Household Words* in August, 1858.



period—amusement parks, zoos, circuses, museums, theater, opera, masquerade balls, and so forth—directly coincides with such an expansion of the audience’s experience of modern life through print media.

General shifts in the social needs of urban workers in the context of industrialization made possible the extraordinary success of the informative newspaper paradigm, but this success was dependent on a concomitant transformation of the formal qualities of the papers that placed primary importance on an economy of length. These changes in the production and formal qualities of the paper influenced the content of the newspapers, the types of stories they printed, and the verbal style writers used to communicate with their readership. McLuhan’s mantra that “the medium is the message” certainly points to the inseparability of the content and language usage in a text and its physical terms of publication. The radical reorganization of the newspaper and its production by papers such as *Las Novedades* and *La Correspondencia* at mid century paved the way for other sectors of the urban entertainment industry to consider equally drastic changes to take advantage of new business opportunities in the modern city.

### **French Antecedents of the *Género Chico***

The changing distribution of labor and leisure in regimented blocks of time in Madrid heavily influenced the development of a popular commercial theater in the Spanish capital. The newspaper represented the primary means through which urban residents gained knowledge with which to decode the text of the modern city, information that helped them understand the condition of the metropolis and negotiate their identity within it. Newspapers provided the base knowledge of the average city dweller, and thus

embodied the common mental life of theatergoers. All playwrights writing for commercial purposes must keep the audience in mind at all times, making sure to mold the dramatic narrative and the content of its dialogue to coincide with the knowledge the public has at its disposal. Comic works depend on this intimate understanding of the audience, because jokes that the public does not or cannot comprehend will always fail. The proliferation of newspapers and the knowledge of contemporary events they communicate in nineteenth-century Madrid offered writers and producers a nearly unlimited supply of material from which to craft witty dialogue and satirical commentary on modern society. Similar to late-night comedy television shows from our own day, the consolidation of daily newspapers by the 1860s in Madrid allowed commercial authors to draw material from the headlines to offer a satirical portrait of events and circumstances with which the audience would be familiar.

The vibrant Parisian theater scene of the 1850s and 1860s gave to Madrilenian theater entrepreneurs ideas for how to revitalize a night at the theater house and to commercial writers models of how to incorporate current events into a theatrical spectacle. Critical studies regularly trace the origins of the *género chico* to Francisco Arderius's trip to Paris in the early 1860s. After this trip, the entrepreneur returned to Madrid and imitated the Parisian *opéra comique* in the Teatro de Variedades. A derivative genre of the *grand opéra*, the *opéra comique* eschewed tragic plotlines and a full musical score in favor of a more variegated aesthetic that incorporated dialogue, physical comedy, satire, witty repartee among the actors, and regular music and dance numbers. Arderius enlisted his friend Eusebio Blasco to pen a script for an original work, a partnership that produced *El joven Telémaco* (1866), the first Spanish *ópera bufa*. The

play shares much with the *zarzuela grande* of the early nineteenth century in its form and content, such as the amorous plot grounded in the mythological story of Ulysses, the use of verse dialogue rather than prose, and a musical organization based on combinations typical of the *zarzuela* tradition—duos for intimate dialogues, *concertantes* involving many characters to highlight conflict in the plot, and so forth.

In spite of *El joven Telémaco*'s points of contact with the *zarzuela*, nearly all of the play's more memorable qualities correspond to the typical features of the *opéra comique* and foreshadow features that will characterize the *género chico*. The characters frequently allude to events and international relations in contemporary Europe and make jokes about Madrid which are designed to relate the content of the spectacle to the lived experiences of the audience. Near the end of the play, Telémaco recognizes that Calipso is attempting to keep him on the island as her lover by enlisting the services of Amor. Telémaco tells Amor that Calipso will not be able to pay when the time comes:

Amor:	Pero, ¿y sus tesoros?
Telémaco:	¡Uf, los perdió todos!
Amor:	¿No mientes?
Telémaco:	No; prestaba a real por duro y en Madrid; y allí es corriente no pagar; por consecuencia hizo quiebra hace dos meses. (63)

Clearly, Blasco demonstrates little concern for realism or anachronism here, instead assuring the success of the scene by inserting a joke that will be appreciated by his target audience. With regards to the visual appeal of the work, Nancy Membrez reminds us of the importance of the can-can aesthetic on the coetaneous French commercial stage, the likes of which had never been seen in Madrid: “[T]he chorus line of leggy females singing the macaronic Greek ditty from the play [...] caused a sensation” (16). Speaking

more generally about the rise of *los bufos*, Membrez continues: “In sum, before 1866 there had been nothing like the *bufos* in Madrid. After its advent, nineteenth and early twentieth century theater would never be the same. Its splashy numbers, relative female nudity, political lampoons and off-color jokes set notorious theatrical precedents in a society universally noted for its moral severity and priggishness” (20). Blasco’s *El joven Telémaco* thus can be viewed as a transitional work that draws on the more established attributes of the *zarzuela* while also incorporating intense interest in contemporary society through mimetic representation and satirical, humorous critique.

Alongside the *opéra comique*, the 1860s also witnessed the introduction of the French *revue* into the Madrilenian theatrical scene. The earliest Spanish *revistas* focused heavily on political commentary and satire through a mixture of symbolic settings and allegorical personifications as the principle *dramatis personae*. Beginning with the name itself, the affinity between the *revista* and the world of periodical publications could not be more clear; writers in Spain began to pen regular dramatic renditions of the events of the year gone by and prognostications for the year to come in pieces scheduled to premiere around important holidays, particularly at the arrival of the New Year. This decision to craft pieces that approached the disparate events of an entire year necessitated an aesthetic of fragmentation and heterogeneity. Ramón Femenía Sánchez has observed that the *revista* genre depends on a simple framing story that provides a loose structure for comic sketches and musical numbers. Entertaining the audience trumps all other aesthetic concerns and permits unusual insertions of song and dance scenes that have little relationship with other scenes in the work (12–13). The *revista* is an evident example of how the fragmentary aesthetic of the newspaper began to spread to other

areas of cultural production, and its formal qualities would permeate all areas of the *género chico* at the height of its popularity.

José María Gutiérrez de Alba's three *revistas* from the years 1864–1866 figure as some of the earliest in Madrid and display a number of important characteristics for the development of the genre on the Spanish stage. In all three of these works, Gutiérrez de Alba uses the conceit of the current year—portrayed as an elderly man—ceding his position to the coming year—a young boy—all the while lamenting the sad state of Spanish society, politics, culture, journalism, and so on. The breadth of subjects with which these plays engage suggests a point of contact with the modern newspaper, whose mission to report a wide range of information and to the reader regularly leads to an attendant propensity for generalized and superficial treatment of the topics at hand. In the second scene of Gutiérrez de Alba's first foray into the genre, *1864 y 1865*—which premiered in the Teatro del Circo on January 30, 1865—we can appreciate the density of material covered in a single dialogue:

1864: Allá, donde el sol se pone,  
tienes dos pueblos hermanos,  
que unidos ha mucho tiempo  
por vínculos democráticos,  
el corazón se desgarran  
con fraternal entusiasmo;  
y por librar a los negros,  
se van a quedar sin blancos.

1865: Qué horror, papá!

1864: Allí, muy cerca  
te dejo otro simulacro  
de imperio, que, según dicen,  
será de ventura un pasmo.

1865: Pueblo feliz!

1864: La anarquía  
lo estaba ya devorando;  
pero un amigo benéfico  
por su suerte interesado,

llevó allí la paz, el orden...  
 1865: ¿Cómo, papá?  
 1864: A cañonazos.  
 1865: Cáscaras!  
 1864: Allí otros pueblos  
 te dejo, republicanos,  
 que son libres.  
 1865: ¿Sí?  
 1864: Muy libres:  
 como el perro en cambiar de amo.(9)

Gutiérrez de Alba condenses commentary on the civil war in the United States, the installation of Maximilian on the throne of the Second Mexican Empire under Napoleon III, and an allusion to the subjugation of the majority of Central and South American to the economic and commercial power of the British navy following independence from Spain. The comicity of 1864's comments derives from the strategies of exaggeration and ironic inversion that are typical of political caricature from the period.

In the following year's revue, *Revista de un muerto: juicio del año 1865*, which also debuted in the Teatro del Circo in January, we see an indication of the constant dialogue between shows that will characterize *género chico* performance practices. In Scene 4, the skeleton of 1864 appears and speaks to 1865:

1864: ¿Y de teatro fue mejor?  
 1865: Sí; en el Circo una revista  
 dio a muchos ciegos la vista...  
 y un tabardillo a su autor. (17)

This scene casually alludes to the revue from a year ago and lauds its ability to stir the audience to recognize both the merits and flaws of the society in which they live. The scene also demonstrates, albeit mildly, the constant allusions and recycling of material that became an essential trait of the popular commercial theater in late nineteenth-century

Madrid, both as a means to engage the audience's interest in the repertoire and as a tactic to bolster the popularity, and profitability, of an author or play.

Gutiérrez de Alba's *revistas* represent for the literary scholar or historian a transitional moment between the more entrenched theatrical modes of the early nineteenth century—specifically Romantic drama and the *zarzuela grande*—and the emerging practices that would dominate the commercial stages in the latter decades of the century. The characters that populate these works include gods from Greco-Roman mythology, historical figures, the ghosts of canonical writers, and personifications of social or moral concepts that share much in common with the allegorical figures of the *auto sacramental*. At the same time, they are joined by new personified beings: Madrilenian streets and locations, major theaters, popular newspapers, national political parties, etc. In *1866 y 1867*—first performed at the Teatro del Circo on Christmas Eve of 1866—the Calle del Carmen and the Calle de Preciados complain of their poorly maintained condition and general abandonment due to the expansion of Madrid eastward with the construction of new neighborhoods such as Salamanca. Later, the newly-mounted Reloj de la Puerta del Sol appears, heavily intoxicated and mumbling a few words of broken English, a visceral embodiment of the problems the timepiece, designed by Leonese clockmaker José Rodríguez Losada in London, suffered during its first few weeks of operation after being installed on November 19, 1866. The difference in setting between the first of Gutiérrez de Alba's *revistas* and the last is indicative of the transitional nature of his work in the genre. According to the description at the beginning of *1864 y 1865*, the play is set in “un bosque casi despoblado y en lontananza algunas ruinas. En primer término, a la izquierda del espectador, un gran sepulcro; a la derecha

una cuna cubierta por una espesa capa de nieve, y a la izquierda, después del segundo término, un arca practicable, de grandes dimensiones y de la forma que la Escritura nos representa la del patriarca Noé, en tiempo del diluvio,” a location reminiscent of the exotic locales and communion with the mysterious and the eternal in the Romantic theater. The setting of *Revista de un muerto* shares even more in common with the symbolic and macabre qualities of Romantic staging practices:

Decoración fantástica en el palacio de la Eternidad. En el fondo dos profundas galerías: la de la izquierda pertenece a lo porvenir, y estará oscura; la de la derecha pertenece a lo pasado, y estará débilmente iluminada. En el centro de estas dos galerías, y un poco avanzado hacia el proscenio, se hallará el trono de Saturno, rodeado de un anillo de fuego; este dios, con todos los atributos del tiempo, tendrá a sus pies las cuatro Estaciones, y estará reclinado sobre un gran reloj de arena. En la galería de lo pasado habrá una multitud de esqueletos en fila: el primero de los cuales tendrá en la frente la cifra 1864, y los que le siguen una unidad menos: en la de lo porvenir todo será confuso y por consiguiente sin formas determinadas.

Once again, the *revista* takes place in a stylized, fantastic space that the audience cannot confuse with its own world. *1866 y 1867*, in contrast, effectively uses minimally stylized, contemporary spaces; the first section of the play takes place in a “Habitación miserablemente amueblada,” while the second occurs in a “Plaza de gran fondo” with “Calles a derecha e izquierda.” While neither of these locations enjoy the detailed descriptions or close attention to plasticity and detail present in Gutiérrez de Alba’s previous *revistas*, the poorly accommodated room and large plaza resonate with the lived experiences of the audience, and consequently remove the exhibition of contemporary Madrid from abstract, symbolic physical spaces and firmly ground their evocation of the spectacle of modern life in the intuitive realities of the Madrilenian public.



The finale of *1866 y 1867* foreshadows the development within the *género chico* of a jingoistic form of nationalism that will severely damage the financial viability and popularity of this style of commercial theater in the wake of the so-called “Disaster” of 1898. In the final scene of the play, the young 1867 asks the elderly 1866 if he has left nothing good for the coming year. 1866 tells him that the silver lining of the year has been an event that will etch his name in eternity, at which point the curtains at the back of the stage open to reveal a visual representation of the Spanish bombardment of Callao during the Chincha Islands War on May 2, 1866. A chorus of seamen sings:

¡Hurra! valiente hijos  
del pueblo singular,  
que cuenta entre sus glorias  
Lepanto y Trafalgar!  
¡El porvenir de España  
nadie puede eclipsar!  
La santa Providencia  
por él velando está. (44)

The misreading of this event as a transcendent moment in Spanish history notwithstanding, the association of national glory with military success sets the stage for the examination of the ills and problems of Spain that will dominate public intellectual discussions in the first decades of the twentieth century. The *género chico* in general and the *revista* in particular regularly support such a view of Spanish national identity, and therefore both will suffer great declines in attendance and revenue once the Spanish-American War shatters the prolonged illusions of continuing imperial aspirations.

### **The *Teatro por Horas*, a New Paradigm of Theatrical Production**

Unlike the newspaper—which can be bought, laid aside, picked up anew, and so forth—the theater requires a measure of physical control over the bodies of spectators in

space and time. While the up-to-date quality of the jokes in *El joven Telémaco* and the satire in Gutiérrez de Alba's *revistas* appealed to Madrilenian audiences' interest in current events, the *ópera bufa* and the early *revista* did little to accommodate the rigid timetable of industrialized labor and its controlling influence over leisure time. Whereas the informative newspaper had adopted new aesthetic and formal principles—headlines, subtitles, typographic variety, blocking, etc.—to permit the reader to take in the relevant information quickly, by the mid 1860s no similar change in the world of theatrical production had taken place.

The collaboration of José Vallés, Antonio Riquelme, and Juan José Luján, however, would lead to one of the most transcendent and pervasive transformations in production method in the history of the Spanish stage. The trio of comic actors first worked together in the amateur acting society *Los bromistas madrileños*, a group that took Arderius's *Bufos madrileños* as its inspiration and offered shows in the new *Café-teatro del Lozoya* in 1866 and 1867 (Membrez 41). Vallés went to work at the *Café-teatro del Recreo* in the summer of 1867 and soon his two companions approached him with a novel idea, which was to create a more flexible production system that would stage a short performance every hour rather than a long play that lasted the entire evening (Íñiguez Barrena 36).<sup>23</sup> A new pricing structure accompanied this production model, leading to a drastic reduction in the minimum entry price to view a theatrical spectacle in the capital. Writing in 1923, Antonio Pareja Serrada recalls how the *café-teatros* altered the means by which the customer paid for entry to view the performance: “No se exigía

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<sup>23</sup> This version of the story is most often repeated, beginning with Zurita's account. Enrique Chicote, in contrast, offers an alternate version in which the actor Ramón Mariscal plays a prominent role as one of the original planners of the *teatro por horas* production model. In his memoir, Chicote recalls how Mariscal often spoke of the earliest days of the *teatro por horas* and his decisive part in its development (65).

billete de entrada, sino que se veía una función por el consumo que se hiciera; pero si se quería asistir a otra, era preciso nueva consumición o abonar doce cuartos, que era entonces el precio de un café” (32). Although the practice of requiring customers to buy coffee in order to view the theatrical spectacle quickly gave way to a more traditional model of purchasing tickets, the basic logic of having the option to pay for only a portion of the evening’s entertainment rather than the elevated price of a *función completa* persisted as the principal organizational structure of the *teatro por horas*.<sup>24</sup> Nancy Membrez affirms that this was an excellent value given the prices in the rest of the Madrilenian theaters: “Since the principal theaters charged two pesetas per seat [. . .], the *bufos* between four and fifty *reales* and the *cafés-teatros* between two and twelve *reales*, one *real* was truly a bargain” (42). This alteration in the organizational structure of the theater was advantageous to the box office as well because “replacing the audience every hour for four hours would quadruple the box office receipts” (42–43). This significant reorganization of the theatrical performance structure clearly exercised broad influence on the status of the theater in relation to society by substantially increasing accessibility to public entertainment for a large proportion of the urban populace.<sup>25</sup>

Just as the popular periodical press developed in response to the information needs of the residents of the growing Spanish capital, the *teatro por horas* system arose

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<sup>24</sup> According to Roger Alier, Carlos Alier, and Xosé Aviñoa, this elevated price “oscilaba en torno a los catorce reales” (58), meaning that the price of one *real* in the *teatro por horas* system offered a 92.8% reduction. Once we take into account the fact that each show presented lasted one hour instead of the average of three to four hours in the theaters of *función completa*, the *teatro por horas* still comes out as a tremendous bargain. Taking the average *función completa* to last 3.5 hours, each hour of entertainment costs four *reales*. The *teatro por horas* still represents a savings of 75% per hour.

<sup>25</sup> David Nasaw pursues a similar line of reasoning in his study of the immense expansion of public entertainments in the United States at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century: “The new amusements were ‘public’ and ‘commercial’ as well as urban. The terms, in this period at least, became almost interchangeable, as the city’s showmen, learning the new calculus of public entertainments, lowered prices to welcome the largest possible audience to their establishments” (5).

to accommodate the growing industrial workforce in the realm of entertainment. René Andioc observes that in the eighteenth century theater attendance was highest on the weekends and holidays, suggesting that the work schedule of laborers precluded attendance at theaters during the week (12). Fernando Vela perceptively observed that the beginnings of the *teatro por horas* system were as much a result of the social life of Madrid as the economic imperative of theatrical entrepreneurs (365). Obviously, we must take into account that the decision to offer theater ‘by the hour’ would have failed miserably if the *Café-teatro del Recreo* had remained empty hour after hour, night after night. Instead, the public responded with overwhelming enthusiasm to such a degree that the trio of comedic actors chose to move their enterprise to the larger *Teatro de Variedades* at the beginning of the 1869 season. Such a fervent reception on the part of the audience tells us that Vallés, Riquelme, and Luján did not impose this new entertainment model on the public, but rather that the *teatro por horas* format corresponded to the evolving needs of the community because it was an entertainment venue “que le diera al público la oportunidad de entretenerse en el momento de la noche que más le conviniera. Podría ser como sobremesa de la cena, descanso en la tertulia o espera para la cita; es decir como los cines de hoy, sin exigir del público la noche entera para ver una representación” (Moreno 10–11). Zurita’s description of the new production format concurs: “De este modo no se obligaba a nadie a estar cuatro o cinco horas en el teatro y cada cual podría escoger, para divertirse, la hora que más cómoda le fuere” (7). The issue at play is not only the price of the ticket, but the power of the urban worker-consumer to choose how, when, and where to spend his or her limited leisure time.

The business practices introduced by the operators of the *café-teatros* and theaters that adopted the *teatro por horas* system mirror the innovative newspaper production and dissemination model that responded directly to the far-reaching socio-economic transformations occurring in Madrid from the 1840s to the 1860s. Along with altering the schedule and pricing of their product, theater entrepreneurs borrowed other strategies from the world of newspapers to reach untapped sectors of the urban audience. Just as newspaper vendors flooded the streets of Madrid selling copies of *La Correspondencia de España* and shouting the main news items of the day, theaters sent young men and women into the streets to advertise their shows crying “¡A real la pieza!” (Membrez 43). The most important similarity between the informative newspaper and the nascent *teatro por horas*, however, was the use of an aesthetic of variety to construct a broad audience. The *teatro por horas* format, unlike its *función completa* counterpart, possesses the inherent flexibility to offer different types of shows and spectacles during a single evening and to alter a portion of its program without having to completely scrap an entire three- or four-hour production. Just as the modern newspaper’s different sections and features are designed to attract the attention of different readers—conceived of as the various members of the idealized nuclear family—theater ‘by the hour’ could specifically target different types of audiences from one section to the next. Edward F. Albee, a major figure in the transformation of vaudeville into a national entertainment industry in the United States and the grandfather of noted American playwright Edward Albee III, best describes the variety aesthetic: “In the arrangement of the ideal vaudeville program, there is one or more sources of complete satisfaction for everybody present, no matter how ‘mixed’ the audience may be. In vaudeville ‘there is always something for everybody.’”

just as in every state and city, in every county and town in our democratic country, there is opportunity for everybody, a chance for all” (408). Albee’s evocation of the democratic ideals of the United States here reflects how entertainment entrepreneurs masked the economic imperative of their exploits with appeals to the prevailing ideology of their society, a strategy of naturalizing and nationalizing the entertainments they offered to the public. The commercial theater and the popular press in Madrid promoted an analogous ideological framework within which to perceive individual and collective identities through a variety aesthetic that was as inclusive as possible...to all those who were willing to pay the price for access, that is.

### **New Types of Plays for a New Model of Production**

The new *teatro por horas* performance schedule limited the duration of the works presented and thus generated demand for shorter plays that accommodated the strict economy of time imposed by the new business practices of the commercial theaters. The strong tradition of three-act dramatic structure in Spain simply could not meet the stringent restrictions of the *teatro por horas* system. Entrepreneurs sought new forms of spectacle with which to please the public in an increasingly crowded urban entertainment market. This activity to renew the offerings of the playhouses led to the implantation of various one-act dramatic genres to fill the four daily timeslots of the *teatro por horas*. The tone of all these genres drew from the zany antics typical of the *Bufos madrileños* performance practice, which essentially set the comic paradigm of witty dialogue, improvisation, choreographed song-and-dance routines, and physical comedy that would come to characterize the comic vision of the commercial theater.

The *revista*, introduced by Gutiérrez de Alba in the mid 1860s, quickly became a dominant genre in the new *teatro por horas* production system due to its structural flexibility. Unlike many theatrical forms, the *revista* does not rely on the neoclassical unities of time and place, and only marginally depends on the unity of action as embodied in the journey that the principle pair of characters undertakes. The *revista* represents a radical breakdown of any sense of narrative continuity in the theatrical spectacle. María Pilar Espín Templado writes: “El desarrollo de la acción de la revista no es lineal [. . .] sino que cada cuadro, o incluso cada escena, puede presentar unos personajes y una temática distinta” (842). Like the modern newspaper, the *revista* compiles a variety of experiences and presents them to the viewer, generating unity by the juxtaposition of disparate elements rather than emphasizing narrative thread or visual continuity.

A second one-act genre that emerged as a staple of the *teatro por horas* performance system was the *juguete cómico*, which like the *revista* owed its origins to French models. Unlike the *revista*, the *juguete* follows the French *vaudeville* and obeys the neoclassical dramatic unities rigorously, situating contemporary melodramatic plotlines in interior, petty bourgeois settings over the course of a few hours (Espín Templado 844). The *juguete cómico* functions as a trimmed-down version of the three-act *alta comedia* as cultivated by Adelardo López de Ayala, Tomás Rodríguez Rubí, and Manuel Tamayo y Baus. The melodramatic vision of the *alta comedia* turned its gaze toward the representation of contemporary society and social issues, particularly “the middle class’s anxiety about its political and economic stability” (Gies 438). While the *alta comedia* approached these issues with the gravity of the struggle between good and evil that characterizes melodrama (Ríos-Font 29–30), the *juguete cómico* offered a comic

counterpoint that presented the complications of amorous misunderstandings as little more than the consequences of hasty judgment and misplaced social anxiety.

Aside from adopting the latest trends from Paris, commercial playwrights in Madrid also looked to the rich tradition of short theater in Spanish literary history and found a one-act form that accommodated the rigid temporal limitations of the *teatro por horas* and the public's interest in portrayals of contemporary settings and characters: the *sainete*. Ramón de la Cruz in Madrid and Juan Ignacio González del Castillo in Cádiz cultivated the genre—which Zurita tellingly suggests is the 'natural father' of the *género chico* (16)—to popular acclaim in their respective cities by crafting short pieces that emulated the local color, colloquial language, and prosaic humor of the urban popular classes. The *sainete* as practiced by de la Cruz and González del Castillo was itself a more recent version of the early-modern *entremés*, and thus the revival of the *sainete* on the stages of the *teatro por horas* connected the contemporary commercial theater scene to a larger trajectory of Spanish theater. In this way, we can read the decision to resurrect the *sainete* as an extension of the Romantic project of constituting a Spanish literary canon by orienting artistic efforts toward national themes and forms (Álvarez Junco 241). Unlike the *revista* and the *juguete cómico*, the *sainete* does not owe its historical antecedents to French models, and this nationalistic 'purity' permits the genre to avoid accusations of *afrancesamiento* and fuse the representation of *lo castizo*—the truly Spanish—with an equally *castizo* theatrical form, 'born and raised' in Spain rather than imported from abroad. The *sainete* thus was born anew with the premiere of Tomás Luceño's *Cuadros al fresco* on January 31, 1870, in the Teatro de Lope de Rueda, a



theater's whose name further consolidates the inscription of Luceño's *sainete* into the national tradition by placing it into contact with the sixteenth-century *paso*.

In *Cuadros al fresco*, Luceño weaves together a number of storylines focusing on different groups of characters in order to evoke a vibrant portrait of contemporary Madrid. In the first scenes of the play, the action focuses principally on Abelardo as he assures Eloisa of his affections and dedication to her in Scene 1 only to contradict himself entirely in Scene 2, when he reveals that her newfound interest in marriage has soured the relationship for him. This sharp difference from one scene to the next exemplifies the humorous development of character pursued by the best nineteenth-century *saineteros* through contrasts and inversions, communicated both through the spoken word and the visual plasticity of the *cuadro de costumbres*. Luceño uses both strategies in *Cuadros al fresco*, particularly with the figure of Salcedo. In Scene 9 he appears to comfort Ramona after she lost a significant sum of money in a card game, but in Scene 11 his words reveal that his occupation is to convince young people to gamble:

Salcedo: ¡Cá! Y si tú quieres  
vestir como yo, gastar  
y tener un duro siempre  
en el bolsillo, hazme caso  
y puede ser que te alegres.

Manolillo: No acierto. . .

Salcedo: Me dan un duro  
por cada joven que lleve  
a jugar en ese cuarto  
principal que ves enfrente.  
Y sabes lo que es Madrid,  
y fácilmente se puede  
engañar a diez o doce  
al día [...] (19)

Here, Salcedo tempts Manolillo to give up his honorable, albeit strenuous, occupation in favor of profiting from the vices of others, a plot construction ripe with religious and

social overtones and, consequently, appealing to the mixture of ideological positions to be found within a mid-nineteenth-century Madrilenian audience. Manolillo harshly rebuffs Salcedo's offer, but the denouement of this storyline is delayed until the very end of the play, when we see Salcedo, his arms tied, being led away by the municipal authority. This moment in which justice is dispensed and the guilty party arrested remains unspoken in the final scene, instead being presented only visually as the audience sees the consequences of Salcedo's actions without being privy to the moment of his arrest or his thoughts on the subject.

That Luceño's *Cuadros al fresco* has come to be known as the rebirth of the *sainete* directs our attention to the nebulous nature of the dramatic forms and categories that populated the stages of the *teatro por horas*. In contradiction to Marciano Zurita's assertion that Luceño is the restorer of the *sainete* in the nineteenth century with this play (23), the edition of the play published in 1879 by the Establecimiento Tipográfico de E. Cuesta gives the full title of the play as *Cuadros al fresco: juguete cómico en un acto y en verso*, qualifying the work as a *juguete cómico* instead of a *sainete*. If Luceño was the restorer of the *sainete*, it appears to have been more by accident than by design. In the play Luceño pieces together a series of disparate events and actions while rigidly obeying the unities of place and time, an approach that fails to coincide with the model provided by Ramón de la Cruz. While de la Cruz's *sainetes* certainly portray a wide variety of characters going about their daily tasks, his works focus on a principal action that occurs against the backdrop of the vibrant street culture of the Madrilenian popular classes. Luceño's reintroduction of the *sainete* borrows heavily from the logic of the *revista* and the *juguete cómico*, depicting the popular neighborhoods of contemporary Madrid

through a series of unconnected scenes as in the *revista*, but also coinciding with the adherence to the unities of time and place typical of the *juguete cómico*. I choose to problematize the generic labeling of *Cuadros al fresco* not to prove beyond a reasonable doubt that the play is or is not a *sainete*, but rather to demonstrate the fluidity of the concept of genre during this period.

### **Genre Trouble in the *Género chico***

The trouble with the *género chico* is that it is not a genre at all. Many scholars spend more of their time making sense of the heterogeneity of the so-called ‘sub-genres’ of the *género chico* than analyzing the aesthetic workings and social function of the theatrical pieces themselves. Approaching the *género chico* as a genre creates more problems than it solves because it leads to the critical dead-end of attempting to reconcile the contradictory features of the *revista*, *juguete cómico*, and *sainete* with the notion that they all pertain to a single ‘master genre’ when in fact they all originate from distinct performance traditions. A more useful approach is to understand the *género chico* as a range of performance practices that developed within the *teatro por horas* system of production. These terms are neither synonymous nor interchangeable; the *teatro por horas* is the practice of dividing a theater’s nightly offerings into multiple sections and selling tickets to each section individually while the *género chico* is a constellation of one-act theatrical spectacles and performance practices that met the temporal restrictions of the *teatro por horas* and the entertainment demands of the Madrilenian public.

While salient features and structure tend to appear time and again in the different one-act theatrical forms that suited the *teatro por horas* production method, commercial

playwrights, composers, and producers were more concerned with crafting a product that would appeal to a heterogeneous public and consequently were willing to blend elements of any and all popular entertainments to achieve this goal. Genre is not a fundamental trait of a work, but rather is a mnemonic device that communicates information quickly. Words such as *sainete*, *revista*, and *juguete* reflect the general patterns of character distribution, temporal organization, and location and provide us immediately with knowledge of the basic structure, form, and possibly content of a given work. Divergences from these general patterns, however, push the boundaries of theatrical praxis in new directions and, quite often, are the quality of a work that makes it memorable for audiences for years to come.

Critics often comment on how bizarre it is that the term *género chico* describes a set of theatrical practices according to the size of its works. More bizarre, however, is the fact that scholarship on the subject implicitly defends this reading of the term by examining the different sub-sets of this ‘genre’ rather than questioning the term itself and investigating its peculiar history and relationship to the theatrical corpus to which it refers. For example, in the introduction of her study of comic discourse in the *género chico*, Margot Versteeg says that it alludes “a la corta duración de las obras (y a lo mejor también a sus pocas pretensiones)” (3). Versteeg’s parenthetical comment should be in bold-face type written across the entire page: the term *género chico* communicates an underlying value judgment of the works to which it alludes by setting them in implicit opposition to works of larger duration and purportedly more serious artistic pretensions. Versteeg cites an article published in *La España Moderna* in May, 1898 by E. Gómez de Baquero as evidence for the general usage of the term *género chico* to refer to short

works. Gómez de Baquero, however, goes on to state that the major triumphs of the 1897–1898 theatrical season were to be seen in representations of Julián Romea’s *El señor Joaquín*, Carlos Fernández Shaw’s *La Revoltosa*, and Carlos Arniches’s *El santo de la Isidra*, and that one of these works should win the prize for best dramatic work of the year. He then makes an important observation:

Yo bien sé que, aun no habiendo obstáculo formal para ello, sería difícil que se adjudicara un premio que parece reservado para los dramas y comedias en tres actos, a cualquiera de las citadas piezas. Se oponen a esto la escasa estimación literaria que en general se concede al *género chico* y el sentimiento de la *jerarquía* (digámoslo así) de los géneros literarios que los divide en castas, patricios y plebeyos. Es indudable que el sainete es un género secundario, y que el drama o la alta comedia son obras de mayor dificultad y más importancia literaria que un juguete cómico, un sainete o una zarzuelita. Pero cualquiera de estas últimas obras, si es acabada en su género, valdrá más cualitativamente que un drama o una comedia malos o mediados. (154–55)

In his defense of these three works, Gómez de Baquero aptly summarizes the value judgments that inform the term *género chico* and reveals the slippages inherent in the term itself: by associating the concepts of quality and artistry with length, to refer to a particular set of theatrical works or performance practices as ‘tiny’ immediately calls their artistic validity into question. While I am not suggesting that we do away with the name *género chico*—such a departure from traditional nomenclature would generate only confusion—it is imperative that we revise how we use the term and what it means.

Considering the *género chico* alongside the development of daily newspapers in the nineteenth century leads us to a new way of envisioning the relationship between the blanket term *género chico* and the individual genres that constitute it. In a sense, the term *género chico* corresponds to the notion of the newspaper. The daily newspaper is not a genre, but rather an extra-generic construct within which multiple genres operate to

transmit information through a variety of formal techniques. Similarly, the *género chico* is an extra-generic construct that recognizes the common performance and production practices that characterize genres such as the *sainete*, *juguete cómico*, and *revista* and the temporal and physical proximity of these genres on the commercial stages of Madrid.

### **Newspapers, *Costumbrismo*, and the Performance of Modernity**

Recognizing the ability of the modern newspaper to juxtapose different types of texts and genres through an aesthetic of visual variety plays a vital role in understanding how newspapers expanded the mental frameworks of readers. I have emphasized the role of the daily newspaper in accelerating a process of formal fragmentation as the collaborative model of journalistic writing and production leads to the proliferation of authors, narrative styles, temporalities, and so forth. Equally significant is the newspaper's subtle capacity for juxtaposing different types of content in order to perform new modes of social interaction and emerging narratives of Spanish nationalism.

The institutionalization of newspaper reading as an aspect of daily and civil life was a crucial component in the constitution of Spain as a modern nation-state. Benedict Anderson has theorized that the newspaper played an important role in the formation of nations, focusing on the creation of an imagined community through the repeated, functionally simultaneous action of reading the newspaper. Anderson suggests that this simultaneity has replaced the logic of religious ceremony in modern society and created a sense of community through ritualistic repetition:

[E]ach communicant is well aware that the ceremony he performs is being replicated simultaneously by thousands (or millions) of others of whose existence he is confident, yet of whose identity he has not the slightest notion. Furthermore, this ceremony is incessantly repeated at daily or half-

daily intervals throughout the calendar. What more vivid figure for the secular, historically clocked, imagined community can be envisioned? (35)

Anderson's thesis is so compelling because it conceives of the nation as a confluence of secular rituals and performances of identity within a tightly bounded sense of perceived or "imagined" community and temporality. At the same time, his hypothesis can be expanded by considering other forms of communal activities that imply a sense of simultaneity, such as attending the theater in the nineteenth century or going to the movies in the twentieth. Both of these activities, like reading the newspaper, carry with them linguistic and cultural associations and assumptions that contribute to the formation of an imagined community of readers, spectators, or consumers participating in a "simultaneous" act of reception.

Although not considered explicitly in Anderson's text, the framing techniques used to present content within the newspaper are just as important as the perceived simultaneity of the physical experience of reading. Robert Wright argues that the printing press generated the sense of cultural and linguistic continuity that was so crucial to the development of nations throughout Western Europe and "began to foster a kind of day-to-day national consciousness" (181). In Spain, the framing of news items from Catalonia, Basque Country, and Andalusia, for instance, as 'national' news reifies a national narrative of territorial and cultural unity between the regions of the Iberian Peninsula and other regions that have no logical geographic relationship to the peninsula, such as Ceuta, Melilla, and the Canary Islands.<sup>26</sup> Daily contact with these far-flung

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<sup>26</sup> Wright also notes the drive toward protest and fragmentation inherent in the rise of the modern printing press, as it allowed eloquent speakers with clearly-defined thoughts to reach audiences that were receptive to their ideas: "Now, with printing cheap, an eloquent agitator with a catchy idea could occupy center stage" (177). The dual nature of the press to provide the means for generating cultural cohesion across large geographical regions while at the same time functioning as a mechanism for undermining that same unity is

locations, albeit only via the mental activity of reading, gradually strengthens the assumptions of cultural unity that underpin notions of nationalism. The press engenders perceptual frameworks through which local and peripheral customs are read in the context of their relationship to the political and cultural center of Madrid, a trend that clearly emerges in nineteenth-century *costumbrismo* in the work of writers such as Serafín Estébanez Calderón and Ramón de Mesonero Romanos. In Estébanez Calderón's *Escenas andaluzas* and Mesonero Romanos's *Escenas matritenses*,<sup>27</sup> each author constructs short narratives based on popular stories, locations, and personages in Andalusia and Madrid, respectively, in order to paint a portrait, or *cuadro*, of local culture. By bringing this representation of local culture to a national public, these authors were conceptualizing a national cultural space within which local variation was possible. Estébanez Calderón corroborates such a project in the dedication of his collection:

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a theme that dominates Wright's discussion of the press, and is a particularly important quality of the modern newspaper in the context of modern Spain. The proliferation of local and regional newspapers throughout Spain in the mid- to late-nineteenth century contributed heavily to the formation of regionalist sentiments and political consciousness. The case of Catalonia is illustrative: at the same time that exiled writers influenced by European Romanticism were returning to Madrid, a generation of Catalan intellectuals and writers were returning to Barcelona with similar experiences. This period is often referred to as the *Renaixença*, a name tellingly derived from a journal published much later in Barcelona between 1871 and 1905 that promoted Catalan language and culture. According to Damià Ricart Lafont's foundational elementary school textbook from the politically-charged atmosphere of Catalonia in the 1930s, the cultural awakening of Catalan writers in the early decades of the nineteenth century preceded a political mobilization in the early years of the Restoration, coinciding with the founding of the newspaper *El Estado Catalán* in 1869 and the first Catalan-language newspaper *Diari Català*, in 1879 by a crucial left political figure, Valentí Almirall (166). The gesture is more than symbolic: by creating a Catalan-language reading public, Almirall initiated the process of creating what Pierre Vilar has seen as a social group formed around linguistic solidarity (38), a group that could then be mobilized politically. As in Catalonia, the rise of nationalism in Basque Land coincided with a growing body of published work both about the community of Basque-speaking people and directed to them in order to create a Basque, as opposed to Spanish, public sphere. In contrast to Catalonia, however, is the fact that this nationalism developed as a significant political movement largely due to the efforts of a single man, Sabino Arana Goiri, who published a book intended to highlight historical antecedents of contemporary Basque nationalism in 1890, *Bizkaya por su independencia*, and founded the Basque-language newspaper *Bizkaitarra* on June 8, 1893 to bring Basque into everyday usage in the contemporary public sphere (Kurlansky 165–67). Both of these important nationalist movements in modern Spanish history, then, are intimately connected to the manipulation of audiences made possible by mass print media.

<sup>27</sup> Both of these collections consist of *artículos de costumbres* published in newspapers during the 1830s and 1840s. *Escenas andaluzas* was published as a collection in 1847, *Escenas matritenses* in 1851.



[A]ntes de maldecirme o dejarme al lado, que es mucho peor, pásate y da un bureo por Triana de Sevilla, Mercadillo de Ronda, Percheles de Málaga, Campillo de Granada, barrios bajos de Madrid, el de la Viña de Cádiz, Santa Marina de Córdoba, murallas de Cartagena, Rochapea de Pamplona, San Pablo de Zaragoza, y otras más partes en donde vive y reina España, sin mezcla ni encruzamiento de herejía alguna extranjera; y si al volver y virar en redondo no me lees con algo del apetito y sabor, date por precito y relapso en materias españolas, que para ti *nulla est redemptio* y estás excomulgado a mata candelas. (54–55)

After this enumeration of important locations of the various regions of the country, Estébanez Calderón affirms their relevance to the notion of Spain as a nation and brazenly asserts that anyone who lacks interest in the local customs of the periphery, characterized as “materias españolas,” does not belong to the nation. At the same time, the framing of news from other areas of the world as foreign events whose significance depends on their relationship to Spain strengthens the foreign/national dichotomy through a politics of difference. Daily contact with news items categorized as “national” and “international” through periodical publications reinforces the perceived geographical boundaries of the nation by generating linguistic and mental categories of difference. The rise of print journalism produced new forms of critical engagement and mental organization in the public sphere, which facilitated the rise of new patterns of identity formation at the local and national level.<sup>28</sup>

Anderson’s thesis on nations as “imagined communities” perhaps overstates the link between newspaper reading and the rise of the modern nation-state by insisting too

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<sup>28</sup> José Álvarez Junco, in his study of nationalism in nineteenth-century Spain, identifies a number of enterprises that contributed to “La construcción de la identidad nacional en el terreno literario” (240). The invention and institutionalization of fields of study such as Spanish literature and history provide a cultural narrative shared by the national community. Álvarez Junco also examines the major contributions of Romantic riders such as Rivas, Espronceda, and Zorrilla in the fusion of national history and literature in their cultivation of historical *romances* (240–49). Somewhat surprisingly, however, is the fact that Álvarez Junco neglects to discuss, or even mention, the role of nineteenth-century *costumbrismo* in breeding new forms of communitarian identification and awareness in the present through controlled representation of the diverse social and cultural groups that constitute the nation.

greatly on a causal relationship between them; we can adjust his notion by suggesting instead that the growth of periodical print media and the consolidation of nations as imagined collectives exerted mutual influences on one another during a period of socio-political, cultural, and intellectual change during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Widely circulating periodicals and nationalism are symptoms of broad transformations of Western society during a period in which technological innovation rapidly stretched the boundaries of individual experiences of geography, time, and society. Both newspaper and nation were structuring elements that helped to orient the human subject and small, traditional communities within the greatly expanded social setting of an ever-more-hurriedly approaching modernity. There is no doubt regarding the power of nationalism and the concept of the nation to shape the mental outlook of millions of people: the very language with which individuals in the twenty-first century perceive themselves within the context of the global community continues to demonstrate the permeating influence of nationalism on modern society. The incredible body of scholarship available on nationalism, ranging from grand theories to microscopically specific case studies, corroborates its omnipresent influence throughout the twentieth century and on into the twenty-first. In contrast, the newspaper as an organizational principle of the mental habits and framework of the modern subject has received relatively little critical attention.

Vanessa R. Schwartz argues that newspapers were an agent of change in a process that introduced new means of understanding the diverse realities of the contemporary city and heralded the beginnings of modern mass culture. Speaking of a number of popular entertainment phenomena in Paris in the mid-nineteenth century, Schwartz asserts:

Aside from their enormous popularity, these forms realistically represented a sensationalized version of contemporary life. Packaged as

*actualités*—‘current events, news’—this combination of verisimilitude in representation and the thematic display of a press-style version of everyday life are not mere descriptions of urban mass culture. Their consumption became one of the means by which a mass culture and a new urban crowd became a society of spectators. (2)

Schwartz argues that the ‘spectacularization’ of modern life permitted new forms of social identity: “The visual representation of reality as spectacle in late nineteenth-century Paris created a common culture and a sense of shared experiences through which people might begin to imagine themselves as participating in a metropolitan culture because they had visual evidence that such a shared world, of which they were a part, existed” (6). Schwartz observes that the mediation of everyday reality through print culture created new modalities of socialization and perception of life in the city as a conglomeration of simultaneous, interrelated individual experiences. The increasing heterogeneity of the content of newspapers as they shift away from exclusive attention on political topics toward sensationalist stories of crime, reports on sporting and cultural events, and accounts of local happenings insinuates that anyone could become the object of journalism. While Habermas argued that eighteenth-century literary and philosophical periodicals functioned as an intellectual forum for rational debate on society, by the nineteenth century the popular newspaper had become—like the boulevard, the café, and the theater—an exhibitionary site of social blending that forged a new mental framework of urban community across political parties and socio-economic class.

In Spain, the development of *costumbrismo* in the nineteenth century reflects the preoccupations and anxieties of Spaniards as they dealt with the difficulties of political and economic modernization and their social consequences. The generation of Spanish writers and intellectuals who fled the country during the “ominous” decade of 1823–1833

paid great attention to the Romantic interest in the spirit of a people, or *volkgeist*. Following the return of these writers to Spain, this notion infiltrated the press at a number of levels, leading to the materialization and widespread dissemination of the *cuadro de costumbres* as an important genre in Spanish journalism from this period. Michael Iarocci sums up the transition from the amorphous, eighteenth-century form of *costumbrismo* to the concretization of the genre in the 1830s by observing that “[m]ost literary historians have noticed [. . .] that the *cuadro de costumbres* does not become fully established as a distinctive literary genre until the 1830s, when it crystallizes in the form of a brief newspaper article aimed at a middle-class reading public” and going on to state that “*costumbrismo* inaugurates nothing less than a fundamentally new form of literary mimesis inasmuch as its object of representation is no longer an abstract, universal human nature, but rather a human subject deeply enmeshed in a specific time and place” (386–87). In contrast to the scrupulous study of customs and manners in the Enlightenment movement to arrive at a picture of the universal qualities of mankind, nineteenth-century journalistic *costumbrismo* celebrates the spectacle of endless diversity and difference, a drive toward heterogeneity and fragmentation that characterized many of the products of popular culture throughout the remainder of the century.

The proliferation of *cuadros de costumbres* in the papers of Madrid beginning in the 1830s marks the arrival of a new relationship between journalistic representation, newspaper writers, and readers/consumers that in many ways reflects the developing sense of the spectacle of modern life. *Costumbrista* portrayals of work and leisure in urban and rural settings appeared in many papers from the 1830s and 1840s, and later reappeared in the form of anthologies made available for purchase in bookshops. In

1851, the editorial Gaspar y Roig published a collection of articles under the title *Los españoles pintados por sí mismos*, and his prologue provides great insight into how modern life was becoming a spectacle for public consumption:

En otro tiempo solo se retrataban los reyes para presidir las sesiones de los concejos; y los enamorados por vivir pared por medio con el corazón de su dulce dueño. Pero ahora *todos se reproducen* (hablamos artísticamente): el rey y el pechero, el viejo pergamino y la nueva vitela; el general que *gana* victorias y el que es *ganado*, oficio que siempre gana; el diputado que habla y el diputado que calla, género de elocuencia no bien cultivado hasta nuestros días; el ministro que se sacrifica por el bien del país hasta que lo destituyen; el cantante y la bailarina que pisan oro y diademas mientras el compositor roe su pedazo de miseria en medio del público en quien *hace furor*; el escritor, el magistrado, el tendero; todos, en fin, se retratan porque no falte a la posteridad cuando quiera escribir la historia de nuestra edad, la *vera efigies* de esos gloriosos obreros de la moderna civilización. (1; original emphasis)

Here we see the tendency of journalism in this period toward an exhibitionary function, putting the people, places, and events of the city before the reader in a seemingly endless parade of quotidian experience-turned-spectacle. Jean Descola, writing about daily life in Spain during this period, corroborates the notion that spectacularity came to permeate the social activity of the street: “Los peatones que se encuentran en las calles de Madrid también forman parte del cuadro exterior de la vida. Si el estilo de las casas tiende a la uniformidad, no es menos cierto que la extrema variedad de las gentes constituye un espectáculo permanente para el viandante” (91). The excerpt from the prologue of *Los españoles pintados por sí mismos* indicates a growing consciousness among journalists of their role within nineteenth-century conceptions of history’s place in the construction of a national psychic space, as well as an awareness of journalistic observation of daily minutiae as the building blocks for future representations of the present as history.

In the 1870s, collections of *cuadros de costumbres* of various types and focal-points flooded the bookshops of Madrid, indicating a surge in interest in the subject. Given that *Los españoles pintados por sí mismos* published articles written from the early 1830s up until 1850 in a volume of 382 pages, the publication of the two volumes of *Las españolas pintadas por los españoles* (1871, 309 and 305 pages), the two volumes of *Los españoles de Ogaño* (1872, 394 and 391 pages), and the single-volume *Madrid por dentro y por fuera* (1873, 507 pages) twenty years later speaks to the volume of writing produced in this genre and implies its popularity with readers. In the prologue of *Los españoles de Ogaño*, Victoriano Suárez's words reflect the desire to market a product and the notion of modern society as a spectacle of constant transformation and novelty:

*Los españoles de Ogaño*, colección de tipos de costumbres, no es una obra hija del estudio y la meditación; escrita entre el bullicio y la agitación de la vida política (casi todos sus jóvenes autores son periodistas en activo servicio,) quizás no hallarán Vds. en la mayoría de sus páginas galana forma ni corrección de estilo, pero en cambio encontrarán dibujados con un *esprit* y una exactitud admirables, los infinitos tipos que en este último tercio del siglo XIX pululan por España y que estaban deseando verse reunidos en un par de tomos, como hace algunos años se vieron *Los españoles pintados por sí mismos*, obra que con más propiedad debe llamarse hoy *Los españoles de antaño*. (5)

Suárez advocates for his product at the expense of an established classic in the genre, but his words point to the undeniable desire in the period for actuality, novelty, and the up-to-date. Conceptions of the present and those features of society most relevant to it have accelerated to a point that *cuadros* from only a few decades earlier are seen as passé and irrelevant to the here-and-now, part and parcel of the process of divorce between the past and present that Stephen Kern identifies in his study of changing perceptions of time and space in the last decades of the nineteenth century and first decades of the twentieth.

### ***Costumbrismo* and the Collecting Impulse: Making Sense of New Realities**

Perhaps the best-known writer of nineteenth-century *cuadros de costumbres*, Mariano José de Larra surpasses the celebration of popular customs and offers an ethical evaluation of the condition of modern Spanish society. Larra toys with the form of the genre and the expectations of his readers by commencing with a typical anecdotal description of some apparently benign custom or activity from Madrilenian life; he subsequently uses the seemingly trivial details of his story as a point of departure for profound observations of the ethical significance of social habits in contemporary life.

“Vuelva usted mañana,” originally published in *El Pobrecito Hablador* on March 14, 1833, begins with a humorous story of a foreign visitor who believes he will finish his errands in the Spanish capital in a matter of days, when in reality institutional procrastination delays him for over eighteen months. The irony with which Larra pens the dialogues between the narrator and his foreign acquaintance, as well as the narrator’s confession of his own tendency toward procrastination, points toward a more fundamental lesson on the systemic inefficiency of Spanish government and private enterprise that have caused Spain to fall behind its European neighbors politically, economically, socially, and perhaps even culturally.

Three years later, in “El día de Difuntos de 1836,” published on November 2, 1836, in *El Español*, Larra brings his acerbic wit to bear on the socio-political chaos that has wracked Spain during his short life. Using the festival of the dead as his starting point, the narrator quickly expands his understanding of the concept of the cemetery to all of Madrid, seeing in the architecture of the city the memorial headstones of various moments of promise and hope for social and political liberalization during the previous

decades. For Larra, the endgame of the *cuadro de costumbres* was not to entertain or portray the endless spectacle of modernity; instead, this genre served as a textual means through which to interpret a contemporary reality fraught with meaning and significance.

The widespread publication of *cuadros de costumbres* in the nineteenth-century press is a surface symptom of a deeper preoccupation with the need to establish order and classification in a dynamic, confusing social context. Larra's eagerness to ascribe meaning to the mundane and seemingly pointless trivialities of modern urban life corroborates the existence of underlying social anxiety and a desire to craft a rational framework within which to understand a complex modern reality. According to Mary Vincent, this inclination toward categorization and cartographic precision was a hallmark of nineteenth-century governmental action in Spain: "The nineteenth century saw a systematic search of national discovery: territories were mapped, landscapes reproduced, customs collected. These processes of collection and classification changed 'nation' from a reified abstraction to a felt, if equally abstract, entity" (3). Foucault tells us that the imposition of a classificatory structure creates a self-contained discourse of signs in order to propagate the veneer of order where in fact there is none. His comments on the techniques of classification in the realm of natural history are relevant here in the context of producing a quasi-zoological classification of the inhabitants of Madrid and all of Spain: "By limiting and filtering the visible, structure enables it to be transcribed into language [...]. By means of structure, what representation provides in a confused and simultaneous form is analysed and thereby rendered suitable to the linear unwinding of language" (135–36). The task of classification filters and distills observable reality into a simplified form by translating visual experience into language.



The myriad volumes of *cuadros de costumbres* are collections of specimens from the urban landscape of Madrid, anthologies that allow writers and editors to impose a sense of order on the quickly-evolving Spanish metropolis and function within the broader socio-political context of establishing a communal sense of national identity.<sup>29</sup> Considering the social and psychic significance of the collection and the impulse to collect, Baudrillard remarks:

[I]t will always embody an irreducible element of independence from the world. It is because he feels himself alienated or lost within a social discourse whose rules he cannot fathom that the collector is driven to construct an alternative discourse that is for him entirely amenable, in so far as he is the one who dictates its signifiers – the ultimate signified being, in the final analysis, no other than himself. (“System” 24)

We can identify a need—psychological, ideological, or cultural—in the interest in classifying the social typology of the disparate historical, cultural, and linguistic zones within the Spanish political state and the emerging urban metropolis to create a sense of order and meaning in the new political systems, social habits, and cultural institutions arising in Madrid and Spain during the mid- to late-nineteenth century.

### **Caricature and *Costumbrismo*: Two Sides of the Same Coin?**

While the *cuadro de costumbres* pointed toward underlying anxieties about the rapidly-changing social order of nineteenth-century Spain, caricature figured prominently in the print culture of the period as an overt locus of political, social, and ethical criticism of the state of contemporary Spain. The practice of including satirical representations of

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<sup>29</sup> Richard Sieburth has observed a similar trend of producing a simple system of order on an increasingly complex urban reality in France in the 1840s by transforming the anonymity of the city “into a lexicon of nameable stereotypes, thereby providing their readers with the comforting illusion that the faceless conglomerations of the modern city could after all be read—and hence mastered—as a legible system of differences” (175).

the political or ideological opposition became widespread among party newspapers as early as the 1820s in publications like *El Zurriago* and a staple of most political weeklies and dailies during the following decades. The novelist Jacinto Octavio Picón offered a succinct idea of caricature in his *Apuntes para la historia de la caricatura* (1878):

La caricatura es la sátira dibujada, la sustitución de la frase por la línea; es la pintura de lo defectuoso y lo deforme, que señala y castiga con el ridículo los crímenes, las injusticias y hasta las flaquezas de los hombres. Es quizá el medio más enérgico de que lo cómico dispone, el correctivo más poderoso, la censura que más han empleado en todo tiempo los oprimidos contra los opresores, los débiles contra los fuertes, los pueblos contra los tiranos y hasta los moralistas contra la corrupción. (7)

Octavio Picón's conception of caricature imbues it with a subversive quality as a means through which the weak or disenfranchised can chip away at the seemingly unassailable power of those who control state power and the economic modes of production.

The popularity of the satirical essays and drawings that flourished in publications in the early nineteenth century led to the creation of papers dedicated almost exclusively to humor, satire, and caricature. In November of 1864, Luis Rivera and Manuel de Palacio founded one of the most indicative examples of these satirical papers, *Gil Blas*, self-described as a 'periódico político satírico.' The paper offered a humorous depiction of contemporary political and social issues in the Spanish capital and an imitation of the structure and content of the serious party papers, replete with consistent sections and regular contributors. The visual layout of *Gil Blas* was innovative and original for its time, featuring a variety of typographical styles and fonts as well as varied division of the text and seamless incorporation of visual material. As with any successful caricature, *Gil Blas* spoofed the journalistic tendencies of its day by integrating the typical style and form of the dominant political papers of the mid-nineteenth century.

