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Refashioning the Sociopolitical in Spanish Modernist Literature (1902-1914)

By

Ricardo Lopez

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

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Doctor of Philosophy

in

Romance Languages and Literatures

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in

Critical Theory

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Dru Dougherty, Chair

Professor Ivonne del Valle

Professor Robert Kaufman

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Abstract

Refashioning the Sociopolitical in Spanish Modernist Literature (1902-1914)

by

Ricardo Lopez

Doctor of Philosophy in Romance Languages and Literatures

with a Designated Emphasis in Critical Theory

University of California, Berkeley

Professor Dru Dougherty, Chair

In this dissertation I argue that the modernist breakthroughs achieved by José Martínez Ruiz's *La voluntad* (1902), Ramón del Valle-Inclán's *Sonata de otoño* (1902), and Miguel de Unamuno's *Niebla* (1914) emerged as a response to the shortsightedness of the revolutionary politics that had taken root in Restoration Spain. I examine how these writers take the historical materials of their sociopolitical world—its tropes and uses of language—and reconstellate them as artworks in which the familiar becomes estranged and reveals truths that have been obscured by the ideological myopia of Spain's radicalized intellectuals. Accordingly, I demonstrate that the tropes, language, and images that constitute *La voluntad*, *Niebla*, and *Sonata de otoño* have within them a historical sediment that turns these seemingly apolitical works into an “afterimage” of Spain's sociopolitical reality. Thus I show how sociopolitical critiques materialize out of the dialectic between historical materials and their artistic handling.

Although *La voluntad*, *Sonata de otoño*, and *Niebla* seem to eschew political themes, I contend that they are the product of their authors' keen understanding of the politics of their moment. As such, these novels bear a critical relation to the sociohistorical that is based not on protest or denunciation but on the careful judgment and observation of the hidden patterns of Spanish society and turn-of-the-century revolutionary culture. Consequently, the stylistic affectations and rarefied conceits of these works are not so much rejections of the sociohistorical as aesthetic refashionings of it.

Chapter 1 discusses the intellectual and sociopolitical dynamics that led Martínez Ruiz, Valle-Inclán, and Unamuno to reconsider their understanding of literature's place in society. In particular, the chapter examines how the positivist ideology that came to dominate liberal thought resulted in a leftist rhetoric that replicated the capitalist ethos it claimed to denounce and protest. This ideological incongruence came to the fore in the critical reception and public commotion of two plays, *Juan José* (1895) by Joaquín

Dicenta, and *Electra* (1901) by Benito Pérez Galdós, which prompted the three modernist writers to reconfigure their understanding of art and artistic autonomy.

Chapter 2 argues that Martínez Ruiz's *La voluntad* is a product of the lessons learned from the liberal euphoria that was unleashed by Galdós's *Electra*. It traces how *La voluntad*, through its formal innovations and the texture of its language, steers away from the habit that many left-wing radicals had of reducing literature to a pseudo-sociology that conformed to their sociological principles and liberal platitudes. In doing so, the novel makes possible forms of thinking that had been increasingly obscured by the abstract rationalism of Spain's liberal culture. Prior to this reading the chapter examines critically a reception history that has erroneously considered *La voluntad* as a sign of Martínez Ruiz's turn away from the sociohistorical.

Chapter 3 argues that Valle-Inclán's *Sonata de otoño* is not a withdrawal from or rejection of the sociohistorical but is rather an artwork that grounds itself deeply in the political dynamics of its historical moment. By examining the *Sonata*'s patterning of motifs and language, the chapter demonstrates how Valle-Inclán refashions the narcissistic and terroristic tendencies of revolutionary politics. Moreover, by refashioning these historical materials into a highly stylized and polished literary work, the *Sonata* vindicates moral virtues that had been discredited by the impatience and zeal of Spain's radicalized liberals.

Chapter 4 contends that Unamuno's *Niebla*, despite its rarefied and humorous content, bears a critical potency with deep historical and political implications. By examining how *Niebla* plays with language and a series of motifs, the chapter reveals the novel's critique of the sorry state of Spain's revolutionary culture. More specifically, what *Niebla* throws into relief is the obsession that Spanish socialists have with modeling their politics after the revolutionary history and culture of France. The chapter then argues that *Niebla* vindicates the Spanish tradition of aristocratic idleness and offers it as a counterargument to the socialist acquiescence to all things French. By insisting on idleness as a space for critical agency, *Niebla* suggests that a tradition rejected offhand by socialists turns out to be a salutary exercise for a liberal polity.

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Without the support of my family I would not be writing these lines. The discipline and insight that have gone into this dissertation are rooted in the values I learned from the two most intelligent people I know: my parents. Completing a PhD is certainly a big accomplishment, but next to their hard-won achievements, it really is quite modest. And for this I am eternally grateful to them for always giving me something larger to strive for.

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Introduction

This dissertation contends that the modernist breakthroughs achieved by José Martínez Ruiz's *La voluntad* (1902), Ramón del Valle-Inclán's *Sonata de otoño* (1902), and Miguel de Unamuno's *Niebla* (1914) emerged as a response to the shortsightedness of the revolutionary politics that had taken root in Restoration Spain. In the chapters that follow, I examine how these writers take the historical materials of their sociopolitical world—its tropes and uses of language—and reconstellate them as artworks in which the familiar becomes estranged and reveals truths that have been obscured by the ideological myopia of Spain's radicalized left-wing intellectuals. Accordingly, the tropes, language, and images that constitute *La voluntad*, *Niebla*, and *Sonata de otoño* have within them a historical sediment that turns these seemingly apolitical works into an “afterimage” of Spain's sociopolitical reality. My aim, then, is to study the sociopolitical implications and critiques that materialize out of the dialectic between historical materials and their artistic handling.

In essence, I argue that although *La voluntad*, *Sonata de otoño*, and *Niebla* seem to eschew political themes, they are the product of their authors' keen understanding of the politics of their moment. As such, these novels bear a critical relation to the sociohistorical that is based not on protest or denunciation but on the careful judgment and observation of the hidden patterns of Spanish society and turn-of-the-century revolutionary culture. Consequently, the stylistic affectations and rarefied conceits of these works are not so much rejections of the sociohistorical as aesthetic refashionings of it.

I read these key works of Spanish modernism as reconstellations rather than as copies or rejections of social reality. That these novels do not obey the demand for a faithful representation of reality does not mean, however, that they are whimsical or arbitrary. On the contrary, I argue that these works were constructed with a keen sense of judgment and awareness of the realities of Restoration Spain—its social customs, habits of mind, linguistic practices, and political ideologies. As artists who were sympathetic to the principles of progressivism, Martínez Ruiz, Valle-Inclán, and Unamuno paid careful attention to how the bluster and imaginative limits of revolutionary rhetoric precluded any form of self-critique and resulted in the impoverishment of progressive thought. And rather than contribute to this impoverishment by giving left-leaning intellectuals what they wanted—namely, a realist and sociologically informed literature that merely confirmed revolutionary doctrine—these modernist writers instead gave expression to forms of critique that had been obscured by the political zeal and impatience of their contemporaries.

What progressive politics in Spain needed was a form of thinking that could reinvigorate its clichéd and ultimately impotent habits of thought. Radicalized intellectuals who had put their trust in nineteenth-century positivism tended to tie truth to objectivity. But Martínez Ruiz, Valle-Inclán, and Unamuno understood that the socialpolitical world was too complex to be pinned down by something as static and stable as “objectivity.” The notion of truth had to be expanded, which is why they turned to art-making as a source for a more holistic and flexible, though not necessarily

arbitrary, conception of truth. Through their literary works they sought to foster a form of cognition—or “aesthetic judgment,” to use Kant’s term—in which reason, understanding, and imagination converge and thereby harmonize objective-conceptual knowledge with freely rendered affective-subjective thought. In other words, forms of thinking that would be free from the demands of a political program while also being coherent and illuminating. Their aim as artists, then, was to free ideas from the myopia of revolutionary discourse, and to reinvigorate political thought, not dictate it. And to do this they had to pay careful attention to the hidden patterns and contradictions of social and political life under Spain’s corrupt Restoration regime.

The Restoration refers to Spain’s period of political stability that spanned from 1875 to 1923 and dated back to the coup d’état of late 1874, which ended the short-lived First Republic and restored Alfonso XII to the throne. The Restoration regime was a constitutional monarchy that was deemed to be the best solution for a Spain that was ideologically divided. It was also considered a better alternative to the many military coups that had plagued Spanish politics throughout the nineteenth century. The Restoration’s long-lasting stability was achieved through a system known as the *turno pacífico* in which the Liberal and the Conservative parties rotated their tenure in power. Such rotation, however, was merely a political contrivance that enabled the oligarchy to remain in power. Universal male suffrage had been instituted under the regime, but it was nothing more than a sham that sought to maintain the illusion of parliamentary democracy, for it was no secret that elections were rigged by local bosses (*caciques*) who had an interest in maintaining the *turno pacífico*.

The Restoration’s façade of political stability, however, was not without its threats. The revolutionary, labor, and reform movements, especially in their more radical and strident manifestations, were a nuisance that the regime often sought to suppress. Among the mishmash of liberal ideologies, of which there were many, the principal tendencies were anarchism, socialism, and republican federalism. Although each differed from the others in several respects and gave rise to different strains, they all shared much of the same rhetoric and imagery, which often blurred the boundaries between them and made for a great deal of confusion.¹

Of all these ideologies, anarchism was the most feared and reviled by the establishment, not only because of its violent anticlerical and antiauthority rhetoric, but also because some of its most radical adherents had practiced propaganda by the deed. The two most infamous incidents, which took place in Barcelona, were the 1896 bombing of a Corpus Christi procession, which killed six people, and the 1906 bombing of a royal wedding procession, which killed fifteen. Much of this fear stemmed from anarchism’s strong emotional element and incoherent political doctrine, which were anathema to the Restoration’s illusion of political stability. Infuriating as well, and especially for a country as traditionally Catholic as Spain, was anarchism’s violent anticlericalism, which

¹ For instance, the anarchists were subdivided into various overlapping strands. There was communist anarchism, collectivist anarchism, anarchism without adjectives, and anarcho-syndicalism. Republican federalists also tended to generate confusion when they were referred to as either republicans or federalists. And the socialists were also often confused with anarchists, when the latter were referred to as “comunistas.”

became one of the principal rallying cries among Spain's radicalized intellectuals and artists.

Next to the anarchists, the socialists in Spain were seen as being much more tame, and thus were tolerated by the state. Although they adopted some of anarchism's anticlericalism, they nevertheless remained somewhat cool toward it, for they considered it to be more of a middle-class than a working-class concern. Although the growth of the socialist ranks during the Restoration was slow and fitful, they were nevertheless much more serious than the anarchists when it came to defining their political doctrine and organizing themselves, especially under the leadership of Pablo Iglesias. This is why, despite their smaller numbers, they were able to strategize and mobilize their ranks for a wave of strikes that took place between 1889 and 1903.

Another political ideology that made noise was republican federalism, a nationalistic and reformist tendency that shared much of the discourse, vocabulary, and symbolism of anarchism and socialism but diverged from these when it came to issues such as property rights, anticlericalism, and the destruction of institutional power.² This is not to say that the republican federalists were uniform in their political program. With older republicans insisting on a reformist agenda, and younger ones pressing for populist agitation, republicanism was not a clearly defined ideology and was no less fragmented than its anarchist counterpart.

In the literary salons and cafes of Madrid and Barcelona, and to some extent in the universities, the principles of these liberal ideologies were championed and discussed by left-wing writers, journalists, professors, and intellectuals. Although many espoused republican federalism and socialism, it was the anarchists who were the most prominent and often the most strident. The flowering of the newspaper culture, along with the proliferation of left-leaning but short-lived periodicals, proved to be a boon for those individuals who sought an outlet for their political passions. What was known as the "cuestión social" had become a fashionable topic of discussion among Spain's literate classes. And like all fashions, it was often the case that the principles of anarchism, socialism, and other progressive ideologies were endorsed by mere reflex, often to the point that they devolved into hackneyed and unimaginative rhetoric.

What united all these progressive tendencies was the aura of "newness" that they possessed in contradistinction to the antiquated social structures and ideologies of Restoration Spain. Those who embraced these "new" and revolutionary tendencies were often and commonly referred to as "gente nueva," "novísimos," and "modernistas." Although the term "modernismo" has long been associated with a literary tendency for stylistic affectation, it originally referred to the artistic and political embrace of that which was modern. For the "modernistas," there was no divide between modern revolutionary politics and modern artistic forms. To write in a style that emulated the

² For instance, when it came to socialism, republican federalists disagreed with the idea that the ownership of economic structures should belong to the workers themselves. And when it came to anarchism, republican federalists agreed with the need to destroy institutional power. But rather than destroy it head on, as the anarchists had wanted, the federalists sought to decentralize it by dividing and subdividing it until it was finally eliminated. Republican federalism's ideal of local self-government appealed to those who sought regional autonomy, which they believed was rooted in historical and social traditions. They figured that a decentralized but united Spain was a better alternative to the ineffective *turno pacífico* of the Restoration regime.

newest fashions and departed from the antiquated genres of the political establishment was thought to be, in modernista circles, an exercise of progressive politics. Less artistically inclined radicals, however, thought differently. For them, modernismo and its aesthetic refinements were a sign of decadence and a distraction from the revolutionary cause. These radicals preferred a utilitarian literature that could give clear expression to revolutionary principles. What they called for was a “literatura obrerista” and an “arte sociológico” that could appeal to and mobilize the disenfranchised sectors of Spain.

Both these tendencies commingled and created a great deal of ambivalence regarding the role that art and literature played in sociopolitical revolution. On one hand, literature could embrace modern artistic forms that foster anti-bourgeois sensibilities, but it could also be impolitic in its unconcern for praxis. On the other hand, literature could be explicitly committed to a political cause but could also be unimaginative and tiresome in its repetition of revolutionary clichés. In the “polen de ideas” that was Restoration Spain, these two tendencies often converged and blurred the lines between each other.³

The works that I study in this dissertation are enmeshed in this politically and artistically muddled context. The following chapters will demonstrate that Martínez Ruiz and Valle-Inclán, having originally followed modernismo’s embrace of modern (usually French-derived) artistic forms, quickly realized that such an approach only resulted in an art and politics that was derivative, unimaginative, and inadequate for Spain’s unique historical circumstances. It is my contention that *La voluntad* and *Sonata de otoño* are a product of their authors’ effort to steer away from such adverse consequences. As for Unamuno, though he shared modernismo’s effort to change sensibilities, he was always wary about its shallow, trend-following aspects. Where he was most critical, however, was toward any form of “literatura obrerista,” which was often premised on the idea that Spain was ready—and by implication, modern enough—for a socialist revolution. For Unamuno, who was a rigorous and alert student of Spanish history and Marxist theory, this was clearly not true. There was thus an incongruence between leftist political discourse and the reality of Spain, and I argue that *Niebla* is a product of Unamuno’s keen awareness of this situation.

Shortsidedness and a lack of self-critique were not alien to the progressive politics and literary culture of the Restoration. For one thing, the stridency with which radicalized writers and intellectuals spelled out their political passions precluded a more judicious engagement with their own politics and with the complexity of Spain’s sociohistorical situation. Much of this has to do with the fact that although many of the theoretical texts by anarchists and socialists circulated in Spanish translations—texts by Marx, Bakunin, Kropotkin, Engels, Lafargue, Proudhon, and others—they were rarely ever studied rigorously or systematically.⁴ It has often been remarked that Martínez Ruiz, Valle-Inclán, and Unamuno’s affinity toward these ideologies, in particular toward anarchism,

³ The term “polen de ideas” is drawn from Darío Villanueva’s book, *El polen de ideas*.

⁴ On this point, one commentator writes that “Spanish Marxism prior to the Civil War merely manifested rigidity, schematism and a striking lack of originality,” and that “the importance of Marxism in Spain lay precisely in its poverty” (Heywood x). Another commentator has noted that Spanish anarchism’s “escasa originalidad” was due to its “carácter tributario” with respect to Russian and especially French sources (Alvarez Junco, *La ideología* 9).

was based more on a sentimental than a theoretical conviction. For this reason, some scholars have considered them to be “anarquistas literarios” as opposed to anarchists *per se* (Lida 363, Valis, “Valle-Inclán’s” 225).

But whether or not these three writers got anarchism or socialism “right” matters little when we consider that their concern as artists had less to do with advancing a political program than with discerning the hidden patterns and contradictions that underpinned the political discourse of the left. Of the many follies that plagued progressive politics, three principal ones stand out for these writers: first, the subterranean affinity that leftist militants unwittingly shared with the bourgeois ideology they protested, a fact which was largely due to their zealous embrace of positivism. Second, the derivative nature of Spanish revolutionary politics, which was modeled after French anarchism and socialism and was all too eagerly applied to Spain. And third, the fetishization of the notions of progress and newness as being inherently good for society, a rationale which discredited and rendered suspect anything old or traditional.

If Spanish anarchists and socialists had no answers to their own myopia, it was largely because they lacked the critical flexibility to deal with whatever did not fit their political worldview, and that included the possibility that their revolutionary pieties were shortsighted and insufficient. What was needed, then, was not more of the same anarchist and socialist rhetoric, but rather more imagination, the kind that would enable even the most strident of liberals to look at the world—and to look at themselves—in ways that were not already prescribed by their doctrine. Only then would it be possible for progressive politics to engage more consequentially with a social world as complex and shifting as that of Restoration Spain.

This is precisely the situation that Martínez Ruiz, Valle-Inclán, and Unamuno see before them as they are honing their artistic craft. Many critics have considered *La voluntad*, *Niebla*, and *Sonata de otoño* to be evidence of their authors’ retreat from politics; but more than a retreat, what these works attest to is their authors’ newly expanded and finely tuned understanding of their sociopolitical reality. By carefully observing the underlying patterns at work in their society, and by making art out of them, the three modernists seek to inject imaginative energy into how their world is perceived. The fact that these writers artistically reconfigure historically mediated materials—the language, motifs, and patterns of thought of their society—is their way of fusing the imaginative and the sociohistorical. The aim of these writers, then, is not so much to persuade readers politically as it is to expand their imaginative capacity, and to challenge certain habits of mind that have hampered the effectiveness of progressive politics. As artists, they are not engaging in a common political praxis, but are instead working at fundamental level that has more to do with patterns of thought than with the content of ideas. Thus the focus and value of their literary works lie more in the artistic patterning of their historically sedimented materials than in their narrative content. The purpose of this dissertation, then, is to demonstrate how this interpenetration between the imaginative and the historical plays out.

Chapter 1 discusses the intellectual and sociopolitical dynamics that led Martínez Ruiz, Valle-Inclán, and Unamuno to reconsider their understanding of literature’s place in society. In particular, the chapter examines how the positivist ideology that came to dominate liberal thought resulted in a leftist rhetoric that replicated the capitalist ethos it protested against. This ideological incongruence came to the fore in the critical reception

and public commotion of two plays, *Juan José* (1895) by Joaquín Dicenta, and *Electra* (1901) by Benito Pérez Galdós, which prompted the three modernist writers to reconfigure their understanding of art and artistic autonomy.

Chapter 2 argues that Martínez Ruiz's *La voluntad* is a product of the lessons learned from the liberal euphoria that was unleashed by Galdós's *Electra*. It traces how *La voluntad*, through its formal innovations and the texture of its language, steers away from the penchant of radicals to reduce literature to a pseudo-sociology that conformed to sociological principles and liberal platitudes. In doing so, the novel makes possible forms of thinking that had been increasingly obscured by the abstract rationalism of Spain's liberal culture. Prior to this reading, however, the chapter examines critically a reception history that has erroneously considered *La voluntad* as a sign of Martínez Ruiz's turn away from the sociohistorical.

Chapter 3 argues that Valle-Inclán's *Sonata de otoño* is not a withdrawal from or rejection of the sociohistorical but is rather an artwork that grounds itself deeply in the political dynamics of its historical moment. By examining the *Sonata*'s patterning of motifs and language, the chapter demonstrates how Valle-Inclán refashions the narcissistic and terroristic tendencies of revolutionary politics. Moreover, by refashioning these historical materials into a highly stylized and polished literary work, the *Sonata* vindicates moral notions that had been discredited by the impatience and zeal of Spain's radicalized liberals.

Chapter 4 contends that Unamuno's *Niebla*, despite its rarefied and humorous content, bears a critical potency with deep historical and political implications. By examining how *Niebla* plays with language and a series of motifs, the chapter reveals the novel's critique of the sorry state of Spain's revolutionary culture. More specifically, what *Niebla* throws into relief is the obsession that Spanish socialists have with modeling their politics after the revolutionary history and culture of France. The chapter then argues that *Niebla* vindicates the Spanish tradition of aristocratic idleness and offers it as a counterargument to the socialist acquiescence to all things French. By insisting on idleness as a space for critical agency, *Niebla* suggests that a tradition rejected offhand by socialists turns out to be a salutary exercise for their revolutionary effort.

Chapter 1

Revolutionary Politics and Liberal Culture in *Fin-de-Siglo* Spain

This chapter discusses the intellectual and sociopolitical circumstances of *fin-de-siglo* Spain that prompted José Martínez Ruiz, Ramón del Valle-Inclán, and Miguel de Unamuno to recast their understanding of art's role in society. It begins by discussing the advent of positivist culture within Spain and its relation to the social Darwinist notion of degeneracy that leftist intellectuals often resorted to, in their literature and rhetoric, when diagnosing Spain's sociopolitical crisis. In seeking political expediency, the intellectuals who were under the sway of positivism tended to reduce Spain's sociohistorical complexity to a Manichean narrative world defined by the facile oppositions of progress versus degeneration, of good versus evil, and of the bourgeoisie versus the proletariat. However, by placing literature in the service of social regeneration and political revolution, these leftist intellectuals unwittingly pandered to the abstract rationalism of the bourgeois culture they claimed to protest and denounce. Thus, the present chapter examines how certain aspects of Spain's leftist literary culture unwittingly mimicked the logic of the commodity fetish, in which a complex reality is turned into a series of abstract concepts.

The chapter also shows how the left's ideological blind spot was thrown into relief by the public commotion that was prompted by two highly popular plays, Joaquín Dicenta's *Juan José* (1895) and Benito Pérez Galdós's *Electra* (1901). I argue that these two events helped Martínez Ruiz, Valle-Inclán, and Unamuno to sharpen their awareness of the ideological workings and imaginative limits of the liberal and revolutionary culture with which they sympathized but which, amid the commotion, seemed to confuse political zeal for political victory. And rather than contribute to the confusion, these writers sought to counter it by developing a literary aesthetic that would make possible new forms of thinking that broke free from the absolutist mode of thinking that was stultifying progressive politics. In other words, these writers began to develop an aesthetic based on the idea that in order to truly liberate society, politics and social reform must be infused with flexible and imaginative ways of thinking that autonomous art can help bring about.

The Absolutist Tendencies in the Progressive Culture of Restoration Spain

The enthusiastic embrace of positivism¹ by Spanish intellectuals in the last quarter of the nineteenth century signaled an important step toward the modernization of Spain.

¹ Positivism is a philosophical doctrine based on the idea that scientific facts are the highest state of human knowledge. It was the dominant system of thought during the latter half of the nineteenth century, and was first put forward by French philosopher and social scientist Auguste Comte (1798-1857). Positivism eschewed theological and metaphysical questions in its search for immutable universal laws that governed the physical and social world. It thus confined intellectual inquiry to scientific analysis and direct observation. Positivism was considered the furthest state of social and

After the Liberal Revolution of 1868—also known as *La Gloriosa*—Spain opened itself to scientific study and to the political and social ideas that were derived from it. Though a great deal of political turmoil accompanied this transformation, the growing influence of science could not be curbed even by the power of the Catholic Church. The advances made in medicine, technology, industry, urbanization, and quality of living were felt in everyday life and helped spread a “*mentalidad positiva*” across virtually all domains of intellectual life (Uría 156). Hence the rise of new social sciences such as sociology and its offshoots, social Darwinism, and environmental determinism, which were originally developed by Herbert Spencer and were known in Spain as *transformismo*. These theories, along with the works of positivists such as Auguste Comte, Hippolyte Taine, Claude Bernard, and Émile Zola, came to dominate the conversations in *tertulias* throughout Spain (Johnson 18-19). The study of sociology gained prominence within this context and held authority over social, political, and moral issues. But like any science, it was subject to vulgarization, and in the political realm it was often wielded in vulgarized form by intellectuals, artists, and politicians who sought to explain the sociopolitical turmoil and economic changes that were taking place in Restoration Spain.

Liberal and conservative intellectuals under the sway of positivism tended to view Spain’s social and political crisis through the social Darwinist notion of degeneracy. Although the concern with decadence was common throughout Europe, in Spain it became an obsession. It was the all-purpose explanation for the many ills plaguing Spain under the Restoration regime; these ills included the corrupt and undemocratic political systems known as the *turno pacífico* and *caciquismo*, the bankrupt ideals of social mobility and harmony, the ignominious loss of the last colonies and empire, and the weakened sense of ideological cohesion due to the rise of local nationalisms and the radicalization of social liberal movements (Campos Martín 185-86). With reference to the concept of European decadence, Stuart Gilman argues that a metaphor like degeneration occurs “in situations where there are dilemmas—social circumstances where there are stubborn conflicts of perspectives” (qtd. in Valis, “Decadence” 139). This was certainly the case in Spain, where anarchists, socialists, and radicalized liberals stood in stubborn opposition to a “degenerate” bourgeoisie that had created a political and economic system of exploitation that was collusive with the Church. However, when viewed from the perspective of the establishment, it was the working classes and their revolutionary activities that were “degenerate” in their disruption of the proper “biological” functioning of society (Campos Martín 185-86).

In their efforts to counteract social and political degeneracy, many left-leaning writers resorted to literature as a pseudo-scientific remedy. This was already the case in France with Zola and the Goncourt brothers. In blurring the line between literature and science, the naturalists treated their subject matter as clinical case studies that were thought to produce scientific knowledge. David Baguley refers to this as a “biological *episteme*,” in which scientifically verified laws of nature provided “established, guiding sequences of consequentiality” to naturalist literature (60). Baguley goes on to point out that the intersection between science and the nineteenth-century novel led to a new uncertainty that left readers “to wonder if the human dramas are there to illustrate the

intellectual development, one which had surpassed the theological and metaphysical ways of understanding the world. Thus positivism sought to answer questions of how things worked, rather than of why they did.

scientific principles or if the science merely serves to motivate the human dramas” (61). In other words, it became unclear whether the novel’s human dramas were contrived to prove an extant concept derived from science, or whether an extant concept was what gave shape the novel’s human dramas. Either way, both these alternatives suggest that the content of the naturalist novel was largely determined by the ruling scientism that dictated how it ought to be read. Literary realism that was less explicitly naturalist was also not without its scientific and utilitarian strain. Gonzalo Sobejano explains that in studying the conditions of social life and bringing into relief “la verdad de la naturaleza,” the realist novel was ultimately an art that aspired to support, or echo, (“secundar”) science. As such, it constituted “una empresa de verificación crítica de la realidad con vistas a un progreso de libertad y justicia” (Sobejano, “El lenguaje” 596). Thus the boundary between naturalism and realism was often porous; and within these two literary modes, science and the pursuit of social progress converged and found expression in much of the literature produced during Spain’s Restoration period.

One such expression was known in anarchist and socialist circles as “literatura obrerista,” which sought to represent a social world that was pre-defined by the principles of sociology and economic determinism. This was an example of literature in the service of social regeneration and revolution, but it was also an example of how the rigid and rational forms of thinking that are proper to the scientific domain could preclude artistic and imaginative experimentation. The rationale informing such literature was that if science allowed medicine and technology to make far-reaching advances, then an instrumentalized form of literary culture would enable Spanish society to make advances in justice and public welfare. Thus if literature was to carry out its noble mission of redeeming Spanish society from degeneracy, it had to educate the masses by exemplifying the laws of scientific rationality, which are those laws derived from sciences such as sociology, ethnology, physiology, geology, and geography (Alvarez Junco, *La ideología* 72-74; Núñez 46).

On precisely this point, the Catalan anarchist and critic Pompeyo Gener explained, in 1894, that “La mejor educación literaria será la que se basa en las matemáticas y en las ciencias naturales” (qtd. in Núñez 45). For Gener, understanding the effects that the social environment has on individuals enables one to understand the dramas that take place in a literary work. Another prominent critic and anarchist intellectual, Manuel de la Revilla, made a similar point when he praised Galdós’s *Fontana de oro* (1870) for bringing into the realist novel what he called an “idealidad racional y prudente” (qtd. in Núñez 44). Here Revilla privileges rationality and conceptual abstraction (“idealidad racional”) as the dominant mode of reading and evaluating literature. But although Revilla sought to advance the positivist enterprise through literature, he was nevertheless wary of going too far by grafting onto the novel a crude naturalism and rigid empiricism (Núñez 44).

The zeal for aligning literature with ideas and concepts that were predefined in the scientific realm was not lost on some of Spain’s more perceptive critics. Juan Valera was a case in point when he claimed that the naturalist novel “no es ya novela; . . . es una parte, un ramo de la historia natural o de la biología positivista” (qtd. in Núñez 46; Valera 11). Valera’s ironic but truthful appraisal suggests that a novel under the sway of positivism is not an autonomous artwork, but is instead an instrument for bringing about social regeneration and revolution. In anarchism’s positivist worldview, this meant

restoring society to its historical evolution, which, as the most pious of anarchists believed, would culminate in a natural state of solidarity, cooperation, and altruism.²

Of all the sociological and historical explanations for Spain's evolutionary derailment and degeneracy, it was capitalism that stood out as the primary culprit. And yet, within Spain, capitalism as an economic system and ideology was understood and studied by very few intellectuals. The names of Marx, Engels, Labriola, and Lafargue, as well as terms such as "class," "proletariat", and "revolution," were frequently thrown around in anarchist and socialist circles and publications; but much of this was little more than a populist vulgarization of subjects that were much more complex. With their limited understanding of history and political economy, Spanish radicals, especially anarchists, insisted that social conflict, exploitation, and oppression were artificial rather than natural phenomena, and that these problems owed their existence to the bourgeoisie, the clergy, and the military, which were collusive with the capitalist order. With such a facile narrative, it is no surprise that a great deal of leftist rhetoric was cast in absolutist and reductive views of capitalism that filled the pages of political pamphlets and periodicals.

Besides the liberal periodical press, this facile narrative of Spain's crisis flourished in the theater culture and short story literature produced by anarchist ideologues who were intent on mobilizing the working-class public. Of all the expedients available to communicate anarchist doctrine, the theatrical and short story genres were the most efficient when it came to dealing with a public of limited literacy. Lily Litvak has studied both these genres with great discernment and notes that they share several recurring themes and techniques. The most obvious one involves the reduction of characters to archetypal figures that embody clichéd and pamphlet-derived ideas about capitalism. Stripped of any complexity, psychology, and nuance, such archetypal characters were there merely to exemplify the tenets of anarchist ideology. The plotlines in which these characters were embedded were no different, as they were often reduced to a melodramatic opposition between the oppressor and the oppressed, the bourgeois and the proletariat, and the individual and capitalist society. With such facile dichotomies, there's no ambiguity regarding capitalism's culpability. Thus, in the hands of revolutionary intellectuals, the purpose of literature was limited to merely denouncing social ills from a posture of moral righteousness. In essence, this was the claim of Teobaldo Nieva, the anarchist intellectual who argued that art and literature could only achieve their civilizing function by revealing society's ills "en toda su repugnante fealdad" (qtd. in Litvak 289). With such an objective, the line between the sociohistorical reality and the fictional world of literature and theater became blurred. In this sense, the name "teatro sociológico," which was widely disseminated, is quite telling (Litvak 248).

For some, however, shaping literature according to the ready-made concepts of sociology and anarchist historiography was not enough to bring about any revolution. Proudhon, whose work appeared frequently in translation in Spanish anarchist periodicals, argued that art that merely reproduces social reality is no more consequential than a photograph. Art, he claimed, should instead serve an ideal, not just imitate, copy, or even falsify nature. Proudhon came to the conclusion, which many Spaniards accepted,

² Although anarchists adopted the social Darwinist notion of the struggle for survival, they saw this struggle as proper to primitive forms of society. In their view, nineteenth-century Spain was long past that phase in the history of human evolution.

that art must be “al propio tiempo realista e idealista” (qtd. in Litvak 308). This meant that the dialogues, conflicts, characters, and language of a literary work not only must reflect reality as the anarchist program saw it, but must also accommodate themselves to anarchism’s higher ideals and teleology. The purpose literature, then, should be to communicate political doctrine, and any artwork that failed to do so was consequently considered decadent and collusive with the capitalist political order.

In this sense, affect plays an important role. Litvak is very insightful when she explains that the language employed by anarchists is affective in that it resorts to words and images that are “tipificadas emocionalmente” (282). Anarchist literature fixes a certain value onto its rhetoric by resorting to binaries and antagonisms—liberty versus slavery, bourgeoisie versus proletariat, the rich versus the poor—and casting them in standardized tropes. Litvak concludes that “Las palabras no son ya experiencias vivas, sino modelos mediante los cuales se provoca en el lector determinado tipo de emociones” (282). Consequently, the spontaneity of human experience—its complexity and fluidity—is subordinated to rigid abstract ideas.

But by quickly and uncritically adopting anarchist-socialist rhetoric, and placing literature in its service, Spanish progressive intellectuals unwittingly duplicated the less-than-obvious workings of capitalism and the commodity fetish. For Marx, the commodity fetish is created by the misattribution of value-producing agency to the abstract concept of labor time, a process which conceals the complex social relations that produced a given object, and assigns to it a value that is independent of those social relations. This independent “exchange value” appears to derive from the object itself as a “second nature,” which in effect obscures the human work activity that produced it. Thus if life under capitalism is dominated by the movement of commodities, then social relations appear to men as fetishized things that conceal the real historical conditions of men, which in turn precludes the possibility of engaging in a truly effective critique of the sociopolitical. Anarchist-socialist literature, by reducing the complexity of the social world to simple abstractions, ultimately mimics this logic. The concrete personhood of men, with their myriad and contradictory needs and desires, gets subordinated to conventional conflicts between stock characters and tropes whose significance—like that of the commodity—is abstract, fixed, and ahistorical.

In addition to revealing the “secret” of the commodity fetish, Marx attacked the uncritical acceptance of fetishized concepts such as labor, credit, and money, which were treated by political economists as fixed and immutable categories. He argued that these political economists had built a science based on hypostasized categories that became independent of the real historical conditions they sought to explain. These political economists essentially confused history with nature when they accepted fetishized categories at face value without ever inquiring into their concrete historical basis. Through such categories, they reduced a fluid manifold reality into manageable, and thus exchangeable, abstractions. Once again, Spanish anarchists and socialists did something analogous in their literary praxis. By presenting a Manichean world governed by abstract antagonistic social forces, they fell prey to the error of bourgeois political economists.

The fact that even the most radical of anarchists and socialists unwittingly fell for this trap reveals how bourgeois rationalism, alongside positivism, had come to influence much of the social and intellectual life in *fin-de-siglo* Spain. David Ringrose has demonstrated that Spain, from the mid-nineteenth to the early-twentieth century,

experienced a steady growth in its economy. He explains, against widely held assumptions, that the loss of empire in 1898 did not mean economic disaster, because the colonies during this period were only tangential to the peninsular economy. He critiques the long-held view that Spain was an economic failure and argues that this view has been based on the English model of industrialization and on the positive—or fetishized—concept of “progress.” He insists on the need to understand Spain’s economic development in terms of variants rather than failures. Assumptions of economic stagnation and failed “progress” have led liberal and Marxist historians to search for defects in Spain’s social structures and customs, which in turn has led them to make judgments on the distribution of wealth and land rather than on economic production (Ringrose 63). Jesús Cruz, following Ringrose’s lead, has elaborated on this view of Spanish economic history by demonstrating that there was indeed a rise in material culture and consumption in nineteenth-century Spain. Admittedly, it did not reach the degree of development seen in France and Britain, but it was nevertheless significant enough to bring consumer culture into the Spanish cities and towns, where consumers vigorously sought “new symbolic objects in order to perform in the diverse spaces for a social interaction of the bourgeois public sphere” (105). As Cruz’s study suggests, the symbolic power of commodities came to govern the relations between urban Spaniards, especially those of the middle and upper classes.

Two Key Cases of Absolutist Thought: *Juan José* and *Electra*

The extent to which positivistic concepts and ready-made modes of thinking held sway over many on the left became evident in the public reception of two “dramas sociales,” *Juan José* by Joaquín Dicenta and *Electra* by Benito Pérez Galdós. These plays were enormously successful and were praised by left-leaning critics for highlighting the categories that seemed to explain the social conflict brought about by capitalism and the religious clericalism that was complicit with it. Dicenta’s *Juan José* premiered in Madrid on October 29, 1895, and was immediately hailed by liberal intellectuals as a revolutionary slogan. The play’s success made Dicenta the most celebrated playwright in Spain, and the play itself ran for hundreds of performances. Due to the simplicity of its plot, the play lent itself to the kind of reductive readings that were typical of “literatura obrerista.” Its plot is the following: Juan José, the protagonist, is a factory worker, who lives with Rosa, who works in the same factory. Juan José’s nemesis, Paco, the wealthy inheritor of the factory, falls in love with Rosa and attempts to seduce her. In a fit of jealousy Juan José confronts Paco and is fired by him. Rosa also loses her job, but for other reasons. An older go-between, or Celestina-type figure, tries to convince Rosa to accept Paco’s advances and to take advantage of his wealth. Desperate and hungry, Juan José resorts to theft to provide for Rosa, but he is caught and thrown into prison. While in prison, he learns that Rosa has moved in with Paco. Furious and enraged, Juan José escapes, kills Paco, and unintentionally strangles Rosa to death.

Immediately after its premiere, *Juan José* elicited numerous reviews and much commentary. One contemporary, Ernesto Alvarez, summarized the play in the following terms: “Así son los trabajadores; así son los burgueses. Víctimas los primeros; verdugos los segundos. Así es también la justicia; condena al infeliz y absuelve al delincuente”

(qtd. in Pérez de la Dehesa, *El Grupo* 21). Another critic, Federico Unecha, described the play's handling of characters as a "presentación naturalista de las figuras" (qtd. in Mas 57). And Unamuno, whose years as a militant socialist coincided with the premiere of *Juan José*, wrote of the play: "El drama del señor Dicenta es bueno artísticamente por revelar la esencia de la vida social de hoy en uno de sus aspectos, por ser resplandor de la verdad, por revelarnos la honda significación de un mundo" (qtd. in Pérez de la Dehesa, *El Grupo* 21).

These three appraisals suggest several things. First, that the play is understood through positivistic abstractions—such as "workers" and "bourgeoisie," "victim" and "victimizer"—that obscure the role of other social forces, conflicts, and literary forms that might be operative within the play. There is thus a naturalist strain that inflects the reception of the play and reduces it to a presentation of a sociologically explainable set of determinative circumstances; in other words, a strain which by overlooking Juan José's murderous act, and viewing him purely as an innocent victim of social oppression, rules out any engagement with moral ambiguity and social contradiction. Furthermore, the reviews of *Juan José* suggest that the play embodies a certain scientific authority for explaining the truth of the social world, or what Unamuno, in his review, referred to as "la esencia de la vida social" and "resplandor de la verdad." Several years after the fervor of the play's reception died down, Manuel Bueno, in 1909, offered a more sober assessment that acknowledges the ideological myopia that surrounded the play: "Nuestra avidez sociológica no llega a advertir en el teatro de Dicenta más que esta sencilla verdad: que hay mucho dinero en pocos bolsillos y muchos bolsillos con poco o ningún dinero. Nada más" (*Teatro* 115).³

Galdós's *Electra* was met with a similar fetishizing frenzy. The play premiered in Madrid on January 30, 1901, and generated an enormous public commotion that resulted in protests and riots that were repressed by the police. Inman Fox rightly describes the premiere as "uno de los acontecimientos más significativos en la historia intelectual española al comienzo de siglo" (*Ideología* 66). After the premiere, the play continued generating attention and played in Madrid and the provinces for eighty consecutive days.

Like *Juan José*, *Electra* has a simple plot: Salvador de Pantoja, who is the family priest, lies to the young Electra by telling her that her fiancé Máximo, who is a scientist, widower, and model citizen, is in reality her illegitimate brother, born to Electra's libertine mother. Pantoja, who may well be Electra's father, devises this scheme to control her life and to get her to enter a convent. Distraught and upset by the false revelation, Electra enters the convent where her mother's grave is housed. Mentally unstable, she projects the ghost of her mother, who reveals to her Pantoja's evil scheme. In the end, Máximo rescues Electra from the convent.

Although the thematic focus had changed from *Juan José*'s anti-capitalism to *Electra*'s anticlericalism, the absolutist logic remained the same. The progressive-minded public understood the play in reductive, one-dimensional terms that now pitted religion

³ Of course, not all critics read *Juan José* this way. Some were skeptical of its "social" value and insisted that it was a romantic "honor play," a "domestic tragedy," and a descendent of the cloak and dagger plays, such as those of Calderón de la Barca and Lope de Vega. Nevertheless those readings that understood the play through absolute categories that obscured the play's potential for complexity and nuance became widespread enough to prompt the authorities of certain places to prohibit its performance (Pérez de la Dehesa, *El Grupo* 25).

against science. Arturo Perera, in an article published in *El Correo* the day after the premiere, made this clear when he characterized the play as “la lucha entre el oscurantismo o jesuitismo, representado por Pantoja, y la libertad o progreso, personificado en Máximo” (qtd. in Berenguer 205). Such a reading quickly gained the status of a stock response that other critics frequently repeated, as was the case with the critic who signed as “Miss-Teriosa” in *El Día*: “Electra es un drama simbólico en el que se pone de manifiesto la lucha entre la libertad y la reacción; entre el adelanto y las supersticiones absurdas; entre la verdad y la mentira; entre el mal disfrazado con el ropaje del bien, y la bondad humana que intenta romper las mallas de la suprema injusticia” (qtd. in Berenguer 212).

Frenzied critics did not hesitate to describe *Electra* as “sublime” and as a true work of art. Pedro Ortiz-Armengol, in his biography of Galdós, describes this frenzy as an “alucinación colectiva” (575). One of Galdós’s contemporaries described it as a “fiebre liberal,” a “verdadero delirio,” and an “explosión de pasiones” (qtd. in Berenguer 204, 205). Another observer came to the conclusion that “No parece sino que todo Madrid se haya vuelto anticlerical y enemigo del jesuitismo” (qtd. in Berenguer 214). Indeed, the fervor with which the public raised Galdós as a radical saint and accepted the play as true to life turned the act of seeing the play into a form of political activism. This prompted the commentator who signed as “El socialista” to complain that all this frenzy was misguided and could not be considered political praxis:

Es divertido ver el desborde de lugares comunes del librepensamiento, inofensivo de puro chillón y rabioso. Y claro, como todo lo improvisado, como todo lo estrepitoso, la baraúnda promovida por el drama, o como pretexto de él, vendrá a quedar en agua de borrajas. Menos voces y más actos, menos gritar y más hacer, menos timideces, menos términos medios; menos radicalismos en las frases y más acción. Dejemos de ser histéricos para ser hombres sanos, equilibrados y llenos de voluntad. (qtd. in Berenguer 227)

Clearly, the frenzy reached the point where liberal intellectuals and the public collapsed political praxis and essentialist ideas into each other and thus took their liberal declamations and platitudes for revolutionary action.

This confusion is compounded by a real historical event that was known to *Electra*’s public and helped blur the line between reality and art. Inman Fox explains that in the month in which *Electra* premiered, a public uproar arose over the case of a young woman named Adelaida Ubao, who had been secretly persuaded into entering a convent by a Jesuit. Her mother and brother, who was an engineer, protested vehemently and took the case to the Spanish supreme court. They were represented by ex-president Nicolás Salmerón, who argued that the Jesuit’s action was a “secuestro moral.” The hearing, which Salmerón won, took place the week after *Electra* premiered and provoked violent protests for several days throughout Madrid (Fox, *Ideología* 75-77). The Ubao case must certainly have inspired or at least influenced Galdós’s play; and it explains much of the feverish public response that the play generated. Ramiro de Maeztu, in commenting retrospectively on the relation between the historical case of Ubao and Galdós’s dramatic work, stated the following: “Cuando hace quince meses aplaudíamos frenéticos *Electra*, más que en el drama, más que en el legítimo triunfo de Galdós, poníamos el alma entera

en librar del convento a la engañada señorita Ubao y a las miles de infelices que purgan en perpetua clausura su credulidad o su miseria fisiológica” (qtd. in Fox, *Ideología* 76). Maeztu’s comment illustrates how the public’s frenetic applause for *Electra* had more to do with previously held views regarding the Ubao case than with the artistic quality of the play.

But unbeknownst to Maeztu, the applause was also gesture that undermined the play’s illusion or semblance character. Art is premised on the idea that it is an illusion, not reality, and that the audience knows to distinguish between the artwork and the world. But in the case of *Electra*, the intellectual Left, due to its tendentiousness and impatience for revolution, seemed to lose sight of the play’s illusory character, which would otherwise enable the individual spectator to participate in constructing new, unprescribed meanings for the play. But with the meaning of *Electra* being already determined by the extant anticlerical ideas that were linked to the Ubao case, the spectator’s subjectivity and critical agency had been shut out. The reception of *Electra*, then, demonstrates that the principles derived from outside the realm of art, in this case, anticlericalism, have ridden roughshod over the literary and artistic domain.

The public and critical reception of *Juan José* and *Electra*, then, not only attests to the growing annulment of critical agency but also reveals the limits to which Spanish progressive thought had come. These plays, in other words, demonstrated that much of anarchist and socialist thought could not think or act beyond its clichéd ideas. And, as suggested above, this was part of a larger pattern that was taking root in Spain. The fact that the individual—through his subjectivity, imaginative judgment, and critical agency—plays no role in how these plays are given meaning was closely linked to the fact that, within capitalist and positivist ideology, the individual plays no role in how society is conceptualized. This is what Walter Benjamin refers to as the “withering of experience,” and it is what Litvak explained was at work in anarchist militant literature, where language elicits automated emotional responses from the public.

By using art as an instrument for communicating political doctrine, and thereby relinquishing any capacity to respond freely to an artwork, progressive intellectuals unwittingly contributed to fostering the very ideology they rejected. Moreover, in their capitulation to the absolutist way of thinking that was intimately linked to positivism and capitalist modernity, they left out of their purview other ways of reflecting on the social world that might emerge out of a more flexible and imaginative way of engaging literature and art. Although they were initially fervent in their political ideals, the three modernist writers at the center of this dissertation—Martínez Ruiz, Valle-Inclán, and Unamuno—eventually realized that such fervency was doing a disfavor to both art and progressive politics. Thus they affirmed their commitment to art and began cultivating a form of writing that was not only free from the demands of politics but also consequential in its political implications.

Martínez Ruiz and the Commitment to Art

After the premiere of *Electra*, a controversy broke out between Ramiro de Maeztu and José Martínez Ruiz that revealed the latter’s growing uneasiness with the absolutizing tendency that had crept into progressive thought and literature. Ramiro de

Maeztu, who was a close friend of Martínez Ruiz, praised *Electra* for its open engagement with liberal politics and anticlericalism. Martínez Ruiz's initial reaction to the play was very similar to Maeztu's, and he even published, immediately after the premiere, a brief article in which he praised the play as "divina" and Galdós as the "profeta" of a utopian technocratic Spain that was soon to be resurrected through revolution (*Artículos* 111). But this praise quickly turned into critique in an article he published a week later, in which he explained that even though *Electra* favors the liberal ideal of science and denounces the religious ideal of faith, it in fact posits a false opposition between science and faith. He stated that for the liberal politician, the play may be satisfying; but for the intellectual, it should be seen with suspicion: "El pensador debe saber que las dos soluciones son indiferentes, y que las dos—la Ciencia y la Fe—son bellas supercherías con que pretendemos acallar nuestras conciencias" (Martínez Ruiz, *Artículos* 114). Martínez Ruiz realizes that progressive intellectuals have been quick to reduce *Electra* to a political slogan in which science is inherently constructive, and religious faith inherently destructive. But such reductiveness, he perceptively notes, fails to register the redemptive qualities of religious faith.

Martínez Ruiz's sudden rejection of any tendentious reading of *Electra* has long perplexed critics, who have offered a variety of explanations. His closest and harshest critic, Maeztu, responded to this change of mind with a diatribe in which he called Martínez Ruiz an "espíritu cobarde" and accused him of being an agent provocateur for the Jesuits (qtd. in Fox, *Ideología* 89-90). Inman Fox, for his part, describes Martínez Ruiz's reversal of opinion as an episode of depression brought on by his disappointment with Spain's failed reforms (Fox, *Ideología* 60). Blanco Aguinaga, on the other hand, claims that Martínez Ruiz drew back from militancy, and thus from a militant reading of *Electra*, as a result of his intensified pessimism regarding the possibility of achieving social change in Spain (Blanco Aguinaga, *Restauración* 114). And Roberta Johnson, after qualifying as "mysterious" the article in which Martínez Ruiz recasts his thoughts on *Electra*, suspects that his vindication of religious faith may be tied to his desire to please Clarín, the admired veteran writer and critic whose reviews could make or break the career of a young aspiring writer like Martínez Ruiz (29). All these are plausible explanations, but there is another way of understanding Martínez Ruiz's varied responses to the two plays, and it is this: that Martínez Ruiz was paying close attention to the larger implications that positivist and capitalist ideology was having on progressive, liberal culture. Although he did not define his sociopolitical uneasiness in these terms, he was clearly pointing to the growing threat that the conceptual determinism of positivism and capitalism posed for human emancipation.

The articles that Martínez Ruiz published during his "anarchist" phase, which spanned from 1894 to 1904, attest to an intellectual evolution that moves away from an absolutizing mode of thinking toward one that is more contingent and experience-based. In these articles, Martínez Ruiz warns against the tendency of intellectuals to reduce social reality to a set of abstract concepts for the sake of political expediency, because in doing so the particulars of experience get flattened out by facile abstractions. Indeed, Martínez Ruiz is quite insightful in seeking to de-emphasize the revolutionary obsession with changing the political regime, because ultimately true change can only take place by first looking at attitudes: "Yo os digo, amantes sinceros de la libertad, que vuestros embates contra un régimen, es decir contra el efecto, serán ineficaces si no

modificáis antes el medio, es decir, la causa” (*Artículos* 171). Here the terms “medio” and “causa” refer to something closer to “attitudes,” or “mentalities.” Elsewhere, he describes both these terms—that is, “medio” and “causa”—as “una apretada y menuda red de pasiones, de prejuicios, de sordideces, de miseria, de tristeza” (*Artículos* 147). Through this definition, Martínez Ruiz brings the particularity of human affect back into how society ought to be ordered and understood. That is to say, he insists on opening up liberal political doctrine to human agency and subjectivity so that they play a part in how society is to be transformed. Moreover, his choice of words—“una apretada y menuda red”—is quite telling, for it suggests that he sees the world in a more dialectical fashion, one in which the particulars of the manifold reality are not brushed over with abstractions but are kept in juxtaposed but never fully resolved tension.

During these transformative years, Martínez Ruiz articulates, with great insight, his new mode of thinking. In 1904 he wrote an article on one of his most important intellectual influences: Montaigne. He admires Montaigne for having a “concepción ondulante, flexible, circunstante, contingente de la vida, frente a la concepción abstracta y absoluta de los viejos protestantes y de los modernos hórridos kantianos” (*Artículos* 176). He notes that there are two irreconcilable tendencies: one that operates through abstract ideals, such as Truth, Morality, Justice, Progress, the Good; and another that operates through “pequeños ideales,” which are always rooted in empirical experience and refuse to conform to any abstract model. These small ideals “mudan con el mudar del tiempo y de la vida, las acomodaciones discretas, los errores benéficos, la sutilidad indulgente, que aplica a cada caso su procedimiento momentáneo y no formula una regla bárbara, universal e inmovible, como un ídolo o como un dios” (*Artículos* 176). Liberals and progressives, as Martínez Ruiz explains, have fanatically embraced abstract ideals, treating them as their idols. In the process, they have sneered at and branded as “reactionaries” those who, like himself, have attempted to tear down those idols by means of “pequeños ideales.”

With aspersions cast upon him from the Left, Martínez Ruiz recasts his commitment not to a political doctrine but to making qualitatively sophisticated art that resists facile communication and sociological reductionism. He explains this in 1915 in a response to Blasco Ibáñez, who had reminded him of his early days as a young militant anarchist. Here Martínez Ruiz explains what others see as his abandonment of doctrinaire progressive politics:

El cambiar de opinión, cuando el cambio es sincero y desinteresado, no humilla ni desdora a nadie. Aparte de que cuando el escritor ha avanzado en la vida, cuando se conocen un poco los resortes de la técnica literaria, se ve que todo lo que se decía antaño se puede decir ahora, sustancialmente, pero cambiando de forma. Y se ve también que en España llamamos revolucionario, no al pensamiento sutil y hondamente innovador, sino lo que se dice en términos bruscos y destemplados. (qtd. in Valverde 30)

In this passage Martínez Ruiz posits literary form not as the vehicle for communicating a revolutionary slogan but as the seedbed of critical, reflective thought. “Pensamiento sutil” and “hondamente innovador”—this is the mode of thinking that Spain’s liberal culture was lacking. So rather than renounce progressive politics, Martínez Ruiz has merely

sought to restore critical agency to it through his literary works, which instead of peddling answers, prefer to embrace a formal ambiguity that involves the reader in previously untapped cognitive processes. Moreover, the radicalism of such a commitment to literature is substantively (“sustancialmente”) as radical as the revolutionary impulse. Art, then, plays an important role in human emancipation. In its awakening of individual human agency, it resists the forces of rational, capitalist modernity that have absorbed progressive politics. Maeztu was blind to this point when he sneered at Martínez Ruiz for worrying about the artistic quality of *Electra*: “Parece usted temer que el éxito social de *Electra* ahogue el de la obra de arte. Desheche sus hipócritas aprensiones” (qtd. in Fox, *Ideología* 91).

Martínez Ruiz’s enormous personal library and encyclopedic knowledge has led many to believe that he treated erudition as a refuge from the sociopolitical. And yet his view of literary study belies this impression. “*Non multa sed multum*” was the maxim he used in an article in 1903 to describe his view of literature. It meant “one should not read many books, but should read a few carefully,” and this becomes the maxim for his literary enterprise. It is in effect a demand that the reader exercise and liberate his own reflective judgment, which is something that partisan literature, in its pursuit of human emancipation, often failed to do. For Martínez Ruiz, this insistence on careful reading begins with his novel *La voluntad*.

Ramón del Valle-Inclán and the Pursuit of Artistic Form

Valle-Inclán moves in a similar direction as Martínez Ruiz, and this is evident in the *Sonatas*’ insistence on aesthetic form and their ability to awaken human sensation. Maeztu, in his polemic against Martínez Ruiz, offered a colorful description of Valle-Inclán’s reaction during the premiere of *Electra*: “Valle-Inclán, el enemigo de la emoción en la obra de arte, llora por detrás de sus quevedos” (qtd. in Fox, *Ideología* 82). To what extent Maeztu exaggerates is impossible to say, but his remark points out a couple of things that are worth noting: first, that Valle-Inclán had flirted with radical politics early in his career; and second, that he had first-hand experience of the absolutizing fervor of revolutionary and progressive intellectuals. Indeed, Valle-Inclán was known for participating in the numerous tertulias of Madrid, and was even involved in several altercations over political and artistic disagreements. And yet by reading his *Sonatas* one would hardly imagine that their author had been in the thick of the upheaval that was *Electra*’s premiere. Given Valle-Inclán’s eccentric and outlandish ways, there is no doubt that he made a conscious effort to give that impression.

However, with respect to the *Sonata de otoño* (1902) there remains an important clue that reveals the *Sonatas*’ rootedness in the political and ideological ferment of Spain’s left-wing culture. This clue reveals itself by the fact that Valle-Inclán borrows a scene from a famous anarchist novel, Octave Mirbeau’s *Le journal d’une femme de chambre* (1900), and adapts it to his *Sonata de otoño*.⁴ Noël Valis, who discovered this intertext, notes that the scene by Mirbeau is originally cast as a protest against a rich man’s enslavement of a chambermaid, who is the novel’s working-class protagonist.

⁴ Mirbeau’s novel was translated into Spanish in 1901 as *Memorias de una doncella*, and went through three editions.

Valis observes that in borrowing this pivotal scene from Mirbeau, Valle-Inclán inverts the master/slave relation between the characters, and thereby subverts the political meaning behind the original scene (Valis 224). In essence, Valle-Inclán strips Mirbeau's tendentious political commentary from the scene in question, and in its place he introduces several levels of ambiguity and even parody regarding the relationship of the *Sonata*'s two main characters: the marqués de Bradomín and Concha. With this literary readaptation, Valle-Inclán makes evident to his fellow intellectuals and writers that he is refusing to place his art in the service of any sociopolitical ideas or commentary. Indeed, the *Sonata de otoño* stands as a manifesto of what literary art ought to strive for, namely, aesthetic quality. As such, the *Sonata* rejects any effort to indoctrinate or educate via literature and instead insists on rescuing the experience of "sensation" from the widespread fixation on positivism and bourgeois utilitarianism.

Valle-Inclán believed that there are two kinds of literature: one that communicates ideas that appeal to reason, and another that hones and intensifies what he calls "sensaciones" (Serrano Alonso, "La poética" 73-74). He rejects writers whose literature merely seeks to communicate ideas that aim to "regenerar el mundo." For Valle-Inclán, the ideas that such writers adopt are ultimately abstract entities that do not belong to them as individuals. Sensations, on the other hand, do; and they are what Valle-Inclán's early works attempt to restore to human experience. By engaging the reader at the level of sensation, Valle-Inclán's modernist works get the reader to participate actively in the artwork (Maier 129-30). Rather than stultify the reader's sense of agency and subjectivity, these works turn him into an active rather than a passive participant in the apprehension of the literary text. And with respect to the sociopolitical, this awakening of the reader is not without consequence.

In stirring up the experience of sensation, the *Sonata de otoño* brings together the aesthetic and the social in a way that was inconceivable to radical intellectuals. T.J. Clark explains that, in 1891, Pissarro used the term "sensation" to indicate the ultimate mystery and motor of signification. Elaborating on Pissarro's hazy comments, Clark notes that for Pissarro signs are not transparent vehicles for man to refer to objects in the world. Instead, they participate in shaping the world, in making it one's own: "the raw contact of sensorium and object is always already inflected by a unique totalizing power, the one we call individuality, which is *there in the perception* and therefore potentially also in the means of registering it" (Clark, *Farewell* 80). In other words, signs do not just have a denotative, instrumental function; because in art they also play a constitutive role for the subject and the object. Each subject experiences the sign in his own particular way; and any inflection in that experience is the subject's own making. Signs, then, are invested with a form of human agency that is based not on cold, functional rationality, but rather on the idiosyncratic and individual disposition of the reader.

Tendentious art that treats the sign as an instrument for denoting an object or promoting an idea divorces itself from the truly social, which is made up of a constellation of particular human sensations. Tendentious art operates at the level of ideas and never truly reaches the individual's concrete, irreducible experience. Valle's *Sonata* reverses this process and restores art's ability to inhabit the social. It seems paradoxical that by immersing the reader in sensation, beauty, style, and extravagance, the *Sonata* is far more capable of emancipating human existence than those works that champion abstract ideas of freedom and revolution. Viewed this way, the charge—first launched by

Ortega y Gasset in 1904—that Valle-Inclán’s *Sonatas* were socially pernicious for their self-absorbed beauty turns out to be less an incrimination than an indication of the *Sonatas*’s bringing together the social and the aesthetic.

T.J. Clark notes that late-nineteenth-century artists were interested in the “decorative,” as well as in “ornament,” “synthesis,” and “style.” But, of course, these words were burdened with pejorative connotations and were seen as less noble when measured against higher aesthetic or political enterprises. And yet there were many artists who summoned the decorative and its correlates as a way of bringing together the social and the aesthetic. These artists caught on to the idea that “less noble” artistic modes had the power to bring absolutized notions such as Beauty down to ground level, where society resides. Clark explains this best:

Decorative means *merely* decorative—meaning overt in its simplifications, ostentatious in its repeated patternings, and unabashed of its offer of visual delight. It mocks the idea of a beauty distinct from prettiness, or glitter, or blinding coloristic shock. And it can rest easy in its mockery ... because it asserts that these are the qualities that allow Art to speak to the public realm. They are the qualities that prepare it ... for the work of persuasion or chastening to come. (131)

The decorative, as Clark argues, engages a viewer (or reader) at the level of sensation, triggering his individual, non-instrumented agency. Furthermore, it makes itself social by addressing and opening itself to the public without capitulating to the regime of abstract political ideas or to any imperative of political expediency. The decorative does not tell the viewer what to think; it merely gives him the opportunity to cultivate a non-instrumental form of cognition and affect that “prepare[s]” him for the world of political praxis. In other words, the decorative stirs up an individual’s experience-based affect so that it plays a role in how praxis is to be conceived, thereby making it possible to envision a praxis sensitive to concrete and particular human needs. Thus the *Sonata de otoño*, in its autonomous cultivation of sensation, enables the reader to resist the market-oriented and life-denying logic driving capitalist expansion and the positivist enterprise that works in its service.

Unamuno and the Critical Capacity of the Art

Unamuno’s reaction to *Juan José* reveals a great deal about his ambivalent attitude toward art. In an article he published in the socialist periodical, *La Lucha de Clases*, he says the following of the play: “No es bueno por tener tesis socialista, sino que tiene tesis socialista por ser bueno” (qtd. in Pérez de la Dehesa, *El Grupo* 21). Here he highlights the play’s artistic value as the source of its revolutionary potential. The reader will recall that Maeztu had chided Martínez Ruiz for privileging the play’s artistic quality. He would undoubtedly have done the same with Unamuno, and perhaps even more so given the paradoxical terms in which Unamuno casts this appraisal. Indeed, Unamuno’s penchant for paradox has led many critics to refuse to consider him, at least during the first part of his career, an authentic socialist thinker. But as Blanco Aguinaga’s

Juventud del 98 has shown, Unamuno's early writings—those prior to 1897—prove that he sought a socialist mode of analysis that was informed by scientific rigor and the tenets of positivism.

But his understanding of socialism was anything but orthodox. For Unamuno, socialism involved not just economic reform, but also a moral and human one that he often referred to as “religious.” To his fellow socialists who were eager to do away with the Church and religious traditionalism, Unamuno's call for a “religious” reform was ludicrous. This became quite evident when, after publishing some of the essays that would make up *En torno al casticismo* (1895), Unamuno was criticized as being a “mystic” and an “idealist.” Such criticism, however, was based on what Unamuno called a “socialismo de exclusión, de envidia y de guerra, y no de inclusión, de amor y de paz” (qtd. in Blanco Aguinaga, *Juventud* 96). The intolerance toward his ideas was due to a vulgarization of Marxism, in which society was seen dogmatically as being determined by economic forces. Unamuno referred to the dogmatists peddling this reductive view of society as “fanáticos necios de Marx” (qtd. in Blanco Aguinaga, *Juventud* 95).

As a corrective to the damage done by those “fanáticos necios,” Unamuno sought to inject Spanish socialism with what he referred to as “humanidad,” which consisted of virtues such as cooperation, justice, and charity. For Unamuno, a true socialism would look not only at economic and material determinism but also at the subjective demands and desires of the people. Without taking those myriad desires and needs into account, socialism degrades into Jacobinism and becomes an abstraction. Thus socialism must be much more than just economic determinism: “Sus raíces son económicas, pero su sustancia abarca todas las esferas sociales y a todas se extiende su influjo, es religioso, artístico, moral” (qtd. in Blanco Aguinaga, *Juventud* 121). This was the true sense of Unamuno's “reforma religiosa,” and it was one that sought to broaden the purview of socialist thought, for only then would Marxian socialism become “la religión de la humanidad.”

After Blanco Aguinaga made it widely known in the 70s that Unamuno had had a deep engagement with socialist thought in his early years, there emerged a series of questions that have not been fully answered. The narrative that developed when Unamuno's early socialism came to light was that Unamuno gradually distanced himself from socialism and moved toward religious irrationalism and concerns about faith, hope, and charity. Given his cryptic and enigmatic way of writing about Marxism—with phrases such as “La realidad, la verdadera realidad, es más sentida que concebida, se halla más en sentimientos que en ideas” (Unamuno, “Realismo” 656)—it is no surprise that critics, including Blanco Aguinaga, have seen such phrases as evidence of Unamuno's withdrawal from socialist thought, and of his subsequent turn toward more subjective and philosophical concerns. Thus what remains to be explained is why Unamuno shifted suddenly from his revolutionary concerns to his philosophical and existential preoccupations.

One important attempt to explain this comes by way of Inman Fox, who sees Unamuno's career not as being divided by an early political engagement and a later meditative phase, but as being made up by the coexistence of those two tendencies. Fox rightly insists that Unamuno never abandoned his political activism. He notes that while Unamuno was active on several political fronts—in reform campaigns, the Partido Socialista, and its periodical, *La Lucha de Clases*—he was also writing some of his most

existential and philosophical works: *Vida de Don Quijote y Sancho* (1905), *Del sentimiento trágico de la vida* (1913), and *Niebla* (1914). Fox contends that if Unamuno's philosophical and existential texts can be considered abstract and detached from the sociopolitical, it is only because they reflect Unamuno's insistence that the writer remain independent from the demands of politics. Thus a writer can be free to produce rarefied and existential literature while being actively engaged in the world of politics. For Fox, then, Unamuno embodies two models of the intellectual: one that focuses on man's existential and affective experience, and another that is "populist" and engages the *pueblo* by way of ideas and values. Fox believes that what is perhaps most interesting about Unamuno is not so much his role as an intellectual or his ideas, but the fact that his desire to engage in politics and regenerate Spain—a seemingly altruistic gesture—was ultimately for the purpose of enriching his own interior experience through an existentialist view of life (*Ideología* 256-57).

What Blanco Aguinaga sees in Unamuno as a shift from an early political engagement to an inward turn toward subjective meditation, Fox sees as a binary of two divergent tendencies that exist simultaneously. What both critics have in common, however, is that they are unable to reconcile these seemingly opposed tendencies. They see Unamuno's work as a zero-sum game, where literature and intellectual activity either are socially and politically expedient, or are without sociopolitical implications. Yet Unamuno, as some of his writings suggest, refuses such an approach to literature. For him, literary and autonomous artworks—that is, those works that obey no other rule but their own—have a cognitive import that ultimately prepares the ground for political engagement. As artworks, they invite people to think, which is an activity that has become increasingly rare in a country as politically polarized and dogmatic as *fin-de-siglo* Spain.

The invitation to think applies to both the reader and the writer. In an article titled "Leyendo a Maragall," published in 1915, Unamuno meditates on precisely this point:

¿Para qué escribimos? Para muchas cosas. Y no tan sólo como acaso crean algunos mentecatos maliciosos y torpes ... para ganarnos unas pesetas con ello ... Yo, por mi parte, escribo para pensar, porque pienso escribiendo o hablando. Y creo que un escritor hace bastante si sabe repetir, repetir mucho y repetir bien. Ocio humilde tal vez este de repetidor, pero ocio necesarísimo en la república humana. Repetir, repetir mucho. Recordar a cada paso lo que de puro sabido se olvida. ¡Qué terrible eso de olvidar algo de puro saberlo! Y hay que repetirlo y darle cien vueltas y presentarlo de cien modos, muchos de ellos paradójicos, que son los más eficaces. Y con el oficio viene la vocación. (Maragall 164)

Unamuno writes in order to not let thought fossilize. By returning to the ordinary and the commonplace the writer sheds the kind of light that provokes renewed and unique forms of thought. In the same article, Unamuno continues to elaborate his view on the role of the writer. The following is a comment on Maragall, but it can just as well apply to Unamuno himself:

Pero él, Maragall, conocía también la suprema gloria del escritor, la lucha constante con el público, con su público, el estarle conquistando día a día y no

dejarse dominar de él, el no claudicar, el no entregarse, el no transigir a darle lo mismo que ellos piensan, a dar expresión a su pensamiento colectivo, al del público, un pensamiento, como colectivo, hecho sino a obligarle a pensar, a repensar, y para ello deshacerle el pensamiento e inquietarle y si es menester irritarle. (Maragall 166)

Here, the writer's task is to refuse to tell the public what it wants to hear or what it already thinks or knows. The insistence on not letting thought settle—through the kind of repetition that might even irritate the reader—involves a kind of play that is requisite for critical thought. In this respect, Adorno's comments are illustrative:

Essential to [thought] is an element of exaggeration, of over-shooting the object, of self-detachment from the weight of the factual, so that instead of merely reproducing being it can, at once rigorous and free, determine it. Thus every thought resembles play ... The unbarbaric side of philosophy is its tacit awareness of the element of irresponsibility, of blitheness springing from the volatility of thought, which forever escapes what it judges. (*Minima* 126-27)

This description of thought as over-shooting the object, of being detached from the factual, and of resembling blitheness and play is precisely what is at work in a novel, or *nivola*, such as *Niebla*, where philosophical meditation takes on a repetitive and exaggerated character, and does so to such a degree that it often becomes irritating. And rather than see this as a fault, Unamuno sees it as a stimulus for thought.

A work such as *Niebla*, then, is not just an exercise in philosophical meditation, but is also, as Unamuno's comments suggest, a way of breaking the habits of mind that lead to the hardening of political dogmas. By eschewing the demand that literature be politically expedient or that it reaffirm the party line, *Niebla* is free imagine forms of social and self-critique that the socialists cannot account for due to their ideological myopia.

Unamuno's article "Geometría política" helps illustrate this point (Unamuno, *Unamuno* 41-43). In it Unamuno claims that it makes no sense to speak of politics of the left or politics of the right just as it makes no sense to speak of east or west in a map that has no compass rose. Without some kind of orientation, it makes no sense to speak of a certain political program as being "more" progressive or "less" reactionary. It all depends on one's political temperament. To demonstrate this, Unamuno uses the following example: an individual who attempts to walk in a straight line on a flat plane will deviate slightly to the left or to the right depending on his physical constitution or temperament. Following a similar logic, Unamuno offers another example, which he draws from geometry: to distinguish a parabola from a hyperbola one needs to be able to understand geometrical space; that is, one needs to understand the space within which he is perceiving the curved line. Both these examples show that it makes little sense to speak of liberal and conservative politics, or of socialism and anarchism, without first having some kind awareness of the framework in which those politics are situated.

Unamuno ties these thoughts to language and philosophy when he insists that in order to write with precision it is necessary to study both of these subjects. Without doing so, one becomes more susceptible to the kind of murkiness and obscurity that

characterizes the oversimplified, and thus critically impotent, use of notions such as “socialism,” “conservatism,” and “bourgeoisie.” Indeed, as we have already seen, such terms had become debased coin in the political and literary discourse of Spanish socialism and anarchism. What was needed now was an antidote to such debasement. And for this Unamuno makes a very suggestive recommendation, which is that “no estaría de más que nuestra juventud se dedicara un poco más y mejor a estudiar geometría y filología para no caer en los camelos políticos del izquierdismo, el derechismo, el radicalismo, el reaccionarismo y otras vaciedades por el estilo para uso de durmientes” (Unamuno, *Unamuno* 42-43). Spain’s “juventud durmiente,” as this passage states, needs to awaken from its intellectual complacency by cultivating the kind of imaginative flexibility that not only is proper to literature but is also coupled with the intellectual rigor of “geometry.”

This brings Unamuno close to the Kantian aesthetic, in which art is understood as having the semblance, but not the substance, of conceptual determination, which in turn gives art a cognitive rigor that remains free and flexible without being arbitrary (Kaufman 366). Autonomous artworks have a critical capacity, or what Kant refers to as “reflective judgment,” that sets them apart from heteronomous artworks that obey the demands of political, positivist, or religious ideology and leave little room for executing spontaneous, not-already-determined critique. In this way, the radical inventiveness of autonomous art makes possible radically new forms of thinking that may help illuminate previously obscured aspects of the social world.

This explains why Unamuno insisted on the imagination as a way of getting Spain out of its ideological rut. In the essay “El espíritu castellano,” of *En torno al casticismo*, he explains that Spaniards have long held a *castizo* conception of the imagination as something that was rational, conceptual, and derivative, as opposed to creative, transcendental, and spontaneous.⁵ In describing Spanish *conceptismo* and *culteranismo* Unamuno reveals what he understood by “imaginación española”:

Y en realidad, sin embargo, imaginación seca, reproductiva, más que creadora, más bien que imaginación fantasía, empleando tecnicismo escolástico. O los hechos tomados en bruto, en entero y barajados de un modo o de otro, no desmenuzados para recombinarlos en formas no reales, o bien conceptos abstractos. Nuestro ingenio castizo es empírico o intelectual más que imaginativo, traza enredos entre sucesos perfectamente verosímiles; no nacieron aquí los mundos difuminados en niebla ... Todo es en [el pueblo] claro, recortado, antinebuloso. (*En torno* 821)

Clearly Unamuno does not hold the Spanish imagination in high regard. He views it as sterile and incapable of creating new things out of the facts of the world. Unable to recombine the world it sees into fresh and interesting configurations, it merely produces “fantasías” in predictable and predetermined ways. Consequently, everything having to

⁵ Some Hispanists have entertained the idea that “true” romanticism only made its arrival with the so-called Generation of 1898, whose writers assigned a high value to the individual conscience and turned their attention to nature. See Fox, *Ideología* 209-11; and King “What is Spanish Romanticism?”

do with the Spanish imagination is plain and clear, or “antinebuloso,” since it only deals in simple facts and abstract concepts.

But the complexity of the social world—from the individual’s consciousness to the collective *pueblo*—exceeds the capability of the Spanish *casticista* imagination. As Unamuno explains in *En torno al casticismo*, each individual is a complex and ever-changing “universo mental” with different levels of consciousness (814); and each society is made up of contradictions and continuities with regard to the historical and the ideological. To do justice to such complexity, a new brand of imagination is needed, one which has the capacity to analyze and reconfigure those ever-changing contradictions and continuities of the individual and his society. Thus what is needed is more “niebla”; and the *nivola* by the same name provides precisely this. It takes some of the sociohistorical materials of its time and holds them together in unique and imaginative configurations that make possible insights that have deep political implications.

Chapter 2

José Martínez Ruiz's *La voluntad* and the Pursuit of Aesthetic Autonomy

La voluntad is a product of the lessons learned from the frenzy caused by Galdós's *Electra*. This play, premiered in 1901, made it clear that within the progressive and anarchist culture of *fin-de-siglo* Spain, art had become identified with praxis and was serving political slogans. Whether or not an author constructed his artwork that way didn't matter: the left-leaning public, in its radicalism and zeal, judged it according to how it addressed certain political and sociological orthodoxies. For Martínez Ruiz there was something deeply disturbing about this. Not only had literature been reduced to a pseudo sociology, but now it had to conform to the sociological and revolutionary principles prescribed by liberal and anarchist programs. Most disturbing of all was that this revolutionary politics demanded standardized forms of thinking, and it recruited literature to fulfill this demand. The protest against economic exploitation, religious intolerance, and bourgeois complacency could certainly be justified, but not the intellectually coercive demands that it imposed on the individual. In reality, what was at stake was more than just the individual; it was particularity itself that was under siege by the frenzied pursuit of human emancipation. Liberal ideology viewed the socio-political world through Manichean and positivist absolutes that had no patience for the concrete and distinctive identities, actions, and modes of thinking of individuals—in other words, those particular aspects of human experience whose slippery and contradictory nature could give the lie to the pieties of liberal culture. This chapter contends that *La voluntad* responded directly to this subtle but no less dangerous tendency within political progressivism. By refusing to serve as a guide for revolutionary action, and by moving instead in the direction of aesthetic autonomy, *La voluntad* provided the reader the grounds for critiquing and reflecting upon the socio-historical circumstances.¹ This is a

¹ The following is a summary of *La voluntad*'s narrative plot: The novel opens with a discussion of the unfinished construction of the church of the town named Yecla. The protagonist is Antonio Azorín. The first part of the novel centers on the lessons he learns from Yuste, a confused anarchist who frequently meditates on the metaphysics of time and reality. Azorín and his teacher go on walks and share their opinions with each other. They also visit the director of a local school, Lasarde, with whom they discuss philosophy, theology, art, and literature. Azorín falls in love with Justina who decides to become a nun, but he ends up marrying Iluminada, an energetic and witty woman who overpowers him. Yuste dies and Azorín moves to Madrid without his wife.

The second part of the novel takes place in Madrid. There, Azorín lives a bohemian lifestyle as a journalist, but is discouraged by the petty rivalries and vanities of Madrid's literary circles. While in Madrid, he visits an elderly man known as "el Anciano," who holds firmly to his positivist worldview. Eventually, Azorín becomes bored of life in Madrid and travels to Toledo, visits Pi y Margall, and visits Larra's tomb, where he pays homage to the nineteenth-century writer. Fed up with the decadence of Spanish society and the suffocating environment of censorship and Spanish austerity, he decides to abandon Madrid and return to his hometown, Yecla.

The third part of the novel finds Azorín a defeated man, intellectually and ethically lost, and living with an overbearing wife. He lacks energy, drive, purpose, and will (*voluntad*). The novel closes with an epilogue made up of three letters written by "J. Martínez Ruiz" while visiting Azorín in Yecla. The letters describe Azorín's intellectual inertia, the misery, apathy and ineptitude of the town

simple gesture but one whose profound implications in the climate of political fervency in *fin-de-siglo* Spain has largely been overlooked.

The chapter begins by examining the reception history of Martínez Ruiz's novel. It surveys some of the earliest reviews that appeared after its publication in 1902. These reviews are important because despite the social context in which they were published, they focus on *La voluntad*'s formal innovations rather than on its sociopolitical concerns and themes. This suggests that the novel's early critics, and some of the later ones who followed their lead, had understood *La voluntad* as a work that was more interested in aesthetic autonomy than in any kind of sociopolitical didacticism. Although these early reviewers valued the novel for its formal innovations, they had not yet caught on to the critical capacity it harbored by virtue of its autonomy. Much of how *La voluntad* was subsequently read was shaped by Martínez Ruiz's early reputation as an anarchist firebrand and by a moment of crisis many believed he suffered. These biographical aspects are also taken into account in this chapter, because, when reevaluated, they point to how the young firebrand aspired to become an artist. I argue that out of this aspiration emerged a carefully wrought novel that responded to the sociopolitical in such a way that it invited new forms of understanding and critiquing the culture of *fin-de-siglo* Spain. This chapter offers close readings that illustrate those new cognitive possibilities. These readings reveal how *La voluntad*—through the texture of its language, its treatment of theme and anecdote, and its solicitation of affective responses—strives to bring particularity back into the reader's consciousness, which was becoming increasingly burdened by the abstract rationalism of Spain's liberal culture.

***La voluntad*'s Reception History**

La voluntad's early reception history evinces considerable confusion. Martínez Ruiz was known to have been disappointed by how critics and the public reacted to his novel. He believed that few people read it, and that those few who did, did so superficially. In 1946, more than four decades after the novel's publication, Martínez Ruiz explained that even though he had invested a great deal of effort in writing it—"me costó más esfuerzo que cualquiera otro de mis libros"—it was nevertheless "improperado, menospreciado, a su aparición." Readers, he claims, considered it an "amasijo de incongruencias" (qtd. in Martínez del Portal, Introduction 33).

But while Martínez Ruiz claimed that the public had snubbed his novel, there were a few perceptive reviews that suggest that he did have some sympathetic readers. María Martínez del Portal has listed six of these reviews in her edition of the novel. And to these I can add another that I have recently found, which brings the number of known reviews to seven.² Of these known reviews, the one by Fray Candil is both critical and approving, and at times even satirical ("*La voluntad*"). The others are generally

residents who prioritize religion above all else. Azorín has become complacent and an ordinary resident of Yecla, and has come to be known by the diminutive and rustic form of his name, Antoñico.
² The review I have found is signed by E.M. [Enrique de Mesa] and appears in *La Correspondencia de España* 13 July 1902. The ones that Martínez del Portal lists are by Bernardo Gonzalo de Cándamo, Fray Candil [Emilio Bobadilla], Eduardo Gómez de Baquero, José Martínez del Portal, Carlos Peñaranda, and Zeda [Francisco Fernández Villegas].

favorable. Zeda's, for instance, refers to *La voluntad* as “un libro interesantísimo,” and to its author as “uno de los escritores (no hablo sólo de España) que más valen entre los literatos que constituyen la juventud literaria del siglo que comienza” (264, 266). These reviews applaud the “talento indiscutible del autor” and claim that its highest merit lies in its “tácita protesta” against the realist novel (Peñaranda 2; Cándamo 183). These reviews register doubts that *La voluntad* conforms to the “novel” form at all, which at that time was dominated in Spain by figures such as Benito Pérez Galdós, Juan Valera, Jacinto Octavio Picón, and José María Pereda—all of them practitioners of realism. Zeda, in his review, notes that *La voluntad* “muy poco ó nada tiene de novela” (264), and Cándamo follows suit, declaring in no uncertain terms that “no es una novela” (182). Gómez de Baquero, on the other hand, expresses some ambivalence when he forcibly admits that “a la novela pertenece,” but then immediately recognizes that it steers the novel form away from its “primitivo tipo histórico de vida de un personaje.” Peñaranda, cognizant of this ambivalence, calls *La voluntad* a “Raro libro”—in exclamations—and posits a dilemma: either it is a “novela sin acción” or it is “acción sin novela” (1).

Although book reviews at that time were often written in haste, the ones addressing *La voluntad* were nevertheless quite perceptive. Not only do they touch on the problem of categorizing *La voluntad* as a novel, but they also make note of the importance of Martínez Ruiz's style of writing, namely, his broad vocabulary, simplified syntax, and verbal economy. They are very discerning when they point out the novel's effort to capture the fleetingness of sensations through cinematographic techniques and through narrative parataxis and fragmentation. They are also instructive in highlighting the similarities between the author's life and that of the protagonist, but perhaps take this biographical observation too far when they attribute to the author some of the ideas and opinions on philosophy, politics, and literature that are voiced by the characters. These reviews take notice of several themes at work in the novel, themes such as the nostalgia for a bygone Spain, the disaffection felt among Spain's youth, and the timeless quality of the Spanish landscape. They also tease out *La voluntad*'s literary and philosophical influences. Chief among these are Nietzsche, the *roman personnel*, the philosophical novel, and romanticism.

Much of the subsequent criticism that has addressed this novel has, in effect, merely elaborated on these early observations. The observation about Martínez Ruiz's style of writing offers a clear example. Fray Candil's remark that the prose of *La voluntad* is “de tonos secos” is later elaborated upon by Carmen Conde, who uses the term “sequedad” to refer to Martínez Ruiz's equilibrated, succinct, and weighty style (Conde 242). Candil's observation about the novel's elliptical use of syntax, repeated adjectives, and fragmentation is fleshed out in much more detail, and even condemned, by Hans Jeschke (132, 152). Rafael Soto, for his part, restates Candil's observation that Martínez Ruiz's prose is “enemiga de metáforas,” and his style “limpio de tropos” (Candil, “*La voluntad*” 93). Soto refers to these qualities as Martínez Ruiz's “pureza anecdótica,” which he understands as a form of writing stripped of allusions, metaphors, symbols, and allegories (81). He also picks up on Candil's comment that Martínez Ruiz “es un *visual* sanguíneo” when he notes that Martínez Ruiz's work is informed by the kind of “óptica pura” that is proper to cinematography (Candil, “*La voluntad*” 93; Soto 80). As noted above, this cinematographic technique had already been suggested in Zeda's review, which states that “el autor de *La voluntad* hace pasar ante los ojos del

lector en forma de enumeración, de un modo *cinematográfico*, elementos que constituyen la escena” (266). This quality of the novel becomes almost commonplace in later criticism. The same is the case with the technique that Zeda refers to as “enumeración,” which is tied to the absence of action or plot. Martínez Cachero, for instance, explains that, in *La voluntad*, “el descriptor resulta un notario que registra cuanto ante él se ofrece” (152). And Inman Fox, in discussing Martínez Ruiz’s early work, offers a similar account, when he explains that “todo se reduce a una especie de inventario de cosas concretas exiliadas de un mundo vital, como en un diccionario o un museo, sin otra función en el texto” (“Azorín y la nueva” 301). Another feature of *La voluntad* that Candil points out is the effort to convey sensations despite their fleeting and elusive nature (“*La voluntad*” 93). This observation also becomes commonplace among later readers of the novel. Among the most important critics of *La voluntad* to draw attention to it are Robert Spires (17), Manuel Durán (18), and Kathleen Glenn (60-61). The importance of subjectivity, which Zeda notices in Martínez Ruiz’s novel, is also echoed in later criticism. For Zeda, Martínez Ruiz’s insistence on style is an effort to give “vida exterior á su modo de pensar y sentir” (266), a technique that Francisco Javier Díez de Revenga refers to as *La voluntad*’s “actitud subjetivadora” (59). And Fox, for his part, explains this “actitud” in the following terms: “el foco de atención llega a ser no el mundo externo de España y las vidas y costumbres de sus habitantes, sino la misma experiencia de aprehender o conocer estas cosas” (“Azorín y la nueva” 303). Worth noting as well is that these early reviews blur the line between the author and the work. Candil refers to *La voluntad* as a “novela autobiográfica” (“*La voluntad*” 92); and Peñaranda, while highlighting some of the ideas expressed in the narrative, suggests that “Hay que dejar al autor la responsabilidad de sus afirmaciones” (1). Later critics have continued this trend by also treating the novel as the author’s mouthpiece. Anna Krause’s *Azorín, the Little Philosopher*, published in 1948, is an early example, and one that was foundational for how Anglo-American scholars would read Martínez Ruiz’s work.

This brief survey of later criticism shows to what extent early reviewers were attuned to *La voluntad*’s formal innovations. They understood that this work cannot be judged against the dominant aesthetic of the realist novel. Although the term “novel” causes some contention, the reviewers are not in its thrall, since they demonstrate a willingness to consider Martínez Ruiz’s new kind of literature. Underlying these reviews is the idea that *La voluntad*’s aim is more aesthetic than tendentious. Zeda notes that the protagonist’s lack of will is precisely the problem plaguing his generation and that the novel touches on the social, religious, and philosophical concerns of Spain’s intelligentsia. Nevertheless, Zeda does not treat these themes as the novel’s primary concern. In similar fashion, Candil does not treat as central what he considers to be the autobiographical aspect of the novel, that is, Azorín’s *abulia* understood as “un caso de pereza nacional” (“*La voluntad*” 99). For these reviewers, *La voluntad*’s relevance lies more in its aesthetic innovations than in any direct socio-political, religious, or philosophical intention. Indeed, *La voluntad* eschews any such intention by refusing to settle on any one position. For Zeda, Martínez Ruiz’s greatness lies in the fact that “por querer del mismo autor [*La voluntad*] es incoherente, ondulante..... y hasta contradictorio” (266). The reviewer Enrique de Mesa is keenly aware of this when he explains that by casting the problem of will and modernity in the form of a novel, Martínez Ruiz “revela que no quiere darle el aspecto de una solución; pero la verdad es

que lo estudia bien.” He goes on to explain that unlike philosophers, who investigate the causes of the problem of will and modernity, artists like Martínez Ruiz “presentan...en concreciones artísticas de la vida ese problema de la voluntad.” Here Mesa marks a distinction between the artwork and the contemporary world, between the aesthetic illusion of Spain’s crisis of will and real-world solutions to it. For these early reviewers, and especially for Mesa, *La voluntad* gives priority to the kind of artifice whose formal intricacy can register something more than just abstract ideas about Spain’s crisis at the turn of the century.

Though it may be motivated by the social problem of abulia, *La voluntad*’s primary interest lies in creating a certain affective experience through language and atmosphere, through the absence of plot and metaphor, and through the illusory display of subjectivity and interiority—precisely those devices pointed out by Martínez Ruiz’s early reviewers and some later critics. Zeda throws into relief the illusory character of this novel when he shares his experience of reading it. He explains that contemplating Spain through the “ojos lúgubres” of Azorín “nos causa el efecto de una pesadilla poblada de sombras dantescas con semblantes doloridos y actitudes y gestos trágicos. A veces leyendo a estos escritores, particularmente a Baroja y a Martínez Ruiz—a quienes de todas veras admiro,—me siento deprimido y casi acongojado, y hasta llego a pensar que España es un cementerio y cada casa un nicho” (265). But, of course, this is all an aesthetic illusion and a temporary affective experience; it is neither sociology nor reality. Zeda confirms this when he signals his awareness of the difference between art and reality: “Mas por fortuna, esta fantástica obsesión pasa pronto. Salgo a la calle, y a decir verdad, Madrid me parece quizás demasiado alegre, quizá por extremo aficionado a coger las flores del presente” (265). *La voluntad* brings to the reader despair rather than solace. And instead of offering ways to answer or deal with the socio-historical, it creates an aesthetic illusion for its own sake. It does not raise itself above society as a call for engagement or decision. Nor does it pretend to be the expression of a spirit that leads readers to some kind of political or sociological realization. The early reviewers do not detect in Martínez Ruiz’s novel any didacticism, tendentiousness, or conventionality; its value, they suggest, lies in its creation of an illusion, as well as in its formal innovations and embrace of indeterminacy.

La voluntad thus emerges as a work of aesthetic autonomy. It breaks away from literary convention and from any utilitarian function. Although the notion of autonomy is not operative or explicitly stated in these early reviews, it is nevertheless latent or implied in them. To highlight the aesthetic autonomy that *La voluntad* strives for, I turn to Adorno, who considers the autonomous artwork to be that which cannot be pressed in the service of a higher or practical end. Aesthetic autonomy is, according to Adorno, disinterested and self-governing and obeys no laws or standards that are external to it. Consequently, the autonomous artwork does not operate discursively; it does not strive to be an instrument to communicate any message or slogan that the author may endorse. This explains both the difficulty of deriving any definite meaning from *La voluntad*, and Zeda’s approbatory characterization of Martínez Ruiz’s novel as being “incoherente, ondulante..... y hasta contradictorio.” Although it takes up several topics of concern to the Spanish intelligentsia of that time, the novel offers no final overriding message. Different impulses, ideas, and themes all play into its construction. They include Yuste’s teachings on determinism and suffering, Azorín’s outrage against pacifism and the frivolity of

Spanish politics, the fascination with the mystical power of the Spanish landscape and with the life of religious devotion, the repugnance toward the vulgarity of Spanish village life, the political disillusion of Olaiz (Azorín's fellow intellectual in Madrid), and the faith in positivism that is voiced by "el Anciano" (an elderly erudite man residing in Madrid). All of these pronouncements, ideas, and themes, though they may be read literally, do not add up to any overall meaning of the work as a whole. This paradox exemplifies Adorno's statement that "What these [art]works say is not what their words say" (*Aesthetic* 184). By insisting on autonomy, *La voluntad* undermines the import of its semantic content and shifts its significance toward another form of cognition that involves affect. *La voluntad*, then, strives more for an exploration of disinterested contemplation than for any definite form of political praxis.

That an artwork seeks aesthetic autonomy and disinterested contemplation does not, however, mean that it is without any critical capability. Indeed, without a measure of autonomy, artworks run the risk of distorting our view of reality. Such is the case with those works that seek to copy reality. By seeking to rationally align the narrated world with the facts of experience, realist and naturalist literature ends up grafting onto the sociopolitical reality a coherence and rationality that is not inherent to it. Any protest against the social world launched in that kind of literature ultimately obeys a logic foreign to the world it protests against. A work may denounce the bourgeois class and the capitalist relations of exploitation, but by doing so through a purported objectivity and fidelity to the concrete world, it unwittingly casts the idea that the world is a Manichean struggle between two classes. Martínez Ruiz was aware that the problem to be critiqued goes much deeper and that human thought cannot be reduced to thinking in such rigid terms. Thus *La voluntad* turns away from moral denunciations wherein human individuality and experience are suppressed by automated forms of thinking.

Artworks gain a special critical capacity when they insist on their autonomy from the dominant mode of thinking, that is, when their various formal elements—language, metaphor, configuration of characters, plot, and time—obey no single rule. The more an artwork strives for autonomy, the more it can articulate the true nature of the social world, where there are no externally grafted rules that determine its complexities, contradictions, and conflicts. In other words, that an autonomous artwork obeys no artistic rules or precepts resembles more truthfully the social world in that it, too, does not obey any teleology whose precepts dictate how society must develop. Kafka's work, as read by Adorno, is a good example of how an autonomous artwork can truthfully mimic the social in such a way that it opens up the possibility for critique:

What is socially decisive in artworks is the content [*Inhalt*] that becomes eloquent through the work's formal structures. Kafka, in whose work monopoly capitalism appears only distantly, codifies in the dregs of the administered world what becomes of people under the total social spell more faithfully and powerfully than do any novels about corrupt industrial trusts. The thesis that form is the locus of social content [*Gehalt*] can be concretely shown in Kafka's language. (*Aesthetic* 230)

Even though the social and the political are not explicit in Kafka's work, they are nevertheless present in its formal structures and language. Through literary form, style,

and technique, Kafka's work gives expression to a deeper and less obvious level of capitalist culture, namely, the impoverishment of experience. This autonomy, which nevertheless expresses the social, places Kafka's work in a paradoxical situation: it is both a product of the withering of experience under capitalism, but also a resistance to it. It is a product because it mimics that withered experience, but it is also a form of resistance because it does not capitulate to the reductive, absolutist thinking that results from a withered experience.

Here the term mimesis, as Adorno understands it, is key. For Adorno, mimesis involves both affinity and difference; it is the gesture by which an artwork creates a narrative world but is not bound by it. In other words, the creation of an aesthetic illusion is not a form of slavish imitation, but instead involves the free arrangement of the artistic material. The artwork may bear an affinity with the social world, but it is not equal to it. Martin Jay explains this with great lucidity when he states that "Mimesis . . . involves a more sympathetic, compassionate, and noncoercive relationship of affinity between nonidentical particulars, which do not then become reified into two poles of a subject/object dualism" (123). In its mimetic function, then, art refuses to surrender its freedom to any external demand or rule; it acts of its own accord in mimicking the social reality but is not subject to any of the sociological or ideological principles espoused within that social reality. An artwork that might be understood as formalist or escapist may in fact be resisting the social forces that have absorbed everything else. In this way literature that strives for autonomy opens a space in which freedom from social forces emerges as a real possibility.

The political bent of the influential Hispanists who have read *La voluntad* has for many years deflected the possibility of reading Martínez Ruiz's work this way. Much of how the novel has been understood in Hispanist scholarship owes a great deal to Martínez Ruiz's early withdrawal from radical anarchism. One example is found in Pedro Laín Entralgo's influential *La Generación del 98*, which appeared in 1945. In a chapter tellingly titled "De la acción al ensueño," Laín Entralgo solidifies the view that after abandoning his "aventura regeneradora," Martínez Ruiz became obsessed with seeking a poetic transfiguration of Spain (346). For Laín Entralgo, *La voluntad* not only exemplifies the introspective turn in Martínez Ruiz's writing but also gives testament of his surrender to the fancy of "ensueño," the daydreaming or fantasizing of a Spain that once was, and could once again be, "originaria y pura" (443). This "aesthetic millenarianism," to use Manuel Barbeito Varela's term (351), not only accords with the nationalist program of the Franco regime but becomes the dominant textbook interpretation of the "Generation of 1898." With terms such as "ensueño," coupled with idealizations of a pure Spain, critics stripped Martínez Ruiz's work of any critical potency it might otherwise have. Angel del Río, whose history of Spanish literature enjoyed enormous acclaim and prestige, contributed to this whitewashing of Martínez Ruiz's work.³ In comparing Martínez Ruiz to the other members of the "Generation of 1898," del Río describes him as "el más apolítico de todos" and claims that any personal encounters he may have had with politics were "poco afortunados y carecen de significación para juzgar su obra" (234). By applying the term "apoliticismo" to Martínez

³ Del Río's *Historia de la literatura española* was originally published in 1948. A revised and expanded edition appeared in 1963, which is the one cited here.

Ruiz's work, and claiming that its predominant note is "su sensibilidad," del Río helped define the terms by which his work came to be judged by later students and critics.

On the leftward end of the ideological spectrum, *La voluntad* was also evaluated in light of Martínez Ruiz's early abandonment of political radicalism. Carlos Blanco Aguinaga, in his groundbreaking *Juventud del 98*, published in 1970, echoes Lain Entralgo's "ensoñación" when he describes the novel as being driven by a "voluntad de mistificación" (295). Blanco Aguinaga, moreover, accuses Martínez Ruiz of evading history and of deceiving readers by idealizing rather than historicizing Spain. For him, *La voluntad* stands as a complete abandonment of the critical stance that Martínez Ruiz had held during his youthful militancy. Thus the novel is little more than an "escamoteo de la Historia," a sleight of hand that disguises "paisajismo" as history (291).⁴ Luis Cernuda once described the "Generación del 98" as "aquel grupo de traidores y apóstatas," though he considered Antonio Machado and Valle-Inclán to be exceptions (382). It is certainly no surprise that a writer such as Cernuda, who maintained his militant Republicanism throughout his career, would judge Martínez Ruiz in such harsh terms. This *ad hominem* attack has much to do with Martínez Ruiz's eventual adoption of a more moderate politics, his five stints as deputy in the Cortes Generales between 1907 and 1919, and his association with the conservative newspaper *ABC*, to which he contributed regularly from 1905 until his death. All of these activities were anathema for literary critics on the left, including those of the stature of Blanco Aguinaga and Cernuda.

Critics have resorted to the idea of a personal crisis in Martínez Ruiz's life to explain his apparent shift from liberalism to conservatism, or as some prefer, from politicism to apoliticism. This biographical approach, however, only attests to the ideologically charged nature of much of the criticism that has surrounded his work. By resorting to this pseudo-biographical expedient, critics have inflated in importance a hazy period in Martínez Ruiz's life to explain a reversal of opinion they cannot fit into their ideological frameworks. The political polarization that had plagued Spanish history and had culminated in the civil war was the same one that helped solidify what Manuel M. Pérez López refers to as Martínez Ruiz's "imagen bifronte." This critic rightly notes that the reception history of Martínez Ruiz's work has not been "exenta de parcialidades y apreciaciones injustas" (Pérez López 89). Even when critics of such import as Ricardo Gullón had turned away from historically- and ideologically-informed criticism and moved toward formalism and stylistics, appraisals of Martínez Ruiz's work continued to be bogged down by reference to biography and other "criterios . . . extraestéticos" (Pérez López 90). Critics on both ends of the political spectrum, especially during the Franco dictatorship, have insisted on constructing "un Azorín contemplativo, casticista, ensoñador de una España eterna y paralítica" (Lozano Marco, "José" 350). This is, in effect, an Azorín defined by contrast to his early radicalism and militancy. Later criticism of a more analytical and less partisan sort, which emerged after the Franco dictatorship, continued to be rooted in this "imagen bifronte" of Martínez Ruiz. Perplexed by this biographical anomaly, critics have sought explanations in the personal crisis they believe Martínez Ruiz suffered between the spring of 1898 and the fall-winter of 1899, which

⁴ Blanco Aguinaga judges Martínez Ruiz quite severely when he describes him as "el más hábil escamoteador de la realidad histórica de su tiempo," and his attitude toward history as "radicalmente reaccionaria" (289, 290).

many believe was enshrined in *La voluntad*.⁵ The period in question, however, is in fact one of silence for Martínez Ruiz, who during that time withdrew from the literary and journalistic world. For Pérez López, this period of silence is the exact moment in which Martínez Ruiz suffers a profound sense of “insatisfacción” brought on by several factors: pressure from his family for him to complete his studies, disappointment with his career and financial situation, frustration with the frivolity and zealotry of Spain’s literary world, disillusion with the political situation, disappointment that his work had not contributed to any change, disaffection toward his ideological commitments, and finally, suspicion that his aesthetic principles no longer suited his new, more nihilistic way of thinking (Pérez López 92-93).⁶

This appeal to a personal and intellectual crisis to explain Martínez Ruiz’s change in orientation has only reinforced a historicist approach that transposes a general *fin-de-siglo* crisis onto the life and work of one author. Critics and historians have come to understand Spain’s crisis to be in line with the European breakdown of bourgeois values that was brought about by the rapidly emerging forces of industrialism. This breakdown prompted a variety of responses that could not be reconciled into any coherent program: some sought political change through direct revolution, while others through reform, grounded in pragmatic means or aimed at spiritual betterment; some sought refuge in nihilism as an escape from rationalism, while others sought aestheticism as way of fighting against bourgeois utilitarianism. Martínez Ruiz took up, at one time or another, and even simultaneously, all of these contradictory responses. And that they could not be reconciled has led many critics to posit the idea of a personal crisis as a way to explain what they see as a before-and-after anomaly in Martínez Ruiz’s work. Although the insights derived from this biography-based hypothesis are certainly illuminating, it nevertheless seems that these critics have been too quick to subsume Martínez Ruiz, the individual, under a general axiom about the European *fin-de-siècle*.⁷

The Pursuit of Artistic Autonomy in *La voluntad*

⁵ Other critics have dated the moment of crisis differently. Inman Fox claims that it took root in 1901, when Martínez Ruiz’s article “Ciencia y fe” outraged his fellow anarchists by calling for a more sober appraisal of Galdós’s *Electra*. The violent reaction the article provoked among his fellow anticlericalists led Martínez Ruiz to question his libertarian principles, which he abandoned definitively in 1904 (Fox, *Ideología* 88). Rafael Pérez de la Dehesa, on the other hand, places the crisis in 1897, when Martínez Ruiz was dismissed from two newspapers, *El País* and *La Batalla*, for his controversial articles on marriage and property, which had infuriated subscribers. These dismissals, coupled with Clarín’s advice that he should temper his radicalism if he ever wanted to write good literature, led to a profound intellectual and moral crisis that drew him away from his revolutionary fanaticism (Pérez de la Dehesa, “Un desconocido” 284).

⁶ Lozano Marco elaborates on Pérez López’s claim by describing Martínez Ruiz’s crisis as an evolution rather than as an abrupt change. He argues that some of the aesthetic principles that would inform Martínez Ruiz’s post-crisis work—such as those derived from the Belgian Symbolists and Jean-Marie Guyau—were already present in some of the work he wrote during his libertarian phase (“J. Martínez Ruiz”).

⁷ A case in point can be found in Pérez López, who states the following: “El camino que conduce de Martínez Ruiz a Azorín es el testimonio de la progresiva permeabilidad del autor a las inquietudes de su tiempo, de su fidelidad a la ‘sensibilidad vital’ (en términos orteguianos) que identifica a su época” (97).

A perusal of Martínez Ruiz's literary-journalistic articles and personal correspondence during his transformative period suggests something other than an intimate crisis. What we see instead in his early writings is evidence of a considered and studied process of intellectual maturation, as well as an enthusiastic pursuit of artistic finesse and sophistication. It is precisely during this supposed "crisis" that Martínez Ruiz enjoys the approbation and encouragement of one of Spain's most important intellectuals at that time, Leopoldo Alas "Clarín." Clarín became a kind of mentor to the young Martínez Ruiz, who at the outset of his writing career had initiated a correspondence with the renowned novelist and feared critic. From Clarín's articles and letters, it is clear that he had faith in the young firebrand, whose only impediment toward artistic achievement was his naïve embrace of radical anarchism. Indeed, the far-sighted Clarín understood that Martínez Ruiz's early flirtation with radicalism would ultimately serve as a lesson that would allow him to achieve literary brilliance and rise above the petty polemics of immature radicals who launched reckless attacks against the literary and intellectual establishment. This process of intellectual maturity is what Clarín means by the peculiar use of the term "*salud*" when he writes: "Pasará el sarampión, que acaso es *salud*, y quedará un escritor original, independiente, y mucho más avisado que esos Nominativos que andan por ahí parodiando a Menéndez y Pelayo" (qtd. in Rubio Jiménez 87). Clarín encourages Martínez Ruiz to read and study the great philosophers, and to stay away from second-rate anarchist philosophy. In return, the young writer expresses gratitude for these encouragements and for Clarín's positive reviews of his first works, *La evolución de la crítica*, *Los hidalgos*, and *El alma castellana*. Clarín explains, in reviews he published during and after Martínez Ruiz's supposed "crisis," that behind the façade of radicalism lies great literary skill, and he asks the public to have patience with this young writer, who is in the process of outgrowing his youthful impetuosity: "Martínez Ruiz [es] uno de los jóvenes que más prometen, a mi juicio, aunque sus comienzos fueron de *enfant terrible*. Mucho se va corrigiendo el simpático anarquista, pero todavía es demasiado *absolutista* en sus odios, en sus desprecios, en sus amores." Clarín goes on to explain that his mentee "luce . . . sus progresos de estilista" and has been working toward achieving intellectual and artistic maturity: "Martínez Ruiz lee mucho y reflexiona, como lo prueba este opúsculo. Pero . . . a leer más y a llegar pronto a la madurez, que tantas ideas trueca" (qtd. in Rubio Jiménez 116).⁸

The letters that Martínez Ruiz sent to Clarín during his "crisis" exude a sense of optimism and resolve: "Gracias, mil gracias por su crítica . . . tan bondadosa, tan oportuna. . . Trabajo mucho; desde las siete de la mañana hasta las diez de la noche no paro de estudiar . . . No sabe usted los sacrificios de salud y de dinero que esta pasión por

⁸ Clarín was not the only intellectual of renown who noticed Martínez Ruiz's intellectual potential. In an article Martínez Ruiz published in February 1898, also during his "crisis," he chronicles an interview he had with Unamuno. In this article, Unamuno voices his concerns about the "culto idólatrico al progreso," and explains, approvingly, that he sees Martínez Ruiz as being different from those raucous, unreflective anarchists: "Ya sé que todas estas reflexiones suelen parecer enojosas o simples a los que meten mucho ruido para no oírse, a los que se emborrachan de vida, a los que se arrojan al torrente de los sucesos y huyen de todo recogimiento para no encontrarse en ningún momento a solas consigo mismos. Pero sé que usted no es de éstos. Sé que hoy por hoy nos separa en creencias un abismo, pero presiento que en caracteres no divergimos mucho" (Martínez Ruiz, *Artículos* 78).

la literatura me cuesta.” He also notes that he has withdrawn himself from the literary world of Madrid to focus on his studies, and that he has been living reclusively with the aim of writing something worthwhile: “No deseo más que hacer *algo*, algo que merezca la pena leerse” (qtd. in Rubio Jiménez 117). In other letters he reiterates this dual commitment to his studies and to honing his literary craft. The measure of optimism in these letters makes it difficult to accept that the young Martínez Ruiz was overcome by a crisis at this period in his life. His correspondence with Clarín does not suggest the kind of pessimism and nihilism that critics have mechanically transposed from the historical context onto his personal experience. It is more accurate to say that his correspondence bespeaks a sense of optimism regarding his artistic development. And this optimism is informed by a conscious liberation from his “vanidad literaria” (qtd. in Rubio Jiménez 121) and from the frivolity and ideological enthrallment in which Madrid’s intellectual circles are caught. Indeed, these letters attest to a process by which Martínez Ruiz strives for autonomy as an artist. Thus the young writer fulfills Clarín’s prediction that he will overcome the “sarampión” of radicalism and will become “un escritor original, independiente, y mucho más avisado que esos Nominativos” (qtd. in Rubio Jiménez 87).

That the term “autonomy” has hardly caught on in criticism of Martínez Ruiz’s work certainly has to do with the generational model—originally proposed by Martínez Ruiz himself—that became the template on which his work was read. The idea of a “Generation” of writers who share similar concerns precludes, almost by definition, the very notion of autonomy. There have, however, been a couple of instances in which critics have resorted to the notion of autonomy, or at least to its implication. One is José-Carlos Mainer, who in 1980 noted with great accuracy, though without elaborating his point, that with *La voluntad* Martínez Ruiz “intentó la imposible aventura de la autonomía de la literatura” (“José” 379).⁹ The other instance, which did not appear until 1992, was articulated by Germán Gullón, in his *La novela moderna en España (1885-1902)*, where he states the following:

La característica de *Azorín* que vengo destacando consiste precisamente en que nos coloca ante un texto [*La voluntad*] sin ningún discurso predominante; en el texto compiten visiones encontradas, la de Yuste, la de Lasalde, la de Martínez Ruiz, sin que aparezca la ortodoxa. Nos encontramos ante un descendiente de la corriente del arte por el arte, cuando el texto flota desprendido de cualquier anclaje institucional o canónico. (189)

Gullón hits the mark by highlighting the novel’s autonomy from any artistic and cultural orthodoxy. He argues that Martínez Ruiz’s great accomplishment was to create an artwork that refused to settle on any external principles or genre norms. As an artist, Martínez Ruiz “se sitúa en el ojo del huracán creativo, la lengua, y en ella inventa su propia brújula” (Gullón, *La novela* 187), which enables him to break the novel down to fragments by means of ellipses, interruptions, and montage. To this technique of fragmentation, which has been repeatedly commented upon by critics, Gullón adds one

⁹ Mainer was also right in this article to be skeptical about the tendency to read Martínez Ruiz’s work through his biography. After discussing Azorín’s change in political orientation he offers the following caveat: “Pero tampoco cabe aquí una transposición mecánica del reaccionarismo político [de Azorín] . . . a un reaccionarismo literario” (“José” 375).

that he claims is distinct: the juxtaposition of “conjuntos temáticos” from different discursive spheres. This leads Gullón to claim that *La voluntad* anticipates the postmodern novel in that it brings together a heterogeneous collage of discourses, which include meditations on Nietzschean and Schopenhauerian philosophy, evocations of Daumier’s lithographs, references to Platonic dialogues, reproductions of letters, including one by Tolstoy, alternating descriptions of urban and rural scenes, and shifts between literary forms such as dialogue, impressionist description, and conventional narration (Gullón, *La novela* 188). Thus *La voluntad* lacks a center and precludes any assured interpretation; it offers no secure ground, or *locus*, as Gullón calls it, on which the critic can base his critical apparatus. Instead, the novel confronts the reader with its *punctum*, which is a term Gullón draws from Barthes to refer to those incommunicable felicities of the text that affect the reader’s sensibility. These felicities gain their force through an endless play of signifiers in which meaning is neither determinate nor immediately present but is dispersed and flickers into awareness according to the ever-changing affective and cognitive circumstances of the reader. The *punctum*, like an arrow’s point, pierces the reader affectively and lies outside the text’s legible and stable codes of signification. For Gullón, *La voluntad*’s significance lies in the fact that it signals a turn in the modern novel from the *locus* to the *punctum* (*La novela* 202-203).

Gullón is very perceptive in noting the autonomous character of *La voluntad*, but he nevertheless understands it merely as freedom from literary norms and thus loses sight of the critical capacity that aesthetic autonomy has in relation to the social. His primary aim is to situate *La voluntad* in a poststructuralist labyrinth of language and indeterminacy, but in doing so he recasts the novel as being unaffected by social and ideological forces. That is, Gullón understands autonomy more as opposition to artistic norms than as opposition to social ones. Such a conception of the novel certainly owes a great deal to the influence of poststructuralism informing his essay, and perhaps also to the abiding tendency to cleanse Martínez Ruiz’s work of any critical potency.

There is, however, good reason to restore the social aspect of *La voluntad* and to see its autonomous character as a refusal to capitulate to the prevailing ideologies of positivism and idealism and even anarchism. Martínez Ruiz’s meditations on art’s relation to revolution reveal a great deal of what characterizes the autonomy *La voluntad* strives for. His early flirtations with anarchism confronted him with the growing dichotomy that emerged within the libertarian conception of literature. On one hand was the idea that literature should focus on being accessible to a largely uneducated working-class public, and that it should disseminate libertarian ideas and incite readers to take revolutionary action. On the other hand was the idea that literature should instead focus on breaking from the literary establishment and from traditional aesthetic norms. Though these two tendencies had originally coexisted in anarchist and socialist publications, their differences would eventually solidify and would generate much debate over the true function of literature in social revolution. Martínez Ruiz’s interventions in this debate and the nature of his literary work at that time show him oscillating between both conceptions. The title of his 1895 tract, *Anarquistas literarios*, published during his radical period, expresses the comingling of the two tendencies: literature, he argues, must advance certain ideals and change political values, but it should also be free from any conventionalisms and externally imposed obligations. In later articles, also prior to *La voluntad*, we see this contradiction reproduced: he protests against Decadentism and

Symbolism, claiming that their blithe aestheticism obfuscates the ideals that literature ought to communicate; but he also reverses his opinion when in other articles he praises the Catalan *modernistes* for their avant-garde flair and the Symbolists for the “vibrante emoción” their work inspires in him (*Artículos* 80-82, 86-89). It seems paradoxical that while Martínez Ruiz militantly denounces Symbolism he is at the same time practicing it in his earliest works: *Soledades* (1898) and *Diario de un enfermo* (1901). This commingling of utilitarianism and literary iconoclasm in his articles persists well into 1902, the year of *La voluntad*’s publication.

What is unique about *La voluntad* is that it absorbs and carefully rearticulates these two tendencies, namely, that literature should have political implications but that it should also not be reduced to any utilitarian program. But such commingling has usually been read more as a product of confusion than of careful rearticulation. This is evident in how some have read Martínez Ruiz’s early literary articles, which grapple with and oscillate between both these seemingly contradictory views about literature. Juan Rodríguez offers a useful inventory of these articles but he dismisses them as an “abanico de contradicciones,” and concludes that they are just another example of the ideological confusion of the *fin-de-siglo* crisis (“Martínez” 155). He notes, moreover, that ultimately Martínez Ruiz “habría de decantarse por abandonar—como tantos otros—la revolución social y desarrollar la revolución estética, incapaz de superar dialécticamente esa contradicción” (“Martínez” 156). Though he is right that Martínez Ruiz abandons his militancy and moves toward artistic experimentation, his other claim—that Martínez Ruiz fails to “superar dialécticamente esa contradicción”—is perhaps too hasty in its definitiveness. And yet the fact that Rodríguez understands the problem of reconciling these contradictions as being a dialectical one is nevertheless very insightful and suggestive, for it points to the possibility of understanding, negatively, *La voluntad*’s movement toward artistic autonomy as a resistance to the sociopolitical and historical conditions of the time. To use Frederic Jameson’s clever metaphor for the dialectic at work in autonomous artworks (35): *La voluntad* is like the concave inscribed in the convex that is the socio-political.

***La voluntad*’s Aesthetic Autonomy and the Sociopolitical**

This understanding of *La voluntad*’s autonomy as a form of resistance centered on the novel’s aesthetic quality registers a radical shift in focus in Martínez Ruiz’s literary trajectory, one that he achieved during his period of serious study under the mentorship of Clarín. What was once his militant assumption that artists can utilize literature to protest and help overthrow the bourgeois establishment, has, in *La voluntad*, unfolded into the realization that such a tendentious use of literature ultimately obeys the absolutist and ideologically coercive logic underpinning the very bourgeois and reactionary culture that inspired leftist protests. Tendentious literature, whose sole purpose is to communicate a political principle, manipulates the reader’s cognition by prescribing a worldview—usually Manichean and reductive—that not only conforms to a political slogan but inhibits the reader from thinking beyond the mandates of partisan doctrine. Just as the Church in Restoration Spain, in its struggle to suppress heterodoxy, sought to domesticate all individuals to its doctrine, so partisan literature sought to get these same

individuals to obey revolutionary doctrine. And just as the State, in serving the economic interests of the bourgeoisie, denied individual liberty, so tendentious literature, in serving the interests of a revolutionary creed, denied the individual's capacity to think freely and affectively when engaging a text. Thus utilitarian literature found its analogue in the ideological coercion perpetrated by the religious and reactionary establishment.

That *La voluntad* strives for aesthetic autonomy bespeaks not so much of disaffection or escapism but of a higher, more conscious ambition, one that goes beyond the iconoclastic subversion of literary tradition and assumes a respectful attitude toward the individual and the particular as opposed to the abstract and universal. By lacking a center and penetrating the reader's affective experience the novel does much more than Gullón had assumed. Its formal innovations and felicities register, dialectically, a resistance to the ideological nature of Spanish liberalism, which had come to dominate intellectual and political life in *fin-de-siglo* Spain. Having derived its assumptions from eighteenth-century rationalism and idealism, liberal ideology threatened human emancipation by absorbing human particularity into a façade of coherence that precluded true forms of freedom and experience. This trend, or rather threat, in Spanish thought was most evident in the liberal historiography of the time and in the certitudes of anarchist culture. A brief excursus into the nature of these enterprises becomes necessary to understand *La voluntad's* critical potency as an artwork.

The nationalist tendency of liberal historiography in Spain—that is, the historiography that flourished from the mid-nineteenth to the early twentieth century—owes a great deal to German intellectuals such as Herder and the Schlegel brothers, and to conservative thinkers of Spanish romanticism (Fox, *La invención* 36). As Inman Fox explains, the genre of the “historia general” made its first appearance with the publication of Modesto Lafuente's *Historia General de España, desde los tiempos primitivos hasta nuestros días* (1850-1867) and became a kind of secularized bible whose protagonist was the pueblo, or the *volksgeist*. Later historians, influenced by Francisco Giner de los Ríos's Krausist teachings, took culture, or the “cultura común,” as the basis of their histories. What came to be known variously as the “genio,” “psicología,” “carácter,” and “espíritu” of the nation was, liberal historians believed, given expression in the literature, language, and art of the people. This “internal” history was for liberal intellectuals the basis of historiography, for it defined the true, unchanging nature of the nation and stood in opposition to the ephemeral and contingent “external” history of politics that had so often interfered with the progressive and liberal essence of the Spanish people. Wary of this idealizing tendency within historiography, Rafael Altamira introduced a positivist approach with his monumental *Historia de España y de la civilización española* (1899-1906). Altamira's conception of society in this work was based on the biological notion that an organism is made up of multiple parts that have diverse functions but one sole aim. For Altamira, the individual belongs, organically, to a collective that develops into what he calls an “espíritu público,” a “conciencia social,” and an “opinión pública.” Fox explains that for Altamira, the basis of nationalism is the “persona social,” which is independent of the subjective will of its members and is the product of a historical development, or evolution, that brings together a multiplicity of energies and qualities, and gives rise to a nation's laws, morality, religion, and art (Fox, *La invención* 50-51). By centering on the Spanish *volksgeist*, liberal historiography cast the “problema de España” as being the result of the failed promises of Spain's progressive-minded medieval culture,

a culture that not only had given rise to the mythical heroism of el Cid and the intellectual agility of Gracián but had culminated in the unification of the nation-state under the Catholic Monarchs. These histories enabled liberal intellectuals such as Lucas Mallada, in his *Los males de la patria y la futura revolución española* (1890), and Macías Picavea, in his *El problema nacional* (1899) to explain the socio-political crisis in Spain in terms of character defects believed to have been brought about by the pernicious interference of Habsburg absolutism, militarism, and religious intolerance. Such defects, they claimed, were linked to and exacerbated by the physical constitution of the land. Thus Spanish backwardness was due to historically anomalous vices such as indolence, fantasy, ignorance, and the thoughtless use of language and ideas (Fox, *La invención* 58-59). The effort by intellectuals to restore Spain to its proper course, that is, to the virtuous character it had exhibited in medieval times, came to be known, at the turn of the century, as “regeneracionismo.”

Just as liberal historians and intellectuals tended to see Spanish history as a lineal progression toward freedom and social justice that had been interrupted by Habsburg influence, so anarchist ideologues tended to see history and philosophy as moving toward the fulfillment of an anarchist social order. Anarchist intellectuals did not write “historias generales” of their own, for they saw liberal historiography to be in tune to their own ideology. They saw themselves as the catalyst for the next phase—the anarchist phase—of the bourgeois revolution. The shared ideology of liberal historians and anarchists, however, did not keep anarchist intellectuals from criticizing the bourgeois class’ failure to fulfill its ideals of equality and liberty. Consumed by the a quasi-religious faith in the fated triumph of reason and liberty, anarchist ideologues insisted on a naively conceived conception of history, one that was linear and utopian and advanced inexorably toward the moral perfection of humanity. One example of this is Federico Urales (pseudonym of Juan Montseny), who was one of Spain’s most important anarchist propagandists and founder and editor of the *Revista Blanca* (1898-1905). In his *La evolución de la filosofía en España*, which he published in serial form from 1900 to 1902, Urales offers an ambitious survey of the history of philosophy that includes “primitive” Spain and Asia, classical Greece and Imperial Rome, and early modern and contemporary Spain. He argues that each philosophical system that has appeared in history has had some current within it that drives intellectual history in the direction of anarchism. Thus his claim that “hemos visto cómo la evolución de la filosofía y de la ciencia propiamente dicha, por lo que a España se refiere, conduce a un principio anárquico” (*La evolución* 82). A few pages later, he rounds off this claim when he asks rhetorically: “¿Qué duda cabe de que a la anarquía va la humanidad?” (*La evolución* 88). This teleological view of history, in which human rationality and its technical advances would finally bring an end to human suffering and injustice, was very common in Spain’s anarchist culture. Many were the pamphlets and sociological tracts that popularized this sort of triumphalism.

And yet despite its good intentions, the triumphant but schematic nature of liberal historiography and anarchist teleology brought with it a liquidation of human agency. The human liberty that anarchists valued could not be reconciled with the insistence on historical determinism. Anarchists ideologues often resorted to roundabout explanations to accommodate both these principles, but ultimately they could not resolve them in any convincing manner. This has led Alvarez Junco to conclude that “El tema, por tanto, se resuelve con ambiguas declaraciones de determinismo social siempre respetuosas de la

libertad humana final” (*La ideología* 110). Despite the precarious equilibrium between these two antinomian principles—historical determinism and human liberty—what stands out in anarchist discourse is the uncritical acceptance of scientific progress. Alvarez Junco, once again, is good on this point: “Ni marxistas ni liberales pueden competir con el anarquismo en esta fe verdaderamente ciega en las hazañas del progreso técnico y su capacidad para alterar radicalmente el planteamiento del problema político-social” (*La ideología* 75). Anarchists used terms such as “el reinado de la razón,” “el imperio de la ciencia,” and “la realización del ideal racional” to describe the social program they envisioned (Alvarez Junco, *La ideología* 66). In this future society, science replaces authority and thus eliminates arbitrariness in political decision-making. The measures proposed by Fernando Tárrida de Mármol, who was another influential anarchist intellectual, and was also a professor of mathematics, exemplified the scientific-rationalist nature of the anarchist social program. Tárrida de Mármol suggests that social data should be gathered, placed on coordinates, and subjected to mathematical analysis in order to obtain “una curva cuya ecuación será precisamente la ecuación del problema que se trata de resolver” (qtd. in Alvarez Junco, *La ideología* 70). This procedure turns politics into a kind of arithmetic, and treats human relations as physical-natural phenomena that can be reduced to rational explanation. The titles of some of the tracts proposing this view are themselves very telling: *Química de la cuestión social; o sea, Organismo científico de la revolución* (1886) by Teobaldo Nieva, and *Continuidad de la sociología con las ciencias naturales*, which is the title of the second part of *Humanidad del porvenir* (1906) by Enrique Lluria.

It is against this intellectual climate that *La voluntad* adjusts itself as a work of aesthetic autonomy. In an article published in 1903, the year after *La voluntad*'s publication, Martínez Ruiz noted how the expression “¡Adáptese al medio!” and its counterpart “¡No se ha adaptado al medio!” had come to pervade public discourse (*Artículos* 149). Despite the vagueness of what “el medio” meant, public opinion demanded that everyone—especially politicians and writers—adapt to it. According to the prevailing wisdom of liberal culture, social progress depended on the individual's surrender to a higher good. Such a demand on the individual followed in the tradition of the historiography just outlined. It also defined, negatively, what aesthetic autonomy would have to involve, namely, the restoration of the individual's agency. So rather than replicate the logic of the social whereby the individual must adapt to prescribed meanings, *La voluntad* insists that the reader exercise his own cognitive and affective agency for its own sake. And the novel does this by leaving gaps in which the reader is free to give meaning.

I take the idea of gaps is from Wolfgang Iser, who argues that the variety of perspectives, elements, and forms that make up a literary text leaves “gaps” that need to be filled in by the reader. The reader, when engaging such a text, must assume an active role in interpreting and creating the meaning of a text. This meaning, moreover, can never be fixed or stable, because the reader himself is always being modified by the variability of his social and affective circumstances. At work is a dynamic interaction between reader and text in which the reader performs a “constitutive activity” that brings his subjectivity to life. Thus “As the reader passes through the various perspectives offered by the text, and relates the different views and patterns to one another, he sets the work in motion, and so sets himself in motion, too” (Iser 106).

Fortunately for the reader's sense of agency, *La voluntad* is riddled with gaps. In what follows, I will offer a series of close readings that highlight some of the ways in which the novel's gaps not only activate the reader's individual sense of judgment but also invite forms of reading that subvert the habit of thinking in abstractions and absolutes at the cost of the particular. These gaps, moreover, give the novel a contrapuntal aesthetic, in which the explicitly stated themes of social and historical determinism are countered by the vitality of the anecdotal and the micrological, and in which the scientific and the rationally communicative are countered by the conspiratorial and the sensational. By reading *La voluntad* this way, I hope to show that it is a work of resistance, rather than of capitulation, to the forceful ideologies of Spanish liberalism.

One of the novel's most salient gaps lies between its thematic substance and its formal innovations. Thematically, *La voluntad* centers on the *fin-de-siglo* pessimism, disillusion, and confusion of the protagonist, Azorín. His frequent discussions with Yuste, Lasalde, and other figures showcase many of the philosophical, political, and artistic ideas that emerge out of Azorín's brand of spiritual and intellectual crisis. *La voluntad's* relevance as a key text of the "Generation of 1898" is owed to the fact that it explores some of the ills plaguing Spain, such as the oppressiveness of religious dogmatism, the frivolity of the intellectual and political establishment, and the moral lethargy of the Spanish people. These themes follow the ideological discourse of national regeneration and can thus be read as a critique of the moral and political decadence of Restoration Spain. In this sense, Kathleen M. Glenn is right in describing *La voluntad* as a "protest novel" (23). At the opposite end of the gap lies the novel's formal experimentation, which instead of communicating themes, seeks to create certain moods and effects. Some of *La voluntad's* most salient innovations have to do with temporal fragmentation, narrative discontinuity, multiplicity of narrative perspectives, impressionism, and subjectivism—none of which, of course, seem to have any bearing on the political project of *regeneracionismo*. With these formal innovations, *La voluntad* breaks with the tenets of the literary establishment and moves into the realm of modernism.

The interplay between these two tendencies—the thematic and the formal—makes for a discomfiting movement between critique and affirmation. On one hand, there is a thematized critique of the oppressive forces that pervade Spain: religious dogmatism, intellectual pessimism, and moral *abulia*. Here the critique is predefined by the politics of *regeneracionismo*, such that the novelist merely adds human flesh to ready-made ideas. On the other hand, there is an affirmation of the vitality and new horizons demonstrated by the novel's formal experimentations that invite the reader to think, feel, and experience in ways that are free from any ideologically prescribed concepts or directives. This dual experience in reading *La voluntad* has a profound implication when considering the intellectually stultifying culture of Restoration Spain. Though the movement within this duality does not itself constitute a political gesture or protest, it nevertheless defies the historiographical and ideological habits that threaten human particularity. And it does this by reminding the reader that even within a static, reactionary, and backward atmosphere, such as the one described in the narrative, there is still a realm of freedom available to him. What follows is a reading that reveals precisely how, through this dual experience, or gap, *La voluntad* dignifies human particularity.

From the very beginning of the novel, in the prologue, the history of the old and decrepit town of Yecla, where much of the narrative takes place, is presented as a closed circuit of eternal return. Just as the ancients built pagan temples, so Yecla's residents are destined to build a Christian one. And just as Yuste became absorbed by his own skepticism and disillusionment, so Azorín must eventually be defeated by that same skepticism and disillusionment. This is the "ciego determinismo" that Yuste discusses early in the novel (142), and it is what leads Azorín to his fate as the docile and defeated don Antoñico. It is the natural consequence of living in a country of religious vulgarity and political frivolousness—and this, on a first reading, seems to be the novel's central message.

But the formal dynamics of *La voluntad* counter its manifest claims about the discourses of social determinism. Several critics have already suggested that this novel embodies a certain "openness" that enables it to transcend determinism. In the introduction to his edition of *La voluntad*, Inman Fox points out the linguistic features that undermine any sense of causation in the narrative's development. These features include the absence of relative pronouns and of clauses and subordinating conjunctions (Fox, Introduction 42-46). From early in the novel's reception history, this linguistic technique has been attributed to the influence of impressionism. Kathleen Glenn, in focusing on the episodic aspect of the novel, describes it as a series of snapshots, picked up and examined at random, and placed next to each other with only tenuous connections between them. Such a technique makes for a novel that is fragmented and discontinuous, and thus free from any tightly knit sequence of actions and events (Glenn 61-62). Fernando Lázaro Carreter, in studying the novels published by Unamuno, Baroja, and Martínez Ruiz in 1902, notes that the insistent use of the present tense, which is very much the case in *La voluntad*, steers the novel away from the "clima cerrado y clausurado" of the realist novel (137). These techniques "open" up the novel so that the reader can give meaning to the text, which is ironically an exercise of that which Antoñico lacks: agency.

The gap between the novel's explicitly articulated theme of social determinism and the aesthetic agency that it invites also takes place in the texture of its language. The language of Yuste and Puche, who embody the forces that determine Azorín's fate, contrasts sharply with the language of the narration itself, in which these characters are embedded. Yuste and Puche, and thus their teachings, are expressed through a closed and rigid rationality that leaves no room for human agency. It is so closed that their political, religious, and philosophical ideas are derived from syllogisms. Here is an example of one of Yuste's teachings:

La sustancia es única y eterna. Los fenómenos son la única manifestación de la sustancia. Los fenómenos son mis sensaciones. Y mis sensaciones, limitadas por los sentidos, son tan falaces y contingentes como los mismos sentidos. (131)

And here is Puche explaining his religious beliefs to the young Justina:

el mundo es enemigo del amor de Dios. Y el amor de Dios es la paz. Mas el hombre ama las cosas de la tierra. Y las cosas de la tierra se llevan nuestra paz. (126)

Both Azorín and Justina, who listen intently to their teachers, hardly have any say in the lessons they are taught. They are, in effect, being indoctrinated.

But the text in which these lessons are embedded demands quite the opposite from the reader. That is, instead of indoctrinating the reader, the text lets him revel in its aesthetic effects. Take for instance the first paragraph of the first section:

A lo lejos, una campana toca lenta, pausada, melancólica. El cielo comienza a clarear indeciso. La niebla se extiende en larga pincelada blanca sobre el campo. Y en clamoroso concierto de voces agudas, graves, chirriantes, metálicas, confusas, imperceptibles, sonoras, todos los gallos de la ciudad dormida cantan.
(119)

There's something about the first sentence that immediately tugs at one's awareness of the feel and form of the words. That something is the missing adverbial form (-mente) that would normally be attached to "melancólica" in its modification of the verb "tocar." Though this violation of grammar is not exactly jarring, it is nevertheless disconcerting. It is as if the language promised a suffix, but didn't deliver. Consequently, we find that the verb "toca" is paired with a series of adjectives ("lenta, pausada, melancólica") but must function as a copulative while continuing to retain its resonance as an action. Which function is ultimately at work—copulative or action—depends entirely on the reader, who is no longer bound to the logic of grammar.

Take also the first three sentences of the passage: they are simple, short, and have a certain "slowness" to them, which in the first two sentences is due to the fact that the verbs, by functioning as copulatives, elicit adjectives whose final vowels match the gender of their respective subjects. Hence the resonance of the feminine morpheme "a" of "campana" is extended across three adjectives: "lenta," "pausada," "melancólica." In the second sentence something similar happens with the vowels of "cielo," as they double back on themselves in the adjective "indeciso." And in the third sentence, the "slowness" of the "niebla" is registered through a drawing out of another "a" vowel in "larga pincelada blanca." This slowness, however, is interrupted by the "clamoroso concierto" of "gallos," whereby a chaotic piling up of adjectives creates a rapid, dissonant jumbling of vowels, consonants, and accents ("agudas, graves, chirriantes, metálicas, confusas, imperceptibles, sonoras").

The gap between the *regenerationista* ideas communicated in the text and the sensations felt through the text's formal dynamics can also be understood as a gap between the social determinism that steers Azorín's fate and the unrestrictedness of the novel's linguistic experimentation. To this gap one can add several others, including the duality of atmosphere and detail. Chapter three of the first section can serve as an example of how this duality works. It describes the somber atmosphere of Yuste's study through a patient inventory that insists on repeating, rather than collectivizing, the names of things, in this case, books: "Llenan los estantes de oloroso alerce, libros, muchos libros, infinitos libros —libros en amarillo pergamino, libros pardos de jaspeada piel y encerados cantos rojos, enormes infolios de sonadoras hojas, diminutas ediciones de elzevirianos tipos" (128). Shortly thereafter, the narrator describes a portrait of an elderly woman and a girl, in which there is a skull sitting on a table and a sign on the wall that

reads “*Nascendo morimur*” (128). Death pervades this dark study where Azorín sits and listens to Yuste’s lessons. And the text itself exudes a certain grimness and melancholy. The creation of this deathlike atmosphere has a curious effect in that it brings to life the objects it describes. The books it inventories are individuated and made tactile by the yellowness of their pages, the feel of their leather binding, and the sound of their crackling pages. They are, in effect, brought to life through their tactility. And even the bookcase itself emits the smell of the larch tree from which it was made. Within this oppressively bleak and somber atmosphere, life finds expression in the details, in the minute. In the grim portrait that so explicitly thematizes death, the woman and child become animated: “Y la anciana y la niña, atentas, cuidadosas, reflexivas, parecen escrutar con su mirada interrogante el misterio infinito” (129). These two figures are not just angled in a certain direction within the picture plane, subservient to the overriding theme of the portrait; instead their spirited gazes assert themselves against the immense power of death. Here the woman and daughter refuse to “adaptarse al medio.”

This attention to the minor aspects of the fictional world and their refusal to be absorbed by larger themes points to another related gap between a teleological and a micrological conception of history. José Antonio Maravall refers to this dualism as an opposition between “*historia en grande*” and “*microhistoria*” (“Azorín” 56). He observes that for Martínez Ruiz repetition is the inexorable force that drives historical development. Social and political changes are merely the surface appearance for a law of repetition, which, in Maravall’s view, arises out of a scientific cast of mind. What goes unseen in this teleological conception of history are the minute details of everyday life—“lo trivial, vulgar, anodino, humilde” (Maravall, “Azorín” 50). These are happenings as simple and spontaneous as a discussion in a town casino, a reading of a book, or a hand that gestures for moderation (Maravall, “Azorín” 55). Such little events—despite the presumptions of the “*historia en grande*”—have always been part of history. If they have been excluded from it, it has only been because of the historian’s focus or scope.¹⁰ History and ideology may move in tidal shifts, but Martínez Ruiz insists that at the microhistorical level there continues to prevail “la iniciativa libre, el libre desenvolvimiento de la persona, el libre pensar, el libre sentir” (qtd. in Maravall, “Azorín” 35). Thus any escape from the cyclical determinism of history can only be effected through those elemental and spontaneous aspects of social existence.

La voluntad dramatizes precisely this gap between historical determinism and the anecdotal particulars that resist or evade historical absorption. Within the novel, the deterministic nature of history takes place at the levels of story and repetitive language. This has already been pointed out by Robin Fiddian, who views the repetitions of scenes and actions as moving in a cyclical motion. Among the things that he notes in his article is the repeated cycle of skepticism and disillusionment suffered by Yuste and then by Azorín; the recurrent outbursts of rage by Azorín, first against the ideals of pacifism and then against the values of bourgeois culture; the literary establishment’s slighting of Yuste and then of Azorín; the repeated appearance of child-sized coffins, first in Yecla

¹⁰ In a letter dated December 14, 1899, Martínez Ruiz wrote to Clarín about his wish to write a *manual* on Spanish civilization, but one that avoids Rafael Altamira’s liberal historiography. The letter reads: “Continúo trabajando a solas y en silencio. Proyecto hacer un manual de la civilización española. Pero aunque manual, es cosa pesada y de mucha paciencia. De Altamira he visto estos días algo parecido. Sin embargo, no es ese mi ideal de la historia” (qtd. in Rubio Jiménez 120).

and then in Toledo. These anecdotal recurrences are given formal expression in the language itself, most strikingly in the initial chapters where word repetitions and chiasmi occur suspiciously close to each other. The following are just a few examples:

Dos, cuatro, seis blancos vellones que brotan de la negrura (119)
un puchero borbolla ... y deja escapar tenues vellones blancos (125)

Largas vetas blanquecinas ... se entrecruzan (119)
En las blanquecinas vetas de los caminos pululan ... negros trazos (120)

En lo hondo, el poblado se esfuma... en mancha incierta (119)
en lo hondo, brilla en sus primorosos arabescos... el alizar del tiempo (124)

notas argentinas de las campanas vuelan (120)
martillos de una fragua tintinean argentinos (125)
los martillos... cantan en sonoro repiqueteo argentino (126)

Although this language imposes the logic of cyclical repetition on the story of Azorín's fate, it does not absorb the many random anecdotes and particular objects that are ever present throughout the novel's pages. Rafael Soto, in commenting on Martínez Ruiz's penchant for "pureza anecdótica," notes that for the Alicante writer, allusions, metaphors, symbols, and allegories are all a disturbance to the anecdotal and the particular. In Martínez Ruiz's work, things are what they are, and they do not pretend to serve any moral or transcendent meaning (Soto 81-82). They stand on their own, refusing to be subsumed to the narrative's dramatization of the Nietzschean eternal return.

That the anecdotal and the particular are more a matter of exhibition than of description or narrative function has been pointed out numerous times by some of Martínez Ruiz's best readers. Cesar Barja, for instance, in 1935, described Martínez Ruiz's scenes as having "mucho de sala o galería de museo" (291). Later, in 1960, José María Martínez Cachero would resort to analogous terms to explain that "el descriptor resulta un notario que registra cuanto ante él se ofrece" (152). And several years after that, in 1985, Inman Fox would bring both these views together in his appraisal of Martínez Ruiz's early work: "En el fondo, todo se reduce a una especie de inventario de cosas concretas exiliadas de un mundo vital, como en un diccionario o un museo, sin otra función en el texto" ("Azorín y la nueva" 301). Fox adds that this technique grants a certain autonomy to things, which in turn makes the reader assume an optical, or visual, perspective.

A subtle but consequential technique through which the particular asserts itself against the novel's overriding themes and repetitive logic involves something as simple as the use of articles. In the conventional prose of Spanish literary realism, the existence of objects and persons inhabiting the narrative world is treated, in the first instance, as information that the reader receives from the narrator. The existence of things is first established through the use of indefinite articles and adjectives, as well as through plural nouns with indefinite value. Only after existence has been established does the definite article come into use, thereby raising the stature of the noun or person it precedes. To illustrate this I turn to Pérez Galdós's *La fontana de oro*, in which we find a description

of a household interior, that of las señoras Porreño y Venegas, comically described as “las tres ruinas”:

En la alcoba había una cama de matrimonio, que no parecía sino una catedral. Cuatro voluminosas columnas sostenían el techo, del cual pendían cortinas de damasco, cuyos colores primitivos se habían resuelto en un gris claro con abundantes rozaduras y algún disimulado y vergonzante remiendo; en otro cuarto se veían dos papeleras de talla con innumerables divisiones, adornadas de pequeñas figuras decorativas é incrustaciones de marfil y carey. Sobre una de ellas había un San Antonio muy viejo y carcomido, con un vestido flamante y una vara de flores de reciente hechura. (140)

Here the existence of the objects being described is softened by the indefinite articles, adjectives, and plurals that gently introduce them into the reader’s awareness. In Martínez Ruiz, however, we get something entirely different: things assert their existence through the use of definite articles. Take, for example, a paragraph in part 1, chapter 15:

Las llamas tiemblan. Sobre el enorme armario fronterizo al hogar, espejean los reflejos. El armario es de roble. Tiene dos puertas superiores, dos cajones, dos puertas inferiores. Está encuadrado en primorosa greca tallada en hojas y botones. En los ángulos sobresalen las caras de gordos angelillos; arriba, en el centro del friso, una sirena sonriente abre sus piernas de retorcidas volutas que se alejan simétricas entre el follaje. Y por una de las portezuelas superiores, abierta, se muestran los innumerables cajoncillos con el frontis labrado. (235-36)

The flames (“llamas”) and the armoire (“armario”) have a concreteness that spurns the protocols of narrative description. They exist on their own, autonomously, with no need for introduction by the narrator or an indefinite article. In *La voluntad*, things assert themselves so forcefully at times that the result can be disconcerting, as the opening of part 1, chapter 27 shows:

Yuste ha muerto; el P. Lasalde se ha marchado al colegio de Getafe; Justina ha entrado en un convento. Y Azorín medita tristemente, a solas en su cuarto, mientras deja el libro y toma el libro. Él no puede apartar de su espíritu el recuerdo de Justina . . . (241)

Reading this passage, one can’t help but do a kind of double-take, wondering which book that is and where it came from. Its existence has been so forcefully thrust upon the reader that he must recalibrate his understanding of the scene and the things that are present within it. The use of the definite article, beyond merely implying familiarity, forces the reader to shift from an optic focused on the ideological forces and social influences determining Azorín’s fate, to an optic that brings into view the petty objects and minor incidents that are cloaked over by those broader and more abstract concerns.

This optical, or cognitive, readjustment may seem like a mere gesture of literary affectation, but in 1902 it harbored profound implications for understanding the deleterious current within liberal and anarchist historiography and politics. In an article titled “In Defense of Politics,” the American historian Walter Karp warned against the

tendency to attribute historical change to social forces rather than to individual actions. He draws this warning from Alexis de Tocqueville, who in 1840, in *Democracy in America*, detected a “dangerous tendency” in modern intellectual thought. Tocqueville noted that historians began attributing the fate and destiny of a people to “great general causes.” Instead of calling attention to the deeds of individuals, the new historians disregarded those deeds and looked instead to “the characteristics of race, the physical conformation of the country, or the genius of civilization” (qtd. in Karp 43). History, in its classical moment, had once been the study of the deeds of men, but by the nineteenth century it had become the study of larger social and intellectual forces. The deeds of men—that is, their capacity to act and exercise power and break free from habit—was something that historians were losing sight of, according to Tocqueville. The result, as Karp explains, was a “scientific” conception of history in which “society or economics or even ‘history’ itself orders and causes our conduct, reducing it to mere motion, habit, and rote, snuffing out the very idea of freedom and power” (43). This tendency had such a powerful grip on historical thinking that intellectuals and historians saw all men—politicians, princes, and paupers alike—as mere creatures of socio-economic circumstance. What was dangerous about this new orthodoxy of history was that the doings of politicians became mere effects of larger causes, and the circumstances of the people became the result of historical providence. No longer were individuals seen to have any agency to change their current circumstances, or to be held responsible for them. This meant that the politician who exercises power was now, in the eyes of history, an impotent and servile creature to ideology, capitalism, and other vague forces. It became a “virtually unquestioned axiom that whatever happens in government and politics must be attributed to forces, factors, actors, influences, sanctions, pressures, and constraints emanating from outside the public realm itself” (Karp 45). Conspiratorial thinking—which in effect recognizes the power and freedom of individuals to act—became a political sin, a product of unreason and paranoia within this historico-scientific orthodoxy. The new mode of history that emerged in the middle of the nineteenth century “proves to be no intellectual triumph” but is rather “a program, an agenda, a prescribed rule of thought” (Karp 44).

La voluntad's formal construction, as analyzed above, stages precisely this opposition or gap between the “scientific” and the “conspiratorial” mode of conceiving the socio-historical. The interaction between the novel's themes, uses of language, and principles of composition make it a microcosm of the patterns at work in *fin-de-siglo* politics and historiography. On a first reading, the dominant themes of social determinism and Spanish backwardness seem to explain the pitiful fates of Azorín, Yuste, and Justina—they are all, in this view, mere creatures of larger social forces. But a closer reading reveals that things are not that simple. The novel's dominant themes are counteracted by the particular objects, persons, and anecdotes that urge themselves into the reader's awareness, and this mode of understanding the formal dynamics at work within the novel has potentially profound implications for how the reader perceives the political world itself. That is to say that attention on *La voluntad*'s formal construction helps one to think in ways that can discern the “dangerous” tendencies within Spain's liberal and anarchist culture. These are tendencies that absorb human particularity into the orthodoxies of liberal historiography and ideology, forcing everyone to “adaptarse al medio,” as Martínez Ruiz had complained—and also refused to do. Walter Benjamin, in

his *Arcades Project*, pointed out these same political implications, of how the self-assertion of the particular is an act against the overreach of the sublimated conception of “history”: “The constructions of history are comparable to military orders that discipline the true life and confine it to barracks. On the other hand: the street insurgence of the anecdote. The anecdote brings things near to us spatially, lets them enter our life. It represents the strict antithesis to the sort of history which demands ‘empathy,’ which makes everything abstract” (S1a, 3).

With this way of thinking it becomes possible to see the subversive aspects of the village life that urban intellectuals so disdain. On his way back to Yecla after a failed stint as a writer in Madrid, Azorín stops to rest in a village called Blanca. There he visits the local casino where two elderly men are discussing politics:

—Fulano —dice uno— será presidente del Consejo.
 —Yo creo —contesta el otro— que Mengano se impone.
 —Dispense usted —observa el primero—, pero Mengano cuenta con el ejército.

(318)

Azorín, having just arrived from Madrid, mocks the conspiratorial thinking of these men, and wonders: “¿Qué he de hacer yo en un Casino donde se habla de tal ex ministro o de cual jefe de partido?” (318). He then moves on to a barber shop, and, again, he hears the same manner of conversation, of local men speaking about the vices, virtues, and deeds of politicians: “Unos hablan del último discurso de Fulano, otros de las últimas declaraciones de Zutano, aquéllos de la actitud de Mengano, todos de lo que hacen, de lo que dicen, de lo que piensan los políticos” (319). Among these village men there is no talk of abstractions or vague social forces that shape history and society. Instead, they speak about the specific individuals who make things happen, which is a way of reckoning with politics that stands in contrast to the “scientific” approach espoused by those historians critiqued by Tocqueville and Karp. In the context of *fin-de-siglo* Spain, these “scientific” historians are the positivists and sociologists who reduce social welfare projects, human relations, and the problems of life itself to mere “hipótesis, generalidades, conjeturas..., ¡metafísica!,” as Martínez Ruiz calls them in an article he published in 1900 (*Artículos* 106).¹¹ More than mere decoration serving the landscape, or fodder for ideas about Spanish backwardness, these anecdotes of the village men defy the grand schemes of liberal historiography and ideology.

One can see, then, that *La voluntad* is not a work of defeat, or of “ensoñación” or “paisajismo,” but is rather one of resistance to positivistic forms of thinking and understanding the socio-historical. In 1941, almost four decades after the novel’s publication, Martínez Ruiz was asked if he conceived *La voluntad* as a “novela de tesis.” His answer was the following: “De tesis, no. De reacción contra un medio” (qtd. in Valverde 184). This is certainly an apt appraisal in light of the reading I have been developing so far. I must admit, however, that *La voluntad*’s ending certainly makes it difficult to imagine how this novel is a reaction against the intellectual and political climate of Spain in 1902. Azorín’s final defeat and resignation seem like a complete acceptance of everything that Martínez Ruiz, as a young firebrand, had protested against:

¹¹ Martínez Ruiz’s critique of the metaphysical nature of positivism and sociology is repeated by Yuste (157).

intellectual, moral, and religious conformism. But read against the triumphalism of anarchist culture, Azorín's defeat becomes a pseudo-virtue: it is in effect a refusal to be absorbed by political and historical triumphalism. There is, however, an irony to this that is worth pointing out. Just as the intellectuals who demand that Martínez Ruiz adapt to the times find refuge in their orthodoxies, so Azorín finds refuge of his own in the traditionalism of village life. Here one can see that the logic of Azorín's defeat and conformism mirrors that of radicalized intellectuals. That we, as readers, cannot reconcile ourselves with his fate leaves open the possibility of refusing to reconcile ourselves with the fate of liberal thought.

But there is more. Our inability to reconcile ourselves with Azorín's sad and pathetic fate has something unexpectedly generative about it in that it triggers the kind of compassion that is often excluded from the orthodoxies of progressive culture. The epilogue, which consists of letters written by "J. Martínez Ruiz," shows his pitiable friend Azorín "sumido en un pueblo manchego, con el traje usado, con la barba sin afeitar, con pañales encima de su mesa, con una mujer desgredada que cree que es preferible arreglar un estandarte [del Santísimo] a dar un paseo con un compañero querido" (352). So strong is the pity that "J. Martínez Ruiz" feels for his "compañero querido" that he writes these letters to express his concern to another friend, "Pío Baroja." His use of the term "compañero" here is very suggestive, for it points to a kind of solidarity that is based no longer on political or social ideals, but on compassion and suffering.

La voluntad's Schopenhauerian theme that life cannot escape suffering has been remarked upon by critics countless times. This theme has become one of the central meanings of the novel, which is no surprise since it is repeatedly voiced by all the main characters—Yuste, Azorín, Puche, Justina, Lasalde—and is given expression in the novel's bleak and somber atmosphere. Next to the triumphalism of liberal culture and the optimism of anarchist ideology, *La voluntad* comes off as an embodiment of defeat and despair. And although this impression is certainly justified, this does not mean that all is lost, for the novel's ending clues us in to the kind of human solidarity that had been brushed over by the rhetoric of anarchism and liberalism.

To illustrate this I turn to Max Horkheimer's essay "Schopenhauer Today." For Horkheimer, Schopenhauer's pessimism offers a therapeutic way out of the dangers of political ideology, that is, out of the dangers of absolutism, utopianism, and nationalism. The value of Schopenhauer is that he reminds us that pain and suffering are inevitable parts of existence. Ideologies come and go, but suffering, agony, and misery always remain. Indeed, they are inseparable from man's biological, affective, and social existence. To believe otherwise is a mere delusion. A politics that treats The People as its highest value and views history through a Hegelian telos that moves toward utopianism will have little or no tolerance for human frailties and failures. This kind of intolerance stems from the view that the highest good is defined by notions such as "justice" and "freedom," while everything else is either a corruption of these notions or a barrier to their fulfillment. This is why Schopenhauer is skeptical about any telos-imbued *Zeitgeist*, for it detracts attention from the true, even visceral ground of human existence: suffering. Truth, in this view, lies not in the absolute ideals of "justice" and "freedom" but in the fact that life is endless suffering and striving. If true human solidarity is to be realized, then it must take root in suffering and despair. This is the redemptive power of the Schopenhauerian view, as explained by Horkheimer: "The doctrine of blind will as an

eternal force removes from the world the treacherous gold foil which the old metaphysics had given it. In utter contrast to positivism, it enunciates the negative and preserves it in thought, thus exposing the motive for solidarity shared by men and all beings: their abandonment” (70). Thus, against a programmatic ethics of justice based on abstract ideals, Schopenhauer proposes an instinctual ethics based on compassion; against a morality driven by the hypostatized truths of fashionable ideologies, Schopenhauer proposes a solidarity rooted in the universal reality of human suffering; and finally, against the smugness and fanaticism of utopians ideologues, Schopenhauer proposes a form of empathy that transcends political ideology.

Exactly this sort of transcendental and empathetic solidarity takes place at the end of *La voluntad*. The idea that art can help cultivate this experience was expressed by Martínez Ruiz in an article titled “Arte y utilidad,” which he published in 1904, two years after *La voluntad*. In this article, Martínez Ruiz addresses the problem of valuing art either for its own sake or for a utilitarian purpose. He explains that it is an exceptional achievement for an “artista puro” to even exist in a society driven by dogmas, where “El nuevo dogma flota en el aire y se ha infiltrado en todos los cerebros” (5). The “artista puro” may protest against the demand that art serve a larger purpose—“el bienestar social”—but ultimately he, too, must accept that his “instinto estético” cannot escape the burden of a certain “instinto de la vida” that spurs the desire for social welfare (5). And yet by pressing on with his “arte inutilitario,” the artist does not actually stray too far from meeting this burden. It turns out that his art does indeed have a function, but it is a function of a higher order that has yet to be recognized. This is how Martínez Ruiz explains the matter:

Y no se comprenderá que este arte inutilitario é incorruptible tiene una utilidad única, excepcional, maravillosa, suprema: porque él hace que nos sintamos todos hombres unos, solidarios, amorosos, ante estas sensaciones extraordinarias de belleza, que sólo nosotros sobre la tierra somos capaces de sentir y gozar; y porque él, que es producto de la fina sensibilidad de unos pocos, ha afinado nuestra sensibilidad de la masa y ha preparado así una nueva conciencia social.
(5)

This quote brings together much of what I have been arguing is at work in *La voluntad*. It points to how an autonomous artwork not only restores an individual’s sense of agency but also fosters a special kind of solidarity that is based on affect and sensation. In addition to this, the quote insists on the importance of man’s concrete, terrestrial existence—that is, his ability to “sentir y gozar” as an individual who is situated and lives “sobre la tierra.” By engaging man’s terrestrial experience, the autonomous artwork, in Martínez Ruiz’s reckoning, counters the abstract dogmas that have infiltrated “todos los cerebros.” Horkheimer, in the essay cited above, explained that “To stand up for the temporal against merciless eternity is morality in Schopenhauer’s sense” (70). The same could be said of this conception of “arte inutilitario”: it stands up against what Martínez Ruiz calls “fórmulas abstractas,” that is, socialism, republicanism, or monarchism—each of which claims to be the way to man’s salvation (“Arte” 5). Simply stated, an autonomous artwork such as *La voluntad* has the capacity to serve as an antidote to mass forms of thinking. It may not offer an agenda or a program for changing society, but it

can offer new ways of seeing and understanding the social world, ways that might otherwise be overlooked by the impatience to put into practice those “fórmulas abstractas.”

“Arte inutilitario,” then, is not exactly “inutilitario”—but neither is it strictly “utilitario.” Having realized this, Martínez Ruiz finds the image of the ivory tower inaccurate. He suggests this at the end of “Arte y utilidad,” where he offers an alternative to the ivory tower: “Y por eso yo prefiero, a la pequeña torre de marfil, la casilla a teja vana y los majuelos de tierra blanca—que habré de cultivar yo mismo en los ratos en que dejo de la pluma para dar así un ejemplo de patriotismo a las generaciones presentes y futuras” (5). These words sound as if they could have been voiced by Azorín at the end of the *La voluntad*, that is, the Azorín who rather than live in Madrid or any modern city prefers life in his house in Yecla, which is also constructed “a teja vana” (151). Though his withdrawal to Yecla seems on the surface to be a gesture of hopelessness, the article “Arte inutilitario” suggests otherwise. Its use of the term “patriotismo” in the quote just cited refers not to a nationalist ideology but rather to that “nueva conciencia social” that is rooted in man’s temporal existence and is cultivated through an engagement with autonomous artworks. Unlike the patriotism of a nationalist ideology, Martínez Ruiz’s version attempts to avoid the pitfalls of dogmatism and absolutism. His patriotism is one that instead of seeking to remake the world to fit certain concepts, takes the world as a given, and in doing so dignifies all of its complex and contradictory actuality. This is the elemental *givenness* that had been obscured by the militant and assertive political ideologies that were seething in *fin-de-siglo* Spain. And it is also what *La voluntad*, in its aesthetic construction, seeks to dignify in its fostering of a “nueva conciencia social.”

Chapter 3

Refashioning the Sociopolitical in Ramón del Valle-Inclán's *Sonata de otoño*

In 1895, Valle-Inclán arrived in Madrid with the intention of making it as a writer. He had already published a collection of stories, titled *Femeninas*, in his native Galicia; and two years later, in 1897, he published *Epitalamio (historia de amores)*. The first book had fallen on deaf ears, but the second one caught the attention of Spain's most important critic, Leopoldo Alas "Clarín," who wrote a scathing review of it. For Valle-Inclán, the review was no doubt painful for his young ego, but in the long run it proved pivotal to his development as an artist, which reached its first high point several years later, in 1902, with the publication of *Sonata de otoño*.¹ The *Sonata* was the success that Valle-Inclán was looking for: it was reviewed in several periodicals, was talked about by the writers and bohemians of Madrid's *tertulias*, and gave Valle-Inclán his reputation as an up-and-coming writer.

But the success of the *Sonata*—a work that seems to glorify and revel in Spain's decadent aristocratic past—becomes somewhat murky when we consider that it was praised by the left-leaning writers and intellectuals who contributed to Spain's modernization and who rejected what they considered to be the cultural and political backwardness of older generations, the *gente vieja*.² The intellectual and bohemian circles in which Valle-Inclán moved were frequented by youthful, self-proclaimed anarchists, socialists, and republicans—the *gente nueva*, as they were then known. Among these were José Martínez Ruiz, Ramiro de Maeztu, Pío Baroja, and Joaquín Dicenta, all of whom, in 1902, were still coming down from the ideological high provided by Galdós's *Electra*. What was expected from a young writer who frequented these *tertulias* and had been involved in *Electra*'s raucous reception was a literature that either denounced clericalism and the aristocracy, was politically expedient, or was modeled on the most advanced European literature, which essentially meant French. Valle-Inclán's *Sonata*, however, did none of that: instead of denouncing the aristocracy and clergy, it presented them in an ostentatious and utopian light, and did so with an obvious concern for aesthetic refinement rather than for politically progressive ideas. And instead of glorifying a French-inspired modernity, the novel reveled in the semi-feudal world of Galicia. Why, then, did the *Sonata de otoño* achieve the success it did if it refused to give the *gente nueva* what they wanted?

There are, of course, many contradictory answers to this question, and the fact that they're contradictory only serves to highlight the strangeness of the reception of the

¹ Prior to appearing in book form, the *Sonata* was printed serially as a *folletín* in the weekly *Relieves: Semanario de literatura, política, industrias, espectáculos y actualidades*, between December 30, 1901, and February 12, 1902.

² The *gente vieja* were those individuals whom younger generations considered to be part of the cultural and political establishment that was responsible for the backwardness of Spanish society. The *gente vieja* included figures such as José Echegaray, José María de Pereda, Leopoldo Alas "Clarín," Gaspar Núñez de Arce, Ramón Rodríguez Correa, Federico Balart, Ventura de la Vega, Antonio F. Grilo, José Castro y Serrano, and Antonio Cánovas del Castillo (Mainer, *La edad* 21).

Sonata de otoño and the other three *Sonatas* that followed. Commenting on the claim that, out of all of Valle-Inclán's work, the *Sonatas* have generated the best criticism, Michael P. Predmore adds the following point:

The best critical writing, perhaps, and also the most frustrating and confusing, for in this criticism are views and perspectives which are diametrically opposed: the *Sonatas* have been alternately praised and criticized for their elegant command of language and their mannered prose; for their original treatment of a "modernist" Don Juan, and for the insincerity and inconsistency of the protagonist as actor and narrator; for their masterful exemplification of an art for art's sake aesthetic, and for the banality and triviality of the materials under elaboration. (64)

"Frustrating and confusing"—I couldn't agree more. Predmore writes in 1987, and the criticism that has come after that date has certainly enriched our understanding of the *Sonatas*, but it has not been any less eclectic or contradictory.³

The critical appraisals of the *Sonatas* are numerous, and I can only offer a brief summary here. The criticism generated from the late 1920s to the early 50s, as outlined by Predmore, tended to see the *Sonatas* as a purely stylistic exercise that sought formal beauty and the cultivation of sensations.⁴ In the mid 60s, critics began seeing humor and irony as the techniques through which Valle-Inclán sought to undermine traditional Spanish values.⁵ In some cases, the *Sonatas* were seen as containing, in embryonic form, what would later become the *esperpento*.⁶ Critics that followed these approaches either took seriously as a nostalgic gesture the *Sonatas*'s depiction of the Arcadian seigniorial world,⁷ or read this nostalgia as Valle-Inclán's rejection of, and thus evasion from, the politically degenerate world of Restoration Spain.⁸ Some have seen in the *Sonatas* two opposing forces—nostalgia and skepticism—whereby the Marqués de Bradomín becomes both hero and antihero, and whereby the past is mythicized but also demythicized.⁹ Finally, in more recent years, and due to the growing skepticism toward the modernismo/noventaiochismo binary, the prevailing view holds that the broader aesthetic innovations in which the *Sonatas* participate have sociopolitical change and revolution as their fundamental aim.¹⁰

³ There are reviews of the novel by Manuel Bueno in *Heraldo de Gerona* 20 March 1902; Luis Bello in *El Evangelio*, 3 April 1902; Cristóbal de Castro in *La Correspondencia de España* 6 April 1902; Manuel Ciges Aparicio in *El País* 16 March 1902; and Julio Burell (known as El bachiller Iznájar), who reviewed all four *Sonatas* in *El Gráfico* 14 July 1904.

⁴ Among the most important critics following this line of criticism are César Barja, Amado Alonso, Pedro Salinas, Alonso Zamora Vicente.

⁵ Among these are Juan Ruiz de Galarreta, José Alberich, Richard J. Callan, and Gerard C. Flynn

⁶ For example, Manuel Bermejo Marcos and Ruiz de Galarreta.

⁷ For example, Juan Antonio Hormigón and José Carlos Mainer (*La edad*).

⁸ For example, Carlos Seco Serrano, and Antonio Vilanova, who writes: "aunque el tradicionalismo romántico de Valle-Inclán es fruto de una actitud desengañada y nostálgica, su evasión sentimental hacia el pasado no obedece a una actitud puramente histórica y arqueológica, sino que responde a un claro sentimiento de frustración patriótica y constituye, evidentemente, una reacción y una protesta contra la realidad de la España de su tiempo" (360).

⁹ For example, Antonio Risco.

¹⁰ This line of criticism owes much to the work of Pérez de la Dehesa and Seco Serrano.

If there is anything known for sure about Valle-Inclán it is that throughout his career he remained adamantly independent as a writer and intellectual. For him, it was better to remain “solo, altivo y pobre” than to capitulate or pander to the intellectual establishment (qtd. in Serrano Alonso, “Solo” 149). With this attitude, he freely rejected and accepted values from a wide range of political, aesthetic, and cultural outlooks, and embraced opposing and competing views without any concern for their coherence. Adorno once described the dialectical procedure as one that “makes statements in order to withdraw them and yet hold them fast” (*Minima* 212).¹¹ This is a fitting description of Valle-Inclán’s aesthetics and politics, and it is one that validates the eclecticism of all those critical approaches to the *Sonatas*. Thus any pretension to resolve them, or to pin Valle-Inclán down, is doomed to endless frustration.

For this reason, I will approach the *Sonata de otoño* as an artwork that is constructed out of an ever-shifting constellation of historically mediated materials—such as language, images, and motifs—that resist being “resolved” in much the same way that historical contradictions and variabilities resist being reduced to any final coherence. I will study how certain formal and thematic elements of the *Sonata de otoño* are historically mediated and are reconstellated in such a way that they reveal unexpected truths about the sociopolitical dynamic of *fin-de-siglo* Spain. In particular, I will examine how the *Sonata* handles the cultural and political concern with the modern and the antiquated, which in the turbulence of the time were often reduced to the opposition between *lo nuevo* and *lo viejo*. Out of this opposition emerged a certain parlance and a series of tropes that the *Sonata* makes its own. These include the terrorism that was carried out by left-wing radicals against the establishment; the utopianism and narcissism that undergirded revolutionary rhetoric; and the derivative and thus uncritical nature of Spanish modernist culture. I argue, then, that these tropes, with their attendant language, become the materials from which Valle-Inclán constructs his first masterwork.

Reading the *Sonata* this way takes as a given that the materials that an author uses have a sociopolitical history sedimented within them, which means that they are a repository for much more than is depicted in a work of narrative fiction. In other words, within literary texts the implications of words, motifs, and their arrangements can be much deeper than what their narrative context might suggest, because prior to the compositional process the artist’s materials—that is, the stuff with which he makes his artwork—are socially and historically “preformed,” and are thus the means through which reality migrates into his work (Adorno, *Aesthetic* 89, 103). The same is the case with works that are as seemingly detached as the *Sonatas*. On this point, Adorno writes: “The language of artworks is, like every language, constituted by a collective undercurrent, especially in the case of those works popularly stigmatized as lonely and walled up in the ivory tower” (*Aesthetic* 86). As much as they may try to evade the sociopolitical, works such as the *Sonata de otoño* are nevertheless constructed out of

¹¹ In an article titled “A ras de la tierra,” published in 1902, Valle-Inclán complained about the inescapable demand that one must forever be consistent in his opinions:

tener opiniones propias ... es una de las cargas más molestas que conozco, pues cuando un triste mortal comete la imprudencia de tener opiniones adquiere el compromiso de mantenerlas hasta el fin de sus días y casi casi, de que le amortajen con ellas. Como yo no me siento capaz de tamaña consecuencia, he decidido, hace ya mucho tiempo, pasar tranquilamente la vida sin quebraderos de cabeza ni pensamientos trascendentales. (*Artículos* 210)

materials that are, substantively, sociohistorical. Consequently, the *Sonata* cannot escape being the “afterimage” of empirical life (*Aesthetic* 103).

My aim in this chapter, then, is to avoid reading the *Sonata de otoño* against a historical backdrop—as if it merely responds to, reflects, or evades its historical context—and to show instead that it is consubstantial with its sociohistorical context in ways that have yet to be explored and that reveal critical insights about the sociohistorical.¹² Thus in order to understand the *Sonata de otoño* it is important to study the reality that has emigrated into it via its language and the configuration of its themes. Key to this reality was the widely discussed opposition between the *gente nueva* and the *gente vieja*. The terms of this binary have their origin in several circumstances. One of the most important was the *gente nueva*’s embrace of positivism and evolutionary theory. By viewing history as a linear evolution that progressed toward a future utopia of anarchism, socialism, and modernity, these youthful writers, intellectuals, and activists criticized many of the ideas, institutions, and customs they considered old or antiquated.¹³ Hence their resentment toward those they called *gente vieja*, who for them represented the social, political, and religious establishment that was responsible for Spain’s degeneracy and backwardness.

The epithet “*gente nueva*” can be traced back to 1884, to the Universidad Central de Madrid, where a group of students organized and protested against the Catholic Church’s efforts to curtail academic freedom. In the same year, in Italy, the raising of a monument in honor of the Renaissance thinker Giordano Bruno generated a great deal of polemic in Spain due to Bruno’s status as a symbol of rebellion against the Inquisition and religious conservatism. From this polemic emerged a pseudo-movement constituted by a loose group of individuals who called themselves various names: “*la joven España*,”

¹² To illustrate what I mean by “consubstantial,” it is helpful to turn once again to Adorno, where he writes:

The historical moment is constitutive of artworks; authentic works are those that surrender themselves to the historical substance of their age without reservation and without the presumption of being superior to it. They are the self-unconscious historiography of their epoch; this, not least of all, establishes their relation to knowledge. Precisely this makes them incommensurable with historicism, which, instead of following their own historical content, reduces them to their external history. Artworks may be all the more truly experienced the more their historical substance is that of the one who experiences it. (*Aesthetic* 182-83)

It’s little wonder, then, that the *gente nueva* responded so positively to the *Sonata de otoño*, for it was they more than anyone who were experiencing the “historical substance” of Valle-Inclán’s first masterpiece.

¹³ Thion Soriano-Mollá, in her illuminating study “*Gente nueva versus: Gente vieja: Martínez Ruiz y los hijos del siglo del Modernismo*,” explains that the opposition between, on one hand, old age, and on the other, newness and youth was given the seal of absolute truth by the dominance of positivism and Darwinism in *fin-de-siglo* Spain. By extension, the *gente nueva* in their rhetoric and propaganda often resorted to images from the natural world: they, inspired by Zola, were germinal, the new seeds of life (“*savia nueva*,” “*brotos nuevos*”), and the dawn of the new day; the *gente vieja*, on the other hand, were the cancer, the blindness, and the gangrene that needed to be eliminated. One commentator writing during the *fin de siglo* described the emergence of the *gente nueva* as a birth that had taken place in an environment of “*política rastrera y mediocre*,” which had contaminated the mother’s milk on which the young were nursed: “*con estos gérmenes nocivos y hediondos hemos comenzado envenenándonos como si hubiéramos nacido en los bordes de alguna laguna maldita*” (qtd. in Thion Soriano-Mollá, “*Gente nueva versus*” 148-49).

“la vanguardia del progreso,” “modernistas,” “novísimos,” “hombres nuevos,” and “gente nueva” (Thion Soriano-Mollá, “La Gente” 426-28). Generally, members of the *gente nueva* hailed from the middle classes. They were students, writers, journalists, professors, intellectuals, and educated and politically conscious professionals; and they all dabbled in a variety of progressive and modern ideologies, including positivism, anarchism, socialism, collectivism, republicanism, decadentism, symbolism, liberalism, and bohemianism.¹⁴ For these young and young-minded progressives, “lo nuevo” and “lo joven” were not markers of biological age but were instead markers of a certain attitude and political inclination. As one contemporary account put it:

Jóvenes son todos aquellos que tengan dentro del pecho un corazón liberal; los que entiendan la existencia como un sacrificio fecundo para el porvenir; los enamorados del ideal que tuvo poder bastante para remozar a Fausto. Los pocos años no son la juventud. Pidal era ya un fósil a las pocas horas de ser engendrado. Larra si continuase viviendo sería tan muchacho como cuando le apuntó el bozo. (qtd. in Thion Soriano-Mollá, “La Gente” 428)

Thus while still holding on to the *joven/viejo* binary, the *gente nueva* nevertheless accepted as one of their own older intellectuals and writers who embraced cultural and political ideals that were “new” and progressive. The key example is Galdós, whose play *Electra*, with its anticlerical implications, had turned him into of an unofficial leader of the *novísimos*. Other older writers who were likewise admired were Alejandro Sawa, Pompeyo Gener, Francisco Giner de los Ríos, Urbano González Serrano, Ernesto Bark, and Antonio Machado Álvarez (the folklore scholar and father of poets Antonio and Manuel Machado). When it came to individuals such as these, the radicalized *novísimo* Ricardo Fuente wrote that “El tiempo ni da ni quita la juventud” (428).¹⁵

The liberal energies of the *gente nueva* found sanctuary in the many periodicals they published during the years of the *fin de siglo*. Most prominent among these was *Germinal*, which ran from 1897 to 1899 and was directed by Joaquín Dicenta and had for some time Valle-Inclán as editor of the literary section. Within *Germinal*'s pages there was a coexistence of modernista literature and progressive politics that helped consolidate the identity of the *gente nueva* in contradistinction to the *gente vieja*.

¹⁴ Some of the most famous individuals who identified as *gente nueva*, or *modernistas*, are José Martínez Ruiz, Pío Baroja, Ricardo Baroja, Ramiro de Maeztu, Jacinto Benavente, Valle-Inclán, Ricardo Fuente, Joaquín Dicenta, Alfredo Calderón, and Francisco Villaespesa. There were many other individuals with different degrees of participation in the *tertulias* and periodicals of the time. A more extensive list of names can be found in Thion Soriano-Mollá (“La Gente” 428).

¹⁵ The standard, of course, would not hold for all intellectuals who were older in age. It was wielded somewhat arbitrarily by the *novísimos*, and was, as we will see, the instrument through which they sought to discredit those writers and intellectuals with whom they disagreed politically and artistically. It is also important to note that much of the disagreement had to do with the fact that the *gente vieja* were entrenched in the political and cultural institutions to which the *novísimos* wanted access. They were, in effect the cultural gatekeepers—or “caciques de la cultura” (Mainer, *La edad* 21)—that kept shutting out up-and-coming writers who wanted to bring artistic modernity to Spain. One important point of contention were the writing contests, which were arbitrated by the *gente vieja*. Valle-Inclán, having participated in them without ever winning, was a harsh critic of the conservatism of the juries (Lima 116, 118; Valle-Inclán, *Artículos* 220-22).

The title of *Germinal* is hardly gratuitous, for it reveals the extent to which the discourse of *lo nuevo vs. lo viejo* came to define the categories through which politics and the regeneration of Spain came to be discussed. Many were the periodicals that alluded to the notion of newness and equated it with sociopolitical progress. In *Germinal*'s case, the rhetoric of newness is evident in its very title, just as it is in others such as *Vida Nueva* (1898-1900), *Revista Nueva* (1899-1899), and *Juventud* (1901-1902). Another periodical worth mentioning is *Electra* (1901), whose title alludes to Galdós's play, in which the character Electra represents the youth that is attacked and coerced by the religious establishment. One can also cite the premiere of *Electra* as another circumstance that helped consolidate the *nuevo/viejo* binary.¹⁶ Although these journals were short-lived, the enthusiasms that informed their content remained undeterred.¹⁷

For some, however, that enthusiasm was excessive and ultimately self-defeating. Rafael Cansinos-Asséns, in describing the *fin-de-siglo* atmosphere in Madrid, recalls a conversation he had with a professor of rhetoric who complained that “estos chicos extreman ya la nota... Todo tiene un límite. Es tolerable la oscuridad cuando se dice algo. Pero estos jóvenes no dicen nada” (100). For this witness, Spain's self-proclaimed “vanguardia del progreso” was making little progress in its rhetoric, which is evident in the repetitive nature of its periodical titles and the clichéd ideas that were often repeated in them. This point was not lost on Cansinos-Asséns, who after noting the precarious and ephemeral existence of these publications, stated that “en seguida el poeta reaccionaba y empezaba a pensar en otra revista, que con otro título era siempre la misma... El fénix que renacía de sus cenizas. Y siempre el poeta era también el mismo, con sus mismas ilusiones, transferidas al nuevo amor” (88). Thus the *gente nueva* resembled Don Juan—or, as we will see, the Marqués de Bradomín—who, absorbed in his own illusions, professed his love to woman after woman. More precisely, Cansinos-Asséns was suggesting that these jóvenes tended to recycle their rhetoric rather than critique it. They

¹⁶ One can also add the polemic over the Nobel Prize in literature that was awarded to José Echegaray in 1904. For the *gente nueva*, Echegaray represented everything that was wrong about Spain; and the fact that he, and not a younger writer, received the Nobel Prize infuriated many writers and intellectuals, including Martínez Ruiz, Valle-Inclán, Unamuno, Darío, Maeztu, Antonio Machado, and Pío Baroja. Their fury was so strong that Martínez Ruiz and Valle-Inclán wrote a manifesto protesting the exclusion that young writers had suffered when it came to being considered for the Nobel. Echegaray became the scapegoat for many young writers, who had already suffered years of exclusion from literary prestige and representation in the academies and prize competitions. There is still a great deal of debate regarding how Valle-Inclán truly felt about Echegaray. Although Valle-Inclán helped Martínez Ruiz draft the manifesto, it does not mean that he held personal animosity toward the Nobel laureate. It may be that his anger toward Echegaray's Nobel Prize had more to do with previous slights he had suffered early in his writing career, when his submissions for literary competitions had been dismissed for their irreverence.

¹⁷ Worth noting as well is the literary journal *Gente vieja*, which was published in Madrid from 1900 to 1905 and was founded as a counter to modernismo. As such, it treated writers and intellectuals not as “viejos y jóvenes” but as “malos y buenos.” Thus among its collaborators it included individuals who were known as “mozos viejos,” that is, young individuals who held ideas or cultivated literary forms that did not conform to the modernistas' penchant for whatever was new or in fashion. And yet, *Gente Vieja* nevertheless seemed to buy in to the modernistas' concern with chronological age by listing on its cover, during the first year of publication, the ages of its contributors (*Gente Vieja*). This was certainly a tongue-in-cheek gesture, but it nevertheless helps illustrate the intellectual atmosphere in which *Gente Vieja* was published.

were caught in what Valle-Inclán referred to as a “servidumbre intelectual” (*Artículos* 205).

It is not gratuitous that Valle-Inclán criticized many of his fellow modernistas, whom he once described as “jóvenes libertadores sin ningún talento” (*Artículos* 239). It is evident throughout his articles that he was aware of the vulgarizing and populist tendencies among the modernistas. In his art reviews, he noted that many artists had acquired the habit of imitating the superficial forms (“todo lo que es accidental”) of their predecessors without ever penetrating into the essence (“esencia”) of art-making (*Artículos* 234). As with any political and artistic movement, there were many instances of shallowness among the *gente nueva*. With a young generation of writers and intellectuals trying to find their political and artistic footing, it was inevitable that some would lapse into trite imitations of French progressive culture, while others would go on to achieve a high measure of artistic sophistication and political insight.¹⁸ Valle-Inclán’s scorn for those “jóvenes libertadores sin ningún talento” attests to the vulgarizing and reckless current within the *gente nueva* that was making a farce out of their revolutionary ideals.¹⁹ Thus it is ironic that some of those who most trumpeted the grand ideals of progress and newness were often mired in hackneyed and unoriginal art and dissent.²⁰

A more patient and prudent response of the *gente vieja* would surely have revealed much that the *gente nueva* would have agreed with. For Valle-Inclán, that opportunity came in an exchange with *Clarín* in 1897 that began when the young writer

¹⁸ A good example of this is Antonio Machado. In an atmosphere as anarchic as that of the *gente nueva*, it was not rare to find novísimos who oscillated between the hackneyed and the truly original. As this chapter progresses, we will see that this was the case of Valle-Inclán and his *Epitalamio*. It is worth noting that the *fin-de-siglo* literary press abounded in book reviews that paid careful attention to the modernistas’ oscillations between banal imitation and artistic achievement. The case of Eduardo Marquina is a good example. In a review of his early play *El pastor* (1902) the reviewer Caramanchel criticizes Marquina’s imitation of fashionable artistic modes. After analyzing some of the decadent extravagances of Marquina’s verses, Caramanchel writes the following: “¡Huya, huya el Sr. Marquina de una ficticia originalidad extravagante! Que se pierdan ingenios de menos fuste, poco importa! ¡Pero que se eche a perder un poeta de tanto talento como el autor de *Odas*, será una lástima!” (“Los estrenos”). (And flee he did, as is evident in his later plays, which achieved a high degree of originality). From this review, and many others like it, it is evident that the danger of vulgarizing modernismo and rendering it derivative was always looming over the *gente nueva*.

¹⁹ The strident tone of some of the *gente nueva* sometimes reached that of the anticlericalism’s most violent rhetoric, as is evident in following example by F. Juan Ribás: “Debemos hacer titánicos esfuerzos porque la *gente vieja* desaparezca de la escena política y cuanto antes mejor. Sí, que se hunda y al hundirse que no dejen nada de lo existente, que la corriente arrastre tras de ellos, los latrocinios que en mala hora han creado y vivificado.” And it goes on: “...nuestra regeneración equivaldrá a un saldo de cuentas y la diferencia resultará un torrente de sangre.... cuanto estorbe debe barrerse sin contemplaciones, y hagámoslo como el doctor, cortar por lo sano antes que se infeste nuestro sufrido pueblo.... ¡Abajo la *gente vieja*!” In contrast to this there are intellectuals whom the *gente nueva* admired, such as Francisco Giner de los Ríos, a novísimo in spirit if not in age, who founded the Institución Libre de Enseñanza upon a judicious program of social reform. In later years, this institution was key to the political outlook of Antonio Machado and Juan Ramón Jiménez.

²⁰ With a bit of humor, Valle-Inclán admits to having been guilty of this contradiction with *Epitalamio*: “cuando llegué a Madrid, vi que todo cuanto se escribía era muy malo. Decíalo así a mis amigos. Y como ellos, incrédulos, lo atribuyesen a un inmoderado afán de crítica, yo les replicaba manifestándoles que aquellos libros detestables podría escribirlos cualquiera. E hice uno: *Epitalamio*” (*Entrevistas* 133).

sent a copy of his second book, *Epitalamio*, to the veteran writer and renowned critic, with the hope that he would publish a favorable review of it. Out of this exchange emerged two articles by Clarín that, while reprimanding the young writer for his literary excesses, ended up enumerating many of the moral and artistic principles that Valle-Inclán would adopt for the rest of his career and would transfigure into the *Sonata de otoño*.

In the first article, Clarín's main target was Valle-Inclán's *Epitalamio*, which he considered to be a product of the *gente nueva*'s shallow and poorly written imitation of French literary models.²¹ For Clarín, mimicry of French-inspired cynicism could only produce work that was derivative and hackneyed, which was precisely the problem with *Epitalamio*. The fact that it dramatized infidelity and referred to a collection of erotic poems as "psalms" was, by 1897, a trivial and banal gesture. Such religious and moral irreverence was nothing more than an empty act of posturing and trend-following. "Try doing that in the age of Philip II" was Clarín's admonishment to the young writer. Thus in *Epitalamio*, there was "ningún estercolero nuevo": "el librito, al fuego," Clarín commanded. Obviously Clarín was not one to hold his tongue. For him, the writer must either be courageous and autonomous, or must settle with being a "carnero de Panurgo."²² However, not everything was negative about the article, for Clarín also recognized Valle-Inclán's artistic potential and urged him to "arrepentirse" and "trabajar en la verdadera viña."

To this article Valle-Inclán responded with gratitude and agreed with Clarín's criticism.²³ In that letter, Valle-Inclán admits that Clarín could have gone even further in his fault-finding of *Epitalamio*, and notes that he has already marked up numerous other infelicities in his book. As for Clarín's call to repent and work in "la verdadera viña," Valle-Inclán writes: "En cuanto a 'arrepentido' ya lo estoy; pero lo otro...! ¡lo otro es tan difícil...!"

Shortly after receiving this letter, Clarín published a second article, also addressed to Valle-Inclán, where he moved beyond *Epitalamio* to launch a critique of the larger intellectual context of the *gente nueva*.²⁴ There are three main points that Clarín makes. The first is that some of the *gente nueva* have reduced revolutionary politics to a narcissistic gesture of moral righteousness and political posturing. Clarín complains that these individuals "quieren despertar interés en favor de *sus literaturas* con la llamada cuestión social." The second point is that the *gente nueva* are quick to adopt whatever artistic or political trend—usually French—is in fashion. This is the point that Clarín made in the first article, and it has resulted in an ideology that divides the social world into *lo nuevo* and *lo viejo*, and leaves out the question of whether something is morally good or not. The third point is that the penchant for the newest trend has brought into progressive culture an unproductive disdain for tradition and for "las verdades que tenemos encerradas en vetustos relicarios." These three points are summarized by Clarín

²¹ The article appeared in *Madrid Cómico* on September 25, 1897, and is reproduced in Appendix A.

²² The phrase "carnero de Panurgo" (from the French "mouton de Panurge") refers to a person who blindly follows and imitates the example of others. The phrase is drawn from a story in Rabelais's *Gargantua and Pantagruel*.

²³ This letter in which Valle-Inclán responds is reproduced in Appendix B.

²⁴ This article appeared in the *Heraldo de Madrid* on October 9, 1897, and is reproduced in Appendix C.

when states that “Lo que hago es combatir la *pose*, la servil imitación, el descaro y la falta de respeto.”

In response to this article, Valle-Inclán wrote a second letter to Clarín, in which he once again expressed gratitude and accepted the elder’s comments.²⁵ He also acknowledged that this second article was a “trágala,” or bitter pill, for the *gente nueva*, and that, for his part, he was glad for the honest criticism, which was more valuable than the superficial praise found in the *revistas* and newspapers. And with respect to the socialist literature that was in vogue at that time, he added: “Ya he huido. Mejor dicho, nunca quise ser de esas *escuelas*.”

The fact that no other communication between Clarín and Valle-Inclán exists or survives has led critics to believe that Valle-Inclán’s letters to Clarín were merely the tactical gambit of an aspiring writer seeking to curry favor with Spain’s most influential critic.²⁶ Certainly it is true that a young writer at that time would have had to be cautious when dealing with someone of Clarín’s stature, but we must also bear in mind that Valle-Inclán did ultimately follow through with what he wrote in his letters to Clarín: that is, he *did* find many infelicities in *Epitalamio*, which he revised and published under a different title; he *did* commit himself to “la verdadera viña” of literature, which is evident in the obsessive care with which he wrote his works, especially the *Sonatas*; and he *did* maintain himself distant from those *escuelas* of politically tendentious literature. More than a gambit, this exchange with Clarín was a rude awakening for the aspiring writer from Galicia. This is not to say that Valle-Inclán was “convinced” or “converted” by Clarín; rather, it is more likely that he was already entertaining inchoate versions of these criticisms and that the exchange refocused his attention on them. There is no doubt that the exchange was painful for Valle-Inclán’s young ego, but it was nevertheless productive, because five years later we see that he absorbs Clarín’s objections to the *gente nueva* and transfigures them aesthetically in the *Sonata de otoño*.

“Combatir la *pose*”

Clarín’s statement that “Lo que hago es combatir la *pose*” captures a great deal of what he sees as misguided in some of the *gente nuevas*’ politics. For Clarín, these individuals are engaged in little more than a narcissistic theatrics of political and moral righteousness in which they subordinate social plight to their frivolous aspirations as writers, and in doing so, they desecrate matters that are deeply human. He goes on to explain that the *gente nueva* are not truly interested in engaging with the poor, because that would involve doing as Saint Francis of Assisi did: touching and kissing the leprous and the impure. Instead, the *gente nueva* prefer to “divinizar” the socialist prophets—Marx, Lassalle, and Rodbertus—whose evolutionary theory of economics entails the abandonment of the unproductive sectors of society. Thus revolutionary politics, as practiced by the most forceful *novísimos*, reduces radical causes to a means for narcissistic self-indulgence. To proclaim the cause of the poor from within such an extravagant display of *decadentismo* is, for Clarín, tantamount to offering the poor and

²⁵ This letter is reproduced in Appendix D.

²⁶ It should be noted that Clarín died about four years after this exchange, in June 1901.

the hungry a piece of bread on the condition that they come to “recogerlo sobre la mesa de una orgía.”²⁷

From Clarín’s point of view, there is within liberalism a culture of narcissistic individuals whose theatrics of altruism and professed virtuousness is, on its reverse side, utterly profane. This should sound familiar to a reader of the *Sonata*, and even more so when considering that Clarín refers to the literary tendencies of the novísimos as “diabólicas, egoístas, hedonistas, místicas.” Fitting words indeed to describe a figure such as the Marqués de Bradomín.

In the early reviews of the *Sonata de otoño* there are comments that suggest that Valle-Inclán’s characters—no matter how historically remote they may have seemed—were remarkably contemporary. One such comment, from Manuel Bueno, states the following:

Concha, la mujer sensual y mística, y Javier de Bradomín, el libertino ávido de placeres y capaz de íntimas e inquietantes delicadezas, se codean con nosotros a diario en la calle. El literato no ha hecho más que trasladar seres vivos, contemporáneos nuestros, a un ambiente lejano y vetusto. A despecho suyo tal vez, Ramón del Valle-Inclán es un escritor naturalista que siente la nostalgia de lo pasado. (“*Sonata*”)²⁸

To say that the characters of the *Sonata*—with their aristocratic and antiquated mannerisms—are of a sort that can be found in the streets of Madrid in 1902 is surprising enough, but to add that this makes Valle-Inclán “un escritor naturalista” approaches the ludicrous. It’s no wonder that some of Valle-Inclán’s contemporaries thought he might be pulling their leg with his forays into literary “galantería.” As one skeptical commentator put it, “Siempre hemos creído que D. Ramón del Valle-Inclán escribía en broma, con el

²⁷ In the second article, Clarín describes this *decadente* as an “obsceno piticoide.” The term “piticoide” is an ambiguous term. It means “Pythic,” that is, “oracular, rapturous, or frenetic,” which clearly alludes to how Clarín sees the gente nueva. But it also has a different connotation that can be found in a poem by Clarín titled “Piticoide (Sarampión campoamorino—D. d. J. 1871),” which was published in *Madrid Cómico* in 1894. The poem is in a satirical vein, and deals with the story of a self-centered, narcissistic ape named Piticoide, who falls in love with another ape. After she dies, he buries her and instantly begins evolving into a humanoid. Believing he is a good catch, worthy of obtaining a beautiful woman, Piticoide abandons his tribe of apes and enters the human world. He seduces and marries numerous women, but always as a means to satisfy his own egotism and self-idolization. In his narcissism, he fashions himself as an incorrigible Don Juan who excuses his infidelities by repeatedly sighing “¡Yo amé a una mona!” Piticoide encloses himself in an ivory tower and becomes a scientific expert, who pursues and obsesses over ideas he considers virtuous but that in reality have no depth or anything to do with a genuine love for humanity. In the end, he becomes a Darwinist, discovers the buried fossils of a female ape, recognizes them, and instead of letting them remind him of his true nature, he destroys them. For Piticoide, then, everything, including the truth, must answer to his narcissistic view of himself as the virtuous expert in Darwinist theory. Here, one can see the parallel between Piticoide and the gente nueva, as described in Clarín’s article.

²⁸ Ciges Aparicio, in his review, published in 1902, writes something similar: “Los amores del marqués de Bradomín y Concha lo mismo pueden ser de hoy que del siglo XVI.” And so does Eduardo Marquina, in 1909, in his review of a French translation of the *Sonatas*: “Es el único marqués que hoy queda en Europa: déle Dios hijos... y bastardos” (qtd. in Serrano Alonso, “Valle-Inclán” 289).

deliberado propósito de tomar el pelo a sus lectores, pintándonos unos príncipes azules y unas cortesanas alejandrinas de las que todos tenemos noticias.” For this commentator, it was inconceivable that Valle-Inclán’s characters could exist in the contemporary world, or that his works could somehow be informed by a naturalist strain: “Porque aun cuando el Sr. Valle-Inclán . . . afirme que él ha tratado con todos esos príncipes y princesas de la novela erótica, no le vamos a creer. Esos príncipes y princesas de la novela erótica no existen en ninguna parte” (Navarro Ledesma).

Many years after the publication of *Sonata de otoño*, Valle-Inclán stated in several interviews that he believed that the novel form was intimately bound to the workings of history. In 1925, for instance, he claimed that the “novela, por su propia naturaleza, más que ningún género literario acusa las transformaciones ideológicas y políticas de la humanidad” (qtd. in Rodríguez, “Valle-Inclán” 202).²⁹ For Manuel Bueno, the *Sonata de otoño* was no different: as a novel by an “escritor naturalista,” it had a great deal to say about contemporary society in Madrid. Of course, the way it went about this was subtle enough that the skeptical commentator cited above, Francisco Navarro Ledesma, could not see beyond the fanciful surface of Valle-Inclán’s work. What the *Sonata de otoño* achieves is no small feat when we consider that the disparate reactions of Bueno and Navarro Ledesma attest to how successfully Valle-Inclán refashioned the sociohistorical in such a way that it became both contemporary and fantastical, truthful and estranged, and most especially in the figure of the Marqués de Bradomín.

Bradomín might well be considered another “trágala” for the gente nueva, but this time cast by Valle-Inclán himself. In the *Sonata*, Bradomín is a kind of inverted mirror of the gente nueva, who may enjoy his antics but may or may not recognize themselves in him. As an aristocrat who is fond of feudalism, he is the inverted image of the gente nueva who believe themselves to be the opposite: egalitarians who champion modernity. And yet both, in their wishful thinking, distort their realities. Enrique Anderson Imbert once noted that the *Sonatas* carried out an “escamoteo de la realidad,” or dissimulation of the real. He was absolutely right, because when we consider the *Sonata*’s relation to the sociohistorical—a relation of truthfulness but also estrangement—the “escamoteo” that is performed in its pages turns out to be more of an artistic merit than a fault. As a merit, it shows that just as the gente nueva measured everything through newness and anticlericalism, so Bradomín measures everything through the inverse, that is, through oldness and religion. In this way, Bradomín reveals to us something of the radical ideologies of the “melenudos y bohemios” with whom one might bump into on the streets of *fin-de-siglo* Madrid.

Hence the abundance of words that evoke the antiquated past throughout Bradomín’s memoir. If things are beautiful and virtuous in his quasi-feudal world, it is only because they are old and antiquated. People, customs, and things are all idealized by the frequent use of adjectives such as, “viejo” and “antiguo,” and other such words that reinforce the impression of antiquity: “secular,” “ruinoso,” “mustio,” “tradicional,” “milenario,” “clásico,” “medieval,” “latino,” “visigótico,” “merovingio” (Lázaro Carreter 156-57). The same goes for Bradomín’s penchant for the religious, which raises the mundane to a level of greatness and sanctity. Bradomín idealizes Concha as a “Dolorosa”

²⁹ This idea is reiterated in other interviews, where Valle-Inclán states: “la novela va siempre paralela a la política” (Valle-Inclán, *Entrevistas* 286); and “la novela camina paralelamente con la Historia y con los movimientos políticos” (qtd. in Dougherty, *Un Valle-Inclán* 178).

and as a “Madona” whenever he can. Her hands are not just white: they are of a “blancura eucarística”; bells do not just glimmer: they shine with “resplandor noble y eclesiástico”; and love affairs are not just illicit: they are a “pecado mortal.” Indeed, this habit of seeing everything through religion—and of expunging all that is prosaic from the world—is so strong that it often reaches the comical, as when Bradomín, in his old age, describes his baldness: “¡Hoy los años me han impuesto la tonsura como a un diácono...!” (83).

The “escamoteo,” however, does not stop there, for it is also and rather insidiously performed upon the humble and the meek. Within Bradomín’s worldview, there is a complete absence of what Amado Alonso called “la lucha por la vida.” The characters in Bradomín’s memoir move about in a kind of artificial society that gives the impression that the *Sonatas* are “montadas en el aire. El en vacío” (Alonso, “Estructura” 209). Bradomín’s world is one in which the peasants are more than happy to fulfill their duties to their landlords by working the land. The boy Florisel, who is assigned by Concha to serve as Bradomín’s servant, is the example that most stands out. When asked what his parents do, he answers: “Pues no hacen nada. Cavan la tierra.” For Bradomín, Florisel’s reason for being was clear: “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” (57)—or simply put, he was born to serve the aristocracy.

Such reasoning may be off-putting, but it is not very different from that which informs the anarchist worldview, as championed by the most strident of novísimos. Like Bradomín, anarchism blurs the line between utopia and reality, and idealizes man as a proletariat who is at the ready for the anarchist’s exhortation. In this idealized view, man is a historical subject, a proletariat, who is destined by economic evolution to rise up and serve the revolutionary cause. Here there is no room for the mundane realities of human psychology or other inconvenient realities, such as apathy and indifference, which were common in Restoration Spain. Thus in his visionary utopianism, the anarchist rebel fails to see reality and instead narcissistically projects his imagination onto it. As Benjamin Barber once put it, “Anarchism is a movement of the imagination—real men, mundane needs, come second” (53). We can see, then, that for both the anarchist rebel and Bradomín, the world is circumscribed by their imagination: in one case, man is there to serve the revolutionary cause; in the other, to serve the aristocratic system. The terms may be different, but they share the same logic.

The presence of aristocratic benevolence in the *Sonata* reveals similar implications when we consider the paternalistic undercurrent of anarchist and socialist ideology. Emma Goldman was famously attacked for stating that “all true anarchists were aristocrats” (194). Although the attack was misguided and unfair, it nevertheless revealed the flaw that has plagued libertarian movements, which is that they are liable to paternalism and alienation from the oppressed masses they seek to liberate.³⁰ This was the bitter truth that many novísimos who espoused progressive ideologies either refused to acknowledge or simply were unable to see; and it was also the truth that Clarín put on

³⁰ The attacks against Goldman were ultimately unfair in that she used the term “aristocrat” as a figure of speech that referred to the Nietzschean spirit that she hoped would transform a society of weak men into a society of strong men. In other words, her hope was for a society whose social and economic system would no longer oppress and weaken individuals, but would instead raise them up into becoming strong.

display in his second article, when he wrote that championing the tenets of “ebionismo”—that is, defending the cause of the disenfranchised—from a posture of self-indulgent utopianism was tantamount to offering bread to the poor on the condition that they come to “recogerlo sobre la mesa de una orgía.”

And what is the *Sonata de otoño* if not an orgy of self-indulgence, *galantería*, and aristocratic benevolence? It is not inconsequential that when Bradomín arrives at the Palacio de Brandeso he finds a group of tenant farmers (“pagadores”) who are waiting near some chests of wheat: “Mis pasos resonaron sobre las anchas losas. Sentados en escaños de roble, lustrosos por la usanza, esperaban los pagadores de un foral. En el fondo se distinguían los viejos arcones de trigo con la tapa alzada” (40).³¹ Indeed, the fate of these tenant farmers depends on the reputed benevolence of the señora de Brandeso, who, as it happens, has been busy swooning over her beloved Bradomín and his gallant entry into the palace, leaving the tenant farmers to wait. Evidently, indulging in wistfulness comes first—the real needs of men come second. It is worth noting, moreover, that the image of the “arcones de trigo” is loaded with historical connotations, most significantly of Kropotkin’s *La conquista del pan* (1893), which had provoked a great deal of ideological fervency in Spain’s revolutionary circles. The appearance of the “arcones de trigo” may certainly be read as an instance of sociohistorical material entering the *Sonata*; on a larger scale, it reveals a grotesque truth, which is that aristocratic benevolence—be it feudal or anarchist—can ultimately disguise cunning and false virtue.³²

Thus we can see how Bradomín’s duplicity may have gained a deeper resonance with a readership immersed in the uncritical excesses of radical politics. His mystique of righteous gentility is a pose that disguises a more sinister and profane underside. He is the compassionate hero who comes to the aid of the sick and dying Concha; he is the selfless Crusader of medieval Christianity who bids farewell to his beloved; he is the protector of the honor of the Brandeso household; and he is the paternal figure who dignifies the humble and meek Florisel. And yet undoing his mystique of righteousness are moments in which Bradomín’s satanic underside flashes into view, as when Concha becomes the object of his lust: “Me das miedo cuando dices esas impiedades... Sí, miedo porque no eres tú quien habla: Es Satanás... Hasta tu voz parece otra... ¡Es Satanás!...” (109). Here we see what Bradomín really is: nefarious and egotistical. Everything else about him—his nobility and propriety—has been a mere illusion modeled on archaic traditions of gallantry and religiosity. Thus his *modus operandi* can be aptly described by an infamous

³¹ It is unclear what the tenant farmers are waiting for, though it is likely they are there either to receive, on loan, their share of grain for planting, or to pay a levy in form of grain. In either case, these chests are most likely linked to the palace’s granary (*hórreo*), on which the tenants depended in times of shortage or urgency. The presence of granaries in Galicia is alluded to early in the *Sonata*, when Bradomín sets out for the Palacio de Brandeso: “cruzamos la Quintana de San Clorio, acosados por el ladrido de los perros que vigilaban en las eras atados bajo los hórreos” (34).

³² The gravity of the image of the granary was not lost on Valle-Inclán, who in 1921 employed it in a poem addressing the plight of the Mexican indigenous peasant:

¡Indio mexicano que la Encomienda tornó mendigo!
¡Indio mexicano!
¡Rebélate y quema los trojes del trigo!
¡Rebélate, hermano! (*Artículos* 417)

fin-de-siècle slogan: what do the victims matter if the gesture is beautiful?³³ As with anarchist ideology, this is a world circumscribed by Brandomín's imagination, and it is one that is there ultimately to gratify his desires. Thus his narcissistic cry at the novel's end, when he reflects on Concha's death, is the lament of a god who has lost the creatures and the world he has created in his likeness: "¡Lloré como un Dios antiguo al extinguirse su culto!" (118).

"Combatir la servil imitación"

Clarín's injunction to "combatir la servil imitación" also finds its way into the *Sonata de otoño*. He expresses this concern most strongly in the first article, and repeats it briefly in the second. His prime target is the tendency that young Spanish writers have of imitating French literary trends. About Valle-Inclán's *Epitalamio*, he writes, "Todo eso que él cree *originalidad* y *valer* es modernismo puro, imitación de afectaciones, *artículo de París*... de venta en las ferias de Toro o de Rioseco." Clarín laments that young Spanish intellectuals are wasting their talents by mimicking French ways of thinking, writing, and feeling. As a corrective, he advises Valle-Inclán to follow Horace's dictum, "*versate manu*," that is, "study, ruminate, reflect." He also encourages him to forget many of his "lecturas malsanas," for only then will he stop being a "carnero de Panurgo."

The advice to forget such readings is not as casual a remark as one might think. In reality, it alludes to the problem of "originalidad," which had generated a great deal of discussion regarding the meaning of modernismo and the *gente nueva*. With the ever-growing presence of French culture in Spain, "originalidad" had become increasingly rare and difficult to define, and practically impossible to achieve. It was, as Fray Candil put it, a "mirlo blanco ['white blackbird'] en esta época de críticos y novelistas traducidos libremente del francés" ("Un nuevo" 6). For the *gente nueva*, "originalidad" could only be achieved through the artistic, usually French, genres and forms that opposed the establishment and the authority of Spanish tradition. For the *gente vieja*, on the other hand, true originality could only be obtained when an artist thought for himself and didn't merely rearrange into a new pattern the hackneyed language and themes of French decadentism and symbolism. On this point, Candil writes, "Una cosa es la obscuridad

³³ This phrase is by Laurent Tailhade, the French satirical poet and anarchist provocateur. In 1893, in response to an anarchist bomb thrown by Auguste Vaillant into the French Chamber of Deputies in 1893, Tailhade scandalized the French public when he stated: "What do the victims matter if the gesture is beautiful? What does the death of some unidentified persons matter, if, by it, the individual is affirmed?" (Sonn, *Anarchism* 257). Tailhade's conflicts with the French authorities were often reported in the Spanish press. The Spanish republican Emilio Castelar wrote the following about Tailhade's infamous remark:

"No ha mucho que sucedió el atentado de Vaillant en el Congreso francés, y no ha mucho que tras el atentado se reunieron varios estetas, corruptores de la gran idea del arte por el arte, capaces de incendiar a París, como Nerón a Roma, por lo hermoso del espectáculo estético. Hallábase allí, entre tantos adoradores de la belleza divorciada del bien, un escritor anarquista llamado Tailhade, quien dijo que importaba poco el crimen cometido por Vaillant ante la hermosura de su actitud y de su gesto al despedir la bomba, sólo comparables, añadido yo, al gesto y actitud de Nerón cuando, vestido de Apolo y llevando en las manos áurea citara tañida por sus delicados dedos, celebraba el incendio de la sacra Ilión entre las llamas que consumían a la Ciudad Eterna." (142-43)

aparente que nace de lo profundo del pensamiento, de lo intenso de la emoción, y otra cosa la obscuridad que nace de no ver claro a causa de anemia cerebral, de artificio retórico, de fiebre de originalidad enrevesada” (“Baturrillo”).³⁴

The criticism by the *gente vieja*, however, did not stop there, for there were several critics who were perceptive enough to discern the logic driving the obsession with “originality.” One such critic wrote the following: “El modernismo actual—¡cuántas atrocidades se cometen en su nombre!—quiere ser una originalidad y resulta un desatino. Es la obra de un neurótico que tiene la obsesión de lo nuevo y hace todo al revés, creyendo que en esto precisamente consiste la novedad” (Buxadé). In other words, if the literature of Valera, Echegaray, and Clarín was realist, sober, and straightforward, then the modernistas’ literature would be, by a reverse logic, mysterious, extravagant, and suggestive. Viewed in this light, modernismo, in the hands of lesser artists, lost much of its originality, for it was ultimately bound by the categories and assumptions of the *gente vieja*.

And yet the modernistas nevertheless saw themselves as being “original,” and by extension, politically expedient with respect to the modernization of Spain. It is worth recalling that modernismo, which some critics have seen as an artistic tendency that merely sought to renew literary language without any concern for the sociopolitical, had always been “un intento de renovación de los valores ideológicos heredados” (Blasco Pascual 71). The modernistas’ pursuit of “originalidad,” then, included a significant measure of ideological reform. Valle-Inclán’s friend and fellow *tertuliano*, Camilo Bargiela, once described the modernistas as “espíritus expansivos abiertos a todas las corrientes científicas y artísticas” (89). And in relation to the organic body that is Spanish society, Bargiela added: “lo viejo caerá, sin gran estrépito, y España seguirá su destino de modo más desembarazado” (89-90). Thus it was the modernistas—those “espíritus expansivos”—who saw themselves as embodying and bringing about Spain’s actualization and modernization. With Bargiela’s quote we can now see that what really underlies the debate over the *gente nueva*’s “afán de originalidad” is the question of whether the *gente nueva* are the embodiment of the nation’s self-actualization, or of the young writers’ self-indulgence.

It the *Sonata de otoño* it becomes clear that Valle-Inclán gave serious thought to the problem of originality and to Clarín’s criticism of *Epitalamio*’s artless imitation of French irreverence. There he outgrows his amateurism and matures as a writer for whom artistic originality is no longer bound to the facile opposition of new vs. old. The result of this process was not lost on Manuel Bueno, who in his early review of the *Sonata*, noted that the novel contained images that reminded him of Solomon:

³⁴ As one art critic noted in 1894, there emerged in Spain’s art world an obsession with novelty, or “originalidad,” that was beginning to override the concern for serious artistic achievement. This critic attributes to modernismo the break from classicism, but now he sees that modernismo has lost sight of its more noble purpose. Commenting on an art exhibition, he writes:

Otro aspecto presenta el actual certamen mirado en general, esto es, el contagio que se inicia de la chifladura tras-pirinaica, afán de originalidad que hace que se dé por antiguo la que quince días antes era espléndido como nuevo; el modernismo que sirvió para desterrar guerreros y el contorno clásico imprimiendo al arte una marcha más sólida y real hoy nos conducirá si Dios no lo remedia al desquiciamiento, al caos. (Compte)

Valle-Inclán escribe: “Tu frente brilla como un astro bajo la crencha de ébano”. Leo en “El cantar de los cantares”: “Tus cabellos son dorados como las guedejas de las cabras que trepan el monte Galaad”. Del escritor español: “El cuello florecía de los hombres como un lirio enfermo”. Del escritor hebreo: “Tu cuello es recto y airoso como la torre de David”... Valle-Inclán se recrea describiendo a Concha y dice: “Sus senos eran dos rosas blancas aromando un altar”. De Salomón a Sulamita: “Tus pechos son como dos gamitos mellizos que están paciando entre dos blancas azucenas”... (“*Sonata*”)

These examples show that rather than merely refer to something profane as sacred, and expect readers to be scandalized by such irreverence, Valle-Inclán has taken a different approach: he has transfigured the profane into the sacred, and the sacred into the profane. In essence, he has gone from merely insulting the things of the world, to transfiguring them artistically. Instead of merely juxtaposing the old and the new, Valle-Inclán has merged them, a process which is the true mark of artistic originality and worth, precisely the kind which Clarín had insisted on.

Another example of this kind of fusion, but with anticlerical implications, can be found early in the *Sonata*, where Bradomín helps Concha dress. The scene is charged with eroticism as Bradomín, against Concha’s sense of modesty, slips onto her a pair of silk stockings and garters, and kisses her feet. As he is picking out a dress for her to wear, she asks him to bring her a white gown (“Ese ropón blanco”). As he dresses her with it, he remarks “Yo la vestía con el cuidado religioso y amante que visten las señoras devotas a las imágenes de que son camaristas.” And then he adds that on Concha, the gown “parecía un hábito monacal” (43-44). With this simile, Valle-Inclán merges the erotic with the clerical; and for those reading this scene amid the anticlericalism and French-inspired radicalism of 1902, such merging is dense with historical and political connotations.³⁵ The sociohistorical charge of Bradomín’s perversions is further suggested when Concha demands that the “brasero” that has been lit for him be removed, and that the “chimenea francesa” be lit for him instead (44). This preference for the French heating method over the one commonly used in nineteenth-century Spain is not gratuitous.³⁶ The term “chimenea,” alone, would have sufficed, as it does elsewhere in the *Sonata*, but clearly the scene is meant to highlight Bradomín’s French-inspired ways and insolence, and by implication, the scene’s anticlerical charge.³⁷

That the *Sonata* fuses the clerical with the perverse, and does so with sociopolitical implications, attests to Valle-Inclán’s pursuit of artistic worth. And yet there is an obvious fact that needs to be accounted for: the *Sonata*, on the surface, seems to replicate the tired themes of *galantería* and *decadentismo*, which by 1902 had lost all

³⁵ The English translation by Margaret Jull Costa renders “hábito monacal” as “nun’s habit” (18), thereby limiting the allusion to female religious orders. However, in Spanish, Valle-Inclán’s use of “hábito monacal”—also “ropón monacal” and “túnica blanca y monacal”—leaves the allusion open to clericalism in general.

³⁶ Nineteenth-century travelers in Spain noted that the “brasero” was usually the only means of obtaining heat in Spain. One such traveler wrote, or rather complained: “our hotel, dirty and uncomfortable, the weather very cold, with only a brazier of charcoal and ashes to warm ourselves with (for there are no fire-places in Spain, except in a few hotels) (Mills 47).

³⁷ Here the English translation also loses the implications of these words. Costa translates “brasero” as “brazier,” and “Enciende tú la chimenea francesa” as “Have them light the fire.”

their novelty and had become clichéd (Alberich 366). One explanation is that Valle-Inclán, by insisting on such themes, was rejecting the imperative to be “original” in the sense of following or inventing new trends. His concern as an artist was now focused on seeking true originality, and to achieve this he needed not “newness” but “artistry,” the kind that looks deeper at the world, and deeper at the process of art-making.³⁸ This is precisely what Valle-Inclán did, and it led him from being a modernista by trend to being a modernista—or Modernist—by artistic accomplishment. In making this transition, he ultimately dignified the original aim of Spanish modernismo, which was to revolutionize and modernize Spain. Thus, to borrow words from T.J. Clark, Valle-Inclán’s “Modernism was materialist where it really counted, when it came to the business of looking and making” (129).

The *Sonata* is a product of such looking and making. More specifically, it is the product of looking at the contradictory nature of “originalidad”—as self-indulgence and self-actualization—and making art out of it. Once again, the figure of Bradomín is key, for he embodies the two sides of the contradiction and effaces the line between them. On one hand, his self-actualization can be seen in his vitalism and amorality. Critics have often viewed him as representing a Nietzschean “Übermensch” who disdains Christian morals and affirms his liberty.³⁹ He may play the part of the devoted Christian who respects propriety, but it is all a farce, because his real ambition is to give expression to his power and will. Such ambition is manifested in his sexual prowess, his seduction of Concha, and his superiority over her cuckolded husband: “Hay maridos ... que ni siquiera pueden servirnos de precursores,” Bradomín mockingly says of him (65). It is also seen in his disregard for religious moralism when he dabbles in witchcraft by placing some “yerbas de virtud oculta” under Concha’s pillows (53), and when he speaks heresies during his erotic and diabolic encounters with Concha, as when he says, “¡Azótame, Concha! ¡Azótame como a un divino Nazareno! (109).⁴⁰

³⁸ In essence, the *Sonata* plays out the modernistas’ wavering between, on one hand, their hackneyed literary forms, and on other, their artistic achievements that were truly original. An example of this wavering can be found in the review of Marquina’s play *El pastor*, which was cited above, in note 18, page 59.

³⁹ Gonzalo Sobejano, in his *Nietzsche en España*, notes that as early as 1909 critics had observed a Nietzschean influence in Valle-Inclán. He cites A. González-Blanco’s *Historia de la novela en España* (1909), which states that “entre las pocas cosas que en el orden ideológico pueden apuntarse al examinar las obras de Valle-Inclán, una de ellas es este fiero alarde de nietzschianismo” (qtd. in Sobejano 213). He cites other critics, such as Cansinos-Asséns and Melchor Fernández Almagro, who also see the presence of Nietzsche in Valle-Inclán’s work. On this point, González-Blanco cites Fernández Almagro, who explains that “No otra es la procedencia de la inclinación mostrada por Bradomín ‘a las pasiones del amor, del orgullo y de la cólera, las pasiones nobles y sagradas que animaron a los dioses antiguos’” (qtd. in Sobejano, *Nietzsche* 214). Also of interest is Thomas Butler Ward’s article “La *Sonata de otoño*: un hito en el desarrollo hacia el nihilismo activo,” in which he studies how an active form of Nietzschean nihilism is played out in the figure of Bradomín; and how a passive form of nihilism is played out in Concha.

⁴⁰ Another example of Bradomín’s Übermensch qualities is his admiration for the cruelty and haughtiness of the great, ancient figures of the past. In the chapel, where the ancestors of the Bradomín lineage rest in their tombs, Bradomín celebrates the cruelty, barbarism, and madness of the great nobles and lords who founded the Palacio (104-105). Bradomín’s admiration echoes what Nietzsche once wrote: “it would be the most extreme sign of vulgarity to be related to your parents. Higher natures have their origins infinitely further back.... *Great* individuals are the oldest” (78). It is

Bradomín's self-indulgence, on the other hand, is clear enough from what has already been discussed (i.e. his indulging in a mystique of righteous gentility and gallantry, and his indulging in his sexual fantasies with Concha). But it is also brought to light in the library scene, with special scorn for the modernista-type literati. There we find Bradomín "refugiado en la biblioteca," reading the *Florilegio de Nuestra Señora*, when the great and commanding lord Don Juan Manuel barges in, loudly and forcefully. Bradomín closes his book, but only halfway, so as not to lose the page—"para guardar la página," he says (76). Don Juan Manuel, with hands that resemble those of a "rey asceta," grabs the book, looks at it disdainfully, and tells Bradomín: "Sobrino, has heredado la manía de tu abuelo, que también se pasaba los días leyendo. ¡Así se volvió loco!" (77).

The contrast between the two men makes Bradomín seem frivolous and even cowardly. Hence the use of the word "refugiado" and the reference to the *Florilegio*, or collection of literary "flowers." As for the reference to Bradomín's "manía," there is no doubt that it alludes to the figure of Don Quixote, but it can also be seen as resonating with the conception that many individuals had of the modernistas as being mentally deranged, or as being "desquiciados" who were infected by the "chifladura," or mania, of bringing French cultural and political modernity to Spain.⁴¹ Finally, this image is rounded off by Don Juan Manuel's asceticism, which makes Bradomín, with his flowery books and his daintiness, seem like an effete man of letters. Although Bradomín has come across as an Übermensch-like figure, next to Montenegro's asceticism and assertiveness, he is revealed to be self-indulgent and decadent. With everything put together, this image of Bradomín gives expression to Clarín's complaint that the modernistas, despite all their posturing and irreverence, were not as commanding or courageous as they thought they were.

Thus the *Sonata* presents Bradomín as an ambivalent figure: he is self-indulgent and deranged but also rebellious and self-actualizing. He is, in other words, a mimicry of the gente nueva in their stridency and excesses. Through Valle-Inclán's expert hand, these two tendencies get mixed up in the erotic encounters of Bradomín and Concha. In the scene where Bradomín dresses Concha, he not only relishes his frivolous sexual fetishes—that is, his desire to seduce her in her weak and sickly state, to dress her in silk and serve as her "azafata," and to kiss her feet. But also, by fulfilling those fetishes and lusts for dominance, and narrating them in highly stylized fashion, Bradomín enacts a strategy of self-creation, or "aesthetic sexuality," through which he makes of his body, behavior, and feelings a work of art.⁴²

One may read these scenes as having the intention to merely scandalize, to *épater les bourgeois*, but Valle-Inclán has gone beyond that facile, amateurish expedient. What he seeks now is much more subtle, and he achieves this goal by constructing the *Sonata's*

unclear to what extent Valle-Inclán was familiar with Nietzsche, but there is no doubt that Nietzschean philosophy was in the air in *fin-de-siglo* Spain.

⁴¹ The terms "desquiciados" ('crazy, deranged people') and "chifladura" ('craziness') are drawn from a citation referred to above, in note 34, page 67. Also illustrative is another previous citation, by José Buxadé, who in *Gente Vieja* stated that "El modernismo actual ... es la obra de un neurótico que tiene la obsesión de lo nuevo y hace todo al revés, creyendo que en esto precisamente consiste la novedad." Such views of the gente nueva were common, and were frequently found in antimodernista publications such as *Madrid Cómico* and *Gente Vieja*.

⁴² The term "aesthetic sexuality" is from Romana Byrne.

erotic scenes in such a way that they dispel the bad faith that keeps self-indulgence and self-actualization as two separate and distinct motives. For some of Valle-Inclán's fellow "jóvenes"—who hold firm that their claims to actualizing Spain cannot possibly be a form of self-indulgence—such scenes must have made for quite an uncomfortable reading. One might even say that they are Valle-Inclán's effort to *épater la gente nueva*.

“Combatir el descaro y la falta de respeto”

In his second article to Valle-Inclán, Clarín states that he seeks to “combatir ... el descaro y la falta de respeto.” Elaborating on this point, he writes:

Yo no sé como hay *artistas* que desdeñan las verdades que tenemos encerradas en vetustos relicarios. ...

En el arte, como en la vida ordinaria, en punto a moral, no hay más que dos *novedades* posibles: o ser moral o no serlo.

Hay que ser moral (por moralidad). *Hortus inclusus*.

Pero ahí, ahondar.

One can see how these allusions to sacred truths inherited from the past might sound like those of an “anticuado” who is either nostalgic for traditional morals, or resentful of their summary dismissal by younger generations. Indeed, such statements were precisely the target of the novísimos' outrage toward the intellectual establishment.⁴³ But ultimately, when it came to Clarín, a man of great critical and artistic insight, neither the charge of nostalgia nor the grounds for outrage were entirely justified.

For Clarín, the *joven/viejo* division not only had become tired and stale, but was also “falsa, vaga, y groseramente fisiológica” (“Malas” 98). For this, he blames the vulgarization of evolutionary theory, in which everything that came before the present was seen to be irremediably flawed.⁴⁴ According to this rationale, the *joven/viejo* division was “un caso más de ese fenómeno biológico” (Cansinos-Asséns 21). And yet, despite the scientific tenor of their evolutionist discourse, the *gente nueva* could not help but sublimate themselves as exemplars of the spiritual. This is made evident in the way that

⁴³ The title of Martínez Ruiz's article “Iconoclastas,” written during one of his fits of outrage, is in this sense very telling, for it exemplifies the novísimos' rejection of anything resembling an inherited or revered truth. With reference to the cultural dogmas of the establishment, Martínez Ruiz explains that the “nuevas gentes, despreocupadas e inquietas, se lanzan piqueta en mano contra los edificios que ellos [la gente vieja] han fabricado lentamente, amorosamente” (*Artículos* 165-66). And he adds: “La vida se engendra de la muerta, no podría haber formas nuevas si las antiguas no perecieran” (*Artículos* 166). Another example of this rhetoric can be found in note 19, page 59.

⁴⁴ One commentator, writing in the periodical *Gente Vieja*, described modernismo in the following terms: “Es algo como el nihilismo en el arte: nada de lo hecho antes de su aparición vale ni sirve para nada; nada de lo que pueda hacerse después tendrá valor alguno. Ni viene de nadie ni va a ningún lado. Es la aspiración suprema y única de los que no han querido molestarse estudiando lo pasado, por conceptuarlo inútil y hasta perjudicial” (Ubeda Correal 6). The Galician writer Emilio Fernández Vaamonde, when describing Spain's young writers, cites a line from Stendhal: “Elle n'a rien à continuer, cette génération, elle a tout à créer” (10). The citation seems to be inexact, but it is no less telling when it comes to some of the novísimos' attitude toward the past.

Ernesto Bark, in his 1901 study of modernismo, saw the *joven/viejo* division as a “protesta ... del espíritu contra la forma” (1). Like many others, Bark divided the issue between the spiritual and the material, and in doing so he echoed the libertarian belief that the corruption and suffering of humanity was rooted in all things material, including the unequal distribution of goods and the physiological consequences of exploitation and disease.

It is clear, then, that the age division connoted an opposition between the spiritual and the “groseramente fisiológico.” The implications of this run deep, as Clarín had clearly intuited, for they involve what the Italian writer Alberto Moravia bluntly referred to as “terror,” a notion which has everything to do with age division and the passage of time. Moravia explains that social and cultural terror took hold during the French Revolution, when the bourgeois materialistic world—a world bound to the passage of time—superseded the feudal world, which was static and situated outside of time. With the Revolution, nothing that had previously been stable could remain still. Values, fortunes, status, opinions, tastes, and styles—all fell victim to continuous change. Hence the emergence of the snob. As Moravia explains, “Snobbery comes to stand as the fickle and arbitrary surrogate of good taste, which is based no longer on the canon of the beautiful but on that of fashion, of whatever is in vogue” (37). Thus in the cultural and social realm, there are no stable values: whatever is up to date inevitably gets left behind by the progression of time.

Terror, then, is intimately tied to the notion of progress. But as Moravia notes, this is a progress that has nothing to do with improvement, for it merely refers to movement in time, whether it be toward decadence or renewal. What matters about moral, aesthetic, and political ideas is not what they are substantively, but rather how they move along a scale of possible values. To illustrate this, Moravia refers to the notion of “patria.” At some historical moments, “patria” was held in high regard, but in others, it was not. In both cases, however, the notion of “patria” itself is not what has moved up or down the scale of values; rather, it has been the opinion that one has of it that has moved. The concept itself, of “patria,” has been left intact and has suffered no substantial change. Moravia points out that the same phenomenon took place during Robespierre’s Terror, when the Girondists, who had been the revolutionary extremists prior to the Revolution, came to be seen as treacherously moderate. