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Roberta Ann Frost

PATTERNS OF REPETITION AND CONTINUITY IN THE
GALICIAN WORKS OF RAMÓN DEL VALLE-INCLÁN

Thesis Submitted in Fulfilment of the Requirements for the
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy of the University of London

Department of Spanish and Latin American Studies
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I declare that the work presented in this thesis is my own, unless otherwise indicated.

Roberta Ann Frost
ABSTRACT

Because of the variety of his output, many of Valle-Inclán’s works have been studied in isolation, or in selective, often arbitrary categories, rather than as pieces of a whole. The aim of this thesis is to consider the elements that provide significant links in his writing between 1889 and 1922, and to demonstrate that works that are apparently unrelated are part of a larger picture. From early articles and short stories, through novels, to the emergence of theatre, the repetition of themes and motifs, of characters and of stylistic devices, reveals an underlying interdependence between works that on the surface appear unconnected or even contradictory. This is especially true of those works that appeared during the first three decades of Valle’s literary career, most of which share the common backdrop of Galicia. Despite changes in perspective and moves from one genre to another, there are constants that relate individual works to those that precede and follow, creating a unifying pattern of continuity.

Many of these features have been the subject of critical studies on Valle-Inclán, but to date there has been no comprehensive review of the connecting factors within his Galician works. This thesis aims to explore the links that give unity to this period, from the very earliest short stories through to the culmination of Valle’s Galician theatre.
# CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CONTENTS</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 1: THE EARLY ARTICLES AND SHORT STORIES</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 2: REWORKING, INNOVATING AND ANTICIPATING:</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THE SONATAS AND FLOR DE SANTIDAD</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 3: THE BEGINNINGS OF THEATRE</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 4: THE EARLY COMEDIAS BÁRBARAS: SOURCES AND LINKS</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 5: CRISIS. NEW DIRECTIONS AND THE RETURN TO GALICIA</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 6: TURNING POINT: THE APPEARANCE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF DIVINAS PALABRAS</td>
<td>193</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 7: THE FINAL COMEDIA BÁRBARA: CARA DE PLATA</td>
<td>244</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONCLUSION</td>
<td>280</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WORKS CITED</td>
<td>286</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION

Valle-Inclán's reputation as a writer rests heavily on his esperpentos. These have largely eclipsed his pre-1920 work, which has received noticeably less attention. It is worth bearing in mind, however, that when in 1920, with the publication of the first version of *Luces de Bohemia*, Valle gave the term *esperpento* his personal connotation, he had by then been writing for over thirty years. To regard anything that preceded this date as what he himself dismissed as 'musiquilla de violín',¹ would be to undervalue the first three decades of his work, and to misread the whole picture.

Apart from a few lines of poetry, and the inclusion of the odd verse of Galician in his plays, Valle wrote almost entirely in Castilian. This, however, should not be taken as a rejection of his native Galicia, for the language, folklore, literature and atmosphere of Galicia pervade his work and shape his style. Born in Villanueva de Arosa, near Pontevedra, in 1866, he was brought up in a region of Spain where superstition, mystery and witchcraft underlie rural life, and where pagan ritual is often inseparable from religious doctrine. From childhood he was fascinated by local tales and legends, many of which he heard from the family servants, in particular, one Micaela, an old maid of his grandmother, whom he acknowledges in the introduction to *Jardín umbrio* (1903) as the source of several of his stories and who figures in more than one of his narratives. Galician elements fill his early stories and continue to appear throughout his work. Although Ricardo Carballo Calero, who divides Valle's work into two periods, maintains that Galician themes only dominate the first of these,² the Galician influence remained strong throughout Valle's life and was a prominent element of his writing.
Miguel de Unamuno remarked that although he wrote in Castilian, ‘En la prosa castellana de Valle-Inclán hay más espíritu gallego que en la de los que escriben en dialecto diferencial’.³

Valle’s decision to write in Castilian was based primarily on the need for his work to reach a wider public, though he himself cites it as a challenge:

Cuando el joven gallego, catalán o vasco siente la aspiración de escribir, aparece una sirena que le dice: ‘Si hablas en tu lengua regional serás un genio. En la lengua regional no hay que luchar con veinte naciones, basta luchar, simplemente, con cuatro provincias.’ Ser genio en el dialecto es demasiado fácil. Yo me negué a ser genio en mi dialecto y quise competir con cien millones de hombres, y lo que es más, con cinco siglos de heroísmo de lengua castellana. […] Yo que vengo de Galicia, región de campo dulce y bello, he pretendido dar al castellano el sentido labriego que no tiene.⁴

It should also be borne in mind that Galician was still considered by many to be an archaic language, kept alive only orally, and by a rural population. For about three centuries, Galician writers had produced barely any literature in their regional language. Described by Emilia Pardo Bazán as ‘una lengua antigua venida a menos’,⁵ Galician had degenerated from a position of prestige in the fifteenth century to a language of the pueblo, and had gradually been replaced by Castilian. Galician virtually disappeared as a written language and ceased to reflect the culture of its people. Its oral form, moreover, became corrupted and fragmented. Galicians who knew how to write now turned to Castilian. It was not until the second half of the nineteenth century, coinciding with the rise of Galician nationalism, that the region began to experience a literary Rexurdimento, whose leading figures, Eduardo Pondal, Manuel Curros Enriquez, Manuel Murguía, Nicomedes Pastor Díaz, and, above all, Rosalia de Castro, began again to write in Galician.⁶ Their success, naturally, was limited, since theirs was a
minority public. Valle-Inclán’s deliberate choice of Castilian, like that of his fellow countrywoman Pardo Bazán, was aimed at a wider audience.

In 1895 the publication of *Femeninas*, a collection of six short stories, brought Valle some recognition. His first significant success, however, was in 1902, with the appearance of *Sonata de otoño*. In a wide-ranging, comparative article, Dario Villanueva regards this prose work as one of the four novels, all published in 1902 (the others are Azorín’s *La voluntad*, Pío Baroja’s *Camino de perfección*, and Miguel de Unamuno’s *Amor y pedagogía*), that were fundamental to ‘la renovación de nuestra literatura’. Subsequently, Villanueva observes that Valle-Inclán would come to be regarded as one of the ‘grandes renovadores novelísticos del Modernismo’ (p. 510). It is important, however, to note that here the critic is using the term ‘Modernismo’ not in the Hispanic sense of *Modernismo* but rather with the broader, Anglo-American meaning of experimental or avant-garde art, and to which he refers, earlier in his article, as ‘modernismo internacional’ (p. 496).

*Sonata de otoño* was followed by *Sonata de estío* (1903), *Sonata de primavera* (1904), and *Sonata de invierno* (1905). These four stories, subtitled *Memorias del Marqués de Bradomin*, established Valle firmly as a modernista writer. The radical difference between this early style and his post-1920 aesthetic has led the majority of critics to divide his work chronologically into two main periods: José de Montesinos calls them *modernismo* and *esperpentismo*; Francisco Ruiz Ramón sees the same periods as dominated by myth and farce; Ramón Sender refers to them as periods of ‘lirismo’ and ‘realismo escarnizado’. Such divisions, however, can give a mistakenly simplistic overview, since there is abundant evidence of *esperpentismo*, farce and ‘realismo escarnizado’ in Valle’s early writing, whilst elements of *modernismo*, myth and ‘lirismo’ never completely disappear from his work. Nor is the change in his
aesthetic as abrupt as these divisions would lead us to believe. It would be a mistake, moreover, to put all Valle's pre-1920 work into a single category; there is a substantial variety of theme, subject matter and style in his early writing, as well as discernible changes in perspective.

Antonio Risco rejects the chronological view, and prefers to separate Valle's work thematically into five main areas: 'lujo, amor y voluptuosidad; ejercicios espirituales; Galicia; literatura heroica' and 'literatura antiheroica'. This assessment gives the impression of a completely new approach, but all Risco has done is to make five divisions rather than two; they still follow a chronological order and ignore, as does the more rigid separation into two periods, the element of overlap between areas. Any attempt at division runs this risk. Valle's total output was so varied that it is difficult, if not impossible, to compartmentalise satisfactorily. It is, moreover, misleading to attempt to isolate any one section of his work from the others: one of the most important elements of his writing is that each stage is connected, not just to those that precede and follow it, but to his work as a whole. There is an interrelationship between texts that gives us essential clues for an overall understanding of his work. Many of his apparently unrelated works are part of a larger scheme. José Rubia Barcia emphasises that what looks at first sight disconnected and even contradictory has, in fact an overall unity. Valle's writing cannot be fully appreciated unless it is viewed as an entity.

One of the links that becomes a characteristic of Valle's style establishes itself very early in his work, in the use of repetition: of characters, of theme, and of subject matter. Many of his characters reappear, sometimes with a different name or in another context: themes that emerge at the very beginning of his writing persist throughout his work, and at times Valle transfers whole sections of prose into a new text, or rewrites a complete story, either giving it another title or incorporating it in its entirety into a
longer narrative. As Rubia Barcia points out, his early work, especially, is marked by this element of repetition:

Siempre que da Valle-Inclán con una descripción, escenario, una frase e incluso una sola palabra de su gusto, no tendrá el menor reparo en utilizarla todas cuantas veces se le ocurra, siempre que entre en el contexto sin violencia. Es secundario que sea original o aprendida. La utilizará como un albañil utiliza sus ladrillos o el pintor sus colores. (p. 99)

William L. Fichter also sees this early trait as one that will become a hallmark of Valle’s writing: ‘La repetición de vocablos y de frases enteras será luego, en toda la obra posterior de Valle-Inclán, como es sabido, un elemento de su arte.’ The constant rearrangement of his work makes for a kind of continuity, a connecting thread that is traceable throughout his literary life. Indeed, even in the very early stages of his work there are the seeds of later ideas.

This recycling of material, however, came under criticism from Julio Casares in 1916. He speculated on whether Valle’s repetition of the same stories under different titles that resulted in a ‘sistema de aprovechamiento y transformación de materiales’, whereby ‘nada se pierde, nada se destruye’, was a joke at the public’s expense. He then tempered his attack by conceding that this repetition of texts and subject matter, and the ‘subsistencia o modificación de voces, giros, frases y conceptos a través de sucesivas redacciones’ served to illustrate the technical and ideological evolution of Valle’s work.

Such elements of repetition and continuity often involved a process of changing and perfecting:

El texto ya no se puede considerar como un dato en sí, sino más bien como un proceso, como una entidad variable y dinámica. Seguir escribiendo el libro después de su publicación es, para Valle- Inclán, una actividad existencial.
Publication, therefore, did not signify the finalisation of a work: the piece could appear again, repeatedly, at times only marginally changed, at others with radical differences.

This kind of repetition was especially true of Valle’s early short stories, written mostly between 1892 and 1907, which show the greatest complexity and re-elaboration. ‘El miedo’, ostensibly a story about mystery and fear, has at its core a derision for the military that would emerge more strongly in Valle’s later works, as well as elements of anticlericalism that would also become more marked as Valle’s work evolved. In addition, the story involves characters who would reappear in Sonata de otoño and El Marqués de Bradomín, and introduces the motif of roses that would be associated with both Octavia, in Cenizas, and Concha, in Sonata de otoño. ‘El miedo’ would appear in no fewer than twenty different versions. ‘A media noche’ would appear in thirteen. This story, again an apparently simple tale of mystery and fear, also introduces several of the elements of superstition that would permeate Valle’s work: a crossroads, moonlight, reference to the howling of a dog, the sinister connotations of a mill. The unidentified horseman, moreover, has elements that will relate him to Don Juan Manuel Montenegro in a later story, ‘Rosarito’, and the mention of a foro paid to the miller’s ‘la señora, mi ama’ may well allude to Concha of Sonata de otoño. Even more complex, ‘El rey de la máscara’ would appear in a total of eleven versions. This story contains rich source material for works that would follow and introduces an additional element of horror that characterises much of Valle’s work. The anticlericalism in the presentation of a priest who is not only politically involved, but sexually inclined and partial to good food and wine, is further underlined by the suspicion that the dead ‘rey’, the Abbot of Bradomín, has been murdered for his wealth. Elements of mystery are repeated in the moonlight, the proximity of a mill, the growling of a dog as it senses death, and the satanic connotations of the cat. The six men involved in the mascara will be the inspiration behind the masked men who attack Montenegro in Águila de
and the burning of the corpse, introducing a grotesque, macabre note, will have its
echoes in the same play, in the boiling of the body from the cemetery.

Such continual reworking, however, was limited to the pieces Valle wrote before
1910. In an interview with Vicente A. Salaverri in 1913, Valle maintained that he was
then writing ‘espoleado por la fiebre, con facilidad’, whereas ‘en un principio, pensaba,
limaba, corregía la construcción’.

Rubia Barcia dates the change later, around 1920, when Valle wrote his first esperpento: ‘De ahora en adelante, no refundirá ni retocará lo que escriba con el esfuerzo y minuciosidad de antes, sino que, escribirá con gran rapidez y facilidad. en notable contraste con la penosa lentitud de sus primeros años de escritor’ (p. 42).

It is clear that while many examples of repetition in Valle’s early writing are attempts to amend and improve, others simply reveal his attachment to certain characters, to favourite themes, to descriptive phrases, and sometimes to whole stories. Many of the longer narratives of this period and much of the theatre that follows, spring from the fusion of previous short texts or are the re-elaboration of earlier works. It is this commonality in Valle’s texts that gives his work its own kind of syncretism.

This thesis will attempt to explore the variety of Valle’s output in the first three decades of his literary career, and draw attention to the links that give unity to this period. It will suggest that the articles and short stories that are Valle’s first attempts at writing merit more attention than they have hitherto been afforded. not only as valuable examples of the genre in themselves, but as the vehicles of substantial source material on which Valle subsequently draws. It will be seen that the longer narratives and the theatre that subsequently evolve, while presenting new material, incorporate a variety of elements from the earlier texts.

Even Valle’s newspaper articles cover a wide range of subject matter and are written in different styles. Reports on past incidents are precise and factual; reviews on
the arts and politics are more personal and, at times, even creative; others, which
describe journeys, part-fact, part-fiction, are written in lyrical, modernista prose. From
a character he meets on one of these journeys, a certain Pedro de Tor, Valle creates the
figure of a feudal lord, who will appear repeatedly, first in his short stories, then in the
longer narratives, finally emerging, renamed, as the protagonist of the Comedias
bárbaras. Juan Manuel Montenegro. Such reappearances— and Valle takes numerous
minor characters through a similar process—not only establish a sense of continuity, but
ease the transition from one genre to another. On another journey, it is the Galician
background of folklore and superstition that is the centre of focus; this element will
provide the most important link between the major texts of the period.

The two kinds of short story that Valle wrote follow a similar pattern. The first
kind is factual and precise and usually male-dominated; these stories concern the
peasant population and are frequently violent or cruel. The other kind is lyrical and
poetic, its subject matter the decadent lifestyle of aristocratic women. From both kinds
of story characters emerge who begin as types, but who will subsequently not only
become familiar figures but will be associated with themes that recur throughout Valle’s
literature. The political activities of the priest in ‘El rey de la máscara’, his implicit
sexual relationship and his weakness for food and drink, are features that will relate to
most of the men of the cloth in works that follow, underlining the theme of
anticlericalism that runs through Valle’s writing. The manipulative behaviour of the
protagonist of ‘Tula varona’ is one of the principal characteristics of many of the
women who feature in the works of this period, and introduces the themes of adultery
and donjuanismo that persist through Valle’s longer narrative pieces and into his plays.

The publication of the Sonatas and Flor de santidad (1904) marked a transition
from the short story to a longer narrative. It is in these more extensive pieces that Valle
begins to incorporate material from the earlier short stories into his writing, by
reintroducing characters who have appeared previously, reiterating themes and motifs, and even repeating entire episodes. In many ways, the *Sonatas* evolve naturally from the stories about women: they use the same *modernista* prose, they share the same aristocratic setting, and continue with the theme of adultery, albeit with the innovation of a male Don Juan. *Flor de santidad*, on the other hand, recalls the other kind of short story, dealing with the peasant world of legend and superstition in the heart of the Galician countryside. It is at this stage that Valle begins to create new characters, whose numbers, until now quite limited within each text, swell into crowds, and his own fictional universe begins to take shape.

From the beginning, one of the most noticeable features of Valle’s work is its theatrical nature. His predilection for dialogue, and the studied, gestural behaviour of many of his characters are elements of a dramatic technique, and blur the dividing line between prose and play, making the initial transition almost imperceptible. His first play, *Cenizas* (1899), and its reappearance as *El yermo de las almas* (1908), are simply a recycling of ‘Octavia Santino’ in play form. Likewise, *El Marqués de Bradomín* (1907) is another version of *Sonata de otoño*. The ease of turning these prose stories into theatre underlines their dramatic essence. Valle’s move to a dramatic format, moreover, indicates his preference for this genre and marks an important shift in direction in his work. However, by including extensive and often elaborate stage directions, in lyrical *modernista* style, he maintains the poetic flavour of his earlier prose, and in this way combines the basic elements of two genres. This unusual balance of prose and dialogue has led many critics to see his plays as ‘novelas dialogadas’ rather than genuine theatre.18

These first three tentative attempts at theatre, moreover, represented a departure from the kind of plays popular on the Spanish stage at the time, and indicated a move towards a new kind of drama. Whilst the theatre that prevailed found favour with most
bourgeois audiences, some of the leading writers of the time, albeit a minority, were aware of a need for change. José Echegaray, whose popular neo-romantic melodramas filled auditoria for over two decades, was encouraged by Maria Guerrero to embrace new theatrical developments, and from 1890, María Delgado notes, showed a ‘palpable shift [...] to a more symbolic naturalism’. Both Benito Pérez Galdós and Jacinto Benavente, leading exponents of Realist theatre, which had dominated the stage since the end of the nineteenth century, also recognised the need for an ‘alternative’ theatre. Benavente, especially, despite the popularity of his current style of writing, made a plea to young writers for a broadening of theatre repertoire that would bring a new, imaginative approach to drama: a subjective drama of feeling and imagination, that would embrace ‘la fantasía y los ensueños y hasta el delirar de la poesía’. The result was the emergence of a ‘teatro poético’, which had strong echoes of Symbolism and of Maeterlinck’s ‘teatro de ensueño’, and was a clear rejection of Realism and Naturalism. The word ‘poético’, in this context, did not necessarily mean rhyme, but in the words of Salvador Rueda: ‘poesía lírica hecha acción’. José Rogerio Sánchez makes a clear distinction between the ‘simple teatro en verso’ of writers like Eduardo Marquina and Francisco Villaespesa, and the imaginative approach of Valle-Inclán. Whilst both forms of writing were a negation of Realism, it was Valle who was writing ‘verdadero teatro poético’, a theatre exploring myth and legend, fantasy and illusion, and marked, above all, by the musicality of its language.

The plays that Valle went on to write would not be mere conversions from prose, but largely conceived as drama, and theatre would dominate his writing. Águila de blasón (1907) and Romance de lobos (1908) introduce radically new material and themes, moving back into nineteenth-century Galicia, and focusing attention on the decline of its rural aristocracy, and the disappearance of a semi-feudal way of life. In what now becomes an established characteristic of Valle’s writing, however, these two
plays retain links with previous work through the reappearance of familiar characters, the continued incorporation of pre-texts, the repetition of themes and motifs, and, importantly, through the ever-present backcloth of the Galician countryside. Stage directions become even more extensive and elaborate in these two Comedias bárbaras, often presenting difficulties of interpretation in performance. They also introduce a new effect into these plays, by implying a rural idyll, which, in Águila de blasón, frequently contrasts dramatically with the harshness or cruelty of the action. A further problem for the director is posed by the long cast list: the ever-increasing numbers that Valle had begun incorporating into his longer narratives are less easily accommodated on stage.

Valle’s unique stylistic use of stage directions in his theatre soon becomes a distinctive feature of his technique, and continues into El embrujado (1912). Links with the Comedias bárbaras are made through the same Galician setting, the continued domination of the theme of adultery, and the characters, who, whilst ostensibly new in El embrujado, bear a strong resemblance to those in the Comedias bárbaras. There is now, however, a manipulating woman at centre stage, re-establishing a connection with the early stories about women. The difference is that Rosa is not a member of the aristocracy but a humble peasant, and this play focuses its attention on the pueblo rather than the ruling classes. This emphasis, together with a background of fear and superstition, relates El embrujado more closely to the other kind of short story and to Flor de santidad. There are, in addition, clear echoes of Valle’s earlier stories ‘Rosarito’ (1895) and ‘Beatriz’ (1901) in its elements of Satanism and demonic possession.

Since adultery, with a woman again at its hub, remains the main theme of Divinas palabras (1920), and since the focus is still on the pueblo, this play relates in much the same way as El embrujado to both kinds of early short story. The Galician setting brings with it similar elements of superstition and the occult, and here, too, familiar characters link the play with previous works, while new characters incorporate
recognisable elements of those who have already featured. The emphasis in *Divinas palabras*, however, is on ugliness, and while elements of the grotesque have been present in Valle’s writing since the beginning, they are used in this play in a way that anticipates the technique of the esperpento. Several of the characters, including Simoniña and Laureano are subjected to dehumanising techniques, and two, in particular, Pedro Gailo and his sister Marica del Reino, are reduced to puppet figures. At the same time, the *modernismo* of Valle’s early work continues to dominate the stage directions. *Divinas palabras*, therefore, not only bears the hallmarks of Valle’s early style of writing, but establishes clear links with the aesthetic that will dominate the rest of his literary work.

As well as demonstrating the overlap of styles that is characteristic of Valle’s writing, *Divinas palabras* thereby also stands as a notable illustration of the incorporation into a text of the connecting links established by characters, themes and subject matter that give this period of thirty years a clear thread of continuity, and relate not just one text with another, but one genre with another. Furthermore, this play highlights the impossibility of attempting to compartmentalise almost any aspect of Valle’s work. The more he wrote, the more material there was on which to draw, and the results were frequently an amalgam of what had gone before.

Published in 1920, the year in which Valle defined his new aesthetic of the esperpento, *Divinas palabras* appears to bring Valle’s Galician ‘cycle’ to a close, but the situation is confused by the unexpected appearance of a third *Comedia bárbara* in 1922, a prequel to the earlier two. Whilst some critics place *Cara de Plata* firmly in the esperpento period, for example, Dolores Troncoso, María del Carmen Porrúa, Roberta Salper, José Alberich, and Robert Lima, this thesis will consider it within the pre-1920 aesthetic. As part of a trilogy, it has basic elements in common with the two earlier *Comedias bárbaras*: its setting is the same semi-feudal Galicia, and
Montenegro remains the protagonist. In other respects it relates closely to *El embrujado* and *Divinas palabras*. It shares with these two plays wider social implications and an emphasis on the occult. Its three new characters, the abbot, his verger, and the abbot’s sister, Doña Jeromita, moreover, bear a striking resemblance to two of the characters in *Divinas palabras*, who are likewise subjected to the same dehumanising techniques.

The play, therefore, stands alongside *Divinas palabras* as a final example of an amalgam of much of the varied material that has preceded it.

Although *Águila de blasón* and *Romance de lobos* were Valle’s first serious attempts at drama, they, along with the theatre that followed, emerged almost inevitably as part of a process of evolution that began with the theatricality of his short stories. Valle, moreover, had taken an active interest in the theatre from 1893 onwards, and as well as marrying an actress in 1907, had acting ambitions of his own, and was involved in directing. It was only surprising that he took so long to begin writing plays. His talents as a dramatist, however, met with limited success, and his refusal to compromise meant that only eleven of his plays reached the stage during his lifetime, and most of these suffered a short run. The result was frustration and disillusionment, and, after serious rifts in 1912 and 1913 with two leading theatre companies, Valle distanced himself from the commercial theatre until 1931.

This thesis will include observations on the first performances of twelve of the plays that Valle wrote between 1899 and 1922, and will make brief comment on their reception by the public and the theatre press. Except in the case of *Divinas palabras*, where there will be reference to two further productions that followed the estreno, the scope of the thesis will not extend to subsequent performances of his other plays or to a discussion of the production history of Valle’s theatre.

It is difficult to be certain of Valle’s feelings about the staging of his plays, since he himself made conflicting observations over the years. Whilst on one occasion he
asserted that ‘el teatro antes que nada exige un público’, on another he made no secret of his despair with the Spanish theatre of the time, and in particular with its audiences, claiming that ‘el autor dramático con capacidad y honradez literaria hoy lucha con dificultades insuperables, y la mayor de todas es el mal gusto del público. [...] un público corrompido con el melodrama y la comedia floja es cosa perdida’. Valle’s frustration with the public was justified. Audiences were mainly from fashionable, upper middle-class society, predominantly female and middle-aged. Tickets were expensive, so only those with money had access to the theatre. They paid for their seats and to a large extent imposed their tastes on what was staged. Their reaction to a play could ensure its success, or destroy it on its first night. They were there to be entertained, but there were limits to what they would tolerate. G.G. Brown comments: ‘Moving the audience to tears, or even righteous indignation, was perfectly permissible. What good taste would not admit was any attempt to worry or puzzle the audience, or to reflect any moral or social values other than those of the bejewelled matrons of the orchestra stalls.’ Serge Salaün uses stronger language: he sees the public as ‘el gran responsable del inmovilismo teatral, del mal gusto reinante, de la intolerancia conservadora, de la incultura que alzan una barrera infranqueable contra todo intento de modernidad’.

Actors also came in for their share of the blame, but again, Valle contradicted himself, first by maintaining that he preferred his plays to remain unstaged, since ‘los suelen interpretar muy mal’, then, later, asserting that his theatre was perfectly stageable and that, ‘más aún, que al actor español le va muy bien’. The standard of acting was usually poor; there was no provision at the time for professional preparation for actors, nor a national theatre for training. This was a paradox in a country that at the time had the greatest number of actors and performers in Europe. Two, sometimes three
performances a day, often for a very short run before the next play had to be rehearsed, resulted in a tired cast. Competition was fierce, nevertheless, and the desire to excel individually drove actors to seek applause at the cost of art. This often made a mockery of a professional performance: if a certain moment gained the audience's approval, an actor would step forward for applause; if a gesture pleased, he would repeat it. María Delgado relates that there would be applause at a diva's first entrance, key scenes would be repeated, and parties would take place in dressing rooms during intervals.34

Most performances, moreover, revolved around one actor, who, under the 'star' system, would take all the lead roles, regardless of age or suitability, and who was frequently also the director. Until 1916, all companies in Madrid had an actor-manager, many of whom were women; the best of these was the company run by the actress María Guerrero, with her actor husband Fernando Díaz de Mendoza. Good actors were powerful and would only accept parts in which they knew they would shine. They became more important than dramatists, over whom they exercised a certain tyranny, frequently having plays written for them. In effect, Valle had been at the receiving end of this system in 1898, though not for quite the same reasons, when Benavente created the role of Teófilo Everit for him in La comida de las fieras. He would, moreover, later perpetuate the tradition himself, by writing a play that he called Pan divino for Margarita Xirgu.35 The system created a vicious circle, since dramatists were writing for an actor's personality. A further negative side effect was that competition for the principal part meant that nobody wanted to accept secondary roles, so all the companies in Madrid had poor supporting actors who, straitjacketed by the 'star' system, never made up a good, complete cast.

The problem with the Spanish theatre did not just lie with the audience and the actors; it was much wider. Whilst no one sector was responsible, financial considerations were possibly the greatest factor. In this respect the impresarios must
accept much of the responsibility, since because the theatre was not subsidised, they would only take on plays that were certain to run and make money. A play had to prove an extraordinary success or it would see a loss. Impresarios were driven by business, not art, and would often struggle to cover the expenses of the locale and the actors; few were therefore interested in the risk involved in anything innovative, and would only accept plays from well-known authors. New material was regarded with suspicion, with the result that over fifty companies were all producing the same kind of mediocre repertory. There was some foreign theatre in the capital and in Barcelona, but according to Juan Aguilera Sastre this was often so badly translated and adapted that it failed; he quotes as an example a performance of Ibsen’s *An Enemy of the People* in Madrid in 1896. A few theatres had educated audiences, but most innovative drama either never reached the stage or was short-lived, and the cultured bourgeois minority failed to influence the tastes of the majority. The Spanish theatre had largely become a place for pure entertainment. But there were exceptions: an enlightened impresario like María Guerrero, as well as promoting established popular dramatists such as Echegaray, (who did, in fact bring a note of innovation into turn-of-the-century drama), was anxious to encourage new talent and was occasionally prepared to take on such writers as Valle-Inclán. Gerald Brown points out, however, that whereas abroad, Ibsen, Chekhov, Shaw, Maeterlinck, and Pirandello were enjoying a measure of success, the same calibre of writer in Spain – Brown cites Valle-Inclán, Azorín and Unamuno as examples – was struggling to compete with a succession of popular dramatists who were giving audiences ‘exactly what they wanted’.  

The writers who were filling this need, however, themselves came in for criticism. The appetite for the theatre was huge; for years there had been a constant demand for new plays, and no shortage of writers. David Thatcher Gies observes that ‘during the late nineteenth century Spain produced and published not a few dozen or
even a few hundred plays, [...] but literally thousands'. The quality, however, was questionable. Thatcher Gies goes on to point out that whereas the number of new theatres built in the second half of the century underlined the great public interest in the theatre, 'not everyone agreed that high activity was equal to high quality'. At the beginning of the twentieth century some writers were producing four or five plays a year, often with a particular actor in mind. Between April 1926 and September 1927, no fewer than 150 new plays were staged in Madrid. Only eight of these were a success, and only five ran for more than a hundred performances, prompting one newspaper to exclaim: 'O España es un país donde brota el ingenio a cataratas, o a nuestros escenarios se puede llegar con cualquier estupidez.'

Playwrights like Carlos Arniches, Echegaray, Benavente, and Joaquín Dicenta were extremely successful. Their themes of domestic intrigue, of adultery and of financial wrangles pleased the public, but they were accused of being lightweight, of merely reflecting surface values, and of creating unreal characters. Arniches's sainetes were pure entertainment; he made the audience laugh, a sure guarantee of success, and adapted his style to the needs of the public. Echegaray took over where Arniches left off. He, too, learned to pander to public taste; he established himself as a reliable source of an ever-changing repertoire that was guaranteed to fill the auditorium, and on which theatre directors could depend. María Guerrero was one of his most enthusiastic supporters, and responsible for much of his success. His work dominated the theatre in Spain for over twenty years. Whilst many dismissed his plays as trivial, he nevertheless wrote seriously about the middle classes in much the same way as Galdós and, in fact, received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1904.

Although serious dramatists saw the need for a radical change, most good writers either shied away from the theatre as it stood, or prostituted their work, so the trivia prevailed. Much of this took the form of light, one-act plays, often including
songs, that had developed from *entremeses*, through *sainetes* and *zarzuelas* to the *género chico*. These were favoured by impresarios, who found in them a solution to their problems: they were cheap to stage, popular with actors, they appealed to the working classes, and tickets were inexpensive. At the end of the nineteenth century, and well into the twentieth, ‘teatro por horas’ dominated Madrid theatres, and musical theatre prevailed at the expense of ‘spoken ‘theatre. There was no venue dedicated to any kind of experimental theatre or even to the classics.

The fourth group of people who wielded considerable power in the stage world was the press. The theatre critics’ review of an *estreno* could as easily ensure a good run as ruin its author overnight. They, too, were seen to be part of the problem, accused of confusing or misleading the public, and of insincerity in their appraisal. A glowing review would encourage attendance, only to result in a disappointed audience, or sometimes even the cancellation of any further performance; a severe critique would keep the public away. Many put this lack of objectivity on the part of the critics down to their loyalties to writers and actors; others blamed a lack of intellectual criteria or dramatic culture. Aware of the increasing decadence of the theatre, critics became increasingly severe in their reports, even contradicting the applause of the public, to the point that by the end of the 1920s, the public lost confidence in their reliability.

All these problems amounted to what was generally accepted as a crisis in the Spanish theatre. yet, as Salaún points out: ‘Pese a estas letanías de defectos y carencias, el teatro español mantiene una salud boyante; es quizá el más dinámico de Europa’.

What underlies this apparent contradiction is that, despite an awareness of a crisis in ‘serious’ theatre, enthusiasm for the theatre had never been greater. It was a time of extraordinary theatrical activity, embodied principally in a public ‘ávido de novedades ingeniosas y divertidas’, with most audiences seeking, above all, diversion and light entertainment, which they found in abundance. New companies, new theatres, many of
them amateur or fringe, several of them specialising in different kinds of performance, some offering as many as seven shows a day, offered every variety of entertainment, from sainete to astracán, from operetta to melodrama, from vaudeville to drawing room comedy: the emphasis was on the element of spectacle, with an especial predilection for music, song and dance. In 1895 there were more theatres in Spain than in France, Germany or Great Britain, and more estrenos in Madrid than Paris. People flocked to the theatre in their crowds. Any difficulties of an artistic kind, involving the quality of writing and acting, or those involving the financial concerns of the impresarios, were certainly not reflected in the activities of the theatre-going public.

As well as what was nevertheless acknowledged by many as a crisis within the theatre, the genre itself was facing a threat from outside. Cinema had arrived in Spain at the end of the nineteenth century, and its popularity spread rapidly. Destined to ‘cambiar el arte y el mundo del comediante’, it was seen initially as a new form of popular theatre – ‘teatro sin palabras’, ‘teatro sin literatura’ – and it would take time for it to be considered an art form in itself. Some locales even combined theatre and film in a ‘variety’ performance. By the beginning of the twentieth century, there were over twenty venues in Madrid, showing films, and by 1908 eight of these had film as the basis of their spectacle. The public began to desert the theatre. Film represented a much cheaper form of entertainment: a cinema ticket cost a fifth of a seat at the theatre. Valle made varying comments about the cinema during his lifetime, but he was quick to recognise its potential, and his writing technique in later years reveals its influence.

The theatre, moreover, was looking increasingly outdated. Its renovation had been proposed as early as 1845, but no improvements transpired. In the 1880s electric light had begun to replace the gas lighting of the mid-1850s, but it was noisy, and for several decades gas and electricity competed with each other. Whilst in many European theatres spotlights were now in use, Spain still only had basic footlights. Nor had the
revolving stage yet arrived. Even in 1929, when the Teatro Español closed for three years for modernisation, the millions of pesetas that were spent went mainly on the comfort of the audience; the set remained ‘antiquado e inservible’.

There was, moreover, an increasing recognition that the theatre should be subsidised, as it was by now everywhere else in Europe, and that each theatre should have an independent ‘director de escena’. In Spain, the nineteenth-century system of the first actor as director spilled into the first two decades of the twentieth century, and the scenic director played a lowly part. In France and Germany, by contrast, his role was crucial. Such ideas were slow to reach Spain. It would be the pioneering efforts of Cipriano de Rivas Cherif that wrought real change in the country. Inspired by Diaghilev’s revolutionary vision of ballet, by what he had learned of Gordon Craig’s reforms in the theatre in Great Britain, and impressed by the work of the Austrian director Max Reinhardt, and France’s Jacques Coupeau, whom he described as ‘los dos grandes renovadores de la escena moderna’, Rivas Cherif had the courage to make changes. Using the newly-founded Teatro de la Escuela Nueva as an alternative to the commercial theatre, during the 1920s he staged challenging new playwrights, including Valle-Inclán, and began to influence the public’s perception of the role of the theatre in Spain. He became, in the modern sense of the word, one of the country’s first ‘directores de escena’, and effected radical change in the Spanish theatre.

The way had been paved, nevertheless, much earlier, by the actor-director, Emilio Mario, whom Maria Delgado sees as ‘arguably Spain’s first significant stage director’ and whose company, first at the Teatro Princesa and then at the Comedia, strove to encourage experimental theatre on the Madrid stage. Yet it was in Barcelona, according to David George, that ‘the first and most significant manifestations of art theatre occurred’. Adrià Gual, the Catalan dramatist-director, founder of the minority-
interest theatre. the Teatre Íntim, in 1898, was responsible for bringing foreign plays to Barcelona before they appeared in Madrid. Rivas Cherif was quick to acknowledge the influence Gual had had on his own work (p. 47), and even in the 1920s regarded him as an innovator (p.166).

Given the general climate before such reforms took place, it is not surprising that writers like Valle stood little chance of success in the commercial theatre. His work was not what the public was used to; it went against the dramatic norm and was slow to be recognised. Although fully aware of what audiences wanted, he persisted with his own theories about what the theatre should provide:

El teatro dramático ha de ser un teatro de tono o no ha de ser, y resulta difícil de escribir e interpretar [...]. Este absurdo decadente de querer encerrar la acción dramática en tres lugares – gabinete amueblado, patio andaluz o salón de fiestas – ha hecho de nuestro teatro, antes frágil y expresivo, un teatro cansino y desvaido … Nuestro teatro fue siempre un teatro de escenarios, de muchos escenarios.50

In practice, Valle’s work presented substantial difficulties for a director, involving multiple scene changes, vast cast lists, animals on stage and, not least, elaborate stage directions, which, according to John London, were ‘as allusive as film scripts’ and ‘in a poetic realm of their own’.51 It was the stage directions especially that directors found such a challenge, but Valle maintained: ‘Ese trabajo de acotar artisticamente es el que más me gusta y el que encuentro más fácil.52 Even today directors find him one of the most difficult Spanish dramatists to stage, and most cite the stage directions as the major problem. Alfonso Marsillach decided against their inclusion in his production of Águila de blasón in 1966; although he considered having them read by an actor, he thought them in some ways redundant, and resorted to sound and lighting effects to achieve his ends. The omission met with some criticism from the
public. In his 1970 production of *Romance de lobos*, José Luis Alonso thought them too important to omit, but too difficult to incorporate, except by reading, in this case by a ‘trio campesino’. This was thought by some to interrupt the flow of the action. Earlier, in 1967, he had done much the same, and with greater success, by having them read by two women in *La rosa de papel*, by one or two characters in *La cabeza del bautista*, and by an extra character in *La enamorada del rey*. In 1956, judging the stage directions to be almost as important as the text, Gustavo Pérez Puig used a ‘dueño’ with a cast of ‘muñecos’ to speak the stage directions in his production of *La Marquesa Rosalinda*, apparently to great effect. In his production of *Divinas palabras* in 1986, Antonio Díaz Merat followed the lead of José Tamayo in 1961, and decided not to take the stage directions literally, but to interpret them within the action.

Since his death, Valle’s unique contribution to Spanish theatre has been universally acknowledged, yet, in a somewhat bizarre response to a survey of dramatists in Madrid in 1927, it was either irony or disillusion that prompted him to say that he would take part ‘si fuese autor dramático’. He reasoned:

> Sin duda me ha colocado usted en ese número por haber escrito algunas obras en diálogo. Pero observe usted que las he publicado siempre con acotaciones que bastasen a explicarlas por la lectura, sin intervención de histriones. Si alguna de estas obras ha sido representada, yo he dado tan poca importancia, que en ningún momento he creído que debía hacer memoria del lamentable accidente.

The fact remains that Valle’s stage directions have continued to pose problems for theatre directors and even for film-makers, who still find his theatre a challenge.
Notes to Introduction

1 According to Francisco Madrid, in *La vida alta de Valle-Inclán* (Buenos Aires: Poseidon, 1943), Valle-Inclán stated: ‘Lo que he escrito antes de *Tirano Banderas* es musiquilla de violin’ (p. 113).


4 Quoted in Madrid, pp. 101-03.


7 Dario Villanueva, ‘1902: Valle, Gide, Yeats’, *Anales de la Literatura Española Contemporánea*. 28 (2003), 493-515 (p. 493). Henceforth this journal will be referred to as *ALEC*.

8 Alex Longhurst makes a similar observation about the importance of these four texts in 1902, pointing out that ‘they all evince a fierce determination to offer something entirely different from the prevalent mode of narrative prose fiction’. See, Pío Baroja: *El mundo es ansi*, Critical Guides to Spanish Texts, 20 (London: Grant and Cutler, 1977). p. 9.
José de Montesinos, 'Modernismo, esperpentismo o las dos evasiones', *Revista de Occidente*. nos 44-45 (November-December 1966), 146-65 (pp. 147,157). Henceforth this journal will be referred to as *RO*.


18 See, for example, Fernando Baeza, 'Las comedias bárbaras', *Primer Acto*, no. 28 (November 1961), 8-9 (p. 9); Rubia Barcia, p. 298; Brown, p. 123.


26 José Alberich. ‘*Cura de Plata*, fuera de serie’, *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies*, 45 (1968), 299-308 (p. 302). Henceforth this journal will be referred to as *BHS*.


28 See Madrid, p. 347.

29 Quoted in Dru Dougherty, ‘Talia convulsa: La crisis teatral de los años 20’, in César Oliva, ed., *2 ensayos sobre teatro español de los años 20*, Cuadernos de la Cátedra de Teatro de la Universidad de Murcia, 11 (Murcia: Universidad de Murcia, 1984), pp. 87-
155 (p. 113). Here Dougherty quotes an extract from an interview with Valle-Inclán in *La Esfera*, 6 March 1915.


32 Madrid, p. 354.

33 Madrid, p. 351.

34 Maria M. Delgado, ‘*Other* Spanish Theatres: Erasure and Inscription on the Twentieth-Century Spanish Stage* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), p. 11.

35 See Robert Lima, *An Annotated Bibliography of Ramón del Valle-Inclán* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University, 1972), p. 37. Lima asserts that *Pan divino* was the working title for *Divinas palabras*.

36 See Juan Aguilera Sastre, ‘Tradición y modernidad: la cuestión del teatro nacional en España, 1900-1910’, in Salaün, Ricci and Salgues, pp. 185-217 (p. 189). David George, however, maintains that the influence of foreign theatre in Spain was substantial. See, *Theatre in Madrid and Barcelona, 1892-1936: Rivals or Collaborators?* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2002), p. 82.

37 Brown, p. 110.


31

30 See Dougherty, 'Talia convulsa', p. 98.
31 Salaün, 'Cuplé y variedades', p. 128.
33 See Jesús Rubio Jiménez, 'Gesto y caracterización en el teatro español del cambio del siglo', in Salaün, Ricci and Salgues, pp. 217-49 (pp. 243-44).
34 Dougherty, 'Talia convulsa', pp. 119-20.
35 Dougherty, 'Talia convulsa', p. 129.
36 Juan Aguilera Sastre and Manuel Aznar Soler, Cipriano de Rivas Cherif y el teatro español de su época (Madrid: Publicaciones de la Asociación de Directores de Escena en España, 1999). pp. 44-53.
37 Aguilera Sastre and Aznar Soler, p. 19.
38 María M. Delgado, 'The Actress and the Playwright', p. 34.
39 George, p. 23.
42 Madrid, p. 105. Quote taken from a newspaper interview with 'Parmeno'. No date given.
44 Antonio Díaz Merat, interview with Ann Frost, Madrid 17 April 1986.
45 Madrid, p. 350, quotes from La Voz of May 1927, but no date is specified.
CHAPTER 1

THE EARLY ARTICLES AND SHORT STORIES

Articles and Short Stories in Magazines and Newspapers

Although *Femeninas* and the *Sonatas* are the works for which he is best known in the early stages of his literary career, by 1895 Valle had already written a substantial number of shorter works, albeit with limited success. He began publishing articles and short stories while still studying Law at university in Santiago de Compostela. His first short story, ‘Via Crucis’, apparently written in 1897, appeared in *El País Gallego* in 1888, followed in the same year by ‘Babel’ in the magazine *Café con gotas*, and in 1889 by ‘A media noche’ in *La Ilustración Ibérica*. As for many aspiring writers of the time, journalism provided Valle-Inclán with a way into the literary world. Newspapers were enjoying a boom and becoming semi-literary; most articles and short stories, even novels and plays, appeared first in instalments in newspapers or periodicals before being published in book form. It was a way of testing the ground, as well as a means of earning money, and in the case of theatre, served as a taster for the public, preparing and educating a potential audience before a possible staging. According to Manuel Bueno, Valle disliked journalism and held that ‘avillana el estilo y empequeñece todo ideal estético’, but while he resisted collaboration as such with the press, he nevertheless used the medium to promote his own writing. Throughout his life, most of his work made its first appearance in newspapers or magazines.

When his father died in 1890, Valle abandoned his studies and left Galicia for Madrid, with the intention of making writing his career. The articles and short stories
that Valle wrote over the next few years brought him very little recognition and continue to be overlooked by many critics, who have either disregarded them for their literary poverty.\(^2\) or dismissed them as of little interest.\(^3\) The fact that they were excluded from early editions of Valle’s *Obras completas*, presumably for their lack of merit, served to confirm this initial view. Yet their importance is becoming increasingly recognised. González del Valle defends them not only as ‘valiosas como creaciones artísticas’, but as ‘un claro anticipo de aspectos importantes de su producción posterior’ (p. 329). By 1905, Valle had not only revealed his journalistic skills in a wide variety of reporting, but had proved himself, in two very different styles, a master of the short-story technique. It is in this early writing that many of the elements that will become characteristics of his style establish themselves, and will continue into his mature work.

‘A media noche’ (1889) opens on a note of mystery, and has a number of the ingredients that will figure repeatedly in Valle’s early work: the Galician setting, a crossroads in a wood, a mill – a building often associated with death – and darkness.\(^4\) A horseman and his servant, riding through the night, are accosted by a figure who leaps into their path, demanding their money or their life. As the horse rears, the assailant falls, apparently mortally wounded. The horseman and his companion continue on their journey, leaving him to die. The atmosphere of menace is increased by the wind and the rain: moonlight brings its own satanic connotations, and the sounds of the night remind the two men of the howling of a dog as it senses death. We never learn the identity of the horseman. This story will make numerous reappearances. For example, in 1892 it appears under the new title of ‘Los caminos de mi tierra’.

Also set in Galicia, ‘El rey de la máscara’ (1892) is even more representative of this developing style. Again the action takes place at night, once more in the vicinity of a mill, against a background of familiar wind and rain, and the warning barking of a dog. The story concerns a priest and his ‘niece’ Sabel. Six men, all with blackened
faces and in fancy dress, arrive and disappear almost as suddenly, leaving behind one of their number, wearing a crown on his head. Sabel discovers to her horror that he is dead. Fearing involvement with the authorities, the priest decides to dispose of the body by burning it in the oven. What follows is an horrific description of his efforts:

Metiólé de cabeza al horno; pero como estaba rígido, fue preciso esperar a que se carbonizase el tronco para que el resto pudiese entrar. Cuando desaparecieron los pies, empujados por la horquilla con que el parroco atizaba la lumbre, Sabel, [... ] se dejó caer. (OC, I, 253)

This story has the added element of horror that will become one of the hallmarks of Valle’s writing, and also introduces the use of the grotesque, which characterises the later esperpentos. In addition, it is a notable example of a narrative containing source material that will feature in future work. Valle will reuse several of the ingredients of this story fifteen years later in Águila de blasón. The six men with blackened faces who attempt to rob Don Juan Manuel Montenegro, the boiling of the corpse that Don Farruquiño and his brother Miguel steal from the cemetery, the element of shock, the fear of the law, all draw their inspiration from this early story. Although the Sabel of this narrative has no apparent connection with the Sabelita of the Comedias bárbaras, she is nevertheless described as ‘rubia como una espiga’ (OC, I, 249), a description later used for Sabelita in Cara de Plata, who is also the niece of a priest.5

There is also, in his presentation of the priest in ‘El rey de la máscara’, a strong hint of the anticlericalism that will become another feature of Valle’s writing. Physically unattractive, the priest is described as ‘un viejo magro y astuto’, involved in local politics as ‘uno de aquellos cabecillas tonsurados que, después de machacar la plata de sus iglesias y santuarios para acudir en socorro de la facción, dijeron misas gratuitas por el alma de Zumalacárregui’ (OC, I, 249). He is, in addition, a man with sensual appetites: living in a dubious relationship with a girl who calls him ‘tío’, 6 he has
a cellar full of wine, and he eyes the food that Sabel has prepared ‘con golosina de viejo regalón’ (*OC. I. 250). The dead man, moreover, who was part of this masquerade, is none other than the Abbot of Bradomín. The priesthood will come under fire in later stories: in ‘Beatriz’, included in the collection *Corte de amor* (1903), it is the family chaplain. Fray Ángel, who is the violator of the countess’s daughter; in ‘Nochebuena’, one of the stories in *Jardín novelesco* (1905), the archpriest is mocked by revellers who sing *coplas* about his relationship with his ‘niece’, and in ‘Juan Quinto’, a story included in the 1914 edition of *Jardín umbrío*, the alleged wealth of the priest comes into question. As well as providing source material for future works, ‘El rey de la máscara’ will make several more appearances under the same title. Some stories would be rewritten in their entirety, some would be left unchanged, while others would be amended and improved.

‘El gran obstáculo’, published in 1892, was completely different in both style and subject matter from the previous stories of mystery and horror. This piece, which Valle would rewrite not once, but six times, concerns a young poet, called Pedro Pondal. In this first version, the object of Pedro’s affections is a woman called Águeda, and the story is told from three points of view: that of Águeda’s mother, who sees Pondal as an undesirable; that of Águeda, and lastly that of Pedro himself. Four further prose versions and two plays would evolve from this story; *modernista* and decadent in tone, they all deal with the traditional theme of the relationship between an older woman and a young lover, and of the conflict between sin and religion.

Amongst the articles that Valle wrote during this period in Madrid between 1890 and 1892, the first of three ‘Cartas galicianas’ is of particular interest. Entitled ‘De Madrid a Monforte. El último hidalgo de Tor’ (1891), the article describes a journey that Valle claims to have made, with an overnight stop in Monforte de Lemos. Here he meets a fellow guest called Pedro de Tor, who, it transpires, is a descendant of the
character of the same name who figures in Benito Vicetto’s *Los hidalgos de Monforte*, which Valle has been reading. He is struck by his appearance:

Aquel hombre era una especie de hércules de feria, [...] Su traza recordaba [...], la de algunos reyes suevos de Galicia en la Edad mediaeval; tenía el pelo como la piel del raposo, la frente angosta, aguileña y torcida la nariz, que daba marcado carácter al rostro asoleado y pecoso; la barba desaliñada, multicolor e hirsuta; verdes las pupilas, que a veces adquirían reflejos cobrizos y toda la persona erguida, valiente, llena de vida y de fuerza extraordinaria. *(OC, II, 1343)*

This description will be recognisable later as similar in tone to that introducing the protagonist of the *Comedias bárbaras*, Don Juan Manuel de Montenegro *(OC, II, 279 and 346)*. The likeness is further underlined when Pedro de Tor admonishes Valle for reading when he could be eating: a criticism which Valle will later put into the mouth of Montenegro when he meets Valle’s *alter ego*, the Marqués de Bradomín, in *Sonata de otoño* *(OC, I, 491)*. As Pedro de Tor leaves for his *pazo* on horseback the next morning, Valle reflects that the only two motives that would bring an *hidalgo montañés* such as he away from his home, would be a *feria* or a *pleito*. Both these activities are seen to be close to Montenegro’s heart in later works.

The other two ‘Cartas galicianas’, and ‘Una visita al convento de Gondarín’, written in the same year, also recount journeys through Galicia. The descriptions of the countryside in all three stories present a picture of a rural idyll. The second letter, ‘Pontevedra: Una visita a Echegaray’ describes a journey to Marín, and is in *modernista* style: ‘en Galicia los comienzos del otoño son más primaverales que la primavera misma, más plácidas y dulces. Los insectos reavivados al calor luminoso de la tarde serena. zumbaban la ardiente canción del verano en lo umbrío de los castaños’ *(OC, II, 1346)*. The third letter is presented as a ‘memoria’, and waxes no less lyrical, but concentrates more on the mythical elements of Galicia and the mystery surrounding the
castle at Lobeira. Here, according to a village girl whom the author meets: 'Entre la piedra del Fuso, [...] y el monte Cavado hay dinero para siete reinados.' There was, moreover, she adds, an enchanted Moorish girl, 'guapa como un sol de mediodía', who appeared from time to time to passers-by (OC, II, 1349). Stories such as these, of buried treasure and enchanted damsels are well established in Galician folklore. The visit to the convent at Gondarín is another nostalgic 'memoria' of an age-old region, steeped in legend and superstition, and is similarly idealised: 'El sol de un día espléndido se ostentaba como disco de brújula plata en un cielo sin nubes, y bajo sus abrasadores rayos parecían pompear las brillantes, plateados ondas del río' (OC, II, 1338).

In 1892 Valle left Madrid for Mexico. His interest in Latin America had been aroused at an early age by one of the maids in his household, who had lived in Cuba. The visit was a success, and served to confirm his literary intentions. It proved an especially productive period: whilst there, he published sixteen articles, three short stories and three longer narratives. He also relaxed his attitude to journalism, partly from economic necessity, and wrote regular pieces for the Mexican newspaper El Universal, which claimed him as its champion of Spanish affairs. His articles appeared under the heading 'Ecos de la prensa española'. Their subject matter was varied: they mainly reported on incidents in Spain, and included previously published articles, but also covered the wider areas of art, poetry, the theatre, descriptions of political figures, and even some costumbrista pieces on Spanish customs.

One article, 'Pablo Iglesias' (1892), deserves attention: the description of the man to whom Valle refers as the apostle of Spanish socialism, and whom he claimed to have met two years earlier, is an almost verbatim repetition of his earlier account of Pedro de Tor in 'Cartas galicianas'. It is certainly not an accurate description of Iglesias. This disregard for the truth was deliberate, and would characterise Valle's writing, as Fichter confirms when he points out that 'desde sus primeros años de aprendiz de
escritor lo que le interesaba a don Ramón no era pintar la realidad tal y como era, sino
dar vuelo a la fantasía para crear algo nuevo y original, aunque para hacerlo tuviera que
copiarse a sí mismo. como aquí” (p. 21). Nor was Valle above plagiarising from others:
Fichter also observes that Valle’s ‘Como escribió Zorrilla “Don Juan Tenorio”’
contains parts copied from Zorrilla (p. 21).

Two of the stories that Valle wrote during his time in Mexico have the same
elements of mystery and violence as the earlier ‘A media noche’ and ‘El rey de la
máscara’. ‘Zan el de los osos’ (1892) is again set in Galicia and involves the
mistreatment of a dancing bear by its owner. The animal finally turns on its master in a
scene that Valle describes in graphic detail, and in which all our senses are assaulted by
the visual images, the sounds, even by the smells:

Sintióse el crujir de huesos descoyuntados y rotos; gemidos roncos, jadeantes,
faltos de aire, como los exhala el que se siente ahogado; desgarraduras de carne
que escalofrian y crispan; y dominándolo todo, los salvajes rugidos que
arrancaban a la hambrienta fiera, la vista del cadáver mutilado y palpitante de su
dueño y el olor de la sangre que humeaba…’. (OC, II, 1437)

This story would reappear in 1895 under the title of ‘Iván el de los osos’. Echoes of the
bear owner’s cruel treatment of his animal will find a parallel later in the way in which
Mari-Gaila exploits her ward in Divinas palabras, though in Laureano’s case, he is in
no position to fight back, and suffers a painful death. The second story, ‘¡Ah de mis
muertos!’ recounts a regional cuento popular, set this time in Andalusia rather than
Galicia, in which a drunken shoemaker, who has failed to mend the shoes of a friend,
feigns his own death. Although the subject matter is essentially comic, it is again,
according to Fichter ‘de los que procuran horripilar por su aire de misterio y sus actos
de violencia’ (p. 25), and the macabre descriptions of death are an attempt to horrify.
Two other pieces, ‘¡Caritativa!’ and ‘La confesión’ (1892) continued the narrative of the earlier ‘El gran obstáculo’. In ‘¡Caritativa!’, Pedro Pondal is taken home by an old friend, Octavia Santino, a once-famous singer, who, rumour has it, had enjoyed the love of a king. This reference itself has an echo later in Divinas palabras, when Mari-Gaila is compared with Carolina Otero, a well-known singer who, according to one of the feriantes, had slept with the King of France (OC, II, 555). Pedro is unsure whether the kiss and the comforting words that Octavia gives him in the night are real or a dream. By the third version, ‘La confesión’, Pedro and Octavia have been lovers for a year and Octavia is dying; the new twist introduced at the end of this version is her cruel deathbed confession of infidelity to the distraught Pedro. Neither Pedro nor the reader can confidently give her story the lie.

A fifth narrative, ‘El canario’, (1892) has a similar traditional theme, though this time with the reverse situation of an old man and his young bride. This story differs from most of the others by dint of its humour. The situation is treated with lighthearted mockery, albeit with an underlying social comment on the lot of women in Spain at the time, and, to a lesser extent, on man’s dilemma in the face of cuckoldry. The life of the young wife, Currita, echoes that of the canary of the title, living within the ‘cage’ of marriage, and admired largely for her decorative value. The bored Currita enjoys a naive but potentially inflammatory flirtation with her husband’s adjutant, Sandoval, who comes each day to read to her. Innocent and impressionable, Currita’s superficial response to literature is presented as typical of the women of her day, and she is ‘turned on’ by the suggestiveness of the novel that she shares with her young admirer. He, in turn, is confused by the contradictory signals that she gives out. Surprised in the moment of a kiss by the husband’s return, the agitated couple delay opening the door to him under the pretence that the canary has escaped from its cage. This story will appear, somewhat altered, under the title of ‘La generala’ in the Femeninas collection in 1895,
and yet again as ‘Antes que te cases’ in 1903, where although the principal characters have different names, the narrative is largely unchanged.

One of the most interesting pieces written in Mexico is ‘Bajo los trópicos’, published in *El Universal* in June 1892, under the wider title of ‘Recuerdos de México’, and describing Valle’s arrival in Veracruz. Although clearly impressed with Mexico, everything that Valle had written since his arrival there had so far been only about Spain. This was his first story on a Spanish-American theme. Again modernista in style, in the most rhythmic prose he had used so far, it was rich in imagery and metaphor:

> El horizonte ríe bajo el hermoso sol. Sientese en el aire estremecimientos voluptuosos. Ráfagas venidas de las selvas vírgenes, tibias y acariciadoras como alientos de mujeres ardientes, juegan en las jarcias; y penetra y languidece el alma, el perfume que se siente subir del oleaje casi muerto.  

This story would reappear in Spain the following year as ‘Páginas de tierra caliente’, and was the primitive version of ‘La Niña Chole’, which would in turn form part of the later *Femeninas* collection. The beginning of this story implies a travelogue of the kind that was popular at the time, but like Valle’s earlier accounts of journeys, the text soon becomes personalised. Dougherty sees in its intimate style the influence of the French novelist Pierre Loti, whose travel writing was characterised by a similar, subjective approach. Its use of the first-person singular distinguishes it from the other stories in this collection, and lends itself to the autobiographical format of the later *Sonata de estío* (1903), which would retain much of the material from these early versions.

The influence on Valle of this first visit to Mexico was far-reaching and long-lasting. When he returned to Madrid in 1893, via Cuba, the first noticeable difference was in his appearance: a first step to the ‘persona’ that he wanted to create; Ramón Gómez de la Serna refers to him as ‘la mejor máscara a pie que cruzaba la calle de Alcalá’. His way of life also changed, and now began to revolve around café tertulias,
the hub of intellectual life in the capital, and a vital sounding board for writers and artists. Here, where Valle eventually held his own peña, and allegedly monopolised the conversation, he would not tolerate interruption. His unconventional behaviour began to attract attention and he became known for his wit, his extravagant stories and outrageous anecdotes, though according to Rubia Barcia he was, despite this cultivated image, a shy, private man (p.312).

Although Valle’s short stories failed to enjoy much success, they continued to appear in a steady stream. ‘Un cabecilla’ (1893), the next to be published, has the same elements of mystery and cruelty that characterised the very early pieces. Whilst there are references to the Carlist activities of the priests in ‘El rey de la máscara’ and in the later ‘Beatriz’, this is the first story to feature Carlism as a central theme. Set once more in Galicia, this time against the background of civil war, it recounts the suspicions of a guerrilla fighter that his wife has betrayed their cause, and describes her subsequent cold-blooded murder at his hands. In this story, the mill, with its sinister connotations, is again at the centre of the action: it is the scene of the crime, and the miller its perpetrator. The miller’s decision to take the law into his own hands will have echoes in the later story ‘Mi bisabuelo’ (1914), albeit there the motive is social rather than political. The same attitude figures again much later as the opening issue in Cara de Plata, in the conflict between the old order and the new. Two further stories in 1893 underline Valle’s attachment to previous works: ‘Páginas de tierra caliente’ is a new rendering of ‘Bajo los trópicos’, and ‘Octavia Santino’ is an almost unchanged version of ‘La confesión’, and the fourth prose adaptation of the Pedro Pondal narrative.

These articles and stories, written in the first five years of Valle’s career, are varied in both content and style. The articles are ostensibly reports on real events or circumstances, though they often digress into the realm of the imagination and become more creative than factual. The categorisation of the stories is complicated not only by
their reappearance in different versions, but by their subsequent collection under different titles, often apparently arbitrary, and thereby confusing. Basically they are of two very different kinds. Those of the first are mostly short and simple. They deal mainly with male characters from a rural background, usually Galicia, and are characterised by an element of surprise, and the intention to inspire fear. Their principal ingredients are those of mystery and superstition, of cruelty and violence, horror and death. The emphasis on the macabre is especially prevalent, and there is a noticeable element of the grotesque. Their impact often lies in the juxtaposition of a bucolic background with unpalatable subject matter.

The stories of the second kind are longer and more sophisticated; their protagonists are women of noble birth, whose behaviour flouts the conventions of respectable Spanish society. Their decadent lifestyle revolves around an illicit sexual relationship, in which duty and religion hover in the wings, but never really threaten to intercede. They are stories about the power of sex and the manipulation of relationships. The modernista style in which they are written lends them an air of artificiality and their characters frequently assume a theatrical quality that descends into caricature. Whilst very different, both in style and content, this second kind of story shares four basic elements with the first: the Galician setting; the shock effect, here from a social rather than a physical angle; cruelty, now emotional rather than physical, and the use of juxtaposition, which highlights the contrast between the beauty of the female protagonists and the baseness of their behaviour. Rosa Alicia Ramos sees an affinity between the two kinds of story, and concludes: 'No es justo hablar de épocas estilísticas sucesivas y en pugna, sino más bien de la constante presencia de las dos tendencias en la producción cuentística de Valle-Inclán.' In both kinds of story Valle has established many of the patterns and themes that will continue into his mature work.
Femeninas

Until now, all Valle’s work had appeared only in newspapers or magazines. His first publication in book form, therefore, in 1895, represented an important stage in his literary career. Femeninas, subtitled Seis historias amorosas, was a collection of six stories, three of which were amended versions of previous narratives. There is a consensus of opinion that Valle’s modernismo only begins with the Sonatas, the first of which did not appear until 1901 and then only in part (the book version of Sonata de otoño was published in 1902). Georges Güntert is one critic who suggests that modernismo appears with the introduction of the Marqués de Bradomín.13 There had, however, been much earlier evidence of modernista style in some of Valle’s articles as well as in his short stories, especially those about women. Lourdes Ramos Kuethe more accurately includes these early stories in her dating of Valle’s modernismo: she sees the period 1892-1903 as the ‘época que la crítica ha dado en llamar modernista-decadente’.14 Femeninas rightly falls into this period.

As the title of this collection suggests, each of the stories revolves around a woman, all of whom, with the exception of Rosarito, are married. Of the three stories that were already familiar, ‘La generala’ is an amended version of ‘El canario’, in which, as the changed title indicates, the emphasis is on the wife; ‘La Niña Chole’ is a revised form of ‘Bajo los trópicos’; ‘Octavia Santino’ remains basically unchanged from its last appearance under the same title.

Of the three new stories, ‘La condesa de Cela’ is in much the same vein as the Pedro Pondal narrative; it concerns the affair of a married woman, a countess, with an impoverished student. The tone is both languid and frivolous, and shares the artificial element of ‘La generala’, in which the characters appear to be acting out a role. The countess’s cruelty lies in her perversity. Persuaded by her mother, whom she regards as ‘una santa’, that she should return to her husband, she resolves to end the affair with the
young Aquiles, but lingers in sentimental indecision. The action is theatrical and melodramatic. The love letters must be burned. Her lover sobs with genuine dismay; she with ‘el llanto nervioso de las actrices. Lágrimas estéticas que carecen de amargura, y son deliciosas como ese delicado temblorcillo que sobrecoge al espectador en la tragedia’ (OC, 1, 23). Finally she relents, but her initial cruelty has triggered a desire for revenge in her lover, who deliberately insults her mother, delivering a deathblow to their relationship. The tone of the piece, the indecision, the role of the letters, and the reference to an interfering mother will all play a part in the later Sonata de otoño.

‘Tula varona’ shares some of the frivolity of ‘La generala’ and, equally, has nothing to do with love, but the action here is deliberate and calculated, rather than a natural development of a situation, and ends on a perverse note. It is also reminiscent of ‘La Niña Chole’, in that its protagonist is likewise a Creole, whose lifestyle carries a similar exotic quality. Tula is not only cruel but deliberately manipulative. She flaunts her sexuality and sets about the conquest of Ramiro with the mocking ease of an experienced seductress. When he finally makes a move, she not only rebuffs him, but humiliates him by hitting him repeatedly over the face with her fencing foil. Her would-be lover summarily dismissed, Tula experiences ‘un placer cruel al rechazarle después de haberle tentado’ (OC, 1, 36). Once alone, she slowly undresses in front of the mirror, caressing herself with pleasure: ‘Todo en aquella mujer cantaba el diabólico poder de la hermosura triunfante’ (OC, 1, 37).

‘Rosarito’ was the last of these stories to be written, and although it shares the same aristocratic background as the other pieces in this collection, the style and atmosphere are closer to those of Valle’s earlier stories of mystery and horror. It also establishes an important link with several major works to come. Set again in Galicia, the narrative opens with the Countess of Cela, now elderly, in the company of her granddaughter. Rosarito, but the story revolves principally around the countess’s
cousin. Don Juan Manuel Montenegro, whose sudden and unexpected arrival from Portugal throws the household into confusion. The mystery surrounding his background has echoes of 'A media noche', which hints at the identity of the unnamed horseman as 'un emigrado', perhaps 'un cabecilla que volvía de Portugal' (OC, I, 278). In addition, Valle's presentation of him in this story uses the same words that described both Pedro de Tor and Pablo Iglesias in earlier articles: 'Tenía ese hermoso y varonil tipo sueño tan frecuente en los hidalgos de la montaña gallega' (OC, I, 80), transferred here to a character who will shortly figure in the Sonatas, and later become the protagonist of the Comedias bárbaras. In 'Rosarito', he has the reputation of a heretic and a conspirator; the priest describes him as 'un hombre terrible, un libertino, un masón!' (OC, I, 79).

Don Juan Manuel Montenegro also emanates a vaguely sinister magnetism. The green of his eyes has connotations of sorcery. The innocent Rosarito is overcome by his presence: she feels fear and fascination, and is both awed and attracted by the legend he represents. He, however, is no respecter of her innocence:

una sonrisa de increíble audacia tembló un momento bajo el mostacho blanco del hidalgo, y sus ojos verdes - soberbios y desdenosos como los de un tirano o los de un pirata - se posaron con gallardía donjuanesca sobre aquella cabeza [...]. Pero la sonrisa y la mirada del emigrado fueron relámpagos por lo siniestras y por lo fugaces. (OC, I, 83)

The sense of mystery and threat increases as darkness falls. At midnight, the countess is woken by a scream. There is an intimation of death in the moonlight that filters through the window, a toad that croaks in the garden, and a large, black cat that watches the scene. 'maullando lastimeramente: su cola fosca, su lomo enarcaido, sus ojos fosforescentes le dan todo el aspecto de un animal embrujado y macabro' (OC, I, 91). Rosarito is found dead in the bed where Montenegro was to sleep, her eyes fixed and terrified, her heart pierced by her own hairpin. There is no sign of Montenegro. A
shadow, like that of a giant bird, crosses the wall, moves to the ceiling, from there to the floor, then scurries away like a huge spider.

Rosarito's death is unexplained; was it murder, suicide or a supernatural revenge by the saint on whose bed she lay? Has she been sexually abused? The story not only has all the elements of mystery, fear and cruelty that characterised the very first of Valle's stories but anticipates techniques he will use in his later works. As María José Rivas Domínguez observes: 'Es evidente el distanciamiento entre las primeras publicaciones y los esperpentos del año 20, pero también es cierto que entre aquéllas y éstos, hay una línea ininterrumpida: hay “esperpentización” antes del esperpento.'

'Rosarito' also introduces a new element: the presence of the satanic. Güntert sees satanic elements in all Valle's work, and especially in the stories of the *Femeninas* collection, where he maintains that all the female protagonists show 'la conciencia de hacer el mal', and take diabolical pleasure in destroying traditional values: 'Existe, de hecho, un rasgo común a todos los cuentos de *Femeninas*: su sentido deriva del choque que se produce entre lo sublime y lo satánico' (p. 258). His argument, however, is based on a rather wide interpretation of the word 'satánico', and fails to distinguish between mere cruelty and satanism. The women in the *Femeninas* stories, with the exception of Rosarito, are alternatively cruel, capricious or perverse, but none of them is satanic. Güntert's suggestion that Currita discovers the Devil when seduced by the young Sandoval in 'La generala' is unconvincing, and although he draws our attention to the use of the word 'satánico' in 'La condesa de Cela', it describes Aquiles' attitude rather than Julia's, and then only for one isolated moment. In 'Tula varona', he sees the fact that Tula has a servant with a 'faz de diablillo', as a coupling device to underline the satanic element in her character; in the same way he relates Octavia to her cat in 'Octavia Santino', and Niña Chole to the Judas figure of her banker in 'La Niña Chole'. Güntert's only distinction, therefore, between the first five stories in *Femeninas* and
‘Rosarito’ is the fact that the satanic role in the last story is played by Montenegro rather than by the female protagonist.

The differences, however, are substantial. The inclusion of ‘Rosarito’ in this collection is something of an anomaly. Although, in keeping with the other protagonists in the Femeninas collection, Rosarito comes from a noble family, she has nothing in common with the other women. She is unmarried, and both innocent and good, victim rather than predator. The story, moreover, centres less on her than on Montenegro. It is he who dispenses the cruelty, he who plays the Don Juan. Nor does the story fall easily under the subtitle of Historias amorosas; it is much closer in kind to the sinister, macabre stories that precede Femeninas. It comes as no surprise, therefore, to find this story republished in 1901 as ‘Don Juan Manuel’, and later included in the Jardín novelesco collection of 1905, alongside other stories of mystery and horror.

With the exception of ‘Rosarito’, the stories in the Femeninas collection not only have in common the figure of a married woman as protagonist, but a woman who in each case is a departure from the usual Spanish stereotype of the time. Whilst these stories can be seen as an affront to the moral and social mores of the time, they nevertheless carry an implicit criticism of the contemporary social conventions that stifled fundamental instincts. Each protagonist has a slightly different attitude to love and marriage, but all overturn the accepted role of submissive wife and devoted mother. Their decadent lifestyle and extra-marital relationships undermine the moral code of the Catholic Church. In a patriarchal society, where a married woman is normally seen as a peripheral figure, and the embodiment of all that is virtuous, she has here taken on a sexually dominant role, playing the part, in three of the stories – ‘La condesa de Cela’, ‘Tula varona’ and ‘La Niña Chole’ – of a feminine Don Juan, both selfish and cruel. In the other two stories, the protagonists lack this predatory quality: until her final revelation, Octavia Santino is barely a person in her own right, more the passive object
of Pedro’s desire, and Currita differs in that, whilst a temptress, she is not a genuine would-be adulteress: a fun-loving character, she is simply playing a game.

The character of the lover in these five stories is also flawed: young and inexperienced, verging on effeminacy, he is a failure as a seducer. His advances are weak and ineffectual, and his child-like attempts to play the part expected of him, such as Sandoval’s illusion in ‘La generala’ that a painted-on moustache will give him the masculinity he lacks, turn him into a puppet-like figure, ripe for manipulation. Whilst adultery is the underlying theme in this collection, it only takes place, in fact, in two of the stories – ‘La condesa de Cela’ and ‘Octavia Santino’ – and, apart from ‘La Niña Chole’ and ‘La generala’, the husband figure is noticeably absent.

Although he received no recognition for Femeninas,17 Valle went on to write four more stories of the same kind. ‘Epitalamio’, published in 1897, perhaps the most perverse, and therefore understandably rejected by several newspapers at the time for its immorality, features the predatory Augusta, a married woman with extreme sexual tastes. Cynical and perfidious, Augusta persuades her lover to marry her daughter in order to continue her relationship with him. Rewritten under the title of ‘Augusta’, this story was published in a further collection, Corte de amor, in 1903, together with the previously published ‘La generala’, ‘La condesa de Cela’, and two new stories, ‘Eulalia’ and ‘Rosita’. This collection, in which the behaviour of the protagonists is far from courtly, and has little to do with love, was even more ironically subtitled Florilegio de honestas y nobles damas.

‘Eulalia’ (1902) was also refused publication by some newspapers on the same grounds as ‘Epitalamio’, but its protagonist is presented in an entirely different light from the other women of these stories. She is quiet and gentle, and her love for Jacobo, whilst adulterous, is neither capricious nor cruel. It is the man in this story, rather than the woman, who shows cruelty. Eulalia’s feelings are, perhaps, the closest approach to
love, as opposed to sex or passion, that appears in any of these stories. The setting, too, is different; in the other stories the character of the protagonists is reflected in the trappings of their surroundings, the luxury and voluptuousness of a palace interior. Although Eulalia is from an aristocratic family, her affair takes place outside, against a simple, pastoral background, a world of peace and harmony. Her suicide in the river when the relationship is ended and she has scattered the torn fragments of her love letters in the water, is seen in terms of liberation and a return to Nature, rather than the literary, clichéd punishment of a fallen woman. In folklore, the crossing of a river can have supernatural connotations, and Catherine Nickel maintains that ‘Eulalia’s death is thus not portrayed as a fitting end for one who has defied societal norms, but as a reintegration into a superior spiritual realm’. Unlike the other stories, which apart from ‘Rosarito’ are open-ended, Eulalia’s death not only brings the action to a close, but gives the protagonist an aura of transcendence. Her memory will live on. In the silence that follows her death, moreover, any sense of tragedy is dispelled by the ‘alegre cantar’ of a villager, on a path that ‘aparecía blanca entre una siembra oscura’ (OC, I, 156).

It is likely that the third story, ‘Rosita’, began in 1899 as ‘La reina de Dalicám’, then became ‘Rosita Zegri’, before appearing in its final version in Corte de amor. It is one of the only stories, along with ‘La generala’, to contain an element of humour, though here it takes the form of a burlesque, an approach that anticipates that of the later esperpento. The stylised setting, the dehumanising techniques, especially animalisation, the atmosphere of carnival with its masked figures, and the use of caricature are all marked elements of Valle’s later style. Rosita shares with Currita of ‘La generala’ a lighthearted approach to love. There is no serious consideration of adultery. Her flirtation with an old love, El Duquesito, is essentially innocent, their conversation empty and artificial. They are both play-acting. As in ‘La generala’, the influence of literature on the characters is ridiculed: some of El Duquesito’s rhetoric is
lifted directly from the works of Echegaray. Rosita, far from being of noble birth, is of gypsy origin, quick-witted and street-wise. An element of the absurd lies in her marriage to the black king of Dalicám, a man who can neither read nor write; this is apparently her bid for security, a mockery of the love for which she claims to pine.

The fourth story in this collection, 'Beatriz', was the cause of some controversy when it was denied a prize on its first appearance as 'Satanás' in 1900. Its atmosphere is closer to that of Valle’s early short stories, and it shares the elements of satanism and witchcraft that dominated 'Rosarito', as well as being strongly anticlerical. Both stories recount the violation of a young girl within a palace setting, in a bed, moreover, in which a saint has slept; both have the same aura of mystery and menace – the wind, moonlight, barking dogs, a black cat – and both end on an unexplained event. Each story also involves a priest who, in 'Beatriz' has a sinister role to play. The appearance and behaviour of Fray Ángel, the family chaplain, recall those of his counterpart in the earlier short story, 'El rey de la máscara': physically unattractive and involved in political activities with the Carlist movement. The young Beatriz is reputedly possessed by the Devil, but her condition is later revealed to be the result of sexual abuse at the hands of the chaplain. The opportune arrival of the saludadora, apparently prompted by a prophetic dream, throws Beatriz’s mother into confusion: instead of asking her to exorcise the Devil – her original intention – she persuades her instead to commit the sin of putting a curse on the priest. The following day, Fray Ángel’s dead body is found floating in the river. As at the end of 'Rosarito', the death in 'Beatriz' is unexplained: it could have been murder, suicide or the supernatural result of the saludadora’s malediction. 'Beatriz' was later included, in 1907, along with 'Augusta' and the six original stories of Femeninas, in a third collection of stories about women, this time more appropriately titled Historias perversas.
As in ‘Rosita’, stylistic elements in both ‘Rosarito’ and ‘Beatriz’ anticipate the later esperpento, this time noticeably in the humanisation of the inanimate, which serve to emphasise the air of tragedy and mystery that prevails, as when ‘la luz de la lámpara agoniza’ (OC, I, 300), and ‘las bujías lloraban’ (OC, I, 235). The motifs of demonic possession and the innocent victim will figure again, repeatedly, in Valle’s work. They become the basic theme of the later short stories, ‘Mi hermana Antonia’ (1909), the last of Valle’s short stories to feature a woman as protagonist, and ‘Milón de la Arnoya’ (1914), and will be the moving force in his play, El embrujado (1912). They also play a significant part in the novel Flor de santidad, and the dramas of Divinas palabras, Águila de blasón and Cara de Plata.

Apart from ‘Rosarito’ and ‘Beatriz’, in which the protagonists are innocent victims, all Valle’s other stories about women underline the power that each of them has, and uses, over her male counterpart, and much of the interest lies in this unusual reversal of roles. It gives these stories an apparent uniqueness, but the motif of woman as the dominant sexual partner is one that will recur frequently, albeit more subtly, in much of Valle’s subsequent work. It will underlie the narrative of the first two Sonatas, despite the shift to a male protagonist, who, although he considers himself the seducer, is still at the mercy of the woman he pursues. It will also dominate the later plays of El embrujado and Divinas palabras.

Recent reappraisal of Valle’s early stories confirms that, far from deserving the neglect to which they have frequently been consigned, many of them not only merit recognition as pieces of writing, but already reveal some of the characteristics of a style that will remain constant throughout much of his work. The modernismo, commonly associated with Femeninas and the later Sonatas, continues into Flor de santidad, and persists in his theatre, as late as 1922, as the form that dominates the stage directions. The musicality of this language and the sense of beauty that it evokes, often provide the
backdrop for violent, grotesque action. It is this juxtaposition, a device deliberately
designed to shock, that produces a dual response in the reader or the audience, not just
in the *esperpentos* of his mature work, but in Valle’s earlier literature. The apparent
change from *modernismo* to *esperpentismo* is neither abrupt nor absolute. The
beautifying aesthetic of Valle’s early work continues for at least three decades, and the
dehumanising techniques that dominate his mature work, his use of caricature and the
grotesque, are already part of his developing style at the very beginning of his writing.
Notes to Chapter 1

1 Manuel Bueno. ‘Días de bohemia’, La Pluma, no. 32 (January 1923), 41-45 (p. 44).

2 Luis T. González del Valle, in La ficción breve de Valle-Inclán: Hermenéutica y estrategias narrativas (Barcelona: Anthropos, 1990), cites Manuel Bermejo Marcos as one such critic (p. 32).


4 Ramón del Valle-Inclán, Obra Completa, I: Teatro, Poesia, Varia (Madrid: Espasa-Calpe, 2002), pp. 275-78. Further page references to works from this collection will be to this edition (which has no editor specified) and will be given in the text, preceded by OC. I.

5 Ramón del Valle-Inclán, Obra Completa, II: Prosa (Madrid: Espasa-Calpe, 2002), p. 281. Further page references to works from this collection (again, no editor is indicated) will be to this edition and will be given in the text, preceded by OC, II.

6 See Gerald Brenan, The Spanish Labyrinth: An Account of the Social and Political Background of the Civil War (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960), p. 49, n. 1. This custom dates back to the Middle Ages, when it was permitted for Spanish priests to have concubines. They were called ‘barraganas’. Although later forbidden by the Council of Trent, according to Brenan, priests ‘continue to have “housekeepers” and “nieces” to this day’.

7 It is likely that the character of Pedro Pondal found its inspiration in the poet Eduardo Pondal, whom Valle knew personally, and with whose poetry he was familiar.

8 See Madrid, p. 44.

9 Cited by Fichter, p. 168.


17 Rubia Barcia, p. 16, comments that outside Galicia, ‘La publicación de Femeninas no fue registrada ni por la prensa ni por la crítica madrileña. De hecho, para el resto de España pasó completamente desaparecida’.

CHAPTER 2

REWORKING, INNOVATING, AND ANTICIPATING:
THE SONATAS AND FLOR DE SANTIDAD

The Sonatas
Valle had been struggling with financial difficulties since leaving university; the
publication of his first Sonata therefore not only represented his first real literary
breakthrough but a significant relief from hardship. There is some confusion over its
acceptance for publication. Femeninas, as was stated earlier (p. 48), had passed almost
unnoticed, and Valle’s next story, ‘Epitalamio’, had met with refusals; subsequently no
publisher was interested in his offering of the Sonata de otoño. According to Azorín,
this was because Valle ‘en aquella primera época estaba rodeado de príncipes exóticos,
“d’annunzianos”’.¹ One of Valle’s friends, Ricardo Calvo, claimed that it was he who
paid for its publication in 1902, but a segment of the novel, bearing the same title, had
already appeared in El Imparcial in September, 1901,² and in the next few months, five
further sections appeared, three in the same newspaper and another two in Juventud:
Revista Popular Contemporánea.

The modernista style of writing that had begun to emerge in Valle’s early
stories, and which became more pronounced in Femeninas, develops further in the
Sonatas, and reveals strong evidence of the influence of Rubén Darío. Valle’s
friendship with the Nicaraguan poet began in 1899, and their mutual respect and
admiration would last until Darío’s death in 1916. Echoes of Darío’s modernismo – its
musicality, its emphasis on beauty and the exotic, the pagan element, its appeal to the
senses, its interest in the occult – would continue to permeate Valle’s work until the early 1920s. According to Leda Schiavo, modernismo, already established in Latin America, became in Spain the equivalent of the decadent movement in other parts of Europe, assimilating its characteristics into themes that were morbid and sexually perverse, that juxtaposed the religious with the erotic, and frequently had sacrilegious or satanic overtones. It was associated with a predilection for the mysterious and the macabre, with a delight in illness and agony, and above all for a derision of bourgeois morals.¹ Into the Sonatas, alongside these features, Valle introduced, with increasing frequency, elements of the grotesque, pointing ever more clearly to his later aesthetic of the esperpento. His protagonists, nevertheless, are still aristocratic and beautiful, and the style of writing remains poetic, its musicality reflected in the title: four movements, each at a different tempo, but linked by a common theme. At a time when most of his writing contemporaries had abandoned Art for Art’s sake, and were concerned with national issues, Valle ignored, or resisted the general trend, and continued to pursue the modernista aesthetic.

The four Sonatas, longer than anything that Valle had written so far, can in many ways be seen to evolve from Femeninas and Valle’s other stories about women, though where these give an impression of contemporaneity, the Sonatas recall the past. They employ, nevertheless, a similar style, with an air of unreality and evasion. They share the same aristocratic background, the same atmosphere of decadence and sin, the same emphasis on illicit sex. They continue to challenge the middle-class Catholic morality of the nineteenth century. Also reminiscent of Femeninas is the theatrical behaviour of the characters, who frequently strike a pose. In Sonata de otoño, Bradomín sees himself as a ‘divino Nazareno’ in his desire to be flagellated by Concha’s hair (OC, l. 516), and he dramatises his brief absence of a few hours when he declares himself to
be 'el Cruzado que partía a Jerusalén’, and Concha ‘la Dama que le lloraba en su castillo al claro de la luna’ (*OC, I, 496).

Despite the nominal change of protagonist – it is now a man who takes over the Don Juan role – it is still woman as temptress who holds centre stage, albeit from a different perspective. According to George Bernard Shaw, this is not a new concept. He maintains that in Shakespeare’s plays woman always takes the initiative, and that ‘the love interest is the interest of seeing the woman hunt the man down. [...] she is the pursuer and contriver, he the pursued and disposed of.’ (p.17) Referring to his play, *Man and Superman* (1902), he points out that his protagonist, John Tanner (inspired, of course, in the name Juan Tenorio), is ‘the quarry instead of the huntsman’ (p.18). With the exception of ‘Rosarito’, the men in *Femeninas* fall into the same category, and this apparent role reversal will persist into the next stage of Valle’s writing. In two of the *Sonatas*, the man is the seduced rather than the seducer; in the other two, his attempts at seduction fail. In the absence of genuine happiness, there is a continuing emphasis on physical pleasures: sex, food, drink and adventure. There is, as before, little evidence of humour from the point of view of the characters.

The introduction of a male protagonist, the Marqués de Bradomín, is the principal innovation in the *Sonatas*. The name Bradomín had already figured in ‘A media noche’, in reference to a rectory where Don Ramón María would be waiting, establishing a first link between Valle and his new creation. Subtitled *Memorias del Marqués de Bradomín*, the *Sonatas* are narrated by their fictional author, who is often seen as Valle’s *alter ego*, an idea that stemmed originally from Valle’s own attempts at self-invention. His supposed *Autobiografía* at the time is full of fantasy; in it he states that he was now beginning to write:

Las Memorias amables que empezó a escribir en la emigración mi noble tío el
marqués de Bradomín. ¡Aquel viejo cínico, decaído y galante como un cardenal del Renacimiento! [...] aquel gran señor que era feo, católico y sentimental. Cabalmente yo también lo soy, y esta semejanza todavía le hace más caro a mi corazón.5

Later, he sets the record straight about his new creation: ‘Yo confieso que mi marqués de Bradomín está inspirado en Campoamor y muchos de sus rasgos no son autobiográficos como creen algunos, sino que pertenecen al autor de las “Doloras”’.6

The first and the best known of the Sonatas, Sonata de otoño, published in 1902, is, in many ways, the result of the development of a series of previously published pieces. It uses yet again the basic narrative of the Pedro Pondal story, though this time the protagonist is Bradomín, who presents the story autobiographically and at greater length. His former mistress, the ailing Concha, has the same religious scruples as Octavia Santino, and the pricking of her conscience is prompted by the same traditional figures of the disapproving mother, the persuasive priest, and loving children; even the malevolent cat makes a reappearance. This was a theme to which Valle was clearly attached: he had used it for the sixth time in 1899, transposed into dramatic form, as his first play, Cenizas; this, in turn, would become El yermo de las almas in 1908, by then a seventh version of the original ‘El gran obstáculo’.

Valle characteristically also weaves elements from other earlier stories into the Sonata. The novel opens in a similar way to ‘La condesa de Cela’, with the receipt of a letter from the female protagonist. In both stories, the letter motif is repeated, in the suggestion that this evidence of love be burned. The two stories are linked further by a conversation in the Sonata between Concha and her cousin Isabel about their several relatives, one of whom is the Condesa de Cela, ‘enamorada locamente de un estudiante’ (OC, i. 502). There are also echoes in this Sonata of ‘Eulalia’, whose protagonist was similarly troubled by her conscience over her neglect of her two daughters, and for
whom letters also played a vital role. Later in the narrative, yet another letter, addressed to Concha from Bradomín’s mother, is destroyed unopened, presumed to carry the same message of disapproval and accusation as previous correspondence. Several elements from ‘El miedo’ (1902) are also woven into the Sonata, though with a total disregard for fictional truth or chronology. In this short story, a young man describes the sad figure of his mother as she gathers roses, an action that becomes associated with Concha in the Sonata. The youth also talks of his sisters, María Isabel and María Fernanda. These are the names of Concha’s daughters in the Sonata, still children in the novel, and who, as far as we know, have no brother. The Prior de Brandeso also appears in both narratives, with his dogs, Capitán and Carabel, and in ‘El miedo’ there is reference to a tomb belonging to ‘Bradomín, Pedro Aguiar de Tor’ (OC, I, 217).

Sonata de otoño is made into even more of a self-pastiche by the interpolation of whole passages that have been published separately as part or the whole of previous short stories. On his way to see the dying Concha, Bradomín spends the night in a mill where he is offered a bunch of herbs by the miller’s daughter, to put under his lover’s pillow. This episode (OC, I, 459-62) is taken almost verbatim from a short story called ‘Hierba santa’ (1901) (OC, II, 1455-58), in which Bradomín is called to the deathbed, not of his dying mistress, but of his mother. Another episode in Sonata de otoño, which concerns Florisel, the servant assigned to Bradomín while staying with Concha, is the basis of ‘Cuento de amor’ (1901), a short story that again tells of a visit by Bradomín to Concha, and was probably the first indication of Valle’s intentions to write the Memorias. Echoes of other short stories, ‘Corazón de niña’, ‘El palacio de Brandeso’, ‘Don Juan Manuel’, ‘Piadoso legado’ and ‘Su esencia’, written between 1901 and 1902 can also be detected in the wider context of this Sonata.

Although the narrative perspective has changed, the basic ingredients of the
Sonata de otoño are therefore familiar to the reader. They not only reflect Valle’s earlier stories about women, however, but incorporate elements from his other kind of story, in which superstition, horror, and death predominate. Half-believing in the white magic of their healing powers, Bradomín surreptitiously slips under Concha’s pillow the herbs that he was given on his journey; Concha is told by her maid not to sit in the moonlight, ‘¡Por las brujas!’ (OC, I, 487), and her interpretation of her dream of the archangel as a warning of death is realised. The circumstances in which she dies are tinged with horror, and underlined by the elements of sacrilege and satanism that were already beginning to emerge in some of Valle’s stories. There are distinct echoes of Sade in their final act of love, as Bradomín demands that Concha flagellate him with her hair: ‘¡Azótame. Concha! ¡Azótame como a un divino Nazareno! ... ¡Azótame hasta morir!’ Concha is frightened by his entreaties: ‘Me das miedo cuando dices esas impiedades […] porque no eres tú quien habla: Es Satanás’ (OC, I, 516). As she dies, dogs howl in the distance and clouds pass over the moon.

Bradomín’s subsequent frantic attempts to wake Concha’s cousin Isabel, to break the news, are interpreted as sexual advances. His ready response has the hallmarks of a last, desperate cry, as if Concha’s death were endangering the very meaning of his existence. His betrayal is underlined by the crowing of a cock: the third time we have heard its cry. The horror of the scene that follows is dominated by the motif of Concha’s hair. As Bradomín attempts to carry his lover’s dead body back to her own room, her long hair catches on the door. The description of his frantic struggle to free it is long and painful, and ends in a cruel, desperate moment:

Palpé en la oscuridad para desprenderla. No pude. Enredábase más a cada instante. Mi mano asustada y torpe temblaba sobre ella, y la puerta se abría y se cerraba, rechinando largamente. […] Tuve que tirar brutalmente hasta que se rompieron los queridos y olorosos cabellos... (OC, I, 520)
The narrative closes on an even more macabre note. Concha’s daughters, unaware of their mother’s death, call for Bradomín to shoot down a kite that is threatening a flock of doves. The girls excitedly gather up the dead bird to take to their mother’s room: ‘¡Verás qué susto le damos a mamá cuando se despierte!’ (OC, I, 522). The fact that Bradomín does nothing to stop them adds a final, gross touch. Self-absorbed to the end, he merely weeps, not for Concha, but in self-pity at the unlikelihood of ever finding another woman to admire him.

In many ways, Sonata de otoño can be seen as an amalgam of all the elements that have characterised Valle’s writing to date, a recycling of characters, themes and situations, creating what is apparently new out of the old. It shows clearly the growing importance of the intertextuality of Valle’s work, and reflects the principles observed by Edward W. Said in Beginnings, Intention and Method: ‘Since there is really no such thing as an absolutely primal text, each act of composition involves other texts, and so each writing transmits itself, receives other writing, is an interpretation of other writing, reconstitutes (by displacement) other writing.’ 7

This Sonata does more, however, than bring together elements from earlier stories: it introduces new characters and themes that will become increasingly important in subsequent writing. It is now that Valle begins to create a fictional universe of characters who will people his future works. A small, apparently insignificant passage in the Sonata refers to the villagers whom Concha sees from her window:

Bajo aquel sol amable que lucía en medio de los aguaceros, iba por los caminos la gente de las aldeas. Una pastora con dengue de grana guiaba sus carneros hacia la iglesia de San Gundián, mujeres cantando volvían de la fuente, un viejo cansado picaba la yunta de sus vacas que se detenían mordisqueando en los vallados, y el humo blanco parecía salir de entre las higueras… (OC, I, 495)
From this apparently idyllic scene, the anonymous figures here described will later take on a greater identity and will be viewed less idealistically in *Sonata de primavera*, *Flor de santidad*, *El Marqués de Bradomín* and the *Comedias bárbaras*.

Two minor characters, the servants Florisel and Brion, are introduced into this *Sonata*, and there is a second appearance of Micaela, who will become a constantly recurring figure. The most notable newcomer, however, apart from Bradomín himself, is Don Juan Manuel Montenegro. Already familiar from ‘Rosarito’ and ‘Don Juan Manuel’, and from the earlier descriptions of Pedro de Tor and Pablo Iglesias, Montenegro now assumes the definitive characteristics that will establish him not only as one of Valle’s prominent figures in works that follow, but a dramatic contrast to the dandyish Bradomín.

In this *Sonata*, Montenegro is first referred to as Concha’s uncle, ‘aquel hidalgo visionario y pródigo que vivía en el pazo de Lantañón’ (*OC, I, 475*), and it is one of his ‘cien ahijados’, Florisel, who is summoned to serve Bradomín in Concha’s palace. The servant’s admiration: ‘¡Qué gran caballero es don Juan Manuel!’ (*OC, I, 477*) is echoed when Montenegro first appears, at a distance, on horseback, by Concha’s ‘¡Es magnífico!’ (*OC, I, 486*). It is his booming voice and overpowering manner that appear to earn him such praise. Concha assures Bradomín that Montenegro would not be shocked by her lover’s presence in the palace: ‘Ése no tiene escrúpulos. Es otro descendiente de los Borgias.’ (*OC, I, 488*). When Montenegro eventually visits Concha’s palace, he upbraids Bradomín for reading in a way that recalls Pedro de Tor’s admonitions of Valle in ‘Cartas galicianas’. His immediate priority is wine and his manner is impatient as he paces the floor, stopping from time to time in front of the fire, ‘extendiendo las manos, que eran pálidas, nobles y descarnadas como las manos de un rey asceta’. White-haired, but with an erect, arrogant posture, his life is described as that of ‘todos los mayorazgos campesinos, chalaneando en las ferias, jugando en las villas y
sentándose en la mesa de los abades en todas las fiestas' \textit{(OC, I, 491-92)}. One of Valle’s major creations, Montenegro will become the protagonist of the future \textit{Comedias bárbaras}, and will continue to figure in the trilogy, \textit{La guerra carlista}.

Place-names firmly re-establish the Galician setting in this novel, and assume a growing importance: Viana del Prior, where Montenegro lives, his Pazo de Lantañón, and Concha’s Palacio de Brandeso will figure in future works. The name Gundar will appear in other works as Gondar and will later be associated with a blind man, el Ciego de Gondar, who becomes one of Valle’s most frequently recurring characters. Another Galician element to which there are repeated references is the payment of a \textit{foro}. The miller and his wife who offer Bradomín hospitality on his journey pay Concha a regular ‘foro de dos ovejas, siete ferrados de trigo y siete de centeno’ \textit{(OC, I, 461)}. Reference to a \textit{foro} appeared as early as 1889, by the miller’s wife in ‘A media noche’, as ‘doce ferrados de trigo y siete de centeno’ paid to ‘la señora, mi ama’, possibly even Concha herself \textit{(OC, I, 277)}. Payment of the \textit{foro} will recur as a stronger motif in the later plays of \textit{El embrujado} and \textit{Cara de Plata}.

\textit{Sonata de otoño} was a success, and was followed in 1903 by \textit{Sonata de estío}, which, like the first \textit{Sonata}, was a reworking of an old story. This second \textit{Sonata} had the longest and most elaborate process of development. Its first appearance in 1892 as ‘Bajo los trópicos’, subtitled ‘Recuerdos de México’, was followed by another version, ‘Páginas de tierra caliente’, in 1893. It finally evolved in the \textit{Femeninas} collection of 1895 as ‘La Niña Chole’, with the subtitle ‘Del libro “Impresiones de tierra caliente”, por Andrés Hidalgo’. This was the name Valle first gave to his fictitious narrator; it was not until 1903 that he converted this story into a second \textit{Sonata}, and Andrés Hidalgo into the Marqués de Bradomín. By then he had published several more versions of ‘Tierra caliente’ which, together with other fragments of the same narrative – ‘La feria de Sancti Spiritus’ (also in a version called ‘Lilí’), ‘Los tiburones’, ‘Un retrato’,
‘Aventura galante’, ‘Final de amores’, ‘Una desconocida’, and ‘A bordo de la fragata Dalila’, all written between 1897 and 1903 – were incorporated into the *Sonata de estío*.

Javier Serrano Alonso suggests that this *Sonata* was conceived before *Sonata de otoño*. It is clearly recounted by a younger Bradomín, and is very different in both approach and setting. Unlike the preceding *Sonata*, where almost nothing happens, *Sonata de estío* is full of action. It is still the woman who calls the tune, but the ageing, ailing Concha has been replaced by a young, hot-blooded Mexican woman, and her passionate affair with Bradomín takes place not in the languid, decadent atmosphere of a Galician palace, but against the vital, primitive background of a tropical Mexico. The sexuality in this *Sonata* is not as straightforward as in *Sonata de otoño*: there are references to an incestuous relationship between Niña Chole and her father, and to the homosexuality of the young man who accompanies her. This, incidentally, is the only *Sonata* not to end on a sad, conclusive note.

Of all the women protagonists from the *Femeninas* collection, Niña Chole had the most pronounced streak of cruelty, and the fewest scruples, and the elements of horror and sacrilege in the earlier story become much more predominant in the *Sonata*. It is Niña Chole who underlines the most macabre moment in the novel with an inhuman act of nonchalance: when the negro whom she has taunted into diving from the boat to kill a shark is devoured by following sharks, she simply smiles, and tossing some coins into the water after him, remarks: ‘¡Bien se lo ha ganado!’ (*OC*, I, 405).

Such theatricality again echoes the behaviour of the women in *Femeninas*, but she is not alone. Bradomín also plays out a role: ‘Yo crucé ante la Niña Chole orgulloso y soberbio como un conquistador antiguo’ (*OC*, I, 406). When it comes to matters of sacrilege, moreover, it is he who takes the lead: at a fountain in the convent where they spend the night, he encourages her to drink directly from the penis of a stone statue of
an angel, reputedly the Christ child himself, whereupon Niña Chole is overcome by ‘tal
tentación de risa, que por poco se ahoga’ (OC, I, 415).

The following year saw the publication of a third narrative in this series. Unlike
its predecessors, Sonata de primavera adapts and incorporates only two pre-texts: ‘Fue
Satanás’ and ‘Judíos de cartón’, though it also contains a brief section that has been
taken from ‘El gran obstáculo’, in which Bradomín’s thoughts are those of Pedro
Pondal from the earlier story (OC, II, 1356; OC, I, 353). The scene has now moved to
Italy, of which Valle had no first-hand knowledge. He would draw on the literature of
others for his background, which, according to Madrid, in this instance, justified
‘lifting’ a passage from Casanova in order to give the setting authenticity: ‘Cuando
escribía Sonata de primavera cuya acción pasa en Italia, incrusté un episodio romano de
Casanova para convencerme de que mi obra estaba bien ambientada e iba por buen
camino’ (p. 109). This kind of plagiarism becomes common in Valle’s work. Dougherty
lists a substantial number of writers whose ‘textos y estilos’ were easily recognisable in
Valle’s writing, and points out that although the device drew severe criticism, it was one
that Valle continued to practise: ‘Traer a otros autores y con ellos los valores culturales
de sus discursos a través de la alusión formaba parte de la “arquitectura” literaria del
escritor gallego.’9

The atmosphere of Sonata de primavera is close to that of the Sonata de otoño.
The setting is again a palace, the home of the Princess Gaetani, this time housing no
fewer than six princesses. There is more gathering of roses in the idyll of the gardens,
and death, again, is in the air. In this Sonata, however, Bradomín takes over the
dominant role. Here, he is the seducer, young, inexperienced, and at his most perverse
and audacious. A guest in the palace, he relentlessly pursues the princess’s eldest
dughter, María Rosario, despite the fact that she is about to take holy orders. With his
customary arrogance, when she fails to respond to his advances, he regards her as ‘cruel
como todas las santas', and though he admits to a 'predilección por aquellas otras que primero han sido grandes pecadoras', he concedes that 'la pobre no sabía que lo mejor de la santidad son las tentaciones. (OC, I, 345)

Elements of superstition and witchcraft are even more pronounced in this Sonata. As the bells ring out to announce the death of the bishop at the beginning of the novel, a sudden, mysterious gust of wind blows through the palace, extinguishing the lights. Princess Gaetani reacts violently: the same had occurred when her husband died, and his father before him. In the course of the narrative, the services of a local witch are engaged by the butler Polonio in an attempt to cast a spell on Bradomín to rob him of his virility. In Bradomín’s ability to foil the plot, Polonio sees powers of the occult.

The presence of the satanic is also strongest in this Sonata. Here, doves, birds with holy associations, take flight as Bradomín approaches (OC, I, 370), and, as he plans his seduction, ‘una ráfaga violenta’ lifts a curtain to reveal the kneeling novice (OC, I, 361). Bradomín’s association with the Devil in this Sonata recalls Concha’s reaction to his sacrilegious behaviour in the Sonata de otoño. He, himself, acknowledges the influence of the Devil, which he associates with the croaking of a toad:

el canto de un sapo repetido monótonamente bajo la arcada de cipreses distraía y turbaba mi pensamiento. Recuerdo que de niño he leído muchas veces en un libro de devociones donde rezaba mi abuela, que el Diablo solía tomar ese aspecto para turbar la oración de un santo monje.

As the toad croaks again, Bradomín goes on to boast:

Yo estoy íntimamente convencido de que el Diablo tienta siempre a los mejores. Aquella noche el cornudo monarca del abismo encendió mi sangre con su aliento de llamas y despertó mi carne flaca, fustigándola con su rabo negro.

(OC, I, 361)
María Rosario’s religious calling and the holy connotations of her name serve to highlight the demonic nature of Bradomín’s intentions. Presented in much the same light as the female protagonists of ‘Beatriz’ and ‘Rosarito’, the confused and frightened victim of a man’s advances, María Rosario sees Bradomín as a ‘brujo’, even as the Devil himself, and crosses herself in his presence, as a defence against his Satanism. When her little sister falls from beside her through an open window to her death, María Rosario’s terrified reaction is to cry out: ‘¡Fue Satanás! ¡Fue Satanás!’ (OC, I, 384).

There is a significant passage in this Sonata that echoes the reference made to the peasant community seen from a window in Sonata de otoño. Here the description is more detailed and in realistic, even naturalistic terms. The scene resembles a tableau: María Rosario, ‘una figura ideal’, graciously distributes alms to the poor and wretched, ‘que alargaban las manos escuálidas bajo los rotos mantos’. This grotesque gathering of ‘viejos y lisiados, de huérfanos y locos’ (OC, I, 349) will feature more prominently in subsequent works, and from amongst them Valle now begins to single out individuals, such as Liberata, Paula, and the ubiquitous blind man.

By the fourth book of the series, Sonata de invierno (1905), Bradomín is an old man, full of self-pity: ‘Hoy, después de haber despertado amores muy grandes, vivo en la más triste y más adusta soledad del alma’ (OC, I, 525). Set against the more austere background of war, the futility of Bradomín’s overtures are echoed in the hopelessness of the war efforts; the hollowness of the role he is playing reflects the emptiness of the cause for which he is supposedly fighting. In the course of the narrative, he manages, nevertheless, to revive one old love affair, and initiate another. This last bid for love, however, proves the most perverse of all his acts, and ends in tragedy. Here, once again, he leaves disaster in his wake.

The Sonata de invierno takes place in Navarre, another area of which Valle had no direct knowledge: he would not visit the region until 1909, after writing the first part
of *La guerra carlista*. In this *Sonata*, Bradomín is serving the Carlist pretender, and it is in court circles that he meets an old love, with whom, we are told, he had had a daughter, now a novice in a convent. A second ex-lover, María Antonieta Volfani, at first resists his advances, but later that night, boasts Bradomín, 'rugió en mis brazos como la faunesa antigua' (*OC*, *I*, 551). The main event in the narrative is the loss of Bradomín's arm. Wounded in action, he is taken to hospital by Sor Simona, where it is decided to amputate his arm. His courage impresses all the nuns, especially Maximina, a young novice of fifteen. Playing on her sympathy and admiration, Bradomín sees a last chance, and sets about her seduction. The full horror of what he is doing is only revealed when he discovers that the girl is his daughter. Accused by Sor Simona of knowing the truth all along, a suspicion shared by the reader, his association with Satan is again underlined as he leaves the hospital 'como si fuera el diablo' (*OC*, *I*, 586). This last desperate attempt to prove his manhood is the most grotesque of all Bradomín's acts. At the core of his psyche lies a vanity and self-love that borders on narcissism. When the Carlist 'queen' suggests that he write his memoirs, he replies: 'Diría sólo mis pecados' (*OC*, *I*, 594). His overriding concern, moreover, is nearly always his effect on women. Even at the moment of his operation, he elaborates on the image he wants to present: 'Sólo pensé en la actitud que a lo adelante debía adoptar con las mujeres para hacer poética mi manquedad' (*OC*, *I*, 570). Pride, for Bradomín is a virtue, and there is repeated insistence in this *Sonata* of the nobility of his lineage, of his exemption from the rules that govern others, and of his supreme arrogance.

Although this *Sonata* is unusual in using no pre-texts, Valle nevertheless weaves into the narrative links with the other three *Sonatas*, and with the later play, *El Marqués de Bradomín*. María Antonieta de Volfani shares with Concha of the *Sonata de otoño* the breakdown of her marriage and subsequent adultery with Bradomín. When her husband is seriously wounded, she resolves to sacrifice the rest of her life to his care, in
the same way that Concha will devote her life to her ailing husband in *El Marqués de Bradomín*. There is an echo of the *Sonata de primavera* when Don Carlos tells Bradomín that he has been warned against him by the granddaughter of an old woman with five daughters, clearly the Princess Gaetani, and the allusion to Bradomín as the ‘diablo’ reminds us of his satanic behaviour in the same Sonata. The *Sonata de estío* is also recalled when Bradomín recognises one of the prisoners he meets as the Russian who was with Niña Chole in Mexico, and the incestuous relationship between La Niña Chole and her father is echoed in Montenegro’s feelings for Maximina. In addition, an autobiographical element lies in the amputation of Bradomín’s arm.

As a Don Juan figure, Bradomín is a parody. Valle does not take him seriously, but pokes fun at him, as he does at most of the characters in *Femeninas* and the *Sonatas*. Although there is little or no humour for the characters involved in these stories, Valle’s treatment of them takes the form of a gentle send-up, an approach that will eventually evolve into the harsher device of the *esperpento*, and will highlight the absurdity of his characters. This changing role of humour provides yet another link between Valle’s early pieces and his mature work. José Alberich expresses surprise at the neglect of the extent and function of ‘esta dimension humorística’ in the *Sonatas*.  

Whilst the presentation of the *Sonatas* in the format of *Memorias*, and their concentration on a central male figure are departures from Valle’s previous style, the continuing importance of the role played by women serves as a significant connecting link with *Femeninas* and the earlier short stories about women. Moreover, Bradomín’s narcissistic self-absorption, at times bordering on the effeminate, echoes the weakness of character of the male lovers in *Femeninas*. However ineffectual the figure of the lover, it nevertheless continues to usurp that of the traditional husband and father, just as the libertine woman replaces that of the devoted Catholic wife and mother.
The theme of illicit sex that is central to *Femeninas* also dominates the *Sonatas*, but its sensuality has become much more pronounced, and its effect heightened by its juxtaposition with religion and death. All the principal characters are very conscious of God, but Bradomín, perversely, is excited rather than discouraged by religious qualities in a woman. Far from representing a restraining influence on his desires, they act as an aphrodisiac. In *Sonata de otoño*, it is not just Concha’s body he must possess, he must also have her soul. The greater the religious commitment of the woman, the greater the challenge: in his pursuit of María Rosario, in *Sonata de primavera*, his desire is fanned by the sight of her in her habit. In his attempt to rival God, his behaviour becomes satanic. He is competing with religion in the same way as Pedro Pondal in ‘Octavia Santino’, but with greater urgency.

The presence of death in the *Sonatas* also serves to heighten the aphrodisiacal effect. For Bradomín, there is a morbid attraction about Concha’s pallor and pain in *Sonata de otoño*. His sexual encounter with Isabel assumes an extra dimension by the fact that Concha lies dead in the next room, in much the same way that his passion for Niña Chole during their night at the convent in *Sonata de estío* is further excited by the presence of one of the nuns dying nearby.

The interrelated themes of sex, religion and death that dominate the *Sonatas* will continue into the works that follow, along with the elements of superstition, violence, and horror that characterised many of Valle’s early short stories. Woman, moreover, will still hold central stage for the next few years, though in his next novel, *Flor de santidad*, the protagonist is a woman of a very different nature.

*Flor de santidad*

From the short stories through *Femeninas* to the *Sonatas*, Valle’s works had been increasing in length. *Flor de santidad* (1904) seemed even longer because of its division
into Estancias and chapters. It was certainly the product of the lengthiest of all processes of Valle’s texts. For this work, he would draw on no fewer than eleven stories, published from 1896 onwards. Unlike those incorporated into Sonata de estío and Sonata de otoño, however, there is no evidence that any of these pre-texts was written with the final version of Flor de santidad in mind. According to Serrano Alonso, though they share the same protagonist and atmosphere, each was an independent story, (p. 46). Even the short story ‘Adega’ (1897), whilst possibly the motor of the later novel, is not just a fragment, but complete in itself.\textsuperscript{11}

Flor de santidad has some obvious links with the Sonatas and the earlier Femeninas: the narrative continues to revolve around a woman, and the action takes place in Galicia. Here, however, the likeness effectively ends: Adega is very different from any of Valle’s previous female protagonists, and the ‘tono señorial’ of palace affairs has been replaced by rural life at subsistence level. While the rhythmic and musical modernista style continues, the decadent, sensual element has disappeared. The superficial, frivolous escapism, which differentiated Femeninas and the Sonatas from anything else that Valle had written, and brought accusations of a lack of concern for national matters, has been abandoned; the tone is now tragic. Moreover, the shift of emphasis from the aristocracy to the poor marks a distinct change in Valle’s approach, and evidences his defence of and affection for the underdog, and his admiration for the authenticity of the simple peasant. It was in 1904 that José Ortega y Gasset expressed his exasperation with Valle’s ‘princesas rubias que hilan en ruecas de cristal’, and he anticipated a work on which he might exclaim: ‘He aquí que Don Ramón del Valle-Inclán se deja de bernardinas y nos cuenta cosas humanas, harto humanas.’\textsuperscript{12} The social awareness in Flor de santidad is evidence of such a change, and, as Dru Dougherty observes, ‘puso de manifiesto la unión de las dos grandes corrientes de fin de siglo en la ficción de Valle’.\textsuperscript{13} The poor take central stage here for the first time, though they are
not yet subjected to the harsh treatment that emerges in the plays of *El embrujado* and *Divinas palabras* that follow.

*Flor de santidad* has more in common with the realism of Valle’s early short stories of folklore, mystery, and superstition than with the fantasy of his stylised narratives of the aristocracy. Where the *Sonatas* follow the same lines as the second kind, *Flor de santidad* reflects the first, and although Valle’s peasants are presented here in a poetic light, unlike the characters in the *Sonatas*, they live in a real world. *Flor de santidad* also leans heavily on the concept of oral tradition. The subtitle, *Historia milenaria*, implies legend, with a basis in reality, but what Valle has done in this novel is to give his own perspective to a Bible story. According to Pío Baroja, far from representing a problem for Valle, this device afforded endless possibilities: ‘Decía que tomar un episodio de la Biblia y darle un aire nuevo, para él era un ideal.’14 The novel has, nevertheless, given rise to varying interpretations, including accusations of mockery and sacrilege.15 Rubia Barcia dismisses these opinions; he maintains that despite ample evidence of anticlericalism in his work, Valle was deeply religious.16 Adrian Montoro agrees; in his view: ‘Valle no pretendía cometer sacrilegio alguno ni tampoco burlarse de las creencias intranables de su pueblo.’17 It is true that over the years, like many intellectuals of his day, Valle became increasingly disenchanted with the Catholic Church, but he never mocked established values, nor did he scoff at folk superstitions or the intuitive behaviour of the Galician peasant. At the end of his life he was said to have claimed: ‘Yo creo que siempre he estado bien con Jesucristo.’18

A previous short story, also called ‘Flor de santidad’, and published in 1901, was similar to the earlier ‘Adega’, but the protagonist’s name was changed to Minia; the same name was used in ‘Lluvia’, in 1897. For some reason, Valle reverted to the original name in the novel of 1904. *Flor de santidad* has the elements of a folk tale,
with echoes of the Cinderella tradition. An orphan, taken in by an innkeeper and his wife who treat her badly, Ádega humbly accepts her lot, and spends her days on the hillsides, tending sheep. When a pilgrim arrives, looking for shelter, and is rejected by the innkeeper’s wife, Ádega offers him a place in the stable where she sleeps. Deeply religious, she is convinced that he is a saint: the dogs lick his hand, a sure endorsement of his holiness, and when he curses the innkeepers, he does so in the name of God. It is only when he starts to undress Ádega that, for the reader, the illusion of his holiness disappears. His sexual appetite and the earlier reference to him as a ‘negra figura’ associate him more closely with the Devil than with God.

Ádega, however, lacks insight; innocent and otherworldly, she is overwhelmed by the privilege that she believes she is receiving, and readily succumbs, ‘como una virgen mártir que se dispusiese a morir decapitada’ (OC, I, 612). The predator-victim relationship is highlighted by the description of their respective hands: ‘Sobre sus manos velludas revoloteaban las manos de la pastora como dos palomas asustadas’ (OC, I, 612). The description recalls a passage from Sonata de primavera, in which the princess’s hands ‘revoloteaban como albas palomas’ (OC, I, 338), and the association of the dove with the Holy Ghost echoes the image of the bird sitting on María Rosario’s shoulder, like ‘la gracia y el misterio de una alegoría’ (OC, I, 338). Later, Ádega will have a vision of the Devil whose ‘manos velludas’ feel her breasts as he attempts to seduce her, and she will see her encounter with the pilgrim in a different light. At the time, convinced that the pilgrim is none other than Christ himself, she subsequently claims that she will bear the Son of God.

Initially, the peasants believe her visions and see her as a kind of saludadora; later, however, members of the household at the Pazo de Brandeso are less credulous, and accuse her of sacrilege. They do not mock her, but exercise compassion: seeing her as a victim of ‘mal de ojo’, they take her to be exorcised by the abbot. His words have
an immediate effect on the peasant simplicity of her belief: ‘Aquel latín litúrgico le infundía un pavor religioso. Lo escuchó llorando, y llorando pasó la velada’ (OC, I, 662). Sixteen years later, Valle will echo this episode in *Divinas palabras*, when the words of the verger have the same effect on a credulous crowd (OC, II, 593-94).

Following her exorcism, Ádega joins the pilgrimage at Santa Baya de Cristamilde where she is taken to be cleansed by immersion in the sea. The ‘cure’ fails, and her pregnancy is confirmed.

Ramos draws parallels between Ádega and Valle’s earlier women protagonists. She claims that they are linked by their eroticism and desire for freedom. Whilst it is implicit that Ádega would like to escape the tyranny of the innkeepers, evidence of eroticism in her behaviour is hard to establish. Ramos maintains that ‘el fervor religioso y la pasión erótica se fusionan en el encuentro carnal de la pastora y el caminante, constituyendo esta obediencia instintiva y despreocupada a sus impulsos sexuales el nexo principal entre Ádega y las heroínas de *Corte de amor*’ (p. 173). Given the cruel, predatory nature of the majority of the women in this collection, actively seeking sexual excitement, and whose pursuit of pleasure is far from an ‘obediencia instintiva y despreocupada’, such a link is tenuous. There is nothing sinful or self-indulgent about Ádega’s response to the pilgrim’s sexual advances.

Ramos also associates Ádega with the protagonists of ‘Beatriz’ (1903) and ‘Mi hermana Antonia’ (1909), who both fall under the influence of a man of religion. This connection is equally unconvincing. Each of these women is an unwilling victim in a relationship that has clear satanic connotations. Ádega, on the contrary, is not a victim in the same sense: she is not violated like Beatriz, but willingly seduced, albeit in the spirit of a martyr. At this point, for her, the pilgrim is a holy man, and her sexual encounter thereby a religious act. Nor is her ‘possession’ the anguished, hysterical result of a demonic encounter, but a serene belief in her religious calling. It is as
difficult to relate her to these two girls as to the 'possessed' characters in 'Un ejemplo' (1905) and 'Milón de la Arnoya' (1914), who, whilst peasants like Ádega, are wild and aggressive, and shunned by society. Ádega, by comparison, is quiet and submissive; her behaviour at Santa Baya is very different from the hysteria of the other 'endemoniadas'.

A third point of comparison made by Ramos is that Ádega, like all Valle's earlier female protagonists, is beautiful. Her beauty, however, is not the kind associated with generations of noble breeding, but a reflection of her simple, inner serenity; nor is she conscious of its power, nor does she seek to exploit it. Ramos' conclusion, therefore, that 'Ádega, así, es una síntesis de los diversos tipos de heroínas de Valle-Inclán' (p. 175), also fails to convince. Although she carries faint echoes of women from previous stories, Ádega is a woman who sins, but innocently, making her substantially different from any of Valle's creations to date, and in most ways, unique. Perhaps surprisingly, she makes no reappearance in any future work, though there are shades of her gentle innocence in the Niña of Divinas palabras in 1920, and again in 1922, in Sabelita of Cara de Plata.

More familiar in Flor de santidad are the background, the atmosphere, and many of the elements that were characteristic of the first kind of Valle’s early short stories. There is the same juxtaposition of a pastoral idyll with the harsh reality of events: when Ádega discovers the murdered body of her pilgrim, with his ‘guedeja llena de sangre y de tierra, pegada sobre la yerta faz’, above her ‘los pájaros cantaban saludando el amanecer del día’ (OC, 1, 637-38). Acts of cruelty and violence are described with the same macabre detail of the early stories: as the fire is stoked to sacrifice the lamb, the innkeeper’s son works callously: ‘cruel y adusto, arrojo el cordero en medio de la hoguera. [...] Los balidos se levantaron de entre las llamas, prolongadas, dolorosas, penetrantes’ (OC, 1, 636). There are likewise moments of fear: when Ádega and the innkeeper’s wife return to the inn after their night-time attempt to
lift the spell from the sick sheep, they face the frightening figure of the innkeeper’s son:
‘Destacábase sobre el rojizo resplandor de la jara que restallaba en el hogar, con un
pañuelo atado a la frente y los brazos desnudos, llenos de sangre’ (OC, I, 627).

Anti-clerical elements of the early stories are repeated here too, in references to
the abbot’s liking for attractive women (OC, I, 619), and to his interference in local
practices (OC, I, 623). The use of the grotesque, and descriptions that approach
dehumanisation also continue to figure: the innkeeper’s wife has a ‘cabeza de bruja’
(OC, I, 615) and ‘brazos de momia’ (OC, I, 617); the treasure hunter’s eyes are
‘lucientes como un can adolecido’ (OC, I, 652), his hands ‘como las de un espectro’
(OC, I, 653). The pilgrims in search of a cure at Santa Baya, described as ‘un cordón de
orugas’, are depicted in merciless detail: ‘Unos son ciegos, otros tullidos, otros
lazarados. […] Una mujer da el pecho a un niño cubierto de lepra, otra empuja el carro
de un paralítico. En las alforjas de un asno viejo y lleno de mataduras, van dos
monstruos. Las cabezas son deformes, las manos palmípedas’ (OC, I, 664). This
passage recalls the milder portrayal of the poor in Sonata de primavera (OC, I, 348-49),
and will have an echo in 1907, in ‘Los pobres de Dios’, one of the poems in the
collection Aromas de leyenda:

Por los caminos florecidos
Va la caravana de los desvalidos,
Ciegos, leprosos y tullidos. (OC, II, 1212)

The poor in Romance de lobos, in 1908, will also be presented in much the same way:
‘Patriarcas haraposos, mujeres escuálidas, mozos lisiados […]. Racimo de gusanos que
se arrastra por el polvo de los caminos’ (OC, II, 464).

The element of dreams and visions, introduced into Sonata de otoño by the
reference to Concha’s premonition of death, assumes greater importance in Flor de
santidad, and will play a small but significant part in Valle’s work from now on.
Ádega's conviction of her chosen status is based primarily on her belief that: 'Ella tan sólo había visto a Dios Nuestro Señor' (OC, 1, 613), and is confirmed by more holy revelations that follow. Her life takes on the nature of a perpetual dream until her later vision of the Devil prompts her first moments of self-doubt and threatens to negate all her previous visions.

The part played by the supernatural, and the overlap between popular religion and superstition, both elements of Valle’s early short stories, are developed further in Flor de santidad, where a thin veneer of Christianity barely conceals the pagan foundations of Galician beliefs. The innkeeper’s wife doubts Ádega’s conviction that the pilgrim is Christ, since he walks alone; when her sheep fall sick, she sees it, subsequently, as the effect of his ‘mal de ojo’. Her instinctive reaction is to seek the advice of a saludador. His instructions are to take the sheep to drink at a fountain on a crossroads where there is an oak tree, at midnight, when the moon is new. All these are accepted elements of ‘white’ magic used to counteract the effects of black magic. The episode is taken almost verbatim from ‘Égloga’, a short story of 1902, which appeared again in 1908 in the collection Jardín novelesco. Although the abbot is the first to be approached to address Ádega’s demonic possession, the ‘cure’ recommended for her ‘ramo cativo’ is seven immersions in the sea at Santa Baya de Cristamilde. Both the reference to the oak tree and to the healing power of water recall observations made by Valle in 1891, on his visit to the convent of Gondarín. He describes ‘la encina sagrada a la cual la superstición popular aún concede no sé qué hechiceras virtudes; [...] el murmurar gentil de la fuente milagrosa que brota al pie del sagrado baptisterio y cuyas aguas van a beber las mujeres que sienten heridas de mal cativo’ (OC, II, 1339).

Alongside superstition, the belief in legend and folklore is seen as a basic element of rural Galician culture in Flor de santidad, and oral tradition plays an important part in the narrative. One favourite tale is that of buried treasure, a story that
Ádega repeats in wonder, convinced of its truth: ‘Entre los penedos y el camino que va por bajo, hay dinero para siete reinados, y días de un rey habrán de llegar en que las ovejas, escarbando los descubrirán’ (OC, I, 652). Her words are an almost verbatim repetition of those of the young girl in the third of Valle’s ‘Cartas galicianas’, ‘Por la tierra saliniense. El castillo de Lobeira’, published in 1891 (OC, II, 1349).

Ádega’s account of the legend introduces a story within a story, a device that Valle will use repeatedly in this novel. When a group of shepherds gathers to listen to Ádega’s announcement of her holy condition, each has his own story to relate, not just of ‘milagros y prodigios’, but of ‘historias de ermitanos, de tesoros ocultos, de princesas encantadas, de santas apariciones’. One old man has many tales to tell and recounts them as real events, personal experiences that happened to him as a boy. A favourite story is of a Moorish princess whose beauty bewitches passers-by and who, at her side, ‘tenía abierto un cofre de plata lleno de ricas joyas que rebrillaban al sol’ (OC, I, 640-41); this again recalls the story told by the girl on Valle’s visit to the castle at Lobeira, of a beautiful woman ‘con una tienda de cosas muy bonitas, tijeras, pendientes, anillos, peines, todo de oro y plata’ (OC, II, 1349-50).

Several of Valle’s early short stories had been told in this personal way, either related in the first person, implying an autobiographical basis, or introducing a ‘frame’ narrator, from whom Valle had learned the story. Brought up in a traditional Galician family, storytelling was an important part of his upbringing. He claims to have heard stories such as ‘¡Ah de mis muertos!’ (1892) from his grandmother (OC, II, 1417), and in ‘Cartas galicianas’ he recalls his ‘nodriza’, who entertained him with ‘historias de aparecidos’ (OC, II, 1343). His major source, however, is Micaela la Galana, whose stories, he remembers, ‘me asustaron de noche durante los años de mi infancia, y por eso no las he olvidado’ (OC, I, 207). It is versions of these ‘historias de santos, de almas en pena, de duendes y de ladrones’ that he then retells with his own personal slant.
In much the same way, Valle presents Flor de santidad as a legend, an ‘historia milenaria’, and although we are aware that events take place in the recent past, since Ádega’s parents died in 1853, the ‘Año del hambre’, the atmosphere is that of a remote era, and the setting a pseudo-archaic Galicia, steeped in ancient traditions. The effect is one of timelessness. Characters are seen as age-old: Ádega is likened to a ‘zagala de las leyendas piadosas’ (OC, I, 606); an old man resembles ‘los santos de un antiguo retablo’ (OC, I, 622), and the sheep appear ‘como en las viejas eglogas’ (OC, I, 621).

The Galician background, the setting for many of Valle’s short stories, has now become a strong physical presence, its way of life idealised into a pastoral idyll:

Las ovejas rebullían en torno, sobre el lindero del camino pacían las vacas de trémulas y rosadas ubres, y el mastín, a modo de viejo adusto, ladraba al recental que le importunaba con infantiles retozos. (OC, I, 606)

As well as references to places such as Santiago, to the rivers Sil and Miño, to the local feria at Brandeso, there are frequent reminders of the physical elements of Galicia: its winding roads and ‘antiguas casas feudales’, the sound of bells and the presence of wolves, the wind in the pine trees and the waves breaking on the shore. Constant emphasis is laid on rural culture: popular sayings and refrains, the singing of the copla, Ádega’s ‘voz cantarina’, the wearing of ‘madreñas’, a girl with a single cow on a rope, the ‘trasgo’ in the chimney, the begging for alms, and the impoverished mother seeking an employer for her child.

In addition to links with Valle’s earlier literature, Flor de santidad has equally important pointers to future works. The picture of rural life, briefly glimpsed in Sonata de otoño, and afforded but one short description in Sonata de primavera is now brought into close focus, and individuals, no longer within the confines of the short story but set against the background of an immense canvas, crowd onto the scene. The limited number of characters in Femeninas saw a substantial increase in the Sonatas, but the
major innovation in *Flor de santidad* is the introduction of vast numbers of minor characters, many of whom remain nameless, but who are described in much greater detail than before. From the comfort of the *pazo* to life at subsistence level, the narrative of *Flor de santidad* embraces a cross-section of the community, albeit mostly limited to the peasant class. According to Sender, Valle ‘acumula sus gozos de rapsodia sobre gañanes, campesinos, pastores, ermitanos, bandidos, pescadores, guerrilleros. Y su admiración era para el hombre desprovisto de circunstancias adjetivas. [...] Sus santos lo eran al margen del altar y de la ortodoxia’. Brought together here for the first time, these characters and types are beginning to people Valle’s fictional universe, and will reappear in many of his later works.

Amongst these characters is the blind beggar who will feature repeatedly in subsequent works. His condition was a source of continuing interest for Valle, who discusses blindness at some length in the later *La lámpara maravillosa*, and recounts his memories of an old blind woman who, when he was a child, told stories in his house. A blind woman will be at the centre of his first one-act play, ‘Tragedia de ensueño’. In *Voces de gesta*, blindness is the underlying theme, and a blind poet will later be the protagonist of his first *esperpento*, *Luces de Bohemia*.

The blind man and his guide would have been familiar figures on the roads from the Middle Ages onwards, not just in Galicia, but throughout Spain, and had become a traditional pair on the French stage before the author of *Lazarillo de Tormes* established them as part of Spain’s literary tradition. There existed a body of stories that portrayed the blind man as a free spirit, living on the fringes of society, a teller of tales, often ‘seeing’ more than the sighted. In *La lámpara maravillosa* (1916), Valle underlines the limitations of physical sight: ‘Son de tierra los ojos, y son menguados sus certezas’; he sees the special vision of the blind symbolised in the eyes of Greek statues: ‘Las pupilas ciegas de los dioses en los mármoles griegos simbolizan esta suprema visión que
aprisiona en un círculo todo cuanto mira' (OC, I, 1959). In 1920, in Luces de Bohemia, the blind Max Estrella echoes this view: ‘El ciego se entera mejor de las cosas del mundo. los ojos son unos ilusionados embusteros’ (OC, II, 916), and the blind man in Divinas palabras scorns the stupidity of the Civil Guards: ‘Éstos son más ciegos que los que andamos a las escuras’ (OC, II, 551). Blindness traditionally went hand in hand with poverty, but since it was also frequently allied to holiness, begging carried no social stigma. By extension, all poor were seen in the same light, and the expectation that the rich should succour the poor was part of the natural order. In Flor de santidad, the beggar curses the wealthy who fail to fulfil this expectation: ‘¡Ay de la gente que no tiene caridad!’ (OC, I, 630).

Valle’s blind man is characteristically a friendly rogue, a fraud and a trickster, with a marked sexual appetite, and usually treated with humour and tolerance. He first appears as early as 1892 in the short article ‘Las verbenas’, as ‘un ciego ladino que guiado por un perrillo encamisado y sarnoso, circula por todas partes implorando la caridad para una hija enferma, que nunca tuvo el muy truhan’ (OC, II, 1397). In Flor de santidad he is again referred to as ‘un ciego mendicante y ladino’, whose malicious character is belied by a sober appearance: ‘Aquél viejo prosero tiene un grave perfil monástico. pero el pico de su montera parda, y su boca rasurada y aldeana, semejante a una gran sandía abierta, guardan todavía más malicia que sus decires’ (OC, I, 619). His stories and his light-hearted pursuit of sex are always a source of merriment to those around him, and introduce the only element of humour into an otherwise serious text. The name that he is given here, Electus, identifies him as the blind man who will reappear in six of Valle’s subsequent works, where he assumes the title of El Ciego de Gondar. He is the most consistent and clearly defined of Valle’s minor characters, and will assume an increasingly important role.

Flor de santidad marks a temporary halt in a period of prose writing for Valle.
The noticeably dramatic element in his early work, his predilection for dialogue and the studied theatrical behaviour of many of the characters in his stories, will translate easily into the tentative theatre that follows this first stage of his work. Even in *Flor de santidad*, the division of the narrative into *Estancias* and its further subdivisions into chapters resembles the format of acts and scenes in a play, and many of the descriptive passages are of the kind that will evolve into the elaborate stage directions that become a distinctive feature of his theatre. Recurring characters provide a continuing link, and certain themes and motifs that established themselves at the beginning of his work will persist throughout his literature. Death and violence remain constants, and Galicia, physically rooted in place names, continues to provide the backcloth of legend and superstition to much of his output for the next fifteen years.
Notes to Chapter 2

1 See Madrid, p. 307.

2 See Madrid, p. 63.


5 Madrid, p. 33, quotes Valle from *Alma Española*, 27 December 1903.

6 Madrid, p. 292, quotes from a lecture given by Valle, ‘Semblanzas de literatos españoles’.


11 The name Adega is written without an accent in the short story. In *Flor de santidad* it is written as Ádega.


15 Ramos cites Antonio Risco, Gerald Flynn Cox and Adelaida López Buenaño, p. 175.
16 Rubia Barcia, p. 256.


18 Cited in Montoro, p. 253.

19 Sender, p. 12.
CHAPTER 3

THE BEGINNINGS OF THEATRE

It is surprising, given the volume and variety of Valle-Inclán’s output, as well as the theatricality of much of his prose work, that by 1906 he had barely made any attempt at drama. Seventeen years into his literary career, he had written only one play. Such an omission is even more remarkable in the light of his very active interest in the theatre.

After his return from Mexico in 1893, Valle spent much of his time in cafés, surrounded not just by other writers and intellectuals but by theatre directors and actors. He even harboured personal ambitions as an actor. According to Francisco Madrid, acting was what he wanted to do, though Valle rather derisively puts his decision to act down to financial hardship. Jacinto Benavente accordingly created a role for him in his play La comida de las fieras, and in 1898 Valle made a tentative debut as Teófilo Everit at the Teatro Comedia in Madrid. The reviews of the first night were so negative that, initially, he refused to perform again. He was finally persuaded to go on stage the following night, but the play ran for only two more performances. Valle’s only other attempt at acting was the following year in Los Reyes en el destierro, an arrangement by Alejandro Sawa of a novel by Daudet.

Shortly after this, the amputation of his left arm in 1899, following an incident with Manuel Bueno at the Café de la Montaña, destroyed any further aspirations to a career on the stage. Notwithstanding, Valle remained closely connected to the theatre; he would subsequently become involved in directing and, in 1907, he married the
actress Josefina Blanco. Since he had begun writing in 1888, however, apart from two
one-act plays, both of which appeared in collections of short stories, his only attempt at
drama had been *Cenizas*, in 1899. Even this was the reworking of the short story,
‘Octavia Santino’, itself a fifth version of the original ‘El gran obstáculo’.

*Cenizas*

‘El gran obstáculo’ had reappeared successively as ‘Caritativa’, ‘La confesión’,
‘Octavia’, and finally, in *Femeninas*, as ‘Octavia Santino’. The connecting character in
this developing narrative is the young poet, Pedro Pondal, who begins as an aggressive,
rather threatening figure in ‘El gran obstáculo’, but by ‘Octavia Santino’ has become a
weak, clinging lover, desperate in the face of Octavia’s imminent death. The last version
of the short story is brief and simple, involving only the two characters. *Cenizas* follows
the same basic narrative line, but is longer and fuller. It is divided into three acts, of ten,
thirteen, and ten scenes, with the symmetry and the use of the number three that will
later become a characteristic of Valle’s theatre. It has the same limited setting of the
short story – all the action takes place in Octavia’s room – but the claustrophobic
atmosphere is somewhat relieved in the play by the introduction of seven new
characters. Their entrances and exits help to reduce the stasis of the short story, in which
there is barely any physical movement: Octavia is bed-bound throughout and Pedro
does little more than hover at her side. In the play, Octavia is mobile and Pedro’s
movements become almost frenzied.

Five of these additional characters, however, bring new conflicts to an already
intense atmosphere. The priest, Padre Rojas, not only clashes with Pedro in his
insistence that he leave Octavia so that her soul may be saved, but also argues with the
doctor, whose attitude towards the clergy is quietly hostile. Doña Soledad, Octavia’s
mother, clashes with Pedro for the same reason as the priest, and, in addition not only
has more than one confrontation with Sabel, Pedro’s faithful old servant, but engages in some highly charged exchanges with her own daughter. She brings with her Octavia’s daughter, another, albeit innocent, source of conflict, since Pedro regards her as a rival for Octavia’s love. María Antonia, a friend who comes to visit, only succeeds in upsetting Octavia, by making her even more aware of her social isolation. Finally, the figure of Octavia’s husband represents a constant threat in the background, though by the time he makes an appearance, Pedro has abandoned Octavia, who has just died. The husband’s name, curiously, is Don Juan Manuel, a tenuous link with the Montenegro of the *Sonata de otoño*, though in the final theatrical version of this story, *El yermo de las almas* (1908), he is simply referred to as El Marido. The other two new characters, Sabel and the doctor, introduce a note of realism and basic common sense into a situation that otherwise borders on hysteria.

More significant than the individual conflicts introduced by each of these characters is the resultant rift that they produce between the lovers themselves. Unlike the short story, in which the only promise that Octavia seeks to exact from Pedro is not to allow her to die alone, in the play she begs him not to let her die before making confession. This also involves a reversal of roles, since, in the story, Octavia had rejected the idea of confession, which came from Pedro, whereas in the play it is Octavia who is anxious to repent before she dies, and Pedro who shows resistance. Octavia is torn by indecision: to save her soul by forsaking her love, or to die in mortal sin. Finally, coerced by her mother and the priest, and for the sake of her child, she accepts that her only solution is to beg Pedro to leave. By complying with her wishes, albeit reluctantly, Pedro unwittingly delivers the final blow: perversely, Octavia sees his departure as the ultimate betrayal. This ending produces another reversal of roles: in the short story, as Octavia dies, she reveals to Pedro that she has been unfaithful; in the play, it is she who feels betrayed.
There are other differences between the short story and the play. The story presents the lovers in their own exclusive world, apparently isolated from outside influences. By incorporating other characters, the dramatised version puts the couple’s relationship into a social context and highlights the conventional attitudes of the time. Ostracized by family and friends, Octavia and Pedro are subjected to pressures that are absent in the narrative version. Their behaviour is subsequently more extreme: Octavia’s sadness develops into near-hysteria and her behaviour with her daughter becomes highly irrational, while Pedro’s melancholy frequently turns to petulance. The play, however, like the short story, still focuses on character; Valle’s later plays will lose this psychological interest in the individual and adopt a broader approach.

A significant addition to the play is the motif of the letter: just as she is about to leave with her mother for her marital home, Octavia snatches a bundle of letters to take with her. Her mother, thinking that they are from Pedro, takes advantage of a moment when Octavia is distracted, and, with the help of the priest, throws them on the fire. When Octavia realises what they are doing, she dies. Too late, her mother discovers that the letters were from her, lovingly kept over the years. The letter motif is a familiar echo from two earlier short stories, ‘La condesa de Cela’ and ‘Eulalia’, where letters play a significant part. It reappeared in Sonata de otoño, and Valle would subsequently use it again in the dramatised version, El Marqués de Bradomín.

There is no evidence in Cenizas of the element of evil that in ‘Octavia Santino’ takes the form of a huge, malevolent cat, which: ‘de pelambre chamuscada y amarillenta. […] despertóse, enarcó el lomo erizado, sacó las uñas, giró en torno con diabólico maleficio los ojos fosforescentes y fantásticos, y huyó’ (OC, I, 45). Absent too is the graphic description of Octavia’s death at the end of the short story: quiso hablar, y su boca sumida y reseca por la fiebre se contrajo horriblemente; giraron en las cuencas, que parecían hundirse por momentos, las pupilas
dilatadas y vidriosas; volviósele azulencía la faz; espumajearon los labios, y el cuerpo enflaquecido estremecióse, como si un soplo helado lo corriese (OC, I, 47).

The absence of the grotesque treatment may have been because this kind of ‘close-up’ lends itself better to narrative, but it is, nevertheless, a device that Valle reinstates in the second version of this play; regarded as a cinematographic technique, it would become one of the major characteristics of his stage directions thereafter.

The play also shows signs of a developing perspective in Valle’s style. The negative view of religion and society presented by a priest whose creed is one of punishment and suffering, and of a mother whose self-righteous hypocrisy embodies the moral fanaticism of the Spanish bourgeois woman, whilst not new, were absent in the short story; here they are heavily emphasised. These two characters introduce a socio-religious dimension into the play, and represent the traditional bourgeois restraining influences brought to bear on the erring woman. They are, however, so stereotyped that they approach caricature. Between them they bully Octavia into submission; their hostility to Octavia’s situation, camouflaged in honeyed terms of charity, is relentless to the point of cruelty. Such patent anticlericalism and derision of bourgeois values were likely to meet with fierce opposition from the theatregoing public of the day.

The publication of *Cenizas* was financed by some of Valle’s friends, shortly after he had lost his arm. They also funded its stage production at the Teatro Lara, on 12 December 1899, to raise money for an artificial limb. According to Rubia Barcia, however, the performance was a disaster. It is not clear whether the new arm ever materialised. If it did, Valle never used it. Anecdotal evidence claims that he preferred to be known as ‘el segundo gran manco de las letras españolas’.
El yermo de las almas

Cenizas was not the definitive version of the story of Octavia and Pedro. It would be reworked once more, and the sequence of repetition of this story would culminate in El yermo de las almas in 1908. This version was not staged until 1915, when it suffered a similar lack of success to that of its predecessor. The new play has the same cast as Cenizas, with one minor addition, and the action is essentially unchanged. It is however, more than just a reconstruction of the earlier play. The first noticeable difference is that it is preceded by a prologue. One of the reasons offered for the failure of Cenizas was that Octavia’s original decision to leave home is unexplained. The addition of the prologue clarifies the situation: the discovery of Pedro’s letters by Octavia’s husband has brought the relationship to crisis point; it is now that Octavia decides to move in with Pedro. The prologue, however, does more than simply explain: by including Octavia’s act of coming in from the world outside, then failing to leave, it underlines the sense of confinement that characterises the life of the protagonist in her exchange of one prison for another. The play thereafter follows much the same lines as Cenizas, divided again into three Episodios, though not subdivided into scenes, and again using just one set for the main part of the play. It is noticeable, however, that some of the action of El yermo de las almas derives directly from ‘Octavia Santino’, rather than from Cenizas.

The most significant difference between the two plays lies in the stage directions. In Cenizas, they are brief and practical, whereas in El Yermo de las almas, whilst the dialogue remains naturalistic, the directions are lengthy, descriptive and novelistic in style, more relevant to the reader than the theatre director:

\[ \text{La expresión trágica y obstinada de sus ojos, parece crecer. Y acaso en aquel momento, para ella supremo, juzga que hubiera sido mejor morir, que arrastrar la larga cadena de los días y de las penas! (OC, II, 90)} \]
This technique reflects the increasingly elaborate stage directions that Valle uses in the first two *Comedias bárbaras*, written in the intervening years. They will become a major characteristic of his dramatic style, and a basis for the argument that his plays were ‘novelas dialogadas’, intended for reading, not for staging. The description of Octavia's final moments follows these lines, with a revival of the grotesque element that had been part of ‘Octavia Santino’, but omitted from *Cenizas*:

> Con el último esfuerzo para incorporarse, la cabeza de Octavia rueda fuera del canapé, y queda colgando: El pelo toca la alfombra: La garganta gorgotea un gemido ronco: Parece alargarse por momentos en una gran blancura livida, en un dislocamiento trágico. (OC, II, 98)

The stage directions also bring a new note of irony into the presentation of the characters. In her introduction to *El yermo de las almas. El Marqués de Bradomín*, Angela Ena Bordonada draws attention to the theatricality of the interchange between the doctor and the priest in *El yermo de las almas*: ‘se asemejan como dos máscaras. Al oírlos se adivina su arte de viejos comediantes’ (OC, II, 65). She also points out the melodrama of Octavia’s behaviour: ‘se cubre el rostro llorando con el llanto nervioso de las actrices’ (OC, II, 73). Once again Valle is re-using earlier material: this last phrase will be remembered as that used to describe the countess’s behaviour in ‘La condesa de Cela’ (OC, I, 23).

Finally, a minor motif that has been incorporated into this version is that of roses. The flowers, picked on Octavia’s last visit to the garden, now fading in a vase, carry the obvious symbolism of mortality; they are, in addition, an echo of the roses gathered by the boy’s mother in ‘El miedo’, and by Concha in *Sonata de otoño*.
El Marqués de Bradomín

Between the publication of Cenizas and its later version El yermo de las almas, Valle wrote another play that would bear a similar stamp. El Marqués de Bradomín, published in 1907, was essentially another dramatic version of a previously published story. Sonata de otoño, however, was much longer than Cenizas, and its conversion into a play was more complicated and involved greater changes. Like Cenizas, El Marqués de Bradomín is divided into three Jornadas: a number increasingly favoured by Valle.

The first episode from the novel, in which Bradomín sets out to visit Concha after receiving her letter, has been cut; the play opens instead with the Brandeso palace, thereby shifting the emphasis from Bradomín to Concha, though somewhat surprisingly she is now referred to simply as La Dama. It is now she, however, who receives a letter, and she who dominates the action. Bradomín is relegated to second place; he does not even appear until the end of the first Jornada, and only figures in the final part of the third. In addition, the importance assumed by a first-person narrator recalling the past, all but disappears in the transposition of these memoirs into the immediacy of a dramatic present. Bradomín comes in, moreover, for unexpectedly fierce criticism from Isabel, whose attitude is very different from the one she expressed in Sonata de otoño. Her accusation of ‘Eres el más admirable do los donjuanes: Feo, sentimental y católico’ also carries quite the opposite connotations from the very same words uttered in praise by La Marquesa de Tor in Sonata de invierno. (OC, II, 148 and OC, I, 596).

The setting, with the removal of the initial episode, is the same as that of the Sonata: all the action takes place either inside the palace or in its gardens. Unlike El yermo de las almas, however, where Octavia comes in from the outside world to a different kind of confinement, the reverse is true of El Marqués de Bradomín, where the movement is outward. The predominance of exterior scenes relieves the claustrophobic atmosphere that underlined the Sonata de otoño, as well as both dramatic versions of
'Octavia Santino'. With characteristic symmetry, *Jornadas* 1 and 3 are in the gardens, and the second *Jornada* inside the palace, though this *Jornada*, too, is linked to the outside by taking place in the *mirador* that overlooks the gardens. The gardens, in their turn, provide a connection with the outside world, already explored in *Flor de santidad*, and increasing in importance in Valle’s work.

As in *Cenizas*, the action is less static than in the narrative version: Concha is more mobile than in the *Sonata*, and the intensity of the love relationship is again attenuated by the inclusion of new characters. The role of Sabel in *Cenizas* is echoed by Madre Cruces in *El Marqués de Bradomín*. Reminiscent of the part she played in the short story ‘Eulalia’, her role here is of both confidante and sympathiser, but her Celestina-like function belies the religious connotations of her name and title: it is she who acts as go-between, bringing the letter from Bradomín, and she is subjected to the same kind of anxious questions from Concha as from Eulalia in the earlier story. The housekeeper, Doña Malvina, also forms part of this supportive element that was absent in the novel. When Don Juan Manuel Montenegro reappears, he puts Bradomín even further in the shade. A man of action, he stands in stark contrast to his bookish, rather sedentary nephew. The abbot is more prominent here than in the novel, and though mild by comparison with the priest in *Cenizas* and *El yermo de las almas*, he is seen in a more critical light than in the *Sonata*: his weakness for chocolate and cakes (*OC, II, 113*) echoes the gluttony of the priest in ‘El rey de la máscara’, and the pleasure he takes in hunting is an element that will be developed further in the *Comedias bárbaras*. His sly manner fools nobody: his hypocritical enquiry about Bradomín’s presence in the palace earns the comment of ‘¡Qué gran raposo!’ from Doña Malvina (*OC, II, 146*). His reputation for womanising elicits an equally critical comment from the blind man: thinking that La Quemada is a young girl, he suggests that she would be good ‘Para el señor Abade’ (*OC, II, 117*). A new character, the sailor Abelardo, who carries Concha
to her husband and children and brings them all back to the Brandesó palace, will figure
again in Romance de lobos, providing a link with work to come.

More innovative, however, is a further substantial increase in the cast list
through the introduction of a number of new characters who are neither part of the
extended household, nor related in any way to the main narrative. Seen only from a
distance in Sonata de otoño, and in more detail in Sonata de primavera in the scene
where María Rosario is dispensing charity, a small group of beggars gathers at the
garden gates to receive alms. The poor, stripped of any earlier trappings of idealism, are
brought briefly into the foreground, and now appear in close-up: each of the beggars has
a name, a history, and the outline of a personality. These, and others like them, are the
characters who had formed the basis of Flor de santidad, three years earlier, and their
inclusion here links, for the first time, the two worlds of Valle’s characters: that of the
aristocracy and its servants, and that of the marginalized poor. By introducing the other
extreme of the social scale, it brings a note of realism into the scene and broadens the
perspective, balancing the enclosed atmosphere of feudal life in the pazo, and its unreal,
artificial atmosphere, with life in the real world. The presence of these characters has
the effect of reducing the decadent element that dominated the Sonata, and their
inclusion indicates the growing importance of the peasant class for Valle, already
established in Flor de santidad, and marks a move away from the individual towards a
more collective theatre.

Several of these characters, including El Manco de Céltigos, El Tullido de
Céltigos, Dominga de Gómez, El Ciego de Gondar, El Manco de Gondar, El Morcego
and his wife, and Paula la Reina will appear again in Romance de lobos, where the poor,
as a class, play a major role, anticipating their even greater dramatic importance in the
later plays of El embrujado and Divinas palabras. Also part of this gathering of
mendicants in El Marqués de Bradomín is Ádega, the central character in Flor de
santidad, here known as Ádega la Inocente. In a device increasingly employed by Valle, the exclamation she makes here: ‘¡Ay de la gente que no tiene caridad! [...] ¡Como ha de castigarla Dios Nuestro Señor!’ (OC, II, 108), is almost identical to that made by the pilgrim in Flor de santidad (OC, I, 630), and Ádega’s response in the novel: ‘Ya los castiga, señor. Mire cómo secan los castaños... Mire cómo perecen las vides... ¡Esas plagas vienen de muy alto!’ (OC, II, 108), is repeated, verbatim, in El Marqués de Bradomín, by another of the beggars, old Minguina (OC, II, 108). In this play, it is also Ádega who offers a bunch of herbs to be put under Concha’s pillow, her gesture described in almost identical terms to the episode at the beginning of the Sonata de otoño, in which the miller’s daughter makes the same offer.

El Ciego de Gondar, who also featured as one of the crowd in Flor de santidad, makes another appearance here, described in exactly the same words as in the novel (OC, II, 116), and with the same sexual overtones, first reaching out to feel the young Ádega and later flirting with the elderly La Quemada. His help is sought by Minguina, who is looking to him to find her a master for her grandson. In another instance of repetition, their exchange is identical to one that takes place between the Abuela and El Ciego in Flor de santidad: ‘Para un nieto mío, ¿no podrás darme razón de alguna casa donde me lo traten con blandura, pues nunca ha servido?’ (OC, I, 646; OC, II, 116).

Another element used frequently in Flor de santidad, and now incorporated into El Marqués de Bradomín, is that of storytelling. An important part of rural tradition, it does not, as we might expect, fall here to the Ciego de Gondar or one of the beggars to relate a fairy tale, but, curiously, to Doña Malvina. At the insistence of Concha’s daughters, she tells the story of the enchanted Moorish princess who had been taken prisoner by a giant. Her words are almost identical to those of the old shepherd in Flor de santidad. Like him, she recalls the story as a childhood experience, and like the listening shepherds in the novel, who with one voice respond: ‘Si a nos quisiera
aparecerse!' *(OC, I, 641)*, it is the credulous Florisel in *El Marqués de Bradomín* who repeats: ‘¡Si a mí quisiese aparecerse!’ *(OC, II, 145)*. Florisel also has a story to tell of a blackbird that he had trained to sing the *riveirana*, and which after being freed, returned to sing in the garden. Bradomín praises it as ‘una historia digna de un romance’ *(OC, II, 122)*. The conversation between Bradomín and Concha in which they recall their childhood, with repeated exclamations of ‘¿Te acuerdas?’, becomes another story within a story *(OC, II, 125)*, as do Bradomín’s account of the dream that had prompted Concha’s decision to separate from her lover *(OC, II, 150)*, and Montenegro’s account of the family history *(OC, II, 137)*.

There are, however, several notable differences between *El Marqués de Bradomín* and the earlier *Sonata de otoño*. The first is in Bradomín’s attitude. In the dramatised version, some of his selfishness and self-absorption has disappeared, and he shows signs of concern for Concha’s welfare, a sense of compassion entirely absent in the *Sonata*. A second difference lies in the ending: Concha’s ‘confession’ of infidelity that drives her lover away in the play is not part of the *Sonata*, but borrowed from the final moments of ‘Octavia Santino’. A further noticeable change, which may be a concession to the nature of the genre, is the absence of eroticism in *El Marqués de Bradomín*: the physical passion of the *Sonata*, which would be unacceptable on stage, has been tempered to an emotional nostalgia. Nor is there any hint of desire between Bradomín and Isabel. Given the already controversial nature of the story line, which would be seen not only as immoral, but anti-Catholic, any explicit sexuality was unlikely to be tolerated by the theatregoing public of the day.

More importantly, of all the stories that revolve around Octavia or Concha, this is the only version in which the ailing heroine does not die. In *El Marqués de Bradomín*, Concha’s daughters do not arrive as they did in *Sonata de otoño*, but send word that their father is gravely ill. Their mother is subsequently jolted out of her self-absorption,
and her mysterious illness—one that, in keeping with the decadent tradition, goes unexplained, as it does in the case of Octavia—disappears. Her allegiance abruptly changes, as did Octavia’s in *Cenizas*, and just as Octavia finally saw it as her duty to reject her lover in favour of repentance, so Concha sees her redemption in the renunciation of Bradomín and a return to family life. Octavia dies before she can realise her intentions; Concha, together with her daughters, brings her invalid husband back to her palace, to live out her days in an endless sacrifice. At the end of the play she is ‘siempre al lado de su marido, no se aparta un momento, y le cuida con una especie de fiebre amorosa. El está que parece un niño’ (*OC, II*, 144). This unexpected twist derives from an episode at the end of *Sonata de invierno*, when Bradomín’s ex-lover, María Antonieta Volfani, decides to devote the rest of her life to her incapacitated husband. He too, was left ‘como un niño’ (*OC, I*, 590), and she now cares for him ‘como una Santa Isabel’ (*OC, I*, 591). Also taken from *Sonata de invierno* is the last scene in *El Marqués de Bradomín*, when Concha dismisses her lover; it is almost identical to María Antonieta’s final meeting with Bradomín. Both women use the same parting words: ‘¡Tú no sabes cuánto he sufrido desde aquella noche en que nos separamos!’ (*OC, I*, 598; *OC, II*, 150). The play, like much of Valle’s work, has become a self-pastiche, a fusing of elements from a number of his earlier works.

Letters continue to play a significant part: the action of both *Sonata de otoño* and *El Marqués de Bradomín* is prompted by the reception of a letter, although in the play it is Concha rather than Bradomín who is the recipient. The lovers’ intention to burn their letters has been omitted from the play, as has the mention of the censorious letter from Bradomín’s mother, but neither of these had had any significant effect on the action in the *Sonata*. In *El Marqués de Bradomín*, the letter from Bradomín’s cousin, Isabel, announcing her forthcoming visit with Concha’s daughters, again has the effect of forcing the lovers to modify their plans. A further letter, from Concha’s children, with
news of their father’s sudden illness, gives a new twist to the play and radically changes the outcome.

Roses, too, are an increasingly important motif. There are numerous references to Concha’s pleasure in gathering them from her garden. The fact that they are losing their petals recalls the dying roses in *El yermo de las almas*, and in the same way serves as an echo of the disintegration of a love affair and the fading of a life. Superstitious elements also persist into the play: the belief in the power of the herbs placed under Concha’s pillow, the fear of witches in the moonlight, the references to enchanted princesses, and, an additional detail, La Madre Cruces’ belief that the horsefly buzzing in the rose garden is a favourable omen.

The transposition of narrative into dramatic form has been effected with much more skill in *El Marqués de Bradomín* than in the relatively simple *Cenizas*. Much of the *Sonata* already consists of conversation; most of this remains unchanged in the play, though with the added interest of lines occasionally allocated to a different character. In the *Sonata*, as Concha gathers roses for her lover’s room, she remarks: ‘Estoy desnudando el jardín’ (*OC*, I, 477); in the play it is Bradomín who observes: ‘Estás desnudando el jardín’ (*OC*, II, 123). In the novel the maid Candelaria brings the lamp into the garden and warns the lovers of the dangers of sitting in the moonlight: ‘Miren que es malo tomar la luna.’ When asked why by Concha, she replies: ‘Bien lo sabe, señorita… ¡Por las brujas!’ (*OC*, I, 487). In the dramatised version, it is the page Florisel who brings the lamp, and his words, now addressed to Bradomín, are almost identical: ‘Consideren que es malo tomar la luna. […] Ya lo sabe el Señor mi Marqués […] Por las brujas’ (*OC*, II, 134).

Another straightforward transition is the conversion of narrative sections into stage directions. In the *Sonata*, Bradomín describes Concha as she gathers roses: ‘Y Concha me enseñó su falda donde se deshojaban las rosas, todavía cubiertas de rocío,
desbordando alegremente como el fruto ideal de unos amores que sólo floreciesen en los besos' (OC, I, 477). In the play, the stage directions show little change: 'La sombra, que se esfuma detrás de los cristales, muestra su falda donde las rosas desbordan como el fruto ideal de unos amores que sólo floreciesen en los besos' (OC, II, 123). The change in tense, however, is one of the ways in which the play brings the past of the Sonata into the present.

The stage directions in El Marqués de Bradomín are more complex than in Cenizas and, though not as elaborate as those in the later El yermo de las almas, are frequently of the kind that would appear intended for the reader rather than a theatre audience. For example:

_Sus ojos tienen esa dulzura sentimental que dejan los recuerdos cuando son removidos, una vaga nostalgia de lágrimas y sonrisas, algo como el aroma de esas flores marchitas que guardan los enamorados._ (OC, II, 106)

Also, some of the narrative from the novel becomes dialogue. Thus, in the Sonata, Bradomín's conversation with Florisel ends on a reflection:

_Era una réplica calderoniana. ¡Aquel paje también sabía decir sentencias! Ya no podía dudarse de su destino. Había nacido para vivir en un palacio, educar los mirlos, amaestrar los hurones, ser ayo de un príncipe y formar el corazón de un gran rey._ (OC, I, 477)

In the play, however, his thoughts become a continuation of the conversation; the words are addressed directly to Florisel:

_¡Es una réplica calderoniana! ¡También sabes decir sentencias! Ya no puede dudarse de tu destino. Has nacido para vivir en un palacio, educar mirlos, amaestrar los hurones, ser ayo de un príncipe y formar el corazón de un gran rey._ (OC, II, 123)
The presentation of the garden in the *Sonata* undergoes a similar transition. The description, ‘El jardín y el palacio tenían esa vejez señorial y melancólica de los lugares por donde en otro tiempo pasó la vida amable de la galantería y del amor’ (*OC, I*, 477), becomes a part of Bradomín’s conversation with Concha in the play: ‘El jardín y el palacio tienen esa vejez señorial y melancólica de los lugares por donde en otro tiempo pasó la vida amable de la galantería y del amor’ (*OC, II*, 124). Concha’s dream, in which an archangel appears, is dealt with in much the same way: in the novel, Bradomín retells her story as she lies in his arms (*OC, I*, 494-95); in the play it becomes part of his conversation with Concha’s cousin Isabel as he explains their earlier separation (*OC, II*, 150).

Valle also uses speech to incorporate an episode that does not figure in the novel, but takes place offstage in the play. Concha’s journey to her husband’s house and her return home with him and their daughters is reported by Doña Malvina in retrospect. She describes the event in detail to the abbot, beginning: ‘Llegamos a Viana caladas de agua’ (*OC, II*, 141).

The similarities between *El Marqués de Bradomín* and the two plays that revolve around Octavia Santino reflect the resemblance between the source stories, *Sonata de otoño* and ‘Octavia Santino’, and are such that the two narratives can arguably be seen as one. Both revolve around a dying woman whose conscience is troubled by her adulterous affair with a younger man. The lover is of secondary importance, an element that links both stories with the earlier *Femeninas* and Valle’s other stories about women. Further links are established by the status of the women: like the protagonists of ‘La generala’, ‘La condesa de Cela’, and ‘Eulalia’, both Octavia and Concha have been married against their will to an older man and are subjected to pressures from a child or children, an absent husband, and a mother figure, who in the case of Octavia and Concha, has the same name, Soledad, and is referred to as ‘una
santa'. Octavia is restrained by her mother’s hatred for Pedro, and Concha is distressed by the curse of Bradomín’s mother.

Whilst neither Octavia nor Concha is consciously cruel or frivolous like her forerunners, both flout convention; they view marriage and traditional values as an impediment to happiness. Both women are religious, distraught by the idea of dying in mortal sin, and both have to face family and religious opposition. In a society that is heavily patriarchal, their role is still seen as marginal, and subject to the control of others. In the dramatised versions, both have a friend, albeit of dubious loyalty, in whom they confide: María Antonia defies social opinion by visiting Octavia; Isabel acts as critic and adviser to Concha. Both Octavia and Concha have to devise some form of pretence when visited by their child or children: Octavia hides Pedro’s photograph; Concha arranges for Bradomín to stay temporarily with Montenegro. Both express the wish to have their lover at their side when they die, yet both finally send him away, albeit secretly hoping that he will return.

Unlike ‘Octavia Santino’ and Sonata de otoño, perhaps as a concession to a conservative theatre audience, the dramatised versions of these stories end on a socially acceptable note. Presumably, Valle believed that the sensibilities of a middle-class audience would be offended if immorality were seen to win the day. Both women renounce their adulterous existence: Octavia resolves to return to her husband and child, though she dies before she can realise this intention, and Concha embraces the laudable sacrifice of caring for a husband who has become a vegetable. Moreover, whereas in the narrative versions the cuckolded husband is simply an absent figure in the background, in the plays he makes an appearance, albeit briefly, at the end. His presence brings in a bourgeois element, neatly ties up loose ends, and re-establishes the role of the dutiful wife and acceptance of the family as a social institution. It also introduces a novel element into these stories: the idea of forgiveness. In the earlier Femeninas, the reaction
of the absent husband to his wife’s adultery is not made relevant, though in ‘El canario’, the first version of ‘La generala’, the likelihood of the general’s disgrace points to a potentially violent outcome. The forgiveness that ends Cenizas, El yermo de las almas, and El Marqués de Bradomín is an alternative to the accepted idea of retribution, and a tentative forerunner of the way in which Valle will upend the traditional solution of revenge to the problem of cuckoldry in the later plays of Divinas palabras and Los cuernos de Don Friolera.

The differences between ‘Octavia Santino’ and Sonata de otoño have much to do with the age of their protagonists: the relationship between Concha and Bradomín can be seen as a mature version of that between Octavia and Pedro. The younger lovers live together, whereas Concha and Bradomín are essentially ex-lovers, rekindling an old affair. Octavia and Pedro behave childishly, often hysterically; there are times when Octavia is suicidal, and Pedro is desperately dependent on the relationship. Concha and Bradomín conduct themselves with more dignity and circumspection. The stigma and isolation felt by Octavia do not affect the older Concha, whose position in society is established, and for whom appearances no longer matter. She also has the security of being in her own house, with her own faithful servants, whereas Octavia is in the precarious position of sharing her lover’s house where the family retainer is essentially his, not hers. Octavia faces fierce opposition from a hostile priest, Concha only very mild, almost conspiratorial censure from her abbot. Octavia has to face her mother in person, Concha only has to deal with Bradomín’s mother at second hand. Both change allegiance at the end, but for different reasons: in Cenizas it is the priest who asks Pedro to leave in the name of Octavia; in El Marqués de Bradomín it is Isabel who asks Bradomín to leave for Concha’s sake.

The basic storyline of these three plays, developed over a decade, was one to which Valle had repeatedly returned. El yermo de las almas would be its final
manifestation, and marks the demise of Valle’s decadent, end-of-century, heroine figure, and with her, his modernista approach; he never, however, abandons modernista language. That El yermo de las almas should appear as late as 1908 was surprising, since Flor de santidad had indicated an apparent shift in direction in 1904, and in 1906 the irony and caricature in El Marqués de Bradomín were signs of a changing style. John Lyon sees evidence in Cenizas and El Marqués de Bradomín of a widening of perspective from the early short stories to the collective theatre that would follow, with the publication of Águila de blasón and Romance de lobos in 1907 and 1908 marking a radical change in Valle’s writing.

On 25 January 1906, a year before it appeared in book form, El Marqués de Bradomín was staged at the Teatro Princesa, under the reliable direction of Francisco García Ortega, with the well-known actress María Moreno in the lead role. Josefina Blanco also took two minor roles. Despite the fact that the character of Bradomín would be familiar to the reading public, and the play itself had by then been serialised in the press, the production was a failure. One review deemed it a success, but the fact that this was its only performance speaks for itself.

One of the keys to the failure on stage of Cenizas, El yermo de las almas and El Marqués de Bradomín lies in their prose presentation. Their subtitles – Episodios de la vida íntima (subtitle of the later El yermo de las almas) and Coloquios románticos – reflect that none represented a great leap in direction, rather a tentative transition between prose and drama, and they draw our attention to the fine dividing line between the two genres. This merging of genres is especially true of Valle-Inclán’s work. His prose was theatrical in nature from the start; many of his early short stories vacillate between narrative and dialogue, and contain striking elements of the theatre in their use of movement, sound, light and dark, colour, even touch and smell, but especially in the importance given to the spoken word. Ramón Pérez de Ayala sees all Valle’s work in
this light: ‘Lo que se puede asegurar es que Valle-Inclán, ante todo, – y hasta diríamos que únicamente – ha producido obras de carácter dramático. Todas sus creaciones están enfocadas sub specie theatri, como decían los antiguos; desde las Sonatas, hasta los últimos Esperpentos.’\(^9\) Manuel Muñoz Cortés also suggests that because of ‘la raíz dramática de toda su obra’ even in Valle’s prose ‘el estilo directo domina’.\(^10\)

It is through dialogue that Valle sought to express an impassive approach:

‘Escribo en forma escénica, dialogada, casi siempre. ... Escribo de esa manera... porque me parece que es la forma literaria mejor, más serena y más imposible de conducir la acción.’\(^11\) Dramatic dialogue alone, however does not make a play. As José Rubia Barcia remarks:

\begin{quote}
Mientras que en la novela el diálogo es un artificio complementario, en el teatro es la clave originaria de su estructura, […] Cuando al diálogo se le añade una acción, y se le convierte en espectáculo representable ante un grupo humano, pasa de experiencia personal a experiencia colectiva, […] El público es parte viva e indispensable de su realización teatral.\(^12\)
\end{quote}

Many of the plays that Valle would go on to write, including the Comedias bárbaras would be seen by the critics, not as theatre, but as ‘novelas dialogadas’, to be read rather than staged. Indeed, those that were performed in his lifetime did not generally please the theatregoing public, and were financial failures.

Nevertheless, although still rather hybrid, these early plays break the boundaries of genre and initiate a theatre that is quite different from that of the day, and indicative of a move towards the ‘teatro poético’ encouraged by Benavente. Clara Luisa Barbeito regards El Marqués de Bradomín as a significant start to Valle’s dramatic production. She sees it as ‘el inicio de una trayectoria dramática dedicada no solamente a la belleza formal sino también a la creación de un teatro expresivo de contenidos histórico-
críticos'. She draws parallels with Lorca's approach to drama: 'En el teatro de Valle puede apreciarse una síntesis de todas las artes: música, pintura, escultura y recursos escénicos como sonido, luz, color, etc. con el fin de crear una unidad artística con la acción y el contenido de la obra.'¹³ In fact, this concept of a 'teatro total' was one that Valle would develop to greater effect in the plays that followed.

'Tragedia de ensueño' and 'Comedia de ensueño'¹⁴

In the years between the publication of Cenizas and El Marqués de Bradomín, Valle wrote two one-act plays. 'Tragedia de ensueño' was included with the short stories collected in Jardín umbrío in 1903, and again in 1905 in Jardín novelesco, now with 'Comedia de ensueño'. Both plays stand out in these collections because of their dramatic format - dialogue predominates, and the descriptions read like stage directions - yet they have always been regarded as short stories and have never appeared in collections of plays. Neither was performed in Valle's lifetime. Rubia Barcia refers to them as 'cuentos dialogados';¹⁵ González del Valle sees them as narrative with dramatic dimension, though asserts that 'Comedia de ensueño' was conceived as drama,¹⁶ while for Emilio González López they are 'cuentos escritos en forma dramática', though he concedes that 'Tragedia de ensueño' is perfectly stageable. Both plays, however, involve the difficulty of the presence of an animal on stage, a problem with which Valle presented theatre directors in several of the plays he would write later. In keeping with the Symbolist trend, these two plays are 'más para la lectura que la representación', with the elaborate stage directions that were favoured by writers like Maeterlinck and Ibsen, and that would also become a hallmark of Valle's theatre. Although he still sees in both these plays elements of the 'decadentismo' that dominated Valle's earlier work,
González López regards them as the first examples of Symbolism in Valle’s writing, and the first in Spanish theatre in general.\(^{17}\)

Gwynne Edwards notes that Paris was the centre of Symbolist drama at the turn of the nineteenth century, and suggests that the Belgian writer, Maurice Maeterlinck, was the most influential Symbolist dramatist.\(^{18}\) Although some foreign theatre reached the Spanish stage, it is likely that young writers in Spain would have known of Maeterlinck only through reading. Valle was familiar with his work – he had translated \textit{L’Intérieur}, which had been intended for performance along with the staging of \textit{Cenizas} at the Teatro Artístico in 1899 – and was clearly influenced by his ‘teatro de ensueño’.

Indeed, it is in the static quality of ‘Tragedia de ensueño’ and ‘Comedia de ensueño’ that Bordonada sees Maeterlinck’s influence: ‘Valle es, con estas dos obritas citadas y la traducción que pudo hacer de \textit{Interior}, uno de los autores españoles, de principios de siglo, que tuvo una postura más próxima a Maeterlinck.’\(^{19}\) The similarities are striking: Katharine Worth speaks of Maeterlinck’s ‘drama of the interior’, ‘static drama’ and ‘school of silence’;\(^{20}\) Archibald Henderson describes his ‘no-plot’ plays ‘as little else, technically, than short stories cast in the dramatic mould,’\(^{21}\) and Linn Bratteteig Konrad points out that the theatre of the time presented serious limitations for Maeterlinck, that his dramatic intention stood ‘in stark opposition to Realist ambition’.\(^{22}\) All these observations are equally applicable to Valle himself.

These two short plays are very different from each other, but the subject matter of both has much in common with Valle’s early short stories, and while no particular location is specified, Roberta L. Salper maintains that their backcloth is clearly Galicia.\(^{23}\) ‘Tragedia de ensueño’ is tragic throughout. It has just one setting and its narrative is simple: a blind old woman, whose seven sons have died, is nursing her only remaining grandchild. The sheep that was providing him with milk has disappeared,
presumed eaten by a wolf, and the child is dying. Dogs have howled for three nights at her door, a sure presager of death. Three maidservants from the king’s palace pass by her door, without stopping to sympathise. As the baby dies, ‘una ráfaga de viento pasa sobre las sueltas caballerías’ (OC, I, 224). The sheep’s bell is then heard as, too late, the animal returns.

The play is distanced from reality and has the aura of a legend or a fairy tale. Death is a tangible presence throughout: its recognised omens – the howling of dogs, the sinister connotations of a wolf, the gust of wind that signals death, the reference to the ‘camino donde cantan los sapos y el ruisenor’, (OC, I, 221) the path of death and the hereafter – are all part of Galician folklore. The use of silence emphasises the tragic atmosphere. There are also religious overtones: the shepherd whose sheep is missing is described as ‘uno de aquellos piadosos pastores que adoraron al Niño Jesús en el Establo de Belén’ (OC, I, 223), and an element of holiness extends to the old woman: both poor and blind, she would be seen as touched by the hand of God. She is Valle’s first blind protagonist, but her condition is one to which he returns repeatedly. Valle’s increasing predilection for the numbers three and seven is noticeable here: three, not only for the servant girls, whose role is reminiscent of that of a Greek chorus, but for the three nights on which the dogs howl; seven for the number of sons.

In ‘Comedia de ensueño’ the comedy is black, and the elements of cruelty and the grotesque anticipate the technique of the later esperpento. Again, there is one simple setting: the cave of an old woman, where a band of robbers gathers to divide the booty from an assault on a group of travellers. Amidst the loot is the beautiful hand of a young woman, covered with rings, which the captain of the gang had cut off in his haste. Now regretting his cruelty, he asks the old woman to identify the owner of the hand. She reads the palm and divines that the lady in question is an enchanted princess, who, when bewitched by her dwarf gaoler, appears as a flower or a dove. As the captain, filled with
ensueño’, resolves to find her, an owl hoots in the distance, and a white, spectral dog suddenly appears and runs off with the severed hand in its mouth.

This play, too, has the elements of a fairy tale: an enchanted princess, a dwarf gaoler, stolen treasure. It recalls the story of the Moorish princess that Valle heard on his visit to Lobeira castle (OC, II, 1347-50), and which is repeated in Flor de santidad. The play also has the air of mystery, superstition, and horror that characterised many of Valle’s early stories, along with cruelty and the desire to shock: the location of the cave at a crossroads, a place associated with magic; the omens of death in the hooting of the owl and the severed hand; the reference to black magic in the spell cast on the princess; the witchcraft of the old woman, with her powers of palmistry. The play also anticipates work to come. The modernista concern with beauty is tinged with elements of the grotesque in the object of the white hand and its macabre circumstances. The figures of the robbers with blackened faces not only recall the masked men in ‘El rey de la máscara’, but will appear again, with their ‘risa de lobo’ in the persons of Montenegro’s sons in the later Águila de blasón. The dog, ‘blanco y espectral’, often seen as a person bewitched, will become a central element in the later play El embrujado.

Both these plays can be seen as a reaction against the Realist theatre whose popularity continued from the end of the nineteenth century into the beginning of the twentieth, and reflect the demands of young writers for a ‘teatro poético’; they represent a totally new kind of theatre in Spain. Valle’s next attempt at play writing, however, was to be a bold departure from these first, tentative pieces, and would indicate a decided shift in direction.
Notes to Chapter 3

1 Madrid, p. 141.

2 Madrid, p. 124.

3 Madrid, pp. 141-43.

4 Rubia Barcia, p. 267.


11 Cited in Madrid, p. 108.

12 Rubia Barcia, pp. 282-83.


14 Although I am treating these works as plays, they are collected as short stories; I am therefore not italicising the titles.

15 Rubia Barcia, p. 298.
16 See González del Valle, p. 229, note 17.


19 See Bordonada, pp.16-17.


23 Salper, p. 69.
CHAPTER 4

THE EARLY COMEDIAS BÁRBARAS: SOURCES AND LINKS

Águila de blasón

Published in 1907, Águila de blasón marked a dramatic change in Valle’s writing. This play was much more ambitious than anything that he had written to date. From three short plays, each neatly divided into three acts, with simple sets, negligible plots, and a manageable number of characters, Valle moved into drama on a much grander scale. Águila de blasón is a long play in five acts involving a disjointed narrative line, with no clear pivotal moment, and complicated by a number of sub-plots that disrupt the unity of the play and divert attention from the central theme. It has, in addition, a large cast of over sixty speaking parts, and involves multiple sets, based on the premise that ‘es el escenario el que crea la situación’, not the reverse.1 Furthermore, whilst Cenizas, El yermo de las almas and El Marqués de Bradomín hovered between novel and play, Águila de blasón represents Valle’s first serious attempt at theatre and a complete departure from his previous work.

Both the approach and the material are new. The nostalgia that underlined the Sonatas and Valle’s first plays was tongue-in-cheek; here it is genuine. Valle’s attitude towards the past is marked by an underlying admiration for the lifestyle it presents. The effete, often ineffectual Bradomín has been replaced by the forceful, domineering Montenegro, a libertine of a different colour, with very different tastes in women. While the action still revolves around life in a pazo, the emphasis is no longer on the decadent,
languid existence of the idle rich, but on an immiserised, rural nobility that is struggling to survive. Although the setting is still rural Galicia, Valle has now focused his attention on a period further back in the past: Águila de blasón is a nostalgic look at the decline of a semi-feudal way of life in nineteenth-century Spain.

The action revolves around the person and family of Don Juan Manuel Montenegro, and concerns the last days of the rural aristocracy, a social class that Valle sees as the backbone of Spanish society, but one now threatened by the liberal politics of the nineteenth century, and in the process of being usurped by a middle-class bourgeoisie. Valle views its passing with regret:

He asistido al cambio de una sociedad de castas (los hidalgos que conoci de rapaz) y lo que vi no lo vera nadie. Soy el historiador de un mundo que acabó conmigo. Ya nadie volverá a ser vinculeros y mayorazgos. En este mundo que yo presente de clérigos, mendigos, escribanos, putas y alcahuetes, lo mejor – con todos sus vicios – era los hidalgos, lo desaparecido.²

The following year Valle has Bradomín repeat the same sentiments in Los cruzados de la causa, the first novel of La guerra carlista series: ‘Los mayorazgos eran la historia del pasado y debian ser la historia del porvenir’ (OC, I. 711). Águila de blasón and Romance de lobos serve as testimony to this thinking. When writing these plays, Valle was conscious of their historical value. Behind the fictional character of Montenegro lies an historical figure: ‘En mis comedias bárbaras reflejo los mayorazgos que desaparecieron en el año 1833. Conoci a muchos. Son la última expresión de una idea, por lo que mis comedias tienen cierto valor histórico.’³

Montenegro embodies the qualities associated with the rural hidalgo: nobility, courage, generosity, and a strong sense of honour. His ‘afán de poder en el amor, en la política, en la religión, en el mundo’ fit Valle’s concept of a hero,⁴ infinitely preferable, despite his vices, to the emerging bourgeoisie. Yet Montenegro’s heroic stature rests on
the weight of feudal tradition, and although Valle introduces him in this play as ‘*uno de esos hidalgos mujeriegos y despóticos, hospitalarios y violentos*’, he concedes that men of his kind ‘*se conservan como retratos antiguos en las villas silenciosas y muertas*’ (*OC. II. 346*). Montenegro himself is aware that his role in society is losing its relevance: his personal excesses – drinking, gambling and whoring – are symptomatic of his decline. Indeed, the story of his fall, the central issue of *Águila de blasón*, is, according to Ramón Espejo Saavedra, ‘causada tanto por sus propios excesos como por la evolución histórica de la sociedad española de la época’.

Montenegro is already a familiar figure from earlier articles and stories, but the character that he will assume in the *Comedias bárbaras* is the one whose outline is laid down in *Sonata de otoño* and *El Marqués de Bradomín*. A lone figure, noisy and overbearing, with a weakness for women and alcohol, he is nevertheless regarded as ‘El magnifico hidalgo del Pazo de Lantañón’ (*OC. I. 485*), commanding admiration from all around him.

In *Águila de blasón*, though surrounded by dependents – wife, mistress, sons, and tenants – he is still alone, but his isolation is seen to be of his own making. His wife, Doña María, has left him because of his womanising; his goddaughter, Sabelita, with whom he is now living in an adulterous relationship, will soon, like Doña María, abandon him, and his six sons have been ejected from the family home. The implication of one of these sons in the attempted robbery at his house, in which Montenegro is attacked and injured, is more than just an expression of filial rebellion or the result of a domestic squabble; the family stands as the basis of the feudal structure of society, and such an assault symbolises the beginning of the breakdown of that society. The incident brings a concerned Doña María to Montenegro’s bedside, prompting a crisis of conscience in Sabelita, who leaves in a state of anguish and subsequently attempts suicide. Whereas the robbery leaves Montenegro defiant, Sabelita’s departure prompts feelings of self-pity and the realisation of his dependence on another human being. He
becomes pathetic, and his knee-jerk reaction is to seek solace in a degrading relationship with the miller’s wife. Apparently invulnerable when we first meet him, by the end of the play Montenegro has become a sad, even more solitary figure; he has further alienated all the members of his family and lost everything that was dear to him.

Whilst, like much of Valle’s early work, *Águila de blasón* is still concerned with the controlling class, one of the major differences lies in the role it plays here. The decadent, inward-looking figures who had been at the centre of *Femeninas* and the *Sonatas* led an ineffectual existence, in rather precious isolation; in *Águila de blasón*, there is no such ‘complejo de las princesas’; the rural nobility is seen to have a positive, social role, and is juxtaposed in an uneasy coexistence with the peasant class. The contrast is marked. Unlike the vain, affected Bradomin, Montenegro has some positive qualities, and is, in Valle’s eyes, the only kind of aristocrat who held out any hope for the future. Aware that he is fast becoming an anachronism, he has to struggle to maintain his position, and from this perspective his pride and despotism can be seen as virtues. Despite the evidence of change that surrounds him, Montenegro still clings to the idea of the nobility as a purposeful ruling class, with an active part to play in society: he assumes a responsibility, and sees himself as a leader of men and protector of his people. *Flor de santidad* brought the peasant class into the foreground, but in isolation; *El Marqués de Bradomin* made a tentative move to link the two worlds of the aristocracy and the peasantry, but in idealised terms; in *Águila de blasón* the relationship will bring conflict and the atmosphere becomes charged with the tensions of a harsh, uncompromising feudal system in decay.

Another obvious departure from Valle’s more recent literature is the disappearance of a woman from the dominant role. In *Femeninas* it was women who moved the action, and although Bradomin was the nominal protagonist of the *Sonatas*, women were still central. *Flor de santidad* maintained this emphasis. *Águila de blasón*
is the first of Valle’s major works to have a male protagonist, and it is this shift that introduces the most notable innovation into this play: the element of violence.

Atmosphere has always been a vital ingredient of Valle’s work, and the prevailing impression left by both Águila de blasón and its sequel, Romance de lobos, is one of violence. Felicia Hardison Londré draws our attention to the uniqueness of this feature in the world of the theatre: “Siempre ha existido una tradición de violencia y barbarismo en las pinturas españolas y en la novela picaresca, pero Valle-Inclán no tiene precedente en el teatro de España.” As the subtitle Comedia bárbara implies, Águila de blasón is dominated by primitive emotions and behaviour. Neither of these is new as such in Valle’s work: the early short stories, which were similarly male-dominated, provide ample evidence of his efectismo – the intention to produce a violent reaction in the reader – but here it has become central. Brute force, robbery, rape, sadism and sacrilege, presented in a series of disconcertingly rapid scene changes, and emphasised by constant noise and movement, are an assault on the senses, and according to María Esther Pérez have become a dominant feature in these plays:

Mientras en las Sonatas hay una violencia contenida, la cual se desfila a través de la invariable elegancia del Marqués de Bradomín, en las Comedias bárbaras esa violencia alcanza todo su furor y se convierte, por lo mismo, en la sustancia de la obra. De aquí que en las Sonatas la violencia es accidental, y en las Comedias es comienzo, secuencia y fin.7

Compared with the quiet, feminine, almost static atmosphere of Valle’s first plays, the male-dominated Águila de blasón is in forceful contrast.

It is essentially Montenegro who embodies the violence in this play, but his behaviour is underlined by five of his six sons. Although banished from his household, they are the first to challenge his authority, and play a major part in the action. With the exception of Miguel, they have none of their father’s nobility; instead they represent ‘la
deshonra de su sangre*, and it is they who are largely responsible for their mother’s straitened circumstances. According to Doña Rosita, a member of Montenegro’s household, whereas Montenegro ‘Lleva un rey dentro’, his sons ‘Sólo han heredado de su padre el despotismo, pero qué lejos están de su nobleza’ (OC, II, 349). It is possible that Valle is indicating the excesses of the father visited on the sons, and showing masculinity as an ultimately destructive element. Selfish and degenerate, referred to variously as ‘lobos’ ‘cuervos’, ‘canes’ or ‘fieras’, the five sons have been disowned by their father as unworthy of his name; indeed, they are hated by everyone except their mother and the all-forgiving family retainer, Micaela, who, despite the evidence, continues to think well of them. Miguel is different. Eventually, he will break ranks, and leave the others to go off and fight the Carlist cause. There is little to distinguish the other five: Valle gives us almost no physical description, save for a reference to Don Mauro’s giant-like stature, and to Don Farruquiño’s ‘manteo y tricornio’, the clothes of a noviciate. though Don Pedrito’s extreme attitudes soon mark him as the ringleader.

Some observations made by Martha LaFollette Miller about a bandit called Juan Quinto, the eponymous protagonist of a later story by Valle (1914), have some bearing on the social reasons behind the sons’ behaviour. When Juan Quinto attempts to rob a priest, he is duly admonished and told to go and do an honest job, such as tilling the soil. But the bandit is of noble blood, and replies: ‘Yo no nací para cavar la tierra. ¡Tengo sangre de señores!’ (OC, I, 211). The inference drawn by Lafollette Miller is that for the fallen gentry, the only choice is manual labour or crime. She sees the degeneration of the nobility as a form of emasculation: ‘The most interesting feature of the stories of “Juan Quinto” and “Mi bisabuelo” is the fact that in both of them, loss of dignity – or said another way, emasculation – leads to violence.’ The parallel with Montenegro’s sons is clear: they are rootless; they no longer have a place or a purpose in society: theirs is a crisis of identity. Their class does not know how to earn a living,
nor can it be absorbed into the new bourgeoisie, so the alternative is to resort to crime. Valle himself makes a connection in *Águila de blasón*, by naming Juan Quinto as the bandit who is allegedly the leader of the gang that attempts to rob Montenegro, and in which the sons are involved, a fact that is later confirmed by Miguel in a conversation with his mother (*OC. II*, 408). Miguel’s decision to become a Carlist is, according to Amparo de Juan Bolufer, to escape a life of crime, ‘para no acabar como bandido como sus hermanos, pues éste era su destino’.9

In *Águila de blasón* violence is mostly expressed in terms of power, in the dominance of the strong over the weak, and frequently borders on melodrama. Noise is an intrinsic part of its expression. The play opens with an outburst of fury and invective from the parish priest. Fray Jerónimo Argensola, who, the stage direction reveals, ‘lanza anatemas desde el púlpito. y en la penumbra de la iglesia la voz resuena pavorosa y terrible’ (*OC. II*, 345). Even his appearance has violent overtones; he is described as ‘un jayan fuerte y bermejo, con grandes barbas retintas’ (*OC, II*, 345). His loud diatribe contrasts sharply with the quiet of the church, the half-light, an isolated cough, the scraping of clogs on the stone floor, whispers from the congregation. His anger is disproportionate, directed as it is against the defenceless Sabelita.

The pattern of this episode is repeated in the following scene: just as the priest disturbs the peace of the church, Montenegro’s arrival at his home is a rude intrusion on the intimacy of the evening. Violent by nature, his guns and his barking dogs reflect the character of a hunter and predator, and he rides roughshod over others.

*Llega con la escopeta al hombro, entre galgos y perdigueros que corretean llenando el silencio de la tarde con la zalagarda de sus ladridos [...]. Desde larga distancia grita llamando a su barragana, y aquella voz de gran señor, engolada y magnífica, penetra hasta el fondo de la sala.* (*OC. II*, 346)
Sabelita is again the object of attention. Montenegro roars to summon her and fires his gun into the air. His booming voice, his tyrannical manner, the intimidating and theatrical shot, the restless, barking dogs, all make a noisy assault on the senses, and reduce the scene to a 'teatro a gritos', a concept that will underlie the rest of the play.

Another scene of peace and quiet is similarly disturbed when a terrified shepherd boy erupts into the comfortable, sleepy atmosphere of the kitchen, to announce an encounter with a gang of seven. A loud banging at the door confirms the worst: the gang, intent on robbery and even murder has brought Montenegro back to his house. The violence escalates and the household is thrown into chaos. The blackened faces of the gang are sinister in the semi-darkness; Montenegro, bound and gagged, is beside himself with fury, 'pálido de cólera, con los ojos violentos y fíeros fulgurando bajo el cano entrecejo' (OC, II, 352); the servants scream in terror; the thieves curse and swear; dogs bark; shots ring out; a lamp is shattered; darkness reigns. The violence in this scene takes on a new dimension by becoming physical: Montenegro is manhandled and Sabelita and La Roja, Montenegro's servant, are also treated roughly.

The most violent episode in the play centres on one of Montenegro's sons. Don Pedrito's rape of Liberata is one of the cruellest scenes in the Comedias bárbaras, with sadistic and tyrannical echoes of the Marquis de Sade's Justine. In a move to undermine his father's authority, and exact rent from the miller, Pedro Rey, Montenegro's eldest son chooses to effect his purpose through the miller's wife:

Sonriente y cruel, [ ... ] azuza a sus alanos, que se arrojan sobre la molinera y le desgarran a dentelladas el vestido, dejándola desnuda. [...] El primogénito [...] llegando a donde la molinera, le ciñe los brazos, la derriba y la posee.

Después de gozarla, la ata a un poyo de la parra con los jirones que aún restan de la basquiña, y se aleja silbándole a sus perros. (OC, II, 367-68)

The effect of the violence is heightened by a background of natural beauty and peace:
Sobre verdes prados el molino de Pedro Rey. Delante de la puerta una parra sostenida en poyos de piedra. Los juveniles pámpanos parecen adquirir nueva gracia en contraste con los brazos de la vid centenaria, y sobre aquellas piedras de una tosquedad céltica. Vuelan los gorriones en bandadas. (OC, II, 365)

Some of the violence in Águila de blasón, despite its barbaric nature, is nevertheless intended to amuse. Montenegro’s treatment of his servant Don Galán borders on the farcical, and several scenes descend into slapstick. When Montenegro dines, his fool usually keeps him company, sitting on the floor close by. On one such occasion Montenegro loses patience:

El Caballero descarga un puñetazo sobre la mesa. El bufón da un salto, fingiendo un susto grotesco y se pone a temblar con la lengua defuera y los ojos en blanco. El Caballero le arroja su plato a la cabeza, y el bufón, que lo atrapa en el aire, se pone a lamerlo. (OC, II, 373-74)

There are other episodes of this nature, in which the violence is non-threatening, and is presented as part of an accepted routine between master and servant. Later in the play, Liberata comes in for similar treatment when Doña María discovers her installed as Montenegro’s new mistress. The scene descends into slapstick:

Don Juan Manuel, con mano trémula y rabiosa coge el plato que ante él humea apetitoso, y se lo alarga a la manceba escondida debajo de la mesa, al socaire de los manteles.

Then, kicking the table over, he drags her out, reviling her with shouts of ‘can’, ‘cadela’ and ‘zorra’ (OC. II, 440-41).

The most shocking scene in the play also has a grimly comic side, though the humour is black. Don Farruquiño has devised a plan to make money: he and his brother Miguel will steal a corpse from the graveyard, boil it to separate the flesh from the bones, and sell the skeleton to the Seminary. Miguel’s mistress, Pichona, unaware of the
details, has been told to prepare a cauldron of water. As Don Farruquiño prods the bocly bubbling in the cauldron. Miguel woos Pichona into bed, where they make slow, tender love on the other side of the small room. The scene is in darkness, but the sounds are explicit: 'Se oye el golpe de las tenazas sobre las costillas de la momia, y los suspiros de la manceba y el rosmar del gato' (OC, II, 421). The violence in this scene lies not simply in the boiling of a corpse, but in the juxtaposition of two starkly contrasting images: the grotesque movements of a dead body in a cauldron and the sensual movements of lovers in a bed. The scene is an uncomfortable combination of horror, comedy and sexual pleasure. Episodes from earlier works, such as Bradomin’s brief sexual interlude with Isabel in Sonata de otoño as Concha lies dead nearby, and his moments of passion with La Niña Chole in Sonata de estío as the bells toll for a dying nun, make use of the same kind of juxtaposition, but pale in comparison.

Two of these scenes – the episode of the corpse and the rape of Liberata – bear little or no relevance to the narrative, and their extreme violence makes their inclusion difficult to justify. They add nothing to the narrative line and are presumably included purely for their shock value. John Lyon challenges Sumner Greenfield’s suggestion that the scene with the corpse reflects ‘esa lucha, muy medieval, entre la carne y el espíritu’,10 by pointing out that there is no spiritual element here. He suggests that the scene was rather to provoke a reaction in the audience than to reflect reality.11 The rape of Liberata, the miller’s wife is only relevant in underlining the depraved character of Montenegro’s eldest son, though it serves to express the frustration of a firstborn in a society where his role is no longer meaningful. As Valle himself pointed out: ‘La verdad es que los mayorazgos no fueron creados para favorecer al primogénito […]. El primogénito era un simple administrador de los bienes comunes, que manejaba las haciendas y dirigía los bienes familiares.’12
What makes both scenes doubly shocking is that it is not just the act in itself that horrifies, but the apparent acceptance of the ‘normality’ of the behaviour of the young men involved. Certainly Valle must have been aware of how unacceptable either of these scenes would be in the theatre of his day, but as Leda Schiavo points out: ‘La preferencia por los temas macabros, característicos del romanticismo y acentuados durante el decadentismo, se manifiesta de mil maneras en Valle-Inclán.’ Such scenes jar on our senses and introduce an alien note into a narrative that is basically the story of family relationships. Some justification for their inclusion, nevertheless, lies in the fact that they illustrate the mood of the play, and by alternating with scenes that narrate the plot, they acquire artistic relevance. Juan Ignacio Murcia sees the influence of Grand Guignol in these scenes of violence and horror, which, while possibly unnecessary for the structure of the play, acquire a value in themselves simply in their intention to shock and disturb the audience. He sees in them a desire on Valle’s part to create a climate, an extraordinary atmosphere. ‘où la terreur, le morbide, le mystère, liés a la poésie, possédent la valeur de réalités esthétiques.’

Throughout Águila de blasón, the violence is discordant, and whether it be humorous or shocking, its effect is heightened by its juxtaposition with a peaceful setting, and it is thrown into relief by the comparative calm of linking scenes. What is significant, moreover, is that each episode of violence, far from being a natural expression of emotion, is in some way contrived, and, increasingly, deliberate or even premeditated. None is prompted by genuine feelings: the priest is conscious of the role he is playing; Montenegro is acting out the part of feudal lord; the robbery is little more than an unconvincing melodrama, in which we recognise the leader and suspect that the danger is not real; Don Pedrito’s rape of Liberata is an example of a young aristocrat calculatingly exercising his droit de seigneur; in the interchange between Montenegro and Don Galán, both men are self-consciously acting out the parts expected of lord and
buffoon in a feudal setting; the scene in which the corpse is boiled is designed for maximum horrific effect, but so contrived as to be barely credible.

One important difference about this first Comedia bárbara is that unlike Cenizas and El Marqués de Bradomín, which were little more than dramatised versions of prose works, Águila de blasón gives the impression of having been conceived as theatre. Dougherty, however, asserts that the play first appeared in 'forma de folletín novelístico'.¹⁵ and Luis Iglesias Feijoo refers to a first version in 1906, subtitled 'Novela en cinco jornadas'.¹⁶ Some of it, certainly, began as prose. According to Serrano Alonso, in April 1906 Valle announced that he had undertaken a new series of four books, which looked as if they would be novels: Águila de blasón, Hierro de lanza, Lis de plata and Cruz de espada.¹⁷ The project was never realised, but a month later, a short story appeared in El Imparcial under the title 'Águila de blasón'. It recounts an attack on Montenegro by a gang of robbers who leave him for dead. His death implies the conclusion of the narrative, but this episode, its ending changed to a wounded Montenegro, would become one of the early scenes in the play version, Águila de blasón. The story was the first of several short pre-texts that appeared in the months that followed: 'Comedia bárbara' and 'Gavilán de espada' reuse material from the story 'Águila de blasón', but Montenegro does not die. This material will in turn become Scenes 3, 4 and 5 of the first Jornada of the final play version. 'Jornada antigua', according to Serrano Alonso, becomes Scene 5 of the second Jornada.

There is some confusion over 'Lis de plata', which although it was published after Águila de blasón, and cannot therefore be considered as a pre-text, was, claims Serrano Alonso. Scene 6 of Jornada 2,¹⁸ which is the scene on the boat in which Doña María is travelling to visit Montenegro. The inspiration for this scene may have come from 'Lis de plata', which is a short description of the person and lifestyle of Doña María, but there the likeness ends. The issue is further complicated by Lima, who...
rightly states that the story was ‘associated with the *Comedias bárbaras* but not actually incorporated into the trilogy’, yet later refers to it as ‘undoubtedly the working title for the last of the *Comedias bárbaras, Cara de Plata*’,¹⁹ to which it bears no relation at all.

Apart from these pre-texts, only one previously published short story is incorporated into *Águila de blasón*. ‘Un bautizo’, published in *El Liberal* in September 1906, is an unusual narrative, recounted in the first person by a man, allegedly Valle himself, who is asked to perform a baptism on an unborn child whose mother has been the victim of a curse. The superstition on which this story is based figures in Rodney Gallop’s *Portugal*, as ‘Baptisado a meia noite’, a story from the Minho region. If an expectant mother fears a difficult delivery or if her previous child was stillborn, she must go to the middle of a bridge at midnight with a male relative other than her husband, and draw a bucket of water from the river. She must then ask the first man to cross the bridge after midnight to baptise her unborn child.²⁰ The subject matter is totally unrelated to the narrative of *Águila de blasón*; Valle incorporates it by turning it into an incident experienced by Sabelita during her flight from Montenegro’s house, but it remains an arbitrary inclusion (*OC, II*, 399-403).

Another episode in the play that is only loosely connected to the main narrative line introduces an element of the fantastical and is a legacy of symbolism. Doña María is deeply affected by a visit from Miguel to tell her that he is leaving for war; weeping, she prays to the image of the Christ Child in her room. The same night she has a vision in which the Child Jesus leads her through a surreal scenario, chastising her: ‘En el cielo están enojados contigo, pues dejaste que la mujer arrepentida volviese a caer en pecado. Eres muy mala, y por serlo tanto sufres el castigo de que el mejor de tus hijos se vaya a la guerra, donde hallará la muerte’ (*OC, II*, 409). She is not the first of Valle’s female characters to have a prophetic dream: in *Sonata de otoño*, Concha interprets her visit from an archangel as a warning of death (*OC, I*, 494-95) and in *Flor de santidad*,
Ádega’s belief that she will bear a holy child is confirmed by a vision of God himself (OC. I. 613). These sub-narratives are all stories within a story; they belong more appropriately to the narrative technique that Valle uses effectively in *Flor de santidad*, and sit less comfortably in a dramatic context. In *Águila de blasón* they turn the logical development of the narrative line into a rambling, fragmented series of events.

The act of storytelling, another device for introducing a story within a story, also continues into this play. In one episode it serves to introduce the elements of superstition and witchcraft that have already become a recurring motif in Valle’s work. After Liberata’s rape, in which Don Pedrito’s dogs play a part, terrorising her, and tearing her clothes, the discussion revolves around the curative powers of a dog’s saliva, compared with the poisoning effect of that of a wolf. The storyteller is La Curandera, herself a figure related to the world of superstitious beliefs; in the course of her story she also reminds her listeners of the association of the moon with madness (OC. II, 368), echoing the superstition voiced earlier in *Sonata de otoño* and *El Marqués de Bradomín*. The story of the bandit, Juan Quinto, is recalled again, this time by the passengers in the boat that carries Doña María to Montenegro’s house: they compare his infamous attempt to rob the priest with his recent attack on Montenegro (OC. II, 371).

A third story, within the episode based on ‘Un bautizo’, becomes an elaborate story within a story. Told by the grandfather of the pregnant girl who meets Sabelita on her flight from home, he claims that his granddaughter has been bewitched, and that ‘solamente se rompía el embujo viniendo a una puente donde había una cruz, y bautizando con el agua del río después de las doce de la noche’, and that ‘para ser roto el embujo no ha de cruzar la puente, hasta hecho el bautizo, ni can, ni gato, ni persona humana’. He maintains that by following the instructions of a *saludadora*, that ‘en cada cabo de la puente pusiésemos un echavo moruno de los que tienen el círculo del Rey
Salomón', they have succeeded in reversing the effect of black magic by the use of ‘white’ magic, and that Sabelita has been sent to break the spell (OC, II, 399-400).

It is likely that the witch to whom he refers is the Saludadora de Céltigos, who is later recommended to Liberata by one of Montenegro’s servants, La Manchada, as a woman who knows ‘palabras de conjuro’ and has ‘remedios para congojas de amores’ (OC, II, 428). Already a familiar figure from ‘Beatriz’, where she had a sinister role (OC, I, 237), she will subsequently be summoned by Liberata to put an evil spell on Sabelita, with the help of a stolen handkerchief. Sabelita’s attempt at suicide could thereby be attributed to this act of witchcraft. The belief in Satanism also emerges in Águila de blasón in Doña Rosita’s explanation to Sabelita that ‘el demonio te cegó para enamorarte de Don Juan Manuel’ (OC, II, 347), and there is more than a hint of demonic possession in Sabelita’s powerlessness to resist Montenegro.

Despite the innovatory nature of Águila de blasón, there are, predictably, several links with Valle’s previous works, including frequent reminders of the Galician setting in the references to place names that are familiar from earlier pieces. This play, however, no longer shows us the gentle face of Galicia, but a harsh, primitive place in which the semi-feudal way of life is accepted by both classes: a landlord with absolute power and tenants treated like servants. References to the collection of the foro, mentioned in one of Valle’s earliest stories, ‘A media noche’ (OC, I, 277), remind us of this integral part of the system. Payment is often made in kind, leading to a rent-free tenancy; it is this that Don Pedrito uses as the pretext for his attack on Liberata.

The most important link, however, lies with his characters. The two principal women in Águila de blasón are, in fact, new characters, and very different from the forceful, manipulative women of Femeninas. No longer in a leading role, they share, nevertheless, some of the characteristics of Octavia from Cenizas, and of Concha from Sonata de otoño, and they continue the line of unhappy women from Valle’s early
works. Doña María, whose only appearance is in this play, is essentially the stereotype of the virtuous wife. Like Octavia and Concha, she is pale, sad, religious, and much given to weeping. Like them, she will die, her death in itself perhaps symbolic of the imminent demise of the aristocracy. Like her predecessors, she too has abandoned husband and home, though her reasons are the opposite: it is not she, but her husband who is seeking sexual gratification outside marriage. In the Comedias bárbaras lust is the province of men, not women. Doña María, however, is far from colourless; her part in Sabelita’s rescue and her subsequent reconciliation with her goddaughter show hidden reserves of strength, and though her reasons are different, her final ejection of Montenegro from his own home echoes Octavia’s dismissal of Pedro, and Concha’s parting with Bradomín. But whilst she, too, overturns the traditional image of the submissive wife, unlike any of Valle’s women to date, Doña María is entirely selfless, with a quiet dignity that sets her apart. Her derision for Don Galán shakes Montenegro’s confidence: her defence of their sons irritates him; her silence in the face of his fury reduces him to a child. She is the only person in the play to have his measure and, significantly, the only one who has earned his respect. Her refusal to turn a blind eye to her husband’s womanising and play the normal passive role expected of her tips the balance of power in their relationship. By the end of Águila de blasón she has proved the stronger of the two, and is responsible for striking the final blow in his downfall.

The other main female character, Sabelita, also has elements in common with Octavia and Concha. She, too, is religious, and like both the earlier women, a sinner with a conscience. Her position is different, however: she does not belong clearly to either social class. Taken in by Doña María, under her roof she was ‘alta y respetada’ (OC. II. 347); now Montenegro treats her little better than a servant. Valle refers to her as a ‘barragana’, a term usually associated with a woman kept by a priest. As her godfather and her lover, moreover, Montenegro is guilty of a form of incest. Sabelita is
another of Valle’s innocent victims, trapped in a relationship that is not of her own making, and is frequently seen by others with compassion: ‘cuitada’, ‘paloma’, ‘pobre cordera’. For a while, she feels powerless to act; at last, however, she too reveals unsuspicted spirit: in an act of uncharacteristic defiance, she disposes of the gift of honey brought by the miller. Montenegro’s fury at her rebellion merely produces laughter in Pedro Rey and Don Galán, a reaction that underlines the emptiness of his authority and the waning of his power.

Finally, Sabelita also finds the strength to abandon Montenegro. As she wanders aimlessly, her encounter with the pregnant girl presents her with the opportunity, in the name of a godmother, to reverse an evil spell and save an unborn child. This baptism of the unborn baby in the river gives Sabelita’s subsequent attempted suicide in the same water connotations of another form of baptism. There is then a curious parallel when her own godmother, Doña María, saves her, and liberates her, not only from Montenegro’s power but from the spell supposedly cast on her by Liberata.

A third woman who plays a small but significant part in Águila de blasón, and who provides a strong link with previous works, is Micaela La Roja. An old woman called Micaela figured briefly in Sonata de otoño, referred to by Concha as her mother’s maid. She may be one and the same person as Micaela la Galana who is the storyteller in ‘Mi bisabuelo’ (OC. I, 283), and to whom another reference is made in Sonata de invierno as a maid of Bradomín’s grandmother (OC. I, 537). It is Micaela la Galana whom Valle cites in the prologue to Jardín umbrio as the source of many of his stories (OC. I, 207); she is the source of the short story ‘Juan Quinto’, and she features again as a maid of the narrator’s grandmother in ‘Mílon de la Arnoya’ (OC. I, 310).

In Águila de blasón, Micaela is Montenegro’s oldest, most faithful retainer, and has long been part of his household: ‘Sirve desde niña en aquella casa hidalga, y conoció a los difuntos señores.’ Her age is cause for admiration: ‘¡Cómo se conserva
esta Micaela la Roja! Debe de andar con el siglo’ (OC, II, 348). She has Montenegro’s confidence, and he sees her as part of his disappearing world: ‘¡Conmigo se va el último caballero de mi sangre, y contigo, la lealtad de los viejos criados!’ (OC, II, 364). When, at the start of the action, Montenegro is attacked by the gang of robbers, Micaela’s devotion almost costs her her life; at the end, when her master has been abandoned by sons, wife and mistress, she remains loyal. Hers is a key role: with authority over the household servants, and familiarity with her master and mistress, she provides a link between the two classes, and she does not hesitate to use her influence over both. Quietly conciliatory, it is she who persuades Doña María to forgive her goddaughter, and she who dispatches Don Galán to search for the missing girl.

A tacit bond exists between these three women: just as Micaela addresses Doña María as ‘hija’, so Doña María, in turn, calls Sabelita ‘hija’, establishing a relationship that is seen to be stronger than the blood ties within the play. In a work that highlights the conflict between father and sons, it is ‘mothers’ and ‘daughters’ who emerge as the cementing factor in relationships. No longer cruel or decadent, the principal women in this play are basically good and unselfish. Whilst men, albeit of noble blood, lead meaningless lives, the women rise in moral stature and, acting with increasing authority, begin to challenge the patriarchal nature of their society. Although Montenegro is the protagonist in this play, women continue to underpin the action. It is Sabelita who opens Águila de blasón, her rescue by Doña María that acts as a catalyst, and the united stance of the three women at the end that brings the play to its close.

Micaela is one of five servants. In previous works, households appeared to have only one or two servants, and Valle paid them little attention. In El Marqués de Bradomin they were given a little more prominence; in Águila de blasón they become a small but significant body, and each is individualised by name and has a particular role.
to play. Their life, in a kitchen that reflects the quality of Montenegro’s house, is protected by the conventions of a feudal system, and presented in comfortable terms:

Todos los criados están reunidos en la gran cocina del caserón. En el hogar arde un alegre fuego que pone un reflejo temblador y rojizo sobre aquellos rostro aldeanos tostados en las sementeras y en las vendimias. […] Sentados en torno del hogar, los criados dan fin a los cuencos de la fabada y sorben las últimas berzas pegadas a las cucharas de boj. (OC, II, 378)

Apart from Micaela, the name of only one other servant is familiar: Rosalva appeared in Flor de santidad (OC, I, 657) as the goddaughter of the owner of the Pazo de Brandeso, presumably Concha from the Sonata de otoño.

Don Galán, Montenegro’s personal manservant is a new creation and a significant addition to the cast. He is introduced as rascally and a provider of humour:

‘Es viejo, feo, embusteroymiedoso, sabe muchas historias, que cuenta con malicia, y en lacasadusuamohacetambién oficios de bufón’ (OC, II, 358). His relationship with Montenegro is extraordinary. Though verbally and physically abused by his master, he not only plays the court jester, but acts as Montenegro’s conscience and is his closest confidant, at times almost his alter ego. There is a curious moment when, as Montenegro looks in the mirror, it is Don Galán’s image that he sees (OC, II, 424).

Even when, at Doña María’s bidding, he sends him away, his voice is ‘llena de afecto paternal’ (OC, II, 385). He maintains that just as his wife’s chaplain edifies her soul, so Don Galán edifies his. At times, Don Galán’s observations are curiously prophetic: his advice on Montenegro’s dilemma over his sons is to distribute his wealth between his children now, so that he can later die in peace. ‘¿Y después?’ asks Montenegro; ‘Después pediremos limosna’ is Don Galán’s reply (OC, II, 360). When Montenegro is evicted from his own home, Don Galán voluntarily joins him in his exile.
Together with Micaela la Roja, Don Galán constitutes another connecting link between the ruling class and the servant body. His inspiration appears to come from a character described by Valle fifteen years previously, in one of his many stories of self-invention. Valle claims to have withdrawn to an old family mansion in a forest, where he was attended by an elderly man who had once served his grandmother. The man had allegedly murdered his wife for infidelity, but with Valle, he was ‘más humilde que un perro. Tanto, que cuando le castigaba con algún puntapié, solía decirmelo alborozado: “Dios le dé salú para aplicarme otro”’. In Águila de blasón there is an almost identical moment: ‘El Caballero le hace rodar de un puntapié. El bufón se pone saliva en los ojos y finge un llanto humilde’. Don Galán responds: ‘¡Dios le dé salú para darme otro!’ (OC, II, 374).

There had, in fact, been a notable lack of humour in Valle’s work to this date; only in the short stories ‘La generala’ and ‘¡Ay de mis muertos!’ is there cause for laughter. Don Galán fills that gap, though the humour is bleak. His is the first example of a grotesque character in Valle’s work. Throughout the play his behaviour borders on caricature, and evidences a perspective that will develop into the esperpentismo of Valle’s later works, but whose seeds were there as early as 1892. Don Galán’s absurdity mocks Montenegro’s heroic attitudes. There is, nevertheless, a human side to him: his affection for Sabelita is revealed when, after her escape, he tracks her down in the fields, and there is in his eye ‘una llama de tímida y amorosa ternura’ (OC, II, 432).

The peasant class, seen briefly in El Marqués de Bradomín, appears in greater numbers in Águila de blasón and embraces a wider variety of characters. Some have names, and three are singled out for more substantial roles. Pedro Rey, one of Montenegro’s tenant farmers, to whom Montenegro grants special favours, is not presented with the usual tolerance associated with Valle’s treatment of the lower classes. Corrupt, greedy and sycophantic, he becomes closely involved in Montenegro’s
domestic affairs, and more than simply a complacent husband, he actively pimps for his wife. Liberata, who will take Sabelita’s place at the end of the play. Liberata’s name may have its inspiration in one of the beggars who receives alms from María Rosario in Sonata de primavera (OC. I, 348), and who approaches Concha in El Marqués de Bradomín. there nicknamed La Quemada (OC. II, 107). An interesting connection in Águila de blasón can be made with an old, blind woman, presumably Liberata’s mother, who appears at the moment of Sabelita’s suicide. She calls herself Liberata la Manífica, and claims that her daughter abandoned her when she married (OC, II, 435).

Another character to receive some attention is Pichona, the local prostitute, a type who has not appeared before in Valle’s writing. She is devoted to, and favoured by Montenegro’s son, Miguel. Young, vibrant, and pleasure loving, with vague echoes of Niña Chole, though lacking her cruelty, she is a woman of spirit: ‘Mujer lozana y de buen donaire para las trapisonadas’ (OC, II, 413). She stands in dramatic contrast to the pale images of Doña María and Sabelita. Pichona also reads cards, and is something of a clairvoyant: she divines that Miguel will go to war. She only figures in two scenes of the play, but they are arguably the most disturbing.

Until 1907, Valle’s characters had belonged either to the aristocracy, the clergy or the peasant class. Members of the bourgeoisie had never figured, so three of the new characters in Águila de blasón are especially innovative. The clerk who accompanies the policeman to Montenegro’s house after the robbery has the same name, Malvido, as the character who was ruining the peasants in ‘Mi bisabuelo’ (OC, I, 281), and who is murdered in the short story by an old man who closely resembles Montenegro. Montenegro’s derision for this class of person revealed itself earlier, in Sonata de otoño, when he claimed that he had no time to stop at Concha’s palace, since he was in a hurry to ‘apalear a un escribano’ (OC. I, 486). Malvido, the policeman, and the moneylender, El Señor Ginero, are all seen in the derisory light that Valle reserves for the petty
bourgeois. Montenegro gives the policeman and his crony short shrift and they run from his house ‘como zorros viejos’; El Señor Ginero, who has lent money to Miguel, is also sent scurrying for safety when taunted and mocked by Montenegro’s sons.

There are other elements in Águila de blasón that link it with earlier works by Valle. Although much of the material is essentially new, there is ample evidence that, characteristically, Valle has drawn inspiration from his previous writing. The episode in which Don Farruquiño and his brother Miguel boil the dead body has its inspiration in the burning of a corpse in ‘El rey de la máscara’ (OC, II, 418-22; OC, I, 253). The same short story features six masked men, who prefigure the gang with blackened faces who attempt to rob Montenegro at the beginning of Águila de blasón. Roberta Salper draws a parallel between the relationship that the Sabelita of ‘El rey de la máscara’ has with the priest, and that shared by Sabelita and Montenegro in Águila de blasón.22 She sees characteristics of Montenegro in the priest’s laugh, his cohabitation with a girl who calls him ‘tío’, his weakness for alcohol and his entourage of dogs. The parallels, however, are tenuous, and more applicable to the abbot who will appear in Valle’s third Comedia bárbara, in 1922. Sabelita’s attempted suicide in the river in Águila de blasón carries echoes of the ending of ‘Eulalia’, in which there is also a boatman who watches helplessly. Doña María’s journey by boat to visit her sick husband in Águila de blasón recalls the frightening voyage related by Doña Malvina in El Marqués de Bradomín, in which Concha goes to see her ailing husband. There are elements in Montenegro’s relationship with his goddaughter that are reminiscent of the incestuous feelings that Bradomín has for his daughter in Sonata de invierno. The same Sonata, set against the background of war, is recalled by Miguel’s decision in Águila de blasón to join Bradomín in the Carlist cause.

There is also an element of continuity in the repetition of themes and motifs from more recent works. The donjuanismo that characterised the behaviour of the
women in *Femeninas*, and was taken over by Bradomín in the *Sonatas*, falls to Montenegro in *Águila de blasón*. The age difference between the lovers in the Pedro Pondal stories and *Sonata de otoño* is echoed in *Águila de blasón*, though in reverse: Octavía and Concha were both considerably older than their lovers, whereas Montenegro is an old man when he takes Sabelita as his mistress. There are parallels, too, in the parent-child relationship: the mother-daughter relationship that unsettled the female protagonists of *Cenizas* and *Sonata de otoño*, as well as some of those in the stories in *Femeninas*, is reflected in the father-son conflicts that are a central issue in this play. The clear reference to the charitable role of the nobility, highlighted in *Sonata de primavera*, is recalled here by Pedro Rey’s praise of Montenegro’s family: ‘¿Hay puerta de más caridad que la suya?’ and the reply of Un Viejo: ‘Las puertas del rey no son más caritativas’ (*OC*, II, 369). The observation is a repetition of that made by the treasure hunter in *Flor de santidad*, when reassuring Adega about the *pazo* where she has sought refuge: ‘Puerta de tanta caridad no la hay en todo el mundo! ... ¡Los palacios del rey todavía no son de esta noble conformidad!’ (*OC*, I, 656).

The theme of adultery and remorse that dominated the earlier stories is still at the hub of this play, giving rise to the same kind of conflicts, be they moral, religious, familiar or social. There is a significant difference, however, in the picture of adultery that is presented in *Águila de blasón*. The relationships in the earlier stories involved two willing partners; Sabelita, by comparison, is an innocent, and gives every impression of being in the relationship with Montenegro against her will. Previously, moreover, adultery was captured in isolated episodes; we had little or no sense of a ‘before’ or ‘after’. and the theatrical behaviour of the characters gave it an artificial quality that distanced it from reality. In *Águila de blasón* it is no longer incidental, but part of the fabric of Montenegro’s life, and Valle widens the picture to show the repercussions felt by all the members of his household. In *Femeninas*, adultery was by
turns frivolous or capricious, often exciting and passionate, frequently shameless; the Sonatas were dominated by eroticism, and tinged with sentimental nostalgia. In Águila de blasón sex has lost all connotations of pleasure; Montenegro’s relationship with Sabelita has become a sad, jaded activity with potentially tragic consequences. Nor does his desperate move to replace her with Liberata appear to give him any satisfaction. Eating and drinking have become his principal pleasures.

The anticlericalism that began to emerge in Valle’s early stories and became more patent in Cenizas, and again, though less forcibly, in El Marqués de Bradomín, is much more evident in Águila de blasón. The three men of the cloth in this play, each very different, are all presented in a negative light. Fray Jerónimo Argensola initiates the violence, threatening with Hell and Damnation those who yield to lust. Doña María’s chaplain, whilst bland and apparently inoffensive, is physically unpleasant: ‘un viejo seco y tosco, membrudo de cuerpo y velludo de manos’ (OC, II, 385), and, like the abbot in El Marqués de Bradomín, indulges in hunting with his two dogs. More sinister is Don Farruquino, who, though a noviciate, is the most perverted of Montenegro’s sons, and the instigator of the plan to steal the corpse from the cemetery. He also has sexual leanings and is not above trying to seduce his brother’s girlfriend. He even suggests that when he is made a priest, Pichona should become his ‘ama’ (OC, II, 414). To avoid gossip, she would call him ‘tío’, establishing a relationship that recalls that of the priest and his ‘sobrina’ in ‘El rey de la máscara’ and again in ‘Nochebuena’. A further indictment of the clergy emerges in Don Galán’s remark about Sabelita, now that she has become a fallen woman: ‘¡Qué buena para ama de un canónigo!’ (OC, II, 379).

One of Valle’s novelistic devices that began in Cenizas, continued into El Marqués de Bradomín, and became more elaborate in El Yermo de las almas, was the extensive use of stage directions, many of which are more descriptive than practical. This develops further in Águila de blasón, and underlines the element of ‘novelas
dialogadas’ that marks Valle’s early theatre. Elizabeth Drumm draws attention to their importance in the Comedias bárbaras. She points out that, more than simply stage directions, they are an interpretation of what is to be seen, but concedes that their complexity often impedes rather than helps representation.23

Some stage directions, for example set a scene that would be beyond a theatre director’s powers:

*Sobre la cubierta del galeón se agrupan chalanes y boyeros que acuden con sus ganados. Las yuntas de bueyes, las cabras merinas y los asnos rebullen bajo la escotilla y topan por asomar sobre la borda sus grandes ojos tristes y mareados.*  

*(OC. II, 371)*

Some describe a character’s appearance in the kind of detail that would be impossible to realise on stage:

*Los ojos del molinero brillan maliciosos bajo las cejas blancas de harina: Son verdes, transparentes, como el agua del río en la presa del molino.* *(OC, II, 362)*

Others go even further, and reflect a character’s innermost thoughts, including the reader in an intimate reflection:

*El alma mística de la aldeana tiene como un oscuro presentimiento de las agonías y las congojas con que lucha aquel corazón que late sobre el suyo, como un pájaro asustado en la mano de un niño.* *(OC, II, 402)*

At times, the stage directions are purely descriptive and written in the modernista language that remains an intrinsic part of Valle’s literary style. All the stage directions, however, as Robin Warner points out, ‘deliberately invite the reader of the text to share the author’s more comprehensive point of view’,24 and thereby serve to give the reader an advantage over a theatre audience.
Romance de lobos

The inconclusive ending of Águila de blasón indicated that Valle had a sequel in mind, and Romance de lobos duly followed in 1908. This play is simpler than its prequel in every way, and better structured. The action has been confined to three acts, each comprising six scenes, and the narrative, in contrast with the several days of Águila de blasón, is contained within just over twenty-four hours. There are fewer characters, and the locations follow a more linear and logical sequence, though like Águila de blasón, the play lacks any clear pivotal scene. The setting and the core characters are much the same, but the title is misleading: the interest has not, as the word lobos implies, been transferred to Montenegro’s sons, but continues to centre on Montenegro himself; he both opens and closes the play, and dominates the action throughout.

The emphasis, however, has shifted from his role as mayorazgo to that of a husband; this play puts far more emphasis on the psychological process of his remorse than on the action itself, and ignores the physical needs that dominated his behaviour in Águila de blasón. The tension that existed between Montenegro and his family in the earlier play has become an internal conflict. The terror inspired by the Santa Compañía at the beginning of Romance de lobos leads Montenegro through introspection to regret, and finally to self-disgust. The vague pricking of conscience that he felt over his wife in Águila de blasón now develops into an urgent need to make amends; her death triggers a genuine remorse in him that leads to a process of redemption, and provides the motivation behind the action of the entire work. Águila de blasón traced Montenegro’s social and moral fall from grace; Romance de lobos completes his social descent, but shows his moral rise: a transition from lord of his people to saviour of the poor.

In this play, Montenegro is back in his ancestral home, but now living almost alone. his only company Micaela and Don Galán. This physical isolation, coupled with his advancing age, underlines the increasing vulnerability that began with the robbery at
the beginning of Águila de blasón. At no time, however, has he shown signs of fear, but now, in the first scene of Romance de lobos, returning home drunk one evening, he is terrified by an encounter with the Santa Compañía, recognised in Galicia as a presager of death. This experience, followed immediately by the news that his wife is dying, prompts Montenegro’s departure for her house, filled with feelings of self-recrimination for his past sins. It is significant that from this moment onwards, his isolation is further emphasised by the absence of his usual entourage of horse and dogs, animals with which he is constantly associated in the earlier play. The rest of the action sees him on foot, symbolically reduced to the same level as a peasant or a beggar. He arrives too late at his wife’s house: Doña María has died and five of their sons are already fighting over her possessions. For the rest of the play, the interest alternates between Montenegro, who is unhinged by his wife’s death and wants only to join her in the tomb, and the five brothers, who not only ransack the house, but fight amongst themselves.

Montenegro’s decision to die is seen is a sign of madness by his household. His insistence that all its members gather to hear his confession is pure melodrama, and implies the need of an audience to confirm his existence. It is the only example in this play of conscious theatricality on the part of Montenegro. Where in Águila de blasón his posturing was that of a man playing a part, in Romance de lobos his dramatic behaviour is a genuine expression of violent feelings. His confession is followed by an almost hysterical outburst in which he storms out of the house to the beach; there, gathering up a horde of beggars, he determines that they, rather than his sons, should inherit the family wealth. The play ends in a violent encounter, in which, together with one of the beggars, Montenegro dies at the hands of his sons. Ironically, his efforts to restore traditional order leave the beggars even worse off than before.

Although Águila de blasón dealt primarily with family relationships, we were made aware of Montenegro’s standing in the community and his reputation for justice.
There was indirect evidence of both in the comments by Sabelita’s adoptive family, who refer to him as ‘tan gran caballero’ (OC, II, 430), and from the miller’s rhetorical question: ‘¿Hay otro que lleva su vara más derecha lo mismo con ricos que con pobres?’ (OC, II, 369). Romance de lobos also concerns family relationships, and initially, in particular, Montenegro’s role as a husband, but the social element assumes greater importance. It is clear that Montenegro still commands respect from his servants, and obedience from the sailors, whom he persuades to put to sea against their better judgement, but it is his meeting with the crowd of beggars that brings about the radical change in his behaviour. Moved by their plight, and overcome with remorse for his past sins, he resolves to atone by making them the inheritors of his estate. By becoming his surrogate family they evolve as his means of redemption. Noble to the end, he turns his journey into a mission. By championing their cause, he becomes one of their number, and thereby finally loses the isolation from which he had been suffering since the beginning of Águila de blasón.

Violence again dominates this play, but manifests itself in a different way. Here, far from being contrived, as it was in Águila de blasón, it arises naturally from strong emotions and expresses itself in spontaneous reactions of physical, emotional and visual violence. The socially conditioned behaviour of the characters in the earlier play evolves here into natural responses. Montenegro’s violent outbursts are prompted first by fear, then by remorse, anger, resentment and retribution. Whereas in Águila de blasón he is rarely seen to hesitate, in Romance de lobos he is no longer in control, but in the grip of violent emotions. The brothers’ violence stems from greed and envy that has been panicked into loss of control and frantic action. The monstrous figure of the leper and the frightening images of the Santa Compañía contribute to the overall atmosphere of terror, which is now inextricably linked with the violence of the elements. It is this feature that is used to full effect in Romance de lobos: whilst in
Águila de blasón human violence contrasted with a peaceful background, in this play Valle uses pathetic fallacy to underline the action. The elements are seen as a natural extension of the emotions of the characters, and the noise that was associated with human behaviour in the earlier play here mixes with noises from the natural world, and dominates the action.

The opening scene illustrates this relation between background and people. As Montenegro comes face to face with the Santa Compañía, his terror is echoed by a roll of thunder and he is lifted from his horse and carried through the air. He witnesses a surreal scene, in which witches build a bridge over the waters of the river that bubble as if heated by the fires of Hell. Gwynne Edwards points out how the juxtaposition of light and darkness in this scene is used to create an atmosphere of menace, and that the storm and the darkness are ‘the exteriorizations of Don Juan Manuel’s inner state’:

The repeated image of whiteness, extending from the cold brilliance of the moon to the chilling spectacle of the souls of the dead and the flame of the candle transformed into a gleaming bone, acquires ominous, inevitable and frightening associations of death, [...] the blackness of night and the dark rushing water assume, in conjunction with evocations of death, unmistakable resonances of wickedness, sin and spiritual darkness.²⁵

It is noise, above all, that increases the feeling of menace. On Montenegro’s return home the clamour that we now associate with him – the roar of his voice, the barking of dogs, his horse panting and kicking – is drowned by the even louder noises of the storm that is now raging. As Montenegro shudders with fear, the rain lashes against the windows, the wind howls, doors bang and glass breaks. The suddenness of the storm has, moreover, an unnatural, even supernatural quality: before the appearance of the Santa Compañía, the night was calm, the moon new. The elements have become inexplicably personal, part of a warning, the anger of the gods directed against one man.
Montenegro’s fears are justified; a sailor brings news of his wife’s approaching death. Desperate to reach her before she dies, he follows the sailor to his boat. At the beach, the force of the storm is even more evident:

*El mar ululante y negro, al estrellarse en las restingas […]. Las gaviotas revolotean en la playa, […] agrandan la voz extraordinaria del viento y del mar* (OC, II, 453). *Los relámpagos tiemblan con brevedad quimérica sobre el mar montañoso.* (OC II, 454)

Despite their protests, Montenegro bullies the captain and crew into setting sail. His efforts to reach his wife’s bedside are no match for the weather, however, which forces the storm-battered boat, its sail torn, to seek refuge on a deserted beach, from where Montenegro decides to continue on foot. The scene is again dominated by the noise of the storm: ‘*En aquella vastedad desierta, el viento y el mar juntan sus voces en un son obscuro y terrible*’ (OC, II, 462), and a church bell tolls ominously in the distance. The boat, on its return, will be shipwrecked, and its crew will perish: further evidence of Montenegro’s destructive influence.

In *Romance de lobos*, Montenegro’s violence changes, and becomes almost solely emotional. The physical violence that had characterised his behaviour in *Águila de blasón* becomes, in this play, the province of his sons. The five brothers – Miguel is missing – have denied their mother’s dying wish to see Montenegro and are fighting over her possessions before their father, whom they still fear, gets wind of his wife’s death. The women who are laying out Doña María are shocked by their behaviour: ‘*Como cinco lobos, los cinco hijos se están repartiendo cuanto hay en la casona, […] mismo parece que deseaban la muerte de la pobre santiña*’ (OC, II, 460). Moreover, suspecting Sabelita of hiding the silver, the brothers had dragged her by the hair from Doña María’s bedside and thrown her into the street. Emotions run high, and, as in the scene in *Águila de blasón* in which the body is boiled, the violence lies again in an
uncomfortable juxtaposition: as the brothers come to blows, their mother is being laid out upstairs. In the presence of death, their greed and violence are the more grotesque.

Two of the brothers, Don Farruquiño and Don Pedrito, have secretly agreed to sack the chapel of their mother’s house. By this time, their mother has been laid there, in her tomb. So here again, the violence lies in their scurrilous behaviour in the presence of death. It is further compounded in this scene by the profanation that they are now committing, and by the mockery with which Don Farruquiño treats the sanctity of a holy place. His behaviour recalls his desecration of the tomb in the churchyard in Águila de blasón: in this play it is he, rather than his brother Pedrito, who is the ringleader. The chaplain calls them both ‘Caínes’, ‘sacrilegos’ and ‘cuervos’, but it is at Farruquiño, no longer a mere noviciate but complete with tonsure and dog-collar, that he directs his greatest abuse: ‘¡Tú eres el peor de todos!’ (OC, II, 458). Farruquiño makes a show of kneeling before opening the sacristy to steal the communion plate and the pyx. He walks on his mother’s tomb, scoffing at his brother’s fears, he extinguishes the holy lamp that should burn continuously, and mocks the Devil. Contemptuously, ‘posa familiarmente una mano sobre aquella cabeza de moro negro, […] Siempre con la misma sonrisa, le arranca un cuerno’, and laughingly, jokes: ‘Te quedas a media asta, Lucifer’ (OC, II, 471). Such violently sacrilegious behaviour is doubly offensive in a man of the Church, and even strikes fear into his brother. Don Pedrito’s growing discomfort reaches crisis point when he suddenly sees his mother’s ghost rise from her grave. Terrified, he flees.

In fact, Don Pedrito’s flight takes him from one scene of violence to another where he is forced to confront his father, now leading a group of beggars. Montenegro’s curses are lost on his son, and the moment represents an emotional crisis for him: a dying father should bless, not curse his son. The realisation, moreover, that his curse neither ‘mata ni espanta’ (OC, II, 473) not only nullifies his authority but his very
existence. Dougherty draws attention to this point, when Montenegro looks at himself realistically and sees that the role he has been playing is a sham. His laughter is that of ‘un viejo loco, desenganado y burlón’ (*OC*, II, 473), and his only alternative is physical violence: ‘A un hijo tan bandido se le abre la cabeza. ¡Se le mata!’ (*OC*, II, 474). Don Pedrito anticipates his move: ‘Ceja, se recoge, y con un salto impensado, arranca su bordón al leproso’ (*OC*, II, 475), but the leper intervenes; Don Pedrito, terrified not only by the huge figure and leprous features of the beggar, but also by a second apparition of his mother behind him, again takes flight. This is the last we see of him, and he plays no part in the final scene of his father’s death.

The old servant, Andreina becomes the object of violence at the hands of the three brothers who have overlooked the gold and jewels in the chapel. Don Mauro, the most brutal of the brothers in this play, grabs her by the neck and threatens her with a knife: ‘He de segarte la lengua si dices una sola palabra a mis hermanos’ (*OC*, II, 477). This is the violence of a bully. Montenegro used bullying tactics when he forced the sailors to put to sea. but whereas this, from a certain angle, enhanced his stature, there is a thoroughly ignoble quality about his son’s behaviour.

Unlike *Águila de blasón*, there is only one episode in this play that is unrelated to the main narrative, but it, too, serves to underline the element of violence. A fight breaks out between the three brothers who have left the house together and a group of men who are on their way to pay their respects to Montenegro. Their polite, deferential behaviour meets with an aggressive reception by the brothers, and insults fly. One of the group is Oliveros, a bastard son of Montenegro, who, like others of his illegitimate children, would traditionally enjoy his father’s favours. Before the emergence of the bourgeois class, bastards were proud of their heritage, and the fact that Oliveros knows he has Montenegro’s protection gives him the courage to rise to the challenge. Although
the fight is fierce and bloody, Valle describes it in deliberately heroic terms, in a way that recalls the rape scene in *Águila de blasón*. Don Mauro leads the attack:

*El segundón lanza su grito en medio del campo, como un gigante antiguo,*

desnudo y vencedor. A sus pies, con la cabeza abierta, muerden la hierba

*Sebastián de Xogas y Pedro Abuín. (OC, II, 494-5)*

His superiority soon asserts itself:

*De pronto, entre el restallar de las picas sobre los cráneos y el cóncavo tundir de los puños contra los pechos, se levanta, como el claro canto de un gallo, el grito de don Mauro. Don Mauro –‘¡Para mí tres!’ (OC, II, 495)*

Despite their greater number, the young men are no match for their opponents, but they accept defeat as part of the natural order of things. The brothers are expected to win:

‘¡Que para eso son hidalgos y señores de torre!’ (OC, II, 495).

Much of the violence from now on stems from the rage and despair of Montenegro’s increasing derangement. Determined to die, he is angered by the constant pleading from the members of his household, and his patience finally snaps: ‘Aparece la figura de Juan Manuel Montenegro. Tiene un fulgor de cólera en las pupilas, en las manos de marfil añoso, la escopeta’ (OC, II, 503). He is drawn back to the beach, where the sea is still wild and there are ominous signs of death: ‘*Una costa brava ante un mar verdoso y temeroso. [...] un charcal salobre donde blanquean los huesos de una vaca. Larga bandada de cuervos revolotea sobre aquella carroña*’ (OC, II, 508).

From there, followed by the family of a woman whose husband perished in the storm, and the group of beggars whom he had befriended earlier, he returns to his wife’s house to beg for alms from his own sons. Roaring with anger, he hammers on the door:

¡Abrid, hijos de Satanás! ¡Abrid estas puertas que cierra vuestra codicia!
¡Abriendas de para en par, como tenéis abiertas las del Infierno! ¡Abriendas para que entren los que nunca tuvieron casa! ¡Soy yo quien después de habéroslo dado todo, llego a pediros una limosna para ellos! (OC, II, 516)

The final confrontation is both violent and tragic. When the beggars are forced to retreat, Montenegro strikes Don Mauro in the face, whereupon: ‘el segundón, con un aullido, hunde la maza de su puño sobre la frente del viejo vinculero, que cae con el rostro contra la tierra’ (OC, II, 519). It is then, once again, the huge figure of the leper who comes forward in Montenegro’s defence and slowly strangles Don Mauro. The two larger-than-life figures fall into the flames of the hearth. The silence that falls – the first in the play – is powerfully effective.

There is every reason to assume that Romance de lobos was conceived as theatre. It incorporates the core of just one previously published piece. ‘La hueste’ (1908), was Valle’s only short story other than ‘Tragedia de ensueño’ and ‘Comedia de ensueño’. to be written in play form, though, like them, always considered a story. The ending of the narrative sees Montenegro return home after seeing the Santa Compañía to find Sabelita, the girl with whom he has been living, is dead. In Romance de lobos, Montenegro’s encounter with the Santa Compañía provides the basis of the opening scene. Reminiscent of a familiar episode from Macbeth, it immediately introduces an element of witchcraft and superstition into this play. The witches in this scene are involved in building a bridge, a skill for which they are well known, and their work is a reminder of the many bridges, not just in Spain, that bear the Devil’s name. They must complete their task before day breaks, when they metamorphose into bats. One of the witches alarms Montenegro by including him in their number: ‘¡Eres nuestro hermano, y todos somos hijos de Satanás!’ (OC, II, 448). ‘La hueste’ will be the last of any previously published narratives that Valle inserts into his work. Unlike Águila de blasón, moreover, all the scenes in Romance de lobos are thematically relevant, apart
from the fight between the brothers and the group of young men. The only other scene
that fails to relate directly with the narrative line is a brief meeting in a church between
Micaela la Roja and Sabelita.

The only storytelling in this play is a bizarre explanation by one of the beggars,
the allegedly mad Fuso Negro, of the evil nature of Montenegro’s sons, for which, he
claims. Montenegro himself is indirectly to blame. Cuckolded by none other than the
Devil, Montenegro has unwittingly become the father of monsters:

Los cinco mancebos son hijos del Demonio mayor. A cada uno lo hizo un
sábado, filo de medianoche, que es cuando se calienta con las brujas, y todo
rijoso, aullando como un can, va por los tejados quebrando las tejas, y métese
por las chimeneas abajo para montar a las mujeres y empreñarlas con una
trampa que sabe. [...] Al Señor Mayorazgo gustábanle las mozas, y por aquel
gusto el Diablo haciale cabró y se acostaba con Doña María. (OC, II, 510-11)

Fuso Negro’s story reinforces the element of the satanic that began with the appearance
of the Santa Compañía.

While most of the core characters from Águila de blasón continue into Romance
de lobos there are some significant differences. Montenegro remains at the centre of the
action but his only well-intentioned son, Miguel, has disappeared from the scene, along
with his mistress, Pichona. There is no allusion to Miguel’s absence; it is possible that
he is still fighting the Carlist cause, or has even died, but Fuso Negro’s reference to just
five sons is puzzling. The remaining brothers now have a more prominent role; they are
even more depraved, and the physical violence in this play is largely their domain. The
most noticeable change in the cast, however, lies in the virtual disappearance of the two
principal women from Águila de blasón, both of whom were new in the previous play
and a vital part of the narrative line. Doña María does not figure in person in Romance
de lobos, though her presence is a constant throughout the play, and one that lies behind
the entire action. We are continually reminded of the esteem in which she is held: her husband refers to her as ‘una santa’ (OC, II, 491), her chaplain as ‘mi madre, mi protectora’ (OC, II, 458), the beggars as ‘la madre de los pobres’ (OC, II, 467). Only her sons remain largely unmoved. The other woman from Águila de blasón, Sabelita, has almost no part in the narrative action in this play: she has apparently been thrown out of the house by the brothers, and her brief appearance at the beginning of the final Jornada is barely relevant.

There is a curious anomaly within the servant body in Montenegro’s household. Don Galán, who played such an important role in Águila de blasón, is no longer the buffoon of before, and appears only briefly, once at the beginning of the play and again at the end. There is little in his behaviour that recalls the servant of the previous play: he is neither the clown nor the confidant of earlier, and when, in a repetition of his dismissal from Montenegro’s house at the end of Águila de blasón, he is finally ejected from Doña María’s house by her sons, he has lost his swagger and his ready wit, and is plaintive with self-pity. All traces of humour have disappeared. Similarly, Micaela la Roja, an equally significant member of Montenegro’s household in the prequel, not only loses her importance in this play, but is presented in a strangely different light: Valle introduces her at the beginning of the play as ‘la figura grotesca de una vieja’, and Montenegro calls her ‘grandísima bruja’ (OC, II, 449-50). She makes a second brief appearance when she searches for Sabelita, in a bid for her help; Valle’s description of her here is similarly unflattering, and by introducing her as if for the first time, rather oddly implies that he had forgotten her earlier presence:

Una mujeruca del pueblo, [...] Es muy vieja, toda arrugada, con ese color oscuro y clásico que tienen las nueces de los nogales centenarios. [...] sirve desde niña en la casa de Don Juan Manuel Montenegro (OC, II, 496).
She is seen again briefly at the end of the play, when both she and Don Galán are thrown out of Doña María’s house, as if they had been part of her household. Loyal to the last. Micaela still refuses to think of the sons as ‘lobos’, rather as ‘leones de mucha nobleza’ (OC, II, 516).

Amongst Doña María’s servants, the only familiar figure from Águila de blasón is Andreína; the other two, La Rebola and La Recogida, are new. Newcomers also are the two family friends, La Moncha and Benita la Costurera, who lay out Doña María’s body. As in Águila de blasón, none of the subsidiary characters in Romance de lobos has an autonomous existence; together they make up a whole. Francisco Ruiz Ramón points out that they all exist to reflect some aspect of Montenegro’s personality and are wholly dependent on him.

There are few familiar figures amongst the minor characters. Three of the young men who fight with the sons in Romance de lobos had appeared before in Águila de blasón: Manuel Fonseca, Manuel Tovío and Pedro Abuín shared the boat journey with Doña Maria. The owner of the boat that carries Montenegro on part of his journey to his wife’s house in Romance de lobos is a character called Abelardo, a name that recalls a boatman of the same name who appeared in El Marqués de Bradomín, and who, in a similar role, ferried Concha to her sick husband. He may well also be the unnamed boatman in Águila de blasón, who brings Doña María to her husband’s side.

The role of the poor in Romance de lobos is prominent. First glimpsed in Sonata de otoño, and again in Sonata de primavera and El Marqués de Bradomín, they became the protagonists in Flor de santidad. There, they were not presented in terms of social injustice, but as part of the natural order. The absence of industrialisation in Galicia in the nineteenth century meant that a man wanting to leave the land had little choice but to beg. In this way, whilst not part of a household, beggars were, like the servants, dependent on it. This attachment to the rich pazo was evidenced in Flor de santidad,
and in *Romance de lobos* Doña María’s house is clearly a main source of succour.

Initially background figures in this play, the beggars gradually move firmly into the foreground, and their very numbers on stage draw attention away from the protagonist and serve as another device to underline his diminishing importance. Their role here is crucial: it is they who serve as a catalyst on Montenegro’s grief and convert it into a positive conviction.

Acting largely as a group, the beggars take on a choral appearance, but amongst their number are several individuals who have featured in earlier works. El Ciego de Gondar, fast becoming a familiar figure, though missing from *Águila de blasón*, makes a reappearance, still with a sexual flavour, but this time accompanied by a young boy. Although one of a crowd, he again stands out for his sharp tongue and suggestive remarks. With the enhanced awareness of the blind, he instinctively intuits what is going on, and plays a small but significant part in the development of the narrative.

Paula la Reina figured in *Sonata de primavera*, and it is she who here sings a *copla* to her starving baby, thereby introducing the only example of Galician into this play. She, along with El Manco de Gondar, El Manco de Céltingos, El Tullido de Céltingos, and El Morcego and his wife, had also made an appearance in *El Marqués de Bradomín*. Their afflictions include a variety of suffering – *manco, tullido, ciego* – and there is greater emphasis on their physical ugliness, especially that of the blind leper, El Pobre de San Lázaro. His description borders on the grotesque, as the stench of his breath assails both Montenegro and the reader of the play: ‘*Hasta su rostro llega el aliento podre de aquella voz gangosa, y apenas puede dominar el impulso de apartarse*’ (*OC, II, 467*).

One of the beggars, Fuso Negro, is a new character in this play, and although he only appears in two scenes, his impact is substantial. He is not part of the first crowd of the poor whom Montenegro meets, but one of a small group of three seen later, scouring the beach at night for possible pickings from the shipwreck: ‘*El Morcego, la coima y un*
loco que se llama Fuso Negro’ (OC, II, 506). Their conversation turns macabre when Montenegro speculates on what they would do had they found his corpse on the beach.

Fuso Negro responds to Montenegro’s fantasy, embellishing it with such wit and imagination that Montenegro finally asks him: ‘¿Por qué dirán que estás loco, Fuso Negro?’ Fuso Negro’s reply is simple and lucid: ‘Lo dicen los rapaces por poder tirarme piedras. En todas las villas tiene de haber un loco y un mayorazgo’ (OC, II, 507).

Fuso Negro takes this idea of balance into the following scene, when it is in his cave that Montenegro chooses to rest, and his bed on which to die. ‘Ya somos hermanos’ (OC, II, 509), he claims, so he, in exchange, will sleep in Montenegro’s palace. Montenegro protests that he has no palace, that he has given everything to his sons. It is now Fuso Negro who takes over the situation and in the discussion that follows puts forward his theory that Montenegro’s sons were fathered by the Devil. The mood is black, the conversation surreal, but Fuso Negro is coherent and persuasive, more philosopher than madman. For a brief interlude, his relationship with Montenegro comes close to that of Don Galán with his master in Aguila de blasón; he becomes the voice of his conscience, he mocks Montenegro’s postures and, finally, triggers him into his fatal resolution. Both Don Galán and Fuso Negro are stylised characters in these plays. one the traditional buffoon, the other the village madman. Don Galán was Valle’s first grotesque creation; Fuso Negro is the second. Both point to the developing aesthetic of the later esperpento.

The range of society in these two early Comedias bárbaras is the most extensive to date in any of Valle’s works: now an immense canvas, it includes members of the rural nobility, their tenants, household servants and beggars. Between the two social extremes are the clergy, and a multitude of assorted characters: thieves, sailors, bastards, a prostitute, a policeman and his clerk, a moneylender, and witches, real and imaginary. Many of these have appeared before and will appear again. Valle’s use of
repetition is one of the most striking features of his early work, and is particularly noticeable in his use of characters, who constantly reappear throughout his texts. Clara Luisa Barbeito sees in these two *Comedias bárbaras* the roots of what has gone before and an indication of the way in which Valle’s work will evolve: ‘Los personajes pasan de una obra a otra siguiendo un proceso de evolución y crecimiento para cumplir distintas misiones dentro de los mundos de ficción donde viven. […] creando así una continuidad […] en el cosmos literario valleinclanesco’. The fictional universe that was hinted at in *Sonata de otoño* and began to grow in *El Marqués de Bradomín*, by *Águila de blasón* and *Romance de lobos*, with their extensive casts, had, according to Roberta Salper, become a complicated network of over two hundred characters, whose reappearance serves to link all but four of Valle’s major works. Salper reminds us that it was Balzac who introduced the device of recurring characters into the nineteenth-century novel, and opened up ‘nuevos horizontes en la novela, pues proporcionó un medio eficaz de crear la ilusión de un mundo diferente’. Other novelists, such as Zola, Galdós, Pardo Bazán, Proust, and Faulkner followed suit, but Valle uses this device ‘para crear un nuevo tipo de universo narrativo’ and his principal innovation is to realise its use in the theatre.

While each of the *Comedias bárbaras* can stand as an independent piece of theatre, not only is the one closely linked to the other, but there are constant reminders of the early short stories, of the *Sonatas*, of *Flor de santidad*, and of Valle’s first tentative attempts at theatre. While there may be anomalies in the chronology, inconsistencies of character, and illogicality within the sequence, each piece is part of a whole. These links not only apply to work already written but extend to work to come. This includes a third *Comedia bárbara* that Valle will write fourteen years later, and also a novel that he was writing at the same time as the first two *Comedias bárbaras*. 
It is a small step from period drama to historical novel, and Valle’s admiration for this era repeats itself in three novels that concern the Carlist War. The first of these, *Los cruzados de la causa* (1908), is also set in Galicia, and finds Montenegro supporting the Carlist cause. Here, for the first time, he is no longer alone, but surrounded by a loyal household. His stance is the same as in *Romance de lobos*: ‘Partimos el pan, partimos la capa’ (*OC*, I, 707). Several other familiar characters reappear: Miguel, very much alive, and surprisingly loyal to his father, is living in apparent harmony with his brother Farruquino under the same roof as their father. Sabelita is there too, as are Don Galán and Micaela la Roja. Bradomín’s reappearance reminds us that it was he who persuaded Miguel to join him in the Carlist cause in *Águila de blasón*, and recalls his role in *Sonata de invierno*. Even some of the minor characters reappear: Señor Ginero, the moneylender from *Águila de blasón* figures again, still mean and avaricious, still pursuing Miguel for the return of a loan. Isabel from *Sonata de otoño* also reappears, rather surprisingly, as an abbess. Mister Briand, the ship’s captain, recalls the earlier figure of Abelardo; as in *Romance de lobos*, he sets sail in a storm, the boat sinks, and all perish.

*Romance de lobos* has fewer links than *Águila de blasón* with the earlier stories of *Femeninas* and the *Sonatas*, though the action is still underlined by the struggle with conscience and there is a continuing absence of happiness. In the references to Doña María’s charity there are echoes of Concha’s generosity in *Sonata de otoño* and *El Marqués de Bradomín*, and of María Rosario’s dedication to the poor in *Sonata de primavera*. Valle also continues to use the motif of a letter or message, with a journey as its consequence: in *Sonata de otoño*, Bradomín was summoned to Concha’s side; in *El Marqués de Bradomín*, Concha hastened to attend to her ailing husband; in *Águila de blasón* it is Doña María who is called to her husband’s sickbed; in *Romance de lobos*, the situation is reversed, and it is Montenegro who hurries to reach his wife. The
remorse that troubled the consciences of the women in *Cenizas* and *El Marqués de Bradomín* has, in *Romance de lobos*, become the lot of the male protagonist.

The links between *Romance de lobos* and *Águila de blasón* are also fewer than one would expect. The setting remains a constant, with references to familiar place names, such as Viana del Prior and Flavia Longa, and its presence in this play is more dominating. The move from an interior setting to outside scenes, which began in Valle’s first attempts at theatre, and continued into *Flor de santidad*, reaches its peak in this play, and turns nature into a dominant power; nothing either before or after *Romance de lobos* gives Galicia such force. In addition, there are two episodes that appear to parallel each other: Montenegro’s encounter with the *Santa Compaña* can in some ways be seen to echo Doña Maria’s dream journey with the Child Jesus in *Águila de blasón*. While his is a demonic experience, and that of Doña María religious, both predict death, and both have a surreal quality, an element new to Valle’s work. Montenegro’s attempt to batter down the door of his own house – in reality his wife’s – in *Romance de lobos* is an ironic reversal of the attempted robbery by Montenegro’s sons in *Águila de blasón*. The main theme, however, whilst it still concerns the decline of the rural aristocracy, and continues to revolve around adultery and remorse, focuses more on the psychological development of Montenegro’s guilt, than on his role as a mayorazgo. The narrative thread, moreover, extends beyond family conflicts to a wider context.

The theme of anticlericalism, now a recurring feature in Valle’s work, continues into *Romance de lobos*. Doña María’s chaplain is almost as ineffectual as before and is mostly conspicuous by his absence. It is he, however, who defies the sons’ wishes and sends word to Montenegro that his wife is dying. He rather mysteriously disappears before the end of the play: either thrown out by the brothers, or beating a cowardly retreat. Don Farruquiño is once more the son who commits sacrilege, this time by desecrating the chapel and stealing its treasures. There is a further reference to the ‘tío-
sobrina' relationship associated with the clergy in earlier stories: Don Farruquiño is prepared to reward Andreiña for her help in the sacking of the chapel by taking in one, or even two, of her daughters as his 'ama' (OC, II, 486).

Religion, however, as opposed to the Church, assumes importance in this play. In Águila de blasón, Montenegro's attitude towards the religious fervour of his wife and mistress was one of amused tolerance. When Sabelita disappeared, he tried to pray, and even appealed to his wife for help, but quickly lost heart: 'María Soledad, reza tú sola porque mis oraciones de nada valen, y no pueden ser atendidas en el Cielo. Soy un gran pecador y temo que los bienaventurados se tapen los oídos por no escucharme' (OC, II, 425). In Romance de lobos, the terror produced by the Santa Compañía revives a deep-rooted religious conviction in Montenegro. Like Don Juan Tenorio, he is at heart a devout believer in an ultimate Hell, but has risked damnation until now on the premise that repentance could be postponed indefinitely. His remorse is now genuine and his subsequent meeting with the beggars completes the process; seeing in them a means to save his soul he becomes bent on repentance. He makes references to the light of religious understanding, the first, 'Ahora siento una luz dentro de mí' (OC, II, 490), when he approaches the bed where his wife has died, the second with greater intensity when he explains this feeling to the beggars: 'Un gran cirio, todo de luz se ha encendido dentro de mí, y me guía y me alumbra.' As he walks away, he carries connotations of a Christ figure: 'La luna parece agigantar la figura del viejo hidalgo y poner un nimbo en su cabeza blanca y desnuda' (OC, II, 508), and in his death scene, when in a symbolic martyrdom he dies at the hands of his sons, he does so with 'la altivez de un rey y la palidez de un Cristo' (OC, II, 519).

Whilst the subject matter of these two plays is very personal to Valle, there are elements in the narrative lines that are not entirely his own. Opinion is divided on the influence that other contemporary Galician literature had on his work as a whole. Rubia
Barcia contests the general assumption that ‘el mundo gallego de Valle-Inclán ha sido creación personal suya y que nada o muy poco debe a los autores regionales que le han precedido’. He cites Melchor Fernández Almagro as one critic who denies that Valle gave any importance to the work of either Rosalía de Castro or Curros Enríquez, while conceding that there is evidence of the influence of Pastor Díaz in his work, and echoes in Montenegro’s story from Pardo Bazán’s two novels, Los pazos de Ulloa (1886) and La madre naturaleza (1887): ‘A Valle le impresiona, sobre todo, el tema de la degeneración de los Moscoso, que no puede menos de relacionar con sus parientes los Montenegro.’  

Apart from the feudal behaviour of their protagonists and the background of poverty into which the hidalgo class was sinking, there is, in fact, much that bears comparison between these two novels by Pardo Bazán and the Comedias bárbaras: the absence of family love, fear of the supernatural, the importance of superstition and witchcraft, licentiousness, gratuitous violence and brutality are common to all four works. Pardo Bazán was also a prolific short-story writer, the most outstanding of her day, and it is not surprising to find noticeable likenesses between the material used in the short stories of both writers: the belief in buried treasure, the power of the evil eye, distrust of the authorities and the taking of the law into one’s own hands. Similar echoes also appear in Flor de santidad, and Pardo Bazán’s ‘Un destripador de antaño’ a story that revolves around an orphan called Minia, has especial relevance. Others, such as ‘La Compaña’, which concerns the hueste and ‘Nieto del Cid’, about a gang with blackened faces out to rob a priest, have echoes later in Valle’s work. Pastor Díaz’s influence on Valle is also undeniable. Like Pardo Bazán, as well as work in Galician, he too wrote in Castilian. His best known novel, De Villahermosa a la China (1858), was one that Valle read and enjoyed, and Sonata de otoño reveals striking similarities: the
name of the protagonist, the *donjuanism*, the conscience-stricken heroine, and the combination of love, death and religion.

Valle, must, moreover, have been aware at least of Rosalía’s work; he knew her husband, Manuel Murguía, a close friend of his father, and to a certain extent, Valle’s mentor. It was Murguía who wrote the prologue to Valle’s *Femeninas*. Valle had read and admired most of Murguía’s works; Juan Bolufer cites *Los precursores* (1885) as the source of pre-texts to Valle’s *Flor de santidad*. It is therefore likely that Valle also knew Rosalía personally. Shades of her poetry emerge in his own verse, and in *Flor de santidad*. Valle would also have been familiar with the work of Curros Enríquez, elements of whose play *La condesita* (1869) can be detected in *Cenizas* and *El yermo de las almas*. Rubia Barcia holds that Valle’s debt to a number of Galician writers was not in doubt, and cites Emilio González López, who contrary to Fernández Almagro, offers evidence of the influence of both Rosalía and Curros Enríquez in Valle’s writing, in particular in *Flor de santidad* (p. 104). Rubia Barcia also gives examples of the influence of Benito Vicetto. He points out that the similarities between Valle and Vicetto are striking, and that the protagonists of Valle’s early work, Bradomin and Montenegro, bear an uncanny resemblance to those of Vicetto. Montenegro’s sons, moreover, have characteristics that echo those of Vicetto’s *hidalgos*, and the *Comedias bárbaras* have the same elements of cruelty, sadism and sensuality that dominate Vicetto’s work, in particular, *Los hidalgos de Monforte* (1857) (pp. 137-45).

There is also evidence in Valle’s work of the influence of foreign literature. Valle himself confessed to being ‘obsesionado con Shakespeare’, and some of the details in both *Comedias bárbaras* bear a strong resemblance to elements in *King Lear*. Like Lear, Montenegro needs to see himself as meaningful in society, when his relationship with his own family is disintegrating and he is increasingly enfeebled by age. Gloucester’s observations of Lear’s predicament apply equally to Montenegro:
‘Love cools, friendship falls off, brothers divide. [...] and the bond cracked ‘twixt son
and father. We have seen the best of our times.’\(^3\)\(^4\) In all three plays the children express
a need to replace the father, but whilst they can easily destroy the system, they are
incapable of rebuilding it. Montenegro’s sons have the same aim as Lear’s two elder
daughters: to lay their hands on their inheritance during their parent’s lifetime; in each
case the parent disposes of his wealth before he dies, though not in a way that was
anticipated. Montenegro’s dependence on Don Galán in Águila de blasón has much in
common with Lear’s relationship with his Fool in King Lear, and the way in which he
sees Fuso Negro in Romance de lobos recalls Lear’s approach to Poor Tom, whom he
calls his ‘philosopher’.\(^3\)\(^5\) Furthermore, Don Galán’s sympathy for Sabelita in Águila de
blasón echoes the Fool’s attachment to Cordelia in King Lear. King Lear and Romance
de lobos make similar use of pathetic fallacy, and Montenegro, like Lear, rushes out
into a storm that echoes his dementia. María Delgado noted ‘strong inflections of
Shakespeare’s Lear’ in Calixto Bieito’s production of the Comedias bárbaras at the
Edinburgh Festival in 2000, and records Bieito’s reading of the plays as ‘the epic
narrative of a family patriarch brought to the edge of madness by the covetous greed of
his children’.\(^3\)\(^6\)

Like King Lear, in which many parts are unstageable, the first two Comedias
bárbaras ignore the limitations of the stage and were, according to Lyon, unlikely to
have been written with performance in mind. Whilst essentially dramatic in conception,
they offer no practical solutions to some of the staging difficulties, which include
multiple scenes, riders on horseback, storms at sea, and grazing cattle.\(^3\)\(^7\) Lyon is not the
only person to think this way: Edwards, whilst acknowledging their ‘highly theatrical
character’. states firmly that these plays were written to be read.\(^3\)\(^8\) Pedro Salinas goes
further and declares that neither the Comedias bárbaras nor any plays that follow ‘están
inmediatamente destinadas para la representación. Son para leídas’. 
Opinion is varied, moreover, on the true genre of these two plays. Alfredo Matilla points out that while some critics maintain that they are ‘novelas dialogadas’, others affirm that they are drama but unstageable; that where some consider not only these but all Valle’s plays totally anti-theatrical, others see them as avant-garde theatre, whose apparent unsuitability for performance was not Valle’s fault, but that of the Spanish theatre of the time. 
Matilla defends the theatricality of these early Comedias bárbaras, basing his argument against their categorisation as ‘novelas dialogadas’ on the fact that they depend on action rather than narration. Dolores Troncoso supports this view: ‘Nadie duda hoy que las Comedias bárbaras sean teatro, y teatro de primera magnitud, aunque el propio Valle-Inclán aludiese varias veces a ellas como novelas.’

Whatever their genre, it is clear that these two plays are unlike any other theatre in Spain at the time, and markedly different from anything Valle had written until then. The stasis that marked his first, tentative attempts at theatre has been replaced by a bold, ‘physical’ approach. Several critics see in this new style a closeness to German Expressionism. The narrative, epic quality of Águila de blasón and Romance de lobos, the central, dominating figure of the protagonist, the multiplicity and simultaneity of scenes, the references to dreams and visions, and above all, the difficulties involved in staging, are amongst elements that are associated with the Expressionist movement. The publication of these first two Comedias bárbaras in 1907 and 1908, however, pre-dates the emergence of Expressionism in Europe, which did not become established as such until 1910, making them almost inexplicably avant-garde. Matilla even ventures that ‘Valle-Inclán “descubrió”, independientemente de influencias traspirenaicas, la modalidad expresionista’. He points out that there is no tangible evidence to indicate the influence of German Expressionism on Valle: there was no vanguard European theatre in Spain until after the publication of the first two Comedias bárbaras, nor did
any German Expressionist films appear in Spain until 1919. He suggests that Valle’s ‘discovery’ of Expressionism was autonomous, and more likely to have Spanish roots: in the paintings of Goya, El Greco and Solana, and in the prose drama of La Celestina. Moreover, basic elements of this style – the distanced vision, the use of the grotesque, the primitivism – had all been present in Valle’s work from the start, and would be part of the ‘visión degradadora’ of reality that evolved into the later esperpento (p. 91).

Harald Wentzlaff-Eggebert shares the view that Valle’s Expressionism evolved independently, and regards the Comedias bárbaras as the most evident example of this new style, bringing Spanish theatre in line with the most progressive ideas in Europe. He quotes Domingo Pérez Minik, who claims that Valle was the only Expressionist in Spain, though Minik sees more Expressionism in the later esperpento. González López agrees that Valle’s Expressionism is usually attributed to the esperpento, but points out that, in fact, it takes several forms, including farce and tragicomedy, and is especially noticeable in his plays for silhouettes and puppets. In the overlap of opinions that is constantly associated with any attempt at categorisation of Valle’s works, while agreeing that the Comedias bárbaras are astonishing, he sees them as Symbolist rather than Expressionist works. Edwards, too, agrees that in the absence of evidence that Valle was familiar with experiments in Europe, the likeness between these plays and those of Maeterlinck is striking.

Until fairly recently, it was thought that neither Águila de blasón nor Romance de lobos was staged in Valle’s lifetime. According to Iglesias Feijoo, however, a version of Águila de blasón – though not the final one – was staged in Barcelona in 1907, directed by Constantino García Ortega. Its lack of success discouraged Valle from pursuing a production of Romance de lobos, though this play may have been performed in Buenos Aires in 1910. It would take the centenary of his birth, in 1966, to prompt the Spanish theatre in Madrid into action. Even then, with the advantage of half a
century of technical advances. Valle’s work still represented a risk that few theatre
directors were willing to take. The incorporation of the stage directions was the main
challenge, but there were other substantial problems that made these plays an ambitious
project for even the most experienced director: the rapid changes of scene, often
implying simultaneity of action, complicated stage effects, especially lighting, a vast
cast list, and the inclusion of animals, in particular dogs and horses. Despite a
successful performance of Divinas palabras in 1961, even established directors were
reluctant to take on a playwright whom they considered one of the most difficult to
stage. It was largely thanks to the efforts of fringe theatre, which had dared to put on
plays considered unstageable by professional companies, that Valle’s work had been
kept alive on the stage at all.

The director Alfonso Marsillach was responsible for the first Madrid production
of Águila de blasón, on 13 April 1966, at the Teatro María Guerrero. The reviews
ranged from one extreme to another: one critic thought the performance ‘llegó a pesar’;
he regretted the exclusion of the scene in which the corpse is boiled, and pronounced
Valle’s theatre generally as ‘¡muerto, muerto, muerto!’47 Another proclaimed the
production one of the most perfect he had seen on the Spanish stage for a long time, and
applauded the choice of a play that he considered an historic document of the highest
category, and a stimulant for an intelligent, sensitive audience amidst the mediocre
theatre on the stage at the time. This, he noted, was not the kind of play to which the
Spanish public was accustomed.48 Most saw this comedia, fifty-nine years after its
publication, as still avant-garde, some pointing out that it was a play to which only the
cinema could do justice. Marsillach’s decision against the reading of the stage
directions evoked some criticism, but there was a consensus that he had succeeded in
staging the unstageable.
Four years later, in the first professional performance of *Romance de lobos* in Spain. José Luis Alonso decided to retain the stage directions: he had them read by a ‘trío campesino’ in the manner of a Greek chorus. His production, also at the Teatro María Guerrero, on 24 November 1970, again met with a mixed reception. There was a general feeling that it lacked tension and violence, and that the epic quality was missing. Luis Álvarez maintained his stance that Valle was ‘muerto’, but nonetheless praised Alonso’s production. Another critic felt that the reading of the stage directions rendered the production cold and unrealistic, and that the whole performance needed to be louder. J. Monleón’s reaction was that although the production was very good, it failed to capture ‘esa agonía valleinclanesca’, a sentiment echoed by Alonso himself, who admitted that he had never succeeded in expressing the ‘alma’ of Valle’s work.

Like many theatre directors, Alonso found Valle the most difficult of all Spanish playwrights to stage and the biggest risk in the theatre at the time. He thought, moreover, that *Romance de lobos* was impossible to represent naturalistically and that Valle had never intended it for performance. Many critics agreed that this was the best of the *Comedias bárbaras*, but the most difficult to stage, and, as in the case of *Águila de blasón*, there was the feeling that the play was still ahead of its time, and read more like a cinema script than a work written for the theatre. Notwithstanding, the play ran for well over 100 performances in Madrid, and went on to a successful tour of the provinces, then to Lisbon.

That these two *Comedias bárbaras* are innovative and different from any other theatre of the time is clear. Both are attempts to create a barbarous atmosphere that contrasts starkly with the decadence of Valle’s earlier work. They are the first to stage the grotesque and the macabre, combined with violence. Explicit scenes of rape, suicide and the desecration of a tomb would inevitably shock a middle-class, Catholic audience.
Salper sees them as a move towards a new kind of theatre: ‘Estas dos primeras Comedias bárbaras suelen ser consideradas timidos experimentos en destreza artística: una cumbre en el trayecto que emprendería Valle-Inclán en búsqueda de un estilo auténticamente propio.’  

That style would eventually develop into the esperpento, evidence of which Salinas sees in what he calls the ‘nueva designación’ of these two plays: ‘Un riguroso antecedente del esperpento, un paso más allá hacia el esperpentismo. Porque, conceptualmente, bárbaro resuena a descomunal, enorme o fuera de la norma civil. Disparatado, incapaz de emparejarse con nosotros.’
Notes to Chapter 4

1 See Madrid, p. 341.

2 Cited in Dougherty, Un Valle-Inclán olvidado, p. 147, n. 177. Dougherty refers to ‘La comedia bárbara de Valle-Inclán’, an article by Cipriano de Rivas Cherif, published in the newspaper España, 16 February 1924, which includes this letter from Valle-Inclán.

3 Cited in Madrid, p. 151.

4 Madrid, p. 79.

5 Ramon Espejo Saavedra, ‘Entre el mito y la desilusión: El discurso histórico simbolista de Águila de blasón y Romance de lobos’, Hecho Teatral, 1 (2001), 37-53 (p. 44). Henceforth this journal will be referred to as HT.


9 Amparo de Juan Bolufer, La técnica narrative en Valle-Inclán (Santiago de Compostela: Servicio de Publicaciones da Universidade de Santiago de Compostela, 2000) p. 34.


11 Lyon, pp. 52-53.
12 Cited in Madrid, p. 25.

13 Schiavo, p. 58.


15 Dougherty, Palimpsestos al cubo, p. 84.


18 Serrano Alonso, p. 60.

19 Lima, An Annotated Bibliography, pp. 15 and 36.


21 Madrid, pp. 45-46.

22 Salper, p. 160.


30 Salper. pp. 19, 23.

31 See Rubia Barcia, pp. 103-04.

32 Juan Bolufer, p. 112.

33 See Iglesias Feijoo, p. 32.


35 *King Lear*. Act III, Scene 4, line 147.


38 Edwards. p. 294.


Harald Wentzlaff-Eggebert, ‘Las Comedias bárbaras y el expresionismo dramático alemán’. in Gabriele, pp. 251-67 (p. 254).

González López. p. 151.


Luis Álvarez. ‘En el María Guerrero se presentó “Águila de blasón” de Valle-Inclán’, ABC. 14 April 1966, p. 103.


In 1922, Águila de blasón and Romance de lobos were followed by a prequel, Cara de Plata. The three plays have subsequently been staged as a trilogy. For information on Jorge Lavellí’s production in 1991, see María M. Delgado, ‘Other’ Spanish Theatres, pp. 117-22; reference is made to the productions of Augusto Fernández (1974) and José Carlos Plaza (1991) on p. 118. Delgado deals with Calixto Beleito’s production (2000) in ‘A Contentious Production of Valle-Inclán’s Barbaric Comedies’, pp. 61-70.


Salinas. p. 91.
CHAPTER 5

CRISIS. NEW DIRECTIONS, AND THE RETURN TO GALICIA

It is a measure of Valle’s commitment to the theatre that he should be undeterred by the poor reception of his plays, and persevere with this genre. Despite the fact that *Cenizas*, *El Marqués de Bradomín* and *El yermo de las almas* had all failed to please, and that neither *Águila de blasón* nor *Romance de lobos* even reached the Madrid stage, he went on to write five more plays in the next four years. Much later, in 1961, the critic Vicente Vega wondered at his persistence and found it difficult to understand how a sensitive writer like Valle could ignore a clearly hostile public, conditioned over the years to enjoy trivia, and continue to write what he knew to be unstageable.¹ Others may have found it less surprising, given Valle’s apparently unshakeable conviction in his own work and his refusal to concede to the tastes of the public. His stance was clear: ‘Un artista debe imponer las normas que tenga. Y si no tiene público, crearlo.’²

*From the time he began writing in 1889, Valle’s output had not only been prolific, but unlike the work of most of the major writers of his time, had embraced all the genres. Although he appeared to progress from the short story to the novel, then from the novel to theatre, with the occasional publication of some poetry, at the time of writing the early *Comedias bárbaras*, he was, in effect, working on all four genres: *Femeninas* was republished in 1907 under the new title of *Historias perversas*, and now included ‘Beatriz’ and ‘Augusta’; a second edition of *Jardín novelesco* appeared in 1908, with the addition of five new stories, and between 1908 and 1909 Valle wrote the*
three novels that make up La Guerra carlista series. In addition, he produced a new collection of poetry, Aromas de leyenda, in 1907. It was a period of intense literary activity, and one for which Galicia continued to provide the background.

It was, nevertheless, with the theatre that he was most involved at this stage, and the years following the Comedias bárbaras saw an element of success. His next four plays, however, would show a total departure from the Galician world of the Comedias bárbaras, and would be unlike anything that he had written previously. The style of each, moreover, would be quite different from that of the others. It is possible that this shift in direction reflected an acknowledgement of the failure of his Galician theatre and an attempt to reach the public with a fresh approach, or it could be that the move to several different kinds of play was simply symptomatic of Valle’s experimental nature.

Written in 1909, though not published in book form until 1914, Farsa infantil de la cabeza del dragón would later be collected with two other plays under the title of Tablado de marionetas, with the qualification Para educación de principes. Ostensibly for children, it is a fairy tale with an underlying moral. Its world of princesses, albeit this time in a context of fantasy, echoes some of Valle’s early work, but at the same time, the play points to future stylisation in its use of the ridiculous and the grotesque. The manageable size of the cast and the less complicated nature of the stage directions may have been deliberate concessions on Valle’s part, with a view to performance; they were certainly factors that would have helped to convince theatre directors of its stageability. Farsa infantil de la cabeza del dragón was performed on 5 March 1910 at the Teatro de los Niños, part of the Teatro Comedia in Madrid. According to the reviews it was greeted with delight by both children and adults, and represented a triumph for its author. The fact that it was not performed again in Valle’s lifetime, however, makes it questionable how much credence can be lent to the theatre critics.
The same month saw a performance of Valle’s first verse play, *Cuento de abril: Escenas rimadas en una manera extravagante*, also at the Teatro Comedia. A story of courtly love, this was a return to *modernismo*, and again concerned with princesses, though in yet another context. The cast was even smaller, and the stage directions, as in *La cabeza del dragón*, brief and practical. The reliability of the critics comes into question again, since despite the unanimity of their praise, they failed to convince Valle of its stageworthiness: he apparently withdrew the play, because he thought the acting so bad: this, despite the fact that it was under the direction of the established theatre company of Matilde Moreno. A month later, however, Valle was given the opportunity of directing the play himself. His wife, Josefina Blanco, had now returned to the stage, and was to go on tour with the Ortega Moreno theatre company. In recognition of his reputation as a writer, Valle was given the honorary role of artistic director, and travelled with the company to Buenos Aires. Even this staging, however, although reported as a success, saw the audiences soon fall away. The play ran for only a week.

The subject matter of Valle’s next play, *Voces de gesta*, also in verse form, was very different from that of the two plays that preceded it, and the only element that links it with earlier work is its motif of blindness. Subtitled *Tragedia pastoril*, it is far from the lighthearted comedy of its immediate predecessors; indeed, many found it morally unacceptable. Its protagonist is a humble shepherdess, and the aristocratic background of the court has been replaced with the harsh Castilian countryside. The other notable change lies in the stage directions, which are slightly lengthier, and now also in verse. Through the efforts of Rubén Dario, it was first published in serialised form from 1911 into 1912 in the Paris newspaper, *Mundial*; it appeared in book form in 1912, prefaced by a ‘balada laudatoria’ by Dario. Valle dedicated it to Maria Guerrero, who would be responsible for staging it, first in Barcelona and Valladolid, where reactions were mixed. before bringing it to the capital, where it met with unqualified enthusiasm. It
proved, moreover, to be to the liking of Alfonso XIII, a vote of confidence that gave Valle his first royal seal of approval. Notwithstanding, María Guerrero angered Valle by subsequently withdrawing the play from the company’s repertory, and their professional relationship, which had begun in 1903, was irreparably damaged. *Voces de gesta* would not be staged again in Valle’s lifetime.

The fourth play of this period, *La Marquesa Rosalinda: Farsa sentimental y grotesca*, was once more in verse. The action returns to the world of the court and the aristocracy, but the approach, while still lighthearted, has satirical undertones and shows increasing signs of farce. Alongside *modernismo* there is irony and sarcasm, with more emphasis on the absurd and the grotesque, elements that would increasingly dominate Valle’s work. *La Marquesa Rosalinda* appeared first in serialised form in the newspaper *Por Esos Mundos* in 1911 and was published in book form in 1913. It was performed at the Teatro Princesa in Madrid, in March 1912, under the direction of the Guerrero Mendoza company, to an apparently delighted audience, and again won the approval of the king and queen. In what seems a discouraging symptom of repetition, however, this play would also fail to reappear on the stage in Valle’s lifetime.

Uncharacteristically, there is little in these four plays that links them to anything that Valle had written previously, but their comparative success, albeit modest, may well have encouraged him to revive the Galician theme. A fifth play, *El embrujado*, returns to rural Galicia, and has clear echoes of the earlier *Comedias bárbaras*. Given Valle’s attachment to the region, the revival of the Galician setting is not altogether surprising, and his move back to live in Galicia at this point could also have been a factor: in 1912 Josefina Blanco retired from the stage and the family moved to Cambados. Valle would stay in Galicia for the next twelve years. It is not clear what prompted the move, though his mother’s death in 1910 may have had some bearing on the decision, as well as the state of his own health, which had been steadily
deteriorating since 1907. He was also again in financial straits after a brief spell of relative affluence: the tour of South America and subsequent performances in the Spanish provinces had brought a measure of success.

*El embrujado*

A link, albeit questionable, between this play and the early *Comedias bárbaras* was immediately established by the newspaper *El Mundo*, which presented the first publication of *El embrujado* in November 1912 as ‘La nueva comedia bárbara de Don Ramón de Valle-Inclán’. Valle himself refers to it as ‘una comedia bárbara al modo de otras que ya escribí, como Romance de lobos’.³ Roberta Salper also sees this play as a re-elaboration of the early *Comedias bárbaras*, and, in its turn, a link with the later *Divinas palabras*.⁴ Its first publication in *El Mundo*, moreover, carried the subtitle *Comedia bárbara en tres jornadas*, but the book form a few months later, in 1913, was subtitled *Tragedia de tierras de Salnés*. This new play was by no means another ‘comedia bárbara’, nor even a ‘comedia’; unlike any of Valle’s previous theatre, it was one of his only attempts to write pure tragedy.⁵ It was also the last: his next play, *Divinas palabras* would be subtitled *Tragicomedia*, and would be followed by a third *Comedia bárbara*.

*El embrujado* has none of the heroic vision of the early *Comedias bárbaras*; no longer stylised, it presents a realistic, even naturalistic picture of a world of primitive passions in a rural community. Valle’s approach has changed, and, according to one critic, ‘el mundo anterior, bellamente grotesco, poblado de altas personas libres se convierte en un mundo bajamente grotesco de bajas pasiones libres’.⁶ In the *Comedias bárbaras* Montenegro held sway; the *pueblo* was resigned and sang his defects as if they were virtues. In *El embrujado*, the only ‘aristocratic’ figure, Don Pedro Bolaño, has none of Montenegro’s stature, and has, moreover, lost the little grandeur he once
had. In addition to the personal conflict in the play, we see the first signs of a class struggle and the possibility of revolt within the peasant community. The thinking behind the *Comedias bárbaras* has been reversed: where before Valle maintained that ‘Lo que importa es el héroe. […] Las grandes cosas las hacen los hombres superiores y no las masas gregarias’, he now turns his attention to those masses, and makes them his collective protagonist. The epic hero has disappeared, and with him, any hint of nostalgia. The characters in *El embrujado* are no longer symbolic, actors playing a role, but real people, with basic instincts. The play does not look back on the deterioration of the feudal past with regret, but paints a dark picture of the misery of contemporary life in rural Galicia. *Flor de santidad* had been the first of Valle’s works to focus solely on the *pueblo*, and Montenegro’s involvement and identification with the horde of beggars in *Romance de lobos* had pointed to a growing interest in the poor. This shift in emphasis is taken a step further in *El embrujado*, where the poor make up the main body of the cast, but are seen in a very different light.

The lead role in *El embrujado* is once more a woman, following a line of female protagonists only broken by Bradomin’s nominal predominance in the *Sonatas*, and Montenegro’s assumption of the main role in the *Comedias bárbaras*, and the narrative line of the play revolves around the paternity of her illegitimate child. Rosa la Galana claims that the father is Miguel, the recently murdered son of the landowner, Don Pedro Bolaño. Initially, encouraged by his niece, Isoldina, who was to marry Miguel on the day that he was killed, the old man is prepared to accept the child as his grandson. When Rosa’s demands on him prove too great, however, he hands back the baby. Rumour has reached him, moreover, that Rosa’s claim is a hoax, that the child’s father is in fact her new lover, Anxelo, and malicious tongues ponder the strong resemblance of the child to Anxelo’s baby by his wife Mauriña, born at the same time. Anxelo is the ‘embrujado’ of the title, bewitched by Rosa into murdering Miguel and then supporting
the claim she puts to Don Pedro. The plan falters when the landowner balks at Rosa’s demands. Subsequently, he relents, but his bid for the child comes too late, and brings tragic consequences. As his servant Malvin attempts to recover the baby, shots are fired, and both child and rescuer die.

Anxelo claims that it is poverty that has driven him to crime. In *Flor de santidad* and *Romance de lobos* poverty was viewed from the outside, and seen as a condition close to godliness; in *El embrujado*, on the contrary, it is experienced from within, and regarded as a curse and a social injustice. The earlier acceptance of their lot by the poor has changed, since now they can no longer look to the wealthy for charity. The social obligations of the nobility implied in *Sonata de primavera*, *El Marqués de Bradomín*, *Flor de santidad* and the *Comedias bárbaras* have been abandoned. Even the beggar woman who comes to Don Pedro’s door in *El embrujado* meets with contempt and hostility. It is, moreover, in this play, one of the servants who dispenses the charity, which she does with bad grace: a sharp contrast with the compassion that has been shown to beggars in earlier works, usually by the mistress of the house, and with genuine concern. In *El embrujado* the poor are struggling for survival.

Nor does Valle any longer present their way of life with indulgence; it is now seen as the embodiment of greed and resentment. The common people have become socially aware, and are prepared to make their voice heard: the servants argue amongst themselves; the tenant farmers protest at their landlord’s avarice; even the beggar woman complains about the quality of the food she receives. They all introduce an element of haggling at the beginning of the play that sets the mood for the arrival of Rosa la Galana and her attempt to bargain with Don Pedro over her baby. Even Rosa, however, stops short of resorting to the law. She shies away from a written agreement, and at the end of the play, is so suspicious of the authorities that when Don Pedro invites her into his house, she sees it as a trick: ‘¡Ay viejo mañero, quiere que entre!’
¡No entro, no! ¡Conozco la artería! ¡Me pone la trampa para me llevar a la justicia con aquel dictado de pisar en su casa por la fuerza!’ (OC, II, 1170). Inbred distrust of officialdom amongst the peasant population is the norm: when Don Pedro threatens legal action against Rosa, his servant La Navora warns him: ‘¡Le comerán los canes de la curia! ¡No hay justicia en Quintán de Castro Lés!’ (OC, II, 1167).

It is poverty that carries the blame for crime in this play; in Águila de blasón it was greed that drove Montenegro’s sons to attempt to rob their father of his wealth; in Romance de lobos the same greed prompted the sacking of their mother’s chapel. In El embrujado it is again greed that starts the cycle of evil, but this time it is the province of the lower classes, and has poverty at its roots. A child who comes to beg at the landowner’s house is asked what his mother does for a living. His reply, ‘Pues no hace nada. Cava la tierra’ (OC, II, 1166), is a bleak but familiar response. The exchange is familiar from Sonata de otoño, in which Bradomín asks Florisel much the same question: ‘¿Qué hacen tus padres?’, and receives the same response: ‘Pues no hacen nada. Cavan la tierra’ (OC, I, 475). ‘Cavar la tierra’ implied ultimate destitution. In El embrujado, poverty is seen as social condemnation. Anxelo maintains that ‘El hijo de un pobre andará a pedir’ (OC, II, 1151); when he is too old to till the soil, all that is left will be ‘el reinar de pobre de pedir’. In defence of his crime, he claims that ‘para reír y cantar hay que holgar y dejar la tierra sin cavar. Y del no sembrar viene el no tener pan, y el robar y el matar’ (OC, II, 1151). His outlook is fatalistic; he is merely fulfilling his destiny as one of his class.

Poverty-provoked crime in El embrujado, however, comes with a new slant: in this play it is inextricably linked with the occult. Superstition and witchcraft are central to the action. While these elements have appeared before in Valle’s work, they have often been incidental to the main narrative. Here, they underpin the entire action.
At the hub of the intrigue is Rosa la Galana. ‘Una mujer renegrida y garbosa’ (OC. II. 1144). Rosa is a new creation and unlike any of Valle’s female characters to date. Until now, all Valle’s female protagonists, with the exception of Ádega in Flor de santidad, have been drawn from the aristocracy. Rosa, whilst she embodies many of the vices of Valle’s earlier women, differs radically from her predecessors in that she is one of the peasantry. Much of the innovative nature of El embrujado lies not only in the fact that this is Valle’s first Galician play in which the pueblo is the protagonist, but the first in which a woman from the lower classes is at the centre of the action. The role of the upper classes, in the persons of Don Pedro Bolaño and his niece Doña Isoldina, has become peripheral. There have, moreover, been few examples in Valle’s work of women from the peasant class who behave badly; they are usually presented in a benign light. Rosa is the exception. Though a mere villager, she shows the same thirst for revenge that drove Montenegro’s sons in Romance de lobos, and she has pretensions to the ownership of land, mills, pastures and livestock. Undeterred by scruples, she is even prepared to make a pact with the Devil.

Rosa carries vague echoes of Pichona from Águila de blason, one of Valle’s first women of spirit, but whereas Pichona’s sexual conduct did not attract censure, Rosa’s open promiscuity is the subject of scandal. Pichona was also known as a clairvoyant and had the ability to read cards. Rosa’s powers are much greater and extend to the satanic. It is this element that most differentiates her from Valle’s previous protagonists. She has the reputation of a witch, and is both feared and despised by the local people. Her green eyes have the power to bewitch, and her arrival on a scene is often accompanied or preceded by the ‘rafaga’ associated with death or evil. While the witches that Montenegro sees in Romance de lobos may have been imaginary, Rosa is a creature of flesh and blood, vital, attractive, but with a cruel edge. Her curse on Don Pedro, when he returns her child to her, is tragically realised.
Rosa is irresistible to the young Anxelo, who is convinced of her supernatural powers. He denies his wife’s accusations of lust, and blames witchcraft, claiming that Rosa cast a spell on him (*OC, II, 1149*). He recounts that as he was returning home one evening, a dog, with ‘los ojos en lumbre’, had leapt, barking, into his path. When he kicked it, it howled like a woman. Retreating into an inn to recover, Anxelo saw Rosa for the first time. and was mesmerised by her eyes, which he later blames for his downfall: ‘¡Es arte que tiene! ¡Con la mirada embruja!’ (*OC, II, 1154*). Terrified by echoes of the dog’s howl in her voice, but by now transfixed, Anxelo’s response to her request for a servant was automatic: ‘En tu presencia lo tienes, pero has de hacerle un sitio en tu cama’ (*OC, II, 1155*). As she flicked her handkerchief at him, he saw that it was covered in blood, where earlier, when she wiped the wound on her forehead, there had been no trace.

The barking of a dog becomes a repeated motif in the play: it marks Rosa’s return from Don Pedro’s with her baby, and it is heard again when the baby is snatched from her home. When the wounded Malvin returns to his master’s house with the child, he is pursued by a white dog, which he believes to be the dog of death. The barking of a dog again heralds the appearance of Rosa at the moment when Anxelo and Maurina arrive at Don Pedro’s house at the end of the play to beg for punishment. Making the sign of horns with her left hand, Rosa demands that Anxelo and Maurina follow her ‘¡A los Infiernos!’ (*OC, II, 1171*), and the play ends dramatically with the mysterious appearance of three white dogs barking on Don Pedro’s threshold, as the figures of Rosa, Anxelo and Maurina disappear.

Dogs had played a part in earlier works by Valle. As Concha lies dying in *Sonata de otoño*, their howling is taken as a presager of death. In ‘Tragedia de ensueño’, dogs howl for three nights before the child’s death. Their association with witchcraft in Galician folklore figures more dramatically in ‘Comedia de ensueño’, when a white
spectral dog runs off into the night with the severed hand of a princess. In Águila de blasón, the efforts of a family to break the evil spell cast on a pregnant woman are frustrated by a dog that crosses the bridge where they have come to baptise the unborn child. The family sees it as a further manifestation of witchcraft: ‘Era una bruja aquel can. y con tal burlería quiso ver si nos cansábamos y tornábamos a nuestra aldea’ (OC, II, 399). In the same play, dogs take on new associations of violence and cruelty: they are used to dispatch the policeman and his clerk from Montenegro’s house, and are set on Liberata before she is raped. In Flor de santidad they are seen from a different perspective: Adega is mistakenly reassured of the pilgrim’s holiness when the dog licks his hand. In El embrujado, Rosa’s ability to metamorphose into a dog is associated with her powers of witchcraft; it also recalls a similar transformation in Romance de lobos, when the witches turn into bats.

Anxelo sees the work of the Devil in Rosa’s power over him. This is not the first example in Valle’s works of sexual magnetism with sinister overtones, often associated with death. In each case, fascination is coupled with fear. The same kind of relationship featured in the short story ‘Rosarito’, in which Don Miguel de Montenegro’s attraction for Rosarito ‘le infundía miedo, pero un miedo sugestivo y fascinador’ (OC, I, 294). Rosarito was powerless to break the spell: ‘quiso huir de aquellos ojos dominadores que la miraban siempre, pero el sortilegio resistió’ (OC, I, 297). In similar vein, the final moments of Sonata de primavera showed a terrified Maria Rosario attempting to reject Bradomín’s advances, with the accusation: ‘¡Sois brujo!...¡Por favor, dejadme!’ (OC, I, 383). There is also a reference to the work of the Devil in Águila de blasón in Sabelita’s inability to resist Montenegro’s claims on her. She has changed from being a respected young woman in her godmother’s house to little better than a whore in her godfather’s. This influence would be shown to be even greater in the later Cara de plata, when Montenegro openly identifies with Satan.
It is only a short step from this kind of sexual power to the idea of demonic possession. The woman in the short story ‘Milón de la Arnoya’ claims to be bewitched by her lover: ‘¡Cautiva me tiene con sabiduría de Satanas!’ , and pleads for help: ‘¿No hay una boca cristiana que me diga las palabras benditas que me liberten del Enemigo?’ (OC. 1, 309). The young girl in ‘Beatriz’ is believed to be ‘possessed’ until it is revealed that she has been sexually abused by the family priest, ‘un sacerdote impuro, hijo de Satanás’ (OC. 1, 234). In Flor de santidad, Ádea is finally persuaded to be exorcised of her ramo cativo.

In all these episodes, it is a woman who is ‘possessed’; in El embrujado the roles have been reversed. The ‘embrujado’ here is Anxelo, terrified of the woman whose attractions he cannot resist, and convinced that he is held in Rosa’s power by forces of evil. Like Gaitana in ‘Milón de la Arnoya’, he begs to be released from the spell that holds him (OC. II, 1149), and is recommended the same treatment as Ádea in Flor de santidad: ‘A ese cativo le hicieron mal de ojo, y menester será llevarlo a que reciba las ondas de la mar bajo la luna de medianoche’ (OC, II, 1157). His cry of ‘¡Fue el Demonio!’ echoes María Rosario’s ‘¡Fue Satanás!’ from the end of Sonata de primavera, and he is pursued by the ‘ánima en pena’ of the murdered Miguel in a way that recalls the effect of the Santa Compañía on Montenegro at the beginning of Romance de lobos. Like Montenegro, Anxelo has a death on his conscience, and his soul is in torment.

Despite its different emphases, El embrujado carries strong links with the early Comedias bárbaras. The setting is familiar – a large house, a comfortable kitchen, servants quietly gossiping as they work, a lone greyhound, a dove, a grazing cow, green fields, rural roads – revealing an apparently pastoral idyll, which like that in the Comedias, belies the world of conflict and vice that it conceals. The difference between the two faces of Galicia, one gentle and harmonious, the other rough and brutal, is
highlighted in this play. References to precise locations, such as Lugar de Condes, András. Viana, reinforce topographical links. And whilst the feria had no mention in the earlier Comedias bárbaras, in El embrujado Juana de Juno makes reference to a feria that took place a year earlier, and we can reasonably assume from the festive mood of the young bloods on horseback, in a hurry to cross the river, that a local feria is their likely destination. Following the gradual shift of focus from the interior scenes of Valle’s earlier plays to the open countryside of Flor de santidad and Romance de lobos, the more natural habitat of the poor, much of the action in El embrujado takes place outside. The context too, has similarities: although El embrujado does not centre on the decline of the nobility. Don Pedro, like Montenegro in the Comedias bárbaras, is still part of a feudal society. He has a household of servants, his tenant farmers bring him ritual payment, in money and in kind, and beggars look to him for charity.

Yet Don Pedro is a pale echo of Montenegro; he is neither ‘mujeriego’ or ‘despótico’, nor is he ‘hospitalario’ or ‘violento’. He does not announce his arrival noisily, armed with a gun, but slips into a scene like a ‘sombra’, quietly and almost unnoticed. His voice is ‘apagada’, rather than booming, and he feels defenceless, whereas Montenegro believed himself in control of his destiny. Despite these differences, there are links between the two men: the name Pedro is a reminder that Vicetto’s Pedro de Tor was the inspiration behind Valle’s Montenegro. The name of the old man in ‘Mi bisabuelo’ is a curious combination of both – Don Juan Manuel Bermúdez y Bolaño (OC, I, 279) – and it is worth noting that in El embrujado Don Pedro takes the law into his own hands in much the same way as his namesake in the short story. There are further parallels: Montenegro has lost his sons through estrangement. Don Pedro’s son has been murdered, his name, Miguel, the same as that of Montenegro’s favourite son. Both men face conflict, but whereas Montenegro’s difficulties lie mainly within his household, Don Pedro’s dilemma extends beyond his
family into the community. Like Montenegro, Don Pedro was once renowned for his generosity, but since his son's death has grown mean and uncharitable: ‘¡No es conocido don Pedro Bolaño! ¡Aquella risa tan liberal para los pobres y ricos, la enterró con el hijo que le mataron!’ (OC, II, 1136). It is this streak of miserliness that loses him the child. In Romance de lobos, Montenegro offers all he has to the beggars and asks for nothing in return; in El embrujado, Don Pedro gives only grudgingly to those who come to his door, and then usually in exchange for a favour or a job of work. Each, in turn, is seen as a father figure, Montenegro by the beggars in Romance de lobos (OC, II, 520), and Don Pedro by his servant, Malvín (OC, II, 1168).

What the two men also have in common is guilt: Montenegro for his womanising, Don Pedro for his avarice. Each finally acknowledges his part in the death of a loved one. In a dramatic public confession in Romance de lobos, Montenegro takes responsibility for his wife's suffering and death. His words: 'He sido el verdugo de aquella santa' are echoed by Don Pedro's quiet acknowledgement of his part in the child's death: '¡Le mató la dureza de mi corazón!' (OC, II, 1168). Both men are isolated by their position and by their behaviour, and are out of step with those around them. Both suffer from their own actions, and their human frailty makes them tragic figures. Finally, each wants to die: Montenegro to join his wife; Don Pedro to escape loneliness. In both plays, death hangs in the air and is a strong underlying motif.

Some of the other characters in El embrujado, although ostensibly new creations, also have their counterpart in the Comedias bárbaras or in earlier works. The beautiful Doña Isoldina, with her saintly, martyred air, closely resembles Doña María of Águila de blasón. The half-naked Malvín, the son of a madwoman, has elements in common with the Fuso Negro of Romance de lobos, and his appearance borders similarly on the grotesque. As a faithful servant, however, he also carries echoes of Don Galán in Águila de blasón, especially in his analogy with a dog: he is described as
showing ‘la lealtad de un mastín’ (OC, II, 1135). His loyalty costs him his life; he dies attempting to retrieve the baby from Rosa’s house, but with his last breath, his concern and affection are solely for his master. In much the same way, Don Galán’s loyalty to Montenegro cost him his home, when he joined him in his banishment. Mauriña’s willing complicity in the sexual arrangement between Rosa and Anxelo is reminiscent of the pimping that took place in Águila de blasón, between Pedro Rey and Montenegro, when the miller ‘traded’ his wife Liberata for favours. In both cases, greed overrides moral decency. Shades of Pichona from Águila de blasón can be seen, not just in Rosa, but also in Diana, who is described as: ‘blanca, alegre, desnuda de piernay de pie, con los ojos verdes de onda de mar’ (OC, II, 1165). Like Pichona, Diana reads cards, and tries to persuade Don Pedro to hear his fortune. Young men on horseback are a familiar sight in both the Comedias bárbaras, and in El embrujado one of their number is a son of Alonso Tovio, possibly the Manuel Tovío of Romance de lobos.

One familiar character reappears, though with signs of change. El Ciego de Gondar is by now a recurring figure. In his early appearances in Flor de santidad and El Marqués de Bradomín, he was without a guide; by Romance de lobos, he had acquired a young boy as his companion. In El embrujado he has, instead, a mistress, and his sexuality is even more pronounced. He also enjoys the traditional role of singer of ballads, and attracts attention wherever he goes, in much the same way as the blind man in the short story ‘Las verbenas’ (1892): ‘Donde hay un ciego, allí se paran, y no se alejan, hasta después de haberse aprendido algunos de sus cantares’ (OC, II, 1397). It is El Ciego in El embrujado who spreads the gossip and stirs the scandal by singing provocative verses outside Don Pedro’s house. The use of the copla in this play is no longer, as before, a mere incidental addition or an aesthetic embellishment, but a central feature with serious intent, and, as part of the narrative line, sung in Castilian rather than Galician. El Ciego’s ballad recounts the story of the murder of Don Pedro’s son, of the
baby that is reputedly his, and of Don Pedro's decision to take in the child. Don Pedro only stops his servants from setting the dogs on the blind man because he suspects that he has the key to the mystery. El Ciego, however, plays the innocent.

El Ciego is, furthermore, the only poor man in the play to claim poverty as a virtue. Defending the role of the beggar as one closest to godliness, he maintains that it is the rich man who is condemned: '¿Sabéis vosotros quien está más al pique de condenarse? ¡El Rey!' (OC, II, 1143). Treated in earlier works with tolerant amusement, El Ciego's waspish behaviour is received in El embrujado with suspicion and mistrust. Most of the household servants regard him as a troublemaker; some even suspect that he has second sight. As before, his role of blind man gives him access not only to the households of the rich, but to the company of the poor, and he acts again as a link between the two communities. This earns him a certain standing, since he is the only character aware of what is happening on both sides. When in the company of Anxelo and Mauriña, he is quick to adapt his loyalties, attempting to persuade Anxelo to persist with his deceit, in order to reap the rewards he has been promised. But, predictably unscrupulous, it is he who is at Don Pedro's house at the end of the play, with news of the snatching of the baby, of shots being fired, and predictions of impending tragedy.

The servants who surrounded Montenegro in Águila de blasón were a loyal body. compassionate, charitable and mostly amicable; in Romance de lobos, there were growing signs of in-fighting and unrest. By El embrujado these rumblings have become much more explicit, and the servants' loyalty is questionable. They argue amongst themselves, criticise their master and gossip about his son. They show no sympathy for the tenant farmers, are hostile to the beggar woman, and give short shrift to El Ciego and his mistress. Amongst them, the sharp-tongued Juana de Juno revels in malicious talk. There persists, nevertheless, a faint echo of the family atmosphere glimpsed in the kitchen of Águila de blasón when, in the last Jornada of El embrujado, the household
appears to be united by compassion, and the beggars who filter in are treated with unexpected kindness.

Familiar themes and motifs recur in *El embrujado*. In Rosa’s promiscuity and predatory behaviour there is an echo of the ‘donjuanismo’ of *Femeninas* and the *Comedias bárbaras*, though its satanic connotations in this play give it a more extreme flavour. The adultery that marked *Femeninas* and the *Sonatas*, and continued into the *Comedias bárbaras*, is still a central issue, though the important difference here is the involvement of a baby. It is significant that, to date, none of the adulterous relationships of Valle’s female protagonists has resulted in a child. In this respect, Rosa is unique. Not only, moreover, does she have an illegitimate baby, but she uses him heartlessly as a negotiating tool in a battle for power. He is the pivot of the entire action. The shock produced by his murder at the end of the play is double-edged: not only is the baby an innocent pawn, but his death is unintentional. Much of the pathos of this moment lies in the fact that his demise is only mourned by his mother as a loss of bargaining power: Rosa’s only weapon has been taken away.

The figure of the innocent victim is a motif that has already featured in Valle’s work. In the earlier short stories, Beatriz and Rosarito were victims of deliberate attack, and in *Flor de santidad* Adega was duped into a liaison with the pilgrim. The murder of Rosa’s baby in *El embrujado*, however, like the death of María Rosario’s little sister in *Sonata de primavera*, is a tragic mistake: the bullet that was intended for the kidnapper, hits the child. Valle will repeat this idea later in an incidental moment in *Luces de Bohemia*, when a random bullet accidentally kills a baby in its mother’s arms. A similar incident becomes a central issue in *Los cuernos de Don Friolera*, when the bullet Friolera intends for his wife Doña Loreta, instead kills his daughter. All these victims die accidentally, and, all the more poignantly, incidentally. The deaths of other innocents will produce moments of intense pathos in works still to come: the final
moments of El Idiota in Divinas palabras, and Zacarias’ gruesome discovery of his son’s remains in Tirano Banderas (1926). The child’s death in El embrujado resolves nothing, achieves nothing, is simply a meaningless sacrifice, but is part of Valle’s deliberate intention to shock.

Remorse, which began for Montenegro in Águila de blasón and became the driving force behind his behaviour in Romance de lobos, was one of the emotions that complicated adultery for some of the women in Femeninas, and was especially painful for Concha in Sonata de otoño. In El embrujado it is not Rosa whose conscience troubles her, but Anxelo, who, in what he sees as carnal bondage to Rosa, becomes a prisoner of his crime, torn between lust and superstitious fear. Unlike Montenegro, however, whose ‘crimes’ were instinctive and thoughtless, Anxelo’s are deliberate and premeditated. His need to confess becomes imperative, not, as in the case of Montenegro, to make his peace with God, but to free himself from a satanic influence. His cry, ‘¡Aquí arrodillado, publicaré mi condenación!’ (OC, II, 1169), is an echo of Montenegro’s public ‘confession’ in Romance de lobos. God, in effect, is barely a consideration for any of the characters in El embrujado, save perhaps Doña Isoldina. When His name is invoked, it is either in a conditioned response, or even a blasphemous aside, as when Mauriña, in the name of the Virgin, encourages Anxelo to persist in his crime: ‘La Virgen Santísima, Nuestra Señora Bendita, que oye mis palabras, sabe cuánto le predico por que vuelva a la obligación que tiene’ (OC, II, 1151). Religion appears to play no part in their lives, and it is perhaps significant that there is no priest in the cast list of this play.

Although subtitles a tragedy, El embrujado is still ‘bárbara’; the violence that Montenegro and his sons brought to the Comedias bárbaras continues into this play, but whereas it was previously the preserve of men, and, in Águila de blasón, had a studied quality, here it is centred in Rosa and arises naturally from a primitive way of thinking.
Similarly, lust and greed, before embodied in the upper classes, are now the driving force of the lower ranks of society. No longer the submissive, shadowy figures of before, they are real people, with individual personalities; their behaviour is cruel and deliberate, and they are presented in a harsh, uncompromising light, at times bordering on the grotesque. There is the same emphasis on lust rather than love, the same absence of happiness or any positive relationship, the same lack of parental affection.

Superstition, witchcraft and the supernatural, which played only an incidental part in the *Comedias bárbaras*, are central to *El embrujado*. The power of moonlight and the significance of the oak tree continue to play a part. As Anxelo hears Rosa approaching, he claims that a shadow has covered the moon; later, Rosa invites those around her to eat, 'bajo la luna, al arrimo de un roble, como las brujas' (*OC, II, 1158*). Rosa’s powers of witchcraft, and her ‘possession’ of Anxelo lead to two murders, and the strong underlying presence of death, which, less important in *Águila de blasón*, but more pervasive in *Romance de lobos*, is now fundamental. As in *Romance de lobos*, it is death that begins and ends the action. There is, moreover, an overall sense of mystery and fear throughout the play, and much that goes unexplained, elements reminiscent of Valle’s early short stories. We never discover who, if anyone, paid El Ciego to sing his ballad, nor if a relationship ever existed between Rosa and Miguel, and if so, what form it took, and whilst we are invited to believe that the mysterious appearance of the three white dogs at the end of the play is a form of lycanthropy, as Robert Lima points out, ‘those who cannot accept such lore are left with a final ambiguity’.  

There is a continuing interest in cartomancy, clairvoyance, and the significance of dreams, all again closely related to death. According to the servants, Don Pedro’s son had his cards read the day before he died, when it was revealed three times that he would meet with treachery at the hands of a woman (*OC, II, 1144*). Partly because he appears to know everything that is going on, El Ciego, too, has the reputation of a
clairvoyant, while Don Pedro himself believes in premonitions, and maintains: 'En
todos los sucesos graves de mi vida el corazón me anunció lo que estaba oculto' (OC,
II, 1163). He claims that he saw his son’s death in a dream, and had a presentiment of
the strife that the child would bring.

A minor motif, new to this play, but one that Valle will use to greater effect in
later theatre, is the part played by alcohol. Rosa has a reputation for drinking, and it is in
the sharing of a glass of wine that Anxelo first becomes aware of her powers. According
to popular superstition, when two people drink from the same cup, the secrets of the
first person are revealed. Later when Anxelo is pleading for release from her spell, she
again insists, not once, but three times, that he drink with her (OC, II, 1157-58).

Valle uses the device of a story within a story again in this play, though here, far
from being irrelevant, both examples give us further information about the situation. El
Ciego’s ballad tells us of Miguel’s death and the mystery surrounding the child.
According to Jean-Marie Lavaud, its inclusion may have been inspired by a romance de
ciego that Valle heard at a romeria shortly after he had returned to Galicia in 1912.
The other story, in which Anxelo describes how he was bewitched by Rosa, also
supplies us with important background information.

The stage directions, while still lengthy, are less elaborate than in the Comedias
bárbaras, but remain part of Valle’s poetic, modernista language. Though at times
impracticable, they are mostly less difficult to interpret. Some, nevertheless, are still
impossible for a theatre director to realise, and it is possible that Valle wrote such
directions with the actors in mind: as the beggars gather in the kitchen in the third
Jornada, they gaze at the fire, ‘con las llamas bailando en los ojos’ (OC, II, 1164); when Diana comes in, she brings with her ‘una brisa de redes y de algas’ (OC, II,
1165), and the figure of Don Pedro is introduced as one so unique that ‘Solamente
Pantoja de la Cruz pintó figuras de tan sombrío y místico realismo’ (OC, II, 1138).
As in Flor de santidad and Águila de blasón, the harsh reality of life is belied by the apparent idyll of the surroundings. Anxelo’s inner torment is set against a background of rural peace: ‘el reposo del paisaje, la quietud de las hojas y del cristal del agua, la paz de todas las cosas que dice la perfección del éxtasis y el sentido hermético y eterno de la felicidad’ (OC, II, 1148). Even the servants, chewing over scandal, are compared to ‘santas de un retablo’ (OC, II, 1137).

El embrujado was conceived as theatre and has no pre-texts. Structurally, it is less complicated than either of the Comedias bárbaras. Águila de blasón had no unity of time, place or theme; its five acts covered a period of at least six days, moved through twelve different sets, and followed a rambling narrative line. Romance de lobos had a tighter structure, with a much shorter time span. Its three acts revealed a deliberate symmetry, and although the action ranged over eleven sets, it enjoyed a much less complicated narrative line. If such changes implied a deliberate move on Valle’s part to conform, El embrujado can, in this respect, be seen as a natural progression from these two plays. Much shorter than either of the Comedias bárbaras, it has a simpler, more stageable format, with unity of both time and theme. The three Jornadas are not subdivided into scenes, and all the action takes place within one day, in fact, within a few hours: from late afternoon until late evening. There is a clear pivotal moment in the second Jornada, when Rosa’s baby is stolen. The narrative line is straightforward and uncomplicated by any subplots, and no simultaneous scenes confuse the continuity of time. The cast is considerably reduced and there are no crowd scenes. Technically, there are three sets, since although the third Jornada returns to Don Pedro’s house, the last Jornada takes place in the kitchen rather than on the veranda. The return to the house brings a cyclical element to the symmetry of the play, and underlines the circular, unresolved, and ultimately pessimistic nature of the action.
All these elements could be expected to make *El embrujado* more stageable, but Valle failed to persuade Matilde Moreno, the then director of the Teatro Español, to take it on. He subsequently wrote to Francisco Fuentes, the leading actor of the company, and also appealed to Galdós, who, as well as a personal friend, was then the artistic director, but again without success. Valle’s reaction to Galdós’ refusal was sharp, but according to Dougherty, his anger should have been equally directed at Moreno. It appeared that neither had even read the play before refusing it. Furious at the rejection, Valle defiantly read the play aloud in the Ateneo on 25 February 1913, and commented on the attitudes of the theatre directors. Since his work was popular amongst his fellow writers, the room was packed. According to a report the following day in *El Imparcial*, he read Act 1 to an enthusiastic response, but later in the evening, during the reading of Act 2, there was loud coughing, and the final applause descended into commotion, with shouts of ‘Viva Galdós’.

The experience was a bitter one for Valle. Still smarting from the earlier rejection of *Voces de gesta* by María Guerrero, this second rift with Madrid’s other leading theatre company represented a serious crisis in his relationship with the commercial theatre, and a severe setback. The effects would be long-lasting. Rather than accept that his works were unsuitable for the theatre, he regarded the theatre as unsuited to his works. In a letter dated 12 November of the same year he expressed his disillusion: ‘Nadie mejor que yo sabe que no son obras de público, y mucho menos de público de provincias. Son obras para una noche en Madrid, y gracias. No digo esto por modestia, todo lo contrario. Ya llegará nuestro día, pero por ahora aún no alborea.’

Valle did not publish another play until 1920, nor did he see any more of his work staged until 1924. His only involvement with the theatre would be mainly with experimental companies or fringe groups, such as Martínez Sierra’s Teatro de Arte at El Teatro Eslava, La Escuela Nueva, formed by Rivas Cherif to bring the theatre to the
working classes, and Baroja’s El Mirlo Blanco. Eventually, Valle formed his own company, first called Ensayo de Teatro, later El Cántaro Roto.

*El embrujado* would, however, finally be performed within Valle’s lifetime. According to Iglesias Feijoo, on the fall of the monarchy in 1931, Valle’s work was viewed a little more favourably, and June of that year saw the first production of *Farsa y licencia de la reina castiza* (1922) at the Teatro Muñoz Seca. Then, later, on 11 November, Valle himself directed *El embrujado* at the same theatre. He made Rosa la Galana the centre of the production. According to one review, the play had the ‘estampa popular de drama estático’ and was applauded ‘sin regateos’. Another critic was equally enthusiastic, but regretted the omission of the stage directions, which he considered to be of great pictorial value. He approved of the Expressionism of the production and likened the dark scenes to paintings by José Gutiérrez Solana. Valle was not there to receive calls to the stage; by this time he was seriously unwell, and his illness had kept him at home.

Dougherty suggests that the timing of this production may have been deliberate, coinciding as it did with the republication in *El Sol* of the two completed novels of *El ruedo ibérico*, at a moment when the first ‘pasos reformistas’ of the Second Republic were triggering violence and unrest in the country. In an introduction to the first of these novels, *La corte de los milagros*, Valle draws attention to the historical analogy between the current turmoil and that of 1868, and claims that ‘El restablecimiento del orden nunca se logra sin el sacrificio de vidas inocentes’. The performance of *El embrujado*, a play that dramatised a conflict ‘engendrado por egoísmos’, and ended in the death of an innocent victim, would serve to underline the dangers of such ‘egoísmos’, and would emphasise ‘la distancia que iba abriendo entre el Gobierno de la República y el pueblo’.
Presumably because of its central motifs of greed, lust and death, *El embrujado* was later collected, in 1927, with four other plays, under the title *Retablo de la avaricia, la lujuria y la muerte*. Its inclusion is otherwise rather arbitrary, and has led to the questionable assumption that all five plays have a Galician theme. María Esther Pérez asserts that while only *Ligazón, El embrujado* and *La cabeza del bautista* 'son de tema gallego', it is possible to see in all the plays 'esas notas de leyenda, superstición, fuertes pasiones. etc. que descubrimos en las otras obras valleinclaninas de tema gallego'.

It is difficult to understand where she sees the 'tema gallego' in *Ligazón* or *La cabeza del bautista*, and her argument concerning the linking 'notas' is weak. González López considers them all, save *Sacrilegio*, to be Galician, but for him the persuasive factors are the common themes of lust and greed.

There are, admittedly, links between these four other plays and Valle's Galician works – it would be uncharacteristic of Valle's writing to find none – but few are convincingly Galician. The themes of greed, lust and death are not exclusive to Valle's Galician works; they figure throughout his writing. While it is possible to see La Mozuela from *Ligazón* as a temptress in the same mould as Rosa, and to accept that the witchcraft in this play echoes that of *El embrujado*, the Galician background is absent. *La cabeza del bautista* has two characters, Don Igi and El Enano de Salnés, who could well be Galician, and Valerio el Pajarito figures in both plays, but otherwise the links are tenuous. Neither *La rosa de papel* nor *Sacrilegio* has any discernible Galician elements. *El embrujado*, moreover, was written much earlier than the other plays in this collection, and does not share their post-1920 approach. Subtitled either *auto para siluetas* or *melodrama para marionetas*, these four one-act plays embrace the aesthetic of Valle's later work.

*El embrujado* is often regarded as one of Valle's lesser plays, and for several of Valle's critics it confirmed the fact that tragedy did not suit his talents. González del
Valle disagrees, and defends the innovative nature of this play, but quotes several critics, including Lyon and Greenfield who consider it below standard. *El embrujado,* certainly, has emerged as one of Valle’s least successful plays, but it served to take the early *Comedias bárbaras* to another stage, and provides a significant link with the later plays of *Divinas palabras* and *Cara de Plata.*

Valle remained in Galicia until 1924. During the eight years that followed *El embrujado,* he wrote very little, but in 1920 a burst of activity signalled the beginning of a new phase in his writing that would confirm his reputation as one of the most original Spanish writers of the twentieth century.
Notes to Chapter 5

1 Vicente Vega, 'Los estrenos de Valle-Inclán', Primer Acto, no. 28 (November 1961), 20-22 (p. 20).

2 Cited in Madrid, p. 110.

3 See Dougherty, Palimpsestos al cubo, p. 81.

4 Salper, p. 186.

5 'Tragedia de ensueño' and Voces de gesta had been Valle’s only tragedies until then.

6 Ciriaco Morón Arroyo, 'La lámpara maravillosa y la ecuación estética', in Zahareas, pp. 443-459 (p. 448).

7 Cited in Madrid, p. 79

8 See Chapter 1, p. 29.


10 See Lima, The Dramatic World of Valle-Inclán, p. 112.

11 See Jean-Marie Lavaud, 'El embrujado: de la comedia bábara a la tragedia de tierras de Salnés'. in Hormigón, I, pp. 143-51 (p. 143).

12 Dougherty, in Un Valle-Inclán olvidado, quotes Valle-Inclán: 'Me permito opinar [...] que las Empresas también deben conocer las obras antes de rechazarlas' (p. 41).

13 Cited in John Lyon. 'Valle-Inclán and the Art of the Theatre', BHS, 46 (1969), 132-51 (p. 135). In footnote 1, Lyon is referring to Valle-Inclán’s words as quoted by Rafael Landin Carrasco in an article in ABC, 27 February 1962.


16 'Floridor'. 'Muñoz Seca: El embrujado'. ABC. 12 November 1931, p. 45.


18 Pérez. p. 103.


Despite the setback occasioned by the initial reception of *El embrujado*, Valle did not abandon writing theatre, nor did he relinquish his Galician theme. *Divinas palabras* would follow, and though it was not published in book form until 1920, the time lapse is misleading, since it is likely that this play began life as *Pan divino* as early as 1913.\(^1\)

Valle himself offers evidence of an early version in an interview in 1915: 'Ahora voy a publicar un libro místico que se llama La lámpara maravillosa y luego tengo que hacer una tragedia para la Xirgu, que se llama *Pan divino*.\(^2\)' Catalina Míguez Vilas confirms its long gestation: ‘En junio de 1919 [Valle-Inclán] de nuevo ofrece a sus lectores otra obra de teatro. *Divinas palabras*, cuyo proyecto de génesis ya contempla el dramaturgo desde 1915.\(^3\) Since *Divinas palabras* is closely allied to *El embrujado*, the idea of this early conception is persuasive, but the delay in the appearance of its final version was curiously long at a time when Valle himself had claimed to be writing more quickly. The gap is, nevertheless, symptomatic of the relatively unproductive period that followed *El embrujado*.

Compared with the steady flow of work that Valle had produced since 1889, and especially with the very active period between 1907 and 1912, the years between 1912 and 1920 were unusually fallow. Valle’s break with the commercial theatre had left him deeply disillusioned, and his move to Galicia bore the signs of a withdrawal. Increasing
ill health, which was to result in serious surgery in 1920, financial difficulties, and personal grief over the deaths of his mother and of his second child, followed in 1916 by that of his close friend Rubén Dario, whom he had known since 1899, must all have affected him deeply. There were also minor setbacks: a move from Cambados to Caramiñal to attempt farming proved a failure; in 1915 his bid for the title of Marqués del Valle was rejected, and in 1916 Julio Casares launched the most serious attack to date on Valle’s work in his *Crítica profana*. The cumulative effect of these events was compounded by the wider issues of political unrest in Spain: the strikes of 1917 and their brutal repression, the unrest in Barcelona in 1919, and the imposition of martial law in Madrid. All indications of a country in crisis, and set against the background of World War I in Europe. It was an unsettling period and proved instrumental in bringing about changes in Valle’s perspective, which are reflected in his writing at the time.

No clear pattern emerges from these years. The two most important works that Valle produced during this time were unlike anything that he had written previously. Both reflect a spiritual restlessness and a mood of introspection. Neither novels nor plays, the first was in the nature of a philosophical treatise, the second more akin to journalistic reporting, though with a clear literary slant. *La lámpara maravillosa: Ejercicios espirituales* was an attempt to set forth his aesthetic ideas on art and beauty. It is especially concerned with the Gnostic philosophy, and with the importance of numbers, an element that becomes almost obsessively important in Valle’s later work: the sophisticated, systematic structure of his final novel *Tirano Banderas* is testament to this. *La lámpara maravillosa*, published in segments between 1912 and 1915 in *El Imparcial* and *La Esfera*, finally appeared in book form in 1916.

The second work, *La media noche*, gave Valle’s impressions of the 1914-18 war, based on his visit to the Allied front as war correspondent for *El Imparcial* in 1916. This piece also appeared first in 1916 in *Los Lunes de El Imparcial* and was published
in book form the following year, subtitled *Visión estelar de un momento de guerra.* Valle’s aim was to give a ‘total’ vision of the war, a panoramic view that transcended time and space, but, by his own admission, he failed to effect his purpose. This first-hand experience of suffering in the trenches was generally assumed to have represented a crisis for him and to be responsible for a radical change in his perspective. *La media noche* was subsequently seen by many as a key work to his transition from the heroic to the anti-heroic. Verity Smith supports this theory and maintains that it prompted the birth of the *esperpento.* John Lyon disagrees; he does not consider the experience traumatic enough to produce a reappraisal of ideas. He thinks it unlikely that any one crisis wrought a sudden change in Valle’s perspective, but that the effect was cumulative, and took place over a period of years. *La media noche*, moreover, was written after his return to Galicia, and still retains some of the heroic nostalgia of earlier work. The *esperpento* was born later. Evidence of a shift to an anti-heroic stance had, in addition, already revealed itself in *El embrujado.*

Then, in 1919, Valle published a collection of poems under the title *La Pipa de Kif.* Valle wrote comparatively little poetry in his lifetime: three collections in all, each relating to a different section of his work. *Aromas de leyenda,* which appeared in 1907, was modernista in style and Galician in theme, and belonged to the early period. This second collection was very different. The style of writing was new and subversive. Lyon sees it as the first manifestation of a debunking spirit in Valle’s work, the first systematic attempt to use the grotesque artistically. Its abundant use of dehumanising techniques anticipates the *esperpento,* and some of the poems are characterised by a carnival atmosphere, a scenario that is developed later in *Tirano Banderas.*

Finally, after seven years without any published theatre, Valle returned to drama and to the Galician theme. *Divinas palabras* first appeared in serialised form in *El Sol* between June and July 1919. The fact, however, that it was published in book form in
May of the following year, the year in which Valle wrote his first esperpento, *Luces de Bohemia*, and in which he lays out the aesthetics of his new literary genre, is possibly one of the reasons why *Divinas palabras* has often been seen in the same light.

Although it is subtitled *Tragicomedia de aldea*, it has been regarded as an esperpento by several critics: Manuel Bermejo Marcos thinks it the cleverest and harshest of all Valle’s esperpentos;* Antonio Buero Vallejo sees it as close to the esperpento, and refers to it as a ‘tragicomedia considerada de hecho, y con razón, como otro esperpento’;* Germán Bleiberg agrees that ‘de *Divinas palabras* al esperpento no hay más que un paso muy corto’, and Lima maintains that although not officially called an esperpento, it is one. Whatever label is given to this play, it is clear that Valle’s approach is much closer to that of *El Embrujado* than to the early *Comedias bárbaras*. *Divinas palabras* revealed a radical shift in Valle’s perspective, and there are certainly marked elements in this play that point to the esperpento; it does not, however, employ the systematic deformation defined in *Luces de Bohemia*, where Valle gives his interpretation of the word through his protagonist Max Estrella:

> El esperpentismo lo ha inventado Goya. Los héroes clásicos han ido a pasearse en el callejón del Gato. […] Los héroes clásicos reflejados en los espejos cóncavos dan el Esperpento. El sentido trágico de la vida española sólo puede darse con una estética sistematicamente deformada. […] Las imágenes más bellas en un espejo cóncavo son absurdas. […] Mi estética actual es transformar con matemática de espejo cóncavo las normas clásicas. (*OC, II*, 933)

The concept of the deforming mirror indicates a new social and artistic awareness on Valle’s part, and a change in attitude in his role as a writer. In a letter to Rivas Cherif in 1920 he acknowledges that the idea of Art for Art’s sake no longer held, that ‘jugar en
los tiempos que corren es una canallada. Hay que lograr justicia social'. The esperpento would be his way of expressing that change.

The word esperpento has a variety of meanings. The Real Academia Española: Diccionario de la Lengua Española defines it as: a) ‘notable por su fealdad, desatino o mala traza’. and b) ‘desatino. absurdo’. It was in general use at the beginning of the twentieth century, along with terms like fantoche, pelele and troglodita. Its most important element is the use of the grotesque. The root of the word ‘grotesque’, crypta, is a vulgar Latin corruption of cripta, and means ‘a hidden place’ or ‘subterranean passage’ and has associations with death, secrecy, mystery and the macabre. The Spanish variants of this word were grutesco, grotisco and brutesco, and were applied to the plastic arts, usually representing a mixture of animal and vegetable, or animal and human elements: small monsters filling spaces in architecture. From here it was only a step to the idea of monstruoso, and thence to ridículo. This new meaning began to evolve towards the end of the nineteenth century, and by the beginning of the twentieth century. the word grotesco was a common term.

Although the overriding style of Valle’s early work is modernista, it contains abundant examples of the grotesque, which began to appear in the first of his short stories, such as ‘El rey de la máscara’. It is this element that becomes the basis of his new aesthetic, and which he turns into his own literary genre. As Rubia Barcia points out: ‘La palabra “esperpento” hasta él se había usado como sinónimo exagerado de mamarracho, con acepción claramente despectiva, aplicable a personas o cosas, y capaz de hacer reír al espectador y observador. Él no hará más que añadirle una nueva dimensión hacia dentro.’

Later, in 1928, Valle elaborated on his new approach:

Creo que hay tres maneras de ver el mundo artística o estéticamente: de rodillas,
en pie o levantado en el aire. [...] Esta es una manera muy española, manera de
demiurgo, que no se cree en modo alguno hecho del mismo barro que sus
muñecos. Quevedo tiene esta manera. [...] Esta manera es ya definitiva en
Goya, y esta consideración es la que me movió a dar un cambio en mi literatura
y a escribir los esperpento, el género literario que yo bautizo con el nombre de
esperpentes.¹⁴

It is in this third way that Valle expresses his tragic view of life, in a borderland of
tragicomedy. He fuses human and animal elements with the inanimate, mingles reality
with the dream world, and juxtaposes horror with laughter. His characters stress the
grotesque side of life through their deformation. By creating monsters, clowns and
puppets, but all in recognisable circumstances, Valle demonstrates the absurdity of
Man’s lot. Puppets are grotesque par excellence, through their departure from the
familiar; their stunted physique implies a stunted spirit and the absence of an authentic
human being; witness the character of Zaratustra in Luces de Bohemia. The grotesque
shatters established values, or the illusion of those values. Valle’s characters experience
real tragedy, but, as he explains, are incapable of expressing it in the traditional manner:

En las tragedias antiguas, los personajes marchaban al destino trágico,
valiéndose del gesto trágico. Yo en mi nuevo género también conduzco a los
personajes al destino trágico, pero me valgo para ello del gesto ridículo. En la
vida existen muchos seres que llevan la tragedia dentro de sí y que son incapaces
de una actitud levantada, resultando, por lo contrario, grotescos en todos sus
actos.¹⁵

Even Luces de Bohemia (initial version, 1920), however, despite its
denomination as Valle’s first esperpento, lacks the deliberate distortion that is the
essential element of this new genre, and which will not be developed fully until the
following year in Los cuernos de Don Friolera, and subsequently in La hija del capitán
(1927) and Las galas del difunto, (1930), all later collected under the title of Martes de carnaval. Lyon sees Luces de Bohemia as the turning point in Valle’s writing, as the transition between the former heroic image of the world and the later anti-heroic view of the true esperpento.16 In this play, however, the sordidness is real, not distorted, and its basis on real events sets it apart from the three later esperpentos. Alonso Zamora and Las galas del difunto, (1930), all later collected under the title of Martes de carnaval. Lyon sees Luces de Bohemia as the turning point in Valle’s writing, as the transition between the former heroic image of the world and the later anti-heroic view of the true esperpento.16 In this play, however, the sordidness is real, not distorted, and its basis on real events sets it apart from the three later esperpentos. Alonso Zamora Vicente considers it the first important European work with society as its collective protagonist, but observes that it simply reflects life as it was, and he sees it as more of a chronicle than an esperpento: ‘Cada vez me convenzo más de que Luces de Bohemia es un periódico.’17 The story of a genius rejected by society, set against the background of the disturbances in Spain during the years 1909-19, the play reflects the violence of the street fighting between the troops and the workers, and the deaths of innocent people. There are, certainly, examples of Valle’s dehumanising technique in this play, but the protagonist, Max Estrella, although initially ridiculed, is never dehumanised. Valle’s respect for blindness would guarantee that. Nor is Max a soldier, like the protagonists from the three esperpentos that follow, which all target the military.

In the same year, moreover, now generally recognised as the point in his career when his work changed direction, Valle published a third collection of poetry and two more plays. El pasajero was modernista in style and close in subject matter to La lámpara maravillosa; neither of the plays was an esperpento, and each was strikingly different from the others. Farsa italiana de la enamorada del rey, published in April 1920, is a verse play inspired by Don Quijote, and tells of a young girl’s illusion of love for an ugly, ageing king whom she has never seen. The second play was another farce in verse form, serialised in La Pluma a few months after the first. Farsa y licencia de la reina castiza is a biting satire on Alfonso XIII’s grandmother, Isabel. While still not an esperpento, the distortion and physical ugliness in this play, its puppet figures and the use of the grotesque bring it closer to the new genre. This play was not published in
book form until 1922, and both farces were later collected in 1926, together with *Farsa infantil de la cabeza del dragón*, under the title of *Tablado de marionetas*.

Whilst the grotesque also dominates *Divinas palabras*, its use in this play differs significantly from that in the esperpento by the fact that it is carefully built up out of natural ugliness. Several of the leading characters are physically ugly and their lives revolve around Laureano, El Idiota, a hydrocephalic dwarf whose presence dominates the play. Attention to physical ugliness in Valle’s work, though briefly paid in *Sonata de primavera* and *Flor de santidad* in their descriptions of the poor, only began to assume importance in *Romance de lobos*, where the depiction of the beggars, especially of the blind leper, El Pobre de San Lázaro, approaches the grotesque. *Divinas palabras* is the first play to use ugliness consistently as a basis for the grotesque. Valle repeatedly draws our attention to elements that are physically ugly in his leading characters: the squint in Pedro Gailo’s eye, the hairy mole on Miguelín’s mouth, and, in particular, the dwarf’s huge head. Caricature, a basic tool of the grotesque, commonly overstresses one or more features of a person, thereby destroying his natural harmony. One of its simplest forms is that of a normal head on a dwarfed body. Just as Valle has contrasted the harshness of the action with the idyll of the setting in previous works, here he highlights the ugliness of the characters by the beauty of their surroundings. As the stinking, swollen corpse of the dwarf lies outside the church, besieged with flies, the setting is one of peace and beauty: ‘*La iglesia románica, de piedras doradas. La quintana verde. Paz y aromas. El sol traza sus juveniles caminos de ensueño sobre la esmeralda del río*’ (*OC, II*, 583).

Vance Holloway talks of the grotesque in terms of the monstrous, which he defines as the expression of an excess or distortion of the normal. He identifies El Pobre de San Lázaro as an example in *Romance de lobos*, because of both his size and his leprosy, Rosa in *El embrujado*, for her powers of witchcraft and her ability to turn
herself and others into the form of a dog, and both Mari-Gaila and Laureano in *Divinas palabras*. she for her abuse of her ward and her links with satanic forces, the dwarf for his monstrous appearance. Salinas puts forward a similar view: he relates the ‘bárbara’ element in the *Comedias bárbaras* to the idea of hugeness or abnormality, of deformation in the form of monsters, and embodied in *Divinas palabras* in the ‘monster’ of El Idiota.

In addition to their physical appearance, the life that the characters lead in *Divinas palabras* is also ugly: villagers and fairgoers alike are motivated by avarice and self-interest; their relationships are based on the satisfaction of their immediate needs, and their behaviour is predominantly cruel and hypocritical. Their treatment of Laureano, whom they see as a monstrosity, is equally monstrous. Ugly behaviour is not new either in Valle’s work: cruelty and violence figured in his earliest literature, but in *Femeninas* and the *Sonatas* evil invariably had an exotic quality. In Águila de blasón, acts of robbery, rape, sadism and sacrilege were frequently designed to produce maximum discomfort through the context in which they were presented. Behaviour that is ugly *per se* thereby becomes grotesque. In *Divinas palabras*, as in earlier works, there is a double perspective between the stage directions that set the scene, and the action and dialogue that develop: the gruesome discovery of Laureano’s dead body, half eaten by pigs, takes place in a scene of apparent idyll. The peace and beauty of the ‘*prima mañana, rosadas luces, cantos de pájaros*’, is rudely broken by Marica’s screams of ‘¡Cache¡...¡Cache!...¡Cache, grandísimos ladrones!’ (*OC, II, 574*).

This is not the only use that Valle makes of contrast in this play; he frequently juxtaposes conflicting images or emotions. Beauty is not just set against ugliness: in the penultimate scene, it is dramatically juxtaposed with cruelty as Mari-Gaila tries to escape the angry mob. Cruelty and compassion are seen side by side at the *feria*, when Laureano is taunted by Miguelin, who, with his ‘*boca rasgada por una mala risa,* [...]
hace beber al enano’, while beside them, the sick child who has come with her elderly parents smiles lovingly at the dwarf and offers him some of her festive bread and cake (OC, II, 566). Also, the comic and the tragic are at variance in the scene of Pedro Gailo’s deliberations over his errant wife (OC, II, 561), while the tragic and the grotesque are painfully combined in the scene when Laureano dies: ‘El Idiota, los ojos vueltos y la lengua muerta entre los labios negruzcos, respiraba con ahogado ronquido. La enorme cabeza, livida, greñuda, viscosa, rodaba en el hoyo como una cabeza cortada’ (OC, II, 566). Later, the presence of his dead body throughout the Trasgo scene brings together the grotesque and the erotic. It is through the use of contrast, a device that he has employed since the beginning of his work, that Valle produces his ‘shock’ effect. By repeatedly juxtaposing conflicting images or ideas, he creates an almost continuous dramatic tension, and produces what Lyon refers to as a dual response in his public.20

Yet dehumanising techniques, which are the hallmark of the later esperpento, did not suddenly emerge, but began to appear as early as 1899 in ‘Rosita’, particularly in the humanisation of the inanimate. In Flor de santidad, the innkeeper’s wife has ‘brazos de momia’; in Águila de blasón, Don Galán is frequently likened to a dog, and there are further examples of dehumanisation, and especially of caricature in 1913, in La Marquesa Rosalinda, La cabeza del dragón and Voces de gesta.

In Divinas palabras the device becomes common. Many of the characters are given animal or inanimate characteristics: Laureano is made to perform tricks like a circus animal and is frequently referred to as ‘el carretón’; Mari-Gaila earns the terms ‘perra salida’ and ‘oveja que descarriay while Simoniña has something about her ‘de lima, de vaca y de pan’. Marica has ‘pezos de cabra’, is likened to a serpent, and Rosa la Tatula becomes a ‘garabato negruzco’. More destructive still is the identification of a character by the clothes he wears, or, even more extreme, by his or her reduction to a
'sombra': Pedro Gailo becomes a 'sotana'; the Civil Guard and his companion are referred to, metonymically, as a 'pareja de tricornios'; the unnamed villagers are 'capas y mantillas' and Juana la Reina is a 'sombra terrosa y descalza'. The ultimate, ridiculing device is the presentation of a character as a puppet figure: Pedro Gailo's stick-like limbs and whirling arms strip him of his humanity and reduce him to a caricature. Moreover, as Paul Ilie points out, by repeatedly returning to the same ugly attributes, such as Pedro Gailo's 'ojo bizco', or the hairs that stand up on his head, Valle 'develops a characteristic exaggeration that is not only amusing but has a grotesque function as well'. So dehumanised is Pedro Gailo that there is little surprise when, puppet-like, he is apparently unhurt after hurling himself from the church tower.

The characters in general are further dehumanised by the reverse device of giving human qualities to animals: a cow is likened to 'una reina'; Coimbra, Séptimo's dog, has a name that figures on the cast list, can dance, at times 'reflexiona', and is 'poseido del espíritu profético'; his bird, Colorín, also has a name, apes human behaviour by wearing a 'caperuza verde y bragas amarillas' and can predict the future.

Even inanimate objects are humanised: a stone 'rueda burlando', the church bells 'bailan locas', and the sun 'traza sus juveniles caminos'. Here again, Valle appears to go well beyond the norms one would expect in naturalistic theatre. In addition, the human element in this play is undermined by non-human sounds: the rattling of keys, the rasping of a lighter, and the croaking of a toad are frequent reminders of the absence of humanity in the characters. The toad even figures in the cast list as 'Un sapo anónimo que canta en la noche'.

Whilst Divinas palabras shares the aesthetic of the grotesque with the other three plays of 1920, it is, nevertheless, essentially realistic, albeit bordering on the extreme; the impression of distortion in this play is emphasised by its uncomfortable juxtapositions. However, Divinas palabras lacks the detachment of the visión.
esperpéntica. Despite the fact that several characters are dehumanised, and one is reduced to a puppet, Mari-Gaila is seen 'de rodillas', and Laureano elicits pity rather than scorn. Gonzalo Torrente Ballester, who adapted the script for a performance of *Divinas palabras* in 1961, even finds humour in the grotesque elements of this play, and feels respect for the characters, who, he maintains, are not responsible for their actions. He claims that the fundamental situation of the 'carreton', one he has seen for himself, springs from poverty, and in the midst of the general atmosphere of greed and cruelty, he finds moments of tenderness. He sees a strong relationship between this play and the *Comedias bárbaras*, and points out that while the seeds of the *esperpento* are discernible in the *Comedias* and emerge more clearly in *Divinas palabras*, none of the plays comes under the new deforming aesthetic: this was reserved for later. 22

The Galician countryside, moreover, is not a setting that Valle uses for the *esperpento*, which usually centres on Castile or on city life. The implicit irony of the *esperpento* is also missing, although the ending of *Divinas palabras* has been seen as ironic: because of its gullibility and blind acceptance of the liturgy, the crowd only reacts to the words when spoken in Latin, and the conversation that follows is far from spiritual. Lyon points out, however, that such an interpretation is contradicted by the reverential tone of the stage directions.23 Whilst the Galician peasant is presented in a morally negative light, he is not mocked. The response of the villagers to the Divine Words is intuitive, if ignorant: '¡Milagro del latin! Una emoción religiosa y litúrgica conmueve las conciencias, y cambia el sangriento resplandor de los rostros. Las viejas almas infantiles respiran un aroma de vida eterna' (OC, II, 593-94).

This is the 'milagro musical' to which Valle refers in *La lámpara maravillosa*, a message that reaches the intuition rather than the understanding (OC, I, 1922-23), and which moves Bradomin in *Sonata de invierno*, when listening to a sermon in Basque, a language he does not understand (OC, I, 526). Valle respects the 'mentalidad milagrera'
of the people, their innocence and their blind faith. As evidenced in *Flor de santidad*, the peasant reveres the language of the Church, even if he does not understand it. Ádega experienced this kind of belief on listening to the words of the abbot at her exorcism. Dougherty also refutes the presence of irony at the end of *Divinas palabras* and maintains that ‘la tragedia que espera el público se convierte, pues, en un ritual de purificación que celebra la redención milagrosa del ser caído’. He goes on to reconcile the extremes of behaviour within the peasant population, and relates this play with *El embrujado*, pointing out that:

> La promesa de redención en que culmina la acción de *Divinas palabras* surgía del mismo fondo primitivo que dictaba los pecados monstruosos de *El embrujado*. Las dos obras revelaban así, el conjunto de potencias que Valle-Inclán atribuía al pueblo. Éste, [...] era capaz de los actos más extremados, bien de signo brutal, bien de alcance heroico. La clave de esa doble potencia eran sus ‘almas rudas’. (p. 130)

The Divine Words in *Divinas palabras* work their miracle through their very incomprehensibility. In *Los cruzados de la causa*, Montenegro derided their obfuscatory nature as deliberate, remarking that ‘el clero reza en latín para que no se enteren los siervos que labran la tierra’ (*OC, I, 706*). If there is mockery in this play it is directed, not at the *pueblo*, but at the Church and the clergy.

Robert Marrast maintains, however, that the ending of *Divinas palabras* is not what it seems. Incapable of avenging his honour in the traditional, ‘Calderonian’ manner, and failing in his attempt at suicide, Pedro Gailo avails himself of the only form of revenge left to him: by assuming the role of a priest and resorting to evangelical language, he upends tradition, and quells the mockery of the crowd. Marrast interprets the villagers’ retreat, moreover, as fear of the law, rather than awe in the face of a religious experience; only a few moments ago they had been, he points out, prepared to
stone Mari-Gaila to death. Far from an optimistic solution, the ‘miracle’ represents only a temporary hiatus, before a depressing return to the status quo, and an uncertain future for Mari-Gaila.25

Of the four plays published in 1920, Divinas palabras is the only one located in Galicia: an interesting repetition of the period following the Comedias bárbaras in which, out of five very different plays, only El embrujado was set in Galicia. Whilst it is misleading to talk of Valle’s work in terms of development, the debt that Divinas palabras owes to the two early Comedias bárbaras and to El embrujado establishes it as part of a sequence. It is the first link since El embrujado to the Comedias bárbaras, and underlines Valle’s continuing attachment to his native region. Despite its subtitle — Tragicomedia de aldea — it was, like El embrujado, seen by some critics as another Comedia bárbara.26 Indeed, Miguez Vilas regards it as a revival of the early Comedias bárbaras, bringing the fictional, Galician universe into the modern age,27 and Eduardo Gómez de Baquero refers to it as ‘la mejor de las Comedias bárbaras’.28

Given that Divinas palabras is set in Galicia and was started shortly after El embrujado, the connections between the two plays are predictable, but Divinas palabras is more complex. Whilst both place their emphasis on the peasant sector, this shift in focus is taken a step further in Divinas palabras. The pueblo now becomes the sole protagonist: there is no one of any social standing in the play, nor any feudal element. Valle’s interest in the hero figure has gone, and with it any trace of sentimentality: ‘El individuo es ya lo de menos, […] Ahora el protagonista de la vida es el grupo, la colectividad, el gremio, la multitud.’29 The cross-section of the population in Divinas palabras is similar to that in Flor de santidad, but now the peasants are not simply types, nor are they idealised; they are real people, treated harshly, as they were in El embrujado and, in addition, some are caricatured and dehumanised. It is this approach,
coupled with an element of social comment, that has led to the labelling of the play as a work of transition. Like *El embrujado*, the background to *Divinas palabras* has moved from the historic past of the *Comedias bárbaras* to a contemporary Galicia, centring on a small rural community. The tone is still realistic, but less grim. Whereas *El embrujado*, subtitled *Tragedia*, presented an almost unrelenting scene of misery, *Divinas palabras*, by contrast, is a *Tragicomedia*, lightened considerably, not just by humour, but by positive attitudes. The daily existence of the people is punctuated by moments of sheer pleasure. Against a background of greed and hypocrisy, happiness, noticeably absent in all Valle's work to date, makes a rare appearance.

The action, like that of *El embrujado*, revolves again around a child, and the rights to his 'ownership'. Laureano, El Idiota, is a hydrocephalic dwarf, the illegitimate son of Juana la Reina, who spends her days trundling him along in a cart and begging for money. When she dies, the dispute over his custody is resolved by a decision that the responsibility be shared between two women: Juana's sister, Marica del Reino, who views the child as a burden that she must shoulder as her Christian duty, and her sister-in-law, Mari-Gaila, wife of the sexton, Pedro Gailo, for whom El Idiota is a potential meal ticket and an opportunity to escape the tedium of village life. The play subsequently follows two narrative lines: one static, revolving around Marica and life in the village, the other itinerant, following Mari-Gaila's travels with her new ward from *feria* to *feria*. The action alternates between one scenario and the other, with the greater emphasis on Mari-Gaila.

Mari-Gaila thrives; in the new company that she keeps, she meets Séptimo Miau, an ex-convict who is roaming the countryside. Their flirtation is brief but intense, and the consummation of their passion marks the climax of the play. The price Mari-Gaila pays is the death of her ward, who, left temporarily with fairgoers, is plied with so much drink that he dies. Under cover of darkness, Mari-Gaila delivers the dead dwarf to
her sister-in-law’s door. Marica immediately returns the corpse, and it is Pedro Gailo who finally accepts responsibility for its burial. When Mari-Gaila is subsequently caught in flagrante in the reed beds with Séptimo, the incensed villagers force her to strip and ride naked to the church on a hay cart. Pedro Gailo’s initial reaction is to throw himself from the roof of the church, but then, surprisingly unhurt, he rises to face the crowd and unexpectedly defends his wife. When his plea, ‘¡Quien sea libre de culpa, tire la primera piedra!’ has no effect, he repeats it in Latin: ‘Qui sine peccato est vestrum, primus in illam lapidem mittat.’ The Divine Words miraculously disperse the crowd, and Pedro Gailo leads his errant wife into the asylum of the church.

*Divinas palabras* is generally seen as an exposure of religious hypocrisy, of lip service paid to the Church, in this case the church of San Clemente, a name that parodies the absence of mercy in the community, but anticipates the resolution of the final dilemma. Although village life revolves around the church, it is significant that we only see it from the outside; no scenes take place inside. The recurring elements of greed, lust and death are all underscored in this play by a lack of Christian charity and an indifference to the suffering of others. Séptimo is expressing a general attitude when he remarks: ‘Dios no mira lo que hacemos. Tiene la cara vuelta’ (*OC, II*, 526). As Juana la Reina lies dying, no one will go to her assistance; even Rosa la Tatula shies away from any involvement. The subsequent haggle over the guardianship of Laureano is not motivated by family love, as those concerned would have others believe, but by the thought of gain. When the dwarf dies, there is a parallel attempt by all family members to shirk the responsibility of his funeral arrangements.

Gustavo Umpierre interprets *Divinas palabras* on a different level. He regards it as an allegory of the clash between the two fundamental movements in Spain at that time: a desire for spirituality and a search for values in materialistic progress. He sees the characters as symbolic: Mari-Gaila’s anti-Christian indulgence of vital instincts set
against the traditional Catholic morals represented by Pedro Gailo; Séptimo, the 
embodiment of the intellectualism related to the Devil; Marica, the importance of 
appearances over the truth, and Simoniña, the result of a negative union between the 
vital and the static.30

Bermejo Marcos' interpretation is political. He maintains that the play is an 
historical allegory, a deliberate attack on the Regency period of 1885-1900, and that 
behind the apparent fable of the tragicomedy lies a caricature of what was happening on 
a larger scale in Spain at the end of the nineteenth century. He draws parallels between 
Pedro Gailo and Antonio Cánovas del Castillo, and likens Séptimo to Práxedes Sagasta. 
He interprets the treatment suffered by El Idiota as the exploitation of the Spanish 
peasant, who is ‘deceived’ by ‘Divine Words’ that he cannot comprehend, the ‘sharing’ 
of the dwarf as the division of political power, and his death and putrefaction as the 
demise and decay of the Spanish people.31 Some elements of his theory are persuasive, 
but when he draws a parallel between Alfonso XII and Juana la Reina, suggesting that 
when the young king died in 1885 he left behind an enfeebled country that would easily 
be exploited, in the same way that Juana leaves her son, and even hints at a common 
suffering from venereal disease, his arguments run thin. The only explicit political 
comment in the play, in fact, is a remark by Séptimo, who claims that Spain should be a 
republic like France: ‘En las Repúblicas manda el pueblo, usted y yo’ (OC, II, 555).

While most critics agree that this is a collective tragicomedy, and that the 
protagonist is now the pueblo, the one character who moves the action is again a 
woman. Just as Rosa was the link between the ruling class and the peasantry in El 
embrujado. Mari-Gaila provides the connection between the two communities – the 
village and the countryside – in Divinas palabras. These are diametrically opposed: the 
one closed and traditional, ostensibly Christian, the other open and freethinking, with 
pagan overtones. With the exceptions of Rosa la Tatula and Juana la Reina, all the
Characters in the play belong either to one or the other of these communities: those in the village live sedentary, conservative lives; in the surrounding countryside, existence is itinerant and precarious. The clash arises when Mari-Gaila, a member of the village community, brings the two into conflict; she deliberately steps outside the limits of the village and crosses the line between its 'moral cerrada' and the open life of the countryside, taking the action into a society of different values. She embraces this world to which she does not belong, as if it were her natural habitat. Her itinerant role brings her into contact with nearly all the other characters in the play, and her rise and fall provide the climax and denouement of the action.

Mari-Gaila is essentially a new creation. Some of her inspiration may be drawn from Pichona and from Rosa la Galana, but her character is much more developed. She is more beautiful and more vital than either of these women. Easy-going and pleasure-loving like Pichona, she also shares Rosa's selfishness and greed, but not her satanic powers. Though sensual like both women, Mari-Gaila is sexually naïve, and her responses are instinctive and impetuous. Like Rosa, she behaves badly, but though shameless and self-indulgent, there is a guileless quality about her behaviour that makes her one of Valle's most engaging and convincing creations. She plays her part with gusto and eclipses all the other characters. Unlike Montenegro, who remained an isolated figure in the Comedias bárbaras until the end of Romance de lobos, Mari-Gaila is socially engaged throughout. Valle draws our attention to her beauty and to her body language from the moment of her first appearance: 'Blanca y rubia, risueña de ojos, armónica en los ritos del cuerpo y de la voz.' Her sensual nature is emphasised even as she responds to the news of Juana's death: 'Abre la curva cadenciosa de los brazos, con las curvas sensuales de la voz' (OC, II, 535). Leda Schiavo maintains that she is probably 'el personaje más humano de la obra de Valle-Inclán'.

32
Mari-Gaila is also quick-witted. She seizes the opportunity that custody of the orphaned dwarf will open up for her, and wastes no time in taking to the road with her new ward. Unusual for Valle's characters, she is, moreover, seen to develop as the action progresses. To date, the only character who had undergone a change of behaviour, was Montenegro, in *Romance de lobos*. Mari-Gaila's development, given the circumstances, has a certain inevitability. Once at the *feria*, she loses her aggressive air and is applauded for the change in her demeanour. One *feriante* comments that she now has 'unas carnes que no tenia'; another adds: '¡Y colores!' (*OC, II*, 548). The *feriantes* compare her with the famous *pletista*, Carolina de Otero, who led a life of scandal and adventure at the end of the nineteenth century, and who, according to *El Vendedor de Agua de Limón*, had slept with the King of France (*OC, II*, 555). This reference recalls the appearance of 'La bella Otero', in the short story 'Rosita' (*OC, I*, 135), and also links Mari-Gaila with the protagonist of 'Octavia Santino', who was reputed to have enjoyed the love of a king. Mari-Gaila's new-found popularity is resented by her sister-in-law, Marica, who remarks sourly: '¡Es gracia nueva que nunca le conoci!' (*OC II*, 546). In the final moments of the play, however, Mari-Gaila undergoes another change, and experiences genuine repentance. Whilst she may not rank with Bradomín and Montenegro as one of Valle's literary giants, Mari-Gaila combines those characteristics that her creator most admired: single-mindedness, authenticity, a primitive vitality, and a consuming belief in self. Unlike the female protagonists who have preceded her, she responds not just to love, but to a variety of stimuli, and, in a play that exposes so many negative values, she stands out for her positive qualities, a fully rounded character with an appealing lust for life. Hers is the only role, moreover, for which Valle, throughout his years as a playwright, had an actress in mind. Curiously, despite her obvious appeal, this is her only appearance in his work.
Although Mari-Gaila does not share Rosa’s supernatural powers, she is subjected to satanic influences through her relationship with Séptimo Miau, in a parallel but reverse situation of that between Rosa and Anxelo in *El embrujado*. Séptimo is essentially another of Valle’s new creations; in this play it is he who carries connotations of the Devil. The name Séptimo recalls the seven deadly sins, and Miau the popular belief in the cat as a reincarnation of the Devil. When asked if he is a friend of the Devil, Séptimo replies: ‘Somos compadres’ (*OC, II*, 526), and his reasons for wearing an eye patch over one eye exceed those of the Devil, whose aim, according to Pedro Gailo, is to have ‘un ojo en cada sin fin, ver el pasado y el no logrado’ (*OC, II*, 586). Séptimo tells his companion, Miguelín, that ‘con uno me basta para conocerle a usted las intenciones’ (*OC, II*, 553). He frightens Mari-Gaila’s daughter, Simoniña, by claiming that he covers his eye ‘Por lo mucho que penetra. Tanto ve que se quema [...] ¡Penetra las paredes y las intenciones!’ (*OC, II*, 586). His claim of an ability to read the future is also reflected in the ‘prophetic’ dog that accompanies him, which ‘tiene pacto con el compadre Satanás’ (*OC, II*, 527), and his caged bird, which tells fortunes. When Séptimo is finally caught in the fields with Mari-Gaila, it is significant that he is allowed to escape unscathed, not only because as a man he has the licence denied to a woman, but because as the Devil, he cannot be caught.

As well as his pretensions to the intellectual powers associated with the Devil, Séptimo also embodies his lasciviousness and sexual appetite. He appears at the beginning of the play with another woman, Poca Pena, and their baby. This trio, sitting outside the church, the girl wearing a blue headscarf, at first sight recalls the Holy Family, but is a vision immediately destroyed by Séptimo’s cruel behaviour. Yet when Mari-Gaila meets him she finds him impossible to resist. As she yields to his embrace, the sinister nature of their relationship is reflected in a brief exchange:

Séptimo Miau — ¡Bebí tu sangre!
Mari-Gaila — A ti me entrego.

Séptimo Miau — ¿Sabes quién soy?

Mari-Gaila — ¡Eres mi negro! (OC, II, 560)

The satanic connotations of the word ‘negro’ and the pagan implications of a blood bond underline the demonic nature of their brief relationship, and the presence of supernatural forces at work is further established when it transpires that as the lovers consummate their passion, Laureano meets his death.

On Mari-Gaila’s journey home with the dead dwarf, an allegorical replay of her sexual encounter with Séptimo brings her face to face with the Trasgo Cabrio. In Galician folklore the trasgo has a dual personality, and is described by González López as follows:

Por un lado, el trasgo de los caminos gallegos, personaje más travieso que malo, dedicado a asustar, más por la noche que por el día, los incautos y desprevenidos pasajeros; y, por otro, el propio Diablo, señor de los siete pecados capitales, dispensador de la lujuria.33

Mari-Gaila is stopped in her tracks and unable to move the cart carrying the corpse. Twice the landscape changes: first to a shining path, then, significantly, to a church at a crossroads, around which there are witches dancing, and from where a red light shines. The scene is reminiscent of Montenegro’s encounter with the Santa Compañía in Romance de lobos: just as he is lifted up by the wind, and sees witches at work, Mari-Gaila, despite an attempt to exorcise the Devil with a ritual Christian chant, is similarly lifted into the air. In a cosmic act of lust, she is carried through the night astride the Trasgo’s back, under the light of a full moon. Her experience has the characteristic ingredients of witchcraft: moonlight, a church at a crossroads and a gust of wind. Her flight would be echoed later in Ligazón (1926), a play that also involves a blood bond.
between lovers, and where El Afilador, a free spirit like Mari-Gaila, claims that he has travelled the world on the tail of the Devil.

Séptimo’s power over Mari-Gaila recalls the sexual magnetism of Montenegro for Sabelita in the Comedias bárbaras and that of Rosa for Anxelo in El embrujado, but the difference lies in her response: where Sabelita and Anxelo, like María Rosario of the Sonata de primavera, and Rosarito from the short story, were reluctant victims, Mari-Gaila is a willing partner. The fear that was previously part of the fascination is absent. Even in her encounter with the Trasgo, where she becomes the object of demonic possession, she is initially defiant rather than frightened, and then overcome by sexual pleasure for a second time as she yields to his advances:

Se siente llevada en una ráfaga, casi no toca la tierra. El impulso acrece, va suspendida en el aire, se remonta y suspira con deleite carnal. Siente bajo las faldas la sacudida de una grupa lanuda, tiende los brazos para no caer, y sus manos encuentran la retorcida cuerna del Cabrío. (OC, II, 570)

This scene is powerfully primitive, and essentially more explicit than the one that it echoes. Valle’s previous attempts to shock the audience – the rape of Liberata in Águila de blasón, and the boiling of the corpse – use brutality or the grotesque to effect their purpose. The scene with the Trasgo in Divinas palabras shocks through its eroticism.

Eroticism in Valle’s writing has evolved from the decadent, rather artificial face it presented in the Sonatas and some of the stories of Femeninas. In Cenizas and El Marqués de Bradomín it disappeared altogether, only to reappear in a more primitive form in the Comedias bárbaras. Any sexual activity in his plays remained, nevertheless, discreetly implicit. Accordingly, Mari-Gaila’s sexual encounter with Séptimo takes place off-stage, but her episode with the Trasgo, under cover of allegory, is the sexual act on stage: the foreplay of their conversation, the sexual tension of her initial show of resistance, the mounting rhythm of their interchange, and the final orgasm of her
surrender are an explicit repetition of the earlier encounter between the lovers. As in previous episodes of a sexual nature in Valle’s work, the erotic effect is heightened by the presence of death: throughout the encounter between Mari-Gaila and the Trasgo, the dead Laureano lies in his cart showing a deathly grimace. It is this combination of the sensual and the macabre that produces the erotic intensity. Scenes such as this, daring in a novel, would be unprecedented in the theatre. The dream-like nature of this episode, however, has a dual effect: it cloaks the explicitness of the scene with a veil of fantasy, which in turn lends an air of unreality, not just to Mari-Gaila’s immediate experience, but to her time in the countryside as a whole. It gives it an ephemeral quality, and points to the inevitability of a return to the status quo. In addition, the scene questions the reality of Séptimo: as the object of Mari-Gaila’s dream for three nights before he appears, his reality, associated with mysterious entrances and exits and a final unquestioned disappearance, becomes equally uncertain.

As well as Mari-Gaila and Séptimo, there are several other new characters in Divinas palabras, amongst whom Pedro Gailo is the most significant. El embrujado was the first of Valle’s Galician plays in which there was no priest figure. Although Pedro Gailo is not a member of the clergy, his role as sexton relates him to the Church and gives him a certain status in the community. In rural Galicia the village church is not simply the religious hub of rural life; for the majority of the inhabitants it represents the only contact with learning and culture, and as man who knows Latin, Pedro Gailo should command respect. Ironically, although Mari-Gaila calls him ‘latino’ as a term of abuse, it will be her husband’s Latin words that ultimately save her. The name, Pedro Gailo del Reino, recalls St Peter and the Kingdom of Heaven, but its religious connotations are parodied here by a weak, ineffectual sexton, identified, amongst other things, by an appropriate rattling of his keys, which, far from their religious symbolism, simply echo the meaningless jangle of his words.
Ugly and cowardly, Pedro Gailo is described as ‘un viejo fúnebre, amarillo de cara y manos, barbas mal rapadas, [...] hurano el gesto, las oraciones deshilvanadas’ (OC. II, 525). Valle caricatures him to the point of farce, presenting him as a grotesque puppet figure, with a waxen complexion, ‘los pelos de pie, los brazos en aspa’ (OC, II, 578). His unattractive appearance and jerky movements contrast dramatically with Mari-Gaila’s beauty and grace. His habit of scraping his fingertips on the walls of the church produces a shudder. Outside his house, a scarecrow reflects his image: ‘Una sotana hecha jirones, vestida en la cruz de dos escobas’ (OC, II, 580). His own cassock symbolises his uselessness as a sexton, continually tripping him up, and ending in tatters, like that on the scarecrow. His inadequacy is further illustrated by his failure to give communion because he had run out of holy wafers, and by the bells that ring wildly without his control, in an ironic realisation of Mari-Gaila’s earlier taunt: ‘¿Esperas que toquen solas las campanas?’ (OC. II, 580).

As a husband, Pedro Gailo is equally deficient: dull and hidebound, he serves as a dramatic contrast to Mari-Gaila’s quick, cunning lover, Séptimo. Dominated and deceived by his wife, existing in an almost perpetual attitude of retreat, Pedro Gailo’s situation introduces a new theme into Valle’s work: that of marital honour. As a cuckolded husband Pedro Gailo is parodied in a sendup of the conventional theatrical figure. Unable to behave like the Calderonian hero of Golden-Age drama, Pedro Gailo agonises over the traditional forms of revenge. It is at this point that he becomes esperpentico: a ridiculous character, yet undergoing real emotions. As Rivas Cherif points out, the tragicomedy in this play lies in the contrast between the real tragedy experienced by the characters and the desire to laugh felt by the audience. Pedro Gailo anticipates the protagonist of Los cuernos de don Friolera (1921), who faces the same dilemma, and is defined by Zahareas as ‘the comic expression of a would-be hero who cannot transcend the crippling [...] banality of life in general and his present
predicament in particular. Unlike Don Friolera, however, whose solution brings tragedy. Pedro Gailo is too cowardly to face his duty. He lacks the stomach for murder and gets no further than moral posturing and melodramatic rhetoric, sharpening his knife and rehearsing the speech he will deliver to the Mayor when he presents his wife's severed head. His solution is to seek a perverted retaliation in a drunken attempt at incest with his daughter Simoniña.

Finally, however, he undergoes a dramatic change, and all thoughts of revenge are dispelled, when, in an extreme and unexpected act of compassion, he assumes the role of priest and absolves his errant wife. He shows here, as Antonio Risco points out, a greater humility than Christ himself, publicly pardoning an adulteress who is his own wife. The scene parodies the episode from the Bible. In St John, Chapter 8, when the woman in adultery is brought before Christ, He stoops down to the ground twice before rising to disperse the crowd; in *Divinas palabras*, Pedro Gailo mimics this by first banging his head on the stones, then throwing himself to the ground from the church tower before getting to his feet to quell the anger of the crowd.

Pedro Gailo opens and closes *Divinas palabras*, and on both occasions his roles coincide. In his confrontation with Séptimo at the start of the play, he stands as defender of the faith, whilst his fate as a husband is predicted by the man who will cuckold him. As the play ends, Pedro Gailo uses his position in the community to sway the angry villagers, and redeems himself not only as a man of God, but as a forgiving husband.

In a lesser role, Pedro Gailo’s sister, Marica del Reino, embodies all the negative qualities of village life: narrow-mindedness, hypocrisy, greed and malice. Valle uses her ugliness too, both moral and physical, to throw Mari-Gaila’s beauty and vitality into sharp relief. Their capacity for enjoyment is in stark contrast: where Mari-Gaila sees ‘provecho’ in her responsibility for the dwarf, Marica sees a ‘carga’; when they drink to celebrate the decision over his custody, Mari-Gaila drinks with delight, whilst Marica
'con mueca de repulsa, apura el trago' (*OC*, II, 544). Descriptions of Marica, though less extreme than those of her brother, also border on caricature and have connotations of evil. Referred to as 'bruja', and 'raida y pelona', she even appears with a broomstick in the scene when Laureano is returned to her door. The religious significance of her name, a distortion of María, is again parodied by her part in this play: her envy rather than her disapproval of Mari-Gaila’s behaviour prompts her to play the part of serpent in the Garden of Paradise that is Quintana. As she goads her brother into a frenzy over the loss of his honour, her words carry ‘el sentido de las negras sugestiones en la primera inocencia sagrada’ (*OC*, II, 558). A link is established with *El embrujado* by the echo of Pedro Gailo’s reproach, ‘¡Llegas como la serpiente, Marica!’ (*OC*, II, 556) in Anxelo’s accusation of Maurina and La Moza del Ciego, ‘sois a tentarme como dos serpientes!’ (*OC*, II, 1151).

Mari-Gaila’s daughter Simoniña is also drawn to contrast with her mother. Described as ‘abobada, lechosa, redonda’ (*OC*, II, 535), her doll-like expression and her mute, mechanical imitation of her mother are also close to caricature, and resemble the puppet-like qualities of her father. She does, however, reveal unsuspected reserves, and the initial observation of ‘veinte años y no vale la risa de su madre’ underestimates her ability. She arbitrates in her parents’ squabbles, she handles her father’s drunken lechery with practised skill, she remains unfailingly loyal to her mother, and she has a ready repartee of defence as she asks for alms to bury the dead Laureano. This particular scene is a significant link with the start of the action in this play: by begging for money. Simoniña is repeating what her mother and the dead Juana have done before her. Simoniña is the third character to develop during the course of this play: Mari-Gaila is transformed from villager into fairgoer, from traditional wife into adulteress, and finally from sinner into penitent; Pedro Gailo changes from a drunken lecher into a
compassionate, forgiving husband, and their daughter develops from a mute, rather stupid, child-like figure, to an articulate and resolute young woman.

Miguelín, Séptimo's crony, is an unsavoury figure, with no redeeming features. Described by Valle as ‘uno que anda caminos, al cual por sus dengues le suele acontecer en ferias y mercados que lo corran y afrentan’ (OC, II, 531), Miguelín makes few appearances, but his importance lies in the uneasy relationship that he has with Séptimo. Jealous of Mari-Gaila’s place in Séptimo’s affections, it is he who, in their absence, gives Laureano so much to drink that he dies, and he who later betrays the lovers, inciting the villagers to set the dogs on them as they fornicate in the reeds.

Rosa la Tatula is a new name, but the character is familiar. A modern-day Celestina, she recalls La Madre Cruces in ‘Eulalia’, and a character of the same name in El Marqués de Bradomín. In Divinas palabras she is much more developed. An ugly, toothless old woman, belonging neither to the village nor the countryside, she is always where the action is. She delights in her role of confidante and procuress and pursues her trade with relish. When Juana la Reina dies, she is quick to transfer her allegiance to Mari-Gaila, whose destiny she deftly shapes and manipulates. She takes a sly pleasure in paving the way for Mari-Gaila’s tryst with Séptimo, and in their absence, enjoys with Miguel the cruel abuse of Laureano that ends in his death. Her most treacherous move is to encourage Mari-Gaila to continue her liaison in the village, thereby consciously manoeuvring her towards inevitable disaster. It is she, presumably, who is responsible for her exposure by betraying the lovers’ movements to Miguelín.

Although El Idiota cannot speak – even Séptimo’s dog is more ‘eloquent’ – his importance as a character is paramount. His name, Laureano, is the third in this play to have religious significance; it derives from Lorenzo, the patron saint of the poor. He acquires further religious associations by lying, like the Christ child, in a ‘domajo’ filled with hay, and at the end of the play his head is seen by Mari-Gaila to resemble that of
an angel. His is the first appearance of a character of this nature in Valle’s work, and his role is both unique and extraordinary. A helpless cripple of indeterminate age, he is both treated like a child — referred to as ‘baldadiño’, ‘ángel’ or ‘inocente’, carried around in a cart and soiling his bedding like a baby — yet is plied with alcohol, has genitalia that Mari-Gaila proudly exhibits at the feria, is sexually aroused when La Niña smiles at him, and needs to be shaved before burial. His deformity is symbolic of the ugliness that underlies the whole play, and he is the pivot of the action, on stage for most of the time, in the manner of a protagonist. From the moment his mother dies, he not only becomes the centre of attention, but the cause of all the events that will follow. He is unwittingly responsible for Mari-Gaila’s abandonment of family life, indirectly so for her subsequent adultery, and finally for her vision of salvation as she sees his huge ‘cabeza de ángel’ in the last, ambiguous scene. He has to be orphaned to start the action; he has to die to bring it to its conclusion.

Laureano is the most prominent of Valle’s innocent victims. By the time he dies, the audience has become painfully familiar with the clown-like gestures and animal noises that provide his onlookers with so much amusement. Seen solely as a source of income or entertainment, he elicits feelings of greed and cruelty, and is rarely treated with compassion. The exhibiting of a cripple from fair to fair was not uncommon at the time: the soldier at the feria remarks that he has seen worse. Freaks meant money, and according to Rosa la Tatula, Laureano’s mother ‘achicaba en un día más bebida que una de nos achica en un año y la bebida no la dan sin dinero’ (OC, II, 534). Although Mari-Gaila exploits him even further, Miguelín sees him as ‘un premio de la lotería’, with limitless possibilities. He boasts that Séptimo, with his entrepreneurial skills, would take him ‘por la redondez de España, sacándole mucho dinero’ (OC, II, 565).

The three most painful scenes in the play have the dwarf at their centre. His death is, for the audience, one of the most disturbing episodes in Valle’s literature, made
even more uncomfortable by the reaction of the characters around him, for most of whom the episode is simply an embarrassment and a nuisance. No one will accept responsibility either for his death or his disposal, and he is subsequently shunted grotesquely between the Gaiío households. A further painful scene follows in which the dwarf’s face and hands are found to have been eaten by pigs during the night. This episode anticipates the moment in the later novel *Tirano Banderas*, when Zacarías discovers the half-eaten remains of his child (*OC*, I, 1067). The final indignity for the dead Laureano is the display of his body outside the church, the remains of his face covered in flies, and his belly, on which sits a pewter dish for offerings, swollen ‘como el de una preñada’ (*OC*, II, 583). And here, for the first time, the remarks of the passing beatas, ‘¡Cómo hiede!’ and ¡Corrompe!’, draw our attention to the smell of the rotting corpse (*OC*, II, 584).

Along with these new characters, there are some now familiar figures in *Divinas palabras*. The Ciego de Gondar appears again, here part of the feria crowd. He has a less traditional role than in *El embrujado*, and is once again without a companion, but his malicious wit is even more pronounced than in his four previous appearances, and his sexual appetite reveals itself again in his pursuit of Mari-Gaiía. His attempts to feel her are a repetition of his approaches to La Ventera in *Flor de santidad*, (*OC*, II, 554; *OC*, I, 620), an episode that in its turn was lifted almost verbatim from the short story ‘Geórgicas’ (*OC*, II, 1568). El Ciego’s behaviour, in keeping with the atmosphere of the feria, is carefree and relaxed, and reflects the enjoyment of life shared by all the characters who belong to the countryside.

The mealy-mouthed Benita la Costurera is familiar from *Romance de lobos*; there she excused her needlework on Doña María’s shroud, arguing that ‘una mortaja tampoco requiere aquel cuidado que una falda para ir al baile’ (*OC*, II, 459). In *Divinas palabras*, however, it is she who is quick to criticise Mari-Gaiía’s sewing of Laureano’s
shroud: ‘¡Vaya unas puntadas que le echaron a la mortaja! ¡Son hilvanes!’, and it now falls to Simoniña to point out that ‘Para los gusanos, ya está bastante’ (OC, II, 584). The Peregrino has elements in common with the figure from Flor de Santidad: apparently holy, he is in fact a well-known criminal, sought by the police. Milón de la Arnoya first appeared in the short story of the same name as a notorious character living wild in the hills. In Divinas palabras, he is the first villager to threaten Mari-Gaila as she attempts to escape from her tryst with Séptimo, and his ‘¡Jujuruju!’ of triumph, soon taken up by the ‘Coro de relinchos’, has the demonic echo of the Trasgo’s shout. Another character, Serenín de Bretal, featured in the short story of ‘Mi bisabuelo’ as a spokesman for the villagers, and again, briefly in ‘Milón de la Arnoya’ as a sheep farmer. In both he is a sober pragmatic figure. In Divinas palabras, now described as ‘un viejo docto’, he is one of the villagers who delights in exposing Mari-Gaila and Séptimo in the reed beds; at the end, however, it is he who is mindful of the authorities and who advises caution. Some of the minor characters are still types, with no personal name, whose role or condition is simply indicated by a title: Una vieja, La Pareja de Civiles, El Vendedor de Agua de Limón. Others simply make up groups of ‘mujerucas’ or ‘tropas de rapaces’.

There are further links between Divinas palabras and the earlier Galician plays, especially with El embrujado. The setting is almost unchanged: the green of the countryside, the gentleness of the rain, punctuated by periods of sunlight, the references to the wide estuary and the wildness of the sea, winding roads, the sound of bells ringing and dogs barking, together with the ever-increasing reminders of familiar toponyms. all again place the action firmly in Galicia. The stage directions, still modernista, present scenes that are again in sharp contrast with the action and the dialogue: the violence of the penultimate scene, in which Mari-Gaila is caught and exposed to the wrath of the villagers is belied by the beauty of its backcloth:

*El río divino de romana historia es una esmeralda con mirajes de ensueño. Las*
vacas de cobre abrevan sobre la orilla, y en claros de sol blanquean los linos
mozas como cerezas y dueñas caducas, del ocre melado de las imágenes de los
retablos viejos. El campo, en la tarde llena de sopor, tiene un silencio palpitante
y sonoro. (OC, II, 588)

In Divinas palabras, the pazo and the colegiata of the Comedias bárbaras and Don Pedro’s large comfortable estate in El embrujado have been replaced by the humble village house, more like that of Sabelita’s adoptive family or the hovel where Pichona lived in Aguila de blasón. In these earlier plays, much of the action takes place in or close to the family estate. Divinas palabras, with its itinerant characters constantly on the move, covers a wider area, underlining the difference between the two communities.

Poverty is still the lot of the pueblo as it was in El embrujado, but it does not give rise to the same bitterness or resentment in this play. The attitude of the poor is closer to that in the early Comedias bárbaras: even the poorest member of the community, Juana la Reina, accepts her poverty without complaint. It is still, however, cause for greed: the dispute over El Idiota’s custody is about money, not charity; Miguelín’s discovery of coins in the ‘carretón’ prompts a quarrel with Séptimo; the shelving of responsibility for El Idiota’s funeral is over the costs involved. As in the Comedias bárbaras and El embrujado, greed leads to crime, but crime in this play is rarely premeditated, rather a natural response to events. Whatever their vices, there is a mitigating spontaneity about the actions of nearly all the villagers that pleads moral ignorance rather than immorality. Their behaviour has an unthinking, child-like, quality.

At the feria, moreover, where begging is a way of life, poverty reveals a lighter side. Valle has woven ferias into several of his works, and his later novel, Tirano Banderas is set against a backcloth of carnival. In Divinas palabras, the regional feria at Viana del Prior, the ‘vieja villa feudal’ of the early Comedias bárbaras, is the setting for the central action in the play. Valle uses it as a means to introduce vast numbers of
characters. whom ‘el acaso los junta en aquel gran zaguán’ (OC, II, 564). The tone of these scenes is relaxed and permissive; there is music and laughter, an emphasis on the pleasures of food and drink, and a physical appeal to all the senses, even those of smell and taste. As Mari-Gaila lights a fire: ‘El humo tiende olores de laurel y sardinas, con un buen recuerdo del vino agrio y la borona aceda’ (OC, II, 549).

Several other earlier themes and motifs continue into Divinas palabras. Adultery is still central to the narrative, but is here treated very differently. Mari-Gaila has none of the donjuanismo that drove the women in Femeninas, Montenegro in the Comedias bárbaras and Rosa in El embrujado. She neither shares their predatory instincts, nor sets out to be an adulteress, but steps into the role through force of circumstance. Her lover, moreover, is not the weak, dependent partner who featured in Femeninas, whose psychological deficiencies highlighted the masculinity of the women in the stories, and on whom suffering was inflicted; Séptimo is a scheming trickster who, conversely, calls the tune, and brings out Mari-Gaila’s full sexuality. In his presence she becomes submissive and vulnerable. Nor does her behaviour reflect the exotic decadence of Valle’s early women. Unlike the fallen women of Sonata de otoño, ‘Eulalia’, and Cenizas, and even Sabelita from Águila de blasón, all of whom suffer from a guilt-ridden conscience, Mari-Gaila feels no penitence.

Free from scruples, Mari-Gaila takes spontaneous pleasure in sexual fulfilment, and rather than remorse, shows only irritation at the inconvenience when Laureano dies. Like Rosa in El embrujado, she has lost her raison d’être. Her defence is attack when she returns home, and she silences both husband and daughter with a sharp tongue. Her infidelity, however, has no place in the enclosed morality of the village, and her mistake is to bring what conventionally belongs to the freedom of the feria back to her home environment. Nevertheless, when she is discovered in flagrante at the end of the play, she is openly defiant. She talks her way out of rape, and brazenly strips naked on
condition that no one touch her. Riding the hay cart into the village, her beauty and sexuality win the day, as ‘ritmica y antigua, adusta y resuelta, levanta su blanca desnudez ante el río cubierto de oros’, she turns public disgrace into a personal triumph (OC. II. 591). Approaching the church, the cart takes on connotations of a float in the Holy Week processions. Mari-Gaila sees Laureano’s head, crowned in camellias, like that of an angel, and the crowds fall silent. In none of Valle’s previous works has adultery has ended on a positive note. The inevitability of Mari-Gaila’s exposure and final reckoning carried the seeds of potential tragedy: death by stoning was always a possibility; the rage and blood lust of the villagers pointed to a violent end. Mari-Gaila upends the situation, and emerges as unique, establishing herself as a one of Valle’s most appealing creations to date.

Apart from adultery, other related sexual activities that have figured in the earlier Galician plays have an echo in Divinas palabras. The procuring, albeit discreet, activities of Madre Cruces in El Marqués de Bradomín, the shameless pimping of Pedro Rey in Águila de blasón, and the encouragement of Mauriña in El embrujado of her husband’s liaison with Rosa, are repeated in Divinas palabras by Rosa la Tatula, who is a practised procuress. The promiscuity that became a feature in El embrujado – Rosa was recognised for being liberal with her favours – is also accepted in the countryside in Divinas palabras, and even encouraged by Rosa la Tatula, but as in El embrujado, it carries an ugly warning. There, the pregnancy that resulted from Rosa’s relationship with Anxelo, led to tragedy. In Divinas palabras, Juana la Reina has paid a price for her presumed promiscuity: a disabled child, possibly as a punishment for his illegitimacy, ostracism from the community, and death from venereal disease. Implicit in Mari-Gaila’s subsequent adventures is the suggestion that had they not been brought to an abrupt end, her fate may well have been the same as Juana’s. If, as she hints at the end, she is pregnant, it is likely that her life would have followed the same pattern. Illicit sex,
celebrated in *Femeninas* and the *Sonatas*, no longer, it seems, goes unpunished. The victim, however, in both *El embrujado* and *Divinas palabras* is an innocent child.

Further forms of sexual expression, some of which have not appeared before in Valle's work, feature in *Divinas palabras*, and will appear again in works that follow. Séptimo's companion, Miguelín, is openly homosexual, and to a certain extent shunned even by the liberal-thinking *feria* community. His proclivities, in turn, call into question Séptimo's own sexual preferences. The nature of their relationship is revealed in an argument to which Miguelín refers as a 'riña de enamorados' (*OC, II*, 534). New in *Divinas palabras* is an element of voyeurism, presented in the penultimate scene of the play. The violence inspired by Mari-Gaila's behaviour brings with it an ugly element of enjoyment, as the villagers' righteous anger is confused with their own envy and frustrated lust. Another sexual taboo, hinted at previously in Bradomín's intended seduction of his daughter in *Sonata de invierno*, and in Montenegro's relationship with his goddaughter in *Águila de blasón*, is that of incest. In *Divinas palabras*, Pedro Gailo's attempt to bed Simoniña is his perverted form of revenge on his wife's adultery.

It is Pedro Gailo's dilemma that introduces one of the most important innovations in this play: the theme of cuckoldry and the question of marital honour. This is the first time that Valle has turned his attention to the other face of adultery. The cuckolded husband made a brief appearance at the end of 'El canario', but his problem was more or less shelved in the rewritten 'La generala'. He appeared again, very briefly, at the end of *Cenizas* and *El yermo de la almas* with the surprising face of forgiveness. This, in fact, will be the solution for Pedro Gailo in *Divinas palabras*. Whereas in traditional literature, male adultery makes a victim of the wife but often enhances the status of the husband, female adultery exposes the husband to ridicule. Society then demands that he avenge his honour. According to Calderonian convention, this meant the murder of his wife and her lover. Until the nineteenth century, the husband's
personal reaction was not an option. In the case of Pedro Gailo, the voice of society is his sister Marica. It is she who forces him to face his dishonour and to contemplate murder; left to his own devices, he would turn a blind eye. Agonising over his situation, his drunken plans for the dispatch of his wife come to nothing, and he ends up making ineffectual advances to his daughter. The scenario is one that will become central to the later play of *Los cuernos de don Friolera*, in which Don Friolera’s resolution of the same dilemma has tragic results: his attempts to murder his wife result instead in the death of his daughter. By contrast, Pedro Gailo’s deliberations take an unexpected turn when he rejects the role of vengeful husband, and Christ-like, forgives the sinner.

Whilst sex, in its varying forms, pervades much of the action in *Divinas palabras*, love, as in previous works, is conspicuously missing. Sexual love is again reduced to lust: there is urgency but no affection in Séptimo’s seduction of Mari-Gaila. Parental love is still absent: Séptimo abandons Poca Pena and their baby; Simoniña is treated harshly by her mother and abused by her father, and the orphaned Laureano, like the innocent baby in *El embrujado*, is grossly exploited by his carers. The only hint of paternal concern is a tear in Pedro Gailo’s eye as he addresses the newly orphaned dwarf: ‘¡Por padre tuyo putative me ofrezco!’ (*OC, II*, 538), though even this remark suggests the possibility of an earlier act of incest. Family life, which is traditionally the basis of society, especially of village life, in *Divinas palabras* is fragmented: Juana has a child, but no husband; Marica had a husband but is childless; Mari-Gaila abandons her child and exchanges husband for lover; Pedro Gailo attempts to replace his wife with his daughter. There are no caring relationships; the absence of Christian charity that marked *El embrujado* is here even more pronounced throughout the community.

Elements of superstition that have linked much of Valle’s work to date continue to play a significant part in *Divinas palabras*. The evil properties of moonlight, of which Concha was warned in *Sonata de otoño*, and Bradomín in *El Marqués de*
Bradomin, are blamed for one of the most upsetting episodes in *Divinas palabras*. On Marica’s discovery of Laureano’s dead body, half-eaten by pigs, Serenin de Bretal, who realises that the dwarf was already dead before the pigs moved in, claims that it was the moon that was responsible for his death, and points out that cripples like Laureano are especially vulnerable. The moon is also reputed to have the power of fertility, which has implications for Mari-Gaila’s claim to pregnancy: it was full moon as she made her tryst with Séptimo. Full moon is a time, moreover, when crime allegedly increases, bringing to mind the causes of Laureano’s death.

The occult, too, continues to figure. In *Sonata de primavera*, Bradomin interpreted the croaking of a toad as the presence of the Devil and an indication of death. In *Divinas palabras*, this idea is recalled when Laureano’s drunken cry of ‘¡Hou! ¡Hou!’ is echoed by a toad’s ‘¡Cro! ¡Cro!’ (*OC, II, 544*). The Devil is also known to take the form of a goat; in this play it is the Trasgo Cabrio, half man, half goat, whose supernatural powers and sexual appetite echo those of Séptimo. His meeting with Mari-Gaila has the elements of a black Sabbath. His invitation to her to kiss him ‘en el rabo’ relates to the *osculum infame* traditionally given by witches when pledging their services to the Devil. The term ‘negro’, often used to refer to the Devil, is the word with which Mari-Gaila addresses both the Trasgo and Séptimo. Séptimo himself claims to be in league with the Devil, and maintains, moreover, that his dog, Coimbra, also has satanic powers. Valle has already drawn attention to the association of dogs with black magic in several previous works. In the opening scene of *Divinas palabras* it is Coimbra who predicts that Pedro Gailo will be cuckolded. The dog, moreover, can also sense the ‘aire’ of death: he was aware that Juana La Reina was already dead when Rosa la Tatuola was calling for help. The Devil is blamed by Pedro Gailo for his thoughts of incest, but paradoxically, he pleads with Simoniña to sleep with him in order to exorcise them:
¡Cómo rie aquel Demonio colorado! ¡Vino a ponérseme encima del pecho!
¡Tórnamelo, Simoniña! ... ¡Prenda! ¡Espáñamelol!” (OC, II, 564).

Cartomancy, clairvoyance and the power of dreams continue to feature in this play, and are again often linked to death. When Mari-Gaila picks up the seven of spades from the ground, Séptimo interprets its meaning: ‘Que de siete trabajos te recompenzas durmiendo esta noche con Séptimo’ (OC, II, 559), but soon after this incident, Laureano will die. As well as his ‘prophetic’ dog, Séptimo has a bird, a common sight at fairs where single women would ask a bird to tell their fortune. His bird, Colorín, predicts Mari-Gaila’s fate. Other episodes involve dreams or visions: as she lies dying, Juana la Reina has a vision of money and of a bright star in the sky, and Marica claims that the dead Juana has appeared to her in a dream, giving her sole charge of Laureano. At the feria, Mari-Gaila reports that she has dreamed of Séptimo for three nights before she meets him.

The importance given to alcohol, a motif that was new to El embrujado, is developed further in Divinas palabras. When the argument over Laureano’s guardianship has been resolved, it is Mari-Gaila who suggests a celebratory drink. For her, alcohol is a sensual pleasure, and ‘respira con delicia el aroma del aguardiente’ (OC, II, 543). Her instinctive reaching for the bottle immediately aligns her with the dead Juana la Reina, whose addiction to alcohol was well known. At the feria, where alcohol is part of the scenario, Mari-Gaila’s pleasure is again clear; sharing a drink with El Ciego, ‘recibe la taza desbordante y roja de las manos del ladino viejo y bebe, gorjeando el vino en la garganta’ (OC, II, 553). Alcohol serves a very different purpose, however, when she offers a drink to Laureano, who, she assures everybody, is, like his mother, ‘imbuido en la bebida’. It is given to make him ‘perform’: he must utter a series of noises before he is rewarded. Even uglier is the episode in which the
fairgoers, led by Miguelín, ply the dwarf with so much drink that he dies from an epileptic fit. What begins as a cruel game ends on a grotesque note:

*El enano había tenido su último temblor. Sus manos infantiles, de cera oscura,*

*se enclavijaban sobre la colcha de remiendos, y la enorme cabeza azulenta,*

*con la lengua entre los labios y los ojos vidriados, parecía degollada. Las moscas del ganado venían a picar en ella.* (OC, II, 567)

The way in which Laureano clutches at his bed covers in his last moments is a powerful echo of the earlier death throes of his mother, as she clawed at the earth.

While Mari-Gaila drinks for pleasure, her husband drinks to forget his problems. Already drunk, and sharpening the knife that will avenge his honour, he is encouraged by Simoniña to drink more, in the hope that he will fall asleep, but Pedro Gailo urges his daughter to drink first, as he eyes her legs and the whiteness of her body. Later, Mari-Gaila will also urge him to drink, and it is this scene that recalls a similar episode in *El embrujado.* Anxelo blames the first drink that Rosa offered him as the start of his ‘possession’; when Rosa returns from Don Pedro’s house with the baby, she invites Anxelo to drink with her again. Despite her insistence – she repeats the offer three more times – he resists, claiming: ‘¡De haber bebido viene mi cadena!’ (OC, II, 1158). The scene in *Divinas palabras* in which Mari-Gaila tries to persuade her husband to drink with her is almost identical. She repeats the offer three times; each time, like Anxelo, Pedro Gailo refuses, in a parody of Peter’s denials of Christ, protesting: ‘Mi alma no te pertenece’ (OC, II, 578). Valle will reuse this same scenario in the later plays of *Ligazón* and *Los cuernos de Don Friolera.*

Another new feature that appears in *El embrujado* and more forcibly in *Divinas palabras* is the emergence of initiative. So far, there has been little evidence of any reasoned thinking in any of the leading characters in Valle’s Galician theatre. In the *Comedias bárbaras* Montenegro’s power comes from his landed status, not from his
capacity to reason logically, or even to make decisions that will further his cause. His actions are a series of automatic responses of anger or pleasure, his speech largely rhetoric, and his behaviour impulsive and emotional rather than rational. In *El embrujado*, behaviour in general is more deliberate and calculated. There is nothing spontaneous about Rosa la Galana. She uses her initiative to the full, and her actions are designed to effect maximum gain for herself. She plans, manipulates and sees things through. *El Ciego de Gondar* shows a similar, cunning approach. Don Pedro also ponders his options, and his head finally rules his heart. Even the servants are sharp and socially aware, compared with those in Montenegro’s household.

*Divinas palabras* follows this trend. Mari-Gaila is clear-thinking and renowned for her ‘pico’, reputed to handle Castilian ‘como una alcaldesa’ (*OC, II, 535*). Her ability to argue and reason gives her the advantage over her family and the villagers. It is only in Séptimo Miau that she meets her match, and her confidence falters. Robin Warner points out how this change is revealed in her language, and that ‘through a series of shifts in speech-style, Valle skilfully presents her slide from smart manipulator to gullible victim’. Other minor characters also show initiative and the ability to manipulate others: Rosa la Tatula exercises considerable control over the people who interest her, and even Simoniña shows evidence of common sense.

Although there is very little humour in Valle’s earlier Galician plays – in *Águila de blasón*, the humour was either violent or derisive – in *Divinas palabras* genuine humour punctuates the action, and offers moments of light relief. Some of it is shared by characters and public alike: there is witty repartee at the *feria* and the jokes and laughter are light-hearted. Other episodes are entertaining to the public, but are uncomfortable for the characters: we laugh at them rather than with them; it is their absurdity that we find comic. The moments when Pedro Gailo’s cuckoldry is foretold by a dog or outwitted by Séptimo’s quick repartee make us laugh, and his anguish over
his ruined honour is, for the audience, one of the funniest points in the play. Conversely, there are episodes of cruel humour, in particular the scene in which the fairgoers get El Idiota drunk for their own entertainment, which the characters find comic, but which are painful for the onlooker.

Structurally, Divinas palabras is the most carefully planned of Valle’s Galician plays to date. Conceived as theatre, it incorporates no pre-texts, has no unrelated scenes, and no stories within a story. More ambitious than El embrujado, its three Jornadas are divided into five, ten, and five scenes respectively, and the climax falls in the two central scenes of the second Jornada, which appear to take place simultaneously. The action of the play extends over an indeterminate number of weeks, but this is because of a time lapse between Jornadas 1 and 2; otherwise, each Jornada is contained within twenty-four hours. The first and third acts take place in daylight; the darkness in four of the scenes in the central act symbolises the sinister nature of their action. There is much more movement than in El embrujado, and nearly all the action takes place outside, underlining the element of freedom enjoyed by Mari-Gaila.

Although there is no overall unity of place, the ten different sets alternate between just two environments, the village and the countryside, and follow two parallel narrative lines. Nearly all the scenes in the first and third acts take place in the village area, and most of those in the second act in the countryside, but each act provides its own kind of unity by beginning and ending in the village. The whole play, moreover, begins and ends at the village church, which lies, significantly, ‘sobre la cruz de dos caminos’.

The fate of the representative of that church also frames the play: the opening scene sees Pedro Gailo’s cuckoldry predicted; in the central scene it is realised; in the last it is resolved. Following a similar pattern, Mari-Gaila leaves the village and returns. These elements lend a clear symmetry to the structure of the play, and its overall circularity serves to emphasise the final return to the ‘moral cerrada’ of village
existence, whose eventual triumph over the itinerant freedom of the countryside implies both the continuity and the sterility of rural life.

*Divinas palabras* places great emphasis on a visual, physical impact, and far from making any concessions to facilitate staging, once again presents problems that would tax a theatre director, not least of which would be the control of a dog, a bird, a lamb, two pigs, cattle, and a *trasgo* who flies through the air. Each scene is in a different setting from the one that precedes it, albeit at times only slightly changed but seen from a different perspective, and is not necessarily consequential. There is a large cast of thirty-one speaking parts, as well as groups of ‘mujerucas’, ‘mozas’, ‘tropas de rapaces’. and a ‘beaterio de viejas y mozas’. Abrupt changes of scene juxtapose noisy milling crowds with quiet intense exchanges between two characters; some of these scenes indicate simultaneous time. All these factors add density and extra dimension to what is in reality limited time and space, but complicate the director’s task. Each set has extensive introductory stage directions, many of which, as in previous plays, are often difficult or impossible to realise on stage, and now frequently cinematographic. Indeed, Jorge Urrutia suggests that Valle’s conception of staging underwent a change between 1912 and 1922, possibly because of the influence of the cinema.

Valle’s feelings about the cinema were ambivalent. In 1928, he acknowledged it as ‘El Teatro nuevo, moderno. […] Un nuevo Arte.[…] Belleza viva’. Lyon maintains that he saw it as a threat to the theatre, but also as a source of artistic salvation, and he cites *Luces de Bohemia* as the first play to reveal specific cinematic influence. Such influence, however, is already evident in *Divinas palabras*; Valle himself agreed with one of the newspaper critics who attended the preliminary reading of the play, and admitted that it read like a film script. Scene ‘switches’, such as the shift from Mari-Gaila’s house to the *feria* in the second *Jornada*, and later, from the Trasgo Cabrio
scene back to Mari-Gaila’s house, often resemble camera cuts. Other directions resemble the panoramic sweep of a camera:

*Otro camino galgueando entre las casas de un quintero. Al borde de los tejados maduran las calabazas verdigualdas, y suenan al pie de los hórreos las cadenas de los perros. Baja el camino hasta una fuente embalsada en el recato de una umbría de álamos.* (OC, II, 534)

Close-ups are frequent, and are especially effective as an eserpéntico device, eliminating normal elements and baring one abnormal detail. Valle repeatedly draws our attention in this way to Pedro Gailo’s ‘*ojo bizco* ’ (OC, II, 527), and to the way in which ‘*los cuatro pelos quédanle de punta* ’ (OC, II, 525). There are ‘still’ moments that have the effect of freezing characters into a tableau, like that of the elderly couple and their daughter at the feria: ‘*La niña, extática, parece una figura de cera entre aquellos dos viejos de retablo* ’ (OC, II, 566). By contrast, the accelerated, puppet-like movements of Pedro Gailo reflect the slapstick quality of early screen stars such as Charlie Chaplin: ‘*El sacristán échase fuera, negro y zancudo, mas queda espantado sobre el umbral, con los pelos de pie, los brazos en aspa* ’ (OC, II, 578).

The use of light also points to cinematic influence. There are frequent references to artificial light: ‘*la luz cornuda de un candil*, ‘*algunos faroles [...] abren sus círculos de luz aceitosa*, ‘*la súbita claridad de los cohetes*, ‘*la puerta iluminada*. Sunlight also features, as when: ‘*El correaje, los fusiles, los tricornios destellan en la carretera cegadora de luz*’. Similarly, moonlight is given repeated emphasis, with, for example, ‘*el claro de luna*, ‘*arcos de luna*, ‘*la luna grande*, ‘*blanco de luna*, and its sinister properties are indicated in the reference to ‘*el relente de la luna*’.

Another visual influence perhaps even more evident in *Divinas palabras* is that of art. Valle was both interested in and knowledgeable about painting. Sender maintains that everything that he wrote was ‘*sub specie pictórica*’ and that he conceived each play
‘como un cuadro a óleo’.43 *Divinas palabras* can be seen as a series of *cuadros*, and even as a triptych, its three pictures representing the ‘before’, ‘during’ and ‘after’ of the action. The use of colour and especially of light and dark is more pronounced in this play than in previous works, and at this stage in Valle’s writing it is Goya, especially, whose influence is the most noticeable. In *Luces de Bohemia*, Max Estrella claims that it was Goya who invented the *esperpento*. Dougherty points out that in much the same way as Goya ‘rimó lo grotesco y lo trágico en sus lienzos’, Valle combines these two elements in his theatre.44 There had already been an echo of Goya’s *Caprichos* in *Águila de blasón*, when it is the image of Don Galán that Montenegro sees in the mirror (*OC*, II, 424), and in *Romance de lobos*, when Montenegro lifts the lid of his wife’s tomb to embrace her dead body (*OC*, II, 489).45 The witches that Montenegro sees in his encounter with the Santa Compañía in *Romance de lobos* are reminiscent of the creatures in Goya’s ‘Las Parcas’, and the grotesque element in ‘La Romería de San Isidro’ is reflected in the crowds of the poor in *Flor de santidad* and the beggars who follow Montenegro in *Romance de lobos*.

There are numerous reflections of Goya’s work in Valle’s use of the grotesque, of animalisation, and of caricature, and some of the scenes in *Divinas palabras* would appear to relate to specific paintings, possibly prompted by an exhibition of Goya’s work in the Prado in 1900, and another exhibition that included his paintings in 1913. Mari-Gaila, as we first see her, bears a strong resemblance to the woman in ‘La Aguadora’: her beauty, her firm stance, even the pitcher that she carries. Pedro Gailo’s appearance with the lighted candle at the end of the play could have been inspired by the burlesque figure of the priest in ‘El Hechizado’, who pours oil into a lamp held by a goat-devil. The Trasgo Cabrio is the same great goat that sits surrounded by witches in ‘El Aquelarre’, his horn twisted as it is in *Divinas palabras*, with the moon above, and bats flying overhead. There is a striking similarity between the scene where Mari-Gaila
is carried off by the Trasgo and the picture presented in one of Goya’s preparatory sketches, ‘Vuelo de Brujas’, which shows a woman riding naked on the back of a goat, gripping his curled horns. The associations are such that it seemed fitting to José Tamayo to use Goya’s Black Paintings as the backcloth to this scene in his 1961 production of *Divinas palabras* in Madrid.

Buero Vallejo maintained that *Divinas palabras* was unstageable, yet of all Valle’s plays it has since been one of the most frequently and successfully staged. The gap between its publication and its first performance reflects the stalled relationship between Valle and the commercial theatre at the time, as well as possibly the fact that most theatre directors saw *Divinas palabras* either as another *Comedia bárbara* or as a transitional play, and temporarily eclipsed by the new *esperpento*. The productions of *Farsa y licencia de la reina castiza* and *El embrujado* in 1931 had, however, broken a long absence from the commercial theatre, and Rivas Cherif, whose friendship with Valle dated from 1907, and whose work as a scenic director was breaking new ground, persuaded Valle to let him direct *Divinas palabras*. There is no record of the version that was staged, but apparently it was reduced to fifteen scenes and some possibly offensive material was changed or omitted. It was performed at the Teatro Español on 16 November 1933, starring Margarita Xirgu as Mari-Gaila, but far from the resounding success that was expected, the performance was a ‘rotundo fracaso’.

One review of the first night saw the play as a link between the ‘novelesco’ period of *Romance de lobos* and the *esperpento*. A second regarded it as another *comedia bárbara*, and considered it ‘para leer’ and unsuitable for the present-day audience. Another critic also classed it as a *comedia bárbara*, but waxed lyrical over the performance, declaring it a great day for the Spanish theatre. He qualified his judgement by praising the leading actors, but conceded that the supporting cast lacked the experience necessary to do justice to this kind of play. The audience, however, still
resistant to innovative theatre of this nature, did not share the critic’s enthusiasm, and voted with its feet.\textsuperscript{50} It was clear that the content of \textit{Divinas palabras} was too strong for some tastes: one very hostile review from Luis Araujo Costa in \textit{La Época} described it as ‘lo más abyecto, sucio y repugnante de la naturaleza caída. En sus escenas y sus monstruosidades sólo pueden tener satisfacción escatófagos y coprófagos’.\textsuperscript{51} Valle himself criticised the acting, complaining that Enrique Borras, who took the part of Pedro Gailo, turned a ‘sacristán de aldea’ into ‘el cardenal Segura’.\textsuperscript{52} By the second night, the audience was sparse, and the play closed after only two weeks.

\textit{Divinas palabras} would not be staged again in Valle’s lifetime. The next performance in Spain was not until 1961, at the inauguration of the Teatro Bellas Artes, under the direction of José Tamayo, with Nati Mistral in the lead role. This production, albeit cut and modified by Torrente Ballester, was generally pronounced a success and seen as a watershed in the revival of Valle’s theatre. Antonio Díaz Merat, who was Tamayo’s stage director in 1961, directed his own production at the Teatro Bellas Artes in 1986, to mark the fiftieth anniversary of Valle’s death, and used the same script. He thought that Tamayo took a risk in 1961: Valle was still thought of as an ‘escritor maldito’. Díaz admitted that Valle remained difficult to stage, and was still not fully understood by the public. He chose \textit{Divinas palabras} as the play he thought most representative of Valle’s work, and he sought above all to present it as he thought it had been conceived: as a total spectacle of colour, movement, sounds and smells.\textsuperscript{53}

In many ways \textit{Divinas palabras} provides an obvious link between the style of Valle’s early work and the aesthetic of the \textit{esperpento} of his mature years, but to see it as merely transitional would be to fail to recognise its uniqueness. If we discount the later \textit{Cara de Plata} on the grounds that it is a prequel rather than a sequel to the two existing \textit{Comedias bárbaras}, \textit{Divinas palabras} represents the culmination of Valle’s Galician cycle, and the most realistic and original of his theatre. Whilst none of Valle’s
plays can be said to be representative, *Divinas palabras* must figure as one of the most important of his works. Montesinos sees it in this light: he considers the *Comedias bárbaras* as ‘el camino de su mejor teatro, el que culmina en *Divinas palabras*, […] una de las obras más “exportables” del teatro español que precede inmediatamente a García Lorca’. Míguez Vilas agrees; she maintains that although it is often seen as transitional and not as good as the later *esperpentos*, an analysis of a work like *Divinas palabras* ‘no hace sino ratificar cuanto venimos diciendo al tiempo que desmiente la etiqueta de pieza de transición habitualmente atribuida a esta obra, que por el contrario sitúa en 1919 el momento cumbre del teatro valleinclaniano’. Rubia Barcia acknowledges it as Valle’s greatest work. It certainly marks the end of a period. Apart from *Cara de Plata*, none of Valle’s future works would focus on Galicia. 1920, which proved the most fruitful year of Valle’s career, heralded a new approach.
Notes to Chapter 6

1 See Lima, *An Annotated Bibliography*, p. 37. Lima asserts that *Divinas palabras* was begun in 1913 as *Pan divino*. This information was corroborated in a letter from Lima to Ann Frost, dated 4 May 1982, in which he says: ‘*Pan divino* was only a working title; to my knowledge the play never appeared in print under that title.’


4 Nevertheless, according to Rubia Barcia, Dario’s death changed Valle’s perspective: ‘Con la muerte de Rubén Dario Valle-Inclán va a liberarse de la más sostenida, quizás, de las influencias que han pesado sobre él’ (p. 218).

5 Smith, p. 50.


8 Manuel Bermejo Marcos, *Valle-Inclán: Introducción a su obra* (Salamanca: Anaya, 1971). p. 188.


13 Rubia Barcia, p. 275.

14 Interview with Gregorio Martínez Sierra, ‘Hablando con Valle-Inclán’, *ABC*, 7 December 1928, p. 43.


19 Salinas, p. 91.


22 Gonzalo Torrente Ballester, ‘Introducción a *Divinas palabras*’, *Primer Acto*, no. 29 (November 1961), 3-5 (pp. 4-5).


27 Míguez Vilas, p. 743.  

28 Cited in Dougherty, *Palimpsestos al cubo*, p. 82.  

29 Madrid, pp. 284-5.  


33 See González López, p. 171.  

34 See Míguez Vilas, p. 106, note 8.  

35 Zahareas, p. 92.  


37 The action of *Tirano Banderas* (1926), in which there are even more extreme examples of dehumanisation, takes place on a day of festival.


40 See Esteban, p. 313.


42 In an unattributed article, ‘En el Español. Don Ramón del Valle-Inclán lee su tragicomedia “Divinas palabras”’, *El Sol*, 25 March 1933, it is stated that ‘*Divinas palabras* parece un pretexto de “film”. Por su acción [...] y por su ambiente’ (p. 4).

43 Sender, pp. 28, 36.

44 See Dougherty, *Un Valle-Inclán olvidado*, p. 47.

45 See ‘Los Caprichos’ by Francisco Goya y Lucientes, ed. by Philip Hofer (New York: Dover Publications, 1969), p. 9. The first of the two *Caprichos* recalled is *Capricho* 31 in Sala XCVII in the Prado, in which a dandy looks in a mirror and sees a monkey; the second is titled ‘Tántalo’.


47 Buero Vallejo, p.133


50 Chabás, p. 6.

51 Cited in Delgado, ‘*Other Spanish Theatres*’, p. 38.
52 See Madrid, p. 354.


54 Montesinos, p. 155.

55 Míguez Vilas, p. 98.

56 Rubia Barcia, p. 232.
CHAPTER 7

THE FINAL COMEDIA BÁRBARA: CARA DE PLATA

Whether *Divinas palabras* is seen as transitional or the culmination of Valle’s Galician cycle, it is clear that by 1920 both the approach and style of his writing was undergoing a radical change. Although he had pronounced *Luces de Bohemia* his first *esperpento*, and had outlined his new aesthetic through the words of its protagonist, Max Estrella, the full force of the *esperpento* did not become apparent until the following year. The publication of *Los cuernos de Don Friolera*, serialised between April and August 1921, in *La Pluma*, was evidence that this change had reached maturity. An implicit consequence of this change was the abandonment of the Galician setting.

It comes, therefore, as something of a surprise, that at this point, and fourteen years after writing *Águila de blasón* and *Romance de lobos*, Valle should return to the Galician theme, and not, moreover, with a work along the lines of *El embrujado* and *Divinas palabras*, but with a third *Comedia bárbara*. *Cara de Plata* appeared in serialised form in *La Pluma* between July and December 1922. The title was misleading: it suggested that this play would centre on Montenegro’s second son, Miguel, since Montenegro himself, the protagonist of the first two *Comedias bárbaras*, had died at the end of *Romance de lobos*, bringing the two plays to an apparently definitive conclusion. The logical assumption was that this third *Comedia bárbara* would continue the family narrative, taking it into the next generation. It transpired, however, that *Cara de Plata* was not, in fact, a sequel to the first two *Comedias*
but a prequel, and, despite the implications of the title, Miguel's role in this new play would still be overshadowed by that of his father.

We can only speculate on why Valle-Inclán should decide to revive the theme of the *Comedias bárbaras* after such a long gap. It is possible that he felt that something was missing, that he needed to broaden the picture that he had painted in *Águila de blasón* and *Romance de lobos* by taking the narrative back a step, perhaps to establish his characters in a more idealised light, before their decline. It is also possible that he was still drawn to the subject of the decaying aristocracy, that his interest in Montenegro and his world had not yet been exhausted. Valle’s attachment to certain characters was apparent in their frequent reappearance throughout his works, and had by now become one of the hallmarks of his writing. His continuing esteem for the hidalgo, moreover, is evident in an excerpt from one of his letters, later published in the newspaper *España*, in which he complains: ‘Esta clase social se ha perdido y no ha venido ninguna otra a sustituirla.’

Alfredo Matilla dismisses the idea of nostalgia as the reason behind this new *Comedia bárbara*, and favours the notion of a gap that needed to be filled. He maintains: ‘La obra había quedado incompleta. Necesitaba un primer acto, una introducción de tema y personajes’, and he sees the completed trilogy as ‘Introducción, desarrollo y resolución’. Rivas Cherif sees them in the same light: *Cara de Plata* as prologue, *Romance de lobos* as epilogue. It is worth recalling that Valle followed a similar process when he wrote the prologue to *El yermo de las almas*; his intention was to offer some kind of explanatory background to the situation at the beginning of *Cenizas*. Salper suggests that Valle returned to the theme of the Montenegro family because his ideas had changed and he had omitted ‘ciertos detalles con respecto a los Montenegro’.

More details had already emerged, in fact, in *Los cruzados de la causa*. Although published in 1908, a year after *Águila de blasón*, its narrative precedes that of
the play in fictional terms since, in the novel, Montenegro is living in apparent harmony under the same roof as two of his sons. Paradoxically, however, Sabelita is already established as his mistress. Such anomalies complicate rather than simplify.

Whatever Valle's reasons for writing a third *Comedia bárbara*, the radical change in his perspective around 1920 would suggest that this third play may not be in the same mould as the earlier two. Yet since Valle himself called *Cara de Plata* a *Comedia bárbara*, we must accept it as part of what he clearly intended as a trilogy; indeed, in the same letter quoted above, he refers to 'esta Comedia Bárbara (dividida en tres tomos: *Cara de Plata. Águila de Blasón y Romance de Lobos*'). Most critics agree, nevertheless, that *Cara de Plata* differs substantially from *Águila de blasón* and *Romance de lobos*. Troncoso concludes that it was clearly written with the other two *Comedias bárbaras* in mind, and agrees with Ruiz Ramón's defence of the literary unity of the three plays, but points out that 'no puede olvidarse que el tiempo transcurrido entre la redacción de las dos primeras y la conclusión de la última fue crucial en la evolución estética del autor, y, en consecuencia, los rasgos que las caracterizan podrán no ser comunes'. María del Carmen Porrúa also concedes the thematic unity of the three plays, but emphasises their difference in approach, suggesting that the last is 'ya cerca del Valle-Inclán de ideas de avanzada, las dos primeras más cerca del Valle tradicionalista'. Salper puts *Cara de Plata* firmly in the post-1920 period, citing the attitude of the tenant farmers as Valle's acknowledgement of social change, while José Alberich goes further, and suggests that it should not be seen as a *Comedia bárbara* at all. While he accepts that it was Valle's intention to write a third *Comedia bárbara*, he maintains that the substantial differences in style and inspiration, together with the anomalies of its content, link it convincingly with Valle's post-1920 theatre.

Lima makes a different distinction; he not only places *Cara de Plata* in this later period, but suggests that all three *Comedias bárbaras* 'depict an earlier era from the
perspective of "the concave mirror" that Valle-Inclán would come to term *Esperpento*. In effect he is saying that thereafter the trilogy had to be viewed wholly as emanating from the aesthetic of the *esperpento*, the earlier plays having been its embryonic manifestation.\(^{10}\) Since, however, his conclusions appear principally to be based on the presence of the absurd and the grotesque in the earlier *Comedias bárbaras*, the same observation would be valid of much of Valle's writing up to that point.

The arguments for placing *Cara de Plata* in the post-1920 period are persuasive, but there is substantial evidence to show that this play has strong links with earlier writing, and especially with the theatre that immediately preceded it. Nor should the fourteen-year gap between the publication of the early *Comedias bárbaras* and *Cara de Plata* be seen as a significant factor, since it is possible that Valle had at least made a start on *Cara de Plata* as early as 1910,\(^{11}\) that is, before either the publication of *El embrujado* or the conception of *Divinas palabras*. These two plays, nevertheless, written in that gap, not only confirmed Valle's continuing interest in Galicia, but provide a significant connection between the early *Comedias bárbaras* and *Cara de Plata*, since they both introduce a number of new elements, some of which anticipate the esperpentismo of later works, and many of which are reflected in *Cara de Plata*. Even if we accept, however, that *Cara de Plata* is part of a trilogy, and belongs to Valle's Galician cycle of writing, its late appearance, especially during this period of change in Valle's focus, inevitably means that there will be elements in its composition that are inconsistent with those found in the earlier *Comedias bárbaras*.

One would expect that, on writing a prequel fourteen years after the first two *Comedias bárbaras*, the most important unifying element for Valle-Inclán would be the main theme, but *Cara de Plata* shows marked differences. The theme of the two early *Comedias bárbaras* is the decline of the rural aristocracy in Galicia. Both plays follow the breakdown of Montenegro's relationships with members of his family, a breakdown
that symbolises the wider disintegration of the society in which, until now, he has held sway. Until the middle of the nineteenth century, almost all the land in Spain was divided between the Church and the nobles and hidalgos in the form of mayorazgos. Under the disentailing laws of the 1830s many of the church lands were sold, and the security of the hidalgos disappeared. Many sold up. Cara de Plata reflects the changes that disentailment represented for the small landowner and for his tenant farmers.

Whilst this play still revolves around Montenegro and his role in a semi-feudal society, the focus has moved to the wider community: the initial conflict is no longer within Montenegro’s household, but between Montenegro and his tenants. The play opens on a group of angry herdsmen who are protesting over the recent closure of an ancient right of way. This thematic shift will, in its turn, undergo a further change when the farmers subsequently draw the abbot into their cause. They would expect support. In Galicia, according to Gerald Brenan, ‘when the peasantry are dispersed in hamlets and small farms, the clergy associates itself with them’. The abbot would have been seen as a substantial ally. His intervention at this stage alters the balance of the argument, and what was threatening to develop into a feud between the peasantry and the ruling class, subsequently looks to turn into a power struggle between the Church and the nobility.

The resentment of the peasants in these initial scenes comes as a surprise. In the earlier Comedias bárbaras there was no such discontent: the only relationship between Montenegro and the peasant class was one of mutual cooperation. In Águila de blasón this is evidenced by his working relationship with Pedro Rey, one of his tenants, and by numerous comments from the peasant community that confirmed the loyalty that he commanded from his people. They formed a supportive pattern of mutual dependence in a semi-feudal society, and accepted their place without question. In Romance de lobos he enjoyed the same kind of support: the sailors risked their lives for him, the beggars revered him as their champion. As Montenegro pointed out to the beggars, each class
had its role to play: ‘Nacisteis pobres, y no podréis rebelaros nunca contra vuestra
destino. La redención de los humildes hemos de hacerla los que nacimos con ímpetu de
señores’ (OC. II, 466). The conflict at the start of Cara de Plata is an unexpected
reversal of this traditional relationship, and inconsistent with the expectations that the
public would have of a play whose action precedes that of the earlier Comedias
bárbaras. Moreover, the only hint of the possibility of peasant discontent comes in what
now follows Cara de Plata. In Romance de lobos, Montenegro predicts an uprising, but
far into the future: ‘El día en que los pobres se juntasen para quemar las siembras, [...] seria el día de gran justicia … Ese día llegará’ (OC. II, 466).

The beginning of Cara de Plata recalls some of Valle’s earlier work. In the last
of his short stories, ‘Mi bisabuelo’ (1914), the peasants are denied grazing rights and
clamour for justice (OC. I, 279-83). The mood of the intervening play of El embrujado,
also shows the pueblo in conflict with the ruling class. In both the short story and the
play, and to a point in Divinas palabras, which followed, the peasantry, far from seeing
poverty as a condition to be accepted, regards it as a curse. Poverty begets frustration
and greed, emotions that in all three pieces prompt the characters into action. Aware of
the injustices in society, the people are prepared to rebel, and, moreover, fear and
distrust of the authorities often persuade them to take the law into their own hands.

This mood of unrest at the beginning of Cara de Plata looks set to assert itself.
A spirit of bravado, tempered by trepidation, underlies the initial protest by the
herdsmen. Some voice resentment and anger, and advocate action; others advise
patience and caution, for the fear of a lawsuit is real. When the abbot is also denied the
right of way, the herdsmen see their chance and look to him to champion their cause,
but the abbot’s only concern is over the affront to his dignity and he pursues the issue
on a purely personal level. The social dimension subsequently loses significance and the
initial issue of the lower classes is forgotten. The first real attempt of the poor to assert
their rights is diverted into a battle of wits between the two men of power. If Valle’s original intention was to deal with social rights in this play, it remained unfulfilled.

The fact that the social element even figures in Cara de Plata, however, is out of step with the vision with which Valle wrote the earlier Comedias bárbaras. In this, the first play of the trilogy in fictional terms, the medieval concept of the Three Estates, which underscores the life of Montenegro and his entourage in Águila de blasón and Romance de lobos, is invalidated. No one is fulfilling his role: the nobility is failing to protect and support the people, the clergy is not attending to the people’s spiritual needs, and the poor are not providing the work base with which to support the other two. All three sectors of society are driven by naked self-interest. John Lyon sees this as one of the main differences between this play and the other two, and points out that ‘in the early Comedias. Montenegro is presented almost nostalgically as the expression of certain traditional heroic values […]. In Cara de Plata, Valle-Inclán gives us an asocial caricature of human behaviour under the whiplash of pride and lust’.14

The introduction of the figure of the abbot is the most important innovation in Cara de Plata. In Águila de blasón and Romance de lobos, Montenegro was the central, dominating character; there was no opposing figure of the same weight. In Cara de Plata, the Abbot of Lantaño assumes almost equal importance and, in fact, makes more appearances on stage than Montenegro. Both wield considerable influence in the community. The abbot’s sister, Doña Jerómita compares their power: ‘Son genios iguales mi hermano y el Mayorazgo’, and the verger agrees that only the one is match for the other: ‘A un fiero otro fiero’ (OC. II. 288). When his power is challenged, the abbot purports to uphold the peasants’ cause, but in reality resorts to petty retaliation by removing his niece Sabelita from what he claims is the evil influence of Montenegro’s household. Montenegro’s subsequent retrieval of his goddaughter is predictable, and
what began as a social issue degenerates into a personal feud that becomes the dominating motif of the play.

It is the abbot, moreover, who brings a new, unexpected element to *Cara de Plata* that pervades the action and underlines the principal difference between this play and the earlier *Comedias bárbaras*. His invocation of the Devil radically alters the perspective of this work; it replaces the nostalgic approach that characterised the earlier *Comedias bárbaras* with a mood of sacrilege, and the play becomes less a comment on the decay of a social class than a damning indictment of the rural clergy. Satanism is not new in Valle’s writing; it figured in the earlier stories of ‘Rosarito’, ‘Beatriz’ and ‘Mi hermana Antonia’. It also played a significant part in *Divinas palabras*, but there the conflict lay between the Church and the Devil; in *Cara de Plata*, the Church becomes synonymous with the Devil, and Satanism develops as a central motif.

The narrative line in *Cara de Plata* is also quite distinct from that of the other two *Comedias bárbaras*. All three plays follow events in Montenegro’s life, but the earlier *Comedias bárbaras* revolve first around his relationships with members of his family, and then with the remorse that leads to his redemption. As the first of the *Comedias bárbaras*, in fictional terms, we would expect *Cara de Plata* to show Montenegro’s relationships with his family before they had broken down, or at least at an earlier stage of deterioration, but there are few indications that the situation is radically different. Doña María does not even figure in this prequel; she has already left her husband. Montenegro’s attitude towards five of his sons is much the same as it was in *Águila de blasón*, albeit a little less hostile, and he admittedly shows some affection towards his second son, Miguel. The only relationship that is patently at an earlier stage is that between Montenegro and his goddaughter. It is not clear why Sabelita is living under her godfather’s roof; the situation is something of an anomaly, since in *Águila de blasón* there is a reference to her place in Doña María’s household. At the beginning of
the play, Montenegro’s affections towards her appear fatherly, though there are signs that his feelings may be other than purely paternal. When these eventually manifest themselves in an aggressive act of lust, they not only irrevocably change the relationship, but exploit a situation in which Sabelita becomes an unwilling pawn in what has developed into a personal vendetta between Montenegro and the abbot.

Not only is there little emphasis on family relationships in *Cara de Plata*, but the storyline is less important than the psychological angle. Like *Romance de lobos*, this play is more a study of obsessional behaviour than a narrative of family life, though in *Cara de Plata* the emotions are of an entirely different nature. Both Montenegro and the abbot become increasingly deranged as the play progresses, and their insanity grows sinister as each ultimately sells his soul to the Devil. It is mainly the combination of sacrilege and monomania that distinguishes this play from the earlier *Comedias bárbaras*. Neither of these elements had figured in the fictional sequels: in *Águila de blasón* Montenegro showed no signs of mental unbalance, nor did he ever blaspheme. His attitude towards religion was rather one of inadequacy and respect. In *Romance de lobos*, moreover, where obsessional behaviour became a central issue, far from sacrilegious, it arose from genuine Christian remorse. There are, therefore, serious deviations in what we would expect from the first play in a trilogy, especially where, as in this case, we are already familiar with the characters and storyline.

In addition to anomalies in the theme and narrative line of *Cara de Plata*, there are also inconsistencies in characterisation. Excepting the absence of Doña María, some continuity is maintained by the reappearance of the core characters from the earlier *Comedias bárbaras*, but most have undergone subtle changes. Some of these differences reflect Valle’s shift in approach, while others evidence the influence of the intervening plays of *El embrujado* or *Divinas palabras*, or both.
Montenegro himself is the most altered: though noisy and violent in the early *Comedias bárbaras*, he behaved as befitted a ‘gran señor’, with the authority that comes with the weight of feudal tradition. He still saw himself as lord and protector of his people, and enjoyed a reputation for justice and generosity. In *Águila de blasón*, the servants referred to him as ‘el padre de los pobres’ (*OC, II, 356*), and the beggars as one bewailed his death in the same vein in *Romance de lobos*: ‘¡Era nuestro padre! ¡Era nuestro padre!’ (*OC, II, 520*). In *Cara de Plata*, Montenegro’s attitude towards his dependants is the reverse: he is seen as intransigent and he no longer commands their loyalty. Miguel tells the farmers: ‘Mi padre se cansó de ser clemente’ (*OC, II, 282*): an odd anomaly in a play that, in fictional terms, precedes two others in which Montenegro is unfailingly clement. Far from being the defender of the poor, he is here their adversary, and is now cursed by those who sang his praises in the earlier *Comedias bárbaras*. His refusal to respond to the pleas of his people provokes reactions of hostility and revenge. Reviled as a ‘lobo cano’ (*OC, II, 275*), he is personally threatened: ‘emplazado quedas!’ (*OC, II, 276*), and his family cursed: ‘¡Montenegros! ¡Negros de corazón!’ (*OC, II, 273*).

This unexpected change in behaviour, from protective *hidalgo* to avaricious landowner, carries clear echoes of *El embrujado*, in which the attitude of Don Pedro, once noble and generous, becomes mean and intransigent on the death of his son. Montenegro also shares with Don Pedro the decision to take the law into his own hands. Each takes by force what he considers to be his by right: Don Pedro orders the stealing of Rosa’s baby; Montenegro snatches Sabelita from the church. Both men exploit an innocent victim in the pursuit of their own ends.

Not only has the heroic stature that characterised Montenegro in the two earlier plays disappeared in *Cara de Plata*, but he has become even more of a lone figure. One curious feature of this play is the almost total absence of servants: in the earlier
Comedias bárbaras they made up a numerous body and, as part of Montenegro’s extended family, represented an essential element of the feudal structure, as well as providing a significant supporting role. In many ways, Montenegro’s position of power was dependent on this entourage, as well as on his immediate family, his bastard sons, and his tenants. In Cara de Plata, instead of being at the centre of a large, traditional, rural household, Montenegro is strangely isolated, with only Don Galán to serve him. Even his faithful retainer, Micaela la Roja, who runs his household in Águila de blasón, is missing. In the course of his battle for power with the abbot, moreover, Montenegro becomes even more solitary.

Two other changes also become apparent in Montenegro: his sexual appetite is given greater emphasis, and, in addition, takes on a sinister tone that was absent in the other two Comedias bárbaras. In both respects he reveals elements in common with Séptimo Miau of Divinas palabras. As seducers of women, they share an abruptness of approach. Séptimo’s brief invitation to Mari-Gaila of ‘Entramos, pecamos y nos caminamos’ (OC, II, 560) becomes a bald ‘Me perteneces’, as Montenegro claims Sabelita in Cara de Plata (OC, II, 321). It is, however, the satanic element that links them more closely. Montenegro’s reputation as a womaniser is established in the earlier Comedias bárbaras, but the magnetic quality of which Sabelita complained in Águila de blasón is much more pronounced in Cara de Plata, where his powers of seduction carry the demonic connotations that were revealed in ‘Rosarito’ and Sonata de primavera, and which were also exercised by Rosa in El embrujado. Here, like Séptimo, who claims to be in league with the Devil, Montenegro reveals powers that border on the satanic, and Sabelita finds herself unable to resist what the abbot labels ‘poder de brujo’ (OC, II, 323). His final identification with the Devil, as he declares to Sabelita: ‘¡Soy Satanás y te pierdo!’ (OC, II, 321), reveals the depths to which he has finally sunk.
This element of sacrilege, which becomes a dominant feature in *Cara de Plata*, is at variance with Montenegro’s attitude to religion in the earlier *Comedias bárbaras*, where he never blasphemed or committed an act of sacrilege. In *Águila de blasón* he tried to pray; in *Romance de lobos*, his prayers were serious; in *Cara de Plata*, he mocks religion. Whatever his shortcomings in the earlier *Comedias bárbaras*, Montenegro had certain principles that he now no longer holds. Any vestige of dignity that he showed in the past disappears with a loss of control, and his pride, previously heroic, becomes a grotesque caricature.

Valle’s treatment of five of Montenegro’s sons in *Cara de Plata* is mostly consistent with the way in which he presents them in the two earlier *Comedias bárbaras*. In the case of Miguel, however, there are anomalies: at the beginning of *Águila de blasón* he was the only son who appeared to have any affection for Montenegro, the only one who tried to warn him of the impending robbery. Such loyalty does not square with his fury at the end of *Cara de Plata*, when he is so enraged by his father’s behaviour that he attempts to kill him. Equally inconsistent, since his anger was over Sabelita, is his apparent indifference to her changed status in *Águila de blasón*. He is not seen to grieve over her loss. He makes, moreover, a confusing remark to Sabelita in *Águila de blasón*, implying a past relationship: ‘A pesar de tantas cosas, no he olvidado aquel tiempo’ (*OC, II, 398*).

Salper sees Miguel as the centre of attention in *Cara de Plata*, and it is certainly he, not his father, who is the negotiator, not only between his family and the tenant farmers, who never come face to face with Montenegro, but also between his father and the abbot. His role is, admittedly, greater than in the two earlier *Comedias bárbaras*, but though the eponymous hero of this play, he never seriously competes as protagonist with either Montenegro or the abbot. Although his emotional involvement with Sabelita prompts the second power struggle in *Cara de Plata* – that between father
and son – Miguel’s behaviour is eclipsed by that of his father. His healthy advances are no match for Montenegro’s predatory lust, and he fails where Montenegro succeeds in his bid for Sabelita. Even his threat of patricide comes to nothing.

On a different note, Miguel introduces the only element of humour into *Cara de Plata*. His sense of amusement had already marked him as different from his brothers in *Águila de blasón*, where he made fun of El Señor Ginero, and joked his way through the theft and boiling of the corpse with his brother, Don Farruquino. For most of *Cara de Plata*, there is evidence of this good humour: rumours of his wild behaviour that claim he rode Pedro Rey’s cow into the river; his tongue-in cheek challenge to the abbot at the beginning of the play; his equally relaxed attempts to make amends and, on the appearance of Fuso Negro on Pichona’s roof, his pleasure in exploiting a situation of mistaken identity.

The presentation of Sabelita has undergone a subtle change: already Montenegro’s mistress when *Águila de blasón* opened, she was referred to variously as ‘una devota’, ‘la amiga del Mayorazgo’, and ‘la mal casada’ (*OC, II*, 345), but apart from allusions to the sadness of her eyes, there was no physical description of her. Even when she had fled to the country, and was apparently so altered that she was barely recognisable, it was only her clothes that Valle described. By contrast, in *Cara de Plata*, he elaborates on her appearance: ‘rubia de mieles, el cabello en dos trenzas, la frente bombeada y pulida. […] risueña y atenta. […] los ojos ingenuos y francos como los de una niña’ (*OC, II*, 276-78), eyes that are always lowered in what Montenegro irritably calls ‘costumbre de monja’ (*OC, II*, 281). This attention to her physical appearance carries the hallmarks of Valle’s stylistic approach in *El embrujado* and *Divinas palabras* and bears a close resemblance to the description of Doña Isoldina: ‘alta, blanca, con la pátina dorada del sol y una gracia sonriente esparcida desde los labios a
los ojos. Tiene pulida de un inocente resplandor la frente serena. [...] su alma es humilde y cristalina, llena de un murmullo sagrado' (OC, II, 1140).

The two women have more than just appearance in common: both possess a virginal quality, both are religious, modest and quietly-spoken. Each is a close family member of the protagonist: Sabelita is Montenegro’s goddaughter while Isoldina is Don Pedro’s niece. Both are emotionally involved with a son of the family: Isoldina was betrothed to Don Pedro’s son, Miguelito, and while there is little evidence in the early Comedias bárbaras of any romantic attachment between Sabelita and Montenegro’s son Miguel, it is clear that in Cara de Plata there is a tentative relationship.

The other woman in this play undergoes similar changes. Pichona is to Miguel what Sabelita is to Montenegro and, though she still has a minor role, she reappears in Cara de Plata as a more fully rounded character, and has assimilated features from the protagonists of both El embrujado and Divinas palabras. Her powers of clairvoyance and cartomancy in Águila de blasón became a motif that continued into the two intervening plays, and they appear again in Cara de Plata, when she reads Miguel’s future in the cards. This feature has shades of Rosa, from El embrujado, but it is from Mari-Gaila of Divinas palabras that Pichona assumes a new vibrancy, and her beauty and sexuality, which were given scant attention in the earlier play, are now highlighted. She is seen with ‘ojos brillantes y grandes, el fulvo cabello esparcido por la almohada’ (OC, II, 316), and appears ‘casi desnuda, fulva y blanca’ (OC, II, 317). Her lovemaking with Miguel becomes much more sensual than in Águila de blasón. In addition, she is no longer a peripheral figure, as she was in the earlier play, but like Mari-Gaila, has become part of the feria crowd. Her philosophy: ‘¡Correr caminos!’ is that of Mari-Gaila. Her pleasure lies in ‘No mirar atrás, [...] y tener en el bolsillo una peseta’ (OC, II, 310). Her exchange with Miguel at Ludovina’s inn is strongly reminiscent of the
conversation between Mari-Gaila and Séptimo Miau at the feria in Divinas palabras, and both couples explore the idea of roaming the world together.

It is noticeable that Montenegro’s servant, Don Galán, who had a substantial part to play in Águila de blasón, is in Cara de Plata a character even more reduced than in Romance de lobos, where his role became strangely minimal. No longer the ebullient fool of the earlier work, he is serious, almost wise in his advice to his master, and he only appears very briefly. It is also curious that as the only character subjected to dehumanising techniques in Águila de blasón he is not ridiculed in Cara de Plata.

The character who undergoes the most radical change in this play is Fuso Negro. Although he did not figure in Águila de blasón, the part he played in Romance de lobos was small but significant. Despite his reputation as the local madman, his conversation with Montenegro was sharp and articulate. The Fuso Negro of Cara de Plata is barely recognisable as the same person: ‘atúlla con tuertos visajes, un mendigo alunado. — Aquel Fuso Negro, roto, greñudo, cismático, que lleno de guijarros el bonete, corria los caminos’ (OC, II, 281). He has become a grotesque, subhuman creature, lewd, blasphemous and demonic, his mutterings an ominous mixture of gibberish and truth.

Whilst one might readily accept that a character could slide from sanity into madness, the reverse is barely credible. Since this is the first play in fictional terms, that is precisely what we are being asked to believe. Fuso Negro makes frequent appearances throughout the play, arriving uncannily on the scene, like a deus ex machina, always at a critical moment. He is part of the feria crowd, where he blasphemes and pontificates in front of the church, but it is his attempted rape of Sabelita in the central scene of the play that changes the entire course of the action. Although apparently still a minor character, Fuso Negro has a crucial role in Cara de Plata. His repeated appearances punctuate events at every stage, and move the action forward; his demonic behaviour, moreover, relates to the two main characters, each of whom will call upon the Devil for
help. The sinister, predatory quality of Fuso Negro’s actions reflects the underlying elements that mark the principal difference between this play and the earlier Comedias bárbaras, elements that predominated in the intervening plays of El embrujado and Divinas palabras: the satanic, the supernatural, and the power of sex.

In Cara de Plata Fuso Negro bears some resemblance to Don Pedro’s servant of El embrujado: ‘un mozo gáñán medio desnudo, todo tinto de mosto: es Malvin, el hijo de la loca que guarda las cabras’ (OC, II, 1134), but his surreal appearances and demonic behaviour link him more closely to the figure of the Trasgo in Divinas palabras. His sudden, unexpected arrivals on the scene have the same supernatural stamp, and his cry of ‘¡Toupourrouitóu!’ echoes the Trasgo’s ‘¡Jujurujú!’ In addition, Fuso Negro’s attempted rape of Sabelita changes the course of the play in much the same way that the Trasgo’s figurative act of sex with Mari-Gaila marks the turning point in Divinas palabras. Both use similar language. Fuso Negro urges Sabelita: ‘Esta noche voy en el caballo del viento, trabajo contigo’ (OC, II, 306); the Trasgo tells Mari-Gaila: ‘Te llevaré por los aires […] Ciñeme las piernas’ (OC, II, 569-70).

The link between these two characters is further underlined by Miguel, who, when he first hears Fuso Negro on Pichona’s roof, confuses him with the trasgo of Galician folklore and presumes he is of the mischievous kind that plays pranks on the unsuspecting. Fuso Negro, however, makes his satanic connections clear, referring to himself as the ‘Diablo Mayor’. His words down the chimney: ‘Sube, Pichona, y echamos un baile’ (OC, II, 333), again echo the Trasgo’s invitation to Mari-Gaila in Divinas palabras: ‘Cuando remates, echaremos un baile’ (OC, II, 569); both scenes, moreover, take place, as befits the Devil, in the moonlight. Fuso Negro’s arrival on Pichona’s roof is marked by the breaking of roof tiles, the triumphant howl, and the lustful intentions that are precisely those described by the Fuso Negro of Romance de lobos, when he explains how the Devil deceives women: ‘aullando como un can, va por
The Fuso Negro of *Cara de Plata* reflects a satanic mood that is new to the *Comedias bárbaras*. If he was mad in *Romance de lobos*, he was human, and harmless. Now he has become a sinister figure, bordering on the supernatural, with a gross sexual appetite and a madness that takes the form of malice, directed in turn towards the abbot, the verger and, ultimately, Miguel. His demonic behaviour underscores the prevailing atmosphere of evil that marks the greatest difference between *Cara de Plata* and the earlier *Comedias bárbaras*.

Of the minor characters in *Cara de Plata*, El Ciego de Gondar is the most familiar. In this, his seventh appearance in Valle’s work so far, his role as one of the *feriantes* is similar to that played in *Divinas palabras*, though less prominent. The herdsmen too, are familiar figures, but their behaviour reveals marked inconsistencies: three of them – Pedro Abuin, Manuel Tovío and Manuel Fonseca – showed no signs of hostility in *Águila de blasón* when travelling in the boat with Doña María, yet they vilify Montenegro’s name at the beginning of *Cara de Plata*. All five herdsmen, moreover, took part in the fight with the brothers in *Romance de lobos*, where their loyalty to Montenegro was without question, yet they are now seen as rebellious.

Of the new characters in *Cara de Plata*, the most important is the Abbot of Lantañón. It is he who dominates the action and challenges Montenegro as protagonist. There had been no comparable character in any of Valle’s Galician literature until now. The only abbot to figure so far, apart from the dead ‘king’ in ‘El rey de la máscara’, was the sly, hypocritical Abbot of Brandeso, who played a minor role in *El Marqués de Bradomin*, with the appetite of a glutton and a weakness for women. There was also mention in *Flor de santidad* of an abbot with a liking for attractive women (*OC*, I, 619). The priesthood, generally, had been seen in an unfavourable light in numerous earlier
works, but whilst Valle’s anticlericalism was implicit in his presentation of these men of the cloth, none of them, up to this point, had been subjected to ridicule.

In Cara de Plata, the change in perspective is striking. The role of the Church now becomes a central issue, and its representative, the abbot, is shown, not just as an unsavoury figure, but one whose manic behaviour finally leads to acts of sacrilege. A clergyman of rank, far from standing for all that is good, the abbot is the embodiment of sin: proud, small-minded, cowardly, a drinker, a gambler and a cheat, he wields a gun and is ruthless in the pursuit of his own ends. Such is his reputation as a womaniser, that at one point, Fusio Negro thinks it is he who is in bed with Pichona. Valle underlines the satanic element in his character by constant references to blackness. He compares his hands to ‘garras negras’ (OC, II, 337), and repeatedly draws attention to the blackness of his general appearance: ‘aquel negro jinete’ (OC, II, 283), ‘negro y escueto’ (OC, II, 286. 301). ‘Negro, zancudo, angosto’ (OC, II, 285). As he becomes increasingly frustrated by his inability to deal with the situation that confronts him, the abbot’s behaviour grows ever more demented, and howling like a dog, he slaps his own cheeks. Eventually he makes his offer to the Devil: ‘¡Satanás, te vendo el alma si me vales en esta hora. ¡No me espanta ni el sacrilegio!’ (OC, II, 324). His qualifying ‘¡Hoy me juego el alma!’ is the ultimate bid of a gambler.

The abbot’s resemblance to the verger from Divinas palabras is striking. Pedro Gailo was also presented as a ‘black’ figure, with sinister overtones, whose ‘sotana escueta y el bonete picudo ponen en su sombra algo de embrujado’ (OC, II, 558). When he is alarmed, his ‘cuatro pelos quédanle de punta’ (OC, II, 525), a feature echoed by the ‘cuatro cuernos’ of the abbot’s ‘bonete’ in Cara de Plata (OC, II, 337), and under stress, both men behave in a similarly demented manner. Pedro Gailo is described as ‘siempre a conversar consigo mismo, huraño el gesto, las oraciones deshilvanadas’ (OC. II, 525); the abbot, likewise, is seen ‘barullando latin sobre el breviario’ (OC, II,
302). Each of them represents a distorted picture of the Church: weak and ineffectual in *Divinas palabras*: in *Cara de Plata*, powerful and corrupt.

The abbot is flanked in this play by another significant newcomer, whom Valle ridicules even more mercilessly. 'Hombre de cuentos y mentiras', the verger is a poor, cringing creature, forever rattling the keys to the church. Physically unattractive, with a 'cara de sebo rancio, la boca larga, la encía sin dientes, muy repelado de las cejas', he has, unexpectedly, 'ojos tiernos' (*OC, II, 303*). When alarmed, he gesticulates wildly, 'con los brazos abiertos en cruz' (*OC, II, 327*). Curiously, he, too, bears a marked resemblance to Pedro Gailo, who was similarly described as 'amarillo de cara y manos' (*OC, II, 523*), showed the same kind of cowardice and had the identical habit of rattling his keys. Pedro Gailo, too, had eyes that were capable of revealing tenderness, and made the same uncontrolled gestures when alarmed: 'échase fuera, negro y zancudo, mas queda espantado sobre el umbral, con los pelos en pie, los brazos en aspa' (*OC, II, 578*). In *Cara de Plata*, the verger's subservient relationship with the abbot resembles that of Don Galán with Montenegro in *Águila de blasón*: when accompanying the abbot, 'se encoge como un perro sobre la sombra alargada del tonsurado' (*OC, II, 323*). He also provides some of the comedy that was previously the province of Montenegro's servant, though in this play the humour is macabre, with grotesque overtones.

A third newcomer in *Cara de Plata*, the abbot's sister, also shows evidence of the influence of *Divinas palabras*. Doña Jeromita is presented as ugly and ridiculous, at times a caricature, in much the same way as Pedro Gailo's sister, Marica del Reino. Both women are characterised by their overreaction to a crisis with wild, puppet-like arm movements. Marica del Reino was described as 'una vieja encorvada' who, on the death of her sister, 'se deja caer en tierra, abriendo los brazos' (*OC, II, 537*). Doña Jeromita is 'una dueña pilonga' (*OC, II, 285*), verging permanently on the hysterical and falling to her knees 'suplicante, con los brazos abiertos' (*OC, II, 314*), when her
brother rejects the bag of gold. Just as Marica goaded Pedro Gailo into a frenzy of indecision, Jeromita, too, provokes the abbot into action, and she, too, is seen as a serpent by her brother (OC, II, 313).

The behaviour of these three new characters is presented as grotesque, and absurd to the point of farce. Valle subjects them to the same kind of dehumanising techniques that became a stylistic device in Divinas palabras, and which will grow even more pronounced in his esperpentos. The abbot is referred to variously as ‘el tonsurado’, ‘bulto ensotanado’ or simply as ‘trabuco, sotana, bonete’. He has ‘brazos de sombra’ and makes animal noises: ‘aullidos de can’ and ‘hosco bramido’. The verger is also given animal characteristics: ‘se encoge como un perro’ (OC, II, 323), ‘grazna [...] hace la corneja’ (OC, II, 302). Similarly, Doña Jeromita ‘cacarea una escala de espantos’ (OC, II, 303) and is further reduced to a puppet figure, with the whirling stick-like movements of her ‘brazos en aspa’.

Alongside the differences between Cara de Plata and the earlier Comedias bárbaras, there are, nevertheless, strong links. One of these is the element of violence in all three plays. Implicit in the word bárbaras, with its connotations of primitive passions and extreme behaviour, violence can be frightening, horrifying, or repellent. It invariably contains a destructive element. The term ‘violence’ includes in its meanings the exercise of physical force, and vehemence of personal feeling, but in Valle’s plays it manifests itself in a number of different ways. It can lie in a character’s appearance: the leper in Romance de lobos is huge, and the deformity of his rotting flesh makes him additionally repulsive, while Fuso Negro’s crazy, demented look is disturbing, and instils fear. Noise can be a reflection of violence, whether it is Montenegro’s booming voice, the shot of a gun, the barking of dogs, or the crashing of waves in a storm. Intense emotions – hatred, greed, revenge, explosions of rage, even Montenegro’s reactions of fear in the presence of the Santa Compañía – are invariably violent. There is
violence in sacrilege, evidenced in the removal and abuse of the corpse in *Aguila de blasón*, the desecration of Doña María’s tomb in *Romance de lobos*, and Montenegro’s appropriation of the pyx in *Cara de Plata*. Physical cruelty is violence *par excellence*; witness the brutal treatment of Sabelita and La Roja by the robbers, and the rape of Liberata in *Aguila de blasón*. Even darkness brings with it an air of menace.

Whatever form it takes, violence is the overriding impression left by all three *Comedias bárbaras*. There are differences, however, in the way in which it manifests itself in each. In *Aguila de blasón* the violence is mainly physical, and has a contrived, deliberate nature. Its discordant effect is heightened by its background of peaceful, often idyllic settings, and its juxtaposition with interludes of calm. In *Romance de lobos*, the violence erupts naturally and spontaneously from deep emotions, in particular from Montenegro’s increasing instability, and is unrelenting: there are no intercalated periods of quiet. In this play, moreover, it is complemented by a background of wind, thunder and angry weather, and dominated by noise. The violence in *Cara de Plata*, whilst occasionally physical, is primarily emotional, and assumes powerful, new sinister associations of profanation, sacrilege and Satanism.

*Cara de Plata* begins with an outburst of anger from the local herdsmen, who are protesting against the closure of an ancient right of way. The hot-headed Pedro Abuin curses the Montenegro family: ‘A esa casta de renegados la hemos de ver sin pan y sin tejas’ (*OC, II*, 273). His parting shot: ‘¡Montenegro, emplazado quedas!’ is echoed by the shepherd’s: ‘¡no hay otra salvación que quemarle los campos!’ (*OC, II*, 276), and the feeling of unrest that begins the action quickly escalates into fury.

Although Miguel, Montenegro’s second son, is initially presented in an attractive light, as a ‘mancebo muy gentil, […] hermoso segundón’ (*OC, II*, 276-77), he is, nevertheless, his father’s son. His arrival at a gallop on horseback, in a manner reminiscent of Montenegro, accompanied by barking dogs, suggests a potential for
violence. One of the dogs has a thorn in its foot, which Miguel tries to extract. In order to prove that he is master, he thrusts his fist into the dog’s mouth, challenging it to bite. The dog is terrified and whines, but does not bite him (OC, II, 278). Miguel’s advances to Sabelita also have an aggressive edge; when gentle flirting yields no results, he resorts to a threat: ‘Esta noche te deshago la cama’. Despite her mild reprimand, he persists with ‘¿Me abrirás la puerta?’ and warns her: ‘Si la encuentro cerrada, cuenta que la derribo’ (OC, II, 278). His treatment of his mistress, Pichona, also has harsh moments. His repeated insistence at Ludovina’s inn that she drink with him recalls similar moments of coercion in El embrujado and Divinas palabras, and his threat: ‘esta noche vas a bailar en camisa’, is the same expression used by one of the villagers as they pursued Mari-Gaila in Divinas palabras (OC, II, 590). It elicits a sharp retort from Pichona: ‘¡En todo sale usted Montenegro!’ (OC, II, 310).

A new, sinister element in the violence in Cara de Plata is first introduced by Fuso Negro. In very different guise from his appearance in Romance de lobos, where he had no connotations of the occult, he is described here as a ‘mendigo alunado’, arriving on the scene unexpectedly and rather alarmingly, with his characteristic shout of ‘Touporroutóu’, and making disturbing predictions of trouble and rebellion: ‘¡Se juntó una tropa de hirmandiños! ¡Touporroutóu! ¡Para acá viene! ¡La torre entre todos nos han de quemar!’ (OC, II, 281). From this moment on, his abrupt appearances punctuate the action, and his demonic behaviour is echoed and later surpassed by both the abbot and Montenegro, in ever-increasing acts of sacrilege. This satanic element, which becomes an intrinsic part of the violence in Cara de Plata, had no place in Águila de blasón. and although the appearance of the Santa Compañía and the accompanying storm in Romance de lobos may belong to the realm of the supernatural, the implications were religious rather than satanic. Moreover, the only sacrilege in the earlier Comedias bárbaras was committed by Montenegro’s sons, but neither act – the
stealing of the corpse from the cemetery in *Aguila de blasón*, or the sacking of the chapel in *Romance de lobos* – was satanic.

Montenegro’s capacity for violence, already established in the earlier *Comedias bárbaras*, is matched in *Cara de Plata* by that of the abbot. The abbot represents the other major force in the semi-feudal society in which Montenegro holds sway. His first appearance, on horseback, puts him on the same footing as both Montenegro and Miguel. His reaction to what he sees as an insult to his office – Miguel’s denial of access to the disputed right of way to a high-ranking man of the Church – reveals an equal capacity for aggressive behaviour. His power has been challenged; he will retaliate by removing his niece Sabelita from her godfather’s care, by force if necessary:

‘La sacaré de esa cueva. Si el padre autoriza la violencia del hijo, romperé para siempre las amistades’ (*OC, II, 286*). His decision triggers a further sequel of anger: the verger, dispatched with Doña Jeromita to fetch Sabelita, becomes the object of Montenegro’s fury, and emerging from the encounter with his clothes torn by the dogs, ‘*salta y gime al flanco del linajudo, que le prende de una oreja*’ (*OC, II, 291*).

From this point on, violence dominates nearly every scene. Even the carefree atmosphere of the *feria* is shattered when Don Mauro catches the abbot cheating during a game of cards with Montenegro’s sons, in which a bag of gold coins is at stake:

*El rojo gigante levanta la bolsa de las treinta portuguesas, y la rueda de jugadores se apasiona y revuelve: [...] El tonsurado saca un pistolón. Cara de Plata se interpone y arrebata a su hermano la bolsa.*

*Cara de Plata* — Ganó el Abad.

*Don Mauro* — Con trampa.

*El Abad* — Goliat, que te abraso.

*Don Mauro* — ¡Tahur!

*El Abad* — ¡Judás!
Don Mauro restalla su vara. El fogonazo de un tiro, charamuscas del taco, olor de pólvora, ladridos, denuestos, espantos. [...] El Abad, con la sotana rota y la pistola humeante, caminando de espalda, pega con la puerta del huerto y escapa. (OC, II, 300-01)

Three consecutive attempts on Sabelita's virtue constitute the most physically violent scene in the play and are the pivot of the action. In the church of San Martiño de Freyres, Miguel threatens Sabelita for a second time: '¡Por el asilo de la iglesia no te prendo ahora por la cintura y te llevo robada sobre mi caballo!' (OC, II, 306). Next on the scene is Fuso Negro, whose grotesque parody of Miguel's attempts is a crude and uncontrolled attempt at rape: 'el fálico triunfo, la risa en baladros, los ojos en lumbre, la greña frenética.' Sabelita's cries for help are miraculously answered by the arrival of Montenegro, like a deus ex machina: 'Imprecador y violento, por el muro del atrio salta impensadamente un negro jinete' (OC, II, 307), who carries her off in triumph.

The result of this episode is even more disturbing. Sabelita's pleas to be allowed to return to the Rectory trigger a violent outburst of temper in Montenegro: smashing the glass of wine that he has offered her, he overturns the table, and knocks over the lamp, extinguishing the light. The ensuing darkness intensifies the atmosphere of menace. Sabelita is paralysed, held by a force beyond her control. It is at this point that Montenegro's feelings for his goddaughter take on a satanic nature: by wanting not only her body but her soul, he assumes the role of the Devil. The moment recalls Bradomín's need for Concha's soul in Sonata de otoño, and the accelerating pace of the interchange between Montenegro and Sabelita has more than an echo of the exchange between Séptimo and Mari-Gaila in Divinas palabras in the moments before the consummation of their lust. Montenegro's attempt to force Sabelita to drink from his glass is a further reminder of the abusive use of alcohol.
It is only at this point, in the final *Jornada*, that the arrival of the abbot brings him face to face with Montenegro for the first time, and creates a surge of dramatic tension. Sabelita’s pleas to Montenegro: ‘¡Rompa el negro imán con que me prende! ¡Déjeme libre!’ (*OC*, II, 322), prompt a sinister accusation from the abbot: ‘¡Poder de brujo tienes!’ and the threat of retribution: ‘¡Emplazado quedas! ¡Aún nos veremos!’ (*OC*, II, 323). But he, too, now resorts to sacrilege, and calls on the Devil: ‘¡Satanás. ayúdame y el alma te entrego! [...] ¡Acúdeme, Satanás!’ (*OC*, II, 325). In an unexpected moment of humour, the Devil responds in the person of Fuso Negro, who, with yet another timely appearance, leaps out of the darkness, shouting ‘¡Presente mi capitán!’ It is his sinister influence over Montenegro and the abbot that finally also affects Miguel. By breaking the news of Sabelita’s ‘rape’, Fuso Negro unleashes a sequence of violence, in which Miguel, too, calls on Satan for help as he grabs an axe and gallops off to kill his father.

The final scene in the play is the first in which Montenegro faces both his rivals, and all three men finally confront each other. Whilst Miguel is bent on murder – ‘demudado y frenético, [...] el hacha en el brazo desnudo’ (*OC*, II, 337) – the violence here lies principally in the sacrilegious behaviour of Montenegro and the abbot. The abbot’s claims for the right of way to give the last rites to a ‘dying’ man are a grotesque parody of his genuine need to administer the last sacraments at the beginning of *Cara de Plata*. Montenegro’s mocking response is to fall to his knees, forcing his two huge dogs to kneel with him, whereupon he makes a public ‘confession’ and asks for absolution. This move, in turn, parodies the genuine confession that he made in *Romance de lobos*: both acts marked by their melodramatic delivery, but with strikingly different intentions. The crowd scatters in panic; Miguel, too, flees in fear. The effect of the violence in these final moments recalls the closing scene of *Romance de lobos*, in which the beggars disperse in disarray in the face of events that are out of control.
The atmosphere of menace that pervades *Cara de Plata* is intensified by the element of the occult. Its presence reflects the influence of the intervening play of *El embrujado*, where witchcraft dominated the action. Rosa’s supernatural power over Anxelo is echoed in *Cara de Plata*, in Montenegro’s control over Sabelita. This form of sexual magnetism also figured in the other intervening play of *Divinas palabras*, in which Mari-Gaila finds herself under the influence of the Trasgo Cabrío. Further echoes of *Divinas palabras*, in the demonic associations of Séptimo Miau, are found in *Cara de Plata*: Montenegro identifies with the Devil, the abbot sells his soul to the Devil, and Fusó Negro is the embodiment of Satan. Moreover, the conflict in *Divinas palabras* between the Church and the Devil, in the persons of Pedro Gailo and Séptimo is paralleled in *Cara de Plata* by the feud between the abbot and Montenegro, though it is confused when the abbot, too, resorts to satanic behaviour.

One of the significant differences between the violence in *Cara de Plata* and that of the early *Comedias bárbaras* lies in its sexual nature. Apart from the rape of Liberata in *Águila de blasón*, sex played no part in the violence, either in this play or in *Romance de lobos*. In *Cara de Plata*, on the other hand, it becomes a central feature. It is sex in the form of lust that drives Fusó Negro to assault Sabelita, Montenegro to possess her, and the abbot to pursue her in vain.

Whenever it occurs in the *Comedias bárbaras* sex is almost invariably presented in a negative light. It has nothing to do with love, which, as a positive force, is conspicuously absent. Nearly every kind of relationship, in fact, is tainted with self-interest. Even a mother’s love for her child is flawed. In *Águila de blasón*, although Doña María’s feelings for five of her sons are half-hearted, her love for Miguel appears to be deep. She fails, nevertheless, to defend his innocence of the attempted robbery from his father’s house, and accepts his reproaches and subsequent departure for war with characteristic resignation. Her love appears to have no stamina.
If Doña Maria fails in her relationship with her children, Montenegro’s feelings have already hardened into hostility. In Águila de blasón he makes no distinction between his sons and is unaware of Miguel’s loyalty, a loyalty that, in fact, is rendered inconsistent by the ending of Cara de Plata, when this play appeared fourteen years later. With Romance de lobos, Montenegro’s resentment of his children has reached the point where he is prepared to disinherit them. As a father, he proves incapable of love; despite the nobility of his lineage and the alleged devotion of his household, he finally inspires nothing but hatred in his sons. Only in Cara de Plata, where we see him at an earlier stage in his life, is there any evidence of a paternal bond. Here, though dismissive of five of his sons, he trusts Miguel, and treats him with respect, even with what is described as ‘una afección indulgente y ruda’ (OC, II, 279). In his admonitions there is, nevertheless, an element of need, a hope that one of his children, at least, should reflect the nobility of his lineage: ‘¡Yo querría que tú fueses un caballero que respondiese en todo a las obligaciones de su sangre! [...] no olvides las obligaciones de tu sangre, como hacen los otros perversos’ (OC, II, 280).

Also detectable in the father-son relationship of Cara de Plata is a note of sexual rivalry. Montenegro is aware of the attraction between his son and Sabelita, and his disapproval stems from his own selfish needs. He warns Sabelita: ‘No eres tú para él. [...] Tú eres para más. [...] ¡Como yo tuviese diez años menos!’ (OC, II, 281). When his vague sexual inclinations turn to lust and he seduces his goddaughter, he not only wrongs her innocence, and betrays her trust in him as her protector but, aware of the tentative bond between her and Miguel, he severs the ties with the only son with whom he has a relationship. His possession of Sabelita is, moreover, a form of moral incest, recalling the relationship between Niña Chole and her father in Sonata de estío, as well as Bradomín’s intentions in Sonata de invierno, and Pedro Gailo’s attempted incest with
his daughter in Divinas palabras, where the absence of parental devotion is likewise a fundamental issue.

Marital love fares no better than parental love. In Águila de blasón, Doña María’s love for her husband bears the same passive stamp as her love for her sons. Her feelings for Montenegro seem genuine, but her reaction to his womanising is simply to withdraw. Her love is tinged with fear; rather than resist, she readily adopts the role of martyr. Edwards sees her as the archetypal Spanish woman: saintly and virtuous, but ‘doomed to abuse and even martyrdom’. When her own goddaughter falls prey to Montenegro’s predatory powers, Doña María not only fails to protect her, but accepts the liaison as if it were inevitable. She even encourages the relationship, conceding her place to the younger woman. Considering the close bond that she claims with Sabelita – she had brought her up as a daughter – her attitude is barely comprehensible. It is not until the end of Águila de blasón that maternal feelings assert themselves and she takes Sabelita back into her life, throwing her husband out of his family home.

As a husband Montenegro is as unsuccessful as he is as a father. His failure to remain faithful to a devoted wife finally drove her away. His need for drinking and whoring have blinded him to any finer feelings, and it takes Doña María’s death for him to acknowledge what he has lost. His final hours in Romance de lobos are filled with apparently genuine remorse; the love that he believes he had for his wife is intensified in recollection. Yet even when he is apparently unhinged by grief, crying ‘¡fui su verdugo! … Sin embargo, la quería’ (OC, II, 463), he still finds justification for his behaviour in an archetypal male argument: ‘Como el hombre necesita muchas mujeres y le dan una sola, tiene que buscarlas fuera’ (OC, II, 463). His obsession with his own redemption, moreover, soon eclipses his original grief, and his wife is all but forgotten in his new crusade. His principal concern remains, predictably, himself.
Such self-centredness and incapacity for unselfish love appear to lie at the heart of the decline of the aristocracy in the *Comedias bárbaras*. It is not surprising that the nobility should fail in its role in society when it is crumbling within itself. As an example of Galician rural nobility, the Montenegro family is dysfunctional. There are no familial bonds, no caring relationships, no happiness, just a series of clashes. With the exception of Miguel, the brothers hate their father and their rebellion progresses through an assault on his house and his person, and finally to his murder. Their disregard for their mother, whom they see simply as a means through which to gain early access to the family fortune, is a betrayal of her faith in them; when she dies, they plunder her estate before she is buried. Nor do the brothers show any love or loyalty for each other; they quarrel and fight amongst themselves. In *Águila de blasón*, Don Farruquiño is not above trying to seduce his brother’s girl; in *Romance de lobos*, he and Don Pedrito attempt to deceive the other three siblings, secretly plundering the chapel. Each is suspicious of the others, and does not hesitate to deceive them when it suits.

Miguel is the only son who has any love or respect for his parents or his siblings. Even at the beginning of *Cara de Plata*, however, where he appears to return his father’s affection, he almost immediately betrays his trust by gambling with his money, and by the end of the play is angered to the point of attempted murder. Although in *Águila de blasón* he shows loyalty to his brothers by not revealing their treachery, in the end, rather than make a stand, he evades the issue by going off to war.

Romantic love barely surfaces in the *Comedias bárbaras*. At the beginning of *Cara de Plata*, there are indications of a tentative relationship between Miguel and Sabelita, who would appear to be natural partners, but Sabelita is aware that Miguel’s intentions are far from honest. She makes a joke of his threats, but is clear about her feelings: ‘si me quieres, quiéreme honesta’ (*OC, II*, 279). Miguel’s affections prove only lukewarm, and though he appears to take a stand when his father carries Sabelita
off, he fails to follow his unequivocal ‘¡Isabel es mía!’ (OC, II, 337) with the pursuit of his claim. In Águila de blasón, the only evidence that this love ever existed lies in a brief interchange between them, as Sabelita is running away from Montenegro’s house. There is no suggestion, however, that Miguel might seize this opportunity to renew his relationship with her. His love, such as it was, has either cooled, or was never deep.

In Cara de Plata, sex predominantly takes the form of lust and is frequently ‘bárbaro’. The rape of Liberata by Don Pedrito in Águila de blasón, though incidental to the main action, establishes a link between sex and brutality that re-emerges in Cara de Plata. Although the description of this incident is more graphic than that of any other scene of violence in the Comedias bárbaras, the cumulative effect of the three attempts on Sabelita in Cara de Plata, each following closely on the other, and coupled with the violation of the sanctity of the church in which the assaults take place, give this episode greater impact. Sabelita’s innocence is part of this; she is little more than a pawn in the power struggle between Montenegro and the abbot, like the bag of gold coins, mere currency to be passed from one owner to another. Whilst Montenegro makes no secret of his lust, the abbot feigns avuncular concern, but his ‘gesto de terror y lascivia’ reveals his true intentions, which Montenegro is quick to expose: ‘¡Sacrílego! ¡Deseas la moza para tu regalo! ¡Nos conocemos!’ (OC, II, 322).

In fact, the only sex in the Comedias bárbaras which is non-violent, and which is not about power or the manipulation of a sexual partner, is between Miguel and Pichona. There are moments of tenderness in their meetings, but even these episodes of pleasure are tainted: in Águila de blasón by the presence of Don Farruquiño, who is boiling a corpse on the other side of the room; in Cara de Plata, by the fact that Miguel is using Pichona to assuage the hurt caused by Sabelita’s rejection.

The emphasis on lust in Cara de Plata, and especially on its links with the satanic, is further evidence of the influence of El embrujado and Divinas palabras,
where it becomes one of the driving forces. Just as Anxelo is bewitched by Rosa’s
sexual power in *El embrujado*, and Mari-Gaila transfixed by the Trasgo in *Divinas
palabras*, Sabelita is held captive by Montenegro in *Cara de Plata*. Mari-Gaila’s final
surrender to the Trasgo in *Divinas palabras*, in which ‘se remonta y suspira con deleite
carnal. [...] desvanecida se siente llevada por las nubes’ (*OC, II, 570*), is echoed in
Sabelita’s submission to Montenegro in *Cara de Plata*. Although she does not share
Mari-Gaila’s pleasure, Sabelita’s flight through the night follows the same pattern, with
the stage directions advising: ‘convulsa y blanca levantada en el arzón, la niña desmaya
la frente en el hombro del Caballero’ (*OC, II, 307*).

Valle’s stage directions at the beginning of *Cara de Plata*, like those throughout
the intervening plays of *El embrujado* and *Divinas palabras*, give no indication of the
tensions, conflict and violence to come. As *Cara de Plata* opens, the anger of the
herdsmen is set against ‘Alegres albores’; horses graze peacefully in the background
(*OC, II, 273*), and shortly after, a flock of doves circles in ‘el cristal de la mañana’
(*OC, II, 276*). The use of light, which was put to great effect in *Divinas palabras*, takes
on a more specific importance in this play: as the action progresses, and day turns
through evening into night, the stage directions record the progress of time by making
careful references to the changing light. In this way, the early ‘luces matinales’ (*OC, II,
276*) give way to the heat of noon, when the trinkets on sale at the feria ‘fulgen al sol’
(*OC, II, 294*). Later, the Rectory reveals a ‘solana de dorados sillares’, (*OC, II, 301*)
and at dusk Miguel is seen silhouetted against ‘el sol poniente’ (*OC, II, 303*). As natural
light fades, artificial light mixes with the light of the moon and the stars. The church in
the ‘huerto de luceros’ is lit by the dim light of candles and a lamp, (*OC, II, 305*) and
Ludovina’s inn is illuminated by ‘faros lejanos que se encienden y se apagan con el
ritmo de las estrellas’ (*OC, II, 308*). A sinister note emerges at the Rectory, where ‘los
reflejos del velón llenan de aladas inquietudes las paredes’ (*OC, II, 313*), and in the
sudden darkness in Montenegro's *pazo*, as he overturns the lamp, the moon appears, 'como si naciese de pronto' (OC, II, 320).

*Cara de Plata* reflects the carefully controlled arrangement of *El embrujado* and *Divinas palabras*, both of which showed a closer attention to structure than either of the two early *Comedias bárbaras*. Again, conceived as theatre, with no pre-texts, no unrelated or simultaneous scenes, *Cara de Plata* has three *Jornadas*, now with five, seven, and five scenes respectively. The action spans twenty-four hours and the scenes are equally divided between daylight, most of which are outside, and darkness, where the action is mostly inside. The pivotal scene is deliberately central: Scene 4 of the second *Jornada*, in which Montenegro seizes Sabelita from the church.

A pattern emerges in *Cara de Plata* of a careful symmetry, based primarily on the number three: the conflicts in the play involve three men; there are three assaults on Sabelita's virtue; Miguel's attempt to murder his father is followed in *Águila de blasón* by a second attack on Montenegro, and culminates in a third in *Romance de lobos*, that ends his life. This concern with numbers grows increasingly pronounced in Valle's later works. In *La lámpara maravillosa*, which, published in 1916, falls within the period that separated the two earlier *Comedias bárbaras* from *Cara de Plata*, Valle explores his interest in Gnosticism, in which the number three is of paramount importance. The chapter, 'Exégesis trina', deals with the three paths to quietism, the associations with the Past, the Present and the Future, with the Word, the Flesh and the Devil (OC, I, 1950). The sense of completion associated with the number three could well have been another reason for Valle's decision to write a third *Comedia bárbara*.

The number seven also has implications for the Gnostics, who hold that matter is evil and that fate has seven demonic agents. These two numbers, three and seven, together with the Gnostic theory that time is concentric and eternal, thereby implying a certain fatalism and sense of predestination, lie behind much of the structural planning
of Valle’s later work. *La lámpara maravillosa* itself, divided into five sections, has a perfect symmetry: each section in turn is subdivided into 7, 10, 9, 10 and 7 parts, beginning and ending with the number seven. *Cara de Plata* echoes this symmetry and, as in *El embrujado* and *Divinas palabras*, it is the central act of seven scenes that is pivotal, and gives meaning to the play as a whole. *Cara de Plata* lacks the linear development of the two earlier *Comedias bárbaras*, and shows much the same unresolved circular movement that marked *El embrujado* and *Divinas palabras*. All three plays end with a sense of futility, related to the idea of circularity: no progress has been made, no solution is offered.

*Cara de Plata* was not staged in Valle’s lifetime. Its first performance was in Barcelona, on 12 December 1967, before it opened in Madrid, at the Teatro Beatriz, on 28 March of the following year, under the direction of José María Loperana. Whilst by this time it had been accepted that Valle’s theatre was not unstageable, it was still considered difficult, and the production thereby deserved praise. The reviews, however, were unenthusiastic; their main criticism was that the musicality of the language had been lost and that, although there were good moments, the production was cold and fragmented. One critic deplored the attempt to imitate the Galician accent, and argued that ‘el ritmo de la palabra’ had become an ‘algarabía de sonidos desordenados, descoyuntados, estridentes y faltos de la honda melodia del autor’.

Valle wrote *Cara de Plata* with the intention of completing a trilogy, and it shares with the other two *Comedias bárbaras* the unifying background of rural Galicia and its semi-feudal setting. In many other respects it has more in common with the intervening plays of *El embrujado* and *Divinas palabras*. The element of social conflict and the presence of satanic forces played no part in either *Águila de blasón* or *Romance de lobos*, and even the characters from the earlier *Comedias bárbaras* have undergone changes in *Cara de Plata* that reflect the influence of these two intervening plays. Links
with the aesthetic of the *esperpento* lie principally in the treatment of the three new characters in *Cara de Plata*, which establishes the innovative stylistic devices of dehumanisation that had only begun to emerge in *Águila de blasón*, but which feature more noticeably in *Divinas palabras*.

*Cara de Plata* would be Valle’s last work located in Galicia. His native region had provided an almost constant background to his writing since 1888, and had thereby dominated more than half his literary career. The abandonment of Galician settings also marks the demise of one of his most important creations. Juan Manuel Montenegro first appeared as a fictional character in 1902 in *Sonata de otoño*, but his conception dates back to the sketches of Pedro de Tor, in 1891, and of Pablo Iglesias, in 1892. Like Valle’s other major literary figure, El Marqués de Bradomín, Montenegro began as a type, but gradually developed a personality. A lone figure in *Sonata de otoño* and *El Marqués de Bradomín*, he emerges as a fully rounded character with a history in the *Comedias bárbaras*, complete with wife, six sons and an entourage of household servants. He and Bradomín stand as the two literary ‘giants’ in Valle’s Galician writing, and their family connections link the two series of works for which this period is best known. The pattern of the four seasons of the *Sonatas* is echoed, moreover, in the summer, autumn and winter of the three *Comedias bárbaras*. Whilst the decadent refinement of the *Sonatas* is in direct contrast with the primitive physicality of the *Comedias bárbaras*, the protagonists of both, although outwardly very different, have characteristics that unite them: both are *hidalgos*, both are womanisers, and both resort to sacrilege. Valle treats them with an affectionate pen. In the years that follow *Cara de Plata*, there would be no figure of comparable stature. Within the aesthetic of the *esperpento*, nostalgia had no place.
Notes to Chapter 7


4 Salper, p. 176.

5 Dougherty, *Un Valle-Inclán olvidado*, p. 147, note 177.

6 Troncoso, p. 77.

7 María del Carmen Porrua, p. 249.

8 Salper. p. 174.

9 José Alberich, ‘*Cara de Plata*, fuera de serie’, p. 302.


13 Brenan, p. 94.


15 Salper. p. 175.

16 See Chapter 2, p. 63.

17 Edwards, p. 299.


CONCLUSION

Valle-Inclán was undoubtedly the most controversial literary figure of his generation. He was also the most misunderstood. Whilst his genius was recognised by fellow writers, the reading public was slow to accept his work, and his theatre taxed directors and audiences alike. Although similar problems were undoubtedly posed by a number of Federico García Lorca’s avant-garde and puppet plays, it must be borne in mind that of the twenty-four plays that Valle wrote, only eleven were performed during his lifetime, and even their reception was mixed.

Amongst the criticisms that were levelled against him, as mentioned in the Introduction (p. 7), one of the harshest came from Julio Casares, over Valle’s practice of ‘aprovechamiento y transformación de materiales’ (p. 16). In this thesis I have attempted to show how this use of repetition, the reuse, recycling, and development of material, becomes one of the hallmarks of Valle’s approach during the first thirty years of his literary career, providing significant links between one genre and another, and blurring the borders between one aesthetic and another. Whilst there is no clear logical development of his work as such, by extracting characters, themes, and background material from one context, and inserting them into another, Valle creates an interrelationship between texts that gives his work a sense of continuity and overall coherence.

Within this pattern, the outline of a character in an early article becomes a subsidiary figure in a novel, and later, the protagonist of a play, changing at each stage as, in Valle’s own words, ‘es el escenario el que crea la situación’. In this way
Montenegro’s conception in the person of Pedro de Tor in ‘Cartas galicianas’ evolves into the peripheral figure of Bradomín’s uncle in *Sonata de otoño* and ends as the central character in the *Comedias bárbaras*. Minor characters provide equally important connections: the blind man, first introduced as a type in the short story, ‘Las verbenas’, links subsequent novels and plays by six further appearances. El Ciego de Gondar, sometimes alone, at others with either a boy for companion or a mistress, is consistently malicious and sexually inclined. His blindness, moreover, serves as a tangible reminder of other blind characters, from different texts, such as the old woman in ‘Tragedia de ensueño’ and the protagonists of *Voces de gesta* and *Luces de Bohemia*.

Other characters provide links by absorbing features from previous figures and becoming an amalgam of more than one character: Concha of *Sonata de otoño* is closely modelled on Octavia Santino, originally Águeda in ‘El gran obstáculo’, and she has assumed, in addition, some of the features of the women from *Femeninas*. In *Divinas palabras*, Mari-Gaila carries clear echoes of Rosa from *El embrujado*, as well as elements of Pichona from *Águila de blasón*. The effect then becomes reciprocal, as Pichona’s portrayal in *Cara de Plata* has, in turn, taken on some of the characteristics of Mari-Gaila. As Valle’s work progresses, there is a steady increase in the number of characters, and from a final, vast cross-section of characters, there are more than two hundred who recur, in fifty-six of seventy-eight texts. Those who reappear with the same name frequently do so with altered characteristics, according to their new context; even when they reappear under a different name, their origins are clearly recognisable.

The same kind of continuity is effected by the repetition of themes and motifs, which, introduced in the earliest stories, recur in the novels that follow, and persist into the theatre. The first hints of anticlericalism that emerge in ‘El rey de la máscara’ are echoed in *Flor de santidad*, grow more pronounced in the early plays, and by *Cara de Plata* have become a central feature. The *donjuanismo* that is practised by the women in
Femeninas is taken over by Bradomín in the Sonatas, but reverts to the role of a woman in El embrujado. The theme of adultery that dominates the early stories about women underlies most of the work that follows, through to Cara de Plata, taking on, in turn, varying associations: of guilt, remorse, promiscuity, sexual magnetism and demonic possession. Minor motifs are also repeated throughout this period of Valle’s writing. Frequent references to dreams and visions, to the gift of clairvoyance and the reading of cards, and to the importance of letters or messages, punctuate his work and provide connections between one piece and another.

Stylistic devices, such as storytelling and the insertion of a story within a story, which are part of Valle’s early technique, continue into his novels and his theatre, and further links are created by the incorporation of a short story, at times with minor modifications, into a novel or a play. ‘Hierba santa’ becomes part of Sonata de otoño, and is later included in El Marqués de Bradomín; ‘La hueste’ becomes part of Romance de lobos, and as many as eleven stories are incorporated into Flor de santidad.

The genres are linked, moreover, by an overall theatricality of tone. The predominance of dialogue in Valle’s short stories and novels weakens the distinction between his prose and theatre, and facilitates the transition from one genre to another. Prose is easily transformed into dialogue: a descriptive passage in Sonata de otoño becomes a comment made by Bradomín in the play that evolves from the novel. In addition, Valle frequently transfers words from the mouth of one character to another, and into a different text: Adega’s complaints about a lack of charity in El Marqués de Bradomín are those of the pilgrim in Flor de santidad. An account of a particular moment can be applied to another episode, often incongruously: the description of El Idiota’s dying moments in Divinas palabras is reused in a dramatically different context in Cara de Plata, to record the feigned death throes of the verger. The constant
reappearance of phrases or whole passages throughout this period creates one of the strongest, albeit at times confusing links in Valle’s work.

The divisions into which so many critics divide Valle’s output are also confused by a constant overlap of approach. Whilst the modernista content of his early work is largely abandoned after the Sonatas, the language persists. In this way, the poetic style that dominates the descriptions of the Galician countryside in the early short stories is incorporated into the harsh context of later plays, such as El embrujado, Divinas palabras and, finally, Cara de Plata, in the form of lyrical stage directions, creating a forceful contrast with the subject matter. This rather dramatic juxtaposition, that exists in essence in early stories, such as ‘Malpocado’ and again in Flor de santidad, becomes one of the outstanding characteristics of Valle’s theatre. The emergence of esperpentismo is equally difficult to date. The stylistic devices with which this aesthetic is associated did not appear abruptly with Valle’s first named esperpento. The use of the grotesque is apparent in several of the earliest short stories and soon becomes a constant in Valle’s literature. Deformation and other dehumanising techniques, moreover, begin to appear as early as Flor de santidad; elements of farce and caricature occur even earlier, in the short story ‘Rosita’, and puppet-like figures feature in La Marquesa Rosalinda. The characteristics of other literary movements are similarly difficult to place within limits: the decadence of Femeninas and the Sonatas spills over into the Symbolism of Valle’s early theatre, and elements of Expressionism that mark the Comedias bárbaras can be traced back to the early short stories. Even the switch from the heroic to the antiheroic that allegedly takes place after the early Comedias bárbaras, has already been anticipated much earlier, in the short stories of ‘Zan el de los osos’, and ‘Juan Quinto’.

The most important unifying factor in this period of Valle’s literature is Galicia. It provides the backcloth for most of his work and, at times, becomes an almost physical
presence. In the majority of the texts, characters, themes and subject matter are drawn from a Galician background. The legendary nature of some of the early narratives, and especially of Flor de santidad, the sense of mystery, the power of superstition and the belief in the occult are all essentially Galician elements, and permeate Valle’s writing. Dru Dougherty maintains that ‘Galicia está como telón de fondo por el que se explican muchas cosas de las obras de Valle-Inclán. No sólo las figuras folclóricas, sino todo ese encuentro entre la belleza y lo grotesco, entre una miseria y una belleza de paisaje extraordinaria’. Antonio Risco also stresses its importance and calculates that exactly half Valle’s work has a Galician theme, noting: ‘De ahí la indiscutible importancia que semejante medio tiene en su producción. Puede decirse incluso que Galicia se transparenta de un modo u otro en toda ella.’

Despite the general assumption that Valle’s mature work is his best, and that the esperpento outshines the literature that preceded it, the first three decades of Valle’s literary output cover a much wider variety of genre and a far greater complexity of approach and subject matter. Although complicated by anomalies and inconsistencies, the texts in this period are linked, moreover, by a series of connecting threads and an intertextuality that provide an overall unity. Furthermore, later generations of theatre directors and filmmakers have given the Galician author the endorsement that was often lacking in the early decades of the twentieth century.
Notes to Conclusion

1 Cited in Madrid. p. 341.


4 Antonio Risco. ‘Las dos columnas del templo de Salomón’, p. 444.
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