*Gil Blas* is perhaps best-known today because of the talented generation of artists and caricaturists who collaborated in its pages, among them the Madrilenian Francisco Javier Ortego y Vereda (1833–1881) and the Catalan Josep Lluís Pellicer i Fenyé (1842–1901), two of the most famous *dibujantes* of nineteenth-century Spain. A salient feature of *Gil Blas* was the autonomy granted to cartoons to offer social or political commentary; for example, on December 3, 1864, a drawing signed by Ortego features a haggard woman wearing rags and a crown, holding a lantern, and searching, along with an emaciated lion, for something in a dank, prison-like space. Below the drawing are the following words attributed to a personified Spain: “Diógenes, con la linterna en la mano, buscaba un hombre por las calles de Atenas. Yo busco un duro en las arcas del Tesoro, ¡y no lo encuentro!” The political value of the cartoon depends on an equal relationship between the visual content of the drawing and the communicative content of the printed word; the image is not an illustration of the text, but rather a partner with the text in the creation of meaning. The use of autonomous visual imagery highlights how political caricature in newspapers educated Spanish readers in a new language of visual humor that bridged language, image, and society in a single comic gesture that could be critical, and possibly subversive, of the socio-political status quo.<sup>30</sup>

Charles Baudelaire’s understanding of the comic and caricature suggest that the interest in representing quotidian reality in the *cuadros de costumbres* and the aesthetic of

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<sup>30</sup> In an analysis of the development of caricature in England in the early nineteenth century, Brian Maidment suggests that the wide-ranging process of social and cultural transformation that was taking place due to technological inventions and rising education levels—the so-called March of Intellect between 1820 and 1840— produced a moment of rupture with previous aesthetic tendencies in caricature: “The social complexity of the March of Intellect coincided with, or perhaps required, a new visual language that focused on social interaction and diversity rather than on the failings of statesmen and the formulation of single-joke political caricatures that had characterized the mainstream of late-eighteenth-century caricature” (149). While this process of change in Spain was by no means the same, we can still consider the rise of a new visual language of humor and satire as indicative of broader shifts and changes in the field of cultural production.

exaggeration implicit in caricature are, in fact, two sides of the same proverbial coin. Michele Hannoosh's readings of Baudelaire's principle writings on humor and caricature—*De l'essence du rire*, *Quelques caricaturistes français*, and *Quelques caricaturistes étrangers*—bring to light the important links between Baudelaire's writings on humor and his ideas on the aesthetics of modernity. Hannoosh affirms that the dualism implicit in Baudelaire's conception of modern man is a fundamental component of his understanding of the comic; referring to Baudelaire's use of a joke to critique the 'superiority theory' of laughter, Hannoosh writes: "The joke, in which the laugher feels superior while unknowingly the object of another's laughter, enacts the very principle of Baudelaire's theory: the comic is a mark of human dualism, a sense of superiority over the object of laughter and of inferiority relative to the absolute" (9). With this dualism as the foundation for the comic, humorous representation gains the ability to forge new mental associations and psychic spaces: "Such a comic method does not merely ridicule an object, but remakes it into a new and independent creation, as Baudelaire will argue of caricature too" (10). Humor and caricature provide a means for "dethroning the ruling aesthetic powers and making way for a new system of value" (15), a system of value that more accurately reflects the social reality and psychological needs of modernity. Finally, Hannoosh argues that these thoughts regarding the comic must be integrated into a broader, revised understanding of Baudelaire's modern aesthetic:

[T]he theory of the comic qualifies or calls into question some of the features of modernity that have been derived from Baudelaire's essay. For example, the emphasis on dualism in the theory of the comic—the laugher's status as an object of laughter—radically revises the concept of the urban *flâneur*, no longer merely a controlling gaze, but at once subject and object, observer and observed. (252)

Here, Hannoosh's reading of Baudelaire converges with Schwartz's vision of the spectacular nature of modern life in that each participant in urban culture is always both the viewer and the viewed. Comic representation reads the spectacle of everyday life by imbuing it with new meanings and tearing down the artificial borders between the observed aesthetic object and the subject that observes it.

The tendency toward caricature and the seemingly systematic project of classifying the inhabitants of Madrid according to tidy categories reflect the evolution of nineteenth-century thought patterns regarding the status of the individual in the larger context of the body politic. The satirical impetus in caricature brought aristocrats, statesmen, and even the monarch "down" to the level of the people, while the concurrent impulse to record the daily lives and activities of the "humble" classes elevated marginal social groups, at least in terms of the space they occupied on the printed page, in the newspapers. The juxtaposition of these trends reveals an ironic inversion of the modes of representation: the *cuadro de costumbres* is a textual genre, most readily accessible to readers who belong to a reasonably educated social demographic; in contrast, caricatures of national rulers and public figures were produced in a visual genre of pictorial representation, readily understood by a broader range of the populace. These two complementary modes of engagement with the quotidian realities of Madrid permit various socio-economic groups normally divided by distinctions of education and class to come into contact with each other via the papers, a process that accompanies the gradual development of Liberal political institutions in Spain during the nineteenth century.

We need not overstate this incremental leveling of Spanish society: privilege, inequality, and manipulation were the glue that held social, political, and cultural

institutions together. The inescapable influence of provincial *caciquismo* in the Restoration monarchy exemplifies how the purported adoption of democratic principles and ideals was regularly, if not always, subjugated to the practical realities on the ground and the need to extend state power through whatever means were available, even if they were dominated by private interests. Vincent succinctly summarizes this reality:

From the 1840s, the Spanish state became chronically impoverished: the scarce and fragile resources of state power severely limited both its ambit and its capacity. Given the lack of money, ceding capacity and expense to pre-existing elites seemed a pragmatic compromise, particularly in an age of oligarchic politics [...] The logic of the Restoration system made the caciques essential to the working of the Spanish state: indeed, in many areas the caciques *were* the state, a fact that undoubtedly skewed the state's penetration of society but did not necessarily prevent it. (5)

While the coexistence of political caricature and *cuadros de costumbres* as staples of nineteenth-century journalism enabled a process of mutual recognition amongst various socio-economic sectors of the population, in the final analysis the combination of these modes of visual/textual representation reaffirmed and reified the bourgeois status quo. Larra's work in the *cuadro de costumbres* stands as the exception rather than the rule, its progressive politics and penchant for devastating social critique deviating wildly from the conservative ideology underpinning the majority of the descriptions of *tipos* to be found in collections such as *Los españoles pintados por sí mismos* and *Los españoles de Ogaño*.

The comic exaggerations and acerbic barbs of political caricatures in the popular press regularly take aim at specific decisions and perceived flaws of public figures and leaders, but avoid broader critiques of the failures of the philosophical foundations of nineteenth-century political or economic policy, principal among them Liberalism and Capitalism. For example, the Barcelonese weekly *La Campana de Gracia* published a full page of caricatures on the final page of each number that are critical of the national

government, but stay within the parameters of the Restoration political system. A drawing from the January 14, 1888, issue depicts Práxedes Mateo Sagasta—leader of the Liberal Party and prime minister on seven distinct occasions during the Restoration—delaying a series of democratic reforms; the contrast between Sagasta’s formal suit and the personification of the nation’s peasant clothes, combined with the politician’s long tenure in politics, implies that Sagasta benefits more from his role in the government than does the nation. The drawing portrays Sagasta as a single man who obstructs social progress and political development, a depiction that removes blame for lack of political or economic improvement from the Liberal system and displaces it onto the principal actors who operate within that system. A similar technique is used in a drawing published on July 7 of the same year, which portrays Sagasta dancing on the steps of the Cortes holding the key to Congress and carelessly allowing the projected reforms to fall out of his pocket, one of which conspicuously reads “universal suffrage.” The allusion to Napoleon embodied in the hat that Sagasta wears once again emphasizes the notion that individual aspirations commandeer governmental processes and hinder progress. This strategy creates a veneer of intense socio-political criticism by investigating the actions and motivations of principal political figures, but this veneer ultimately distracts the reading public from deeper scrutiny of the failures of the political system itself.

### **The Carnavalesque in the Nineteenth-Century Spanish Newspaper**

The dual gesture of visually leveling Spanish society on the printed page while reinforcing the socio-economic hierarchy confers an ambiguous quality to emerging mass media, an ambivalence that we can understand through Bakhtin’s notions of carnival and

the carnivalesque. To begin, Bakhtin reminds us: “Carnival is a pageant without footlights and without a division into performers and spectators. In carnival everyone is an active participant, everyone communes in the carnival act” (122), a description that immediately brings to mind Schwartz’s concept of the ‘spectacularization’ of modern life and Hannoosh’s insistence on the modern *flâneur* as both observer and observed. The newspaper-consuming public is simultaneously the principal reader of the periodical press and its primary object of contemplation and analysis. Bakhtin emphasizes that the laws and restrictions that govern the ordinary do not apply in carnival, a removal of boundaries that coincides with the close textual proximity of government ministers, nobility, petit-bourgeoisie, and popular classes on the pages of the newspapers. Consider Bakhtin’s observation: “All distance between people is suspended, and a special carnival category goes into effect: free and familiar contact among people [...]. People who in life are separated by impenetrable hierarchical barriers enter into free familiar contact on the carnival square” (123). The logic of familiarity and interconnectedness permeates the carnivalesque mode and extends beyond persons into the realm of concepts, ideas, and belief systems: “Carnival brings together, unifies, weds, and combines the sacred with the profane, the lofty with the low, the great with the insignificant, the wise with the stupid” (123). What better description of the mixture of odd curiosities, grave political matters, horrifying crimes, and trendy fads that was the mass popular press of the nineteenth century? Or the cable news networks of our own day, for that matter?

Bakhtin’s connection of carnival to a cycle of crowning/decrowning and rituals of death and renewal delineate the contradictory forces operating within nineteenth-century Spanish journalism. Carnival inverts power hierarchies and the social order, but this



inversion is only temporary, carrying within itself the inevitable restoration of the non-carnavalesque order of power and authority. The inclusion of all social classes in the pages of the newspaper generates a process of social leveling that exists only in the carnivalized space of the newspaper, which, in essence, has become the carnival square of the modern public sphere, a festive space where new modes of socialization are suggested and tested. As Bakhtin states: “Carnival is the place for working out, in a concretely sensuous, half-real and half-play-acted form, a new mode of interrelationship between individuals, counterposed to the all-powerful socio-hierarchical relationships of noncarnival life” (123). Inherent within the carnival space, however, is the inevitable return to the status quo and to the uneven relationships of power between the popular classes and the authorities in the political, economic, social, and cultural realms. In addition, the nineteenth-century newspaper’s compromised status as entrepreneurial or political enterprise embedded within a system of exchange and profit assures the return to the established order of social and economic hierarchy. A clear point of divergence emerges between the modern newspaper and the medieval carnival space: rather than an organic, ritualistic space created by the people and organized by centuries of collective experience and memory, the newspaper is a physical commodity whose content and production depends on journalists, editors, and entrepreneurs, all of whom bring personal interest and ideology to bear on the final product.

### **Undermining the Realism of the *Género Chico***

Understood within the broader context of emerging mass print media in nineteenth-century Spain, it is clear that the *género chico* internalized the complex

interplay of the festive realism that characterizes the *cuadro de costumbres* and the satirical exaggeration of political caricature. The *sainete* and the *revista* lie at the two extremes of a spectrum of theatrical practices that blend realist staging practices with allegorical characters and symbolic visual presentation. In literary studies, the greatest shortcoming of scholarship on the commercial theater of the nineteenth century is the dominant tendency to portray the *género chico* as an impoverished form of theatrical realism. Such a correlation originates in the propensity for only looking at the *sainete* as a legitimate dramatic form due to its clear historical antecedents in the work of Ramón de la Cruz and other *saineteros* of the eighteenth century. The *género chico* did not embark on a systematic project to identify and represent the social ills of modern society, a hallmark of the realist undertaking as seen in the work of novelists such as Jacinto Pérez Galdós, Emilia Pardo Bazán, Leopoldo Alas, and José María de Pereda or in realist playwrights such as Galdós and Joaquín Dicenta. Situating stories firmly in the context of contemporary Madrid in specific areas of the city owes more to the Romantic interest in portraying culture as enmeshed in a particular place and time than it does to the realist project. Commercial playwrights approached theatrical renditions of the *barrios bajos* “no con una voluntad realista o documental, sino con el deseo de tomar notas para configurar la estilizada imagen de un Madrid alegre y satisfecho” (Ríos Carratalá, “Arniches” 994). The social content of *género chico* works rejects the realists’ systematic portrayal of modernity, opting instead for festive humor and carnivalesque satire.

From a performance standpoint, *género chico* works break with the ‘fourth-wall’ conventions of neoclassical drama, Romantic drama, and the bourgeois *alta comedia*, instead welcoming the presence of the audience and laying bare the terms of theatrical

production. Commentators on the *género chico* regularly argue that it was the immense popularity of the music in these works, rather than the strength of the libretto, that accounted for their phenomenal success: “El servir de base para una agradable música castiza es casi el único mérito de estos libretos de zarzuela, que apenas resisten la lectura fuera de la parte musical” (Valbuena Prat 710). The primacy of music in these plays clearly undermines the realist elements of a work and opens the way for more direct engagement between audience and performer. The interest of the public in the music often led spectators to interrupt the show in order to ask the orchestra and performers to repeat songs that received a warm reception, sometimes two or three times before the play could resume. At the end, performers might return to the stage and reprise a comic scene or dialogue that had garnered applause in order to leave the audience with something to talk about as they exited the theater and to create excitement for the following night’s show. Such a focus on the music in *género chico* plays directly contradicts any pretensions for realist representation. I, for one, seriously doubt that it was a commonplace in nineteenth-century Madrid for *lavanderas*, *chulos*, and other residents of the *barrios bajos* to break out into perfectly choreographed song and dance with orchestral accompaniment.

A number of habits and customs developed during the late nineteenth century that generated further direct communication between audiences and the actors, playwrights, and composers that collaborated to entertain the urban public. One of these customs was the audience’s demand that the playwright and/or composers be present on the night of a play’s debut so that the audience could applaud or vilify a work’s creators according to its merits. Another important custom was the rise of homage or benefit performances

whose proceeds went directly to a specific actor, playwright, musician, or composer as a means of honoring their work and augmenting their salary (Espín Templado, “Teatro lírico español” 214–15). This interaction between creators and public undermined realist elements of a given play by directly inscribing it within a frame that established the play as fiction, in contrast with the ‘real’ presence of playwrights, actors, and composers on stage after the end of the work.

If the realities of performance practice chip away at the realist elements of the *género chico* from the outside, the widespread use of allegorical and symbolic characters and visual presentation equally weakens any realist pretensions the *género chico* might have from within. From its beginnings in Spain in the work of Gutiérrez de Alba, the *revista* genre always includes allegorical representations of time, space, and cultural practices. The end of *1866 y 1867*, once again, symbolically glorifies the Spanish bombardment of Callao through a massive ensemble sequence in which a chorus of the twelve months of the year, a chorus of seamen, and pairs of characters representing the different provinces of Spain flood the stage. Ángel Gamayo’s *Revista europea* (1872) includes a final scene consisting only of visual spectacle according to its stage directions: “Decoración fantástica de gloria. La España aparecerá sentada en un trono, apoyada en el león, con gorro y frigio y espada. A los lados marinos, y todas las naciones a derecha e izquierda. Cuadro general.” The commingling of realistic seamen with allegorical representations of the months of the year points to a conception of the theatrical space that oscillates between realist mimesis and allegorical representation.

By the end of the nineteenth century and well into the twentieth, playwrights habitually included a final visual presentation—which came to be known as the

‘Apoteosis’—at the end of their works. The ‘Apoteosis’ offered an allegorical representation of the main themes developed in the play through powerful images and juxtapositions, a technique that prioritizes visuality and plasticity over realism or naturalistic mimesis. The Oxford English Dictionary defines the term ‘apotheosis’ as “The action of ranking, or fact of being ranked, among the gods; transformation into a god, deification; divine status.” Manuel Fernández de la Puente’s *La Patria de Cervantes*—which debuted in the Teatro Apolo on March 1, 1916—offers a striking example of the function of the ‘apoteosis’ scene. This *revista* comically juxtaposes Cervantine characters, themes, and settings with their contemporary counterparts in the *barrios bajos* of Madrid. While Cervantes’s texts suffer a series of comic distortions, the ‘apoteosis’ restores dignity, prestige, and esteem to the early-modern writer and his work by depicting the characters of the play presenting laurels at the feet of the newly-erected statue of Don Quijote and Sancho in the Plaza de España.<sup>31</sup> The ‘apoteosis’ scene at the end of *género chico* plays redeems the transcendental or serious material of these plays, setting the final visual sequence in contrast to the comic tone of the rest of the work.

The *género chico* is not a brand of impoverished realism, but rather consists of a dynamic dialectic between the realistic and the symbolic. The mixture of *costumbrismo* and caricature in the pages of Madrilenian daily newspapers put a brand of festive realism into contact with comic exaggeration and distortion, but the *género chico* went a step farther by integrating these contrasting forms of representation into the same scenic space. By mixing the allegorical extremes of caricature with the depiction of recognizable

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<sup>31</sup> The bronze statue of Don Quijote and Sancho was erected in 1916 as part of the commemoration of the 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Cervantes’s death in 1616. The statue originally stood in what is now the center of the reflecting pool in the plaza. The larger sculpture in the plaza was built and erected between 1925 and 1931, at which time the bronze statue was moved to its present location, thus allowing the construction of the reflecting pond.

people and locations from Madrid, *género chico* writers and composers mapped a broader interpretation of Spanish history and identity onto the physical space and inhabitants of the modern city.

### **The Urban Audience's New Knowledge and the *Revista***

The maturation of the *teatro por horas* over the course of the 1870s and 1880s solidified the major qualities of the *género chico* as entrepreneurs, producers, playwrights, and composers gauged and responded to the demands of the Madrilenian public. The creators of the commercial theater during this period employed similar tactics to their counterparts in the burgeoning print industry as they attempted to meet the expectations of a rapidly-changing urban audience. At the same time, the changes that the rise of mass circulation daily newspapers were producing in the mental landscape of the Spanish public are of crucial importance for our understanding of the form and content of *género chico* plays. While the Romantic theater relies heavily on well-known legends and historical events and the bourgeois *alta comedia* focuses on family dramas in interior settings divorced from the broader socio-political context, the works of the *género chico* relentlessly insist on the audience's familiarity with contemporary events in Spain and awareness of Spain's precarious position in Europe. The proliferation of *revistas* during the 1870s and 1880s coincides with a period in which knowledge from reading the daily newspaper increasingly constituted the nucleus of comic action on the commercial stage.

The theatrical *revista*, like periodicals, is a flexible format that uses a formulaic and predictable framework in order to facilitate the audience's ability to understand and immediately absorb the varied sensory experiences it communicates. The primary

organizational feature of the nineteenth-century *revista* is the use of two characters that provide continuity throughout the work for the audience in the absence of an all-encompassing story that tightly binds the different scenes together. Although the number, nature, and arrangement of these characters varies, generally one of the characters functions as a knowledgeable guide that understands the inner workings of the scenes we are about to witness while the second character is a naïve outsider who is entering a realm of experiences for the first time. The audience usually is expected to identify with one of these two characters. Two popular conceits are that of the visiting foreigner (usually British) touring the city with a Spaniard (with whom the original audiences most likely identified) and that of the uninitiated Spaniard (the audience) learning about a subaltern reality of the city or the future under the supervision of an allegorical character.

The second organizational feature of the *revista* concerns the geographical location of the work. The location of the scenes follow one of two main variants: first, all of the scenes occur in a single setting while a vast array of characters parade in front of the gaze of the guide and visitor; second, the guide and visitor travel to a number of different locations in order to observe the habits and customs of the people that inhabit these spaces. Great variation is possible within this premise, as the guide and visitor might travel to a number of locations and witness a parade of characters at each of them. Nevertheless, by remaining within this general paradigm of location and guide characters, the writers and producers of *revistas* could circumvent a number of problems that might be posed by works lacking plot development or concentrated development of characters.

Ángel Gamayo's *Revista europea* and *Revista de Madrid*, both of which debuted in Madrid in 1872, reflect how the knowledge of contemporary events facilitated by

newspapers altered the content of popular theatrical works. *Revista de Madrid* commences with an exemplary scene designed to demonstrate the futility of the electoral system instituted during the ‘Revolutionary’ six-year period following the ‘Glorious’ Revolution of 1868. Marcos urges Crispín to join him as he goes to vote for Don Frutos in return for the small favor each had received in the amount of four pesetas; in spite of the new liberty that supposedly reigns in the country following the expulsion of Isabel II from the throne, the social oppression and corruption of *caciquismo* remain alive and well. Following this introductory scene, a symbolic character representing modern Madrid guides old Madrid—from the epoch of Charles V, according to the stage directions—through scenes that describe the politics and culture of Spain and its capital in the nineteenth century. These scenes vacillate between nostalgic longing for the past glories of the early-modern period and assertions of the enduring spirit of Spain in spite of capricious or foolish contemporary habits and customs. For example, in Scenes 7 through 10 old Madrid laments the deplorable state of theater, poetry, and painting in contemporary Spain as modern Madrid explains to him how these cultural activities have changed. Scene 11, however, suggests that the problem that plagues modern Spanish culture is not a defect of the moral character of the people, but rather a consequence of nineteenth-century nationalism:

Madrid antiguo: ¿Y estos ejemplos se dan  
al pueblo para que aprenda?  
¡Y con estos disparates  
a una nación se la enseña!  
Madrid moderno: Tocayo, si el pueblo un día  
sintiese romper la venda  
que ha tiempo le tiraniza  
la luz de su inteligencia,  
entonces no habría pueblos,  
ni naciones, ni banderas:



sólo hombres existirían  
con una patria... ¡la tierra! (18)

This exchange is fraught with ideas from the Enlightenment regarding the didactic or edifying qualities of art and culture and the notion of a universal man than transcends local distinctions of race or nation, ideas that had been abandoned by the middle of the nineteenth century as the different nations of Europe battled for political supremacy across the continent and colonial supremacy throughout the world. At the same time the play projects a jingoistic view of Spaniards' love of liberty and courageous spirit through an interpretation of the War of Independence against Napoleon's troops, articulated through an evocation of the national hero Pedro Velarde:<sup>32</sup>

Mientras aquel Rey dormía  
en faustuosa soledad,  
por su santa libertad  
su sangre España vertía.  
¡Y mártir de sus derechos  
rompió su yugo en pedazos,  
sin más armas que sus brazos,  
ni murallas que sus pechos! (9)

Gamayo's *revista* implies that the degenerate state of Spain's politics and culture are not a product of Spanish character, but the consequences of a troublesome political system and subjugation of the arts to the logic of entertainment rather than moral instruction.

Gamayo's *Revista europea* provides a visual counterpoint to contemporary debates in the periodical press on the state of European politics and Spain's status and role within the broader power dynamics of the continent. In this play, the Nineteenth

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<sup>32</sup> Pedro Velarde y Santillán is one of the principal figures of the national mythology surrounding the popular uprisings of May 2, 1808 against the French in Madrid. Velarde was charged with defending the Monteleón artillery barracks along with Luís Daoíz de Torres. All of the 37 soldiers and gunners who protected the barracks were wounded or killed in the fighting, and Velarde and Daoíz soon became national martyr figures in the histories of Spain's War of Independence against the French (Fraser 66). Numerous commemorations of each of them are scattered throughout the Spanish capital, most notably the monument in the Plaza del Segundo de Mayo and the lion statues that stand on either side of the entrance to the Congreso de los Diputados, named Velarde and Daoíz.

Century (Siglo XIX) and Time serve as the guiding pair of characters that interact with caricatures of the various nations and powers of Europe. All of these symbolic figures reflect currents of thought and stereotypes regarding the players in European politics; for instance, France eloquently laments her constant socio-political upheavals and avows that she will rise from the ashes of destruction once more, England efficiently and deftly offers a wide variety of items for sale, and the Ottoman Empire bemoans the loss of its glorious past. The play presupposes a cursory knowledge of the conflicts and trends in European politics with its portrayal of the Russian Empire's desire to expand and the newly-formed German Empire's aggressive colonialism. The German Empire had been formed on January 18, 1871, with the public declaration of Wilhelm I as Emperor, and the portrayal of these events by the Spanish press certainly factored in to the audience's reception of this aspect of Gamayo's *revista* the following year. The character representing the German Empire mimics the hawkish nationalism and territorial ambitions inherent in the public discourse of the *Deutsches Reich*: "Y seré el señor fecundo, / en la paz como en la guerra, / que leyes dictará al mundo" (12). Without acquaintance with European politics through the newspapers and the conversations they generated in coffee houses and taverns, this scene would be incomprehensible for the theater-going public. This knowledge of Spain as part of a larger European context permits Gamayo to extend the commentary implicit in his play; rather than remain content with a caricature of European powers such as England, France, and the ascendant German Empire, Gamayo enlarges the ideological purview of *Revista europea* to include imagining a reality in which the rest of Europe recognizes Spain's superiority of morality and character, which permits the allegorical figure of Spain to 'right the wrongs' of its

European counterparts. Spain challenges England's occupation of Gibraltar and reminds France, Rome, and Portugal of their past subservience to the Spanish crown:

Francia, humilla tu arrogancia.  
Sin orgullo y sin desdén,  
supo humillar tu jactancia  
mi fiel sangre de Numancia  
en los campos de Bailén.  
Hunde tu frente en la arena  
Roma, lasciva y serena,  
que un día, al rayar el alba,  
mi pendón clavó en tu almena  
mi valiente duque de Alba.  
Portugal, tu orgullo vi;  
orgullo insolente y loco,  
que con desprecio acogí.  
Portugal, vales muy poco  
para subir hasta mí. (17)

At the end of the play, Siglo XIX asserts that Spain's grandeur will one day lead to a new dawn of Spanish ascendance in the world, inverting the confidence implied in *Revista de Madrid* regarding Spain's glorious past and redirecting it toward an optimistic future:

Pasarán generaciones;  
pero llegará un momento,  
en que España sea el cimiento  
que emancipe a las naciones.  
Y tanta será la gloria,  
que fáltale al genio llama  
de los templos de la fama  
en los fastos de la Historia. (22–23)

Just as the daily newspapers of nineteenth-century Madrid presented the history and current socio-political status of Spain through a particular ideological lens, Gamayo's *revista* posits an underlying hypothesis of the Spanish people's transcendent moral character and spiritual virtue that will lead to renewed grandness as a major power.

In his 1902 lecture "The Discovery of the Future," H. G. Wells puts forward two types of reasoning, one of which prioritizes the past to explain the present and the other

of which interprets the present as the building blocks of the future. Wells argues that the “more modern and much less abundant type of mind, thinks constantly and by preference of things to come, and of present things mainly in relation to the results that must arise from them” (6). He continues by stating that this type of mentality “is constructive in habit, it interprets the things of the present and gives value to this or that, entirely in relation to things designed or foreseen” (6). Gamayo’s plays fuse the two mentalities outlined by Wells, looking to distinct, triumphant moments of the national past in order to construct an idealized narrative of future return to supremacy in the emerging world order. The mentalities suggested by Wells and the combinations of them in Gamayo’s plays emerge from newspapers, which provide information about the present through an analysis of history and precedent while offering commentary about the future through examination of the present.

The *revistas* that occupied Madrilenian theaters through the 1870s and 1880s followed similar patterns to those initiated in the works of José Gutiérrez de Alba and adjusted by Ángel Gamayo, using allegorical and symbolic characters on stage to embody the tensions and issues that dominated the public imagination in an era in which the social order of the Spanish capital experienced immense changes due to structural reorganization, technological innovation, political upheaval, and economic transformation. Leopoldo Vázquez y Rodríguez’s *Revista de 1878*—which debuted on January 31, 1879, in the Teatro del Recreo—follows Gutiérrez de Alba’s formula by presenting the nations of the world and their complaints against 1878 for his poor reign over the affairs of the past year. In Scene 3 Spain takes on the role of spokesman for the group and guides Jupiter through a series of scenes that present the political, social, and

economic ills of the nation. Scene 4 decries the exorbitant taxation in the country, Scene 7 focuses on the regrettable robbery perpetrated against a young intellectual who has recently returned from working in Cuba, and Scene 11 laments the problems of press censorship and the lack of freedom of expression by presenting a character representing the press whose hands are tied and is persecuted by the Gentleman with a comically large red pencil. The final visual sequence of the work portrays the triumphant crowning of the new year, 1879, with a buoyant look to a hopeful future as the chorus implores the adoption of hard work rather than the constant search for bribery and nepotism:

Basta ya, basta ya de política;  
basta ya, basta ya, a trabajar;  
que el trabajo a los pueblos da siempre  
la riqueza, la dicha y la paz. (29)

José de la Cuesta, Heliodoro Criado, and Pascual Alba's *Cosas de España*—which premiered at the Teatro Martín on April 10, 1882—similarly reviews the various ills that afflict the Spanish nation and prevent achieving its full potential, using allegorical figures of Spain and France as the pair whose conversation serves as the basis for commentary on a variety of subjects. The contrast between France and Spain following periods of political and social turmoil functions as the primary direction of the work. Both of the countries are portrayed as women, reflecting the popular iconography of each following the revolutionary happenings of the late 1860s. When Spain asks France if she continues to struggle with the negative effects of political change, France responds:

No, chica, yo marchó bien  
desde que no soy cautiva.  
Para mí la libertad  
ha sido una panacea. (12)

The *revista* presents Spain and France as contrasting cases regarding the effects and consequences of modern liberal democracy. The remainder of the play focuses on an analysis of modern Spain that criticizes the Machiavellian attitudes and actions that dominate contemporary Spanish politics. Patriotism is personified in the play as an old man who has been forgotten by the Spanish people. At the end of the work, Patriotism implores the people once again to take up their responsibilities to the proper functioning of their government and society in order to cure the ills of imperfect democracy in Spain:

Patria mía, no abandones  
de tus deberes el peso,  
que por su amor al progreso  
se engrandecen las naciones.  
Nunca la ocasión perdones  
de vencer con heroísmo  
el cruel indiferentismo [sic]  
que en agobiarte se ensaña,  
y serás feliz, España,  
mientras tengas patriotismo. (46)

Like their counterparts in journalism, these *revistas* carefully present information about Spanish society in order to formulate an argument or action plan that will contribute to the success and glory of Spain in the near future. While the majority of these plays focuses on how the present is a mere shadow of the glories of the past, the final resolution of the works looks toward a brighter future by offering specific recommendations for the improved functioning of the Spanish economy, politics, and society.

The *revista* phase of the early *género chico*, which spanned the decades of the 1870s and 1880s, culminated in Felipe Pérez y González's masterpiece of the genre, *La Gran Vía*, which enjoyed a summer debut at the Teatro Felipe on July 2, 1886, and, due to its positive reception by Madrilenian audiences, moved to the Teatro Apolo at the

beginning of the 1886–1887 season. In his introduction to the play, Fernando Doménech Rico describes the incredible public response to the work:

*La Gran Vía* alcanzó de inmediato un éxito fulminante. Se hicieron mil representaciones seguidas. Al terminar la temporada de verano, la obra pasó a Apolo, donde estuvo cuatro temporadas ininterrumpidamente. Al publicarse el libreto el éxito no fue menor. En el mismo año de 1886 (es decir, sólo en un semestre, porque se había estrenado en julio) tuvo nada menos que diez ediciones, a las que siguieron siete en 1887, cuatro en 1888, dos en 1889, dos en 1891 y una en 1892. En menos de seis años alcanzó veintiséis ediciones, lo que probablemente es más de lo que ha conseguido cualquier otra obra de teatro editada en España. No hay duda de que fue la obra más popular de su época y la que consolidó definitivamente el género chico. (34)

*La Gran Vía* consolidated the *género chico*, to use Doménech's turn of phrase, by bringing together stage practices that would lead to the greatest successes of the mature phase of this theatrical mode and business practices that would permit the *género chico* to rise to prominence as the preponderant urban entertainment of the Spanish capital.

The debut and lengthy run of *La Gran Vía* signal a watershed moment in the history of the *género chico* because Pérez y González's play modernized the more antiquated features of the *revista* genre and delivered the proper blend of visual spectacle, comic wordplay, dynamic song-and-dance routines, and a deep grounding in the urban realities of the Spanish capital that the Madrilenian public demanded. Gone are the mythological figures and purely allegorical characters, such as Time or Truth, which we find in the work of Gutiérrez de Alba in the 1860s.<sup>33</sup> Symbolic characters remain, but they are firmly based on the physical realities of contemporary Madrid: hence, the

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<sup>33</sup> Other examples of the prevalence of Greco-Roman mythological figures in the early phase of the Spanish *revista* include Luis Mariano de Larra's *Los misterios del Parnaso* (1868), in which the Muses and Apollo lament the success of the can-can and other theatrical forms based principally on spectacle and the abandonment of the classical conception of art, and Rafael María Liern's *El can-cán-jatrás paisano!* (1869), which offers a similar comparison of classical aesthetic ideals and modern spectacle that espouses a critique of the state of Spanish theater.

majority of the characters in *La Gran Vía* are the streets and plazas of the Spanish capital, characterizing areas of the city through their costumes, mannerisms, speech, and relationship with one another. The piece adopts the polyvalent perspective of the newspaper by offering a scenic parade of different areas and peoples of the capital city, fleshed out with the commentary and satiric wit of the Caballero de Gracia and the Paseante.<sup>34</sup> Whereas the humor and socio-political commentary in earlier *revistas* emerged from lengthy conversations between characters and speeches delivered to the audience by allegorical and symbolic figures, in *La Gran Vía* these elements have been integrated into the visual and musical spectacle of the performance. We see an effort to show the story and its humorous or critical themes instead of telling it through direct monologue or dialogue. For example, the exuberant and subversive “Jota de las ratas” at the end of the second *cuadro* weaves together superb music, scintillating choreography, and a reflection on popular resistance to the codes and representatives of contemporary urban authority. The *jota*<sup>35</sup> implies a fusion of audio and visual experience as a highly flexible dance form accompanies the traditional music. The three Rats laud their marginal social status as thieves and opposition to authority, asserting that:

Siempre que nos persigue  
la autoridad  
es cuando más tranquilos

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<sup>34</sup> The Caballero de Gracia alludes directly to a street in the oldest section of Madrid and historically to Jacopo de Gracia, a legendary figure known for his countless amorous adventures and subsequent religious awakening that led him to dedicate his life and immense wealth to pious works (Doménech Rico 77–78, note).

<sup>35</sup> The *jota* is a traditional musical form practiced and performed throughout much of the Iberian Peninsula. Nicolas Slonimsky, in *Webster's New World Dictionary of Music*, defines the *jota* thus: “National dance song of northern Spain from the 17<sup>th</sup> century, in rapid triple time (like a fast waltz); usually played on guitar, mandolin, and castanets.” Although widely believed to have originated in Aragón, variations of the *jota* extend throughout the northern regions of Spain as well as eastern regions such as Valencia and Murcia. Such a wide geographic dispersion has led to significant regional variation, particularly with regards to instrumentation: the typical Castilian *jota*, for instance, predominantly features stringed instruments such as the guitar, mandolin, lute, and bandurria, while the Galician variant highlights bagpipes and percussion.



timamos más. [. . .]  
Cuando nose cha mano la policía  
estamos seguritos que es para un día. (93–94)

They go on to correct what they perceive as an erroneous assumption that their profession is simply the fallback of the socially unprivileged:

A muchos les *paece*  
que nuestra carrera  
sin grandes estudios  
la sigue cualquiera;  
pues vean ustedes  
lo que es más preciso  
*pa* ser licenciado  
sin ir a presidio. (94)

The Rats explain that they belong to a clearly-defined social stratum in which their profession is not a haphazard activity, but an institutionalized occupation informed by a specific reading of the power relations of the modern city. The choreography of the scene reflects the oppositional relationship between the underworld of thieves and the official authority of the Guardias as the two symmetrical groups alternately avoid and confront each other. The music contributes to this growing conflict, as earlier in the song the portions sung by the Rats and Guardias alternate, but near the end of the number their lyrics and melodies are blended in a cacophonous musical skirmish. Music, lyrics, and choreography converge to tell and show different elements of the heterogeneous, multi-faceted, and polyphonic ‘story’ of the modern city.

The monstrous success of *La Gran Vía* at the box office and the bookstore reminds us that by the late nineteenth century the entrepreneurial opportunities of the theater had expanded to include print editions of popular plays as well as ticket sales for performances. As was the case with newspapers, new printing technologies responded to increasing audience demands for cheap copies of dramatic works (Peters 72). No longer

confined to the theatrical performance, the plays of the commercial stage became widely available in print, permitting avid spectators to purchase the work in commodified form to enjoy in the privacy of home or in the company of others at the café, bar, or *tertulia*. While in the early decades of the century printed editions of plays were produced to allow provincial or traveling troupes to perform a work or to adorn the libraries of the wealthy, by the end of the century inexpensive copies were produced in mass print runs that made the scripts of commercial theater works widely available to the burgeoning theater public of the *teatro por horas* format. The ability to acquire theatrical works through a system of economic exchange allows Marx's notion of commodity fetishism to enter the relationship between spectator and spectacle. Rather than simply an item that graphically communicates the content of a particular show, the book itself stands in for a complex series of experiences and identifications between the reader/spectator and the spectacle, authors, composers, and actors.

The opening chapters of Jacinto Octavio Picón's *Dulce y sabrosa* (1891) reflect how the physical book stands in for the myriad desires bound up in the gaze of the young Cristeta Moreruela toward the glamorous and fashionable world of the commercial stage. The narrator tells us that Cristeta's appetite for the theater led her constantly to read the most recent works as soon as they appeared on loan from an acquaintance: "Apenas se estrenaba en cualquier teatro una obra, ya la tenía entre las manos" (31). Cristeta's consumption of dramatic texts points to a craving to remain in perpetual contact with everything the theater represented to her, most adequately summarized in the narrator's description of her reaction to meeting a famous actress:

Al marcharse la cómica, el poeta dijo a Cristeta que aquella mujer ganaba una onza de oro diaria; pero la estanquerita no dio señal de envidioso

asombro ni de cosa que denotase codicia. No; lo que le parecía realmente envidiable era el constante triunfar, el bien vestir, el hablar y oír cosas bonitas, el vivir, aunque fuese con existencia ficticia, en un mundo más poético y extraordinario que el de la realidad. (37)

In other words, Cristeta does not feel jealousy toward the actress due to the economic disparity existing between them, instead seeing in the star a mode of being and lifestyle that transcend the mundane existence of the popular classes. For Cristeta, the printed plays are doorways to her personal world of fantasy and desire for the constant triumph of the commercial stage. As Daniel Miller observes in his study of ‘stuff’ in a passage regarding traditional Indian pots, objects such as the printed play cannot be reduced to their functions but rather must be understood within the broader fabric of meaning and identity in which they operate as extensions of the subject (46–47). The printing of plays in inexpensive editions permitted the theater’s influence over the identity of the urban audience to reach far beyond the physical space of performance halls and permeate the desires and attitudes of *madrileños* across an array of social contexts.

### **Innovation and Imitations: Playing Safe with the *Género Chico***

The long-term success of the *teatro por horas* production system depended on entrepreneurial innovation. The earliest informative newspapers would not have survived the tempestuous political climate of the 1850s and 1860s if they had not found new means by which to attract a spectrum of readers and through which to circulate their products. In a similar fashion, business acumen permitted the *teatro por horas* system to take firm hold of the major theater houses of the Spanish capital. The relocation of *La Gran Vía* from the Teatro Felipe to the sumptuous hall of the Teatro Apolo at the beginning of the 1886–1887 season marks a turning point for the fortunes of the theater

that would come to be known as the ‘cathedral’ of the *género chico* and the Spanish commercial stage through the first decades of the twentieth century.

After opening in 1873, the Teatro Apolo suffered years of disappointing seasons in spite of the luxury and amenities it offered the public. Carmen del Moral Ruiz summarizes the decade of frustration through which the owners of the theater toiled:

Se dedicó al gran teatro de verso bajo la dirección de un empresario, Manuel Catalina, que llevaba años en el negocio, en el que había empezado como actor. Desde su inauguración hasta 1883–1884 la elegante y suntuosa sala languidece tristemente sin que pueda decirse a qué se debe. Precios exorbitantes, frío de la sala, lejanía del centro... son los motivos que aducen los contemporáneos para explicar el fracaso estrepitoso de un teatro con condiciones inmejorables. (*Género chico* 31)

Manuel Catalina’s experience in the business of the theater may be what held the Teatro Apolo back under his supervision, as he insisted on a business model that was outdated and did not respond to the evolving demands of the urban audience. The success of a staging of Ricardo de la Vega’s *La canción de la Lola*—which had debuted in the Teatro de la Alhambra in 1880—in March of 1883 pointed the way toward the *género chico* as the savior of the Apolo. During the summer prior to the 1883–1884 season, a number of important librettists and composers pooled resources to take control of the Teatro Apolo for the following season in order to focus on shorter musical works (Ruiz Albéniz 135–36, Moral Ruiz, *Género chico* 31).<sup>36</sup> The most important step in the evolution of the Teatro Apolo into the center of the *género chico* universe, however, occurred when Felipe Ducazcal paid the necessary fees prior to the 1886–1887 season to move *La Gran Vía* from his summer theater and continue to reap the financial rewards of Pérez y González’s sensational *revista*:

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<sup>36</sup> The people involved in this accord were the composers Emilio Arrieta, Manuel Fernández Caballero, Ruperto Chapí, Llanos y Marqués and the librettists Miguel Ramos Carrión, Zapata, and Estremera. Novo and Colson initially agreed to participate, but subsequently dropped out before signing the agreement.

Tal fue este éxito y tan metido estaba el <<todo Madrid>> en aquel garboso e inspiradísimo acierto lírico, que el avisado empresario Felipe Ducazcal no vaciló en pagar lo que los propietarios del teatro Apolo le pidieron en arrendamiento para llevar allí a sus triunfales huestes cómico-líricas y continuar explotando el género <<revista>>, que tan del gusto del público había sido en su edición <<casi príncipe>> de *La Gran Vía*. Así, apenas empezaron a refrescar las noches, haciendo poca grata la estancia en el recinto veraniego del Felipe, Ducazcal aposentó sus espectáculos en la escena del suntuoso teatro de la calle de Alcalá. (Ruiz Albéniz 151)

Ducazcal viewed the decision to lengthen the run of *La Gran Vía* and the fees for relocating his enterprise for the regular theater season as profitable investments.<sup>37</sup>

Ducazcal injected vitality into the Teatro Apolo as impresario by installing the *teatro por horas* format on a semi-permanent basis and bringing a more modern business model to bear on the business and production decisions of the playhouse. In early 1889, Luis Aruej and Luis Arregui teamed with Ducazcal as proprietors of the theater and continued to follow a strict entrepreneurial model for the selection of works to be shown while paying extremely close attention to the whole experience of spending an evening at the Apolo.

A crucial component of the modern business model employed by Ducazcal and later Aruej and Arregui in the Teatro Apolo was ruthlessness in matters relating to the content of the individual shows and the four works that comprised an evening's offerings. Even after its favorable reception, Pérez y González and Chueca continued to tweak, adjust, and change aspects of the play for several months in response to audience

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<sup>37</sup> Ducazcal's decision to establish the Teatro Apolo as his base of operations does not mean that he purchased the physical structure. In the nineteenth-century Spanish theater, there was a distinction between the *empresario* of a theater, the person who invests money in the shows and reaps the economic benefits of them, and the *propietario* of a theater, the person who owns the physical installations. The owner of the theater profited from the rent paid by the *empresario* in order to take full advantage of the facilities for a specified period of time, usually coinciding with the theater season. According to Leonardo Romero Tobar, the *empresario* had to engage in a dual economic-artistic operation: "[E]n primer lugar, el arrendamiento del teatro [. . .] tiene que conseguirlo en las mejores condiciones posibles; Segundo lugar, ha de acertar con las exigencias del público en el momento de confeccionar el elenco de actores y las piezas que se han de representar durante la temporada" (235). In other words, the *empresario* had to barter effectively to use the theater building at an affordable price while at the same time negotiating the demands and interests of an exacting, fickle public.

reception of specific moments in the *revista*. Doménech Rico mentions a number of musical scenes that were inserted into the work at various points after its debut: “[L]a del sietemesino y la gomosa, caricaturas de la última moda; la de la Mamá y el Niño; la del Duro Nuevo y el Duro Viejo; la del Bazar de Juguetes; la de los sargentos y la del policía de seguridad, amén de una escena gemela de la de los ratas en que caballero bien vestidos se saludan bajo los sones de la famosa jota” (35). The decision to introduce new material into the work necessitated the elimination of other scenes to account for the strict time limits of a *revista* performed in the production model of the *teatro por horas*, and consequently long sequences lacking musical numbers were excised from the play, such as a lively discussion between the various forms of urban lighting in the scene immediately preceding the “Jota de las ratas.” The producers at the Teatro Apolo were equally impatient with works that did not draw sufficient audiences and were always willing to axe newer works with limited audience appeal in favor of reprises of ‘tried and true’ classics of the genre.

Equally significant for the impresario and the proprietors of the Teatro Apolo was the experience of spending an hour or two in the cathedral of the *género chico*. The physical spaces of the entryway and the foyer invited the public in for an evening of spectacle and social interaction: “El cuidado puesto en la resolución de los espacios ‘secundarios’ es especialmente evidente en el articulado y profundo vestíbulo de la llegada que precede al no menos notable ‘foyer.’ El carácter de lugar de relación, fiesta y encuentro que la sociedad del XIX adjudica al teatro, tiene aquí su mejor reflejo” (Fernández Muñoz 122). The architectural contours of the building reflect and propagate the social practices of the era, providing spaces for enjoying the performance while also

facilitating the social interaction that characterized a night at the theater in the nineteenth century. Of course, the theaters of Madrid were in constant competition, and Víctor Ruiz Albéniz reminds us that “la Empresa de Apolo no podía consentir que nadie se le adelantase en materia de confort” (164). Consequently, the proprietors of the Apolo unexpectedly shut down the theater at the beginning of the 1888–1889 season to install an electric lighting system. In 1890, the success of the theater was so great that the main hall was renovated in June to allow the season to extend well into the summer in spite of the terrible heat, only ending on August 14 due to an argument between the entrepreneurs and the lead actor, Emilio Carreras (180–82). Like the works on stage, the physical space of the theater hall had to be renewed constantly to attract a demanding urban audience and remain competitive in a commercial theater market that witnessed the opening of twenty four theaters between 1867 and 1897 (Moral Ruiz, *Género chico* 26).

The last major component of the modern entertainment business model used by Ducazcal, Arregui, and Aruej was careful manipulation and exploitation of the public’s interest in the theater and desire for new types of spectacle and famous performers. In Ruiz Albéniz’s anecdotal account of the Apolo Theater, time and again he refers to newspaper accounts of scandals surrounding relationships between entrepreneurs, actors, writers, composers, and musicians associated with the theater, and these stories incited the enthusiasm and curiosity of the Madrilenian public. During these years, “[t]heatre entrepreneurs came to depend on the newspapers for hype” (Peters 68). For instance, an announcement on January 10, 1894, in *La Correspondencia de España* announced an indefinite delay in the much-anticipated debut of Ricardo de la Vega’s *La verbena de la Paloma* due to a quarrel between Ruperto Chapí, the initial composer for the work, and

Luis Arregui (219). Ruiz Albéniz says that these bits of news “fueron la comidilla del mundillo teatral durante varios días” (219), until Chapí resigned as composer for the work and was replaced by Tomás Bretón. On a less combative note, the producers and actors frequently appeared in interviews and extensive articles about their projects and lifestyle in the daily papers and publications that emerged specifically to target the avid theater public. The publicity inherent in newspaper coverage of the happenings of the theater reinforced the potential audience’s interest in the shows and reified evenings at the Apolo Theater, particularly attendance at the late show or ‘cuarta de Apolo,’ as a fashionable Madrilenian experience. In the words of Ruiz Albéniz:

[E]sperar a que se diese la <<entrada>> para la <<cuarta>> de Apolo constituía ya de por sí un motivo de diversión, un placer, un espectáculo al que daba derecho, no ya la entrada adquirida para la función, sino el simple hecho de ser madrileño, de plantilla o transeúnte, ya que todos podían, con sólo transitar por el concurridísimo trozo de la calle de Alcalá que se extendía desde la esquina de Barquillo a la angosta calle de las Torres, ser a un tiempo actores y espectadores del casticísimo <<cuadro>> de la <<cuarta>> de Apolo. (Estampa III)

Intimately related to the representation of the comings and goings of theater life in Madrid in the newspapers was the procurement of the services of famous performers in order to attract a greater public. Ruiz Albéniz’s history of the Apolo provides ample evidence of the deliberate decisions to contract famous personages in the world of theater and music to pique the interest of the audience and limit the damage of a series of lackluster debuts (168, 239). The international fame of these performers, of course, was the product of widespread media coverage of their artistic achievements and triumphs across Europe. The type of knowledge generated by media outlets that led to widespread celebrity and renown for actors at the local, national, and international level functioned very similarly to the *star system* that would emerge in Hollywood in the early decades of



the twentieth century. Richard deCordova's description of the confluence of production techniques, media, and audience desire that defines the *star system* remains at the core of modern criticism on stars in the age of mass media: "The picture personality was defined [. . .] by a discourse that restricted knowledge to the professional existence of the actor. With the emergence of the star, the question of the player's existence outside his or her work in film became the primary focus of discourse" (98). The proliferation of newspapers and magazines with stories about performers, as well as postcards, photographs, and other small commodities that carried their image, allowed the figure of the famous performer to permeate urban society to an unprecedented degree. These are what Gérard Genette would label epitexts that transcend the boundaries of a specific, intended audience—such as the one that attends a performance—and reaches into the realm of the abstract public (345). The Reporter in Felipe Castañón's *Nuevo género*—which premiered on November 10, 1900, in the Teatro Martín—may be overstating his case a bit, but probably not by much: "[Y]o soy un representante de la prensa y creo que usted ya sabrá que la prensa es el todo para los espectáculos, porque sin nuestra protección... Mire usted, en cierta ocasión, una primera tiple nos negó localidades para su debut, nos echamos encima toda la prensa y la aplastamos" (11–12). The convergence of the theater and modern print media liberates the theatrical performance and its players from the confines of the theater building by endlessly propagating visual representation and textual information about the commercial stage throughout the public sphere.

Public interest and consumption of information about the inner-workings of the theater world was not lost on the commercial playwrights of the *género chico*, who replied to this fascination with their profession by producing plays that gave audiences a

‘behind-the-scenes’ glimpse into the excitement, tension, and stress of the various roles that contribute to a theatrical production. Ramón de Marsal’s *Agencia teatral* debuted on July 27, 1885, in Felipe Ducazal’s Teatro Felipe and presented a caricature of the difficulties of forming a working theatrical company. Alfredo García Salgado’s dramatic monologue *En vísperas de estreno* that debuted in Cádiz on March 18, 1893, portrays a young actor, Rafael, who laments the decisions and misfortunes that derailed his studies to be a doctor and forced him into work in the theater. The monologue highlights the precarious social status and economic condition of the young performers aspiring to fame and fortune who will attain neither stardom nor even a comfortable lifestyle. Sinesio Delgado’s *La zarzuela chica*—which premiered in the Teatro Apolo on October 7, 1897—comically treats the theme of a theatrical failure and its consequences for the various members involved in a production team. Villanueva, the author whose new *zarzuela* is roundly and fiercely rejected by the audience at the beginning of the play, offers a lengthy but highly entertaining description of the battle that rages between the author of the failed play and the audience who rejects it:

Y entra efectivamente en el palenque el monstruo de mil cabezas receloso, inquieto, regodeándose interiormente con la esperanza de las emociones futuras. Puede engañársele con recursos falsos, con frases de relumbrón, con muñecos rellenos de serrín, imitando personajes de carne y hueso; puede bañársele en esa ola de vulgaridad que le sabe siempre á Gloria; pero si tal no se consigue, se le verá crecer, agrandarse, emborracharse con la alegría del escándalo, avanzar fieramente como fatídico espectro hasta las candilejas, alargar sus zarpas de hierro, estrujar y pulverizar al autor, escondido tras la débil muralla de los bastidores, y arrojarle como un guiñapo en las profundidades del foso, tronzando sus ilusiones, desbaratando su labor de muchos días, arrebatándole tal vez de entre las manos el pan de sus hijos... Pero ¡qué gusto ser vencido así! Porque eso será terrible como una catástrofe, pero es hermoso como un pedazo de Gloria. Pelea desigual y cuerpo á cuerpo, combate de uno contra mil, ¡lucha de hombres! (13)

These plays that delve into the tensions behind the scenes of the theater add layers of context and texture to the public's conception of this form of mass entertainment, enhancing the audience's identification with the actors, writers, and producers of the commercial stage by presenting hardships and stresses with which to sympathize. They also augment the public's interest in the exoticized world of theater and contribute to a self-propagating cycle of desire and demand for performances and spectacles.

The cyclical nature of the *género chico* comes sharply into focus as we recognize that the endless allusions to other works, both from the commercial stage and the literary tradition, are not the result of theater hacks attempting to fill space, but rather function as a premeditated strategy to elicit positive audience response to the play. To understand how this pattern works, we can look to the modern newspaper, which engenders a cycle of desire and demand by generating interest in a story or subject through sensationalist tactics and thus provokes curiosity for continuing coverage. Stefan Collini, although working in the slightly different context of intellectual journals rather than mass-disseminated daily newspapers, aptly explains the relationship between an individual number of a publication and all the numbers that precede it: "More than many other forms of writing, the periodical essay is an *excerpt whose full intelligibility depends on a fairly intimate acquaintance with the larger cultural conversation from which it is taken*" (56). Many of the stories in newspapers are unintelligible to a reader who has not absorbed information on a variety of relevant, up-to-date subjects over time. In the 1880s, crimes and other 'sucesos' supplanted the *folletín* novel as a principal means of attracting the interest of the reader (Cruz Seoane 296); the extraordinary interest of all of Madrid in the investigation of the murder on Fuencarral street in 1888 testifies to the attraction of

sensationalism for the urban reading public.<sup>38</sup> Enrique Prieto Enríquez and Joaquín Barberá exploited the public's interest in the legal proceedings of the case in their *El día del juicio*, a *sainete* that premiered in the Teatro Apolo on May 18, 1889. The tendency toward constant self-referentiality in the *género chico* obeys a similar logic of breeding interest and dedication to the commercial stage through continuity with prior work. Through liberal quotations and allusions to famous works, the writers and composers of the *género chico* seek to establish and maintain a 'taste culture,' a current marketing concept in which "the demographic identity of the audience members is less important than the continuing commitment of a group of people to some type of product" (Grossberg et al 225). Rather than starting from zero with each show, writers and composers use wordplay, musical quotations, and remakes and parodies of classic songs or scenes to offer audiences the pleasure of adaptation, a pleasure which, in the words of Linda Hutcheon, "comes simply from repetition with variation, from the comfort of ritual combined with the piquancy of surprise" (*Adaptation* 4). In an age in which video and sound recordings were not available, allusions to past works provided a means by which to relive past performances and the pleasant memories associated with them.

Famous and well-loved plays lived beyond the temporal and spatial limitations of their original performances in endless allusions that elicited exuberant responses from

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<sup>38</sup> Historians of Spanish journalism generally point to the 'Crimen de la calle de Fuencarral' as the landmark occasion when sensationalism arrived in full force in the world of Spanish dailies. Sánchez Aranda and Barrera effectively summarize how sensationalism signaled changes in the content, form, and visual appeal of the newspapers, as well as shifts in views of the social and ethical role of journalism in society: "Al considerar las consecuencias de estos sucesos y la actuación de la prensa, hay que señalar cómo fue esta la ocasión en la que irrumpió de forma ostentosa el sensacionalismo, tanto por la importancia que cobró el proceso judicial, como por el recurso a una tipografía exagerada que sirviera para atraer la atención de los lectores; unidos a esto, que era lo que se buscaba, algunos periódicos aumentaron notablemente su tirada. Por otro lado, es digno de mención el papel activo que jugó la prensa en el desarrollo de los acontecimientos, en los cuales—al asumir el papel de defensora de los intereses del pueblo—ejerció una apreciable influencia" (172).

Madridien audiences. The unprecedented popularity of *La Gran Vía* obviously made it a prime target for such quotation as other playwrights and composers sought to profit from its success. The two drunk men in Scene 9 of Salvador María Granés, Eduardo Lustonó, and José Jackson Veyán's *Te espero en Eslava tomando café* choose to leave the Teatro Eslava because the current offerings are too boring and as they exit they whistle the "Jota de las ratas." In Carlos Arniches and Gonzalo Cantó's first staged play in Madrid, *Casa editorial*, a character representing a caricature of the Zarzuela Moderna dances the famous *jota* in Scene 12. Granés, Lustonó, and Jackson Veyán's play debuted on April 24, 1887, and Arniches and Cantó's premiered on February 9, 1888, both in the Teatro Eslava. In other words, they coincided with the original run of *La Gran Vía*, still showing in the Teatro Apolo only a mile away. A decade later in Ramos Carrión's *Agua, azucarillos y aguardiente* (1897), the three ubiquitous Rats sneak across the stage to the tune of their *jota* and return to stage after having robbed Serafín of his clothes as he sleeps on a park bench after his plan to drug Doña Simona backfires. In the final scene of the work, two Guardias carry Serafín off to jail for public indecency: popular solidarity allowed Doña Simona and Asia to escape Serafín's perfidious conspiracy, but the tradition of the *género chico* lays the groundwork for justice.

The strategies employed by writers, composers, and producers to remind the audience of enjoyable experiences play on the notion that associating current works with positive memories yield favorable opinions of the current performance. Along with allusions and quotations of past successes, the presence of famous celebrities on stage also could remind the audience of previous performances and evenings at the theater. Mirre Stallen et al have conducted neurological studies of the brain using neuro-imaging

techniques that corroborates that recognition of celebrities' faces in advertisements triggers memories associated with those celebrities: "The positive affect that is experienced during the retrieval of these memories may subsequently be transferred to the product associated with the celebrity" (4). According to these researchers, this process of recognition and memory retrieval occurs consciously and subconsciously (4). While this study relates to the presence of the actors on stage, perhaps this is also why referencing prior works is a successful strategy for garnering favorable reactions from the audience: allusions to triumphant works associate the current show with the positive memories of the past in the mind of the spectator. Constant recycling of previous material is not a byproduct of the impoverished state of the commercial stage, but a conscious decision on the part of producers that reveals how well they understood the urban public of the period, what it wanted to see on stage, and how to turn a show into a hit.

### **The Festive *Sainete*, a Formula for Commercial Success**

If *La Gran Vía* supposes the culmination of a process of experimentation in form and content through the first decades of the *teatro por horas*, *La verbena de la Paloma* initiates the definitive rise of the festive *sainete* in the 1890s and displays the qualities that define the *género chico* during its period of greatest commercial success and popular appeal. The overwhelming tendency to highlight the *sainete* as the quintessential dramatic form of the *género chico* ignores the cultural process at work in the *revista* that made this revival possible. The development of the *revista* demonstrates how the logic of the newspaper infiltrated the theatrical spectacle via the changing knowledge and expectations of spectators and producers. With the subsequent triumph of the *sainete*, we

see how the innovations of the first twenty years of the *género chico* were reconciled with longstanding dramatic and literary traditions. The rebirth of the *sainete* at the end of the nineteenth century, I contend, occurs precisely because of the scenic and aesthetic innovations brought to bear on the commercial theater by the evolution of the *revista*.

The importance of Ricardo de la Vega's *La verbena de la Paloma* in the trajectory of the *género chico* cannot be overstated. The show was an absolute smash hit that captured the imagination of the Madrilenian public months prior to its debut on February 17, 1894. Ruiz Albéniz unapologetically claims that "su libro es el del *mejor sainete madrileño que vio la escena en todo tiempo*" (228). Whether or not it is the best *sainete* of all time is of less concern to us here than the fact that de la Vega hit upon a precise balance of theatrical components that lifted this musical play to the highest realms of commercial success and popular acclaim. Evident in the title of the play is the brilliant notion of grounding the visual spectacle of the work in the popular festival of the same name.<sup>39</sup> Whereas the classic eighteenth-century *sainete* of Ramón de la Cruz focuses on popular Madrilenian *tipos*, de la Vega extends and deepens this aesthetic vision by contextualizing the people of Madrid's popular neighborhoods in a firm setting that offers a multitude of possibilities for song and dance as well as visually stunning costumes, set designs, and so forth. *La verbena* draws upon the same modes of scene construction and arrangement of characters into musical ensembles so typical of the *revista*, but rejects the allegorical and fantastic spaces common in this genre in favor of the actual customs of

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<sup>39</sup> The "Festival of the Dove" is part of a week of important festivals and religious observances in the traditional neighborhoods of La Latina and Lavapiés between August 6 and August 15. After the festival of San Cayetano in the Plaza de Cascorro on August 7 and the festival of San Lorenzo in Lavapiés on August 10, the week culminates with La Verbena de la Paloma on August 15. The popularity and status of Ricardo de la Vega's play is so great in Madrid that every year young men and women dress in period costume and stand for election as the official characters of the play for each year's festival.

the Spanish capital as the basis for dramatic continuity. This strategy informed the aesthetic vision of the other successful *sainetes* of the decade that today remain as the pillars of the *género chico*: José López Silva and Carlos Fernández Shaw's *La Revoltosa* (1897), Ramos Carrión's *Agua, azucarillos y aguardiente* (1897), Miguel Echegaray's *Gigantes y Cabezudos* (1898), and Carlos Arniches's *El santo de la Isidra* (1898).

The temporal and spatial setting of *La verbena de la Paloma* on the festival day and in the popular neighborhood of La Latina was not only a clever decision on the part of de la Vega in assuring the visual flair of the work, but also is an integral component of the plot that is skillfully developed throughout the play. Doménech Rico argues that the appearance of the work as an amorous plot between Julián and Susana that serves as a pretext for a series of *cuadros de costumbres* is misleading: the scenes that portray a variety of Madrilenian customs also develop the relationships among the different characters and thus constantly contribute to the growing conflict between Julián and Don Hilarión (42). Doménech Rico rightly observes that the subtle structure of the work allows the central conflict to emerge organically from the rich fabric of social practices and personal relationships that constitute life in the *Barrio de la Latina*; like the spectators, for much of the play Don Hilarión and Julián remain unaware of their impending conflict over Susana's affections (43). The play reflects the realities of the modern city at a conceptual level, portraying the fact that the inhabitants of a densely populated space do not and cannot know the myriad social relationships and diverging interests that put them into conflict and bind them together to form a community.

Just as setting and story exist in constant ebb and flow in *La verbena*, the play also fuses lyrical passages and spoken dialogues in a constant development of the central and



secondary storylines and to further cement the relationship between the festive setting of the *verbena* and the love triangle dynamic between Susana, Julián, and Don Hilarión. The setting of the opening scene consists of a single building façade of which Don Hilarión's drug store forms the left side, a doorway and a *buñolería* occupy the center, and a tavern resides on the right. The stage direction immediately introduces a visual juxtaposition between two of the principal players in the dramatic conflict that will unfold throughout the work, placing them in opposition on the left and right of the stage before they know of their competing interests for Susana's hand. Tomás Bretón's musical score participates in establishing the mood of the show and ensuring continual development of the plot. Julián and Rita sing a duo in which Julián expresses his struggle with jealousy and anger due to the rejection of a woman whose identity has not yet been revealed. The musical number then expands into a *concertante* to include Don Hilarión and Don Sebastián's discussion of the debilitating effects of old age, particularly during the summer months in which the heat impairs comfortable digestion. The tragic, operatic style of Julián's emotional outpouring contrasts entirely with the staccato notes and frivolous tone of Don Hilarión's complaints of heat-induced indigestion, foreshadowing the tension to come between Hilarión's physical desire for Susana and Julián's deep-seated adoration. The conversations that serve as bookends for the song provide further context and explanation of these tensions. The play opens with Hilarión and Sebastián talking about the brutal summer heat of Madrid in August; this heat obviously explains the physical discomfort of the old men, but also points conceptually toward the inadequacy of these men for a younger woman such as Susana in a reworking of the traditional theme of the old man and the young woman, so typical of the late neoclassical *comedia* and the nineteenth-

century *alta comedia*. At the same time, the heat symbolically reinforces Julián's ardent passion for Susana and willingness to resort to violence to make her his wife. After the song, Rita harasses Julián about his attempt to commit suicide until he explains his sentiments toward Susana and the obstacles separating him from her love. In other words, the first scene of the play already has introduced all of the conflicts and themes that will be developed in later scenes through a nuanced combination of visual and audio cues, a feature of the work that doubtlessly fueled repeat customers during its initial run in the Apolo Theater as audiences viewed the work multiple times to notice all of the interconnections from the very first moments of the play.

*La verbena de la Paloma* stands as a testament to the importance of items and objects in constituting the daily life of *madrileños* at the end of the nineteenth century and recreating that experience on the commercial stage of the period. In his study of 'stuff,' Daniel Miller argues against notions and theories of things as being separate, discrete entities from human beings. Rather, he argues that the objects with which we surround ourselves exist in relation to us as the other end of a constant dialectic of identity formation and self-awareness (5–6). Throughout his study, Miller warns against reading 'stuff' simply as a semiotic sign that automatically tells us about the individual who uses it or the culture within which it operates. Instead, items such as clothing, pottery, furniture, and stuffed animals constitute the social fabric and material reality we inhabit, and thus play an active role in shaping how we interact with others and conceive of ourselves. Miller sustains that these objects teach us how to be part of and participate in society: "Objects don't shout at you like teachers, or throw chalk at you as mine did, but they help you gently to learn how to act appropriately. [. . .] These unconsciously

direct our footsteps, and are the landscapes of our imagination, as well as the cultural environment to which we adapt” (53). The *seguidillas* in Scene 1 of *La verbena* show a social environment saturated with food and clothing that shape the festive space of the celebration. The relationship between men and women in this fast-paced, zany song is based on the exchange of feminine attention and affection for gifts purchased by the men:

Ellas: ¿Cuántos buñuelos  
nos vais a dar?  
Ellos: Cuarenta libras.  
¡Las que queráis!  
Ellas: ¡Queremos churros!  
Ellos: ¡Vengan acá!  
Ellas: ¡Quiero aguardiente!  
¡Yo limoná!  
Ellos: ¡A ver si luego  
sus alegráis! (123)

The repeated association of the female characters with the verb *querer* establishes feminine desire for purchasable items as the primary site of social interaction with the opposite sex. The men seek to satisfy this feminine desire in order to obtain the favor and amorous attentions of the women. More than just signs that represent local Madrilenian customs or the accoutrements of a *castizo* identity, these articles of immediate consumption and gratification serve as the primary conduit through which a specific social habitus, to use Bourdieu’s term, is learned, enacted, and performed. The card games in *La verbena de la Paloma* and *La Revoltosa*, for example, do not simply function as a masculine activity to pass the hours of a warm summer evening, but also give form and structure to conversations between the men in which attitudes and thoughts regarding women, work, and recreation are learned, circulated, and appropriated as natural by the male community.

A more prominent example of the active role of objects in the social and mental life of the community in *La verbena de la Paloma* emerges from the *mantón de la China*, the typical Spanish shawl made of Chinese silks that arrived in Madrid via the capital of the Philippines. In the *seguidillas* from Scene 1, the men offer to give the ladies a *mantón* in honor of the festival celebration. The women express their enthusiasm and augment the sexual connotations of the scene by asking to be driven in a *berlina*, a type of closed carriage consisting of only two seats. Clearly, offering to buy a woman a *mantón de la China* presupposes a significant financial investment and for many women would suggest a sense of profound commitment to the relationship. Tellingly, when Julián confronts Susana due to her refusal to accompany him to the *verbena*, he immediately inquires about her wardrobe: “¿Dónde vas con mantón de Manila? / ¿Dónde vas con vestido chiné?” (145). Julián instantly sums up the situation by interpreting Susana’s clothing, using the outward signs of conspicuous consumption to confirm his suspicions that she has discarded him in favor of a man with greater wealth. At the same time, Don Hilarión’s prosperity diminishes the significance of the *mantón* as an indication of commitment, because such an investment means less to him in relative terms than it would to the poor Julián. Once again, the physical realities of the setting and objects come alive to form an integral part of the drama developing on stage.

### **Social Identity and the *Género Chico***

The resounding success of *La verbena de la Paloma* generated a seismic shift in the commercial theater scene of Madrid and set the mold for the major *género chico* works of the 1890s. Such was its popularity that ticket scalpers were able to take

advantage of the demand by requiring potential customers to buy tickets to the remaining sections at the Teatro Apolo if they hoped to attend the performance of de la Vega's phenomenal hit (Ruiz Albéniz 231). After witnessing the triumph of *La verbena*, it is no surprise that other writers and composers adopted many of the same strategies that enraptured the Madrilenian public. Setting the plays in Madrid, using the colloquial speech of the popular classes, and portraying the street culture and festivals of the city contributed to the simulation on stage of the experience of living in and being part of Madrid. Much like the *aguardiente*, *buñuelos*, *churros*, and *mantones de la China* that frame the social practices and interactions of the characters of *La verbena de la Paloma*, the *género chico* itself occupied a central role in the cultural life of *fin de siglo* Madrid and functioned as a site of collective identity formation for those who regularly passed through the front doors of the Apolo, the Eslava, and the Zarzuela and for the even larger group that felt the constant presence of the dynamic, modern entertainment industry in the pages of the periodical press.

To dismiss the *género chico* as frivolous theater that suffers from a hopelessly impoverished realist aesthetic and profoundly backward ideological underpinning is to miss the point entirely: the *género chico* was an enunciative practice of self-awareness and reflection that recognized the theatricality and constructed nature of identity. The set of theatrical practices that constitute the *género chico* do not attempt to pass social realities through the idealized, objective lens of Realism, but rather approach modernity through a systematic aesthetic of comic and musical distortion that highlights the spontaneous and vital qualities of popular culture in Madrid while glossing over the negative, destructive features of the Spanish metropolis: growing class conflict, a

systemically corrupt and ineffective civil administration, the lack of a solid industrial base to support the growing city's infrastructure and finances, etc. Fernando Vela contends that the *género chico* achieved tremendous popularity because “[e]l gran placer de Madrid era verse” (368), but this was only half the equation. The great pleasure of Madrid indeed was to see itself on stage, but only through rose-colored glasses.

The visual spectacle of the popular theater became inextricably entwined with the social and cultural imagination of what it was to be *madrileño*, a circumstance that fueled the ire of those who decried the debilitating moral effects of the *género chico*. Manuel Cañete, in an article in *La Ilustración Española y Americana* published on September 22, 1887, launches a broadside attack:

Por punto general las piececillas, ya cómicas, ya cómico-líricas, que sirven de cotidiano alimento a casi todos los teatros de función por hora, más aún que deshonestas, son groseras; más que groseras, absolutamente desnudas de ingenio y de verdadero chiste [. . .] la mayor parte de los desatinados cuadros escénicos a que aludo ni siquiera se distinguen por el propósito de censurar vicios, preocupaciones o ridiculeces sociales [. . .] De aquí el vuelo que ha tomado en nuestra escena la caricatura insustancial, y el olvido absoluto de la verdad humana, de los caracteres reales, de las costumbres mismas del pueblo, a quien tales dramaturgos desfiguran o calumnian sin reparo alguno, trazando con brocha impregnada en colorines rabiosos personajes y acontecimientos inverosímiles. (164, 166)

An explicit element of Cañete's vilification of the *género chico* originates in his objection against entertainment that distorts and manipulates reality. In Baudrillard's formulation, Cañete demands theater to be representation, which “stems from the principle of the equivalence of the sign and of the real,” but instead finds in the *género chico* a simulacrum, which “stems from the utopia of the principle of equivalence, *from the radical negation of the sign as value*, from the sign as the reversion and death sentence of every reference” (3). The lack of verisimilitude and didactic instruction of morals and

customs, in other words, leaves the commercial theater's relationship to the 'real' world unclear, and hence calls into question the 'real' status of the external world by implying that the characters and *tipos* that populate the streets of Madrid's popular neighborhoods are just as theatrical and constructed as those that crowd the stage in a *sainete* or *revista*.

This dual impulse to portray quotidian reality in order to distort it brings us back to the dominant frameworks of thought instilled in the nineteenth-century Spanish spectator by the periodical press: *costumbrismo* and caricature. These visual forms relied on the reproduction of official discourses and colloquial speech to produce a readily-identifiable mimicry of a social, political, or cultural referent. On the page and stage, language became a layer of the visual and linguistic experience of the reader/spectator that could be manipulated for comic or dramatic value or imbued with ideological, critical, or ethical significance. The predominance of visual and aural experience points toward the growing preeminence of plasticity as the guiding aesthetic principle in the development of modern mass media and the entertainment industry. Whereas many of the more artistic enterprises of the period depended on the contours and vicissitudes of subjective human experience and psychological development—the Realist and Naturalist novel, Symbolist poetry, etc.—it is obvious that industrialized popular culture paid little attention to these matters, instead seeking to craft a world of endless visual flair, auditory delight, and pure exteriority. Nonetheless, the pervasive presence and widespread dissemination of the *teatro por horas* system and *género chico* works dug a deep well of popular vocabulary, striking images, potent stories, and compelling themes from which the artistic innovators of the early twentieth century would draw to give life to a range of novel aesthetic visions. Two important twentieth-century innovators, Carlos Arniches and

Ramón del Valle-Inclán, refashioned the instinctive social and cultural critique of the comicity, parody, and satire characteristic of the *género chico* into sophisticated aesthetic experiences aimed at sounding the depths of the moral and ethical complexities of contemporary society and Spain's historical legacy.



## CHAPTER III

### PLEASING AND PROSECUTING THE PUBLIC: THE RISE OF THE GROTESQUE IN THE DRAMATURGY OF CARLOS ARNICHES

Carlos Arniches arrived in Madrid during the period that witnessed the rise of the *género chico* as a mass entertainment industry—in 1886, fresh on the heels of the debut of *La Gran Vía*—and the consolidation of the major daily newspapers. This was a moment in which the accelerating emergence of mass culture in Spain was exercising a greater influence on the national body politic and coming into greater conflict with the traditional cultural pursuits of the literary and artistic elite. This charged environment in which the role and power of emerging mass media were contested and reaffirmed exercised a powerful influence over the development of Arniches’s understanding of language, dialogue, and the relationship between aesthetics and ethics on the stage.

Arniches’s varied and illustrious career exemplifies the process by which forms of formally innovative and ethically engaged theater emerged from contact with the wide-ranging visual and linguistic repository of the *género chico*. Far from the *fin de siglo* ivory tower intellectual or artist, Arniches cut his teeth in the callous world of late nineteenth-century commercial theater in Spain and built early success through his ability to understand the principal elements of different theatrical genres and assimilate them into his own dramatic praxis (Ríos Carratalá, “Arniches” 996). This chapter examines Arniches’s oeuvre as a case study of the interconnections between the commercial and artistic theater, arguing that his later work uses the stereotypes and facile comicity of the

commercial stage as the basis for a more thoughtful critique of the dehumanizing tendencies of modern society.

Arniches's biography reads like the standard narrative of young men with literary ambitions that made their way to Spain's cultural centers during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Born on October 11, 1866, to Carlos Arniches and María Antonia Barrera, the young Arniches grew up in a tempestuous social and political climate in Alicante. Economic instability, yellow fever epidemics, and civil conflict in the region marked the future playwright's youth, and his family "suffered acutely from these social, political, and economic afflictions" (McKay 13). The Arniches family moved to Barcelona in 1880 because political manipulations led to his father being fired and thrust the family into poverty. In the Catalan capital, young Carlos helped the family's fortunes by seeking employment, notably as a news reporter for *La Vanguardia* (McKay 13–14).

This experience in the ruthless world of publishing plunged Arniches into the literary life of the city and ignited his interest in pursuing a career in letters. As Albert F. Calvert noted in 1909: "Young writers still seek Madrid, bringing with them plays or novels, which, in most cases, are never given to the public" (69), and Arniches was no exception as he abandoned Barcelona in favor of Madrid in 1885. Once in the capital, he was obliged to subsist on his literary activities and labors, leading him to take odd jobs and work for the editorial staffs of various newspapers (McKay 14). For Arniches and his contemporaries, the excitement and buzz of life in the newspapers and theaters outweighed the possible benefits of a career obtained through education: "[L]a vida universitaria es en sí misma aburrida y al poco abandonan las aulas por las redacciones de los periódicos, las tertulias en los cafés y en un sentido amplio la vida en las calles y en

las plazas de la ciudad” (Moral Ruiz, “Mitificación” 81). In 1887, he published his first work, a school primer on the reign of Alfonso XII, *Cartilla y cuaderno de lectura*. According to Arniches’s biographer Vicente Ramos, the research required for this publication put him into contact with the *barrios bajos* of Madrid for the first time, an experience that would inspire countless of his *sainetes* and short plays throughout his career (30–31). As with many aspiring writers in Madrid during the period, Arniches participated in a variety of literary activities as he attempted to gauge the demands of the public and remedy his condition of poverty.

### **Early Collaborations and the Precarious Status of Language and Knowledge**

Following the financial respite provided by *Cartilla y cuaderno de lectura*, Arniches and fellow would-be playwright Gonzalo Cantó staged their first work, *Casa editorial*, which debuted on February 9, 1888, in the Teatro Eslava. The starting point for Arniches’s first play is a situation he knew all too well during his first years in Madrid: two hopeful writers, Fernández and Gómez, wait outside the editorial offices of Don Justo, hoping that he will see their talents as a novelist and poet and lamenting the difficulties and injustices of the publishing world. In Scene 2, Mister Kramell, a visiting Englishman, arrives and tells the pair that he is passing through Spain in order to see the esteemed editor and acquire the best works of contemporary Spanish literature and music. Gómez and Fernández speak with Kramell about the life of writers in Madrid in a dialogue fraught with irony and witty double entendres that will characterize Arniches’s best comic work, and in the end ask Kramell to assist them in convincing Don Justo to accept their manuscripts. This first *cuadro* of the play is a prologue to the main body of

the work, as Gómez and Fernández accompany Kramell into Don Justo's office in the second *cuadro* and succeed in persuading him to take the novel and poem they offer. From this point on, the play takes the form of a *revista* as a number of allegorical characters representing various artistic currents parade through the office as Don Justo guides Mister Kramell through the literary landscape of modern Spain.

The obvious autobiographical elements of *Casa editorial* should not obscure the more subtle recognition in the work of the evolving status of 'literature' and printed books in modern Madrilenian culture. In Scene 10, a Guardia enters the offices wishing to buy 'urbanidad' in the form of a book. Upon discovering the price of ten *reales*, the Guardia responds: "Pues quede con Dios, *siguiré sin urbanidad*" (27). This exchange portrays the evolving social and cultural climate of a society in which the printed word was increasingly the dominant form of public interaction. The positivistic discourse about the panacea that education and economic development would bring to Spain posited reading, books, and newspapers as signs of modernity and progress. At the same time, this scene acknowledges the economic and social barriers that prevented this modernity from permeating all sectors of the urban population. The Guardia's inability to penetrate the sphere of knowledge and urbanity is not due to intellectual limitations, but the lack of economic capital with which to purchase the commodities that confer this learning. Luis de Larra approached similar matters in his *Biblioteca popular*—which debuted on October 20, 1905, in the Teatro Eslava—a *revista* in which the poorly educated Robustiano wishes to use his wealth to purchase an entire bookstand so that he can learn enough to embarrass his wife and make her appear to be the imbecile in the relationship instead of him. Unlike the Guardia in *Casa editorial*, Robustiano's unexplained wealth

allows him to enter the world of culture and modernity signified by the purchase and consumption of reading material. Larra's *revista* asserts more strongly what Arniches and Cantó's play hints: that knowledge of current events through newspapers and literary tradition in classic works is indispensable to negotiate the modern public sphere.

Arniches's early collaborations focus on print culture and journalism as a site of exchange between language, culture, social norms, and politics. He and Gonzalo Cantó continued to explore these intersections in *Ortografía*, which premiered at the Teatro Eslava on December 31, 1888. In the play, El Guión guides the Portuguese Señor Canone through a *revista* of the Spanish language that fuses the orthographic norms of standardized Spanish with scenes of contemporary life in Madrid:

Guión: Yo voy a proponer a usted un nuevo sistema de enseñanza, de resultados brillantes, siendo al mismo tiempo recreativo y pintoresco, por el cual a la vez que nuestra ortografía, conocerá usted muchas de nuestras costumbres.

Canone: ¡Oh! ¡Bravo, excelso, señor! De manera que aquí la ortografía...

Guión: Va usted a verla en tipos, humanizada; ortografía que rueda por calles y plazas. La ortografía somos todos; yo soy el guión, primer signo. (129)

This decision to translate the visual cues of written Spanish into the physical experience of urban life recognizes written and spoken language as the medium in which modern subjects construct identity and relationships to the broader fabric of society. In their first collaboration, Celso Lucio and Arniches took stock of Spain in *Panorama nacional*—which debuted on November 8, 1889, at the Teatro de la Alhambra—by framing the story as two reporters, representing the fictional newspapers *El presente* and *El pasado*, who view and critique the Director's panorama of contemporary Spain. The *revista* decries the precarious position of Spanish journalism in the second *cuadro*:

Golilla: Me marchó, tengo que prender a un ladrón cuya cabeza está  
pregonada en dos mil escudos.  
Guardia: ¡Buena cabeza...! Yo también me marchó, voy persiguiendo a  
otro mucho más peligroso.  
Golilla: ¿A un asesino?  
Guardia: ¡Peor!  
Golilla: ¿A un hereje?  
Guardia: Qué hereje..., mucho peor.  
Golilla: ¿A quién?  
Guardia: A un periodista. (218)

This witty dialogue demonstrates the endangered status of journalists as they contested and criticized the decisions and functioning of state power while simultaneously communicating the underlying clout of the media in organizing and promoting public awareness and response to civil authorities. In these early works, Arniches and his collaborators sketch a map of the press's relationships to power in modern society. These plays also lay bare the uncertain status of the professional writer in a cultural landscape in which the larger interests of entrepreneurs and politicians exercise a controlling influence over the possibilities of achieving fame and fortune in the literary field.

### **Finding the Recipe for Success: the Festive *Sainete***

The first milestone in Arniches's career as a professional dramatist arrived with the debut of *El santo de la Isidra* on February 19, 1898, in the Teatro Apolo. This play marks Arniches's adoption of the formula that made Ricardo de la Vega's *La verbena de la Paloma* a major commercial success. Playwrights and composers participating in the commercial theater of late nineteenth-century Madrid worked in an environment fueled by the need to receive immediate, positive feedback from audiences that translated into box office success to keep the support of theater owners. In the wake of commercial hits such as *La verbena de la Paloma*, *La Revoltosa*, *Gigante y cabezudos*, and *Agua, azucarillos y*

*aguardiente*, Arniches was wise to embrace the model of setting an amorous plot with potential for bloodshed in the *barrios bajos* in the context of a popular festival. While Dru Dougherty suggests that Arniches set the paradigm for one-act plays that portrayed “the customs and stereotypes of lower-class urban neighborhoods” (581), this assertion overlooks the major works of the *género chico* repertoire that preceded Arniches’s first foray into the modern *sainete*. Once Arniches discovered how to use the elements that de la Vega had combined masterfully in *La verbena de la Paloma*, the Alicante dramatist rose to preeminence in the theater of his time as he continued to cultivate the *sainete* in works such as *La fiesta de san Antón* (1898), *El último chulo* (1899), *Sandías y melons* (1900), *Los pícaros celos* (1904), and *Las estrellas* (1904).

*El santo de la Isidra* exemplifies the exteriority that characterizes the comicity and dramatic praxis of the *género chico*. Stock characters and situations dominated much of the commercial theater in late nineteenth-century Madrid, as many playwrights were more interested in clever dialogue, comic visual juxtapositions, and witty musical numbers than in presenting multi-dimensional characters that undergo significant psychological or emotional development. The time limitations of the *teatro por horas* system contributed to the popular *tipomanía* of the *género chico*, as playwrights penned works that could build to a climax and find a resolution in an hour. According to Membrez, “[o]beying the artistic limits imposed by the *teatro por horas*, the *género chico* developed a series of types peculiar to the times of a complacent bourgeoisie, the new ruling class—the way having been prepared by Ramón de la Cruz’s eighteenth century types and the *costumbrista* sketches in the popular press from the 1830s onward” (178). Using popular types and stock situations permitted playwrights to skip over exposition

and jump straight to the action. As Manuel Linares Rivas tells us, “[a]penas sale a la escena el personaje, ya sabe el público en qué sitio está, a qué medio social pertenece y en qué situación pecuniaria, real o aparente, se encuentra colocado” (24). Dialect, clothing, occupation, and other exterior indicators indicate the social status and education of a character immediately, allowing audiences to anticipate the situations this character will encounter and how he or she will react to them. In her considerations on the problems of theatrical translation, Phyllis Zatlin observes that a dramatic translation, unlike a novel or poem, cannot rely on footnotes to communicate information to the public; consequently, the reality of the source text must be changed significantly in order to allow “[s]pectators in the theatre [to] grasp immediately the sense of the dialogue” (1). The *sainete* was a form of dramatic translation, transmuting the complex realities of a modern, evolving metropolis into a simplified version on the stage, reducing “society to its basic components with visual, linguistic and musical cues designed to stimulate the spectators’ immediate recognition” (Membrez 181). *Género chico* works required the audience to bring knowledge of theatrical convention and types to bear on every new work, reinforcing the association of external visual signals with social status and identity.

Arniches’s *El santo de la Isidra* relies on simplified portraits of the protagonists to integrate a discussion of moral character into the amorous conflict around which the play revolves. Language functions as a clear channel of communication that transmits important information about the characters and their attitudes toward each other. Rather than show the inevitable clash of affections, personalities, and worldviews embodied by Epifanio and Venancio, the opposition of these two young men develops mainly through conversations between characters. In Scene 4 of the first *cuadro*, Señor Matías challenges



Epifanio to a fight in the street after an argument in the local tavern, but it remains unclear that the origin of this conflict is related to Epifanio's dastardly treatment of Matías's daughter until Scene 5, in which he explains to his family what precipitated the harsh words and fisticuffs outside. Epifanio's threat to anyone who dances with Isidra at the festival in the Pradera is related through Matías's retelling of the story rather than by Epifanio himself. In the next scene, Señor Eulogio expresses his happiness upon learning that Isidra no longer courts Epifanio and describes the humble, hard-working, and gentle Venancio, who has hidden his feelings for Isidra for over a year. The juxtaposition of these scenes introduces the antagonism on which the play focuses, but the characters do not come into contact until Scene 14. In the end, the conflict plays out exactly as we expect in a work designed to please the audience through a parade of popular Madrilenian customs and facile amorous plot: Venancio displays his true courage and inner moral strength in order to prevail over the physically intimidating but morally lacking Epifanio. Language, clothing, dialect, and visual cues are faithful in their representation of characters' moral qualities and anticipation of how the conflict will be resolved.

### **Character Types: Theatrical Predictability Masking Social Instability**

We must be careful, however, not to see the character types and stock situations in the works of the *género chico* simply as strategies for dramatic expediency that facilitate production practices within the strict time limits of the *teatro por horas*, but recognize these conventions as contested sites of discourse and ideology. Georg Lukács asserts that a type is “a peculiar synthesis which organically binds together the general and the particular both in characters and situations.” He continues: “[W]hat makes it a type is that

in it all the humanly and socially essential determinants are present on their highest level of development, in the ultimate unfolding of the possibilities latent in them, in extreme presentation of their extremes, rendering concrete the peaks and the limits of men and epochs” (6). Frederic Jameson likewise sees that types represent “something larger and more meaningful than themselves, than their own individual destinies. They are concrete individualities and yet at the same time maintain a relationship with some more general and human substance” (*Marxism* 191). In stock characters and situations both Lukács and Jameson detect manifestations of broader political ideologies, social interactions, and cultural contexts that characterize a society. In the *género chico*, the configurations and attitudes of stock characters control the range of emotional and moral experiences portrayed on stage and the corresponding social classes with which they are associated. It is “un mundo teatral poblado por tipos fruto de una estilización coherente con la finalidad cómica y costumbrista” (Ríos Carratalá, “Del castizo al fresco” 26), a realm in which the exotic lower classes of the modern capital are limited to generally harmless, genteel folk consumed by petty rivalries and amorous adventures. Such a pattern of development permits writers to brush aside the more dangerous and subversive qualities of the emerging, industrialized mass public of the modern city: “Un público que vivía día a día la realidad histórica que se supone convulsa, pero que encontraba un remanso de paz en un teatro, donde todo tenía una solución tan inmediata como feliz” (Ríos Carratalá, “Del castizo al fresco” 26). The commercial theater provides the psychological solace and simple solutions that the vagaries and vicissitudes of modern political life never offered.

The proliferation of the *cursi* on the stages of the *género chico* offers an example of how the contested ideologies and discourses of modernity converge in the social

constitution of stock character types. The figure of the Spanish *cursi* could only emerge in the modern context of a society that permits social ascent (or descent) on the basis of personal merit or accrued wealth, or, as Noël Valis states, during “the shift from a traditional to a more modern society” (16). Valis argues that *lo cursi* originates from a state of inadequacy, “when there are insufficient means (economic, cultural, social) to achieve desired ends” (11). This understanding of *cursilería* coincides with journalist Miguel Moya’s summation of this phenomenon of Spain’s shift to modernity, penned in 1880: “[E]l que se vanagloria de algo o tiene alto concepto de sí mismo o de sus cosas, puede o no equivocarse con tal creencia. Si no se equivoca, es presumido; si se engaña, cursi” (3). The exaggerated dress and bizarre, effluvious speech of the *cursi* type reflect their cultural and intellectual inadequacy as they attempt to navigate the complicated social path from the *barrios bajos* to the affluent neighborhoods of the *nouveau riche*. Sinesio Delgado and Joaquín Abati’s *La lucha de clases*—which debuted at the Teatro Eslava on October 27, 1900—depicts this sort of idealized journey of social ascension and its subsequent failure.<sup>40</sup> Rufino and Segismunda, owners of a grocery store, seek to marry their daughter Adela to a young engineer from Valladolid. Their social inadequacy could not be more obvious as they attempt to attract the attention of the Madrilenian upper classes with a dazzling dinner party, which is disastrously planned and poorly executed. Membrez comments on the effect of the show: “This comedy is an example of how a play could appeal across class lines. The moral lesson is clear. The aristocratic sector could laugh at the boorish upstarts; the working class public could be grateful that

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<sup>40</sup> Tellingly, the title of Delgado and Abati’s *zarzuela* alludes to the issue of class conflict brought to the fore in modern societies by the rise of socialism, communism, and anarchism in the mid nineteenth century, and subsequently the play has nothing to do with any of these issues. In fact, the play ultimately presents a resolution in which Rufino and Segismunda accept their lower middle class status and allow their daughter to marry Doroteo, her working-class cousin.

they had no such pretensions; and the middle class audience members, while laughing at themselves, could also take copious notes” (209). Every member of the audience, regardless of social class, had a relation to and opinion of the types they saw on the stage. In these stock characters, the interests and ideologies of producers, writers, and audience members converged as new forms of socialization were introduced and enacted on the stage and in the city. Stock characters such as the *cursi* or *chulo* were not static, permanent concepts, but constantly evolved and changed, fusing the history of theatrical practice and the lived experiences of actors, authors, and viewers in a constant reinvention of the type.

The subtle division of stock characters and situations into two distinct groupings reflects the social anxieties of the nineteenth-century bourgeoisie. Membrez reports that popular-class stock settings in the *género chico* included baptisms, popular festivals, weddings, and the work day in which stories revolve around love, jealousy, and rivalry; “[I]n short, everything that the bourgeoisie **perceived** to comprise the life of the working class and its relations with other social classes” (180, original emphasis). In contrast, middle class stock situations dealt with themes such as marriage, money, social pretension, business morals, patriotism, and the *turno pacífico* political system, all of which were dominant preoccupations for the socially unstable bourgeoisie of the period. By creating character types and stock situations that pertained to clearly distinguished categories of people in the plays, the typologies of the *género chico* delicately soothed the worries of middle-class audiences who feared any real or perceived backsliding down the social ladder. Certainly, character types such as *cursis* or *chulos* were of interest to audiences regardless of socio-economic class, but in *género chico* works a *cursi* was

never in danger of descending into the lower classes once more, nor was the *chulo* capable of ascending to a higher social rank. The inherent conservatism of social representation in the *género chico* sought to gloss over the instabilities of social status in modern, capitalist society.

A number of Arniches's plays at the beginning of the twentieth century present social advancement as undesirable and dangerous to traditional values and the unity of the nuclear family. In *Las estrellas*—a *sainete* that debuted in the Teatro Apolo on June 22, 1904—Pepe el Carpanta's tale of the wild success his daughter and wife enjoy in Paris as performers contribute to the ironically named Prudencio's reckless faith in his son's aptitude for bullfighting and his daughter's talent for singing and dancing. In place of hard work and dedication to the moral and financial success of the family, Prudencio and his children pursue the misleading narrative of fame and fortune in the modern entertainment industry. The principal conflict of the play emerges from the tension between Prudencio's foolhardy dreams and his wife Feliciania's down-to-earth common sense. While Feliciania rightfully scolds her son Casildo for pawning off the family's possessions to give the appearance of affluence and pursue a career in bullfighting, Prudencio overlooks his son's lack of courage and moral deficiencies. The audience coincides with the residents of the neighborhood who are held captive by Prudencio's blind support of his lackluster children, such as in Scene 4 of the first *cuadro* when Prudencio's acquaintances suffer through an impromptu performance by Antoñita:

Pepe: [A Polinio] (¡Ya habrá usted advertido que tie menos gracia que una caja e betún!).

Polinio: Ya, ya; pero ¿quién le quita las ilusiones a un hombre así? (925)

The rags-to-riches narrative of the emerging *star system* has captured the imagination of Prudencio, Casildo, and Antoñita to such an extent that Feliciano's sensible advice and emotional pleas are for naught; the trio learns its lesson through catastrophic failure on the stage and in the bullring and reluctantly returns to the humble barbershop to ask mother's forgiveness. The secondary story of Pepe el Carpanta also ends badly, as Pepe takes up his old job after learning that his wife and daughter failed to achieve success as performers and turned to a life of prostitution. The desire to rise above their status as unassuming working class people leads all of these overly-ambitious dreamers to the brink of ruin, but the appropriately named Feliciano reveals to them the true recipe for happiness: "Entrad a ese rincón de casa que llamábais triste y oscuro, porque vosotros, ¡pobrecitos!, no sabíais que el cariño y el trabajo, son alegría y claridad" (958). McKay tells us that "[t]he lesson is obvious, as Arniches meant it to be, and as is the case with most of his plays, the female figure reaffirms the moral truth" (67), but quite clearly we see that the 'truth' communicated through the denouement of the play is not only a moral lesson on the importance of familial bonds and good, old-fashioned hard work. Prudencio, Casildo, and Antoñita suffer once they leave the safe space of the *barrios bajos* and venture out in the modern city to strike it rich and become famous. Even Feliciano feels herself tempted by the desire to live a life of fame and fortune through her children, demonstrated in the third *cuadro* when she awaits information from Acacio to learn whether or not Antoñita has garnered applause in her theatrical debut. The comedy of the play—i.e. Prudencio's outrageous miscalculation of his children's talents—serves as a mask for the underlying conservative vision that *Las estrellas* communicates: social mobility leads only to misery and ruin.

The transmission of a bourgeois ideological vision of society through a play depicting working class characters is more obvious in the overtly political *El iluso Cañizares*, a short, satirical work Arniches wrote with his longtime collaborator Enrique García Álvarez that debuted in the Teatro Apolo on December 22, 1905. The play is a theatrical rewrite of the chapters in the second book of *Don Quijote* in which Sancho Panza governs over Barataria, although no direct allusions to the novel or Cervantes are to be found in the play. In the opening *cuadro*, Ufrasia laments her husband Aquilino's newfound interest in politics because he spends all of his time at meetings and in cafes talking instead of dedicating his time to his job and family. When he appears in Scene 4, Aquilino speaks of nothing but his lofty ideals and claims that he would straighten out the poor administration of Madrid if he were allowed to rule for a mere twenty-four hours. In the second *cuadro*, we are transported from the impoverished hovel where Aquilino and his family live to lavish offices full of luxurious furniture and the trappings of high political appointment as we learn that Aquilino has indeed gained the governorship over Madrid. Once in power, Aquilino pursues an oppressive social agenda designed to root out immorality and 'clean up the streets' of the Spanish capital, all the while abandoning the promises of social justice and redistribution of wealth he had described in the previous *cuadro*. Arniches and García Álvarez replace the Mayordomo and advisors who make Sancho's life unpleasant as governor of Barataria with an agent from the secret police, Chinarro, who regularly appears to warn Aquilino that his life is in grave danger:

Pues que por confidencias, anónimos y delaciones, he venido en conocimiento de que varios perjudicados por las rigurosas medidas de policía tomadas por vucencia, tratan de hacer estallar en su mismo despacho una bomba de dinamita [ . . . ] No coma vucencia nada, ni acepte nada, ni toque nada, ni se fíe de nada, ni se acerque a nada. ¡Corro a

investigar! La vida de vucencia es preciosa; la vida de vucencia está en peligro. (25)

After a series of escapades involving abuses of authority and the difficulties of ruling—especially for a man lacking credentials, education, and refinement—Aquilino becomes increasingly weary and wary of his sudden rise to power and its hidden dangers. In the final *cuadro*, Aquilino awakes from his dream (or nightmare?) and finds himself at home once more. Safe from the dangers of civic responsibility, he renounces his ambitions:

Aquilino: Pero no me regañes. Este sueño me ha quitao las ilusiones, porque he visto que eso de mandar no es tan fácil como yo me figuraba.

Ufrasia: ¡Pues natural, señor! Los pobres no tenemos más política que la del trabajo. (44)

The protagonist's wife expresses the underlying conservative message of social order and stability as opposed to advancement or upheaval.

A play such as *El iluso Cañizares* shows how the *género chico* systematically ignored the significance of radical and revolutionary ideologies in the evolving urban landscape of Madrid at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries. Moral Ruiz observes that the geography of the *género chico* indicates an exclusive portrayal of the city by focusing only on the *barrios bajos*—Latina, Embajadores, Lavapiés—while disregarding the regions of the city that were growing and flourishing during the decades of the *género chico*'s rise to prominence, mainly the axis of the Paseo de la Castellana and the Salamanca neighborhood and the growing *barrios obreros*—Pacífico, Cuatro Caminos, Pozas—home to the politically mobilizing urban workers of the period (“Mitificación” 74–75). Any representation of radical ideologies on the stages of the *género chico* passed through the worldview of the bourgeoisie. In a word, the



commercial theater of this period relied on the patronage and support of the moneyed classes, and thus never was willing to take extreme political positions seriously.

In *El iluso Cañizares*, Aquilino never passes for a truly committed political revolutionary. At the beginning of the play, Dionisio questions Aquilino's understanding or devotion to socialism in a comic dialogue with Ufrasia:

Ufrasia: Pues ahora lo tienes mochales del tóo con lo del reparto social.

Está emperrao en que no hay propiedad y en que todo es de todos.

Dionisio: ¿Que todo es de todos? Gachó, pues se conoce que lo suyo no lo mete en el reparto.

Ufrasia: ¿Por qué?

Dionisio: Porque el otro día le cogí un petillo y de poco me escalabra. (11)

The comedy of this passage arises from the disjuncture between Aquilino's supposed ideals and his contradictory actions. Before Aquilino appears on stage, we as the audience doubt his credentials as a revolutionary figure, a skepticism that the title of the play reinforces. After Aquilino's rise to power, our suspicions are confirmed: the new governor of Madrid throws ideals and ideology to the wind and dedicates himself fully to personal interest. Arniches and García Álvarez thus make Aquilino simply another self-serving politician whose power is based on nepotism and state-sanctioned violence, the hallmarks of the *turno pacífico* and *caciquismo* of the Restoration period. By extension, the play casts doubt on revolutionary political parties, politicians, and their followers by suggesting that there is nothing behind the discourse of radicalism, that in fact it is simply a different path to the same, bourgeois ends of personal advancement.

Alongside the effacement of radical socialism in the play, *El iluso Cañizares*, like *Las estrellas*, serves as a cautionary tale for the dangers of the working-class *chulo* that seeks to rise into the upper echelons of society. The dream *cuadros* of the play portray Aquilino as a humble worker attempting to pass not merely for a middle-class

functionary, but for the highest administrator in the city! The stage directions at the beginning of the second *cuadro* describe Aquilino's clothing, and by extension his lack of preparation for the role he is about to undertake: "[A]parece Aquilino vestido de levita y con una gran chistera, sentado frente a la mesa de la derecha y dormido apaciblemente en el sillón, con el bastón de mando en una mano. En su indumentaria debe revelarse que aquel hombre es un jornalero vestido de levita de prisa y corriendo y sin preparación alguna." What we have here is a rare creature of the *género chico*: a double *cursi*. If a *cursi* is a middle-class person characterized by cultural inadequacy as they attempt to ascend the social ladder, then Aquilino is a doubly inadequate *chulo* whose cultural inadequacy prevents him from convincingly passing for a *cursi*. Aquilino suffers because of his inability to negotiate his new social role as a broker of power and authority: instead of commanding others, he is manipulated and controlled by their greater knowledge of the 'rules of the game.' For instance, Chinarro's ominous warnings of impending danger come across as empty threats of gloom and doom in order to reap the benefits of a reward for his services. Likewise, in the fourth *cuadro* when Aquilino and his Guardias seek to view and censor a theatrical production with a reputation for moral depravity, the theater impresarios and company deftly alter the performance and shower favors and gifts on Aquilino in order to avoid government interference. Even in his dreams—a convention to which the work does not strictly adhere in any case—Aquilino lacks the knowledge and cultural literacy required to navigate the complicated realities of modern society.

## Communication, Manipulation, and the Problem of Language

Alongside the cautionary tales on the dangers of social mobility and the comic caricature of radical ideologies, Arniches and García Álvarez's collaborations explore the slipperiness of language. While the divergence between Aquilino's promises of what he will do once in power and what he actually does while wielding authority serves as the basis of *El iluso Cañizares*'s comicity, at the same time it points to the inherent problems of a political system that in large measure depends on candidates' and politicians' representation of themselves to provide the voter with the information necessary to make a knowledgeable decision. The problem of language and representation moves to the forefront in the scenes in which Chinarro warns Aquilino of dangers and threats; is Chinarro hoodwinking Aquilino to receive a higher salary, or are these words of caution the result of legitimate intelligence? The governor finds himself in a tricky position, caught between his need to gather information from trusted sources to draw educated conclusions and recognition that everyone involved has personal interests and desire at play. In an era in which powerful state-controlled organizations increasingly mediated the relationship between top government officials and the nation, language began to lose its status as a vehicle of clear communication and became a contested space where reality could no longer be disentangled from the influence of personal or corporate interests.

Arniches's collaborations with García Álvarez from 1903 to 1912 mark an important point in his development as a playwright as language ceases to be a transparent instrument of communication and increasingly becomes the site of human interaction that generates conflict. During this period, Arniches and García Álvarez develop the *fresco* character type, "a roguish, teasing fellow in whom is combined the cunning of the *pícaro*

and the disarming wit of the fool [...]. [H]e is the incarnation of deceit, gaiety, cowardice, carelessness, and greed all rolled up in a character whose devious actions miscarry” (McKay 56). Although strongly connected to the picaresque tradition in Spanish prose, the *fresco* is also a reinvention of the Don Juan figure, applying his industriousness, charm, and wit to the satisfaction of carnal desires at the expense of decent, hard-working husbands. While the aggrieved husbands threaten to avenge their affronted honor bloodily, in the end they ensnare the *fresco* in a highly theatrical trap to teach him the error of his ways before allowing the *fresco*'s enemies and victims to deliver a savage beating. This fusion of the early-modern picaresque, the Romantic Don Juan, and the honor drama avoids tragedy and firmly entrenched in comedy by replacing the violent cleansing of masculine honor with a psychological punishment in which the *fresco* feels the threat of imminent doom. The *fresco* plays thus emerge from the blending of genre, mood, and literary tradition that will typify Arniches's later grotesque tragedies.

The differences between Arniches's earlier *Calderón*, co-written with Celso Lucio, and the first *fresco* play, *El terrible Pérez*, illustrate the gradual development of language as an obstructive and evasive medium of human interaction rather than a clear instrument of communication. In *Calderón*—which premiered at the Teatro Eslava on November 10, 1890—characters come into conflict because their interests and desires impede their ability to communicate effectively with each other. Señor Manso believes that his wife has stained his honor by having relations with another man and consequently views everything that occurs through the Calderonian lens of the wronged husband, a perspective he expresses through clear allusions to the world of theater: “¡Por fin, esta noche es la tragedia! El honrado suelo de esta casa será teatro de un sangriento suceso: de

mi venganza” (327). At the same time, Solita’s perspective of the events unfolding revolves entirely around her desire to marry Arturo. After the arrival of Aniceto Calderón, the pianist hired by Doña Dolores for the dance she and Manso are hosting, these characters interpret Calderón’s words through their preoccupations and view him as an obstacle that will prevent the realization of their wishes. In Scene 8, the impoverished Calderón meets Dolores and explains to her that his suit is extremely dirty and that he would be ashamed to play for the party in such a state. Dolores remedies the situation by giving him one of her husband’s jackets while she asks the servants to clean Calderón’s coat. In Scene 10, Manso encounters Calderón, and the comedy and conflict of their conversation arise from Calderón believing that Manso’s anger is because of the jacket and the fact that Dolores secretly hired him to provide music at the party, while Manso assumes that Calderón is his wife’s lover:

Manso: ¿Y usted sabe quién soy yo?  
 Calderón: No tengo el honor de...  
 Manso: Yo soy el dueño de la casa.  
 Calderón: Muy señor mío, me tiene usted a sus órdenes, todo cuanto tengo es de usted (hasta la americana).  
 Manso: No disimule usted; lo sé todo.  
 Calderón: ¿Todo?  
 Manso: Todo. ¿No tiembla usted?  
 Calderón: ¡Sí, señor..., de frío!  
 Manso: ¿De modo que no teme usted mi enojo? ¿Usted cree que a mí se me engaña impunemente?  
 Calderón: (Anda, ya lo sabe). Mire usted, la verdad, no es culpa mía.  
 Manso: ¿Cómo?  
 Calderón: Su señora, tenía interés en ocultárselo.  
 Manso: ¡Miserable...! Siga usted; quiero saberlo todo antes de vengarme.  
 (338)

Both characters talk honestly, but are unaware that they speak about different subjects. This juxtaposition of deep-seated desire and total ignorance of the larger questions at play succeed in propelling the comedy throughout the work. When Calderón and Solita’s

beloved Arturito come into contact, this combination allows the dialogue to venture, unwittingly for Calderón, into the risqué, as Calderón believes they are arguing over the right to play at the ball while Arturito speaks of the desire to possess Solita as his wife:

Calderón: Que podíamos quedarnos los dos.

Arturito: No, señor, de ningún modo; me quedo yo solito, yo.

[Incomodado]

Calderón: No, hombre, los dos.

Arturito: Yo solo. Eso no debe ser más que para uno.

Calderón: ¡Hombre...! ¡No sea usted egoísta! Mire usted; usted podía tocar hasta las diez y media, y yo de la media para arriba.

Arturito: ¡Caballero...! ¿Qué está usted diciendo? ¡Calle usted! (346–47)

The conflict and comedy arise not from premeditated attempts to disguise reality through the mask of linguistic invention and flexibility, but rather the breakdown of communication due to interpretations in which the hearer automatically applies a context to the speaker's words without confirming the speaker's true identity or intentions.

Arniches's and García Álvarez's *El terrible Pérez*—which debuted on May 1, 1903, in the Teatro Apolo—signals a transition in Arniches's dramaturgy as language begins purposefully to occlude personal interests and desires in a murky space full of disingenuous and misleading discourse. Billed as a “humorada tragi-cómica-lírica,” the play begins conventionally enough as Concordio speaks of his role in assisting Pérez in his amorous exploits, specifically in attracting the attentions of Doña Teresita. Concordio describes the dangers that would befall him and Pérez if Don Fidel were to learn of Pérez's advances: “[S]i esa carta llegase a manos del marido, con el genio que tiene, bajaba, y los residuos del señor Pérez y los míos tenían que llevarlos a la fosa común en un pulverizador” (601). This danger of violent retribution appears real enough as Don Fidel discovers the letter, storms into Don Braulio's clothier's shop to confront Concordio and Pérez, and even fires a shot as Pérez escapes at the end of the first *cuadro*.

In the second *cuadro*, which really is a single scene that serves as a transition between the two main sections of the work, we learn that the basic premise of the play, introduced at the beginning by Concordio, is false: Fidel does not aim to slay Pérez and his dim-witted helper, but seeks only to scare them into repentance. He tells Braulio, referring to the shot that rang out in the previous *cuadro* and his larger plan:

Braulio: ¿Pero no le ha tirado usted con bala?

Fidel: ¡Quia, no señor! Si lo que le he tirado ha sido un garbano de pega.  
¿Cree usted que ese mamarracho vale la pena de que un hombre de bien se comprometa?

Braulio: ¡Hombre, yo como le he oído a usted hablar en la sastrería de aquel modo!...

Fidel: Para que me oyesen los dependientes y se lo dijeran [. . .] Les he contado lo que me pasaba a cinco o seis amigos de buen humor de los que van al café, y le tenemos preparada una, que como Pérez caiga en el lazo y vaya al baile de esta noche, que es lo que queremos, allí pagaré todo lo malo que ha hecho en su vida. (624)

Fidel reveals that everything he had said previously was a false front of discourse designed to manipulate the minds and actions of his adversaries. Unlike Epifanio in *El santo de la Isidra*—who makes good on his promise to retaliate violently against anyone who attempts to dance with Isidra at the festival—Don Fidel’s outrage and threats conceal a nuanced, supple mind that sets the stage meticulously to bring about a change of attitude in his adversary without resorting to violence. The tragic element of the play’s subtitle gives way to the comic as the audience learns well in advance that the threat of violence is empty and we are welcomed into the plot that will bring Pérez’s downfall.

But can we be so sure that the menacing specter of violence really has disappeared? Although Arniches and García Álvarez do not pursue this angle, Fidel’s revelation of a larger strategy could very well be another layer of empty discourse designed once again to disarm and manipulate his interlocutors. Such a decision on the

part of the playwrights certainly would have problematized the play's ending, in which the morally superior residents of the community discipline the public pariah for his misanthropic ways. Nonetheless, once we know that characters can and will lie to each other and to us, confidence in the direct signifying power of speech breaks down. In the broader context of genre, theatrical conventions that depend on the clarity and faithfulness of language to communicate information about the work also disintegrate. The monologue in the opening scenes of a work to provide exposition and description, for example, betrays us in *El terrible Pérez* as Concordio's summary of the back story and characterization is inaccurate. In the typical juxtaposition of characters in the Romantic Don Juan story, Don Juan manipulates others through lies and deception while his morally superior counterparts act forthrightly in accordance with their values. In *El terrible Pérez*, Don Fidel, the final arbiter of justice in the play, utilizes the same tactics of trickery and theatricality to castigate Pérez. Any and all means are employed by everyone to achieve the desired ends, be they noble or otherwise.

Arniches and García Álvarez draw a comparison between Pérez's strategies of slick speech and theatrical mind games to woo beautiful women and the tactics utilized by the modern newspaper to attract readers. In Scene 6 of the first *cuadro*, Pérez compares himself to the *ABC* periodical to describe his powers of seduction: "Fíjate: Tipo, impresión, cubierta a dos tintas, amenidad en el texto, información telegráfica sin hilos, varios pasatiempos, y rompecabezas con juguete. Soy el *ABC* de la seducción" (603). Like the modern daily newspaper, Pérez uses a variety aesthetic to be all things to all women in order to satisfy his sexual appetite. He carefully manages his appearance, speech, tone, actions, and presentation to present a highly controlled audio-visual



experience of himself to those in his company. He has become pure exteriority and surface, shrouding himself in language and visual appeal in order to conceal his true intentions and purposes. Later in the play, when Pérez puts his flirtatious powers of attraction on display for the others in the clothier's shop to witness as he pretends to be a tailor, Concordio exclaims: "¡Este tío está largando un artículo de *Vida Galante!*" (607), once again connecting Pérez's chameleon-like powers of molding himself into what others want him to be with the business logic of modern periodicals. The play links the slipperiness of discourse in the public sphere with the roguish behavior and cynical calculations of the anti-hero Pérez, an association that implies an ambivalent stance toward modern mass media. Even though Pérez suffers a spectacular downfall in the end, Don Fidel uses the same methods to deliver justice, thereby calling into question the legitimacy of this punitive act. Modern mass media offer the same conundrum, as their nearly perfect permeation of contemporary society make it impossible to address the abuse and manipulation of the media except through those very same media.

Arniches and García Álvarez's second *fresco* play, *El pobre Valbuena*—which premiered on July 1, 1904, in the Teatro Apolo—further develops the theme of the unreliability of communication. In the opening scene, all of the characters speak of their fondness for Valbuena and their sympathy for his neurological affliction:

Salustiano: ¡Pues Valbuena es el tío más simpático que come pan en este globo!

Paca: ¡Un santo! [. . .] Pero pa que veas lo sarcasmo que es el mundo. Un hombre tan servicial y tan útil como ese, y es más desgraciao que una pelota del *Fu-bul*.

Ludgarda: ¿Desgraciao, por qué?

Salustiano: Pues porque le dan unos arcidentes tremendísimos.

Ludgarda: ¡Cómo arcidentes!...

Paca: Sí, chica, que está tan tranquilo hablando contigo y de pronto ¡blum!, un espasmo, y si no lo coges en tus brazos, cae redondo.

Ludgarda: ¡Ay, qué lástima!

Paca: ¡Pobre Valbuena! Nosotros lo queremos con delirio. (809–810)

Immediately after this conversation, Valbuena appears in Scene 2 as he recovers from an attack he suffered during an argument with another man. His appearance corroborates the descriptions of his kind nature and physical malady. After Salustiano asks for Valbuena's help in an amorous escapade in Scene 3, however, we learn that all is not as it appears:

Valbuena: Vaya, ¿amplía usted la suma a doscientas pesetas y le hago a usted poseedor de un secreto pa abrazar mujeres y reírse de los hombres sin peligro?

Salustiano: ¡Pues ya lo creo! Venga.

Valbuena: Allá va. ¿Usted cree que yo soy neurasténico?

Salustiano: Claro que sí.

Valbuena: No hay tal cosa. ¡Es mi martingala! En mi estao normal abrazaba yo antes a una mujer y me desabrochaba una mandíbula de una bofetá; pero inventé esto de los arcidentes y ahora me derrumbo en brazos de la que me gusta, preso de un ataque, y no hay ninguna que no me recoja en su seno, compadecida. (816)

Earlier impressions of Valbuena evaporate and give way to a different view of his moral character and behavior. Through clever parroting of scientific discourse and vocabulary, Valbuena has invented an infirmity by creating a new word to describe it. Valbuena takes advantage of the emerging expert paradigm of scientific research, a realm of intellectual inquiry sealed off from the rest of society by a series of stringent barriers including specialized vocabulary accessible only to those within the limited expert group (Walsh 366–67). By employing a complex, unfamiliar idiom, Valbuena controls communication by automatically limiting the degree to which his interlocutors can understand his speech, thereby precluding any serious investigation of the veracity of his condition.

The resolution of *El pobre Valbuena* is more problematic and more revealing than the end of *El terrible Pérez*. Unlike Pérez, Valbuena is not the principal instigator of dishonorable activity, but facilitates Salustiano's advances toward Pepe el Tranquilo's

wife by collecting a letter and providing Salustiano with a strategy for attracting the attentions of the beautiful woman and evading her dangerous husband. Pepe assures that he will avenge himself through violence at the end of the second *cuadro*, but in the end he neglects to kill either Valbuena or Salustiano in the scuffle that occurs at the *kermesse*, the nocturnal festival that serves as the setting for the third section of the play. Instead of publicly condemning either Valbuena or Salustiano when their wives arrive in the final scene of the play, Pepe inexplicably covers up the grievances committed by them and participates in the false medical discourse they have used in their exploits:

Paca: [*A Pepe*] ¿Por qué se pegaban ustedes?

Pepe: Por distracción.

Valbuena: ¡Me ha descoyuntao ese animal!

Paca: ¿Pero por qué ha sido?

Pepe: Señora, es usted tan extremadamente simpática, que no merece usted que se le diga la verdad.

Paca: ¿Qué quie usted decir?

Pepe: Pues que los he visto arcidentaos esta mañana y he dicho: a estas naturalezas anémicas las hago yo reaccionar. [*A ellos*]. ¿Y a que no se vuelven ustedes a desmayar en su vida?

Salustiano: ¡Ni mucho menos!

Valbuena: ¡Ni de debilidad!

Pepe: Para la *nurastenia* no hay como un *sanatorio*. . .de este tamaño [*Enseñando la estaca*]. Todo ha sido una ligereza, *si que cariñosa* broma. Sigán ustedes gozando del festival nozturno, y [*A ellos*] no olvidarse de que a Pepe el Tranquilo el que se la hace se la abona. Dicho. (862)

Not wishing to create a scandal or commit a crime in the presence of the men's wives and the civil authorities, Pepe el Tranquilo co-opts Valbuena's faux medical discourse and redeploys it to serve his own ends, without being fully aware that the medical condition to which he refers does not actually exist. For Arniches and García Álvarez in the *fresco* plays, language and visual information are in the process of breaking down as vehicles of clear, reliable communication and instead begin to take on a life of their own, becoming

tangible, palpable materials through which to generate a particular image or set of images of the self and manipulate the perceptions and interpretations of others.

The collaborations between Arniches and García Álvarez, which ended abruptly in 1912 due to a personal rift, brought two different theatrical perspectives into extended contact that would alter the work of Arniches in the following years. In their joint efforts, they fused Arniches's developing didactic tendencies with García Álvarez's dedication to a theater of comedy designed for a night of entertainment and escapism.<sup>41</sup> The best of the *fresco* plays achieves a synthesis and coexistence of these dramatic modalities, structuring individual scenes and interactions around the verbal and physical comedy García Álvarez wished to emphasize while fitting all of these into a broader social landscape and formal structure that communicated a latent call to morality, charity, and hard work as the pillars of Spanish renewal in the wake of national economic, political, cultural, and perhaps even spiritual crisis. Although his decision to work almost exclusively in collaborations makes it difficult to discern the specific qualities that define García Álvarez's theatrical vision,<sup>42</sup> after his nine-year partnership with Arniches ended García Álvarez worked with Pedro Muñoz Seca, with whom he developed "his *astracán* humor from the moderate use of dialogue which characterized his plays with Arniches into the most lavish exhibition of vocalized inverisimilitude and absurdity to be witnessed on the Spanish stage" (McKay 55). Arniches, in contrast, emerged from the creative alliance with García Álvarez with a more polished understanding of how to pace and

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<sup>41</sup> Elena Palacios Gutiérrez observes that García Álvarez "[r]echazaba una creación basada en la tesis, la filosofía y los pensamientos subyacentes a favor del mero entretenimiento de un público que, durante el transcurso de la función, debía olvidarse de los problemas de la vida" (1051).

<sup>42</sup> Of his entire theatrical *oeuvre*, García Álvarez wrote only three works by himself due to his notorious lack of discipline as a writer: *El ratón* (1906), *El fuego* (1923), and *Las aceitunas* (date unknown). (Palacios Gutiérrez 1052).

extend verbal interactions in his plays to build the comedy and irony to a crescendo instead of relying on massive quantities of facile one-liners as he had done for so long in his earlier comic work in the *género chico*. This new comprehension of the contours and rhythms of dramatic dialogue carried his individual, longer works in the following decades to new heights of commercial success and critical acclaim.

### **1898 and the Veneer of Discourse**

In the context of Spain's spectacular defeat at the hands of the United States in Cuba and the Philippines in 1898 and the role that newspapers played in controlling perceptions of the conflict in both countries, the intersection of truth, discourse, and media was a topic of concern for intellectuals and writers in Spain at the time Arniches and García Álvarez were carrying out their first collaborations in the *fresco* plays. Coverage of wars against Cuban insurgents had been constant in Spain in the latter decades of the nineteenth century, but the growing threat of American intervention in the mid 1890s transformed the conflict from a matter of colonial policing into an international affair and, consequently, front-page news in Spain and the United States. Journalistic representations of the diplomatic proceedings and ensuing armed conflict played a key role in mediating the public's understanding of the events unfolding in Cuba and perception of those events' significance for their homelands. In Spain, the portrayal of the impending conflict with the United States as necessary defense of national honor and a demonstration of Spain's moral superiority contributed to the national malaise experienced by a generation of thinkers following Spain's defeat.

In the pages of mass-circulation daily newspapers, journalists depicted the coming war as a conflict between Spain's honor and nobility and the United States's crass materialism and cynical geopolitical vision. Writing a few years after the war, Martin Andrew Sharp Hume wrote: "Spain was poor and unprepared, but she was anxiously desirous at last to do justice to Cuba, and was proudly indignant at the peremptory demand of the American Republic. Her honour was touched, she dared not give way" (560). The most successful newspaper during this period, *El Imparcial*, provides a number of illuminating examples in the days before Spain declared war on April 23, 1898. In an editorial titled "¡¡España, España!!" from April 7, 1898, the author implores the reader to set aside political divisions and ideological rifts in order to think only of Spain: "[A]hora, frente a la iniquidad, a la ingratitud y a la soberbia que pretenden arrojar unos derechos evidentes y una bandera honrada [. . .] frente a los que, en fin, imaginan que la riqueza de un pueblo puede ir más allá que el honor de otro pueblo, ahora, frente a tales gentes y a tales procedimientos, es fuerza pensar sólo en España" (1). The author develops this theme by presenting the United States's actions as a series of increasingly outrageous offenses to Spain's honor:

Con mengua de la razón y daño del honor se rasga el tupido velo de prudencia con que España quiso vestirse, y descubierto el rostro de esta nación hidalga, por creerla empobrecida y exhausta de fuerzas, le abofetea un embajador medio general y medio comerciante con un escrito donde se marca el plazo de seis horas para resolver. ¡España tratada con los respetos y consideraciones que se usan con Haití! (1)

The author's analysis of the two nations interprets Spain's economic weakness through a quasi-bohemian lens, understanding the lack of industrial strength as the byproduct of a noble spirit that eschews material advancement in favor of moral superiority. The writer offers concise statements designed to develop this dichotomy between U.S. materialism

and Spanish idealism: “Fíanlo todo los yankees al poderío de sus elementos; nosotros lo pondremos todo en las energías del honor. Una máquina, por perfecta y acabada que sea, se destruye; un sentimiento noble no muere jamás” (1). The opposition employed in this editorial and in so many essays and articles on these events presents the conflict with the United States as a war between materialist utilitarianism and defense of Western culture, honor, and nobility. In the years following Spain’s defeat at the hands of the United States, this dichotomy gained greater currency in the cultural debates of Pan-Hispanism revolving around Uruguayan essayist José Enrique Rodó’s *Ariel* (1900).

In this context, journalistic representation of the buildup to the Spanish-American War served an interpretive purpose rather than an informative function. Ron M. Carden observes that Spanish public opinion overwhelmingly supported the defense of Cuba and “reacted with patriotic fervor to any mention of giving up the island” (57). Public opinion—inflamed to some degree by newspapers—put politicians in the difficult position of having to defend Spanish interests in Cuba against a superior adversary (Carasa 94). Newspapers’ interest in maintaining positive relationships with the established power structure led them to embed facts in a broader narrative that attempted to make sense of the conflict and justify Spain’s intransigent stance. Ironically, this is exactly the type of reporting paradigm pursued in American “yellow journalism,” in which reporters used newsgathering techniques to supply evidence that was incorporated into an interpretation of events and mediated by a stunning visual aesthetic (Campbell 1–8).<sup>43</sup> While it would be a mistake to identify newspapers as the cause of the war or

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<sup>43</sup> Campbell strongly rejects the common idea that “yellow journalism” simply pushes an ideological agenda with total disregard for the facts. For example, he cites William Randolph Hearst’s claim that the *New York Journal* spent in excess of \$750,000 for newsgathering regarding the Spanish-American War and

Spain's defeat,<sup>44</sup> journalism's movement away from telegraphic reporting of facts and toward a more interpretive stance toward the war certainly fueled suspicion of emerging mass media's ability to manipulate information and, therefore, public perception.

Acting out of self-interest, Madrilenian newspapers masked Spain's disastrous prospects in the war behind a veneer of discourse on honor, nobility, and patriotism. Articles in the newspapers frequently allude to Spain's legendary warrior spirit and historical achievements in battle in an appeal to modern Spaniards' sense of national pride and patriotic spirit. A short item in *El Imparcial* from April 8, 1898, summarizes an article titled "A España le conviene la guerra," published on the same day in the Cuban newspaper *La Lucha*: "Comparando las fuerzas de España con las de los Estados Unidos no encuentra ninguna superioridad en las de este último país, pues España—añade—tiene razón y tiene soldados que pelean impulsados por el patriotismo, y los Estados Unidos solo cuentan con legiones de mercenarios que no comprenden el sentimiento de la patria y del honor" (2). Like many of its contemporaries, this article hides the material and numerical inferiority of the Spanish navy and army behind the language of patriotism and heroism. On April 6, 1898, *El Imparcial*'s front page editorial, "Por si acaso," offered a list of strategies the United States would pursue in the opening weeks of the potential conflict. The writer asks the reader to remain calm in case such events come to fruition, because ultimately the enemy seeks to sow panic among the Spanish population. Given our knowledge of what occurred in the war, the next lines of the editorial are shocking

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the events leading to it as evidence that "yellow journalism" led innovation in newsgathering techniques. Adjusted for inflation, \$750,000 in 1898 is the equivalent of roughly \$20 million in 2011.

<sup>44</sup> David Ralph Spencer eloquently rejects such an interpretation: "There is considerable merit in blaming both Hearst's *New York Journal* and Pulitzer's the *World New York* for playing fast and loose with the truth in their respective attempts to garner larger and larger circulations. But to assert that these two journalistic enterprises were capable of dragging a reluctant nation into battle is both misleading and erroneous" (124).



indeed: “Todos esos riesgos son más escénicos que reales. Con un poco de serenidad, esa jugada de ajedrez, preparada en tanto tiempo como se ha dejado al gobierno de Washington para colocar las piezas en las casillas que mejor le han parecido, se anulará con que mueva nuestro gobierno con oportunidad las piezas de que dispone” (1). After itemizing the tactical and material advantages enjoyed by the U.S., the article only vaguely refers to the pieces at the Spanish government’s disposal, clearly wishing to avoid a direct comparison of the two nations’ military power. In a moment of supreme irony, the author claims that the United States’s tactics were based on theatricality, a mere façade of strength attempting to hide a reality of weakness; perhaps the author was unaware that he was describing the rhetorical strategy of his editorial.

The war with the United States demonstrated the increasing opacity of language in modern mass media. Newspapers supported the war effort out of the hope of broadening circulation and strengthening political relationships, just as businessmen benefited from profitable deals to supply and transport troops (Carasa 111). Instead of maintaining a critical, distanced stance from governmental policies, the dailies in Madrid contributed to those policies by presenting them positively in the public arena. The lead editorial of *El Liberal* on April 22, 1898 demonstrates this tendency:

Ante la guerra de legítima defensa a que nos obligan provocaciones e ingerencias de que no hay ejemplo desde los días del primer Bonaparte, tiene la nación española confianza plena en sí misma.

Sólo necesita, no para cumplir con el deber y el honor—que en ese punto no le hacen falta estímulos—sino para llegar a los últimos límites de la perseverancia heroica, tener una confianza igual en aquellos que la gobiernan. (1)

The subjugation of transparency to the political and economic interests of individuals and groups, however, was not simply a characteristic of newspapers or the Spanish-

American War alone, but of the Restoration Monarchy in general. Speaking about the government's tacit agreements with rural strongmen to maintain the social status quo, Juan Pablo Fusi and Jordi Palafox argue that the supposed stability of the Restoration period "era una realidad artificial y frágil, que no aguantaba la más leve movilización de la opinión" (173). The Restoration Monarchy and *turno pacífico* system was a house of cards held together by frenetic improvisation and the veneer of permanence promoted by mass journalism's discourse of patriotism and national pride.

Arniches and García Álvarez's interest in the opaque qualities of language as a medium of human interaction emerges from a socio-political context full of empty discourse and misleading public pronouncements. Their theatrical works, although of a comic nature, tap into larger issues as they incorporate the slippery, unstable characteristics of language into their dramatic vision. Plays such as *El iluso Cañizares* and *El pobre Valbuena* may appear as frivolous comedic works, but at a deeper level they reflect the social anxieties and fractured body politic of a society moving haphazardly toward democratic government and modernity in the context of emerging mass media.

### **A Laboratory on the Printed Page: *Del Madrid castizo***

The decline of the *género chico* in the first decades of the twentieth century led Arniches's creative attentions to splinter during and after his collaborations with García Álvarez.<sup>45</sup> Ruiz Albéniz points to the 1904–1905 season as the year that initiated the

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<sup>45</sup> Following the triumph of *El santo de la Isidra* in 1898, Arniches and his collaborators rode a wave of triumphs with *sainetes* such as *La fiesta de San Antón* and *Las estrellas* and many of the *fresco* plays, as well as forays into the romantic *comedia* such as *Alma de Dios*, which debuted on December 17, 1907 in the Teatro Cómico. During this period Arniches applied his theatrical vision to a variety of enterprises and projects, trying his hand at Echegaray-inspired melodrama in *La sobrina del cura* (1914) and a full-length *zarzuela* with *La estrella de Olimpia* (1915), all the while continuing to cultivate the *sainete* in *El amigo Melquíades* (1914). César Oliva regards 1921 as a fine example of how the playwright constantly moved

descent of the *género chico* while signaling the deaths of composer Ruperto Chapí in January, 1909 and librettist Ricardo de la Vega in June, 1910 and the unnoticed disappearance of actor Emilio Carreras from Madrilenian stages as the end of an era (402–16). The waning success of the theatrical formulas that had garnered huge attendance for the previous twenty years required Arniches to turn his attention to new means by which to attract audiences (Ríos Carratalá, “Arniches y el teatro cómico” 2397). The necessity to discover fresh material and move in new directions led Arniches to a period of experimentation that culminated with the volume of short plays *Del Madrid castizo*, a collection of one-act plays that bridge Arniches’s earlier commercial work with the longer, more artistically accomplished pieces of his later career.

In the prologue of *Del Madrid castizo*, Arniches tells the reader: “Empecé a publicar en la prensa estos cuadros de ambiente popular madrileño por indicaciones de un amigo ilustre y queridísimo, don Torcuato Luca de Tena” (51). Luca de Tena was not just any “amigo ilustre,” but none other than the guru of the Spanish print industry and founder of the daily newspaper *ABC* and the lavishly produced monthly magazine *Blanco y Negro*, where the *sainetes rápidos* that constitute *Del Madrid castizo* first were published in 1915 and 1916. Arniches coyly understates the importance of these pieces in the prologue, where he writes: “No tienen significación ni importancia artística ni trascendencia literaria” (51). These sketches lack ‘transcendence’ or ‘importance’ not because the plays are not vibrant and lively works of theater, but because they were conceived as a project in which Arniches experiments with the relationship between form

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from genre to genre in order to find new avenues for pleasing the audience and achieving other dramatic goals: “Tres de las cuatro comedias que estrena en 1921 señalan con claridad la variedad de horizontes de Arniches. Sin renunciar a la crítica social (*La heroica villa*), deambula con firmeza por los caminos del melodrama (*La chica del gato*), y es capaz de sacar una fuerte situación dramática de un simple sainete (*Es mi hombre*)” (53).

and content. Arniches connects the *mise en scène* of the collection with the humble status of the prologue itself: “Podría yo haber buscado un escritor ilustre de fama indiscutida que hubiese prologado este libro, pero no he querido que la ingerencia de una pluma brillante le haga perder la humildad de su condición” (51). He goes on to write: “Todo en [el libro] debe ser como el medio social que refleja: pobre, sencillo, oscuro” (51). Arniches is beginning to see a relationship between message and medium, an understanding that is brought to bear on the prologue of the collection in which the plays were published together for the first time. In his introduction to *Del Madrid castizo*, José Montero Padilla observes: “El teatro de Carlos Arniches [. . .] concede un valor primordial a la palabra: la agudeza, la gracia dialogística, el golpe imprevisto, la ocurrencia inesperada, el ingenio, la sorna y el desgarrar verbales, aspectos todos de eminentísima eficacia teatral, se apoyan y viven en la primacía de la palabra” (23). Since language is the medium through which drama emerges, Arniches recognizes the need to control the prologue so that it coincides with the impoverished people of the *barrios bajos* that populate *Del Madrid castizo*.

In the *sainetes rápidos*, Arniches’s reliance on character types and stock situations begins to disintegrate as he continues to explore language as the medium through which social interaction and identity formation occur. In “Los pobres,” the prose introduction that precedes the dramatic dialogue describes the setting, but communicates no information regarding the personalities or traits of the characters. It is only through the verbal interaction between Señá Justa, Señá Librada and Señor Celipe that we learn that all three are *pordioseros* who beg for a living. They talk about strategies employed by beggars to ply their trade and elicit money from upper- and middle-class *madrileños*. The

reader does not experience these marginalized figures through the ideological lens of a narrator or other 'guide' that interprets and explains their character and morality, but rather Arniches attempts to bring the reader into direct contact with the beggars and allow them to speak for themselves. We should not believe that Arniches succeeds, because his regenerationist reformism is felt at the end of the dialogue when Señá Librada and Señá Justa explain the root of the problem of begging:

Señá Librada: A más, que si no diesen no pediríamos.

Señá Justa: Esa es la fija. De forma que si quien acabar con la mendicidad y quieren recoger, que no recojan a los pobres que piden; que recojan a los tontos que dan, que son los culpables. (59)

The didactic intention in this comic denouement of the conversation is all too clear, but at the same time Arniches's gesture of allowing members of the social periphery to dominate the work without the direct intervention of middle-class mediators, as is common in much of the *género chico*, should not go unnoticed. Developing characters through verbal communication rather than the narrow constraints of *género chico* typology permits Arniches to construct a more complex view of the values and opinions that inform the decisions of Señá Librada, Señá Justa, and Señor Celipe. Near the end, Celipe complains about contemporary charity: "¡Que hay que ver lo de mala fe que se ha puesto la caridá hoy en día!" (57). Celipe tells of how he asked a woman for money who bought him a loaf of bread, tearing it in half to prevent him from selling it to someone else, which was his plan all along. Celipe and the women's indignant reaction paints a picture of these characters as they recognize the marginal status of their occupation but at the same time expect others to accept it as a legitimate means of making a living.

"Los pobres" demonstrates how Arniches continued to explore the slipperiness of language and appearance as his theatrical vision matured. Celipe's annoyance in response

to his failed plan to resell the bread exhibits the collapse of language as a tool of communication. Celipe expects the woman to recognize his stories as artistry executed for a purpose rather than as truth. When he tells the woman: “Señorita, por la salud de sus hijos, déme usted pa un panecillo, que hace cuarenta y ocho horas que no lo pruebo” (57), he does not expect her to respond as if this were true, but rather expects her to reward the effort and artistry he applies to his begging. This notion of artistry and spectacle runs throughout the short play, as the three characters speak of different strategies to use for begging. Celipe describes a collaborative effort in which he regularly participates:

[U]n truco que se le ha ocurrido al señor Quintín el Bolas, que es un diantre pa inventar. Nos ha reclutao a siete u ocho conocidos de la cuesta e las Descargas; nos caracteriza de albañiles con un poco de yeso, que parece talmente que acabamos de bajar del andamio, nos lleva a Recoletos, tiende un pañuelo de hierbas en metá del paseo y le dice, señalándonos, a tóo el que pasa: <<Grupo de obreros sin trabajo>>. (58)

Quintín el Bolas’s plan uses all the tactics of an effective theatrical spectacle, manipulating linguistic and visual information to draw the spectator into a world of illusion. The status of speech and sight are thrown into question in the short play: none of the people who give beggars money are portrayed as people who actually believe what the beggars tell them. The woman who buys Celipe bread refuses to give him money or the ability to turn the bread into money precisely because she does not believe the veracity of his story. This play responds to how the modern social contract is no longer an agreement of mutual responsibility to the wellbeing of the community; rather, the modern social contract is based on theatricality, spectacle, and the willful suspension of disbelief as language and sight lose their ability to guide the subject to objective reality.

The illusory and elusive nature of language permeates the short plays in *Del Madrid castizo*. “Los ateos” proffers an interpretation of contemporary atheism in

Spanish society that regards disbelief as a false discourse of plenitude and self satisfaction. In the first *cuadro*, in response to Señor Eulalio's defense of God, Señor Floro asserts: "En este mundo no hay nada más que este mundo, donde está todo, lo bueno, lo malo y lo entreverao. Y el día que te mueras vuelves al seno de la tierra materna y te haces polvo, fósforo, gaseosa... nada. ¡He dicho!" (129). The obvious allusion to Góngora's "Mientras por competir con tu cabello" serves a dual purpose by presenting Floro as moderately educated while at the same time portraying his incongruous use of Spain's cultural tradition; education and information do not equal intelligence and reason. Floro's bizarre allusion to Góngora—does a seventeenth-century sonnet on the paradox of the fleeting nature of beauty really confirm the inexistence of God?—implies a critique of how the modern public sphere transmutes cultural knowledge into an empty status symbol or indicator of socio-economic class. In the second *cuadro*, Floro suffers a near-death experience in which he reaffirms his faith, a matter he discusses with Eulalio in the third and final *cuadro*. In an ideologically charged moment, Eulalio suggests that people are only comfortable with atheism or agnosticism when they are safe: "Cuando el hombre está bueno y sano y se encuentra en la taberna rodeado de cuatro necios que le rían las gracias, el hombre es un valiente [ . . . ] pero cuando cambia el viento, y viene la negra, y el dolor te mete acobardao y solo en el rincón de tu casa... Será uno to lo blásfemo que sea; pero yo te digo que no hay quien no levante los ojos pa lo alto y pida misericordia" (134). In the end, Eulalio admits that he conceals his renewed faith when in the company of his friends to avoid embarrassment, and the two talk of strategies to conceal their belief:

Señor Eulalio: Pues que cuando paso por delante de una iglesia, pa saludar y que no me se burlen los compañeros, me quito la boina y me la sacudo de yeso.

Señor Floro: A mí me se había ocurrido levantarme la visera de la gorra y rascarme, que también es disimulao.

Señor Eulalio: Sí, pero eso no tié novedaz.

Señor Floro: ¿Tú crees?

Señor Eulalio: Se lo he visto hacer a la mar de *ateos*. (135)

In spite of their religious renewal, both characters disguise their belief through theatricality and deceptive discourse to create an unbridgeable gap between their true selves and the persona they project in the public sphere.

In “El premio de Nicanor o ¿a quién le doy la suerte?” the slipperiness of language turns into a force for positive progress and correcting the weaknesses that trap the poor in a cycle of poverty and bad habits. The play begins as Isidoro learns that his wife Segunda bought a lottery ticket with Enriqueta, but neglected to pay her; when Enriqueta’s ticket won, Segunda thought she was entitled to half of the winnings, a point Enriqueta contests. Isidoro complaints about his wife’s addiction to the lottery reflect a broader regenerationist view of the game as a wasteful source of conflict: “¿Lo estás viendo, Segunda, lo está viendo?... ¡La lotería!... ¡La maldita lotería, que encima que merma el jornal de los pobres y los arruina, no da más que disgustos!” (73). Nicanor states that he and his wife Brígida owe their good fortune to the lottery. This statement is misleading, as Nicanor explains how he turned his wife’s compulsive obsession into a means by which to save money for long-term investments in their financial independence. Nicanor tricked his wife into depositing money for lottery tickets into a jar for years, until one day they found they had accumulated a quantity matching the biggest prizes and used those savings to open their store. Nicanor reinvents the narrative of the lottery, replacing the promise of a large, immediate payout—based on luck, of course—with sustained effort



and discipline over time. His actions demonstrate the instability of language because he alters the signified to which the signifier 'lotería' refers, a simple substitution that Brígida criticized when she told him: "¡Pero cómo va a tocarnos jugando de este modo!" (74). Brígida's recognition that they do not play the game properly points to the linguistic sleight of hand that Nicanor employs to modify her spending habits.

Rather than confined to the petty and mundane trials of life in the *barrios bajos*, the exploration of the vicissitudes of language and meaning in *Del Madrid castizo* extends to a broader social and political purview via the lens of the working-class neighborhoods of Madrid. In "Los ricos," Serapio and Paulino, two poor coachmen, talk animatedly about their relation to the rich. Serapio echoes Aquilino from *El iluso Cañizares* as a caricature of radical political discourse, asserting at the very beginning that he would violently rid the world of rich people: "[Q]ue tuviese yo el Poder en mis manos cinco horitas náa más, y que me hicían papilla si quedaba un rico pa contarlo" (138). Serapio's severe point of view is the result of his (weak) understanding of socialist discourse, which leads him to say that he longs for "el día glorioso en que se proclame que la propiedad es un robo y que tóo tié que ser de tóos y que hay que repartirlo" (142) and that if he had millions of *pesetas*, he would provide others with what they need: "Yo lo daría tóo, yo lo repartiría tóo" (143). As he expounds on his conviction of the necessity of the redistribution of wealth, he is distracted:

Serapio: Oye tú, ¿qué buscas ahí?

Nicanor: Náa, que por no interrumpirte no te he pedío permiso; pero es que no tengo tabaco, y, como tú tiés aquí una cajetilla sin empezar, te iba a tomar un cigarro.

Serapio: (*Indignado*) Pues tómaselo a tu respetable agüelo, si te es lo mismo. ¡Vaya una frescura!

Nicanor: Hombre, es que, como no tengo tabaco...

Serapio: Pues te fumas el dedo. Suelta el cigarro...

Nicanor: Pero, señor, por un pitillo...

Serapio: Ni por uno ni por medio. Lo mío es pa mí, y el que quiera echar humo, que le prendan fuego. (143)

As is the case of Aquilino in *El iluso Cañizares*, Serapio does not understand the connection between abstract political concepts and the concrete daily realities of how he interacts with other people. Serapio's parroting of socialist ideology is a feeble façade of political consciousness that masks his underlying agenda of wanting to spend his time idly without ever working again. Paulino, in contrast, focuses on his tasks and says that everyone must work together for a better future: "[V]eo que las cosas del mundo las tenemos que arreglar tóos, altos y bajos, y, consecuente con ello, hago lo mío" (141). Paulino's perspective echoes Arniches's belief in the edifying power of work to bring prosperity both to the individual and to society as a whole.

"Los neutrales" deals with one of the most serious themes in *Del Madrid castizo* by presenting a conversation in which a number of characters discuss World War I and Spain's neutrality in the European conflagration. The play portrays how people take ownership of the information brought into their everyday lives by mass media and fit current events into their quotidian experience. The play begins with Peroles explaining that Felipe broke his nose during a fight that occurred because Felipe is *aliadófilo* and Peroles is *germanófilo*. Peroles describes a series of insults the two exchanged about military and political figures on both sides, a petty argument that ended in fisticuffs. Both bring their knowledge about the war to bear on a conflict of neighborhood rivalry and bravado, thus demonstrating how familiarity with important events of the time influences each man's conscious and subconscious construction of identity. Severino then tells the group of how he had been strongly *germanófilo*, but that he had decided to give up his

affiliation because of all the arguments and clashes it provoked. He describes how his obsession with the war began to infiltrate his dreams: “Pues una noche, que por cierto en la cena me había caído un poco de aceite en el pantalón, soñé que estaba en el canal de la Mancha. La Bernabea, mi señora, era el U-18, y yo un pesquero inglés [...] Otra noche soñé también que mi suegra me había puesto una alambrada a la puerta de la taberna y me quería aniquilar con los gases asfixiantes, pa que no entrase” (80–81). Daily experience with media accounts of the war affects Severino’s mental life to such a degree that he reconstructs the pressures and struggles of daily life in his dreams using the imagery and backdrop of the war.

The group of workers’ fascination with the European War in “Los neutrales” is a case study of how spectacle dominates the interaction between consumers and mass media representation of events in the modern public sphere. Marceliano tells his companions that his interest in the tactics and strategies of the war led him to buy a map of Europe—“de esos que vendían en la Puerta del Sol por veinte céntimos”—to track the movement of the various countries’ troops using different types of dry cereals and beans. Interest in the war for these men ceases to be a matter of curiosity and becomes a pastime and an obsession as they seek out the latest news in the papers and pass the hours in the tavern or coffee houses debating the merits of military strategies and discussing the possible outcomes of the war. Opinions about the war offer new modes of sociability with friends and strangers in the city; those sharing opinions enjoy solidarity based on a sense of agreement and their unison against the opposing faction. Severino speaks of how, during his days as an arduous *germanófilo*, his beliefs led to a breach between himself and his brother-in-law: “Al principio de las hostilidades me pegaba yo con mi

sombra por Alemania. En fin: baste deciros que a mi cuñado Aniceto, que repartía una carrera de Abes ceces el invierno pasado, un parroquiano, compadecido de verle que andaba a cuerpo le dio un ruso pa que se abrigase; pues desde el día que le vi con el ruso, que ya no le volví a saludar” (80). Arniches’s portrayal of the senseless conflicts generated by the European war in Spain points to a deeper concern of how the proliferation of entertainment under the guise of information promotes ruptures and schisms in the body politic.

“Los neutrales” expresses a preoccupation that Spaniards see the war raging across Europe as a spectacle rather than a human catastrophe unlike any the world had ever seen. Severino’s eventual decision to give up his preference for the German Empire in favor of a shifting allegiance to whomever those around him support parodies the serious matter of Spain’s official neutrality in World War I. Severino says: “Mi opinión es que me fíen; pa cuyo ojeto me adazto a las ideas del dueño del local en que delibero, que es lo que está haciendo la mar de gente” (82). When his friends criticize him for lacking ideals, Severino’s replies: “¿[Y] qué ideal tienen los que arramblan con el arroz, y las patatas, y el ganao, y a pesar de la burocracia [sic] gubernamental se lo llevan frontera alante, pa que luego los pobres comamos ñañaños?” (82). His response connects Severino’s cynical position with the Spanish government’s and business community’s decision to remain neutral during the war to profit from food and arms sales to both sides.<sup>46</sup> The comic dialogue at the end of the play, rather than relieving the tension of this parallel between Spain’s stance on the war and Severino’s cynical attitude, exacerbates it:

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<sup>46</sup> According to Raymond Carr, “La neutralidad española fue la clave de la prosperidad de tiempos de guerra. Una vez pasado el desconcierto inicial, la demanda de los beligerantes se hizo insaciable, alimentando un auge exportador en un país que poseía un débil mercado interior [. . .]. Se trató de una era

Marceliano: Hombre, a mí, la verdá, estar aquí gozando nosotros en una tarde como ésta, y pensar que hay tantos millones de hombres peleando allá lejos..., me da así una meaja. . ., vamos. . .

Señor Severino: Pero ¿es que íbamos a estar mejor en las trincheras, so primo?

Marceliano: Hombre, no; pero. . .

Señor Severino: ¡Qué allí se ventila el porvenir del mundo, pues aquí nos ventilamos nosotros!

Peroles: Tóo es ventilarse.

Marceliano: Sí, pero. . .

Señor Severino: Moja y calla. ¡Pa algo somos neutrales! (*Comen y rien*)

(84)

Severino repeatedly cuts off Marceliano as he attempts to articulate the ethical problems of watching the European war and hiding behind neutrality rather than supporting one of the clashing ideologies. The final line of the play reflects Spain's decision to remain silent and devour the fruits of a booming economy during the wartime depression experienced by the rest of Europe. When Severino says "¡Pa algo somo neutrales!" his comment communicates more than just the safety afforded by neutrality by pointing to the fact that the discourse of neutrality is a sleek way to package the headhunting mentality of a government seeking to gain economic and geopolitical advantage over its European rivals by using the war as a business opportunity.

This discussion of World War I as spectacle and Spain's compromised neutrality calls to mind Schwartz's theory of the spectacularization of modern society and Baudelaire's theory of the comic in the previous chapter. Both of these conceptions of modern social and cultural life posit the spectator or *flâneur* not as independent observers but as active participants in the cultural, social, political, or ideological exchange implied by viewing. Arniches's "Los neutrales" broaches many of these themes, not arguing for Spain to support one side or the other in World War I, but seeking to revise the attitude

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de beneficios conseguidos sin esfuerzo y de elevados dividendos para la industria naval, la siderúrgica y la minería" (118).

with which Spaniards make sense of the war. Implicit in “Los neutrales” is an understanding that any position—whether *germanófilo*, *aliadófilo*, or Severino’s cynical “gangófilo”—is morally, if not politically or ideologically, compromised. To view the war as a pastime or entertainment, the moral position implicit in many Spaniards’ ambivalent engagement with the conflict, is the most morally pernicious position of all in Arniches’s short *sainete*.

Arniches takes up the theme of the ethical position of the spectator or ‘laugher’ again in “La risa del pueblo,” the heart of the regenerationist tone of *Del Madrid castizo*. Bonifacio Menéndez and his wife Angustias talk to Primitivo and El Sardina, two acquaintances from Lavapiés, and listen to their stories of nights of revelry. Primitivo and El Sardina recount frivolous pranks until a story irritates the more subdued couple:

Primitivo: [Q]ue como enfrente del bar la calle hace mucha cuesta y la acera es estrechita, fue el Verruga, y a la plancha del alcantarillao, que es de plomo, la dio de jaboncillo, y no pasaba un transeúnte que no se diese una costalada.

El Sardina: Y no sus quiero decir ca talegazo la juerga que s’armaba en el bar. (107)

Angustias and Bonifacio react horrified to this story, at which point Primitivo and El Sardina question how it is that Bonifacio, born and raised in Embajadores, is not a more fun-loving person, to which Bonifacio replies:

Lo que tiene es que ca uno vive según los prencipios que l’han dao. Vosotros, ¿en qué sus habéis divertido siempre? Pues yo te lo diré. De chicos, en iros por las mañanas con los tiradores a matar pájaros a la Moncloa; por las tardes, a la pedrea, y por la noches, con las estacas, a perseguir gatos por el barrio. Total: a disfrutar haciendo daño. (107–08).

Bonifacio’s allusion to the ferocious pastimes of Madrid’s youth constructs a broad argument on Spanish character that begins with the moral laxity and carelessness of parents that allow their children to find amusement in others’ pain. In this harangue,

Bonifacio expresses a belief that unwillingness to impose a sense of compassion and dignity from an early age cripples young people's ability to develop these qualities as adults. He continues:

Y luego, ya de hombres, ¿a qué le llamáis vosotros diversión? Pos a ver destripar caballos en los toros; a marcharse en patrulla armando bronca por los bailes de los merenderos; a acosar por las calles a mujeres indefensas con pellizcos y gorrinerías; a escandalizar en los cines y a insultar a las cupletistas. ¿Y eso es alegría, y eso es chirigota, y eso es gracia? . . . Eso es barbarismo, animalismo y bestialismo. Y hasta que los hijos del pueblo madrileño no dejen de tomar a diversión todo lo que sea el mal de otro. . . , hasta que la gente no se divierta con el dolor de los demás, sino con la alegría suya. . . , la risa del pueblo será una cosa repugnante y despreciable. (108)

Bonifacio's speech condemns the tendency to see humor in the misfortune of others, denouncing such laughter as an indication of spiritual vacuity; this sadistic form of laughter in the popular culture of Spaniards at the beginning of the twentieth century, in Arniches's view, is a symptom of the moral decadence that has led the nation into a period of political and social chaos.

The brilliance of "La risa del pueblo"—and of *Del Madrid castizo* in general—is that the play does not end with the statement of moral clarity and purpose, but instead with its destabilization. Arniches splendidly incorporates the cognitive dissonance of knowing what is right and consciously doing otherwise into the logic of this *sainete rápido*. After Bonifacio ends his speech and receives Angustias's approval for what he has said, Primitivo and El Sardina leave because they are attending a race for cripples:

Primitivo: Anda, que son las cuatro y media.

Señor Bonifacio: Pero ¿ande vais tan corriendo?

El Sardina: Al solar de Vitor el Mengue, que ha organizao unas carreras de cojos que va a ser morirse de risa.

Señor Bonifacio: (*Con asombro*) ¡Carreras de cojos! . . .

Primitivo: Na, que ha comprometío al cojo Tranca, a Natalio el Patapalo y a dos u tres cojos más, y hacen carreras pa batir el recor de las dos

vueltas con muletas y sin ellas. El premio son doce docenas de pájaros fritos y seis frascos de morapio que sufraga Indalecio el de la Corrala. (109)

Instead of another outburst of righteous indignation, Bonifacio hesitantly chooses to accompany his two acquaintances, excusing himself through verbal gymnastics that rationalize his decision: “[U]no conoce las cosas . . . Pero, después de tóo, ¿qué culpa tengo yo de que haiga cojos ni de que me gusten los pájaros fritos? . . . Es el fatalismo humano” (110). The force and power of his statement on the ethical treatment of human beings evaporates as Bonifacio fails to follow his recipe for social and moral regeneration of the community. Rather than give the voice of moral superiority the authoritative final word—as Arniches does so often—the play undermines this message by showing Bonifacio giving in to the temptations of finding joy in the plights of others. As is the case with the caricatures of socialism in *El iluso Cañizares* and “Los ricos,” a gap separates the abstract realm of discourse from concrete reality. The ambivalence of the play’s denouement allows the work’s structure to reflect the uncertainty of Spain’s prospects for improvement and progress.

Unlike the plays Arniches penned for the commercial stage earlier in his career, the short *sainetes* of *Del Madrid castizo* are not tightly constructed works that tie up all loose ends in a strong concluding scene. These pieces give the impression of a sketch or snapshot because they lack the larger dramatic contours and story arcs that characterize even the one-act plays from the *género chico* repertoire. While on the surface the *sainetes rápidos* appear to be little more than dramatic dialogues, these works function as the laboratory in which Arniches experimented with new ways to weave dialogue into the fabric of drama. Characters in these works feel no need to explain their personalities and



actions because the words they speak communicate all the necessary knowledge for the audience. At the same time, *Del Madrid castizo* demonstrates that Arniches's movement toward a more artistic conception of dramatic praxis remained connected to his earlier experience in the commercial theater world of the *género chico*.

### **Repetitive Difference: Defamiliarization and the *Género Chico***

Highlighting the spectatorial qualities of the modern public sphere, revealing the contradictions between what people say and do, reordering the typical structure and logic of the theatrical work: all of these strategies employed by Arniches in *Del Madrid castizo* work together to compel the reader to see quotidian life in the Spanish capital in a new way. Arniches's work coincides with the interest in techniques of estrangement in the European avant-garde in the first decades of the twentieth century. While developing his theory of poetic language as distinct from normal, everyday prose language, Victor Shklovsky prioritizes the reader's interpretation as the key element and argues that overcoming habit is the artist's main challenge. Shklovsky defends art as the means by which man renews his comprehension of the world and avoids automatism:

If we examine the general laws of perception, we see that as it becomes / habitual, it also becomes automatic. So eventually all of our skills and experiences function unconsciously—automatically [. . .] And so, held accountable for nothing, life fades into nothingness. Automatization eats away at things, at clothes, and furniture, at our wives, and at our fear of war. (4–5)

While Shklovsky's argument is intoxicating for the literary scholar, it relies on casual observations about the human mind that remain unconfirmed in his essay. Does the mind really fall into patterns of perception that must be abated in order to retain dynamic mental flexibility and true aesthetic engagement with art and reality?

Recent neurological research on neuroplasticity<sup>47</sup> appears to confirm Shklovsky's observations by explaining how the brain constantly reorganizes itself to respond to new tasks, but at the same time engages in a streamlining process to accelerate its most oft-used functions. Norman Doidge tells us that the brain's ability to alter itself gives flexibility for learning new skills and tasks, but also allows the brain to fall into "rigid behaviors" (317) in a Darwinian "survival of the busiest," to use Jeffrey Schwartz's term (201). While considering neuroplasticity in his essay on how the age of social media and Web 2.0 are transforming our collective mental life, Nicholas Carr writes: "As particular circuits in our brain strengthen through the repetition of a physical or mental activity, they begin to transform that activity into a habit" (34). Add Shklovsky to the long line of researchers whose work anticipated the findings of the contemporary field of neuroplasticity.<sup>48</sup> Shklovsky's concept of defamiliarization (*остранение*) in art serves an important psychological function by subverting the neural pathways of least resistance and shaking the viewer out of patterns of habitual thought.

The comicity of the *género chico* derives from transforming common experiences and well-known modes of speech into something new and strange. The most obvious strategy by which the *género chico* makes reality strange is recasting the mundane

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<sup>47</sup> Neuroplasticity emerged largely behind the efforts of Michael Merzenich's research beginning in the 1970s and began to gain steam with a series of articles he published in the 1980s. His research focused primarily on how the sensory organs and brains of primates responded to injuries to the nervous system. In a paper from 1983, Merzenich summarizes how his findings seriously challenged the accepted views of the physically and chemically static brain: "These results are completely contrary to a view of sensory systems as consisting of a series of hardwired machines, essentially established through a critical period of development, and static thereafter. That is, while anatomical wiring may or may not be static, and almost certainly limits distances across maps over which reorganization can occur after that early critical stage of brain development, dynamic modification of local map detail occurs throughout life. It is reasonable to suppose that such alterability is relevant to learning, recognition, and the acquisition of tactile skill" (662).

<sup>48</sup> Nicholas Carr once again: "At first dismissed, Merzenich's meticulous work finally begins to receive serious notice in the neurological community. It ends up setting off a wholesale reevaluation of accepted theories about how our brains work. Researchers uncover a trail of experiments, dating back to the days of William James and Sigmund Freud, that record examples of plasticity. Long ignored, the old research is now taken seriously" (26).

comings and goings of the modern city as song-and-dance spectacle. Consider, to cite only two well-known examples, the “Coro de barquilleros” in Scene 17 of *Agua, azucarillos y aguardiente* that portrays the wafer salesmen in Madrid and the Zaragoza market in the opening scene of *Gigantes y cabezudos*: typical sights and sounds are reinvented through choreography, orchestration, and vocal performance. The *revista* is based on this logic of making the familiar strange, as objects, locations, landmarks, and even ideas come alive in the bodies of actors on stage. Gerardo Farfán, Javier de Burgos, and Gaiño Peraita provide an unusual example in *Astronomía popular*—which debuted on April 18, 1908, in the Teatro de Novedades—in which celestial bodies and other natural phenomena parade across the stage to sing, dance, and play out their petty conflicts. The key to these works and hundreds of others like them is not their accurate depiction of quotidian reality, but the systematic estrangement of that reality.

Arniches understood the pulse and rhythm of the commercial theater scene and the expectations of the audience, keen insight that permitted him to develop comedy at every level of his work. Beyond estranging the daily sights and sounds of the Spanish capital, Arniches explored language and discourse as terrain ripe for comic exploitation. Mispronounced words, broken syntax, and unusual metaphors abound in his dialogue, constantly forcing the spectator to concentrate on the richness and complexity of the language spoken on stage. At the same time, Arniches’s theater recontextualizes modes of speech to achieve comic effect. Governmental and bureaucratic language is a frequent target of this strategy, as characters in Arniches’s plays adopt the vocabulary and formality of official speech in widely divergent contexts. In “El zapatero filósofo o año nuevo, vida nueva” from *Del Madrid castizo*, Señá Nicasia asks her drunk husband about

the twelve *pesetas* he had in his possession after only finding thirty *céntimos* in his pockets, to which he sarcastically responds: “Pues si tú, que eres el ministro de Hacienda del chaleco, no sacas más que eso carcúlate lo que sacaría yo” (88). In a much later play, *El solar de Mediacapa*—which debuted on December 21, 1928—, Sidorio Mediacapa serves as president of the “Junta direztiva” of the “El Gratis et Amore Club,” an informal organization of men who woo as many women as possible without spending any money on them. The comicity in each of these situations depends on the audience’s familiarity with the language of government institutions in their normal setting and the reinvention of this language in an unusual context.

Arniches and his collaborator García Álvarez proved themselves capable of extending the recontextualization of contemporary socio-political discourse in *El pobre Valbuena*, in which the faux medical terminology employed by Valbuena and co-opted at the end by Pepe el Tranquilo participates in the broader trend of regenerationist thought in Spain at the turn of the century. Pepe el Tranquilo conceals his message to Valbuena and Salustiano at the end of the play by appropriating the language the mischievous pair had used to trick women: “Para la *nurastenia* no hay como un *sanatorio* . . . de este tamaño” (852). The illness that Valbuena invented as the basis of his trickery becomes the means by which he learns his lesson. The extended metaphor of illness and a potentially violent cure taps into debates occurring in Spain in the aftermath of the debacle of 1898. Leading intellectual and political figure Joaquín Costa used the metaphor of Spain as a sick body in need of drastic medical treatment to describe its chronic political chaos and lack of social development. For Costa, the nation needed both quick stop-gap measures and long-term solutions to heal the many social, political, and

cultural illnesses that afflicted it. In his political treatise *Oligarquía y caciquismo como la forma actual de gobierno en España* (1902), Costa wrote:

Ahora bien; para una tal evocación de vida, para una tal condensación de tiempo, los lentos procesos de la medicina ordinaria son insuficientes: se requiere sajar, quemar, reseca, amputar, extraer pus, transfundir sangre, injertar músculo; una verdadera *política quirúrgica*. Y esa política, sin la cual la libertad podrá ser una promesa y una esperanza para mañana, para un mañana muy remoto, en manera alguna para hoy, y España como una simiente de nación enterrada en el surco, que otra generación podrá ver nacer, si antes el campo no es subvertido por uno de tantos terremotos de la historia; esa política quirúrgica, repito, tiene que ser cargo personal de un cirujano de hierro, que conozca bien la anatomía del pueblo español y sienta por él una compasión infinita [. . .] (86)

In the context of Costa's political philosophy of the "iron surgeon," the denouement of *El pobre Valbuena* gains a layer of depth and engagement with social and intellectual discussions of its day. Pepe el Tranquilo is Costa's "iron surgeon" and supplies just the right amount of threat and force to convince Valbuena and Salustiano to rectify their behavior. The comedy of the play is not based solely on Valbuena's antics, but also emerges from the reimagining of serious debates on Spain's moral and political future.

The experimentation with form and convention played out in the *sainetes rápidos* of *Del Madrid castizo* is the basis for Arniches's ventures into new dramatic territory during the late 1910s and early 1920s. Recognizing that the previously dynamic qualities of the *género chico* had become stale convention and habit, in these written trials Arniches toys with new elements and configurations to revivify his comic vision. His exploration of the means by which individual identity is projected through speech and appearance leads to a reduction of expositional dialogue between third parties in later works. At the same time, he begins to deal with the divergences between the public persona constructed through language and appearance and the inner mental life that exists

out of sight. The *sainetes rápidos* of *Del Madrid castizo* treat this dualism of interior/exterior overtly, particularly when characters espouse beliefs in conversation and then contradict those statements through their actions, but many of Arniches's best later plays will approach this subject with more subtlety and nuance.

### **Humor, Parody, and Pastiche in *La señorita de Trevélez***

*La señorita de Trevélez* communicates an ethical response to contemporary social norms and the cheap comicity of the Spanish commercial stage through humor. In his essay *On Humor* (1908), Luigi Pirandello delineates between the comic and humor:

I see an old lady whose hair is dyed and completely smeared with some kind of horrible ointment; she is all made-up in a clumsy and awkward fashion and is all dolled-up like a young girl. I begin to laugh. I *perceive* that she is *the opposite* of what a respectable old lady should be. Now I could stop here at this initial and superficial comic reaction: the comic consists precisely of this *perception of the opposite*. But if, at this point, reflection interferes in me to suggest that perhaps this old lady finds no pleasure in dressing up like an exotic parrot, and that perhaps she is distressed by it and does it only because she pitifully deceives herself into believing that, by making herself up like that and by concealing her wrinkles and gray hair, she may be able to hold the love of her much younger husband—if reflection comes to suggest all this, then I can no longer laugh at her as I did at first, exactly because the inner working of reflection has made me go beyond, or rather enter deeper into, the initial stage of awareness: from the beginning *perception of the opposite*, reflection has made me shift to a *feeling of the opposite*. And herein lies the precise difference between the comic and humor. (113)

Pirandello's description—which coincides so closely with the circumstances in *La señorita de Trevélez* that we might wonder whether or not Arniches was familiar with the essay—of depth and the difference between perception and feeling corresponds generally with the dichotomy of interiority and exteriority in Arniches's dramaturgy in the late 1910s. For Arniches, humor implies an ethical stance because it requires the audience to

move beyond simplistic interpretations of superficial comicity in order to understand the human toll of the comic.

With *La señorita de Trevélez*, Arniches's dramaturgy more deeply analyzed the obsession with surface and appearance that, in his view, dominated Spanish society in the early twentieth century. Arniches interrogates the moral consequences of the entertainment industry in which he participated so assiduously. He concludes that bullfighting, many comic plays, and the bawdy jokes and rowdy humor of bar culture are recreations that encourage nihilistic laughter and find hilarity in the suffering of others. Arniches extends his consideration of the interior/exterior dichotomy to critique a society incapable of moving past the superficial interpretation of the comic. Ramón Pérez de Ayala notes this component of *La señorita de Trevélez*, seeing Arniches's experience in the commercial theater as the building blocks for his efforts in longer formats. Pérez de Ayala identifies the difference between surface effect and artistic depth as an important quality of the *género chico* and critics' responses to it:

Rara cosa es que, para juzgar una obra de arte, se empleen adjetivos que adulen al volumen y no a la materia o sustancia de la obra. Este criterio implica un hábito peculiar de la mente: el de clasificar en ordenación jerárquica las cosas según sus dimensiones. Y así resulta a veces que un kilo de lana pesa más en el aprecio, ya que no en la balanza, que un kilo de platino, porque abulta más. Cosas de España, en donde un discurso vacío, por ejemplo, vale, políticamente, más que una sentencia preñada de sentido. (321–22)

Pérez de Ayala accuses critics of being guilty for the very crime of which they so often accused the *género chico*: paying attention only to the obvious exterior qualities of a play rather than probing its intellectual, artistic, or ethical depths. Pérez de Ayala points to Don Gonzalo as an unusual character whose contrasting exterior appearance and interior struggles force the audience to a greater understanding of contemporary Spanish customs.

He then applies Henri Bergson's ideas on laughter to Don Gonzalo, arguing that the comic ceases whenever we begin to feel sympathy and compassion for his plight:

El espectador, tal como advierte con sus sentidos al señor Trevélez, tal como le ve y le escucha, tal como le juzga, por la experiencia sensible y externa que de él tiene, halla un cúmulo de ridículas particularidades, que son otros tantos estímulos para que la malignidad burlesca, que yace ingénita como integrante del ser elemental humano, tome a chanza al señor Trevélez y se ría a su costa. Pero, al propio tiempo, el espectador, por ministerio artístico del dramaturgo, va pasando insensiblemente por otra experiencia de orden espiritual, va compenetrándose con el alma del señor Trevélez, hasta que se le aparece toda desnuda y delicada, y en este instante el personaje teatral es digno de veneración sin dejar de ser ridículo. (326)

Pérez de Ayala recognizes Arniches's place in the broader contours of European dramatic modernity.<sup>49</sup> If, as Robert Leach suggests, "Modern is [...] associated with startling novelty, with art which deliberately shocks or which deliberately—even joyfully—breaks conventions" (1), then Arniches's career in the business of the commercial theater placed him in an advantageous position for internalizing the conventions of the popular theater in order to tear them down and reconstitute them as a critique of modernity.

The period of formal experimental and character study in *Del Madrid castizo* yielded results in *La señorita de Trevélez*, which espouses an ethical critique of contemporary society by probing the silences and slippages of *género chico* conventions. The play borrows from the situations and characters of the *género chico* and melodrama, blending popular customs and literary motifs in a highly stylized drama. Arniches's goal of critiquing contemporary Spain leads him away from the shorter *sainete* with its

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<sup>49</sup> Manfred Lentzen sees Arniches's exploration of grotesque characters and situations as his principal link to the modern European stage. Lentzen links both Arniches and Valle-Inclán to a long tradition of the grotesque in Spanish literature and the plastic arts, the principal exponents of which are Quevedo and Goya (67). He goes on to connect Arniches's *tragedia grotesca* and Valle-Inclán's *esperpento* to the coetaneous development of German Expressionism in the 1910s and 1920s and to examine all of these manifestations of the grotesque as developing from the foundation given by the plays of August Strindberg and the stage techniques developed by Gordon Craig and Adolphe Appia at the beginning of the twentieth century (68).



structural limitations in order to cultivate the more flexible three-act *comedia*. Stock characters and events, festive humor, and zany spectacle persist, but are no longer the principal substance of the play. These features operate within a larger pastiche, participating like other clusters of knowledge in the manipulation of the audience's response to the drama on the stage. Superficial visual experience or verbal humor no longer are the goals of the work, but are subordinated to the broader ethical response Arniches hopes to elicit from the audience.

After the self-conscious employment of estrangement strategies in *Del Madrid castizo*, Arniches extended his defamiliarizing tactics to the logic of the commercial theater itself, thus moving away from the *género chico*'s simple variety aesthetic toward pastiche. Variety is embedded within the concept of pastiche, as we see in some of the definitions of the term given by the *Oxford English Dictionary*. Two relevant definitions of pastiche (noun) are: 1) "A novel, poem, painting, etc., incorporating several different styles, or made up of parts drawn from a variety of sources;" 2) "A work, esp. of literature, created in the style *of* someone or something else; a work that humorously exaggerates or parodies a particular style." Describing pastiche (adjective), the *OED* says: "Exhibiting or incorporating an amalgam of different styles." The convergence of imitation and amalgamation as two clusters in these definitions implies the assemblage of contrasting styles and structures to constitute a heterogeneous whole. Fredric Jameson, however, sees pastiche as something more:

Pastiche is, like parody, the imitation of a peculiar or unique, idiosyncratic style, the wearing of a linguistic mask, speech in a dead language. But it is a neutral practice of such mimicry, without any of parody's ulterior motives, amputated of the satiric impulse, devoid of laughter and of any conviction that alongside the abnormal tongue you have momentarily borrowed, some healthy linguistic normality still exists. (17)

For Jameson, the difference between parody and pastiche lies in their relationship to an objective linguistic normality; he uses two different terms to refer to the same practice in different historical and cultural milieu, before and after postmodernism.

I would like to revise Jameson's view of pastiche because he needlessly sets parody and pastiche in opposition to each other, thus divorcing two discursive modes that often work in tandem. The *OED* definitions tell us that the defining quality of pastiche is not merely imitation, but rather the contrived juxtaposition of different styles or sources. Parody, on the other hand, functions as a "form of repetition with ironic critical distance, marking difference rather than similarity" (Hutcheon, *Parody* xii) and as "imitation characterized by ironic inversion, not always at the expense of the parodied text" (Hutcheon, *Parody* 6). Parody is the foundation and *materia prima* of pastiche. Pastiche is the multiplication of parodies, a baroque magnification of the borrowed, mimicked, and parroted that self-consciously mixes the different discourses and cultural frameworks through which the modern subject identifies itself and interacts with the rest of society.

The movement toward pastiche as an organizational logic for dramatic structure and ethical critique in Arniches's dramatic work is closely connected to his earlier experiences in the *género chico* theater scene. The comic effects and social satire of Arniches's earliest works result from the flexibility of genres like the *revista* to bring together the disparate realities of modern life into the dramatic space of the stage. Like the daily newspapers of the period, the commercial theater thrived by using an aesthetic of variety to present life in the capital as a spectacle and to appeal to various demographics. In Arniches's mature theater, he becomes more aware of theater's unique ability to give plastic form to the multiple realities of modernity.

A key component of Arniches's use of pastiche in *La señorita de Trevélez* is the interpenetration of the tragic and the comic. Rather than follow a single arc of dramatic development, the play sets in contrast various converging groupings of characters toward a climactic collision. Commercial theater practices of the era strongly influence the comic and tragic elements. *Género chico* visual strategies, wordplay, and physical humor dominate the understanding of the comic in the play while the grandiose sentiments of melodrama infiltrate the tragic. The play begins as Tito Guiloja tells his companions that everything is prepared for "una broma tan estupenda que quedará en los anales de la ciudad como la burla más perversa de que haya memoria" (77). This scene sets the stage for comic antics and foreshadows the darker side of the prank that the *Guasa Club* will play on Numeriano Galán, Don Gonzalo, and Florita. The purpose for this elaborate joke is Numeriano's and Picavea's competition for the affections of Solita, a handmaiden in the Trevélez household, an amorous plotline of rivalry that harkens back to the early-modern *comedia*. Once the plot has been set in motion, however, Numeriano finds himself trapped in a relationship with Florita Trevélez and repeatedly fails to reveal the truth for fear of Don Gonzalo's wrath. The comic story begins to interweave with a potentially tragic plotline, as the possibility of Don Gonzalo's rage putting many lives in danger builds to a tense crescendo by Act 3. This oscillation between the two poles of the play coincides with a feature of what J. L. Styan classified as the 'dark comedy,' a species of dramatic works that does not obey the contours of comedy or tragedy, but rather fosters tension between various groups and interests in the work. Styan writes: "The dark drama is exciting because one pattern of feeling, dramatized perhaps by one character or group of characters, is countered by a contrary pattern from an opposite

character or group, or by the same character or group seen in another light” (265). This strategy shines forth in *La señorita de Trevélez*, as the mean-spirited joviality of the *Guasa Club* contrasts with Florita’s hopefulness as she believes her dream of finding a husband has finally become reality. At the same time, Picavea’s triumph over Numeriano gives way to the imminent danger of an honor duel faced by the principal conspirators in the plot against Numeriano.

The dialectic between the physical humor and visual flair of the *género chico* and the gravitas of honor and reputation of melodrama is the central axis around which the pastiche in *La señorita de Trevélez* revolves. The *Guasa Club*’s plot in the first act of the play draws from the stock situations that drive the comedy of the *sainetes*, *zarzuelas chicas*, and *juguetes cómicos* at the turn of the century: the malicious *chulo* frustrates the amorous intentions of the hard-working, morally upright *chulo*. The conversation between Don Gonzalo and Don Marcelino in Scene 14, however, begins to shift the tone of the work by offering a somber glimpse into Don Gonzalo’s mental life and his fears that his sister would never find happiness through marriage:

De muy niños quedamos huérfanos. Comprendí que Dios me confiaba la custodia de aquel tesoro y a ella me consagré por entero; y la quise como padre, como hermano, como preceptor, como amigo; y desde entonces, día tras día, con una abnegación y una solicitud maternales, velo su sueño, adivino sus caprichos, calmo sus dolores, alivio sus inquietudes y soporto sus puerilidades, porque, claro, una juventud defraudada produce acritudes e impertinencias muy explicables. Pues bien, Marcelino: mi único dolor, mi único tormento era ver que pasaban los años y que Florita no encontraba un hombre... (105)

Apart from the sentimental themes of becoming orphans and the brother’s love, this speech depicts Don Gonzalo as the protector of Florita’s morality and honor, thus casting a shadow of solemnity over the comic proceedings that dominate much of Act 1. This

blend of comic and tragic accelerates as the first act ends; the members of the *Guasa Club* appear on stage to congratulate Don Gonzalo, and everyone listens as Florita plays a song on the piano and sings from her house across the street. At the end of the song:

Manchón: ¡Admirable!

Tito: ¡Colosal!

Torrija: ¡Suprema!

Don Gonzalo: (*Se limpia los ojos*) ¡Son lágrimas!... ¡Son lágrimas!...  
¡Cada vez que canta me hace llorar!

Tito: (*Fingiendo aflicción*) ¡Y a todos, y a todos! (*Vuelven a aplaudir*)

Flora: (*Levanta la persiana, sonríe y tira un beso*) ¡Para Galán!  
(*Felicitaciones, abrazos y vítores*) (113–14)

This scene juxtaposes the cynical, feigned congratulations of Picavea's cohort with the true affection felt by Don Gonzalo in light of his sister's happiness. Don Gonzalo's tears also reflect the association of his character to a tragic element in the work. Flora's display of affection for Galán when she blows him a kiss subtly increases the dramatic tension by evoking the physicality and sexual nature of romantic love.

The second act moves toward a metatheatrical conception of Numeriano's plight as the groups of characters involved in his predicament manipulate the situation according to their interests. Nearly all of the characters refer to the unusual circumstances of Numeriano's relationship with Flora through the lens of the theater. Several members of the *Guasa Club*, including Picavea, express their reservations about continuing with the joke. Picavea observes: "[E]stos pobres ancianos han tomado la cosa tan en serio que, según dicen, Florita se está haciendo hasta el *trousseau*" (120). Picavea and the others realize that Flora's assumption of an impending marriage could lead to serious consequences for all involved, at which point Tito, who presents himself as the director of the elaborate prank, reveals that he has a resolution to the difficult situation: "[Q]ue es un drama pasional, que voy a complicar en él nuevos personajes y que tiene un desenlace

muy poético, inesperado y sentimental” (120). The theatrical imaginings of Numeriano’s condition are not limited to the members of the club, but extend to the rest of the characters. Numeriano admits: “Esta broma está tomando para mí proporciones trágicas, espeluznantes, aterradoras” (121). Later, Flora tells her brother that she suspects a rivalry is developing between Numeriano and Picavea, the consequences of which she describes using the same language that Tito uses to talk about his resolution to the conflict: “Que Picavea y Galán se han ido a las manos; mejor dicho, se han ido a los pies, por causa mía [. . .] Yo estoy aterrada, porque en el fondo de todo esto veo palpitar un drama pasional” (132–33). This consciousness of the theatricality of their lives brings to mind Lionel Abel’s description of metatheater as a dramatic mode that recognizes life as “already theatricalized” (60). Abel suggests that a principal difference between tragedy and metatheater is that the tragic hero is unaware of his own theatricality, whereas the characters in metatheater by default are aware of it (61). In Act 2, *La señorita de Trevélez* builds toward a more complex configuration as the characters recognize their theatricality, but remain ignorant of the genre of the play they populate. The members of the *Guasa Club* realize that they are not the directors of the drama because events—or Fate?—begin to dictate how the plan will unfold. Flora believes that she is at the center of a “drama pasional” in which Picavea and Numeriano will challenge each other to a duel for the right to her hand, when in fact she is the victim of a cruel farce. For much of the play, Don Gonzalo believes he is the protector that will give Flora away in marriage at the end of the *comedia*, but actually he is the tragicomic hero whose eagerness to fulfill his sister’s wishes sentences them to a heartbreaking downfall.

The insistence on metatheater as a metaphor through which the characters of *La señorita de Trevélez* understand themselves connects Arniches's play to the larger context of mass media in the twentieth century. While many theater critics and practitioners understand metatheater as a means by which to portray and interrogate the theatricality of life, at the same time it stands as a theatrical version of hypermediation. Bolter and Grusin argue that hypermediacy is a hallmark characteristic of much popular culture, which asks "us to take pleasure in the act of mediation" (12). According to Bolter and Grusin, hypermediacy and immediacy function as a dialectic in communication media, each complementing the strengths and compensating for the weaknesses of the other. The move toward metatheater in the historical Avant-Garde and experimental theater of the twentieth century can be seen in the terms of this dialectic, as playwrights and directors retreated from Naturalism's insistence on immediacy to reclaim the ambiguities and complexities of a hypermediated dramatic experience. Dramatic hypermediation challenged realist stage conventions and shook audiences out of complacency as they were forced to approach drama through new codes of interpretation.

The defamiliarization of the stock types in *La señorita de Trevélez* serves as the basis for the ethical critique of modern society embedded within in the play. Serge Salaün remarks on Arniches's evolving use of types: "Siguen funcionando como estereotipos o arquetipos, pero su finalidad y su relación con la realidad ha cambiado; no se trata ya de provocar la risa intrascendente y digestiva del sainete costumbrista, sino de abrir perspectivas, de provocar una toma de conciencia" (23). Building on the dichotomy of the interior and exterior from *Del Madrid castizo*, Arniches's use of stock character types in this play lures the audience into a facile, superficial reading of Don Gonzalo and Flora.

The costuming and mannerisms of the two throughout the work present them as ridiculous characters whose childish behavior does not correspond to their age and social position. The rivalry between Numeriano and Picavea, the verbal wordplay and physical comedy, and the constant tension brought about by an amorous misunderstanding all lead the audience to perceive the work within the framework of the conventions of the *género chico* and its parodic re-workings of the bourgeois *comedia*.

The final scenes reveal the comic surface of the play to be a façade that cloaks the cruelty of those who find laughter in the sad fate of an old maid unable to accept that she grows old and will never marry. While we expect Picavea and Numeriano's confession to resolve the comic and tragic storylines, Gonzalo unexpectedly offers a confession of his own in which the audience learns of his motives for presenting himself as a frivolous dandy rather than a respected gentleman:

¡Burlarse de mi hermana adorada, de mi hermana querida, a la que yo he consagrado con mi amor y mi ternura una vida de renunciaciones y de sacrificios! De sacrificios, sí. Porque vosotros, como todo el mundo, me suponéis un solterón egoísta, incapaz de sacrificar la comodidad personal a los desvelos e inquietudes que impone el matrimonio. Pues sabedlo de una vez: nada más lejos de mi alma. En mi corazón, Marcelino, he ahogado muchas veces—y algunas, Dios sabe con cuánta amargura—el germen de nobles amores que me hubiesen llevado a un hogar feliz, a una vida fecunda. Pero surgía en mi corazón un dilema pavoroso; u obligaba a mi hermana a soportar en su propia casa la vida triste de un papel secundario, o había yo de marcharme dejándola en una orfandad que mis nuevos afectos hubiesen hecho más triste y más desconsoladora. ¡Y por su felicidad he renunciado siempre la mía! (160)

A lifetime of pent-up frustration and sadness bursts forth in this outcry of indignation and fury as Don Gonzalo laments the cruelty of a world that could laugh for hours at the exterior silliness of an old man and his old maid sister without recognizing that they carry within them deep misery and affliction. The comicity of the work is metaphorically



pulled out from under our feet, sending us flailing toward a realization of Don Gonzalo and Flora de Trevélez's tragic fate. This revelation not only accuses the young men who spent their time maliciously tormenting Florita, but also directs blame at the audience for finding humor in the earlier scenes of the play. In the closing lines, Don Gonzalo says: "¡Ver llorar a un ser que tanto quieres, con unas lágrimas que ha hecho derramar la gente solo para reírse! ¡No quiero más venganza sino que Dios, como castigo, llene de este dolor mío el alma de todos los burladores" (166). We are the "burladores" that have not perceived Gonzalo and Flora's suffering because we were unable to look past the exterior signs; our laughter indicts us as equally responsible for the decayed state of compassion and humility in modern society.

### **Monstrosities of Modernity: Arniches and the Grotesque**

In the two years following *La señorita de Trevélez*, Arniches moved toward the dramatic form that, for many, redeemed his legacy in the annals of Spanish theater history: the *tragedia grotesca*. Many scholars have outlined the general characteristics of the *tragedia grotesca* and its specific permutations in the plays of Arniches's later career, paying attention to his treatment of the hero and the interplay of the comic, the ridiculous, and the serious (McKay 100–01, Ramos 157–66, Mainer 325). Critics from the 1920s and 1930s discerned the continuity in Arniches's *oeuvre*, seeing connections between the mature full-length grotesque tragedies and earlier works, particularly *Las estrellas* (Díez-Canedo, Calvo). Limiting Arniches's understanding of the grotesque to matters such as character development, however, misses the more extensive points of contact between the *tragedia grotesca* and the *género chico*.

The focus on full immersion sensory experience in the *género chico* is the basis for Arniches's perception of how to manipulate visual cues and scenic plasticity in the grotesque. Bernard McElroy stresses that the grotesque emerges from "man's capacity for finding a unique and powerful fascination in the monstrous" (1) and contends that "the grotesque is physical, predominantly visual. [. . .]. In literature, it exists in precisely those works that use language to evoke for the reader a vivid visual image which is perceived as grotesque" (ix). Such a formulation touches on the principle media of drama, language via the spoken word and the visual experience of bodies in space and time. Whereas painting, sculpture, prose, or verse poetry can only develop the monstrous mixtures that characterize the grotesque in a single medium, the theater enjoys the endless possibilities of mixing multiple media together in a hypermediated aesthetic experience that could, theoretically, expand to include all forms of media. McElroy goes on to discuss how the grotesque embarks on a program of systematic deformation to lay bare the inner workings of modern life: "It distorts or exaggerates the surface of reality in order to tell a qualitative truth about it" (5). It is no surprise that the grotesque rises as an important aesthetic milieu in the modernist and avant-garde theater alongside the strategies of defamiliarization and estrangement: "Its steadfast refusal—in nearly any of its forms—to accommodate ready interpretations makes it a mode in which light is cast on the act of perceiving itself" (Remshardt 10). The application of these observations to Arniches could not be more obvious: the accumulated repository of stock situations and characters from the *género chico* provide him with all the material he needs to exaggerate the vicissitudes of contemporary life in Spain and point to a deeper critique of a society that seeks the superficial amusement of an hour rather than human compassion and

community. Laughter is only possible because of blindness, because of the occluding qualities of the comic veneer. Although we think we recognize the same stock types from the *género chico*, Arniches provides them emotional depth and psychological complexity. Instead of simply laughing at the joke and moving on with its perpetrators, we remain with the victim and see the pain and distress it causes them.

The hero of the grotesque tragedies serves as a focal point of dramatic development through which the audience perceives the monstrous deformity of a social environment that permits the ignominies suffered by the hero. The pastiche that characterizes Arniches's implementation of the grotesque is not a juxtaposition of different components, but a wide-ranging consideration of the settings and contexts in which such juxtapositions could occur. McElroy remarks: "The artist of the grotesque does not merely combine surfaces; he creates a context in which such distortion is possible. To imagine a monstrosity is to imagine a world capable of producing that monstrosity" (11). This is precisely the basis on which we can claim that *La señorita de Trevélez* fits firmly within the overall framework of the *tragedia grotesca* phase of Arniches's dramaturgy. While Don Gonzalo does not meet the characteristics of the hero layed out by McKay—he suffers a spectacular defeat and conceals not a character flaw, but a sacrificing spirit—his relationship to the larger social context of the third-rate provincial capital in which the play is set portrays a monstrous world capable of extravagantly humiliating a good person. This is the principal feature of the hero of the modern grotesque; he "is not alienated man, but *humiliated* man" (McElroy 22, original emphasis). This relationship between the grotesque tragic hero and the larger socio-cultural environment is not limited to the play, but includes the audience as well, for our

laughter and lack of compassion compromise us equally in the world that produces the grotesque deformities we witness on stage. Ralf Remshardt tells us: “[T]he most successful grotesque will incorporate the laughable into its own structure and play it against the horrific in such a way that we are horrified to laugh where we do and amused that we are horrified where we are” (86). *La señorita de Trevélez* draws the audience into the ethical purview of the play by inciting us to condemn ourselves through our laughter.

The first of Arniches’s play to be labeled a grotesque tragedy, *¡Que viene mi marido!*—which debuted in the Teatro de la Comedia on March 9, 1918—confirms that the focus of these plays is not the figure of the hero and his lax character, but actually the monstrous world that forces the hero into ridiculous situations and moral compromises. While we might be tempted to identify Bermejo/Menacho as the hero of the play, it would be difficult to compare him to characters such as Don Gonzalo, Don Antonio in *Es mi hombre*, Don Juan in *La locura de don Juan*, Saturiano Badanas in *El señor Badanas*, or even Don José in *El casto don José*. Family interests and social norms pressure these characters into dubious decisions, whereas Menacho chooses of his own accord to impersonate the deceased Bermejo and financially blackmail the family, a cynical plan that establishes Menacho as a *fresco* rather than a tragic hero. The play magnifies the concept of the hero to encompass Carita and her family; desirous of the fortune that Carita’s godfather Rogelio Nogales has left her under the cruel condition that she must be a widow to collect it, the family goes to absurd measures in order to comply legally with the language of the testament while undermining its spirit by marrying Carita to a dying man so that she will become a widow, inherit the three million *pesetas*, and then marry her beloved Luis. This original plan is grotesque enough as the family seeks to benefit

from the slow, agonizing death of a total stranger, although Carita admittedly displays significant moral reservations. The beginning of Act 2 accelerates the family's audacities, first in conversations between Don Valeriano, Doña Tomasa, and Genoveva in which they reveal that Bermejo remains alive and Carita is ignorant of it, then in the increasingly outrageous attempts to kill off Bermejo or convince him to commit suicide. As the play unfolds and Bermejo's recovery and good health, not to mention his marriage to Carita, make matters more complicated for the family, the audience too continues to ask itself when Bermejo will hurry up and die so that everyone (else) can live happily ever after. Monstrous social norms and pressures beget monstrous ethical laxity.

The implausibly happy ending of *¡Que viene mi marido!* is the product of Arniches's need to reconcile the ethical project of his grotesque tragedies with the entrepreneurial realities of the commercial stage. Although a critical success thanks in large part to important figures such as Pérez de Ayala, Enrique Díez-Canedo, Melchor Fernández Almagro, and others (Dougherty 581), *La señorita de Trevélez* did not achieve the same level of commercial success as his earlier *sainetes* or comic collaborations with García Álvarez. Don Gonzalo's emotional outpouring and condemnation of a society that sees only superficial comedy rather than underlying pain at the very end most certainly cooled audience enthusiasm for the play. The reviewer for *ABC* wrote regarding Don Gonzalo's emotional confession: "Este momento sentimental, que interrumpe bruscamente la eutrapélica acción de la comedia, era difícil de abordar y que interesara al público," and then goes on to praise the actor, Emilio Thuillier, for his outstanding individual efforts that maintained the audience's attention. *La señorita de Trevélez* ends on a somber note of unfilled dreams and bitter disappointment while simultaneously

castigating the audience for participating in the collective guilt of laughing at others' pain. Arniches resolves this problem in *¡Que viene mi marido!* by availing himself of the simple (and simplistic) recourse of a case of false identity. The play redirects the audience's outrage from the heinous, albeit unsuccessful, attempts on the faux Bermejo's life toward Menacho's treachery. Don Valeriano theatrically punishes Menacho's trickery by saying that the perfect solution to everyone's problem is for Don Valeriano to murder Menacho and then commit suicide, a plan that repeats the punishment Paulita devises in *El fresco de Goya* (1912). In the end, however, the revelation that Bermejo was in fact dead all along does nothing to pardon the family's desire to profit from another person's misfortune or the audience's complicity with those desires. Andrés Amorós aptly summarizes the moral uncertainty that dominates all but the most superficial interpretations of the play's resolution: "¿Es éste un final feliz o un final atroz? Los que han triunfado, ¿son de verdad los *buenos*? ¿Qué será del oficialmente *malo*? ¿Quién se atreverá a condenarlo?" (19). Arniches incorporates the ambivalence and duplicity of the grotesque into the resolution of the play, presenting a facile happy ending on the surface while maintaining the "grave silence" (pun only partially intended) that characterizes the ambiguity of modern metatheater (Abel 59).

The dramatic conflict of *¡Que viene mi marido!* emerges from the grotesque transformation of language and discourse into reality. Ralf Remshardt observes: "Metaphor and its sister tropes always harbor the potential to become grotesque, especially if they are literalized, that is, if their component parts are brought together not only on the plane of the rhetorical imagination but also in the field of concrete aesthetic experience" (10). In the grotesque, language loses its ethereal quality as a mechanism of

communication and passes into a physical, corporeal state of being. In *¡Que viene mi marido!*, exactly such a literalization occurs; when Luis introduces the plan to marry Carita to Bermejo so that she will enjoy the inheritance her uncle left her, Bermejo is a name, an idea, a linguistic construct rather than a real person; conflict arises when Bermejo ceases to exist as language and appears on stage as a tangible entity. The panic and frenetic actions in the first scenes of Act 2 reflect the terror of Carita's family upon coming into contact with Bermejo as a living human. Don Segundo insists: "Hay que prevenir a Genoveva que no abra la puerta a nadie" (208), seeing the door as the barrier that prevents Bermejo's transformation from a harmless word into a very real antagonist.

Although *¡Que viene mi marido!* represents a step toward reconciling the aesthetic and ethical demands of the *tragedia grotesca* with the expectations of the bourgeois audience of the early twentieth century, *Es mi hombre*—which debuted on December 22, 1921—best exemplifies Arniches's compromise between the dual objectives of instructing and entertaining the theater-going public.<sup>50</sup> Arniches came closest to coinciding with the avant garde's desire to push the audience outside of normal experience at the theater with *La señorita de Trevélez*, and his later work shows a pattern of searching for middle ground between commercialism and aesthetic achievement. Berghaus's argument that avant-garde performances "were extremely challenging and could go far beyond the level of acceptance that audiences were able or willing to muster. This, of course, is the inherent obligation of the avant-garde" (xiv) does not define Arniches's whole view of the theater; the playwright preferred to balance estrangement strategies and aesthetic renewal with strong doses of traditional dramatic artistry and

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<sup>50</sup> Ramos offers an excellent summary of contemporary critics who praised *Es mi hombre* in the days and weeks following its premiere, a list that includes Alejandro Miquis, Joaquín Sanz, Manuel Machado, Enrique de Mesa, and José Alsina (192–93).

comic relief. In *Es mi hombre*, Arniches fuses critical comments on the dehumanization of capitalist society with a melodramatic story of a father's love for his daughter. Unlike *La señorita de Trevélez*, the audience perceives the relationship between father and daughter as each character expresses their affection through word and deed. The comic presentation of Don Gonzalo in *La señorita de Trevélez* undermines the audience's ability to appreciate and sympathize with his fraternal love in the early moments of the play, whereas *Es mi hombre* pathetically portrays Don Antonio as his inability to provide sustenance and shelter for his daughter causes him dismay. Instead of shocking the public at the end of the work, Arniches concedes access to the conflict between the hero's outward appearance and interior mental life throughout the play.

*Es mi hombre* does not adopt the formulas of melodrama, but reworks those conventions within the ethical framework of the *tragedia grotesca*. Wadda C. Ríos-Font traces the history of melodrama from its beginnings in the late eighteenth century, when it was considered a type of theater that combined words with music, to the specific forms that characterized melodrama in the nineteenth century. Melodrama does not only entail sentimentality, although this is often a feature by the latter decades of the century, but “demands [. . .] the constant interpretation of signs of good or evil, and the spectator is responsible for deciphering the code” (29–30). According to Ríos-Font, such a connection between the characters and *mise-en-scene* of the play and a broader moral universe lends itself to hyperbole: “[E]verything is exaggerated, because everything must express not only itself but the grandiosity of the ethical signified” (31). Ríos-Font, echoing the opinion of other scholars of melodrama, asserts that a primary source of appeal for bourgeois Madrilenian audiences of the nineteenth century was the notion that



this type of theater forged a clear moral universe that served as a psychological respite from the ethical complexities of modern life (43). Robert Heilman suggests that the allure lies in the fact that the protagonists are unquestionably good people who suffer unjust grievances at the hands of others with whom the audience does not and cannot identify (141). Arniches's grotesque tragedy depends on this type of reading of melodrama in order to invert it; the grotesque tragedy intentionally muddies the clear waters of melodrama's moral world by implicating modern society, and the audience along with it, in the ghastly injustices and monstrous humiliations suffered by the protagonist.

*Es mi hombre* highlights the negative moral influence of capitalism and leisure culture on Don Antonio. The threat of hunger and homelessness compel Don Antonio to seek employment of any type in Act 1, leading him to accept a humiliating job as a walking advertisement for cognac. Believing she is acting in her father's best interests, Leonor contacts her godfather Don Mariano, who offers Don Antonio a job as hired muscle at the local gambling establishment, much to Leonor's chagrin. The tyranny of money in modern society carries Don Antonio into the corrupt space of the gambling hall and precipitates his descent into alcoholism and a damaging relationship with a woman who uses him for his money. In the final act of the play, Don Antonio interprets his faltering morality as a byproduct of the company he keeps and the space in which he operates: "[E]l ambiente. Que se hace uno a todo. Aquel día fatal que entré en la casa de Andorra fue mi perdición. La baraja tiene detrás una mujer y a dos dedos una botella... y das de una cosa en otra, como si una mano fatal te empujase" (175). In Arniches's view, the moral laxity of contemporary leisure culture stands in for classical Fate to ensure the

downfall of modern man, pushed to the precipice of ruin by a society more interested in the accumulation of wealth than the moral wellbeing of its individual members.

Arniches balances Don Antonio's slide into vice and immorality with the refinement of Leonor's suitor, Marcos. In Act 1, Marcos shares many qualities with the naive proletarian socialist types of Arniches's earlier works, such as Aquilino in *El iluso Cañizares* or Serapio in "Los ricos." When he appears on stage in Scene 2 of Act 1, Marcos recounts that his labor syndicate has succeeded in their demands after a three-month work stoppage and is celebrating by taking the day off. During the course of the play, Marcos moves away from socialism toward interest in hard work as the foundation of his future life with Leonor, a change in focus supported by his statements on wanting to open a business with the money Don Antonio has earned. The development of Marcos's worldview in the play coincides with Arniches's own views, and it is no accident that Marcos's newfound work ethic in Act 3 coincides with the decision to marry and start a family with Leonor. Don Antonio's relationship with La Sole, in contrast, is based on a desire to take advantage of his money in order to fulfill financial needs and wishes. Not surprisingly, this relationship begins in earnest just after Don Antonio ceases to pretend to be a tough bouncer and in fact throws the three professional hit men out of the gambling establishment by force. The figure of La Sole echoes the charm of Mari Pepa from *La Revoltosa*, drawing men into her orbit and using their desire for her benefit. When La Sole appears in Act 3 to ask Don Antonio to pay her electric bill, she succeeds in convincing Marcos to make up the difference when Don Antonio lacks the funds. While both Don Antonio and Marcos return to work in Act 1 after a long hiatus, the contexts of their labors alter the moral trajectories each experiences. Don

Antonio works in a morally lax environment where people use each other to reach desired ends, a social code enacted by his relationship with La Sole. While the female figure often “reaffirms the moral truth” (McKay 67), in this play feminine characters embody both the moral lesson and the temptations of modern society.

As in many of Arniches’s plays, language occupies a central role in *Es mi hombre* to frame the interactions between characters. For Paco and those that frequent the casino, language precedes action in their understanding of Don Antonio and how he will respond to different situations. In order to procure the job for Don Antonio, Don Mariano crafted a narrative of cool behavior and courage: “Le he dicho al Maluenda que de figura eres poquita cosa; pero que ties un valor frío, que hielas la sangre. [. . .] Y que, siempre correzto y bien educao, con la mayor finura le metes al tío de más fachenda una cuarta de acero en el estómago. . .por lo cual le he dicho que te llaman Antonio Jiménez el Modoso” (134). This image of a quiet yet fierce man operates as the frame within which many characters interpret Don Antonio and serves as the basis for the impression Don Antonio attempts to make on others. Politeness and loquacious courtesy are the tools Don Antonio uses to sustain this appearance. In Act 2 Scene 4, Don Antonio’s quasi-baroque, hypercorrect language masks his fear of conflict and unnerves the player who is to be dismissed from the premises. Don Antonio says to him: “Hónreme con su más profundo silencio. [. . .] Inestimable contertullio, ruégole que con la más discreta sordomudez tenga la amabilidad de movilizarse a noventa por hora con rumbo a la vía pública” (149). The dialogue estranges language and forces the listener, either the player or the audience, to painstakingly decipher the underlying concept—leave quietly!—by replacing the efficiency of colloquial speech with a strange manner of speaking that inserts long

phrases in place of single words.<sup>51</sup> Once again, language does not function as a communicative instrument, but rather the play foregrounds language as a negotiable, unstable terrain of social interaction in which identities are constructed and rearranged.

Arniches prevents *Es mi hombre* from plunging into despair due to the destitute state of Don Antonio and Leonor by juxtaposing the serious matters of poverty, lack of work, and hunger with comic elements reminiscent of the *género chico*. Leonor's doomed attempt to earn money by sewing a sailor's outfit for Señora Calixta's son reflects the impoverished state of a family with no money, no skills, and no prospects, but the hilariously disastrous article of clothing mitigates the despair of the scene through comic relief. Don Antonio's attempts to justify the outfit in Scene 7 of Act 1 and suggestion that it is not too poorly sewn serves the dual purpose of eliciting laughs from the audience and reflecting his desire to deny their dire situation. In the same scene, Don Antonio reveals his last opportunity to earn money, which is to wear a huge, fake head as a walking advertisement; Don Antonio adorning himself with the ridiculous costume presents a powerful visual image of capitalist marketing absorbing his humanity and transforming him into an advertising vehicle. The *cabezudo*—perhaps a subtle allusion to *Gigantes y cabezudos*?—provokes laughter and points to the deeper criticism of modern society embedded in the play. Arniches makes use of *género chico* conventions in Act 2, describing the three professional hit men with whom Don Antonio will come into conflict as “tres puntos tahures profesionales, vestidos entre señoritos y chulos, con caras carcelarias. El Pollo Botines los lleva. El Jarrita va siempre en jarras, por llevar las manos

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<sup>51</sup> This is a strategy discussed at length by Victor Shklovsky in *Theory of Prose*, particularly with regards to Tolstoy. Shklovsky observes that Tolstoy often does not refer to an object or activity by its name, but rather uses the technique of naivety, describing the aforementioned object or action as if seen or experienced for the first time. By avoiding the normal, everyday vocabulary of colloquial language, the author circumvents automatic interpretation and forces the reader to see reality anew (10).

en los bolsillos, y el Requiés va de luto y es su aspecto patibulario” (163). This description places the three between the *chulo* type, whose violent temper often was at the center of disputes, and the *señorito*, regularly a young man with money seeking to take advantage of young, working-class women. The oscillation between these two types in the depiction of these characters accurately forecasts the activities in which they will engage in the play, representing violence and danger for Don Antonio and a lascivious threat to Leonor. Paco el Maluenda underscores the connection of these characters to the *género chico* when he expresses his belief that Don Antonio will dispatch them with no trouble: “Esos tres pa él son tres ratas, hombre; ya lo verás” (160), alluding to the famous trio of rats from *La Gran Vía*. *Es mi hombre* utilizes many of the same stock situations and character types as the *género chico*, but these components of the commercial theater have been distorted and amplified within the framework of Arniches’s grotesque tragedy.

With *¡Es mi hombre!*, the paradigm for the *tragedia grotesca* was set, and Arniches’s forays into the genre during the latter portion of his career more or less conform to the mixture of elements that made this play so successful: the hero’s humiliation due to a contemptible social context; language’s ambivalent role as a mechanism of communication, revealing and obscuring truth in turn; the audience’s direct access to the duality of the hero; and an ambiguous ending that happily settles the immediate problems of the protagonist while doing nothing to resolve the structural failures of society that led to those problems in the first place. Exactly such an ending occurs in *¡Es mi hombre!*, as Leonor and Marcos assure Don Antonio that they are to be married and that he will be welcome to remain with them, supported in his old age by the fruits of their labors. The superficial and transitory image of familial bliss that concludes

the play is undermined by the work's first act: clearly, Don Antonio's wife (who is never mentioned) has died at some point in the past and his fortunes at work failed him to such a degree that he and his daughter find themselves on the brink of poverty and starvation. If such a series of events could befall Don Antonio, why could the same problems not occur for Marcos and Leonor? At the same time, Don Antonio and Marcos both fail to resist the enticing charms of La Sole, a lingering peril that may threaten the family's financial and moral stability in the future. Carlos Fernández Cuenca's cinematic adaptation of the play from 1927 visually captures this instability by concluding the film with a wonderful shot of Marcos and Leonor embracing on a street corner as Don Antonio furtively slips into a bar for a drink. The interest in indefinite endings in the *tragedia grotesca* is not a new development in Arniches's theater, but a further intensification of ambiguities already present in his earlier work. For example, the conflict between Venancio and Epifanio at the end of *El santo de la Isidra* is never really resolved; Epifanio angrily departs the festival after Venancio stands up to him, but who is to say that Epifanio will not be waiting for Venancio in a dark alley later that evening? The difference between these earlier *género chico* works and the later *tragedia grotesca* is that the festive mood and tone of the *género chico* precludes a deeper reading of the ambiguities of the resolution, whereas the constant vacillations between the comic and the serious in the grotesque tragedy invite the audience to anticipate and ponder the next swing from the comic to the tragic.

Arniches's cultivation of a grotesque aesthetic depends on the simultaneous staging of competing discourses and modes of representation in order to craft oscillations between the comic and the serious. The logic of duality that underscores the *tragedia*

*grotesca* engenders a doubling of meanings and interpretations in these works. These dramas layer a comic veneer of the banal trivialities of quotidian life over an exploration of the ethical dilemmas of modernity. The overtly stated morals or didactic lessons proffered at the end of Arniches's plays must be considered carefully, because they communicate only a superficial response to the conflict in the play itself, leaving the audience to ponder the broader ethical landscape portrayed in the work. The uplifting, happy ending is a false one; like the protagonists of these plays, the ending seeks to hide from us the truth of a society wracked by corruption and unethical treatment of others.

## CHAPTER IV

### DISSECTING THE STAGE, DEFYING THE DAILY: VALLE-INCLÁN'S PARODY OF COMMERCIAL THEATER AND CRITIQUE OF MASS MEDIA

An aggressive, pervasive sense of parody characterizes the later dramatic work of Ramón del Valle-Inclán. Equally aware of the avant-garde ideas floating around Europe in the 1910s and 1920s and the dominant commercial theater practices of the day, Valle uses parody as a site of textual and dramatic interface where artistically engaged aesthetic principles articulate an ethical evaluation of modernity through a reworking of popular entertainments. The *esperpento* emerged as much from Valle's reactions, interpretations, and reinvention of prevailing theater practices on the Madrilenian commercial stage as from his interest in contemporary European dramatic trends. Alonso Zamora Vicente, in his classic *La realidad esperpéntica*, argues that the dominance of the *género chico* and its permeation of cultural life in the Spanish capital at the turn of the twentieth century certainly left an impression on the young writers of the period (25–26). Likewise, the meteoric rise of the popular print industry, along with its intimate relationship with the theater, was a major cultural phenomenon in which Valle participated during his formative years. As my analysis of his later theater will show, Valle was aware of the major contours of these transformations of the Madrilenian cultural environment and the resulting mental paradigms that constituted the primary modes of social engagement for the readers and spectators of the period. I contend that the systematic distortion of contemporary Spain and the grotesque, dehumanized representation of characters in the *esperpento* emerge from Valle-Inclán's critique and condemnation of the manipulative



powers of mass media in modern society. More than anything, Valle insistently parodies the major entertainments of contemporary popular culture in order to show how they constrict the reader or spectator's ability to interpret and engage with modernity.

### **World War I, Puppet Theater, and the Need for Aesthetic Distance**

The 1910s were a tumultuous decade for Valle-Inclán. While Arniches was benefiting from commercial success and newfound critical praise for works such as *La señorita de Trevélez* and *¡Que viene mi marido!*, Valle's uncompromising dramatic vision and erratic temper alienated him from many of those who had supported his work in earlier years, such as Benito Pérez Galdós and the Guerrero-Díaz de Mendoza theater company (Lima, *Dramatic World* 28–30). After conflicts with the theater troupe over *Voces de gesta* in 1912 and Galdós's rejection of *El embrujado* the following year, Valle "separated himself not only from the stage but also from the writing of plays over a considerable period" (Lima, *Dramatic World* 30–31), not publishing a new play until 1920. Verity Smith contends that Valle's withdrawal from the world of the theater was symptomatic of a larger crisis in his literary vision that occurred after finishing his first two major cycles of novels, the *Sonatas* (1902–1905) and his trilogy on the Carlist wars: "These, in my view, are the barren years when, 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 *modernista* credo, Valle needed a respite in which to rethink his position as a writer" (22). Beleaguered by financial difficulties and frustrated by what he perceived as the decadence of the Spanish stage, Valle moved his family back to Galicia for a number of years.

World War I left an impression on Valle-Inclán that would alter his dramatic vision. He traveled to northern France to view the western front of the war, commissioned by the newspaper *El Imparcial* to publish his reactions to the conflict. The result of this journey was the serial novel “Un día de guerra,” a fictional rendering of the war that signals a clear departure from the nostalgic exaltation of the glories of warfare in texts such as the *Sonatas*. Fittingly, the beginning of the story, published on October 10, 1916, strikes an epic tone to remark on the unfathomably large scale destruction unfolding across Europe: “Doscientas leguas alcanza la línea de sus defensas desde los cantiles del mar hasta los montes que dominan la verde plana del Rhin. Son cientos de miles, y solamente los ojos de las estrellas pueden verlos combatir al mismo tiempo, en los dos cabos de esta línea tan larga, a toda hora llena de relampagueo de la pólvora con el trueno del cañón rodante por su cielo.” The point of view employed in this opening passage reflects Valle’s insistence in *La lámpara maravillosa* (1916) on the need to surpass temporal and spatial limitations through the use of a “visión de altura” (137).<sup>52</sup> Only a celestial audience could possibly observe the tragicomedy of folly and heroism that human beings were inflicting upon each other.

This opening passage of “Un día de guerra” provides an early glimpse of Valle-Inclán’s emerging *esperpento* aesthetic. The prologue of *Los cuernos de don Friolera*, originally published in *La Pluma* in installments from April till August of 1921, describes

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<sup>52</sup> Valle-Inclán already had proposed this type of vision for the war in an interview he gave Cipriano Rivas Cherif prior to his departure for Paris. In the interview, published on May 11, 1916, Valle affirms that such a viewpoint is necessary in order to see the war as part of a larger historical continuity rather than an interruption of history: “Yo quisiera dar una visión total de la guerra; algo así como si nos fuera dado el contemplarla sin la limitación del tiempo y del espacio. Yo sé muy bien que la gente que lee periódicos no sabe lo que es la fatalidad de esta guerra, la continuación de la historia y no su interrupción como creen todos los parlamentarios, algunos cronistas de salones y tal cual literata. Lo que sucede es que no ven, no saben ver sino lo que pasa en su rededor y no tienen capacidad para contemplar el espectáculo del mundo fuera del accidente cotidiano, en una visión pura y desligada de contingencias frívolas” (11).

many qualities of the *esperpento* through the dialogue between Don Estrafalario and Don Manolito. The dialogue begins as the two react to a fantastic painting they have seen for sale at the festival of Santiago el Verde. Don Estrafalario tells his companion: “La verdad es que tenía otra idea de las risas infernales, había pensado siempre que fuesen de desprecio, de un supremo desprecio, y no: Ese pintor absurdo me ha revelado que los pobres humanos le hacemos gracia al Cornudo Monarca” (113). Don Estrafalario expresses his realization that superior beings such as angels and devils can find aesthetic satisfaction in the trials and triumphs of human beings. He goes on to champion a form of estrangement or defamiliarization as the only means by which to achieve true aesthetic experience through an analysis of the *corrida de toros*. Excessive identification or empathy serves only as a barrier for an aesthetic response: “Los sentimentales que en los toros se duelen de la agonía de los caballos, son incapaces para la emoción estética de la lidia” (114). Distance and difference offer the means toward aesthetic transcendence: “Mi estética es una superación del dolor y de la risa, como deben ser las conversaciones de los muertos, al contarse historias de los vivos. [. . .] Yo quisiera ver este mundo con la perspectiva de la otra ribera” (114–15). In Don Estrafalario’s assessment, the absolute alienation of death offers the path to an aesthetic understanding of the world.

Death is not a very practical aesthetic solution for the theater; one cannot very well kill off an audience just so that they achieve an optimal aesthetic experience. Obliginglly, the prologue provides another strategy for creating a sense of distance or estrangement between the audience and the characters. Don Estrafalario and Don Manolito happen upon a puppet theater stall at the festival, where the itinerant showman speaks to one of his puppets, instigating the puppet to murder his wife as punishment for

her unfaithfulness. Don Estrafalarío responds to the show with a polemical comment on the state of the Spanish theater by asserting that “[e]se tabanque de muñecos sobre la espalda de un viejo prosero, para mí, es más sugestivo que todo el retórico teatro español” (121). He explains this observation by connecting it with his remarks on the need to generate distance between the spectator and the spectacle: “En tanto ese Bululú, ni un solo momento deja de considerarse superior por naturaleza, a los muñecos de su tabanque. Tiene una dignidad demiúrgica” (123). The prologue and epilogue of *Los cuernos de don Friolera* frame the play by emphasizing that its characters are not to be seen as naturalistic, psychologically developed individuals with whom the audience should identify emotionally, but rather as puppets that represent larger spiritual, moral, and social forces that shape contemporary society. This is a goal of the *esperpento*, to replace characters with puppet-like figures, thereby creating the same aesthetic distance that exists between the living and the dead or angels and mortals (Lyon 105–06).

Valle’s movement toward a marionette-based understanding of character in the *esperpento* is late within the larger context of European and Spanish theater. In the latter years of German Romanticism, Heinrich von Kleist turned his attention to the inherent artistic possibilities of puppetry in his essay “On the Marionette theatre” (1810). The late-nineteenth century saw a surge in interest in the subject in the wake of the Symbolist movement, as artists such as E. T. A. Hoffman, Oscar Wilde, Alfred Jarry, and W.B. Yeats began to explore the puppet as a symbolic site of interface between the visceral realities of the physical world and the abstract realm of artistic transcendence. In the early-twentieth century, the historical avant-garde movements saw puppet-based performance as a means by which to connect their progressive aesthetic projects with

traditional popular theater (Bell 6). Gordon Craig utilized puppets both in practice and as a metaphor in his pursuits to abolish what he viewed as the anachronistic, outmoded, and un-artistic practices of realist acting. In a diary entry from February 3, 1909, after observing rehearsals directed by Stanislavsky in Moscow, Craig wrote: “I wish to remove *the word* with its dogma but to leave *sound*—or the voiced *beauty* of the soul. I wish to remove *the actor* with his *personality* but to leave *the chorus of masked figures*. I wish to remove *the pictorial scene* but to leave in its place the *architectonic scene*” (77). Similar to Shklovsky’s notion of defamiliarization, Craig wished to remove the normal physical realities of quotidian experience that lead to automatic perception and replace them with symbolic components, “for only the symbolic can best create and communicate a vision, or so Craig believed” (Eynat-Confino 162). Craig reiterated this belief in an article from 1912: “There is only one actor—nay, one man—who has the soul of the dramatic poet and who has ever served as true and loyal interpreter of the poet. This is the Marionette” (*Theatre Advancing* 93). Removing the human realities of body, appearance, and personality from the stage eliminates sentimentality in the audience, and the avant-garde theater deemed this removal of sentiment from the theatrical space necessary to allow the audience to engage in an aesthetic interpretation of the dramatic work.

Jacinto Benavente is the first Spanish playwright to incorporate modern ideas regarding the symbolic value and formal flexibilities of puppetry into his theater. Harold B. Segel identifies Benavente’s collection of plays *Teatro fantástico*—first published in 1892, but later expanded and reissued in 1905—as an experimental playground in which Benavente explores the dramatic possibilities of puppets, masks, and the Italian *commedia dell’arte* (125–26). *La senda del amor*, for example, includes a puppet show

within the play, simultaneously exploring the expressive possibilities of the marionette, the relationship between audience and puppet, and the complex interrelations of two planes of existence in metatheatre. The prologue of Benavente's most famous play, *Los intereses creados* (1907), openly declares the play's lack of verisimilitude and its divergence from the established naturalism of the Madrilenian theater scene of the era: "Es una farsa guiñolesca, de asunto disparatado, sin realidad alguna. Pronto veréis cómo cuanto en ella sucede no pudo suceder nunca, que sus personajes no son ni semejan hombres y mujeres, sino muñecos o fantoches de cartón y trapo, con groseros hilos, visibles a poca luz y al más corto de vista" (53). These introductory remarks by Crispín are not meant to suggest that no connection exists between the themes presented in the play and external reality; the prologue emphasizes that the qualities and characteristics of each of the characters in the work are common traits of mankind rather than the specific or peculiar traits of a single character. In other words, the characters function as allegorical representations of a broader human reality that extends to all of humankind instead of remaining limited to a handful of dramatic beings. Segel relates the aesthetic project of the play to a larger social vision as well: "This, then, is at the heart of Benavente's intention [. . .] to enable that audience, through art, to rejuvenate its collective spirit and hence overcome the age of the world. Only such rejuvenation could eventually accomplish the necessary abandonment of antiquated and ossified forms, not just in the drama but in culture and society as a whole" (131). The presence of puppets on stage prevents the audience from reading actions as the specific behavior of an individual, instead viewing all behaviors, attitudes, and deeds as representations of the broader social and cultural environment to which the audience belongs.

The tendency in European modernist and avant-garde drama toward a less realistic, more symbolic understanding of character is integral to the project of re-theatricalizing drama at the dawn of the twentieth century. This search for essential theatricalism led playwrights and directors to medieval dramatic praxis, particularly its highly-developed sense of symbolism and allegory. According to Elinor Fuchs, the modernist theater at the end of the nineteenth century sought to abandon theatrical realism in order to access a communal spiritual plane that remained unencumbered by the ideology of materialism and individuality: “Turning away from realism, materialism, and positivism, this generation stumbled afresh into the *mysterium tremendum*, and sought corresponding art forms” (36). Fuchs goes on to explain that the *mysterium* “is a metaphysical play whose subject is salvation. The event it seeks is not the recognition of tragedy, the reconciliation of comedy, or the victory of melodrama, but a mysterious transubstantiation: characters shed, or want to shed, the dross of individuality and sometimes corporeality—whatever stands as their particular, painful separation from the larger plan” (48). Although not explicitly political, the modernist rejection of realism and individuality in favor of allegorical meaning and aesthetic transcendence implies a critical reading of European modernity.

Implicit in the modernist reading of modernity is a sharpened sense of skepticism in the face of mass media. We can productively read the modernist rejection of realism as a strong critique of journalism’s claim to present truthful information through a lens of objectivity and fairness. In an article titled “Journalism” published in *Die literarische Welt* in June of 1927, Walter Benjamin playfully turned his keen sense of criticism toward the power of contemporary mass media to manipulate and mold information.

Benjamin recounts a prank played on all of the Parisian newspapers by a student at the Ecole Normale in the context of Charles Lindbergh's historic flight across the Atlantic:

[S]omeone telephoned all the newspaper editors with the news that the Ecole Normale had resolved to declare the aviator 'a former student.' And all the papers printed the announcement. Among the medieval Scholastics, there was a school that described God's omnipotence by saying: He could alter even the past, unmake what had really happened, and make real what had never happened. As we can see, in the case of enlightened newspaper editors, God is not needed for this task; a bureaucrat is all that is required. (353)

Although written in a witty, comic style, Benjamin's criticism of contemporary journalism could not be more acute. Motivated by personal interests, politics, and profits, newspapers 'play God' by controlling the public's access to information.

If modernist drama sought reconciliation with the larger, spiritual fabric of the universe, the avant-garde movements accepted and dramatized the fragmentary experience of modernity. As the proliferation of machinery, technology, urbanization, and mass media testified, humans no longer constituted the center of social or political life, but often found themselves caught between larger forces. Fuchs describes how this perception of modern human's condition was translated into the language of drama in "a type of staging that has become a signature style of contemporary experimental theater. In these performances, the human figure, instead of providing perspectival unity to a stage whose setting acts as backdrop and visual support, is treated as an element in what might be described as a theatrical landscape" (92). In contrast to the bourgeois comedy's tendency to center drama around the experiences of a human protagonist or ensemble of characters, avant-garde drama seeks out the theatricality of vast forces and spaces in which humans play a part but by no means dominate the whole.



Jacinto Grau's *El señor de Pigmalión* (1921) assesses the changes occurring in the artistic theater of the early twentieth century and dramatizes the declining role of individuals as they recede into the background, unable to control through either will or effort the fragmented reality of modernity. The prologue satirizes the crass commercialism of Spanish theater producers and the egocentricity of actors, setting them in contrast to the artistic vision of the avant-garde. Pigmalión's long speech, in which he discusses his personal history in the art of puppet-making, supports many of the ideas held forth by Gordon Craig on the need to transcend the inadequacies of human actors to fully express the aesthetic vision of the poet-creator: "[N]ació en mí la idea de crear artificialmente el actor ideal, sin vanidad, sin rebeldías, sumiso al poeta creador, como la masa en los dedos de los escultores" (38). Grau's rendering of the Greek myth takes on a much darker tone than George Bernard Shaw's famous version of the story in *Pygmalion* (1913). At the end of Shaw's adaptation, Henry Higgins's 'creation,' Eliza Doolittle, abandons him to marry Freddy, leaving Higgins in a state of denial that his handiwork has turned against him and that he must now find a way to replace all of the important functions that Eliza had performed for him. In Grau's version, the marionettes, like Eliza, complain and rebel against what they perceive as Pigmalión's tyrannical rule over them, while Pigmalión uses increasingly intense means to control his marionette-actors out of fear that they, his most beloved companions, will abandon him. Like modern human, Pigmalión finds himself in a constant struggle with the technological wonders he has created, striving to keep them under control so as not to become lost and disoriented without them or, worse still, wholly dominated by them. The marionettes escape their boxes one evening and when Pigmalión catches them, Urdemalas leads the final revolt by

shooting Pígalión with a shotgun. All of the marionettes leave the stage, except for Juan el Tonto, the least advanced, who lingers over Pígalión's body, ignores his cries for help, and crushes his skull with the gun's handle. The play dramatizes the plight of modern humanity, caught in a complex web of social, commercial, and political interrelationships increasingly mediated by impersonal technology, powerless to free itself from the desire and tyranny of the products of its own creation.

### **Popular Culture and Linguistic Distortion in *La pipa de kif***

Valle-Inclán experimented with a parodic, distorted reworking of the *género chico* in the poetry collection *La pipa de kif* (1919). Iris M. Zavala identifies this anthology as the work that announces Valle's movement away from turn-of-the-century *modernismo* and toward a more modern poetic conception. She sees this as the text in which the carnivalesque definitively enters Valle's literary aesthetic, the text "donde Valle nos ofrece la clave de las innovadoras y cambiantes jerarquías de sus códigos" (45). In the second poem, the poetic voice invokes the modern muse, whose identity and characteristics remain a half-shrouded mystery to him: "¿Acaso esta musa grotesca— / ya no digo funambulesca— / Que con sus gritos espasmódicos / Irrita a los viejos retóricos, / Y salta luciendo la pierna, / No será la musa moderna?" (20–21). Valle embeds the notion of tension between literary tradition and modernity in this description of the modern muse, writing within the context of an ongoing crisis in art that leads a generation of poets to take advantage of "las técnicas del *collage*, el *pastiche* [. . .], el hábil empleo de la cultura popular o de aquellos aspectos de lo que hoy llamaríamos *mass media* (canciones, pancartas, literatura de cordel, folletín, anuncios, cine)" (Zavala 40). In other

words, Valle's aesthetic concepts during this period are moving closer to the aesthetic principles of formal fragmentation, visuality, and distortion that already had characterized the mass daily newspaper and the *género chico* in the last half of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth.

*La pipa de kif* casts its poetic gaze on the marginalized figures that populate the periphery of modern Spanish society. Smith observes that in this collection of poems Valle's attentions turn from the pastoral landscapes of Galicia and the rural Galician aristocracy and toward "the dregs of urban society" and "the slum quarters of the city" (71). Like the *género chico*, the poems in *La pipa de kif* focus on visually stunning scenes from the life of the popular classes, largely revolving around festive spaces and community activities: Carnival, the circus, the mid-summer *verbena*, etc. The collection shares the *género chico*'s proximity to journalism's sensationalist representation of crime, executions, and the underworld in poems such as "El preso," "Garrote vil," and "El crimen de Medinica." The collection weaves together disparate threads of life and death in the city, textually recreating the myriad of narratives, events, and discourses that constitute the communal generation of signification of contemporary urban living.

To recreate the rhythm and heterogeneity of the modern city, Valle incorporates the logic and structure of the Madrilenian theatrical *revista*. The heterogeneous themes and subjects presented in *La pipa de kif* share a common point of contact in that they converge on the physical and psychic space of the modern capital. Each poetic vignette adds a landscape, story, or perspective to the work, and the sum total of these mini-narratives approximates the experience of the growing political and cultural metropolis. The collection integrates the guide characters of the *revista*—one well-versed in the

nuances and complexities of the modern city and the other a starry-eyed outsider in need of guidance—at multiple levels. Within the text, the modern muse is the experienced guide who helps the poetic voice navigate the tricky physical and social terrain of the city and the slippery artistic terrain of modern poetry. From a broader perspective, the poetic voice guides us, the readers, on a similar journey, assisting us as we make our way through the labyrinthine maze of geography, language, and discourse that characterizes the contemporary urban public sphere.

While the collection of *La pipa de kif* shares similarities with the genres, verbal ingenuity, and plasticity of the *género chico*, the poem “Resol de verbena” offers a point of contact with the festive *sainetes* that came into vogue in the 1890s, the first years of Valle’s residence in the capital. The poem begins and ends with a vivid ‘stuffscape’ of the food items and other articles of consumption that populate the popular *verbenas*, *ferias*, and festivals in Madrid. For example, the final two stanzas of the poem:

¡Naranjas! ¡Torrados! ¡Limonos!  
¡Claveles! ¡Claveles! ¡Claveles!  
Encadenados, los pregones  
Hacen guirnaldas de babeles.

Se infla el buñuelo. La aceituna  
Aliñada reclama el vino,  
Y muerde el pueblo la moruna  
Rosquilla, de anís y comino. (135)

Like the festive *sainetes*, this poem depicts the *verbena* through the physical realities of the celebration’s attractions and delights. The poetic voice’s simple statement of “[s]e infla el buñuelo” in the final stanza captures the simplicity of this confection, but also hints at the poem’s underlying magnification or inflation of the terms of the *género chico*’s representation of popular customs and practices; the *buñuelo* stands in

metonymically for all of the food items named in this poem and in an endless number of commercial theater pieces to create the ambiance and atmosphere of popular Madrilenian street culture. Each stanza centers on an aspect of the festive *sainete*. Stanza 3 recreates the physical motion and visual and aural pleasures of dance. Stanza 6 through 9 sketch the character types and situations that arise in the *sainete*, such as the threat of violence between the *chulo* and the *guardia* or the semi-bourgeois student who sees an evening in the *barrios bajos* as an opportunity for an amorous adventure. In Stanza 11, an anonymous voice advertises: “¡Agua, / Azucarillos y aguardiente!” (134), an allusion to Ramos Carrión’s eponymous *sainete*. Through poetry, “Resol de verbena” lays bare the dialectical process by which the realities of popular festivities gave form to the theatrical world of the *género chico* and in turn were changed by the popularity of *género chico* plays and musical scores.

The ambivalent tone, simultaneous recreation of popular practice and dramatic tradition, inventive language, and the plasticity of *La pipa de kif* are key components of this collection of poetry that will appear in the *esperpento*. Zavala observes:

Valle juega con las distancias; es a especie de imagen del telescopio invertido de la realidad cósmica (semejante a la imagen romántica). España se transforma en *ruedo*, una *corrida*, un *carnaval*, un *tablado*, habitado simultáneamente por liliputienses y gulliverianos, enanos y gigantes, monstrous carnavalescos. Las imágenes se parodian a sí mismas y los textos forman un sistema de espejos deformantes; espejos invertidos que alargan, acortan, desfiguran, agrandan, achican, engordan, adelgazan en diferentes direcciones y grados. El texto es la *arena* de duplicación paródica que caricaturiza, ridiculiza y deforma héroes, autoridades, ideologías, objetos. (45)

The short stanzas and simple syntax of the poems open expansive spaces full of vibrant color, frenetic motion, and the predictable actions and activities of the popular classes. If the *género chico* was conceived by many as a theatrical mirror that reflected the image of

the capital, as Fernando Vela suggests (368), then *La pipa de kif* is a funhouse of mirrors reflecting back and forth in a gesture of parody and distortion. This image of mirrors facing and infinitely reflecting one another appears explicitly in Scene 9 of *Luces de bohemia*: “Un Café que prolongan empañados espejos. [. . .] Los espejo multiplicadores están llenos de un interés folletinesco, en su fondo, con una geometría absurda, extravaga el Café.” This description of the scene’s setting fuses the visual absurdity of the mirrors with the pounding music, smoke-filled air, and electric lights to produce sensory overload not unlike the effect of *La pipa de kif*. The multi-sensory aesthetic of deformation and caricature that would define the *esperpento* in the coming years already appears highly developed in Valle’s poetry from the 1910s.

### **Luces de bohemia: an Avant-Garde Revista**

The aesthetic principles implied by the form, structure, and linguistic distortion of *La pipa de kif* came to fruition in Valle-Inclán’s dramatic texts of the 1920s beginning with *Luces de bohemia*. The wider variety of semiotic signs available in drama expanded the opportunity to craft a complex web of heterogeneous visual spectacle and slippery language. Physical form and verbal enunciation stand side by side in a constant exchange of signification, crafting for the reader/spectator an all-consuming spectacle that places the myriad narratives and texts of modernity in a single space of direct interaction. Many strands of contemporary Spanish identity crowd the dramatic space of the *esperpentos*, all changed and distorted not only by Valle’s witty use of language and theatrical construction, but by the mere fact that they have been brought together in a single psychic space that attempts to resist the homogenizing effects and manipulations of mass media.

The variety of semiotic signs available to Valle-Inclán in drama, as opposed to poetry, necessitates a framework that structures the theatrical works and makes it intelligible to the audience. Valle's strident use of parodic imitation and invention serves not only to criticize popular theatrical practice of the period, but also to orient the reader or spectator through the use of familiar forms. The estranging impulse of the avant-garde theater problematizes the automatic and makes the familiar strange; thus Valle begins with the familiar—commercial theater practices—in order to arrive at a defamiliarized destination.

The endless parade of characters, frequent allusions to politicians and current events, the incredible mixture of linguistic registers and discourses, and the juxtaposition of disconnected scenes in *Luces de bohemia* firmly identify this important play as a version of the *revista*. The lack of scholarship concerning the relationship of *Luces de bohemia* to this genre within the *género chico* has generated significant confusion and misunderstanding of the play. A critic as astute as John Lyon has observed: “There is something deliberate and almost aggressive about the topicality of *Luces*, to the extent that the contemporary allusions run the risk of obscuring the more durable aspects of the play” (107–08). Lyon is correct to use adjectives such as ‘deliberate’ and ‘aggressive’ to describe the up-to-date quality of the play, but I would suggest that this uncontrollable topicality is exactly the point of a dramatic work that seeks to portray a society increasingly obsessed with the narcissistic viewing of its own representation in the papers, on the stage, and increasingly in film. The obsession with topicality is deliberate, because the structure and content of the play are based on a genre that emerged precisely as a means to dramatize current events through a vigorous aesthetic of variety. Jesús Rubio Jiménez is one of the few critics to have filled this gap in scholarship on Valle's

conception of the *esperpento*, linking this idiosyncratic aesthetic with the political *revistas* of the early twentieth century. He writes: “El *esperpento* valleinclaniano, como muchas de aquellas *revistas*, es un viaje por Madrid tanto literal—comparecen calles y personajes reales—como simbólicamente, ya que la obra es una reflexión sobre las costumbres y los tipos sociales representativos” (19). *Luces de bohemia*, like the *esperpentos* that follow it, uses many of the strategies of scenic construction and allegorical characterization found in the *revistas* of the commercial stage, but with a sharp critical edge that probes the ethical conundrums of contemporary Spanish society.

Máximo Estrella and Don Latino de Hispalis’s nocturnal journey through the central neighborhoods of Madrid corresponds to the wanderings of the principal character pair in the typical *revista*. As in many of these plays from the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, Max and Latino provide the thread of unity that connects a series of disparate scenes and characters groupings that appear in a variety of locations throughout the work. *Luces de bohemia*, however, does not obey the typical formula for the logic and structure of the *revista* and thus actively rearranges the normal qualities of the genre, changes that lead to a number of fascinating consequences in the work. First, the play undermines the tendency in the *revista* to include a well-informed lead character who guides an uninitiated outsider. A constant vacillation of roles occurs between Max and Latino, for neither fully occupies the role of guide or guided. In the early scenes of the play the blind poet relies on Latino’s vision to navigate the urban landscape of the Spanish capital. During Max’s epiphany in Scene 12, however, it is Latino who remains blind to Max’s aesthetic and artistic transcendence. The two men inhabit different planes of existence: the Sancho-like Latino operates in the tangible world of economic exchange



and constantly worries about money, clothing, food, and so forth; in contrast, the quixotic Max moves in an intellectual, literary realm of language, poetry, and visuality (as opposed to vision), in which his artistic creativity trumps other concerns for life or well-being. Sofía Irene Cardona has analyzed this contrast as a parodic reworking of the *galán/gracioso* dichotomy in early-modern theater, basing her distinctions on José Fernández Montesino's classic description: "El galán ve la vida a través de sus sueños, el criado a través de la experiencia de una realidad mutilada" (35). Cardona confirms that Max corresponds to the *galán* because he obeys the demands of an "ética rigurosísima," a phrase she borrows from Juana de José Prades (90), and in this way joins Rubén and the Marquis of Bradomín as figures that espouse ethical positions in texts and live out those beliefs in their bodies (426). Max and Latino's existence on different planes of mental experience precludes any ability of one to guide the other effectively through a series of encounters and toward a deeper understanding of modern society and their role in it.

Valle's decision to resist and undermine the 'tourguide' storyline of the *revista* in *Luces de bohemia* points to a broader critique of this commercial genre. Valle directs our attention to the falseness of the *revista* genre's claim to instruct and educate about the realities of the modern world by positing two groups of spectators within the play itself. At the end of the play, the only characters that learn anything from the gradual decline and sudden demise of Máximo Estrella are either dead or destined soon to pass to the other side of the river Styx: Rubén Darío's death on February 6, 1916, is a historical certainty, while the Marqués de Bradomín's remark that he wishes to sell his memoirs to be published posthumously connects his death with the publication of Valle's *Sonata de otoño* in 1902. In contrast to Rubén and the Marqués, the rest of the characters that

populate *Luces de bohemia* remain unchanged by their experiences, a feature of the play most clearly expressed in the final scene as all of the characters in Pica Lagartos's tavern continue their petty tussles for control of the money Max left behind, oblivious to the moral implications of their actions in the socio-cultural fabric of Spanish society. The majority of characters in *Luces de bohemia* interpreted Max as an object for the satisfaction of their desires rather than a reservoir of ethical thinking and behavior. Similarly, the *revista* of the early twentieth century had lost its critical edge and had become a reflection of the bourgeois audience's desires and anxieties rather than an active theatrical engagement with modernity. Valle-Inclán adopts the structure and formal qualities of this popular entertainment to reveal its aesthetic limitations and ethical blindspots from within.

*Luces de bohemia* further deteriorates the sense of unity in the *revista* genre by splitting up the principle pair of characters for a number of scenes. After Max's arrest in Scene 4 and booking at the police station in Scene 5, he and Latino are separated in Scene 6 through 8. The play adopts a quasi-cinematic quality as the scenes alternate between Max and Latino's actions to portray the simultaneity of their experiences. This is especially true of Scene 7, in which Latino and the young *modernistas* implore Don Filiberto to assist them in freeing Max and decrying the poor treatment he has suffered. The phone call that Don Filiberto places at the end of Scene 7 leads into the opening moments of Scene 8, in which Dieguito speaks on the phone, confirming that orders have been made to release Max. When Scene 9 begins with Max and Latino entering a café, however, there is no explanation of how or where they reunited. These important scenes in the middle of the play demonstrate a further dissolution of the limited dramatic unity

present in the *revista*. Max's death at the end of Scene 12 signals a greater breach in the typical structure of the *revista*, permanently separating the principle pair of characters. Scenes 13 through 15 mark a more extreme version of the alternation of scenes centered on Max and Latino. Max's body continues to occupy a central role in the scenic organization and dramatic unity of the play, even though Max now plays an obviously more passive role. Scene 14 most acutely exhibits the absent presence of Max at the end of the play, as Rubén and the Marquis of Bradomín engage in conversation that echoes the final chat between the famed Nicaraguan poet and Max in Scene 9. These two scenes, in fact, present a number of important similarities: the juxtaposition of Rubén's resistance to speak about death and his interlocutors' fascination with the subject; requests for Rubén to recite his poetry, which he delays and denies; philosophical discussions on the nature of existence and the relationship between life and death; and the concurrence of intellectuals and common minds, which leads to ironic combinations of the transcendent and the mundane.

Max Estrella's absent presence in the final scenes of the play is crucial to Valle's reinscription of the *revista* genre within the aesthetic principles of the *esperpento*. Too often, critics approach the *esperpento* genre entirely from Max's epiphany in Scene 12 of *Luces de bohemia*. While such an approach is understandable, it does not take into account that Max himself is a character in a play that is an *esperpento*, and consequently is part of the same systematic distortion he describes. Don Estrafalarío's comments regarding the need to see the world from "la otra ribera" are delivered in the prologue to *Los cuernos de don Friolera*, set apart from and in contrast to the play. Max's aesthetic awakening in Scene 12 of *Luces de bohemia* marks only the climax of a process by which

he transcends the limitations of his mortality toward the realization of true aesthetic distance. Already in Scene 9 Max hints at this ultimate fate when he tells Rubén: “¡Rubén, te llevaré el mensaje que te plazca darme para la otra ribera de la Estigia!” (134). The articulation of the *esperpento* in Scene 12 is an incomplete rendering of the concept, stated before Max himself has gained the ability to see the tragicomedy of earth from the celestial vantage point afforded by death. The repetition of elements in Scenes 9 and 14 reflects Max’s transition from a sentimentally-involved earthly viewer to an emotionally-detached celestial spectator. Max is present during both scenes, in one as an active participant in the conversation and in the other as a disinterested corpse whose tranquility and lack of identification with the living allow him to take in the spectacle of human fear, confidence, suffering, and joy.

Understanding the relationship of *Luces de bohemia* to the history of the *revista* genre on the Spanish commercial stage helps to reconcile the multiple conceptions of time embedded in Valle-Inclán’s play. The *revista* developed in Spain, as in France, as a theatrical genre that reviewed the events of a specified period of time, generally the past year, and commented on those events through musical numbers, comic dialogue, zany visual effects, and choreography. The settings of the earliest *revistas* almost always were symbolic or allegorical spaces that exist outside of time, such as an eternal forest or the mythological Mount Olympus, as we see in José María Gutiérrez de Alba’s plays from the 1860s. *La Gran Via* and other successful *revistas* from the 1880s, however, firmly entrenched the genre in the stylized portrayal of the immediate urban reality of the theater-going public. The commercially-successful decision to ground works in the modern city problematizes time in these works, as the principle pair of characters no

longer exists outside of time, instead occupying two different times at once: the temporal unity of their walk through the city and the decidedly different temporal unity of the period of time from which the play draws its social satire and commentary.

*Luces de bohemia* takes this splitting of time a step further by establishing three distinct temporalities in the play: the dramatic or experiential time of the play itself, the panhistorical representation of an era of turbulent Spanish political life, and Max Estrella's existence outside of time. Max and Don Latino's walk through Madrid constitutes the play's dramatic time, following the events and interactions of these characters as they navigate colorful characters drawn from the types of the *género chico* and the typical settings of the commercial theater. From this series of dramatic encounters emerges a second, panhistorical temporality that presents a cross-section of Spanish cultural and social history through the interpretative lens of the final day of Max Estrella's life. Many commentators of the play note the accretion of an array of allusions in the work that correspond to very different historical moments. José Servera Baño, after outlining a list of allusions in the play, offers a useful observation: "Todo ello forma un tiempo histórico indeterminado, la tremenda condensación realizada por Valle enriquece sobremanera la ambientación y el carácter histórico y real del drama, ya que esta técnica es de un gran efectismo en la creación de una atmósfera social verosímil" (34). Similar to Dru Dougherty's assessment of Valle's discursive practices, the fusion of multiple temporal logics in *Luces de bohemia* functions as a palimpsest, superimposing various historical moments onto the same dramatic setting and actions. The time of the play, then, does not correspond to 1909, the year of Alejandro Sawa's death to which many commentators point as the historical referent of the play, but rather relies on a

panhistoricism that coincides with an entire era, the turbulent first decades of the twentieth century in a country still grappling with its tumultuous transition to modernity.

Unlike Don Latino and other characters that populate *Luces de bohemia*, Max remains outside the normal flow of time in the play. Max's dedication to a bohemian lifestyle emerges time and again as a charming anachronism, out of sync with the realities of modern life. In Scene 9, Rubén Darío tells him: "¡Max, es preciso huir de la bohemia!" (135). Max's very being, however, is intimately connected to a larger, allegorical project and remains unencumbered by the current cultural context. In Scene 8 the Ministro declares: "Para ti no pasan los años" (125), confirming Max's existence outside of time, beyond the demands of contemporary society. In the conversation in the Café Colón, Max openly rejects the notion of time when Don Latino suggests the necessity of spending money with frugality:

Don Latino: Me parece un poco exagerado pedir vinos franceses. ¡Hay que pensar en el mañana, caballeros!

Max: ¡No pensemos! (136)

Max refuses to think about tomorrow because, for him, past and present do not exist. Later in this conversation, Rubén and Don Latino speak of their occult beliefs and the search for understanding the universe's grand scheme of unity until Max chimes in:

Rubén: Mar y Tierra, Fuego y Viento, divinos monstruos. ¡Posiblemente! Divinos porque son Eternidades.

Max: Eterna la nada. (137)

Once again, Max opposes time as a conceptual framework within which to understand humanity or existence. Scene 10 stands as a parodic deformation of these themes as Max flirtatiously passes time with La Lunares, focusing exclusively on the palpable realities of the here-and-now and fleeing all considerations of past or future:

La Lunares: Yo guardo el pan de higos para el gachó que me sepa camelar.  
¿Por qué no lo pretendes?  
Max: Me falta el tiempo. (148)

Valle-Inclán consciously manipulates time in *Luces de bohemia* to further exaggerate the treatment of time in the *revista* genre.

*Luces de bohemia* maintains and juxtaposes three competing temporalities in the dramatic space of the play. Valle by no means introduces the multi-layered conception of time present in the play; this fusion of the dramatic time of the principle characters' walk through the city with a historical time spanning a year or even decades had been a feature of the theatrical *revista* for over half a century in Spain. Valle's contribution revolves around his subtle integration of the multiple temporalities of the *revista* into the primary dramatic movement of the play: rather than allegorical characters that appear on stage to announce themselves as specific events from the past year or to speak explicitly about particular happenings, Valle incorporates thirty years of social unrest and disorder into Max Estrella's urban nocturnal trek through subtle dialogue, allusions masked by distorted names and speech, and a creative sense of background and scene construction. This feature of Valle's play contributes to its critique of contemporary Spanish society by contrasting the aesthetic and ethical transcendence of Max Estrella with the banal realities of the play's dramatic story arc and its panhistorical representation of modern Spain.

### **The Periodical-Based *Revista*, an Intertextual Genre for *Luces de bohemia***

This exploration of the coexistence of multiple temporalities in *Luces de bohemia* brings us back to the intimate relationship between the development of the *género chico* and the rise of mass print media in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Valle-Inclán's

stylistic and discursive variety, fragmented visual spectacle, and use of multiple times in *Luces de bohemia* mirror the major qualities of the modern newspaper. Valle's extensive work for newspapers during the earliest years of his career, particularly during his first trip to Mexico in 1892, obviously corroborates his familiarity with the types of writing and production process of contemporary journalism.

At the same time that Valle was getting involved in the journalism and theatrical scene of the capital for the first time in the 1890s, a trend emerged on the commercial stage of generating *revistas* based on specific Madrilenian newspapers. An examination of these generally-forgotten works will be crucial for understanding how *género chico* theater practice and contemporary journalism converge in the form, content, and logic of *Luces de bohemia*. The following section may appear to be a lengthy digression, but in fact the fusion of popular theatrical praxis and journalistic techniques in these plays reflects an important cultural substrate from which the dramatic vision of *Luces de bohemia* emerges. None of these plays exists in modern editions and are only accessible in specialized collections of libraries such as the Biblioteca Nacional in Madrid or the Biblioteca Española de Música y Teatro Contemporáneos at the Fundación Juan March. Consequently, this section serves as a bit of literary archaeology, digging deep into the popular theater currents of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in order to find a hidden key to Valle-Inclán's *Luces de bohemia*.

Ángel Caamaño's *Heraldo de Madrid*—which debuted in February of 1896 in the Teatro Romea and then reappeared in November, 1896, in the Teatro Martín with significant changes—initiated the fad of theatricalizing popular newspapers. The five *cuadros* of the play correspond, as we might expect, to major components of the paper:



“Artículo de fondo,” “Ecos de todas partes,” “Actualidades,” “De todo un poco,” and “Estafeta taurina.” The first scene begins with a chorus consisting of the paper’s sections singing a song that describes how the fragmented formal layout of the paper functions as a means of increasing the paper’s readership by targeting specific demographics:

Todas en amable  
tranquilo consorcio  
le damos la vida  
y el alma al periódico,  
y á todas nos leen  
con agrado igual,  
pues tenemos todas  
público especial. (7)

Scene 2 sets off the dramatic action of the play as Mr. Chiflatis, a foreigner, arrives at the offices of the *Heraldo de Madrid* to be guided through the production process by the editor, Herald, who appears in the second *cuadro*. The play blends the technique of portraying the editorial offices of a newspaper—utilized in earlier works such as Sinesio Delgado’s *El Grillo, periódico semanal* (1885)—with an allegorical interest in physically incarnating the sections and features of the paper in actors’ bodies, costuming, set designs, musical selections, and so forth. Caamaño’s play juxtaposes not only multiple temporal frames but also two distinct sets of physical bodies on the stage, those portraying dramatic characters, such as Mr. Chiflatis, and those symbolically embodying the components of a modern newspaper, such as the choruses of Pasatiempos and Anuncios. Other characters straddle these two realms, such as Herald and the Reporter, both of whom exist as specific dramatic characters in the work itself and point to a larger socio-cultural reality as metonymic representatives of the journalistic profession. In the *cuadro* “Actualidades,” the Reporter frenetically sings of his day-to-day activities:

Corro yo todo Madrid

lo mismito que el exprés  
para averiguar noticias  
que han de ver la luz después.  
Del Juzgado al Ministerio  
de la Guerra y de Ultramar  
y así me paso la vida  
sin poder ni respirar. (19)

The fast tempo and staccato notes of the song, along with the zany choreography, aurally and visually reinforce the chaotic speed of the world of journalism through the anecdotal experiences of the dramatic character.

Caamaño's *Heraldo de Madrid* introduces an important dramatic strategy that will bear bountiful fruit in *Luces de bohemia*, which is the clever use of dialogue by characters that have value as dramatic characters in the play and symbolic meaning in the allegorical or panhistorical plane of the play. In the fifth scene of the second *cuadro*, the editor Heraldo speaks on the phone to a source who relates to him a story involving an attempted robbery as Mr. Chiflatis listens:

Heraldo:       ¿El ratero escapó,  
                  según la costumbre, intacto?...  
                  ¿Qué fue cogido en el acto?...  
                  Apunte. Se le prendió.  
                  Ha sido de sobra tonto...  
                  ¿Los guardias?... ¿Sí?... ¡Qué emociones!  
                  Ponga usted entre admiraciones:  
                  ¡¡Llegaron los guardias pronto!!  
Chiflatis: ¿Es suceso sorprendente?  
Heraldo: ¡Ya lo creo! ¡Apabullante!  
                  Ahora un título chocante...  
                  ¡Ya está! ¡¡Milagro patente!! (17)

At the immediate level of the action within the play, this exchange functions comically as Heraldo expresses ironic surprise upon learning that the Guardias were successful in apprehending a criminal. The item is newsworthy not because of the crime, as we might expect, but due to the unexpected competency of the civil authorities in bringing the

criminal to justice. Allegorically standing in for all editors, *Heraldo*'s reaction communicates a harsh indictment of the systemic inefficiency and failure of Madrid's security forces to enforce the law and maintain order in a city whose immense population growth in the late-nineteenth century coincided with equally rapidly-growing crime rates. Rather than a direct statement with obvious comic and allegorical intentions, here Caamaño fuses the basic components of drama—dialogue, pantomime—with a coexistent allegorical plane to create a scene that functions on at least two distinct discursive levels.

Félix Limendoux and Enrique López Marín continued the newspaper-based *revista* when their theatricalization of *Madrid Cómico* appeared at the Teatro Romea on April 20, 1896. The arrival of *Madrid Cómico* is particularly significant due to the relationship between this satirical periodical and the *género chico*. Founded in 1880, a whole generation of writers, playwrights, and artists collaborated in the pages of *Madrid Cómico*, including illustrious names such as Luis Taboada, Juan Gris, Leopoldo Alas “Clarín,” and Jacinto Benavente. The first to identify the profound connection between this paper and the *género chico*, Nancy Membrez, sums it up best:

The relationship between the *Madrid Cómico*, the apex of festive literature, and the *teatro por horas*, the apex of festive theater, is fundamental and cannot be emphasized enough. With few exceptions their writers were one and the same individuals. These festive authors *por horas* were the vanguard of a major nineteenth-century Spanish trend towards combining a career in journalism with a career as a playwright. [. . .] Festive poetry, festive prose and festive theater, all outgrowths of *costumbrismo*, formed a bond among these writers, whose hegemony was only challenged in the 1890's by the insurgent sensibilities of Modernism, by the *género ínfimo* and by cinema. (71–72)

Hence, the arrival of a theatrical work designed to portray the familiar pages of *Madrid Cómico* does not merely entail a commercial decision to capitalize on the success of a popular publication, but also actively participates in the mutually supportive relationship

between this paper and the commercial playwrights it unapologetically and unreservedly supported. The theater critic José Yxart, in his classic survey of Spanish theater, decried the collusion and camaraderie that characterized the Madrilenian theater scene's relationship to criticism and journalism: "En todas las principales redacciones actúan como periodistas, compañeros del autor, autores como él, relacionados con las empresas, interesados u obligados a su favor" (129). Writing three years after the end of the paper *Madrid Cómico* and quite possibly thinking of its relationship to the *género chico*, Pedro Mata laments the benevolent dramatic criticism that results from the collaboration and close relationships of critics and the playwrights they are supposed to critique in an article in *Blanco y Negro* in 1915:

Unas veces, el autor es un colaborador; otras, un compañero de redacción, el amigo con quien se toma café todas las noches, el contertulio del saloncillo del teatro, el colega que constantemente nos elogia, el director de la revista que nos encarga artículos [. . .] ¿Qué hace el crítico en estas circunstancias? ¿Se enemista con el compañero? ¿Riñe con el amigo? ¿Es ingrato con quien le favorece? ¿Rompe de un martillazo las ilusiones de un principiante? (28–29)

Both critics sustain that the journalistic activities and affiliations of many commercial playwrights wrought a pernicious effect on the Spanish stage as authors' reputations remained intact and unscathed in spite of theatrical works of uneven or poor quality.

We find indirect evidence of this unofficial collaboration between *Madrid Cómico* and the *género chico* in the pages of the newspaper itself. For example, in the second number of the paper from January 11, 1880, a poem by Carlos Coello appears titled "A un crítico sin vergüenza." A portion of the poem reads:

¿Y porque no me he suscrito  
A tu periódico *El Pito*,  
Das, Senén, un varapalo  
A mi ultimo [sic] drama, malo

Como todos los que he escrito?  
Yo no miro con desdén  
Tus críticas, ni es razón;  
Mas las prefiero, Senén,  
A pagar la suscripción  
Y á que tú me trates bien. (no page)

The poem operates in two directions at once: first, the poetic voice overtly accuses the critic of writing a poor review of a play because the poetic voice is not a subscriber to the critic's paper; second, the poetic voice is entirely complicit with the idea of essentially buying good reviews for the cost of a subscription. The poetic voice undermines the sobriety and seriousness of criticism by suggesting that negative reviews result not from the critic's desire to give an accurate account and appraisal of the work in question, but actually from the same sense of ego and vanity that leads the playwright to desire positive reviews in the first place. Although the poem certainly was intended to be read ironically as a shameless playwright accusing the theater critic of shamelessness, it nonetheless confirms the fears expressed by Mata and Yxart that these cozy relationships between writers and critics did in fact exist and were unabashedly desired

The meritorious or nefarious aspects of the relationship between the paper *Madrid Cómico* and the *género chico* playwrights aside, the debut of Limendoux and López Marín's *revista* confirms the convergence of the festive vision of Madrid propagated by both. The character Madrid Cómico appears on stage in the first scene of the play and tells the audience:

Quizá llegue á extrañarles mi cinismo  
hablando de este modo,  
pero en este Madrid, que soy yo mismo,  
todo es cómico, todo. (10)

The opening speech equates all of Madrid with the festive, satirical, and comic vision purported by the publication, the play that seeks to theatricalize this publication, and the larger commercial theater phenomenon of the *género chico* of which the play is a part.

Like so many plays of the *género chico*, the paper *Madrid Cómico* approaches the city through a very specific ideological lens, erasing and overlooking major aspects of modernity in an attempt to support the bourgeois values that inform the political culture of the Restoration in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. Political barbs and social satire critique surface features of the inefficiency of civil government or the laziness and mean-spiritedness of Spaniards, but never approach the deficiencies of modern society from a deeper perspective that seeks to find structural faults with the bourgeois, capitalist status quo. Once again the second number of the paper provides an illuminating example in Francisco Pérez Echevarría's short story "El cumplimento del deber." The story follows the wanderings of the typical *artículo de costumbres* narrator through the streets of Madrid until he comes upon a scene in which a security official refuses to help a citizen in need because this area of the city is out of his jurisdiction. The dialogue builds to a culminating lesson on civic virtue: "Desde el momento en que el deber tiene limitaciones, distritos, sexos y clases, y uno mismo no debe hacer caso de los males que le ocurran. ¡Viva la Pepa! y ¡ancha es Castilla!.... Por este camino se llegará fácilmente á la calle de la *Libertad*, pero no se entrará nunca en la del *Progreso*" (4). The denouement of the story seeks to undermine the causes of class or gender solidarity to extol the bourgeois values of hard work and civic duty and neglects consideration of whether or not the social system fosters equality and opportunity for all people.

Financial interests to a large degree determine the social vision put forward by the *género chico* and the majority of mainstream newspapers in late-nineteenth-century Spain. The structure of Limendoux and López Marín's rendition of *Madrid Cómico* communicates the primacy of profits in the commercial theater and mass print industry. The third *cuadro* of the play, titled "Noticias y anuncios," dramatizes the advertisements that made periodicals into lucrative business enterprises for the first time. *Madrid Cómico* once again appears on stage to ask for the audience's attention:

Con vuestra gran tolerancia  
quiero de nuevo contar,  
porque os voy á presentar  
una sección de importancia;  
y doy con este telón  
noticias interesantes,  
y anuncios más importantes  
que forman esta sección. (24)

Even though the purpose of the paper is to provide news and entertainment, *Madrid Cómico*'s statements reveal that the advertisements function as the all-important nucleus that drives the enterprise as a money-making business. Scenes 9–11 blend the visual appeal of the printed advertisements that were a staple of Madrilenian newspapers with the corporeal spectacle of drama. The decoration for the third *cuadro* includes printed signs advertising a tailor, artificial stomachs, and cheap suits. In Scenes 10 and 11, various characters parade across the stage announcing the merits and great value of an assortment of products, physically embodying the salesmanship and language of the printed advertisement. By placing the marketing section of the paper in the structural center of the *revista*, the play's organization implies the central role of profitability in the long-term success of modern print media and the commercial stage and confirms each of these cultural industries' strong affiliation with the bourgeois, capitalist status quo.

The relationship between newspapers and *revistas* based on periodicals became complicated on November 4, 1898, when Gabriel Merino and Enrique López Marín's *El Mentidero* debuted in the Teatro Eslava. This *revista* differed from the previous two in one major regard: the paper to which it alludes did not exist. The play's ironic title operates as an obvious comic element, but at the same time calls into question the means by which emerging print media present information to readers. Don Olimpio, the editor of the paper, engages in an array of comic activities with the sole desire of attracting readers. Illustrations, photographs, jokes, puzzles, sensationalist stories and more appear in the first number of the fictional *El Mentidero*, all with the intention of drawing the interest of readers who will pay the price of the subscription. The personification of Temperature, speaking about the unpredictable winter weather in Madrid, makes a statement that clearly relates to the formal concerns of the modern newspaper when she sings: "[Y]a sabéis que el gusto se encuentra en la variedad" (13). The play appropriately ends with Don Olimpio asking the audience if they would be so kind as to order a subscription as well. The profit motive of the paper and its directors sow a seed of doubt in the mind of the audience as we begin to realize that the desire to sell papers supersedes the responsibility of printing accurate, well-balanced news and information.

Ironically, a paper titled *El Mentidero* was founded in Madrid on February 1, 1913, and openly took aim at the tendency of newspapers to focus more on increasing earnings than on the objective reporting of news. The opening article of the paper's first number, "El programa único," directly attacks the sad state of journalism in Spain. The author's declarations of the power of humor and satire to more accurately reflect the actual state of Spanish politics, government, society, and culture certainly would have



interested Valle-Inclán: “La gente está asqueada de tanto embuste y de tanto adjetivo por la derecha y por la izquierda. Triunfa la mentira, y *El Mentidero*, precisamente porque estamos en el país de las paradojas, viene a decir verdades, si es posible, con una miajilla de gracia” (1). The connections between the author’s notion of Spain as a country of paradoxes and Valle’s *esperpento* aesthetic could not be more obvious. Spain’s status as “una deformación grotesca de la civilización europea” (162), as Máximo Estrella would have it, leads to a bizarre situation in which the ambivalent jokester or prankster is the only voice capable of providing readers with a true account of contemporary society. The author of “El programa único” rejects the profits actively sought by other newspapers:

Sustentamos la teoría de que se puede decir todo sin incurrir en groserías, en delito, ni en responsabilidades subsidiarias; pero, por si acaso, advertimos al Sr. La Cierva que somos insolventes, que *El Mentidero* se publica sin dos pesetas, aunque le hubiera sido fácil obtener unos miles de cualquier fondo secreto para empezar, como empiezan muchos y acaban no pocos.

Con las mismas dos pesetas pensamos morir, cuando Dios nos llame a su santo reino, después de habernos reído mucho. (2)

The author of this piece rejects political cronyism as the basis for creating and sustaining a newspaper enterprise, a practice that was all too common in the final years of the nineteenth century. He continues by resisting any notion of commercial viability for the paper by evoking Genesis 3:19 and stating that the paper, like man, will enter and leave the world with nothing. In a word, the writers of *El Mentidero* (claim to) refuse financial solvency and success to pursue the social and ethical ideal of journalism through satire.

Guillermo Perrín and Miguel de Palacio’s theatrical re-imagining of *ABC*—which debuted on December 12, 1908, in the Teatro de la Zarzuela—focuses less on the practical elements of a newspaper’s production and more on the spectacular vision of

modernity presented in its pages. The play diverges from the typical structure of the *revista* due to the lack of a principle pair of guide characters that give dramatic unity to the work, perhaps indicating the further fragmentation of the scenic arts during the first decades of the twentieth century under the auspices of the so-called *género ínfimo*, which tended toward a true variety show aesthetic of individual performers, singers, and dancers rather than a cohesively planned theatrical show. In the first *cuadro* of *ABC*, El Narices, a bricklayer, wakens El Mangas, a poor newspaper seller, to purchase a paper. In the dialogue that follows, the two discuss modern technological marvels in the context of the planned canalization project for the Manzanares River, a civic development venture proposed by Madrid politicians at the turn of the century to contribute to Spain's desire to become a first-rate world power. As is so typical of the *género chico*, the official positivistic discourse of politicians passes through a lens of distortion and deformation as it sallies forth from the mouths of popular character types:

Narices: ¿Papel? (Cogiendo uno) ¡Anda! La *España Nueva*. Viva la Niña.  
 (Desdoblado el periódico y acercándose al farol) ¡La *canonización* del  
 Manzanares!  
 Mangas: ¿Cómo *canonización*?  
 Narices: ¡Lo van a hacer santo!  
 Mangas: ¡Hombre!... Si es la *Cana*... La *Canalización* del Manzanares.  
 Narices: Oye, tú, ¿y qué es eso?  
 Mangas: ¡Animal!... Es que lo van a hacer navegable, para cuando  
 estrenemos la escuadra.  
 Narices: ¡Anda la escuadra!... No me había *enterao*. ¿Y en dónde van a  
 lavar las lavanderas?  
 Mangas: Las suprimen, porque la ropa sucia debe lavarse en casa.  
 Narices: Has *estao* bien, galán. ¿Y sabes tú que con esa reforma ganará  
 mucho Madrid?  
 Mangas: Como que va ser *Potencia* de primer orden.  
 Narices: ¡Olé las *potencias*! (14)

This dialogue simultaneously dramatizes the spectacular vision of modernity propagated by the modern newspaper and the ways in which readers receive, interpret, and incorporate this vision into their daily lives.<sup>53</sup>

The visual presentation of Perrín and Palacios's *ABC* draws from early-twentieth-century journalism's fascination with scientific and technological innovation as the modern spectacle par excellence. In Scene 5 of the second *cuadro*, for example, a character named Santos Palomo appears and wishes to show off his invention of an airplane. Thankfully the character only speaks of his invention, thus preventing some hapless director in 1908 from having to recreate the following technological monstrosity on stage: "Mi aparato tiene la forma de un mosquito, aumentado catorce mil veces su tamaño natural" (27). Technology appears as both an artificial means by which to extend man's control over his environment and an unnatural, grotesque distortion of nature. The third and fourth *cuadros* of the play dramatize the process by which man exercises dominion over the natural landscape through scientific knowledge and technological prowess as the third section of the play depicts the shores of the Manzanares while the fourth portrays the river after the completion of the canalization project. The grandiose image described for this final section in the stage directions is illuminating:

Gran panorama general del Manzanares canalizado. Grandes edificios.  
Fuentes luminosas. Jardines. Puentes de hierros y colgantes,  
monumentales. Todo iluminado convenientemente. Es de noche.

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<sup>53</sup> While the comic tone suggests that the unabashed optimism in the power of science and progress presented in the play is purposefully exaggerated, at the same time precisely this type of belief in the unlimited possibilities of modern science certainly appeared in newspapers during the period. For example, during the uncertain context of the days leading up to the war with the United States no less, an article was published on April 8, 1898, in *El Imparcial* titled "Bombas de aire" in which the author discusses recent experiments in the "liquidación del aire" and cites the potential practical application of converting air into a type of explosive. The author then asks a question and provides a revelatory answer: "¿Se llegará por medio del aire líquido a perforar las montañas sustituyendo ventajosamente a la dinamita? Todo es posible" (2). This "todo es posible" was not merely the unbridled optimism of a single autor, but a phrase that adequately defines an entire epoch's faith in the permanent progress promised by scientific inquiry.

Banderas, colgaduras, etc. Acorazados de la escuadra. Torpederos. Todos engalanados e iluminados. Los barcos disparan cañonazos. Toda la fantasía de esta decoración a gusto del pintor escenógrafo.

The unreserved praise of scientific inquiry as the inevitable panacea for progress is intimately connected with a positivistic narrative of national advancement and a reestablishment of Spanish power in the realm of European politics. The incredibly lengthy stage directions included in the script of the play—some of which consist of multiple pages!—are indicative of Perrín and Palacios' attention to visual complexity and detail and reflects the newspaper *ABC*'s extensive use of photography from its founding in 1903 by Torcuato Luca de Tena in order to present contemporary events and scientific discoveries as the fantastic marvels of modernity.

Our final example of the newspaper-based *revista*, Antonio López Monís and Ramón Peña's *Blanco y Negro, Revista Ilustrada*—which premiered on April 3, 1920, in the Teatro Odeón—coincides with the period during which Valle-Inclán was working on *Luces de bohemia* for its original publication in *La Pluma*. The extensive stage directions and attention to visual detail in *Blanco y Negro, Revista Ilustrada* correspond to the continuing sophistication of the use of photographs, images, and other visual elements in early-twentieth-century Spanish journalism. The most significant component of the play for our analysis of Valle-Inclán, however, is the beginning of the work, in which a woman appears on stage to introduce the spectacle we are about to witness. She sings:

En vez de ver el número en la casa  
quizá aburrido, y siempre solitario,  
vas a ver cómo aquí en el escenario  
el *Blanco y Negro* ante tu vista pasa  
en tiples y en actores encarnado [. . .].  
Ya sabes: nuestra idea,  
modesta o atrevida,  
vulgar, feliz, genial, como ella sea,

es infundir el soplo de la vida  
a esta revista mágica y alada  
escrita sólo para ser leída  
y que tú vas a ver representada. (2–3)

The purpose of the present theatrical spectacle, then, is to transform the solitary, reflective experience of reading the journal in a quiet library or at home into the collective, social activity of an evening at the theater. Embedded in this speech is the transformation of language and discourse into palpable reality, a hallmark of Remshardt's conception of the grotesque (10). This prologue can be read as a paradigm for Valle's discursive practice in the *esperpento*, which is the transformation of the themes, styles, and modes of textual production from the collective imagination of Spanish dramatic and literary tradition into visceral dramatic reality.

### **Speaking the Unspoken in Contemporary Theater and Journalism**

*Luces de bohemia* emerges as a multifaceted portrayal of contemporary Spanish society through a dramatization of the complex interrelations between the commercial theater and mass print media. Unlike its *género chico* predecessors, Valle's play skeptically interrogates how modern journalism influences the public through the manipulation and misrepresentation of information and current events. In the same critical gesture, *Luces de bohemia* responds directly to the conventions and standard practices of the festive commercial theater in order to reveal its blindspots and the elements of contemporary society that it systematically overlooks. The play touches on many of the themes and images of the newspaper-based *revista* in particular and the commercial theater in general, albeit with a decidedly different parodic impulse. *Luces de bohemia* thus enacts an intricate parody of a number of textual and theatrical practices

from the early twentieth century, appropriating their exterior forms, styles, and codes with a markedly different ideological and rhetorical intention (Genette, *Palimpsests* 12).

While the newspaper-based *revistas* from the 1890s and early years of the twentieth century focus on the activities of editors and the reading habits of the audience, *Luces de bohemia* fills in the missing term in the equation: the effect of industrialized cultural production on the status of the writer. Valle-Inclán expresses a preoccupation for how the rise of entrepreneurial newspaper production and the industrialization of writing change the relationship between writer and reader. We find Max in a state of sadness and disbelief in the opening scene as he asks his wife to reread the letter from Buey Apis, which informs Max that the newspaper no longer requires his services and is terminating his contract for four articles per year. Already in a state of destitute poverty, the lapse of this agreement pushes Max's family to the brink of abject poverty and starvation. His ironic suggestion of a "proyecto de suicidio colectivo" and Madama Collet's remark that "[l]os jóvenes se matan por romanticismo" (40) conjure images of the Romantic writer, torn between the dedication to artistic achievement and the need to earn a living within the capitalist social order. This need to compromise artistic integrity for job security appears time and again in the work of Mariano José de Larra, such as in an article published on January 26, 1835 in *La Revista Española* titled "Un periódico nuevo." The subtitle of this article reads "Artículo mutilado, o sea refundido," an obvious allusion to the writer's obligation to amend and alter his work at the behest of editorial exigencies. A series of articles published in *El Mundo* consists of letters signed by Larra's famous pseudonym, Fígaro, and directed to the editors of the paper. In "Fígaro dado al mundo," the narrator comments on the dire circumstances of the Spanish writer, comparing him to

a bird trapped in a cage or the star-crossed fate of the Roman gladiator. The references to Romanticism in Max and Madama Collet's discussion of their desperate state of affairs echoes the theme of the writer's creative imprisonment by the demands of capitalist exchange economy. The increasing power of publishing houses and editors over the course of the nineteenth century interferes with the artist's role as the spokesperson for the *volkgeist* of the people and subjugates artistic creativity to the logic of supply and demand. The lugubrious plan Max proposes, his death due to hunger and cold in the twelfth scene, and the apparent suicide of Collet and Claudinita in the final scene contrast with the humorous portrayal of hungry writers looking for a big break in festive plays such as Arniches's *Casa editorial* or Delgado's *El Grillo, periódico semanal*.

The historical basis for Max Estrella in the biography of Alejandro Sawa offers another strong point of contact between the development of journalism as a theme of *Luces de bohemia* and the tenuous position of the writer in a cultural context increasingly controlled by industrialized production and capitalist business interests. In his biography of Sawa, Allen W. Phillips affirms that after his return to Madrid from Paris in 1896, "el desdichado escritor se dedica casi exclusivamente al periodismo, sin duda mal retribuido, pero que constituía uno de los pocos medios de que disponía en aquellos años para mantenerse" (236). Sawa's artistic creativity declines during this period because the poor compensation of journalistic writing forced him to dedicate immense quantities of time to his journalistic pursuits.

Valle dramatizes the writer's endless struggles to gather funds in Max's listless journey through the nocturnal landscape of the capital. In the early scenes of the play, Max loses the little money he possesses as his acquaintances take advantage of his

blindness, inattention to finance, and generosity. In Scene 2, for example, Max enters Zaratustra's bookshop in order to undo a deal he no longer finds advantageous, only to be tricked by Zaratustra and Don Latino, whose words and deeds clearly do not coincide:

Don Latino: El Maestro no está conforme con la tasa, y deshace el trato.  
Zaratustra: El trato no puede deshacerse. Un momento antes que hubieran  
llegado... Pero ahora es imposible: Todo el atadijo conforme estaba,  
acabo de venderlo ganando dos perras. Salir el comprador, y entrar  
ustedes.

[El librero, al tiempo que habla, recoge el atadijo que aún está encima del  
mostrador y penetra en la lóbrega trastienda, cambiando una seña con  
Don Latino] (50–51)

Zaratustra and Don Latino collude to reap the benefits of the deal; their cynical actions point to a larger situation in the cultural marketplace in which editors, publishers, and entrepreneurs profit at the expense of the writers that produce the texts but collect very little in return. In the next scene, La Pisa Bien asks Max for the money he owes her for a lottery ticket, and Max unwittingly returns to her a ticket that had won the prize:

Don Latino: ¡Ese número sale premiado!  
La Pisa Bien: Don Max desprecia el dinero.  
El Chico de la Taberna: No le deje usted irse, Don Max.  
Max: Niño, yo hago lo que me da la gana. (62)

Max's financial incompetence in a capitalist order that encourages the accumulation of wealth inadvertently assists others in their desires to manipulate and take advantage of the blind man. In a sense, Max's blindness is not simply a physical malady brought on by the late stages of syphilis, as is intimated on a number of occasions in the play, but also a metaphorical blindness that results from his inability, or unwillingness, to incorporate the accumulative logic of capitalism into his worldview and social interactions.

Similar to Max, other characters in the play participate actively in the publishing world and function both as individual dramatic figures in *Luces de bohemia* and as



symbolic characters whose actions and relationships dramatize the functioning of the literary marketplace. In Scene 7 the action of the play centers on the editorial offices of a newspaper, a space made familiar to contemporary audiences through its repeated portrayal on the commercial stages of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Unlike so many of its *género chico* counterparts, however, Scene 7 almost immediately confesses that the considerations for content in the modern newspaper remain beyond the power of the editor and ultimately lie in the hands of those who have controlling interests in the paper's financial success and political allegiances. Don Filiberto responds to Don Latino and the chorus of Modernistas' story of Max's arrest:

Max Estrella también es amigo nuestro. ¡Válgame un santo de palo! El Señor Director, cuando a esta hora falta, ya no viene... Ustedes conocen cómo se hace un periódico. ¡El Director es siempre un tirano!... Yo, sin consultarle, no me decido a recoger en nuestras columnas la protesta de ustedes. Desconozco la política del periódico con la Dirección de Seguridad... (106–07)

As far as I have been able to determine, no *género chico* play that deals with the subject of newspapers and their production ever refers to the paper's owner or director, instead focusing exclusively on the figure of the editor as the final arbiter of the paper's format, content, and political agenda. Commercial theater's portrayal of newspapers thus corresponds directly to its humorous depiction of contemporary social problems: in the end mistakes in civil administration or in the confection of a newspaper are attributed to the foibles and errors of imperfect individuals, rather than interpreted as structural flaws in the capitalist economic system or entrepreneurial model of newspaper production. *Luces de bohemia* directly challenges this tendency by presenting the active financial and political interests of newspapers, printers, and publishers before the audience.

Journalistic genres serve as a model for structuring a number of the scenes in *Luces de bohemia*. Cruz Seoane and Dolores Sáiz identify five major genres in early-twentieth-century journalism: the *crónica*, the survey, the interview, the *artículo de fondo*, and the report (56–61). Valle-Inclán incorporates all of these genres into the structure of scenes and dialogue in *Luces de bohemia*. Just after Zaratustra and Don Latino succeed in tricking Max out of recovering his work in Scene 2, Don Gay appears and extensively opines on the similarities and differences between conceptions of religion in Spain and England. The mixture of information and opinion in his comments is reminiscent of the *artículo de fondo* (Cruz Seoane and Dolores Sáiz 56), while his descriptions of the life he led in London reflect the personal narrative style of the *crónica*. In Scene 7, the chorus of Modernistas and Don Latino report on Max’s detainment by the authorities. Scene 11, often cited for its tragic elements as the mother cries out in anguish and pain over the death of her child, functions as a survey of varying opinions regarding radical social movements and the government’s response to them:

Retirado: El Principio de Autoridad es inexorable.  
 El Albañil: Con los pobres. Se ha matado, por defender al comercio, que nos chupa la sangre.  
 El Tabernero: Y que paga sus contribuciones, no hay que olvidarlo.  
 El Empeñista: El comercio honrado no chupa la sangre de nadie.  
 La Portera: ¡Nos quejamos del vicio!  
 El Albañil: La vida del proletario no representa nada para el Gobierno.  
 (156–57)

Diverging from the representation of the popular classes and petty bourgeoisie in the *género chico*, this scene permits working-class characters to express their opinions on a pressing contemporary social issue. Whereas the *género chico* generally presents characters from the popular classes as consumed by amorous desires and personal rivalries, *Luces de bohemia* gives voice to the political consciousness of these groups.

Scene 6 stands as a moment of defiance against the facile caricatures of radical social movements or the erasure of these important socio-political phenomena in the *género chico*. While plays such as Arniches and García Álvarez's *El iluso Cañizares* or Vázquez y Rodríguez's *Revista de 1878* offer only a superficial, satirical portrayal of radical socialist discourse, *Luces de bohemia* descends into the dank, dark space of the dungeon and depicts the final moments of a political rebel's life before his execution. The conversation between Max and El Preso betrays a depth of understanding and complexity beyond anything to be found in representations of radicalism on the commercial stage or in the pages of the mass-circulation daily papers:

Max: ¿Quién eres, compañero?

El Preso: Un paria.

Max: ¿Catalán?

El Preso: De todas partes.

Max: ¡Paria!... Solamente los obreros catalanes aguijan su rebeldía con ese denigrante epíteto. Paria, en bocas como la tuya, es una espuela. Pronto llegará vuestra hora.

El Preso: Tiene usted luces que no todos tienen. Barcelona alimenta una hoguera de odio, soy obrero barcelonés y a orgullo lo tengo.

Max: ¿Eres anarquista?

El Preso: Soy lo que me han hecho las Leyes. (98–99)

This scene permits the anarchist to speak as a reasonable and compassionate human being rather than a simplistic caricature of discourse and comic antics. The prisoner may be the only character equal to Max in terms of his dedication to an idealistic vision of the world and his willingness to follow that ideal to its bitter consequences. So often in the *género chico*, the representation of working-class political radicals follows a logic of unwieldy, flowery speech followed by actions that undermine the proclaimed ideals. Arniches regularly follows such a pattern, as in the *sainete rápido* “Los ricos” when Serapio speaks interminably about his distaste for the socio-economic abuses of the rich and the need to

redistribute wealth evenly, but then berates Nicanor for borrowing one of his cigarettes and undermines his own stated beliefs by saying: “Lo mío es pa mí, y el que quiera echar humo, que le prendan fuego” (143). This paradigm questions the sincerity of social radicalism and its proponents, presenting them as people who speak about social justice out of personal ambition rather than sincere belief in creating a more equitable social and economic system. This formulaic representation applies the logic of capitalism to the actions of political radicals, attributing to them the desire to accumulate political capital through discourse while hypocritically maintaining their hold on wealth and goods.

Scene 6 of *Luces de bohemia* reacts against this trend on the commercial stage, departing from the darkly satirical tone of much of the rest of the play in order to serve as a counterpoint for the ridiculous representation of radicalism elsewhere in the Spanish public sphere. The prisoner’s comments destabilize the terms of the public debate on radicalism and resist even the term *anarquista* as a label impressed upon him by the discourse of the bourgeois capitalist social order. Ironically, the prisoner expresses a social vision that is remarkably similar to that proposed by Arniches in so many of his plays: “En España el trabajo y la inteligencia siempre se han visto menospreciados. Aquí todo lo manda el dinero” (99). Instead of ascribing the material and spiritual decline of Spain to an inherent moral malaise of Spaniards, the prisoner argues that the excessive power of money and personal interest to control everything has weakened the ethical fiber of the people by convincing them that the accumulation of wealth is the key to happiness, rather than work and a sense of community.

The prisoner's penultimate remark to Max before being led to his execution thrusts the manipulation of information in mass media to the forefront of the play's investigation of contemporary Madrilenian society:

El Preso: Llegó la mía... Creo que no volveremos a vernos...

Max: ¡Es horrible!

El Preso: Van a matarme... ¿Qué dirá mañana esa Prensa canalla?

Max: Lo que le manden.

El Preso: ¿Está usted llorando?

Max: De impotencia y de rabia. Abracémonos, hermano. (104)

Max shares the prisoner's preoccupation that the press will distort the true events surrounding his execution and confirms that the papers will print whatever information the government officials send to them. Once again the prisoner finds himself subjugated to the superior exploitation of mass media by the State. Seoane Cruz and Dolores Sáiz corroborate the relationship of mutual support between the State and the major newspaper enterprises: "Los grandes diarios, sea cual sea su tendencia, son respetuosos con las instituciones y defensores del sistema. En sus páginas no se pueden traspasar ciertos límites" (25). Newspapers depend on the capitalist economic system and status quo in order to remain profitable and beneficial to the business interests that sustain them, thus intimately linking modern mass media to a set of ideological positions that stand opposed to any radical restructuring of the social order.

Social unrest links Scenes 4, 6, and 11 of *Luces de bohemia*, all of which signal important moments in Max's development over the course of the play. Amalia Gladhart emphasizes the coexistence of tragedy and metatheater, arguing that the historical and social allusions generate verisimilitude and pointing to Scenes 6 and 11 as key moments in Max's trajectory as a tragic hero and a self-conscious, self-dramatized character. Gladhart's reading focuses on how these moments of crisis affect Max's understanding

and conception of himself. At the same time, however, in these two scenes as well as in Scene 4, socio-political allusions forge a discursive and ideological context of the propagation of information by newspapers. In addition, these experiences reveal to Max the incongruence between what he sees in the newspaper and what he witnesses in the streets of Madrid. Having lost his affiliation with Buey Apis's paper in the first scene, in Scene 4 Max is arrested because the police assume he has been leading violent demonstrations, accusations that Max is powerless to challenge in the following scenes and that can only be dropped by the efforts of powerful friends (Don Filiberto, the Ministro, etc.). In Scene 11, the divergence between the official government discourse of social order and the real consequences of the dead child, killed by an errant bullet fired by representatives of the State, could not be more obvious. The play follows Max's progressive separation and alienation from mass media, first as his professional affiliation comes to an end, then as his personal experiences directly contradict the official discourse disseminated by print journalism and spokespersons of the State.

Max's personal trajectory in relation to mass media in the play brings us back to his gradual movement toward the ideal status of the reader envisioned by the *esperpento* aesthetic. Newspapers during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries presented themselves as entities that gave readers the perspective and critical distance required to achieve impartial consideration and reflection on the complexities of modernity. The reality, as Max learns, is that mass media operate in a social, political, and economic system that subjugates media's ability to disseminate knowledge to the ideological interests of the powerful. Hence, the reader or spectator must take on an active role, distancing him or herself from the commonplaces and clichés of commercial popular

culture to arrive at a truer understanding of society. Max, however, recognizes the limitations of the Spanish public, as when he comments on its primitive religious sensibilities in Scene 2: “La miseria del pueblo español, la gran miseria moral, está en su chabacana sensibilidad ante los enigmas de la vida y de la muerte. [. . .] Este pueblo miserable transforma todos los grandes conceptos en un cuento de beatas costureras. Su religión es una chochez de viejas que disecan al gato cuando se les muere” (56). The epiphany in Scene 12 of *Luces de bohemia* is not a sudden epiphany at all, but rather the culmination of a process by which Max progressively rejects the predominance of mass media and commercial spectacle in contemporary society and proposes an alternative formal principle and aesthetic strategy of resistance. Ironically, Max comes to see the systematic distortion of “los grandes conceptos” into a “cuento de beatas costureras” as the seed from which this aesthetic principle may grow in the same way that Valle draws from the vast visual and thematic repertoire of the *género chico* and reinvents it through a critical reading to serve his own aesthetic and ideological purposes.

### ***Donjuanismo and Calderonian Honor: Popular Stories and the Esperpento***

Although at first glance *Los cuernos de don Friolera* and *Las galas del difunto* appear to engage less directly with modern Spanish society, these later *esperpentos* follow the paradigm set by *Luces de bohemia* as they rearrange and reconstitute the constellation of contemporary theater practices in a creative articulation of social and ethical critique. The appropriation of Calderonian honor and the Don Juan legend permit a critical reading of the deeper social narratives of Spanish modernity embedded in modern adaptations of these literary traditions. In this regard Valle recognizes that the

type of texts or stories that garner popular interest and attention is significant because these ways of representing modernity or remembering the past reflect broader mental attitudes and frameworks of thought.

*Los cuernos de don Friolera* and *Las galas del difunto* draw from the rich history of parodies and re-imaginings of Spain's vibrant early-modern and Romantic theatrical tradition. Although at first glance the plays appear to share little in common, further consideration leads us to realize that in both plays the principle impetus of dramatic action revolves around the complex interrelations between the themes of Calderonian honor and Don Juan's cynical social or moral vision of the world. Leopoldo Alas's *La Regenta* (1884) stands as a testament to the interplay of Calderonian honor and *donjuanismo* in nineteenth-century Spanish culture. Upon discovering Ana Ozores's interest in him, Álvaro Mesía aggressively woos her, more to confirm his sexual reputation in provincial Vetusta than out of genuine amorous interest. Ana's older, impotent husband is obsessed by seventeenth-century honor dramas, which he recites in his bedroom at night, and ultimately allows this fixation to draw him into a duel in which he is killed. In contrast to the naturalism of Alas's text, Ramón Pérez de Ayala's final novel, published in two parts as *Tigre Juan* and *El curandero de su honra* in 1926, approaches this familiar juxtaposition of themes through an avant-garde sensibility of language's musicality and power to negotiate identities. Pérez de Ayala's novel reads the literary traditions of Calderonian honor and *donjuanismo* against the grain, as it were, by forcing all of the characters to suffer a form of humiliating deflation. Albeit through very different aesthetic practices, Alas and Pérez de Ayala offer a critical reading of the



themes and motifs of literary tradition and rearrange them in present-day settings in order to espouse harsh critiques of contemporary social norms and prejudices.

Parodies and reinventions of the Calderonian honor drama and the Don Juan myth were staples of the commercial theater in nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Spain. The success of José de Echegaray on Madrilenian stages from the mid 1870s owes much to his ability to recast the dramatic vigor of works such as *El médico de su honra* or *El pintor de su deshonra* into a melodramatic form that reflected the social and cultural anxieties of the emerging Spanish bourgeoisie. Echegaray's *En el puño de la espada* (1875) portrays the typical honor drama plot a historical background reminiscent of the Romantic theater, while his most widely-known play, *El gran Galeoto* (1881), translates the rigorous, violent social norms of the *drama de honor* into the equally arduous social code of the nineteenth-century bourgeoisie, where the mere suspicion of infidelity could ruin a woman's reputation and good standing in society. The *género chico* followed a similar pattern as it energetically devoured the dramatic possibilities of the Calderonian honor theme in parodies that almost exclusively focus on the interior, bourgeois spaces of the *juguete cómico*. Arniches's *Calderón* (1890) and Pedro Muñoz Seca and Pedro Pérez Fernández's *Un drama de Calderón* (1919) stand as two excellent examples of this phenomenon during the period, converting the tragic seriousness of the Calderonian intertext into facile comic wordplay in Arniches's case and the more complex linguistic humor of the *astracán* in the work of Muñoz Seca and Pérez Fernández.

Audience interest in the mythology of Don Juan was insatiable in the nineteenth century following the extraordinary triumph of José Zorrilla's *Don Juan Tenorio* in 1844. Already a Romantic reworking of Tirso de Molina's *El burlador de Sevilla*, the success

of Zorrilla's play served as the basis for a sub-set of the commercial stage as playwrights from successive generations reworked, adapted, and parodied *Don Juan Tenorio* as a means for attracting crowds whose appetite for Don Juan's outlandish trickery and dark humor was seemingly endless. As early as 1849 Mariano de Pina capitalized on the achievements of Zorrilla's play with a parody titled *Juan el perdido*. Adelardo López de Ayala's version, *El nuevo don Juan* (1863), inscribes the play within the formal constraints of the *alta comedia* and renders the religious and existential themes that characterize both the early-modern and Romantic iterations of the Don Juan myth into the bourgeois preoccupations of social standing and class. The emergence of the *teatro por horas* system in the 1870s witnesses an impressive increase in parodies of *Don Juan Tenorio*, such as Ambrosio el de la Carabina's *Don Juan Notorio* (1874), Rafael María Liern's *Doña Juana Tenorio* (1876), and Juan de Alba's *Las mocedades de Don Juan Tenorio* (1877), a play that simultaneously borrows the concept of Guillén de Castro's *Las mocedades del Cid*. The great parodist of the *género chico*, Salvador María Granés, produced a modest success with *Juanito Tenorio* (1886), a quixotic tale in which Juanito imagines himself as Don Juan due to his recent financial windfall in the lottery. Juanito's friends cure him of this obsession by enlisting the help of a *sereno* who threatens to imprison Juanito for his crimes until he confesses that he is not, in fact, Don Juan Tenorio. The famous author of *La Gran Vía*, Felipe Pérez y González, attracted Madrilenian crowds with *¡Doña Inés del alma mía!* (1890). Pablo Parellada spoofed the airy imagery and linguistic fancies of *modernismo* with his *Tenorio modernista* (1906), in which Don Juan succeeds in wooing Doña Inés by virtue of his creative use of language. José María Dotres reimaged the play as a drunken escapade in *Ramón Osorio* (1907),

which he qualifies as a “sueño lírico con vistas a Don Juan Tenorio; en una borrachera dividida en cinco delirios.” The emergence of film in the early twentieth century as a serious counterpart to the commercial stage permitted the expansion of the Don Juan brand to the silver screen, as Alberto Marro and Ricardo de Baños produced a film adaptation of *Don Juan Tenorio* in 1910 and Baños again took up the famous play in a more technically-accomplished version in 1922. This is by no means an exhaustive list of Don Juan adaptations and parodies, but demonstrates the theatrical activity of many generations of playwrights and audiences who were fascinated by the rich dramatic possibilities of Zorrilla’s play and its memorably antagonistic protagonist.

Dramatic portrayals of the Don Juan legend in Spanish theater rely on a social context structured according to the logic of Calderonian honor. Both *El burlador de Sevilla* and *Don Juan Tenorio* rearrange the components and terms of the *drama de honor* by redirecting dramatic concentration away from the affronted husband or father who must restore masculine honor through blood and toward the purposefully irreverent trickster who stains the honor of young women. Tirso de Molina’s meditations on the subject in *El burlador de Sevilla* focus on Don Juan’s moral vacuity and misplaced confidence in longevity giving him the opportunity to repent of his sins and find eternal redemption. The play presents a protagonist who challenges the strict morality and tenets of masculine honor that structure his society and consequently suffers immediate and eternal punishment. Zorrilla’s *Don Juan Tenorio* preserves Tirso’s portrayal of Don Juan as a social pariah whose activities purposefully subvert established social norms, but changes the terms of Don Juan’s punishment by moving him to feel guilt for his sins as the angelic figure of Doña Inés implores him to amend his ways by joining her in the

eternal matrimony of death. Even though the early-modern version of the story appears to condemn Don Juan and the Romantic rendering seemingly redeems him, in both versions the social norms of masculine honor and strict Christian morality and humility reign triumphant, either by physically destroying Don Juan's sinful body and soul or winning and cleansing that soul through a religious awakening. Valle-Inclán's dramatic vision saw the intimate interrelationship between the Calderonian *drama de honor* and *donjuanismo*, as Don Juan's intentional excesses stand as an oppositional posture that not only disobeys social norms, but destabilizes and interrogates the validity and slippages of the social and moral rules by which society organizes itself.

### ***Los cuernos de don Friolera: a Calderonian Honor Melodrama?***

In *Los cuernos de don Friolera*, Valle-Inclán combines the typical story arch of a Calderonian honor drama with the sentimental exaggeration and flowery dialogue of melodrama. While melodrama in Spain emerges as a revision of the honor theme according to the values and anxieties of the emergent urban bourgeoisie, *Los cuernos de don Friolera* avoids the interior, well-furnished drawing rooms of the *alta comedia* and portrays broad sectors of society, including representatives from the popular classes that were systematically ignored in the dramaturgy of playwrights like Echegaray, López de Ayala, and Sellés. Just as *Luces de bohemia* dramatizes that which was ignored in contemporary newspapers, *Los cuernos de don Friolera* moves beyond the strict framing devices of the *alta comedia* and melodrama.

The juxtaposition of Pachequín's loquacious declarations of affection for Doña Loreta with Don Friolera's solitary apprehensions of suspected infidelity cause the two

dramatic traditions to circle around each other, moving ever closer to a cataclysmic climax. Honor dramas such as *El médico de su honra* or *El pintor de su deshonra*, in which the wife is largely innocent of any wrongdoing, and a tendency to misread innocuous objects and actions fuels the husband's outrage and ire. Much like the handkerchief Iago plants for Othello to find, Don Friolera's interpretation of the flowers that Doña Loreta and Pachequín exchange in Scene 2 as signs of his wife's infidelity unleashes terrifying violence. The addition of the melodramatic, however, permits these signs to pass between two loci of dramatic action, as we realize that Don Friolera's suspicions of adultery are, in fact, completely justified in the context of the romantic conversation between his wife and Pachequín. Doña Loreta's mistake in Scene 2 is summarized when she says that these flowers should be viewed "Como una fineza [. . .]. Sin otra significación" (137), tragically unaware that dramatic tradition demands that such a gesture carry other meanings.

The juxtaposition of melodrama and the *drama de honor* serves an ethical purpose in Valle's second *esperpento*. As Lima has noted, the three *esperpentos* that constitute the collection *Martes de Carnaval* offer a farcical portrayal of the Spanish military establishment that points to a broad condemnation of its abusive behavior and anachronistic institutional norms (160). The binary structure of *Los cuernos de don Friolera*, which constantly moves between the melodramatic and honor drama, can be understood as a dramatic rendering of the military's obsolete and archaic policies viewed alongside more modern conceptions of society. Melodrama promotes a conception of conjugal union based on love and empathy, ideas that Pachequín supports throughout the play as he argues that Don Friolera's unswerving dedication to the military's ideals blinds

him to his wife's wonderful qualities. In Scene 5, Pachequín accompanies Doña Loreta as she returns home to protect her against Don Friolera's lust for blood, and in Scene 6 Pachequín explains his presence to Don Friolera: "Para testificar que tiene usted una perla por esposa. ¡Una heroína!" (162). Doña Loreta likewise supports a more modern conception of love, repudiating Don Friolera's desire to settle the dispute with a duel: "[Y]o jamás consentiré que expongas tu vida por una demencia" (163). Just as Pachequín wishes to protect her from Don Friolera, Doña Loreta's love guides her to shield her husband from himself and the consequences of his demented suspicions.

In contrast to the contemporary concept of love promoted by Pachequín and Doña Loreta, Don Friolera and his military cohorts uphold the logic of the *drama de honor*, a set of dramatic conventions that date from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Doña Tadea Calderón's letter and subsequent encounters with Don Friolera invigorate the fire of his wrath, and her status as a *Celestina*-like character further connects Don Friolera's obsession with washing his honor with blood to antiquated cultural and social norms. The speech with which Don Friolera opens the first scene of the play unambiguously connects the honor drama logic with the military as an institution: "El oficial pundonoroso, jamás perdona a la esposa adúltera. Es una barbariedad. Para muchos lo es. Yo no lo admito: A la mujer que sale mala, pena capital" (127). Beginning with Scene 7, the play more emphatically associates the punishment of unfaithful wives with the military as the various customers at Doña Calixta's pool hall discuss Don Friolera's expected expulsion from the military. Scenes 8 and 10 move away from secondhand accounts of the military's customs to a direct portrayal of upper-level officers talking about how the dishonor of a single officer spreads to the entire 'family' of the military. Lieutenant

Cardona, for example, asserts that “[e]l Ejército no quiere cabrones” and that “[s]e trata del honor de todos los oficiales, puesto en entredicho por un teniente cuchara” (183). The play associates the savage customs of the military—which require the affronted husband to murder the offenders and request a transfer—with an out-of-date moral system through the form of an old-fashioned dramatic genre.

The contrast between the modern conception of love expressed through melodrama and the outmoded defense of honor through violence characteristic of the honor drama coincides with an ethical critique of the military’s view of itself as separate from the rest of society and the socially damaging effects of such an outlook. Don Friolera’s crazed exclamations when he believes he is reclaiming his honor and standing among his military brothers: “¡Vengué mi honra! ¡Pelones! ¡Villa de cabrones! ¡Un militar no es un paisano!” (215). Don Friolera uses pejorative terms such as “pelones” and “cabrones” to describe common citizens, a group from which he excludes himself. This vision of the relationship between the military and civil society implies the superiority of the military based on habits and customs that are in reality savage and horrific. The revelation that Don Friolera actually killed his daughter when shooting at Pachequín and Doña Loreta in the darkness highlights the uncontrolled savagery of military customs and undermines any notion of the military man’s superiority, moral or otherwise, relative to other members of society as Don Friolera’s total incompetence has led him to commit the worst of crimes.

## **Outside the Drama: Honor, Mass Media, and Popular Culture**

The prologue and epilogue of *Los cuernos de don Friolera* situate the body of the play within the larger context of increasingly mediatized public life and popular culture in modern Spain. The relationship of Don Friolera's story to the prologue and epilogue is not immediately clear. Does the main drama seek to develop the themes and images of Compadre Fidel's puppet show? Is it the 'true' story on which the puppet show was based? Is it the realization of Don Estrafalario's desire to see Compadre Fidel's theatrical vitality and ingenuity brought to the Spanish stage? While all of these possibilities have merit, I argue that the relationship between the prologue, body, and epilogue of *Los cuernos de don Friolera* dramatizes the relationship between events and their distorted representation in popular entertainments and print media. By using various dramatic levels and frames in the play, Valle-Inclán portrays how mass popular culture glosses over the ambiguities of reality and creates a reified cultural narrative that constrains the range of thought in contemporary society.

Immediately following Compadre Fidel's puppet show, Don Estrafalario interprets it as subversive and contrary to centralized, nationalistic portrayals of Spanish culture and identity. Don Estrafalario comments: "Indudablemente la comprensión de este humor y esta moral, no es de tradición castellana" (120). He suggests that the spectacle owes its roots to Portugal, Cantabria, and Catalunya, because its humor runs "tan contrario al honor teatral y africano de Castilla" (121). Compadre Fiel's show promotes an ironic and darkly humorous reading of the classic honor drama that questions the tendency of Spanish nationalism to conflate Spain with Castilla. The prologue of *Los cuernos de don Friolera* situates the play as an alternative interpretation of dramatic tradition in order to



interrogate the monolithic conceptions of Spanish culture and identity propagated by modern mass entertainments.

Although not nearly so apparent as in *Luces de bohemia*, *Los cuernos de don Friolera* presents modern mass media as a pernicious influence in the construction and dissemination of narratives of cultural and social identity. At the end of the prologue, Don Estrafalario describes the Devil as an intellectual and a philosopher and goes on to say that he “[f]ue estudiante en Maguncia, e inventó allí el arte funesto de la Imprenta” (123). This allusion to the printing press as a satanic enterprise is not simply a broadside attack against print media, but rather grows out of Don Estrafalario’s understanding of the Devil as the love of learning: “El Deseo de Conocimiento, se llama Diablo” (123). The view of print media put forward by *Los cuernos de don Friolera* is ambivalent and paradoxical, praising the availability of knowledge made possible by books and newspapers while at the same time remaining wary of the power of printers to control public discourse through the manipulation of information.

The main drama of *Los cuernos de don Friolera* expands on the potential negative consequences of the printing press by introducing the theme of mass media into the triangular conflict between Pachequín, Doña Loreta, and Don Friolera. In Scene 2, Pachequín attempts to woo Doña Loreta and their conversation turns to the possible consequences of an amorous affair:

Doña Loreta: ¡Ay, Pachequín, la esposa del militar, si cae, ya sabe lo que le espera!

Pachequín: ¿No le agradecería a usted morir como una celebridad, y que su retrato saliese en la Prensa?

Doña Loreta: ¡La vida es muy rica, Pachequín! A mí me va muy bien en ella.

Pachequín: ¿Es posible que no la camele a usted salir retratada en *ABC*?  
(136)

The presence of mass media alters the circumstances of the honor drama by turning the cleansing of honor into a sensationalized public spectacle. In Calderón's *El médico de su honra*, for instance, Don Gutierre orders the surgeon to kill Doña Mencía in secrecy and erases the memory of his wife by marrying Doña Leonor. *Los cuernos de don Friolera* differs from its early-modern predecessor because mass media offer the opportunity for the woman's story and image to circulate in the public imagination. Don Friolera's adherence to the sanguinary code of masculine honor also emerges, at least in part, from the circulation of information via print media. While Don Gutierre has internalized the social norms of masculine honor and decides to act under little exterior influence, Don Friolera feels pressure from the anonymous letter he has received and from his superiors in the military. The potentially widespread circulation of Don Friolera's dishonor through the pages of periodicals fuels the military's obsession with maintaining, in their eyes at least, a spotless reputation as a family of strong men who closely guard their honor.

The epilogue of *Los cuernos de don Friolera* portrays the final steps in a process that transforms the stunning complexities of art into the simplistic claptrap of facile, mass-produced entertainment. This portion of the play commences with a *romance de ciego* in which we see the missteps and moral ambiguities of the principal drama transformed into a naïve, superficial story of tragic error and romantic heroism. Historically, the *romance de ciego* bears an important relationship to the emergence of newspapers in Madrid and other Spanish cities. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the blind men of Madrid maintained a monopoly on the sale of newspapers (Kany 64–65). Additionally, they had the exclusive privilege of gathering official accounts of proceedings in legal courts, which they shaped into verse form and sung in

the plazas and public places of the city while selling printed copies of their *romances*. Although their legal status changed with the rise and fall of different governing regimes, these activities remained an important part of popular culture in Spain well into the nineteenth century, as is made evident by the inclusion of “El ciego” as a popular type in collections of *cuadros de costumbres* such as *Los españoles pintados por sí mismos*. In the *romance* in the epilogue of *Los cuernos de don Friolera*, the poetic voice ascribes guilt to the war hero’s wife, who takes their daughter Manolita with her during her nighttime escapades to avoid suspicion (224). After accidentally shooting Manolita, the poem’s protagonist takes violent revenge on his wife and her lover and presents their heads to his commanding officer. He fights in another campaign in the African wars, where he performs feats of heroism and rises to an important post as the king’s assistant. While the principal dramatic action of *Los cuernos de don Friolera* uses the devastating errors of the protagonist as a mechanism by which to reveal the ethical and moral blindspots of a social system that places greater importance on public image than the value of human life, the *romance de ciego* in the epilogue supports the social status quo by romanticizing its flawed hero.

The epilogue brings the meditations on art, society, and mass media in *Los cuernos de don Friolera* full circle as once again we listen to Don Estrafalarario and Don Manolito converse on the status of literature and readers in Spain. Don Estrafalarario and Don Manolito find themselves imprisoned in “una ciudad blanca, dando vista a la costa de África” (222) because the local authorities suspect they are anarchists. This association of the two men with anarchism, at least in the minds of the authorities, points toward their status as outsiders or contrarians relative to the mainstream narratives of

Spanish culture and identity supported by modern mass media. They are anarchists because they reject the facile content and structures that dominate contemporary visual spectacles and print culture. Listening to the *romance de ciego* from their cell, Don Estrafalario remarks: “Éste es el contagio, el vil contagio, que baja de la literatura al pueblo” (226). Don Estrafalario laments how the intricacies and ambiguities of Don Friolera’s story have passed through the simplistic frameworks of mass-produced pop fiction to yield a swashbuckling tale reminiscent of medieval chivalric tales. Don Estrafalario’s anger quickly turns political:

Don Estrafalario: ¡Aún no hemos salido de los Libros de Caballerías!

Don Manolito: ¿Cree usted que no ha servido de nada Don Quijote?

Don Estrafalario: Ni Don Quijote, ni las guerras coloniales. ¿No le parece a usted ridícula esa literatura, jactanciosa como si hubiese pasado bajo los bigotes del Káiser? (227)

Don Estrafalario’s comparison of *Don Quijote* and the colonial wars brings the discussion firmly into the realm of contemporary mass media. In spite of Spain’s protracted conflicts in North Africa and their immense cost in terms of money, resources, and human lives, audiences continued to take pleasure in stories and spectacles that supported a jingoistic form of nationalism that in no way reflected the realities of Spanish modernity. *Los cuernos de don Friolera* condemns the simplistic, monolithic narratives of Spanish militarism, honor, and heroism propagated in the pages of contemporary periodicals and on the stages of commercial theaters as cynical business practices that propagate destructive patterns of thought in audiences.

### ***Las galas del difunto: Severe Parody, Severe Critique***

Whereas *Los cuernos de don Friolera* strongly critiques the Spanish military, *Las galas del difunto*—first published as *El terno del difunto* as part of the “La Novela Mundial” series by Rivadeneyra on May 20, 1926—offers a harsh indictment of Spanish militarism, expanding the focus of the play to include the production of broader conceptions of national identity in Spanish society. Unlike the facile comicity and superficial satire of *género chico* plays that focus on the concrete abuses of individuals and ignore the more abstract structural failures of the social and governmental status quo, Valle’s grotesque aesthetic sounds the depths of widely-accepted attitudes about war and the military through a clever rewrite of the Don Juan legend in *Las galas del difunto*. While *Los cuernos de don Friolera* questions the competency of the military by portraying it as out of touch with contemporary social norms, *Las galas del difunto* condemns the simplistic, false images of Spanish colonial exploits that were so prevalent in public discourse in the context of the military dictatorship of Miguel Primo de Rivera.

As is a fundamental quality of the *esperpento*, *Las galas del difunto* fuses the examination of contemporary society with a parodic rendition of the dramatic motifs and structures of literary tradition. Many critics recognize the presence of an anti-militaristic theme in the work as well as an extended allusion or quotation of Zorrilla’s *Don Juan Tenorio* (Lima 160–63, Lyon 138–40), but neglect to read the adaptation of the Don Juan story as the means by which the play presents its severe critique of militarism. Lyon offers an interesting contrast between Valle’s other *esperpentos* by suggesting that in *Luces de bohemia* and *Los cuernos de don Friolera*, the protagonist undergoes a metamorphosis due to the condition of the general ideas of society at large, whereas in

*Las galas del difunto* the protagonist “is a pariah, vilified or ignored by bourgeois society, who turns rebel. The play does not consist of showing how the ethos of society produces this reaction” (138). Lyon is correct in saying that the play does not show how Juanito Ventolera’s experiences engender his nihilistic worldview and actions; the key to this transformation, however, is embedded in the intertexts of the Don Juan tradition and the firm historical grounding of the play. *El burlador de Sevilla* and *Don Juan Tenorio* never provide more than a superficial explanation of why Don Juan behaves as he does; both plays succeed by thrusting the audience into the action *in media res* and rely on the dramatic vigor of the circumstances, rather than convincing psychological development, to drive the development of the play. *Las galas del difunto*, however, offers a glimpse into Juanito Ventolera’s history that helps to explain his reckless treatment of others’ lives as his playthings: the war in Cuba.

If the Don Juan character of *Don Juan Tenorio* serves as a contrarian figure who deliberately subverts the social and moral status quo in order to reveal its underlying instabilities and slippages, Juanito Ventolera serves a similar role by embodying the psychological, moral, and social effects of colonial warfare on the modern body politic. The traumatic events of the war in Cuba—read Morocco for 1926, the year of the play’s publication—lead Juanito to rebel against the prevailing discourses of heroism and patriotism that dominate the popular imagination in discussions of colonialism. Lyon perceptively notes: “[A]n abyss has opened up between the myths of heroic sacrifice, patriotism and loyalty to the flag, etc, and the realities of callous exploitation and criminal disregard for human life. To be a hero was to be a dupe of the system” (139). In his conversation with La Daifa, Juanito states that the war does not end “[p]orque no se

quiere. La guerra es un negocio de los galones. El soldado sólo sabe morir” (49). The medals Juanito wears on his chest represent nothing more than an advertisement that propagates the myth of heroism, distracting the public’s attention from the futile sacrifice of the dead. In response to Juanito’s negative comments regarding the war, La Daifa tells him that all of the soldiers return with the same complaints, but that none of them ever does anything about it, a statement that can be seen as the final impetus that pushes Juanito down a destructive path that ultimately will lead to La Daifa’s undoing.

Juanito Ventolera’s bizarre fixation on the idea of reclaiming the Boticario’s clothes after his burial suggests a pathological craving to shed his previous identity as a man of war and to take on a new role in society. During Scene 3 as he digs up the body, Juanito explains to the trio of fellow soldiers who happen upon him that he seeks the suit in order to fit in socially when he takes La Daifa out for the evening: “Esta noche tengo que sacar de ganchete a una furcia, y no quiero deslucir a su lado” (69). Social preoccupations drive Juanito to this extreme act as he seeks to utilize the cultural cache of the dead Boticario’s wardrobe to refashion his relationship to society through the exterior signs of clothing. This strategy works, as La Daifa nearly does not recognize Juanito without his military regalia: “¡Te desconocía sin las cruces del pecho! ¿O tú no eres el punto que me habló la noche pasada?” (96). In fact, La Daifa recognizes her father’s clothes on Juanito and admits that she almost confused the young man for her now-deceased father: “¡Mira qué illusion! Cuando te vi llegar, se me ha representado!” (96). This confusion of Juanito for the Boticario fits nicely within the ethical project of *Las galas del difunto* and its satirical portrayal of contemporary Spanish society. Juanito, like the rest of the characters depicted in the play, pursues goals of self-interest and

accumulation that coincide with the logic of the capitalist socio-economic order. The retrieval of the Boticario's hat and cane yields a change in fortune, as Juanito exhibits a roll of money and looks the part of the upstanding bourgeois gentleman (Lima 163). In the end, Juanito's outrageous offenses against common decency and total disregard for the dead or the feelings of others are successful, allowing him to integrate himself into society through an unwavering dedication to self-interest rather than showing compassion or pity for others. Juanito's audacious and nefarious venture of grave robbing successfully contributes to his project of transforming his outwards signs of identity from those of a repatriated soldier—a figure who receives respect and honor only in the empty discourse of politics and journalism—into those of a middle-class, bourgeois entrepreneur, the real ideal citizen of the modern, capitalist State.

A strong theatricality is tied up in Juanito's project to shift identities and confront the egregious injustices of the empty discourses of heroism and patriotism. This sense of theatricality originates in the characterization of the Don Juan characters in Tirso's *El burlador de Sevilla* and Zorrilla's *Don Juan Tenorio*, both of which use meticulous planning and careful considerations of the actions and reactions of others to execute their daring and dastardly deeds. In *El burlador de Sevilla*, for example, Don Juan depends on the slipperiness of language and cases of mistaken identity, painstakingly arranging the stage, as it were, according to the principles of early-modern dramatic praxis to set his plans into motion. In order to achieve his goals, Juanito Ventolera, as we might expect, obeys a different theatrical principle: the aesthetic distance of the *esperpento*.

As in *Luces de bohemia*, the cemetery plays a crucial role in the process by which the protagonist of *Las galas del difunto* transcends sentimentality and passes into the



realm of the dead so that he may become the ideal author/reader of the *esperpento*. In Scene 1, La Daifa coquettishly guesses that Juanito's origin is "Cuatro leguas arriba de los Infiernos" (51). The three soldiers who discover Juanito's violation of the Boticario's grave repeatedly suggest that Juanito walks a fine line between the living and the dead, risking the possibility that he will be dragged to hell by his ears. At the end of Scene 3, Juanito relates his actions in the graveyard to his experiences in the Cuban war:

Pedro Maside: Para pelear con hombres, cuenta conmigo, pero no para despojar muertos.

Juanito Ventolera: ¿Pues qué otra cosa se hacía en campaña? (70)

Juanito sees his communion with the dead in the cemetery as the same activity as cohabitating with the future dead in the military barracks in Cuba. War and its traumatic experiences have broken down the taboo qualities of death for Juanito. When he arrives at the Casa de la Sotera in Scene 4, this transformation is complete: Juanito has passed over to the other side, no longer moved by the sentimentality or compassion of human beings, but rather possessed of the emotional distance of the dead. He tells his companions that he has tasted death:

Juanito Ventolera: ¿No me oléis a chamusco? He visitado las calderas del rancho que atiza Pedro Botero.

El Bizco Maluenda: ¿Y lo has probado?

Juanito Ventolera: Y me ha sabido a maná. En el cuartel lo quisiéramos. (75–76)

"Las calderas de Pedro Botero" is a colloquial phrase to refer to hell, and Juanito's assertion that he has sampled the contents of these cauldrons strongly implies that he has passed over to the other side, at least in attitude and aesthetic disposition if not biologically. Once again, he discusses his fellowship with the dead in conjunction with

the traumatic experiences of war, suggesting that they sought the delicious flavor of death while serving in the military.

After refashioning himself into the ideal playwright of the *esperpento*, Juanito becomes the author of social critique in *Las galas del difunto*, rendering his body and actions as the dramatic text through which the degraded state of contemporary society is portrayed. Valle-Inclán toys with the reversal of dualities inherent in *El burlador de Sevilla* and the relationship between Don Juan—the perpetrator of crimes and victim of punishment—and Don Gonzalo—the victim of crimes and, returning from the dead as a statue, the executioner of the guilty party. The initial exchange between the three soldiers and Juanito in the cemetery immediately suggests this fusion of multiple dramatic figures in Tirso’s version of the story in the singular figure of Juanito:

Juanito Ventolera: Parece que representáis El Juan Tenorio. Pero allí los muertos van a cenar de gorra.

Franco Ricote: Convidado quedas. No hemos de ser menos rumbosos que en el teatro. (66)

Here we see that Juanito simultaneously functions as the Don Juan figure for his audacious irreverence in the graveyard and as the Don Gonzalo figure who returns from the dead, like Juanito, to fulfill an invitation to dinner. When Juanito enters the tavern to meet his companions, he subtly alludes to the punctuality of the ‘convidado de piedra’ as he pardons his own tardiness: “¡Salud, amigos! Hay que dispensar el retardo” (75). By fusing the major dramatic figures of the classic play into a single theatrical persona, Juanito embodies the underlying logic of sacrificial punishment embedded in the structure of *El burlador de Sevilla*. Judith H. Arias clarifies a common misunderstanding of Tirso’s play by demonstrating that the stone statue does not issue forth from Heaven to enact divine punishment on Don Juan, but actually descends into the flames of Hell along

with Don Juan in its final act of vengeance. Basing her interpretation of the play on René Girard's studies of the cultural development of sacrifice, Arias writes: "What is truly remarkable about this play is that it is a sacrificial drama in which Tirso establishes the guilt of the victim at the same time that he denounces the innocence of the avenger and of the community he represents" (375). Don Juan and Don Gonzalo both suffer damnation because either their actions or their steadfast defense of a morally suspect ideology seriously endangers the emotional and physical wellbeing of others.

Following his transformation in the cemetery, Juanito becomes an avenging angel of death, witnessing the punishment of others' misdeeds and impoverished ideology. In the second scene, Juanito retrieves the letter that had fallen to the ground and returns it to El Boticario, who dies suddenly upon reading it. This innocuous action occurs just after El Boticario demonstrates his lacking sense of charity with the repatriated soldier, a boarder in El Boticario's home by civil order:

Juanito Ventolera: ¿Qué arreglo tenemos, patrón? ¡Como una puñalada ha sido presentarle la boleta! ¿Soy o no soy su alojado, patrón? ¿Qué ha sacado usted del alcalde?

El Boticario: Dormirás en la cuadra. No tengo mejor acomodo. Mi obligación es procurarte piso y fuego. De ahí no paso. Comes de tu cuenta. Dame esa carta. Me pertenece. (61)

Instead of demonstrating appreciation for his military service for Spain, El Boticario does the minimum to fulfill civil obligations, degrading the newly-arrived soldier by sending him to sleep with the animals in the stable. El Boticario's reluctance to give Juanito lodging indicates the moral and ethical poverty of the bourgeois class El Boticario represents, a group of people who rely on the power of the State to protect their property rights but at the same time show no measure of indebtedness to the economically underprivileged men employed by the State for such purposes.

Beyond the context of the colonial wars, Juanito's actions punish El Boticario and his wife for their hard-line stance against their daughter, La Daifa, whose wretched state as a prostitute is introduced in the opening moments of the play. This element of *Las galas del difunto* coincides with the interweaving of dramatic genres and social critique in *Los cuernos de don Friolera*. El Boticario has expelled his daughter due to her premarital sexual activity, a situation aggravated by her lover's death in the war in Cuba. In the opening moments of the play, La Daifa conspires with a witch to conceive a plan that will convince her father to accept her again, because being abandoned as a single woman has forced her into prostitution. The witch, however, suggests an alternative:

La Bruja: Tú llámale por la muerte, que mucho puede el deseo, y más si lo acompaña encendiéndole una vela a Patillas.

La Daifa: ¡Renegado pensamiento! ¡Dejémosle vivir, que al fin es mi padre!

La Bruja: Para ti ha sido un verdugo.

La Daifa: ¡Se le puso una venda de sangre considerando la deshonra de sus canas!

La Bruja: Pudo cubrirla, si tanto no le representase aflojar la mosca, pero la avaricia se lo come. (45)

The witch argues that death would be a better option because La Daifa would inherit her father's estate and be able to pursue a more agreeable middle-class occupation. La Bruja's words are prophetic: Juanito Ventolera arrives moments later and, in fact, brings about the ruin and death of El Boticario as punishment for his greed, hidden under the thin veneer of honor. Juanito's abusive treatment and possible rape of Doña Terita can be interpreted as either an additional punishment against El Boticario by further staining the family's honor or as castigation directed at Doña Terita for allowing her daughter to lose dignity as she struggles to earn a living by working in a whorehouse. La Daifa's melodramatic fainting spell at the end of the play results not just from learning of the

death of her father, but realizing that to a certain degree she is guilty of his death based on her scheming at the beginning of the story. The play is not pessimistic, as Lyon would have it (140), but rather functions as a survey of the conflicts between ethical behavior and self-interest propagated by the bourgeois socio-economic world order.

*Las galas del difunto* dramatizes the disjuncture between public discourse on colonial warfare in early twentieth-century Spain and the realities of those wars for the country and the soldiers who returned home. As a historical intertext in *Las galas del difunto*, the war in Cuba against the United States occupies an important position as an example of how the government and mass media presented the conflict in terms that grossly ignored conditions on the ground. The strong tendency of politicians and newspapers to wax poetic about the spiritual and heroic qualities of the nation appears absurd in the aftermath of a short war that witnessed the deaths of thousands of Spanish sailors. For example, in the lead editorial—titled “Para salvar el honor”—published on the first page of *El Imparcial* on April 10, 1898, precisely during the final diplomatic attempts before the war erupted, the author writes: “[A] despecho de todas las inconcebibles debilidades del gobierno, la honra de España pide un camino para salvarse, y trata de abrirse paso. [. . .] Si lo cierran aquellos hombres que representan el poder público, procederán con mal acuerdo; en un pueblo como el pueblo español, ninguna resistencia iguala el impulso del decoro nacional.” Amazingly, the author of this piece accuses the government of blindness for considering a peaceful resolution to the conflict with the United States, basing his position on the notion that the Spanish people’s sense of honor will overcome the logistical and industrial superiority of the United States’ navy and army. The grotesque irresponsibility of such an argument has found its way into the

ethical underpinning of Valle-Inclán's *Las galas del difunto*. Contemporary to the play is the socio-political context of the aftermath of the disaster at Annual in Morocco in 1921. Following the massacre of thousands of poorly-trained Spanish soldiers and the loss of five thousand square kilometers of territory in only a few days, politicians in Madrid turned the investigation of this unmitigated debacle into a political battle. Accusations of incompetence reached all the way to the top of the military and to King Alfonso XIII himself, which led to the pronouncement of a military dictatorship by General Miguel Primo de Rivera in Barcelona in 1923 (Carr 132–37). Once again, the reality of the events on the ground become lost amidst a sea of public discourse and manipulation of mass media, most readily apparent in the control and censorship of newspaper coverage of the continuing investigation of the Annual disaster (Carr 132). In this context of exploitation of the power of mass media to pursue political and ideological goals, *Las galas del difunto* responds with a dramatization of the grotesque and degrading effects of Spain's protracted colonial wars and their moral costs for the nation.

The ethical critique of *Las galas del difunto* moves beyond its condemnation of militarism to portray how the logic of detached competition in capitalist society leads people to use others as means to an end rather than viewing others as fellow human beings that also belong to the community. Not surprisingly, the products of the modern print industry appear on stage as a dramatic vehicle to portray this type of exploitation. In Scene 5, the Sacristán and the Rapista take advantage of Doña Terita in her moments of grief following the burial of her husband in order to extort dishonest sums of money for the services they rendered for the funeral. When they enter the pharmacy, the Sacristán and the Rapista praise Doña Terita's work ethic:

El Sacristán: Da usted ejemplo a muchas vecinas.  
La Boticaria: No faltará quien me moteje.  
El Sacristán: ¡Qué reputación no muerda la envidia, mi señora Doña Terita!  
El Rapista: ¡Y en esta vecindad!  
El Sacristán: Por donde usted vaya verá los mismos ejemplos, Doña Terita. Toda la España es una demagogia. Esta disolución viene de la Prensa. (81)

The Sacristán echoes a commonplace in public debates during the early twentieth century that sought to associate fascination with gossip and hearsay with modern journalism's relentless search for interesting stories that could attract readers. Valle-Inclán's portrayal of the relationship between newspapers and readers in the *esperpentos* problematizes such a simplistic argument by depicting the complicated cycle of supply and demand in which newspapers' sometimes cruel and callous mudslinging emerges from the demands of the public and at the same time stimulates those demands.

In this regard, *Las galas del difunto* draws a subtle comparison between perceptions of contemporary mass media and uncritical readings of the Don Juan legend. Just as readers often mistakenly understand Don Juan as the guilty party punished by the representative of a righteous society, people in early-twentieth-century Spain uncritically ascribe guilt for the problems of modern society to the press when in fact these problems, according to the *esperpentos*, originate in the social characteristics of people that allow the sensationalist practices of contemporary mass media to attract their attention. The structure of the dialogue that initiates Scene 5 bears out this argument, as the Rapista follows up the Sacristán's comments regarding the debilitating social effects of the press with an unabashed recommendation of a particular paper: "¡Y tampoco es unánime en el escalpelo toda la Prensa! La hay mala y la hay buena. Vean ustedes publicaciones como Blanco y Negro" (81). He then goes on to describe the types of materials published in

*Blanco y Negro*: “Retratos de las celebridades más célebres. La Familia Real, Machaquito, La Imperio. ¡El célebre toro Coronel! ¡El fenómeno más grande de las plazas españolas, que tomó quince varas y mató once caballos! En bodas y bautizos publica fotografías de lo mejor” (81–82). The features that the Rapista values are exactly the type of gossip-fostering items that he and the Sacristán condemn moments earlier. The interest that both characters demonstrate in this paper undermines their point regarding the morally incapacitating consequences of contemporary print media. In a broader sense, this component of their dialogue with Doña Terita approaches the moral dilemmas of readers and newspapermen taking advantage of the personal lives and misfortunes of celebrities and individuals for financial gain or entertainment. While this discussion of journalism at first seems unrelated to the shameless act of extortion that occurs at the end of the scene, upon further inspection we see that it thematically foreshadows the Sacristán and Rapista’s intention to take advantage of Doña Terita’s fragile emotional state in her darkest hours of grief as a recent widow.

Valle-Inclán’s manipulation and modernization of the dramatic tradition of the Don Juan myth in *Las galas del difunto* is perhaps one of the most complex exercises in parody to be found in the history of Spanish drama. This play, better than any of his other works, demonstrates that Valle’s use of parody originates not so much in a desire to lampoon literary tradition or to take advantage of the audience’s favorable disposition toward popular works, but rather from a desire to force the audience to recognize an element of the source text that either is not immediately apparent or has been hidden by cultural commonplaces. Hutcheon observes that modern parody “is a form of imitation, but imitation characterized by ironic inversion, not always at the expense of the parodied



text” (*Parody* 6). Considered alongside the tendency toward strategies of estrangement and defamiliarization in the avant-garde theater of the early twentieth century, Valle’s rearrangement of the elements of the Don Juan legend revivifies a set of dramatic practices so common on the Madrilenian stages of the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries as to have become automatic for audiences. Valle severely alters the logic of Tirso’s *El burlador de Sevilla* to create a similar dramatic text that shows the social norms of an entire community as the source of grave injustices. Valle’s rewrite of the play corresponds to Arias’s criticism of the tendency to read Don Gonzalo as a representative of heavenly justice, a misconception carried to the stage in Zorrilla’s *Don Juan Tenorio*, in which Don Gonzalo appears alongside Inés as she pleads for Don Juan to repent of his reprehensible crimes and accept salvation and an eternal life of faithful marriage. Valle makes such a misreading of the Don Juan story impossible by fusing the Don Juan and Don Gonzalo characters into a single dramatic entity, thus rendering impossible any interpretation of the play that might seek to portray the avenger of sins as untouched by the decadence and depravity of the society he represents.

The drastic rewriting of the Don Juan story in *Las galas del difunto* points toward the critique of the bourgeois, capitalist world order that Valle-Inclán espouses through all of the *esperpentos*. Ester Abreu Vieira de Oliveira argues that in this play the Don Juan character passes through the distorting mirrors of the *esperpento* with the objective of destroying “un sórdido mundo burgués” (98). The play achieves this goal largely through its aggressive rearrangement of the Don Juan story itself, a story that in large part had come to reflect the logic of capitalism and control of state power by a relatively small political élite. Arniches and García Álvarez’s *fresco* plays, for example, portray witty,

anti-heroic protagonists who use their industriousness to charm as many women as possible, pursuing a capitalist logic of accumulation, albeit in the realm of romance, to satisfy their carnal desires and improve their masculine reputations. While Arniches and García Álvarez used the Don Juan story to craft a humorous critique of contemporary social practices, Valle-Inclán recognized that these plays and others like them offered only a facile critical vision in which an individual perpetrator suffers punishment but the social system as a whole remains intact. Valle-Inclán avoids this pitfall in *Las galas del difunto* by displacing premeditation from Juanito to other characters, making his actions seem almost innocent by portraying him as never considering the consequences of what he does. For example, Juanito does not originally think of the possibility of visiting La Boticaria, rather El Bizco Maluenda suggests the idea: “Sólo te falta un bombín para ser un pollo petenera. El patrón se lo habrá olvidado en la percha, y debes reclamárselo a la viuda” (76–77). This is not to suggest that Juanito is innocent, but rather that his heedless transgressions serve a larger thematic purpose by wreaking havoc not only on the family of El Boticario and their support of the bourgeois social order, but also on the stagnant conventions of the Don Juan story and the tacit acceptance of the ideological status quo embedded in contemporary parodies and reimaginings of the story.

### ***La hija del capitán* and the Multiplication of Parody**

While *Las galas del difunto* and *Los cuernos de don Friolera* develop similar themes and incorporate the confluence of important dramatic trends in the commercial theater of early-twentieth-century Madrid, *Luces de bohemia* and *La hija del capitán* employ the formal qualities of the *revista* to fashion a sweeping vision of Spanish

modernity. The differences between these plays convey the variety of social and ethical commentary found in the *esperpentos*. *Las galas del difunto* and *Los cuernos de don Friolera* focus on a much smaller cast of characters. Both plays, excluding the prologue and epilogue of the latter, include less than twenty characters, almost all of which appear in multiple scenes and bear a direct relation to the principle dramatic action. In contrast, more than thirty characters comprise the cast of *La hija del capitán*, while the roles in *Luces de bohemia* exceed fifty, not including the various ensemble groups mentioned throughout the play, such as the civil policemen, the Modernist chorus, and so forth. In these plays there are an immense number of characters who appear in only one scene and, given the nebulous and multiple nature of the dramatic action, only tangentially relate to the major events. This variety results from the *esperpento*'s flexibility in appropriating manifold discourses and organizational structures; the terms and conditions of the genre, style, or formal devices parodied in the mirrors of the *esperpento* influences the image reflected, however distorted and deformed they may be.

*La hija del capitán*—first published in the Arts and Letters supplement of the Argentine newspaper *La Nación* on March 20, 1927, and later published in the “La Novela Mundial” series in Spain on July 28 of the same year—more aggressively manipulates the organizational and structural features of the *revista* by eliminating the guide characters and following a looser temporal structure, moving closer to the formal and aesthetic principles of silent film. Valle's other plays from the early 1920s also demonstrate a strong interest in visual elements and plasticity. For instance, *La Rosa de Papel* and *La cabeza del Bautista*, both published in the series “La Novela Semanal” in 1924 and later published with other plays in the volume *Retablo de la avaricia, lujuria y*

*muerte* in 1927, sacrifice dialogue at the end of the play in favor of strong, visceral images that synthesize the major themes and qualities of the characters in the play in fierce, violent resolutions of the dramatic action. *La hija del capitán* coincides with Valle's tour-de-force novel *Tirano Banderas* (1926) in seeking to transpose cinematic aesthetic elements to drama and narrative prose. Events that occur simultaneously comprise much of the central section of *Tirano Banderas* and we can view the different storylines woven together in the body of the novel as fading into one another in the same way silent film used parallel, repetitive imagery and shot construction to visually link disparate scenes. *La hija del capitán*, in contrast, follows a linear plotline, but purposefully distances the reader/spectator from the center of dramatic action. Instead of following the activities of the main characters at decisive moments, the play artfully intertwines snapshots of locations consistent with the structural logic of the *revista*, but following a progression in order to reflect, if not directly represent, the dramatic action of the play. Valle brings the cinematic technique of montage, "the ordering of images in time" (Bazin 42), to the stage, allowing film's primacy of the visual to structure the scenes and sequencing of *La hija del capitán*.

The opening scenes of *La hija del capitán* lead us to believe that this play will parody melodrama by recreating the plot of lovers separated by the young man's financial difficulties and the desires of the woman's father to use her sexuality, through marriage or more illicit means, to solidify his social standing. Just after Captain Sinibaldo Pérez appears for the first time, several characters gossip about how his excessive zeal for drinking and merriment have led to a judicial process against him in the military:

El Tapabocas: Pues se lo han acumulado como un guateque diario y tiene una sumaria a pique de salir expulsado de la Milicia.

El Horchatero: ¡Bien seguro se halla! Para que el proceso duerma, la hija se acuesta con el Gobernador Militar.

La Poco-Gusto: La dormida de la hija por la dormida del expediente. (239)

La Sini, the Captain's daughter, endures an unwanted relationship with the General in exchange for her father's protection from a court marshal. In Scenes 1 and 2, the play synthesizes the theme of the Neoclassical comedy and the nineteenth-century bourgeois sentimental novel of the young woman obligated to marry an older man due to family interests with the circumstances of the nineteenth-century *sainete* of the young man who lacks the courage or financial means to pursue his beloved. El Golfante, whose name obviously evokes the *género chico*, is down on his luck and playing an *organillo* in the streets as he tries to scrape together enough money to offer La Sini a reasonable life with him, circumstances that remind us of Julián's plight in *La verbena de la Paloma* or the financial difficulties of countless other would-be lovers in the festive *sainete*.

The offstage murder of Don Joselito, referred to mainly as El Pollo de Cartagena, at the hands of El Golfante radically alters the tone of the remainder of the play and requires us to shift our gaze to a different object of parody. El Golfante erroneously slays Don Joselito, mistaking him for the General in an attempt to exact revenge and eliminate the only obstacle to freeing La Sini from her deleterious situation. El Golfante uses the violence that Venancio rejects at the end of Arniches's *El santo de la Isidra*, for example, thus breaking the pattern of the *sainete* and moving *La hija del capitán* beyond the festive, comic, and essentially harmless representation of the *género chico*. Scene 3 adopts a conspiratorial tone as the Captain and General design a plan to dispose of Joselito's body in secret and employs a highly stylized setting structured around the cadaver of the fresh victim. In Scene 4, La Sini and El Golfante meet surreptitiously after

he flees the scene of the crime in Scene 2 and she robs the body in Scene 3. Later, they meet with shady figures that help them profit from the documents that Joselito had at the time of his death. The melodramatic overtones of the first two scenes were a red herring intended to throw the reader/spectator off the track of the real parodic intertext...

The furtive encounters, conspiratorial conversations, plans to dispose of a body, all of these features that surface suddenly in Scenes 3 and 4 of *La hija del capitán* point toward the variations of the crime story as a principal object of parody. The public's fascination with stories of transgression and punishment began in the pages of newspapers. As daily papers dedicated themselves to the portrayal of contemporary life as spectacle, a category of journalism emerged that revolved around the *relato de crímenes*. In Paris, *Le Petit Journal* gained popularity by reporting the unusual experiences of normal people in a section known as the *faits divers*; the success of this section was not sealed, however, until the paper exploited the murder of an entire family in what became known as "l'affaire Troppmann" (Schwartz 37). The "Crimen de la calle de Fuencarral" in Madrid in 1888 similarly sparked interest in all newspapers in the Spanish capital and initiated the appeal of sensationalized crime stories for mass audiences. Although the crime novel gained prominence in the United States, Great Britain, and France in the latter half of the nineteenth century, it did not penetrate the Spanish marketplace until the first decade of the twentieth century, enjoying its first successes in Spain between 1906, the year in which Doyle's Sherlock Holmes first started appearing in Spanish translation, and World War I (Colmeiro 97–98). The combination of danger, violence, and modern scientific knowledge proved irresistible to readers during this period; Patricia Hart confirms that readers' interest in fictional accounts of detective

activities was intimately related to meticulous, though often sensationalized, descriptions of crimes in newspapers and books: “True accounts of real detection [. . .] added to readers’ knowledge of police methods and scientific techniques” (20–21). Emilia Pardo Bazán’s relentless, scathing appraisal of Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes stories in her regular feature “La vida contemporánea” in the February 15, 1909, issue of *La ilustración artística* describes the psychological component of the public’s fascination with crime stories in the papers: “Todos llevamos dentro algo de instinto policíaco; cuando leo en la prensa el relato de un crimen, experimento deseos de verlo todo, los sitios, los muebles suponiendo que, de poder hacerlo así, averiguaría mucho y encontraría la pista del criminal verdadero.” The proliferation of novels and short stories relating exciting adventures of detectives and criminals during the first decades of the twentieth century responded to a growing interest in these dastardly deeds fostered by the sensationalist representation of modern journalism.

### **The Pop Culture Phenomenon of Crime Stories in Print and on Stage**

A wave of enthusiasm greeted the arrival of detective thrillers and crime stories to Spanish booksellers. The publication of Doyle’s *A Study in Scarlet* in Spain in 1906 initiated a flood of foreign texts into the Spanish market as classic crime fiction from well-known nineteenth-century writers reached Spanish audiences for the first time: Edgar Allan Poe, Wilkie Collins, Emile Gaboriau, and many others. The popularity of these texts confirmed the interest of Spanish audiences in the heroic exploits of the detective and encouraged further cultivation of the market as editorials took the initiative to strike copyright deals with their foreign counterparts for the Spanish-language rights to

recent works. The Barcelona-based publishing firm Sopena took the lead, publishing works by Edward Philips Oppenheim and Arthur Morrison, as well as circulating the immensely popular “Nick Carter” novels, which exceeded 63 titles. Limited Spanish contributions to the crime fiction genre complemented the veritable deluge of foreign works pouring into Spain.

Joaquín Belda’s parody of detective fiction, *¿Quién disparó?* (1909) offers one of the most sophisticated Spanish forays into the genre from the early period. Hart adeptly appraises the novel: “This riotous parody of the detective genre is Spanish to the core: it is set in the *castizo* Madrid of the time and peopled by a cast of characters who seem to have just stepped out of a zarzuela” (21). The satirical impulse of the work reaches such extremes as to derail the novel from the logical development of a crime story, devolving into zany antics and hilarious digressions aimed at spoofing the crime genre’s predictable conventions rather than offering a highly developed reinvention of those techniques. In the narrative fiction market of the early twentieth century, Spanish iterations of the detective novel and crime story never seriously competed with their foreign counterparts.

Where Spanish writers did succeed in adopting the conventions of the detective story and capturing the attention of large sectors of the urban public was in the theater. The entry of American, British, and French crime fiction into the Spanish print marketplace and its ensuing popularity offered yet another commercially viable subject ripe for exploitation on the Spanish commercial stage. José F. Colmeiro argues that the theater was “el medio que más contribuyó a la popularización de la literatura policiaca en España, y el más utilizado por los autores españoles de esta temática en la época” (101), also observing that the sensational events in the stories and the melodramatic depiction of



the characters were suited for the early-twentieth-century commercial stage. A small sampling of the titles produced during the years following the initial publication of Doyle's *A Study in Scarlet* in Spanish in 1906 demonstrates the fascination of Spanish audiences with detective stories. A number of writers capitalized on the fame of the Sherlock Holmes stories by carrying the well-known British detective to the stage along with a constellation of other characters that emerged from the prolific series of stories and its spin-offs. A ubiquitous character in detective story theater in Spain is Raffles, the "gentleman thief" inversion of Holmes created by none other than Doyle's brother-in-law, Ernest William Hornung, in a series of short stories originally published in the 1890s and first translated into Spanish between 1908 and 1911 (Colmeiro 100). Gonzalo Jover and Emilio G. del Castillo wrote two plays in 1908 bringing together Holmes and Raffles, *Holmes y Raffles: desafío del célebre "detective" y el famos ladrón* and its continuation *La garra de Holmes*. In 1909 Luis Millá Gracio and Guillermo X. Roure produced *La captura de Raffles o El triunfo de Sherlock [sic] Holmes*, an effort they followed with a sequel, *Nadie más fuerte que Sherlock-Holmes, segunda parte de La captura de Raffles*. In 1912 Heraclio S. Viteri and Enrique Grimau de Mauro offered before the public *La aguja hueca (Lupin y Holmes)*. Interest in Holmes did not wane by 1915 and 1916, years that saw the debut of many more Holmes-inspired theatrical works: Emilio Graells Soler and Enrique Casanovas's *Hazañas de Sherlock Holmes*, Gonzalo Jover and Enrique Arroyo's *La tragedia de Baskerville*, and Miguel Sierra Montoya's *El robo del millón o De potencia a potencia, Holmes y Rafles [sic] burlados*.

Spanish commercial playwrights' interest in crime stories as the materia prima for plays extended well beyond the well-known characters and situations of imported

translations as writers merged sensationalist story arcs with the stock character types and settings of the *género chico*. The commercial theater drew on decades of experience in the depiction of urban spaces and socially marginalized characters, adapting these mainstays of the *género chico* to the lurid violence and dark tone of crime fiction while maintaining heavy doses of light-hearted humor and witty wordplay. These plays appeared on stages in Madrid and other important cities throughout Spain in the 1910s, and included a wide variety of theatrical genres qualified as “policíaco:” *melodramas policíacos* such as Carlos Allen-Perkins’s *La muñeca trágica* (1913) and Luis Becerra Linares’s *El puente de los crímenes* (1915); *dramas policíacos* such as Horacio Socias and Tomás A. Angelo’s *El corredor de la muerte* (1915), Amaro García Miranda’s *Fantoma* (1915), José Quilis Pastor’s *El ladrón misterioso* (1915), and Arturo Mori’s *Lord Cleveland. Una noche sangrienta* (1918); and *comedias policíacas* such as Becerra Linares’s *El angel bueno* (1915). At least one example of a *sainete policíaco* exists in Francisco Comes and Enrique Arroyo’s collaboration *Zapatero y detective o La banda del dedo gordo* (1917), a play in which the neighborhood cobbler lays down the tools of his trade long enough to sort out a series of crimes perpetrated by a band of criminals.

Many of the playwrights that sought to profit from the popularity of crime novels and detective stories recognized that their plays existed at the intersection of multiple forms of popular entertainment: narrative fiction, theater, and film. Similar to the phenomenon of translating the experience of reading daily newspapers to the stage, these writers transformed the paradigmatic features of written texts into visual spectacle. Ricardo Rodríguez Flores and Bartolomé Guzmán acknowledge this fact in the subtitle of their play *Lucette o La cruz de fuego: novela policiaca en acción, en cinco capítulos y en*

*prosa* (1915). Other writers realized that the formal qualities of their plays owed much to the visual innovations of early film, as José Pérez López implies in the subtitle of *El rata primero: película policiaca madrileña en un acto* (1913). Much later, in his characteristic style of exaggeration, Pedro Muñoz Seca toys with the convergences of the crime story and movies in *Calamar: casi película policiaca en tres jornadas, divididas en varias partes, con algunos letreros y primeros planos* (1927). The subtitle of this play intentionally combines the classic divisions of Spanish drama, *jornadas*, with formal techniques of silent cinema, title screens and close-ups. The fusion of dramatic form and cinematic visual qualities in *La hija del capitán*, then, is part of a larger context in which the theater was attempting to maintain its popularity by borrowing the storytelling strategies of film, which by the mid 1920s had replaced the theater as the popular entertainment of the masses.

Spanish appropriations of crime stories diverge from the models set forth by North American and British writers, an observation corroborated by a quick perusal of José Ignacio de Alberti and Enrique López Alarcón's *Sebastián el bufanda o el robo de la calle de Fortuny: película policiaca en cuatro actos y en prosa* (1916). Like many of these works, the play focuses on the exploits of the criminal, a jewel thief named Sebastián whose brilliant manipulations of people and masterful disguises frustrate the dedicated police detective Aguirre's attempts to arrest him. The well-meaning detective uses the techniques of modern investigation, but Sebastián carries on the long tradition of the picaresque hero in his shrewdness and cunning to escape Aguirre's grasp time and again. Hart identifies three major features of detective fiction in Spain in this early play: first, the resistance to create an infallible detective; second, widespread use of criminal

slang, both by criminals and by those seeking to apprehend them; last, the theme of police corruption (23–24). Corruption is of particular importance in the work, as Revilla takes bribes from criminals in return for his silence and collusion in their efforts. Hart remarks: “This is important because it shows that from the very beginning of the Spanish detective novel there is a refusal to believe in a facile, happy ending where virtue is rewarded and wrongdoers are punished. [. . .] Probably the single most outstanding characteristic in the body of Spanish detective fiction is a basic mistrust of the police” (24). This “basic mistrust of the police” in *Sebastián el bufanda* calls to mind the larger patterns of representation in the *género chico*, works that often portrayed popular resistance to the imposition of State authority and control through representatives of power such as the police and the Guardia Civil. Many of the strengths and unusual features of Spanish detective fiction, at least at this early date, emerge from the contact between the new modes of storytelling embedded in crime fiction and the existing features of the Spanish commercial stage.

### **From Crime of Passion to National Crisis in *La hija del capitán***

The underlying social commentary embedded in Spanish crime fiction emerges more forcefully in Valle-Inclán’s parodic reworking of the genre in *La hija del capitán*. Rather than the police, the principal object of the play’s admittedly harsh critique is militarism in contemporary Spanish society. After the murder of El Pollo de Cartagena, the Captain and the General speak about the best course of action to follow and immediately choose to cover up the murder to avoid the peering eyes of the press. Precisely the representatives of State authority who should dedicate themselves to finding

the murderer and bringing him to justice hide the body because, as the Captain says: “Dar parte trae consigo la explotación del crimen por los periódicos. [. . .] Mi General, saldríamos todos en solfa” (258). Like the murderer, the military men pursue personal interest and work to escape the consequences of the crime rather than seeking justice. Valle-Inclán’s reinvention of detective stories in *La hija del capitán* draws from this genre’s inherent skepticism of the motives of civil authorities.

In an extreme gesture so typical of the *esperpento*’s parodic vision, Valle-Inclán eliminates the figure of the detective from the crime story, leaving only perpetrators in a dramatic environment void of morally-centered figures that seek justice. The structure of the play purges the need for a detective because we know the identity of Joselito’s killer all along. The play obeys the structural logic of what Todorov has called the thriller, in which “[t]here is no story to be guessed [. . .] there is no mystery” (47). The safety of the protagonist is no longer assured as it is in the whodunit, the earlier form of detective fiction that consisted of a stable narrative in the form of a memoir usually narrated by a friend of the sleuth. Instead, *La hija del capitán* focuses on how different groups of characters—many of which stand in for larger social forces—manipulate the events surrounding Joselito’s death in a frenetic quest for self preservation and personal gain. El Golfante and La Sini use the chaos that erupts after the slaying to run away together, profiting from the documents they recovered from Joselito’s body. Newspapermen and politicians take advantage of the situation to support their political positions and entrepreneurial interests in the public sphere. The military, through the actions of the General and the Captain, likewise works toward a political agenda, reacting to the press campaign against them in order to overthrow the government and take power. These

efforts to establish reputation or legitimacy through the exploitation of a murder correspond to an implicit feature of the crime novel, in which detectives profit from horrific crimes. All of the figures in classic crime fiction, from Sherlock Holmes to Nick Carter and beyond, enjoy the privileges and benefits of belonging to an investigative elite class due to their ability to use misdeeds to enhance their reputation as crackshot private eyes. They do not approach their tasks from the perspective of the blind eye of justice, but rather know that from the successful solution of a case they will reap bountiful rewards publicly, financially, and, often in these stories, romantically.

*La hija del capitán* inverts the narrative structure of the crime novel, beginning with a tight perspective on the relationships and tensions between a concrete group of characters and gradually spiraling away toward an expansive portrayal of contemporary Spain. Crime fiction generally approaches storytelling from the opposite direction, beginning with a large-scale depiction of the depraved condition of the modern city and slowly focusing more closely on a concrete set of power brokers, investigators, and suspects, ultimately arriving at a resolution involving the solving of the crime and the apprehension of the perpetrator. *La hija del capitán* uses complete information about the murder as its point of departure rather than its resolution, concentrating not on how an intelligent and hardworking detective solves the case, but rather on how the principal players in the drama utilize Joselito's death to advance personal agendas. The play shows how El Golfante's rash decision produces wide-ranging, life-altering consequences for all of the citizens of Spain as his crime opens the door for the military to carry out a *coup d'état* and install a military regime.

The role of the print media in transforming a relatively simple, albeit misdirected, crime of passion into a decisive political event in the history of a nation is central to the ethical critique embedded in *La hija del capitán*. Already in the other *esperpentos* we detect signs of discomfort and mistrust of the press's ability to shape public perception and the means by which individuals interact. The anarchist prisoner's concerns over what the press will say about him in Scene 6 stands as the most obvious example of fears of media manipulation in *Luces de bohemia*. A more subtle example, however, occurs in the closing moments of the play, when Don Latino purchases a newspaper and reads: "El tufo de un brasero. Dos señoras asfixiadas. Lo que dice una vecina. Doña Vicenta no sabe nada. ¿Crimen o suicidio? ¡Misterio!" (203). Drawing on Max's plan of collective suicide from Scene 1, the closing moments of the play dramatize how newspapers transform the reality of everyday life into a public spectacle and alter social relationships to such a degree that the demise of the wife and child of a purportedly close friend becomes the *mise en scène* of community gossip. More than anything, that Don Latino had to learn of Madama Collet and Claudinita's death through the pages of a periodical reveals the degree to which mass media dominate social interaction in modern society.

*La hija del capitán* intensifies the critique of the media's ability to manipulate the mental spaces in which social, political, economic, and cultural interactions occur by presenting a fictional case study in which sensationalism and irresponsible exploitation of journalism alter the course of a nation. Following the murder, the actions undertaken by the Captain and the General respond to the potential threat of a press campaign against the military under the pretext of the slaying. The decisive step occurs in Scene 4, when

La Sini and El Golfante meet with El Batuco to discuss the possibility of profiting from stolen documents. After seeing the documents, El Batuco responds:

Es caso para estudiarse y meditar... De gran mamporí si se sabe encauzar. Yo trabajo en una esfera más modesta. El negocio que ustedes traen es de los de Prensa y Parlamento. Yo soy un maleta, pero tengo buenas relaciones. Don Alfredo Toledano, el Director de El Constitucional, me aprecia y puedo hablarle. Verá el asunto, que es un águila, y de los primeros espadas. Un hombre tan travieso puede amenazar con una campaña. En manos de un hombre de pluma estos papeles son un río de oro, en las nuestras un compromiso. Ese es mi dictamen. Con la amenaza de una campaña de información periodística se puede sacar buena tajada. (273–74)

In their quest to flee Madrid and allow their love to blossom far away from La Sini's father, the couple sells the documents to a newspaperman who launches a press campaign that attacks the moral values of military officers. At this point, Joselito's moral compromises, attested to in the documents, and death pass from the reality of concrete, visceral experience and into the nebulous realm of the public sphere.

Scene 5 portrays the consequences of the press's distortion of personal events and concrete reality into public spectacle. At first, this scene appears out of place and disconnected from the rest of the play because none of the principal characters—La Sini, El Golfante, the Captain, the General—are present. Instead, the scene captures a moment in the *Círculo de Bellas Artes* during which a number of characters comment on what they have been reading in the newspapers, particularly information published about a distinguished military figure's escapades at the notorious parks of Madrid Moderno:

El Quitolis: ¿Cree usted una fantasía la información de El Constitucional?  
El Camastrón: Completamente. ¡La serpiente de mar que se almuerza a su bañista todos los veranos! ¡Las orgías de Madrid Moderno! ¿Ustedes creen en esas saturnales con surtido de rubias y morenas?  
El Chulapo: No las llamemos saturnales, llamémoslas juergas. Ese antro de locura será alguna Villa-Laura o Villa-Ernestina.  
El Camastrón: ¿Y ese personaje?



El Chulapo: Cualquiera. Uno de tantos beneméritos carcamales que le paga a la querida un hotel a plazos.

El Quitols: La información alude claramente a una ilustre figura, que ejerció altos mandos en Ultramar. (278–79)

The remarkable information published in the papers serves as a point of departure for the group of men to imagine the scintillating, forbidden pleasures of Madrid Moderno and speculate the identity of the unnamed personage to which the story alludes. This exchange between the men exemplifies the clever textual strategies of the papers, providing sensationalist headlines and lurid details to spark the curiosity of the reader to probe the depths of human depravity from the comfort of his or her armchair while at the same time withholding vital information to encourage the reader to find the answer, presumably in tomorrow's edition of the paper. El Chulapo, El Camastrón, and El Quitolis attempt to connect the details of the story with the comings and goings of the *Círculo de Bellas Artes* as El Camastrón notes the astonishing similarity between a blond woman described in the paper and a young lady he had seen earlier in the day. The events unfolding in the newspapers are a pastime for these men as they idle away the hours engaged in intense conversation and guesswork.

The constant appearance of new characters with new tidbits of information throughout Scene 5 dramatizes the logic of newspaper production and reporting, which thrives on a model of piquing the reader's curiosity and delaying full satisfaction of that curiosity. Just after the initial dialogue, El Babiaca storms into the room and tells everyone that they have determined that the illustrious personage in the newspaper story was Don Joselito. Immediately thereafter the reporter enters the scene to make a phonecall regarding an even more tantalizing discovery: “¡La gran bomba! Voy a telefonar a mi periódico. Se ha verificado un duelo en condiciones muy graves entre el

General Miranda y Don Joselito Benegas” (283). The reporter goes on to say that a number of sources claim that Don Joselito died in a hotel in Vicálvaro, a piece of information that inspires a passionate response from El Camastrón: “Esos ya quieren llevarse el suceso al distrito de Canillejas. ¡Señores, no hay derecho! ¡Formemos la liga Pro Madrid Moderno! Moderno! Afirmemos el folletín del hombre descuartizado y la rubia opulenta. ¡Ese duelo es una comedia casera! No admitamos esa ñoñez. El descuartizado y la rubia se nos hacen indispensables para pasar el verano” (284). El Camastrón’s outburst bespeaks his and other readers’ interest in following the news in the papers and their indispensable, as he says, need for a captivating story to occupy their attention during the hot summer months. El Camastrón rejects the reporter’s insistence on ascertaining all of the details of the unusual case so quickly because a speedy resolution will deny him and his fellow readers weeks, or possibly months, of entertainment.

The inversion of the logic of the crime story permits the audience to view the process by which the press and its readers exaggerate, romanticize, and sensationalize the death of Don Joselito. There is never any mystery for the reader or viewer, for we know from the beginning the identity of the perpetrator and his motives for the crime. Instead, the reader witnesses the course by which mass media convert a horrendous but unextraordinary crime into a fullblown, thrilling spectacle for the consumption of the masses. Ironically, the military men are precisely those who most clearly criticize this tendency toward exaggeration, albeit for reasons of personal interest. Already in Scene 3, the General laments the aggressiveness of the Spanish press, presenting it as an aberration from the broader culture of the Western world: “¡La Prensa en todas partes respeta la vida privada, menos en España! ¡La honra de una familia en la pluma de un grajo!” (258).

Again in Scene 6 the General complains: “Esta intromisión de la gacetilla en el privado de nuestros hogares es intolerable” (287). The General sharply criticizes the insistent and uncompromising aspects of modern journalism’s search for news items, arguing that the papers should respect personal privacy and certain limitations of decency and propriety.

The well-known associations between government officials and the editors or proprietors of daily newspapers takes center stage in the climactic moments of *La hija del capitán* as the General interprets the press campaign as a direct attack on the institution of the military waged by members of the civil government in collusion with mass media. An exchange between El Coronel Camarasa and the General at the end of Scene 6:

El Coronel Camarasa: Se quiere distraer al país con campañas de escándalo. Mi General, la familia militar llora con viriles lágrimas de fuego la mengua de la Patria. Un Príncipe de la Milicia no puede ser ultrajado, porque son uno mismo su honor y el de la Bandera. El Gobierno, que no ha ordenado la recogida de ese papelucho inmundo...

El General: La ha ordenado, pero tarde, cuando se había agotado la tirada. No puede decirse que tenga mucho que agradecerle al Gobierno. ¡Si por ventura no es inspirador de esta campaña! (292–93)

The Coronel’s comments, which remind us of the treatment of the military family’s honor in *Los cuernos de don Friolera*, conflate the criticism of the military’s morality with an attack on the nation, thus revealing how the military characters in this scene discursively connect the interests of the army with the health of the homeland. The dialogue in this scene indirectly evokes the circumstances surrounding the passing of the Ley de Jurisdicciones on March 22, 1906, a law that granted the military the right to press charges and try anyone who directly or indirectly criticized the nation or its armed forces. Amidst tremendous controversy, the Cortes passed the law in response to military pressure and the events of November 25, 1905, when hundreds of soldiers stormed the

editorial offices of the satirical magazine *¡Cu-cut!* in reaction to a caricature drawn by Joan Junceda. The Ley de Juridicciones, which was repealed in the dawning moments of the Second Republic in 1931, protected the nation, its emblems—national anthem, flag, etc.—and the military from public defamation in speech or print.

Although generally recognized as a caricature or satire of the uprising that installed Miguel Primo de Rivera as dictator in 1923, *La hija del capitán* compresses the tensions and conflicts between the government, military, and public sector throughout the Restoration period into the short duration of the play. Like *Luces de bohemia*, *La hija del capitán* layers political events from different years onto the same dramatic *mise en scène*, juxtaposing different historical moments to highlight the recurring patterns of militarism, political abuse, and media manipulation in modern Spain. If *Luces de bohemia* presented the damaging effects of the industrialization of writing on the public status and personal wellbeing of the writer, *La hija del capitán* further intensifies this critique of the modern print industry by examining how the press, motivated by profit margins and the desire for political influence, cynically exploits the reading public by turning everyday occurrences into public spectacle. Even more, the play demonstrates how such an abuse and misuse of information injures the public at large by producing and fueling conflicts based on public perception rather than concrete events or facts.

### **The Absurdities of Modernity, All in One Place**

In the final analysis, Valle-Inclán's *esperpentos* present a complex, nuanced, and wary response to the cultural ramifications of the rise of mass media in the early twentieth century through an aggressive reworking of popular theatrical practices. The

legacy of the *género chico* in Valle's work is not merely the passing remembrance of a prevalent spectacle; rather, Valle's plays probe the depths of contemporary discourse and patterns of thought by pulling apart the popular activities of the era and putting them back together in creative and strange combinations. As is obvious in all of his dramatic works, imaginative rearrangement of seemingly unconnected theatrical practices, historical moments, social customs, political events, and cultural attitudes reveal the underlying mechanisms of a society caught in the liminal space between the modernity of urbanization, industrialization, and democratization, and the anachronistic barbarism of honor killings and military interventionism. Only on the stage can such disparate realities come together, and Valle-Inclán sought to make the most of drama's flexibility for portraying the absurdities of modern life.

## EPILOGUE

### REVERBERATIONS OF THE *GÉNERO CHICO* IN TWENTIETH-CENTURY PERFORMANCE MEDIA

At the beginning of this study, I argued that the rise of mass circulation daily newspapers in nineteenth-century Madrid altered the theater-going audience and the production practices of entrepreneurs, directors, and playwrights. The daily newspaper lies at the heart of modernity, bringing together industrialized production and technological innovation to mediate and communicate ideas of community and nation to a public of consumers through an aesthetic of visual variety and formal fragmentation. In this cultural environment the theater changed significantly as conceptions of character development, scene construction, dramatic narrative, *mise en scène*, and visual presentation underwent a process of revision and rebirth. By reconstructing late nineteenth-century popular entertainment in Madrid, we arrive at a better understanding of the cultural processes within which playwrights such as Carlos Arniches and Ramón del Valle-Inclán were operating as they experimented with dramatic form to espouse an ethical critique of modernity.

By examining how the rise of modern newspapers wrought changes on the theatrical landscape of Spain, this study hopes to have provided a model for investigation of the intersections of media, literary expression, and visuality in modern culture. The recuperative thrust of cultural studies provides a framework within which to revive ephemeral entertainments that dominated the public's attention at the turn of the twentieth century. The attention of media studies to the physical realities of texts, images,

and the technological means by which they are disseminated permits a deeper sense of how the circumstances of reception affected the generation of social meanings and cultural interpretations of journalism and drama. Along with textual analysis, these approaches to the Madrilenian theater scene combine to examine changing theatrical production and performance practices as responses to the evolving cultural ambit of the period. Such an attitude does not intend to devalue the importance of the playwright, but rather to re-contextualize and reconsider the role of the artist in a larger cultural milieu.

There are many directions that future studies of the relationships between mass media, textual practices, performing arts, and popular entertainment might take. In the pages that follow, I briefly sketch two general areas of inquiry that emerge from my explorations of how the fragmentary aesthetic of modern journalism and the rise of a vibrant commercial theater contributed to a series of shifts in dramatic praxis in Spain. These outlines demonstrate that the development of an aesthetic of variety in the nineteenth century and its incorporation into more artistically engaged cultural products are part of a larger cultural process that persists well into the twentieth century.

### **Understanding the Rise of Film as a Product of Changing Spectatorship**

A common assumption is that theater was inevitably doomed to decline after the introduction of moving pictures into the cultural marketplace. According to this view, the artistic theater survived because of its literary value while the commercial stage gave way to film as the preferred entertainment of the masses. This position fails to probe the causes for the shift in audiences' tastes and enthusiasm for the new medium. By looking at the trend toward fragmentation and heterogeneity in nineteenth-century popular

culture, we can more effectively theorize how audience expectations and economic pressures shifted twentieth-century entertainment toward film.

The convergent business practices of the print industry and the commercial stage fueled radical changes in the demands of the Madrilenian public. New bodies of knowledge and technical innovation stimulated the public's interest in spectacles that brought together a variety of sensory experiences. As newspapers provided the public with knowledge about faraway places and peoples, theatrical works attempted to follow the lead by portraying exotic locations. The structure of the *revista* was suited for the depiction of many distinct settings in a single work. Commercial theater also reflected journalism's strengths in visual presentation (etchings, drawings, caricature, photography) through the use of elaborate costumes and the final apotheosis—a highly stylized visual arrangement on the stage—at the end of many works. A clear cycle developed: 1) journalism and theater introduced innovations to attract more customers; 2) these innovations generated new expectations of heterogeneity in the audience; 3) journalism and theater consequently were obliged to continue searching for innovations to maintain the attention of the audience.

Film eclipsed theater as the principal mass entertainment in Madrid—and most everywhere in the industrialized world—because the theater's formal limitations prevented its continued evolution and ability to 'keep up' with the demands of the twentieth-century spectator. The formal flexibility of film allowed the new medium to outpace the commercial theater as the entertainment of choice for the modern audience. Theater's ability to adapt could only extend into the realm of organization, plot structure, and the mixture of sensory stimulations (visual spectacle, music, dance, etc.); the



spectator was always constrained by the tyranny of the theater seat, confined to a single vantage point. The visual language of film allows the director to vary the visual field of the spectator through cuts, close-ups, panoramic views, long shots, and pans. Film visually performs an aesthetic of fragmentation by unlinking the spectator's vision from his or her physical location and establishing its own sense of time and space.

Film's dependence on the theater as the foundation for its eventual success is most apparent in the process of experimentation that characterized moving pictures' earliest years. Before projected images on a screen became standard practice, many different technologies for the production of moving images competed for the attention of audiences seeking novel experiences. Thomas Edison played a central role in the development of moving pictures in the United States with his company's work on the Kinetoscope in the early 1890s (Spehr 23–25). The Kinetoscope granted viewers the opportunity to watch short motion pictures by individually looking into large wooden boxes. Edison's company produced over one hundred motion pictures for the Kinetoscope prior to the debut of the Lumière brothers' Cinématographe in 1896 (Spehr 42). While the individualized nature of spectatorship presented by the Kinetoscope seems natural to a twenty-first-century consumer familiar with televisions, smart phones, and other personal electronic devices, spectators at the turn of the twentieth century were embedded in a social and cultural environment structured around collective spectatorship at community festivals, religious celebrations, and theatrical performances. Edison's images "were small, viewed awkwardly in a wooden box, and only one person at a time could see them—quite different from the shared experience of watching dramas and comedies on a screen in a darkened room" (Spehr 42), or in the theater hall, for that

matter. Entrepreneurs seeking to profit from motion pictures adjusted technologies to fit the social needs and cultural expectations of their customers, expectations that were based largely on audiences' experiences in the commercial theater scene (Larson 263).

The documentary impulse in early cinema relates film to journalism's intent to portray modernity as spectacle. Early filmmakers shot on location at important world events so that they could offer consumers the opportunity to see those events rather than simply read about them in newspapers. Charles Musser observes that film in the 1890s performed these functions within the space of commercial theater houses: "The cinema increasingly functioned as a visual newspaper, with a mix of news films, short cartoon-like comedies, and human-interest stories forming part of an evening's program in many vaudeville houses" (49). Even though newspapers were capable of giving readers up-to-date information from all over the world, film took advantage of its potential for providing spectators with visual access to a representation of the events themselves.

*Asesinato y entierro de don José de Canalejas* (1912), an unusual title from early Spanish silent film, demonstrates the problematic nature of filmic representation of 'true' events. This short film, directed by Adelardo Fernández Arias and Enrique Blanco, juxtaposes documentary footage of José de Canalejas's funeral wake with a re-enactment of his assassination as he browsed the windows of the San Martín bookshop in Puerta del Sol on November 12, 1912. In the documentary footage, people in the crowd, policemen, and high-ranking civic officials look at the camera, a gesture that simultaneously draws attention to the mechanisms of production and shows how the physical realities of the medium itself (the presence of the camera) influenced the *mise en scène* of the film. In the re-enactment, Manuel Pardiñas, Canalejas's assailant, attempts to flee but is gunned

down by guards. In the frame we see the actor playing Pardiñas—José Ysbert Alvarruiz, who was better known under the name Pepe Isbert and became a significant actor in the early twentieth century—rise from the ground after his character has been shot to death, just before the frame cuts to another shot. Also, before the assassination, the careful viewer will notice the bullet holes in the glass windows of the bookshop, another sign pointing to the constructed nature of this section of the film. After the re-enactment, the camera's gaze turns again to documentary footage showing the actual Pardiñas's body lying in the morgue and the bullet holes in the bookshop window in a close-up. The juxtaposition of live footage and theatricalized re-enactment in the moving picture points to film's status as a medium of expression that exerts a powerful influence over the images it projects to audiences. Through this mediated aesthetic experience, the film permits audiences all over Spain to be present at the events surrounding Canalejas's burial and to witness, albeit through simulation, the national leader's death.

The purpose of this approach to the rise of cinema is to situate film in the larger trajectory of media culture in modern society. Ironically, commercial theater contributed strongly to a process that forever changed the modern spectator and led to its own demise as a major form of commercial entertainment. Bridging the formal qualities and aesthetic principles of newspapers and commercial theater to cinema and video helps us understand the relationship between popular entertainments of the nineteenth century and those of the present. Further investigation of these intersections is vital for a more profound ability to place current trends in electronic media in a broader historical context.

## **The Transmedia Migration of the *Género Chico***

The arrival of film and its formal refinement extended the life of the *género chico* and brought it to new generations of spectators. Critics and historians often point to the decline of the *género chico* in the 1920s as audiences abandoned theater halls in favor of movie houses, but at the same time Spanish film production companies looked to the *género chico* repertoire in search of material that could be expected to attract audiences. The *género chico* does not experience a wholesale demise as film rises to the apex of popular culture, but rather undergoes a transmedia migration as many famous works move from the stage to the silver screen.

This migratory process began during the early years of the twentieth century as *género chico* playwrights and producers responded to film as a novelty and growing competitor. Only a few months after its debut in Paris, the Lumière brothers' Cinematograph dazzled Madrilenian audiences. The device even made it into the Teatro Apolo, the 'cathedral' of the *género chico*, during the first and third slots on October 30, 1896 (Membrez 410). Theater entrepreneurs during the early years of projection cinema approached film as another element that they could incorporate into the overarching variety aesthetic of the commercial theater halls.

Playwrights during this period dealt directly with cinema by incorporating cinematographic aesthetic tendencies into the visual presentation of their plays. A year after the first presentation of film in the Teatro Apolo, Andrés Ruesga Villoldo and Enrique Prieto Enríquez's *Fotografías Animadas, o, El arca de Noé* (1897) integrated short films as a storytelling element, a practice that became common in European theater in the early decades of the twentieth century as playwrights sought new mechanisms by

which to communicate the inner mental lives of characters. Many plays organized the visual presentation of scenes around the aesthetic logic of silent film, prioritizing plasticity and pantomime. A wonderful example is Luis de Larra y Ossorio's *La última película* (1913), which begins with an extended action sequence in which criminals are gaining the upper hand over a group of policemen. Confusion ensues when a watchman interrupts the shoot because he believes an actual crime is taking place. This opening serves as the basis for a *revista* in which the various *cuadros* portray the typology of films from the era: crime stories, mythological fancies, current events, marvelous inventions, and adventure stories.

The use of the *cinematógrafo* as the basis for satire and social critique was a second trend that developed as *género chico* writers responded to the emergence of cinema in Madrid. Dozens of plays written in the first two decades of the twentieth century were structured around the central motif or space of the movie house and those who worked there or attended the movies. Following a tradition that began at least with the *costumbristas* and continued in the early years of the Spanish *revistas*, these plays latched onto a popular activity or location in Madrilenian culture as a point of departure for satirical social critique. A strong example is Guillermo Perrín and Miguel de Palacios' *Cinematógrafo Nacional*, which premiered in the Teatro Apolo on May 10, 1907. The central conceit of the play is a comparison of the popular movie houses that were springing up all over Madrid with the Congreso de los Diputados, the center of democratic governance in Spain. Such a conflation of the sites of popular leisure with the focal point of political power questions the blending of politics and entertainment by putting forth the "premise that the center of political decision-making has been converted

into the site of the selling and consumption of mass-produced spectacle” (Larson 272–73). Not surprisingly, theater practitioners of this period—who were beginning to see their audiences abandon theater halls in favor of movie halls—associated a rival form of entertainment with social decay and moral decline. Arniches and García Álvarez followed a similar line in *El fresco de Goya*; the *fresco* who plays fast and loose with the sexual chastity of young women just happens to own the new cinema that has opened in the neighborhood. The negative portrayal of cinema in these plays obviously surfaces due to the intense competition for market share that was occurring between film and theater during this period. Once cinema took a clear lead in this battle for spectators, many of the creative minds in the *género chico* began participating in the production of films.

The *género chico* was always a commercially driven phenomenon. When motion pictures became the new gold standard for popular entertainment in the early twentieth century, the one-act *sainetes* and *zarzuelas chicas* that had amused Madrilenian audiences for decades refused to be left behind in oblivion and moved into the new realm of the silver screen. This migration from stage to screen marks a major shift in the *género chico*, which no longer revolves around the constant production of new works, but rather depends on the actualization of an existing corpus of plays in a new medium. Just as many theaters in the heyday of the *género chico* immediately cancelled shows that were not profitable in favor of reliable successes, film production companies turned to well-known musical plays to minimize risk.

The migration of famous *género chico* works to film in large part helps to explain the generation of a modern canon of well-known *zarzuelas chicas* and lyric *sainetes* that stands in contrast to the majority of forgotten commercial theater works from this period.

The *juguete cómico* generally lacked musical accompaniment and the *revista* lacked a strong sense of narrative, characteristics that made the transference of these genres to film a difficult task. While the importance of narrative continuity may seem obvious, the significance of a strong musical score at first appears somewhat paradoxical. What is the significance of music for adaptations of musicals into the visual language of silent film? The answer lies in the fact that all of the lyric *sainetes* and *zarzuelas chicas* that were carried to the silver screen had been phenomenal popular successes, and thus Spanish audiences knew every song from these shows. The audience's familiarity with the lyrics and melodies of a play such as *La verbena de la Paloma* made dialogue unnecessary in the silent film version of the play directed by José Buchs that premiered in 1921. Whereas other types of narrative film during this period had to find creative means by which to communicate important dialogue or plot points, musical works from the *género chico* could reasonably rely on audiences' previous acquaintance with the work in the film's visual presentation. Moreover, the strong visual cues from the theatrical renditions of the play and the association of specific objects with different moments in the play further facilitated directors' ability to maintain a strong sense of narrative through the visual language of film.<sup>54</sup>

A wave of film adaptations of *género chico* works emerged in the 1920s as audiences' interest in documentary works waned and demand for fictional narratives increased. By this period feature length films were reaching lengths of eighty minutes to two hours, which suggests a systematic extension of works that were designed to fit into

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<sup>54</sup> At the same time, it is very likely that some sort of music accompanied many of these films. A variety of techniques were used during the presentation of films during the early decades of the twentieth century to provide spoken dialogue, music, and sound effects. Rick Altman's *Silent Film Sound* (2005) examines a wide swath of methods used in variety theater, nickelodeons, and cinemas during this period.

the temporal constraints of one-hour slots. No longer confined by the physical limitations of a stage or theater hall, film directors melded the narrative structures of *sainetes* and *zarzuelas* with the documentary impulse of earlier film and fleshed out these works by firmly grounding the stories in realistic geography and urban environments with on-location shooting. For example, the opening shot of José Buchs's silent version of *Carceleras* (1922) consists of a panoramic view of Córdoba to set the film in the Andalusian city. Florián Rey used a similar technique at the beginning of his adaptations of *La Revoltosa* (1924) and *Gigantes y cabezudos* (1925) to locate the plays respectively in Madrid and Ríola. The prioritization of the visual in these films also encouraged directors to expand choreographed dance sequences and spectacular visual elements to add something new to the films and in some ways make up for the lack of sound. In *Carceleras*, *La Revoltosa*, *Gigantes y cabezudos*, and many other films from the period, festive sequences record regional dance practices while advancing the plot. Linda Hutcheon argues that the main ways in which we engage with stories are showing, telling, and interacting with them (*Adaptation* xiv). In the cinematic adaptations of *género chico* works from the 1920s, we observe the process by which the showing and telling functions of the theater passed into the primarily showing capacities of silent film.

The arrival of new sound technologies restored the telling function to *género chico* adaptations in the 1930s, but only after silent film's primacy of showing had altered the visual language of these works. Rather than attempting direct adaptations of the stories as they were presented on commercial stages, directors during the first decade of motion pictures with sound continued to situate popular *sainetes* and *zarzuelas* in a stylized visual environment that reflected the spaces of modern cities and the countryside.



Eusebio Fernández Ardavín's adaptation of *La reina mora* (1936), for example, begins with panning shots of the Guadalquivir River and panoramic vistas of Seville. This technique permeates the film as Fernández Ardavín keeps the story firmly grounded in its Andalusian setting. Documentary style shots of famous locations such as the Giralda intersperse the story as the narrator explains various facts about Seville. We then realize that the narrator is a tour guide who has been leading a group of British tourists around the city, and the last site they visit is the home of the female protagonist, *la reina mora*, thus weaving the story of the musical into the fabric of Seville's history and culture.

Directors were also willing to reorder and restructure famous plays to fit the narrative storytelling modes of cinema. In his classic adaptation of *La verbena de la Paloma* (1935), Benito Perojo drastically alters the structure of the play. The opening scene juxtaposes three dramatic spaces and three contrasting musical motifs; Perojo divides these elements into distinct scenes and distributes them throughout the film. Recognizing the challenges that the initial ensemble scene would present in a motion picture, Perojo abandons theatrical convention and translates this scene's various components into a linear narrative structure more suited to cinema.

The adaptation of *género chico* works into film continued at a high pace after the Spanish Civil War brought the political consolidation of the Franco regime. The cultural policies of the new regime were notoriously arbitrary and ambiguous, but the most intense scrutiny was cast upon media that reached the largest audiences, and film was the prime candidate for strong censorship (Muñoz Cáliz xxxiii). In this context, adaptations of *género chico* works were a relatively safe bet, given the association of this theatrical tendency with a generally conservative worldview that ignored developments in

revolutionary politics and proletarian representation during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Additionally, the interest of these works in portraying *castizo* subjects fit within the larger cultural interest of the regime to reclaim and fortify a strong sense of traditional Spanish identity. At the same time, the *género chico* harkened back to a nostalgic vision of time before the ‘disaster’ of 1898, the bitter socio-political conflicts of the early twentieth century, the disillusionment accompanying World War I, the turbulent political and economic climate of the Second Republic, and the atrocities of the civil war. It is not surprising that film versions of *género chico* works found a willing audience during the 1940s and 1950s, an era frequently associated with ‘escapist’ novels, theater, and film.

A strong example is Ramón Quadreny’s adaptation of *La alegría de la huerta* (1940), a *sainete* by Antonio Paso and Enrique García Álvarez that debuted in Madrid’s Teatro Eslava on January 20, 1900. The action of the play takes place in a small rural town in Murcia named Algezares, far removed from the Spanish urban centers where political conflicts and social unrest were occurring in both 1900 and 1940. All of the visual elements of *género chico* films from the previous decades are present: *costumbrista* scenes of regional dance, panoramic views to establish the setting, on-location shooting to connect the setting with the main contours of the drama, and so forth. The principal theme of *La alegría de la huerta* takes on a new meaning in the ideological context of the 1940s. Alegría, the male protagonist, deeply loves Carola, but is unable to find the courage to state his feelings for her and ask for her hand in marriage. Alegría’s inability to speak leads his desires to the brink of ruin as Carola agrees to marry Juan Francisco. After pouring out his heart to an image of the Virgin Mary, Alegría vows to

abandon the town, but is stopped before leaving and finally dares to confess his feelings to Carola, leading to the typical happy resolution to the story. The ideological underpinnings of the play are complex; Alegría's incapacity to speak points to the silence imposed on the Spanish population following Franco's victory in the war. The religious imagery of the play, however, points to divine intervention as the means by which Alegría ultimately regains his bravura and finds happiness. This imagery is closely connected with *falangista* symbolism as the film ends with a shot of a religious parade in which the people of the village honor the image of the Virgin as it passes with a fascist salute. The motion picture simultaneously moves in a number of different ideological directions, which suggests the incorporation of a critical subtext through the choice of Paso and García Álvarez's play along with the inclusion of imagery that would allow the film to pass the inspection of state censors.

A pattern of adaptation of these works appears in the twentieth century. Many plays appeared in silent film in the 1920s, took advantage of sound technology in the 1930s, and then reappeared in the 1960s in Technicolor or in television formats. *La verbena de la Paloma* is the best example of these generations of film adaptations: in 1921, José Buchs brought the play to silent film for the first time; in 1935, Benito Perojo made the classic version; and in 1963, José Luis Sáenz de Heredia directed another adaptation of the work. Other *género chico* works follow similar distributions: *Gigantes y cabezudos* (1925, 1969), *Bohemios* (1937, 1969), *Doña Francisquita* (1934, 1952). Greater familiarity with these generations of *género chico* adaptations permits us to understand how the legacy of this corpus of works has changed over time and to see how new audio and visual techniques have been brought to bear on these plays.

Contemporary views of the *género chico* doubtlessly have been influenced and shaped by cinematic and television adaptations. Sáenz de Heredia's 1963 version of *La verbena de la Paloma* stands as an example of how even during the later, less overtly ideological stage of the Franco regime, cinematic adaptations of the *género chico* tended toward a conservative vision of Spanish society.<sup>55</sup> Sáenz de Heredia's film uses framing devices to connect the famous play from the 1890s to the realities of Madrid in the early 1960s. The opening shots juxtapose video of the contemporary Spanish capital—la Plaza de Cibeles, la Puerta del Sol, Gran Vía—with sepia photographs of those same locations in the late nineteenth century. The narrator argues that the surfaces of Madrid have changed—the construction of skyscrapers, paved streets, foreign consumer goods—but that the city preserves its essential spirit: “La ciudad se defiende de la invasión.” The language the narrator employs is reminiscent of the xenophobia characteristic of the Franco regime after the war. The visual presentation of the film seeks to corroborate this interpretation through images that depict similar activities in the nineteenth century and the present, such as streets musicians playing the *organillo* and festival attendees purchasing *buñuelos*. This visual evidence reflects the street culture of the nineteenth century, activities that served as the *mise en scène* for many of the *género chico* works that are best known today. Other aspects of the film work towards the conservative message of the play, particularly as the narrator enlists young people from contemporary Madrid to serve as the principal characters for the play. The man who becomes Julián and the woman who takes on the role of Susana already are a couple that has been arguing

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<sup>55</sup> In spite of his early acting and directing work prior to the Civil War and his lengthy career as a director until 1975, José Luis Sáenz de Heredia is most widely remembered as the director of *Raza*, the film based on a script written by Franco himself that premiered in 1942. Even though he gradually distanced himself from the regime's propaganda, the government obliged him to direct a documentary in 1964 commemorating the twentieth-fifth anniversary of Franco's victory.

over his jealous tendencies. In other words, while the narrator literally dresses the characters with the outward markers of another time, the film presents the basic conflict that drives the plot of the movie as universal to all times.

The film alters the resolution of the conflict between Julián, Susana, and Don Hilarión by introducing new characters and situations. After the initial skirmish with Don Hilarión, Julián's friends advise him to give up violence and use Susana's affections for him to regain her trust. Julián asks Manolo if he would allow his girlfriend Balbina to enter a dance contest with Julián to make Susana jealous. The insecure Manolo resists at first, but eventually consents to allow Balbina to participate in the rouse. The plan works as Susana becomes enraged at the sight of her beloved dancing with another woman. The police intervene in the ensuing scuffle, and in the end the police give Julián and Susana two choices: either they can go to jail or swear to marry. They choose the latter and then decide to enter the dance competition together, as originally planned. Precisely at this moment, the time period of the film shifts back to the early 1960s, and Julián and Susana find themselves dressed in clothing more appropriate to their own time. The film concludes as the happy pair dance the mambo, instead of the mazurka, to a jazzy, updated version of the famous musical theme from *La verbena de la paloma*.

Sáenz de Heredia's very different ending for *La verbena de la paloma* contributes to the conservative ideological message of the film. Unlike the play, in which Julián remains emotionally unstable to the end, in the film he regains his composure and implements a plan to achieve his desires. Susana becomes hysterical and assaults Balbina in a fit of jealous rage. The film implicitly supports a view of gender relations that posits men as rational and self-aware and women as emotionally-driven and hysterical.

Moreover, the different actions of the police in the film point to the broader social and moral context of Spain in the 1960s. While in the play Julián and Susana reunite with no plans to wed, the film sets up an obvious contrast between criminality and marriage. In order for Susana and Julián to avoid jail, they promise to marry. This decision on the part of the director suggests a deeper preoccupation with and reaction to the changing moral and social norms of the 1960s.

The continued success of cinematic adaptations of the *género chico* attests to the enduring vibrancy of the stories told by these plays. Always intended as commercial works designed to appeal to mass audiences through an aesthetic of variety, these stories have proven to be durable for over a century, enjoying extended life on the silver screen, televisions, and frequently in revival productions in Madrid's summer cultural festivals. Contemporary views and attitudes doubtlessly have been shaped not only by the plays themselves, but interpretations of the works in various cinematic adaptations and current stagings. Further work on these plays' dissemination via film is crucial in order to achieve a more complete vision of the *género chico*'s legacy and its place in the history of modern Spanish culture.

### **Theatrical Reverberations of the *Género Chico***

The survival of the forms and thematic interests of the *género chico* in film from the 1920s through the 1960s permitted a new generation of playwrights to experiment with the inherent possibilities for social and cultural critique that Arniches and Valle-Inclán had exploited decades earlier. Out of this ideologically complex environment arose new reinscriptions of the *género chico* within the progressive social theater of the mid

twentieth century. Socially engaged playwrights from the postwar period drew from the vast visual language and dramatic tradition of the *género chico* to analyze the state of contemporary Spanish society in the aftermath of a devastating civil war and under the control of an oppressive political regime. This relationship with *género chico* places these dramaturges into a specific dialogue with cinematic adaptations of the *género chico* that were ideologically complicit with Francoist cultural politics and the broader context of modern Spanish theater praxis.

Antonio Buero Vallejo's *La historia de una escalera* (1949) draws on *género chico* traditions in its representation of an inescapable historical cycle of poverty and frustration. The play revolves around a central staircase in a *patio de vecindad*, a setting typical of the festive *sainete* of the 1890s made most famous by *La Revoltosa* (1897). Buero Vallejo moves away from the festive tone of the *sainete* by focusing on the destitution of the working class neighborhoods. Even though the first two acts of the play are set prior to the civil war, audiences could recognize easily the economic depression Spain experienced for decades following the war as a result of the country's self-imposed isolation and autarkic economic policies after World War II. The play traces the desires and injustices of three generations of two Madrid families. Like its *sainete* predecessors, *La historia de una escalera* revolves around a sentimental story involving Fernando and Carmina, but departs from the mold by depicting how the characters' impoverishment contributes to the frustration of their romantic desires as we discover in Act 2 that Fernando has abandoned Carmina in favor of a marriage of monetary convenience with Elvira. By extending the vision of the play from the one-act form of the *sainete* to a more extensive three-act format, Buero Vallejo revises the facile happy endings of the *género*

*chico* to show how widespread poverty leads to the dissolution of ethical behavior and begets misery and frustration. The play fuses the character types, spaces, and representational strategies of the *género chico* with the transgenerational structures reminiscent of Ibsen's naturalist aesthetic (Edwards 140). Similar to Valle-Inclán's technique of layering socio-political allusions onto the same dramatic *mise en scène*, this strategy allows Buero Vallejo to depict a society suffering from a recurring, cyclical pattern of self-destruction. The structure and form of the play serve to underscore that the surface effects of historical moments may differ—subtle changes to the set, new coats of paint on doors, updated fashion, etc.—but the central symbol of the rundown staircase remains intact, implying that the ills of Spanish society have not been addressed in spite of a series of drastic political changes and a devastating war.

Temporary easing of censorship practices in the early 1960s facilitated the rise of a realist theatrical movement committed to the creation of a theater dedicated to social criticism rather than the satisfaction of middle-class bourgeois expectations. Alfonso Sastre emerged as an important antecedent to this movement due to his theoretical and critical writings on theater, rather than his dramaturgy, which always was beset by problems of censorship. *Drama y sociedad* (1956) advocates the social function of theater and the need to provoke thought and introspection in the audience, while *Anatomía del realismo* (1965) posits realism as the antidote to the simplistic, escapist vision of the bourgeois theater and the solution for recreating a conceptually accurate account of contemporary Spanish society within the dramatic space of the stage. These calls to realism led many socially-committed playwrights during this period to establish a dialectic between the popular realism of the *género chico* and intense interrogation of



current social issues. Embedded in this gesture was the notion of creating a theatrical vision that represented all of society, not just the middle class (Halsey 668).

Lauro Olmo quickly emerged as the principal voice of this turn toward realism as a means by which to espouse intense social critique. His best-known play, *La camisa* (1962), presents a bleak picture of the working-class neighborhoods of Madrid, filled with people whose optimism has been crushed by poverty and disappointment and others who remain dedicated to illusions such as winning the lottery. The play parodies the festive *sainete* genre in order to call attention to the disjuncture between the *género chico*'s representation of the Spanish popular classes and the realities of contemporary Madrid. Olmo distances his play from the comic tone of the festive *sainete* and instead strikes a somber, dark tone through which to take advantage of the slippages and silences of the *género chico* to critique the state of Spanish society. The economic stagnation that resulted from early Francoism's autarkic economic policies permeates the *barrios bajos*. The economic woes of Juan's household affect all three generations as the members of the family find ways to earn money, both legal and illegal. Poverty and economic disparity breeds exploitation and abuse, a situation that threatens the social order of the community. This disintegration of community is highlighted by the one option that remains for Juan's family to find a better way of life, which is for Juan's wife Lola to immigrate to Germany and work as a nanny or maid. The only solution that will prevent Juan's family from falling into moral and ethical depravity due to their impoverished status is the (supposedly) temporary dissolution of the family.

A more intense example of how the imagery and structural features of *género chico* works served as the basis for social critique in the realist generation of the 1960s is

José María Rodríguez Méndez's *Bodas que fueron famosas del Pingajo y la Fandanga* (1965).<sup>56</sup> The different scenes in the play draw on the festive *sainete* tradition in its portrayal of various locations in Madrid. The setting of the play in 1898 intensifies the acerbic critique it constructs of militarism and political oppression. *Bodas* also draws on the rich visual tradition of cinematic adaptations of the *género chico* by assembling an elaborate tapestry of the trappings of a feast, such as wine, food, colorful dishes, and so forth. This was a common feature of film versions of the *sainete*, and a wonderful example occurs after the baptism scene in Fernández Ardavín's adaptation of *La reina mora* (1936). The play also draws on the ambivalent representations of the representatives of State authority present in the *género chico* as the police arrive and hold everyone at gunpoint. The tone of the play turns decidedly dark as Pingajo is arrested and led away to be executed in the epilogue. In a sense, this epilogue can be seen as the spiritual successor to Scene 6 of Valle-Inclán's *Luces de bohemia*, portraying the bloody horror of Pingajo's execution as he is shot down by the police and wrapped in a shabby Spanish flag. The extreme poles of representation in the play—beginning with the zany antics and festive atmosphere of the *género chico* and ending with striking, grotesque scenes of craven violence—serve to unmask the dark reality of violent social oppression that resided behind the façade of order and peace in Spain in the 1960s.

These are but a few of the best-known examples of how playwrights in postwar Spain fused elements of the *género chico* with their ideological platforms and social commentary. The representation practices of the commercial theater from early in the

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<sup>56</sup> In actuality, 1965 is the year in which Rodríguez Méndez originally wrote the play, but it was banned by censorship due to its satirical and ridiculous portrayal of the military. The play was not performed until the opening of the Centro Dramático Nacional in 1978, appropriately inaugurating an important and new theatrical institution of the post-Franco era.

century and its survival in films proved to be fertile terrain for contestation of the dominant ideological tendencies of the Franco regime. Instead of directly commenting on the social and ethical failures of the dictatorship—an antagonist form of activism that Sastre championed in his theatrical *oeuvre*—these dramatists found in the *género chico* a space of contestation in which to interrogate and destabilize official discourses of Spanish identity by manipulating the conventional features of festive spectacles.

### **Convergences of Media and Performance in Western Culture**

A primary feature of newspapers and the *género chico* is their intense materiality. A newspaper is an object that conveys information through direct physical interaction, demanding that its reader control unwieldy pages, squint to read its tiny print, and deal with the ink that inevitably stains his or her hands. It is a text that does not sit tidily on a shelf, contained between covers and tight binding, but rather one with a natural tendency to spread as its pages are carried away by the wind and the sweat of our fingers removes ink from paper. The *género chico* is also a physical phenomenon, populating the theatrical space with large casts and the accoutrements of modern consumer society. Spectators sat or stood in crowded conditions, aware of the spectacle on the stage and the other members of the public in an event that was as much about watching the audience as it was about taking in a show. Both the newspaper and the commercial theater scene that developed around the *género chico* were cultural institutions of Spanish society during a specific historical moment. Any attempt to come to a profound understanding of that period of time in the peninsula and realities of that era for those who lived it depends on knowledge of these activities and the relationships that connect the two.

It is ironic that I have examined the significance of the modern newspaper's role in initiating a process of cultural change precisely in a moment when newspapers find themselves in a state of crisis. Like the commercial theater of the late nineteenth century, the day has arrived when newspapers no longer meet the ever-changing expectations of the modern reader. Just as formal elasticity permitted film to rise to dominance in the world of popular entertainment, the seemingly limitless flexibility of electronic communication and media platforms have overtaken traditional print media. The twentieth-century spectator was freed from the tyranny of the theater seat, and the twenty-first century reader has been released from the constraints of paper. Text, video, audio, interactive applets, video games, and more intermingle on the screen, yielding a panacea of fragmentary sensory delight.

In the end, media are not a product of technology, but a conduit of human interaction. Media are imminently historical and cultural because they emerge from the collective needs and demands of a society in a particular time. Newspapers and the *teatro por horas* did not arise as the major leisure activities of their day because they were imposed on Spaniards by manipulative businessmen; these entertainments gained popular status because they opened up new avenues and mechanisms through which the individual experiencing the shift to modernity could engage with the larger community of which he or she was now inescapably a part. The convergence of newspapers and commercial theater in Madrid at the turn of the twentieth century signals a wide-ranging confluence of mass media and performance practice in Western culture. By bringing our examinations of drama into contact with the broader contours of modern media culture, we begin to see the outlines of cultural processes with far-reaching implications.

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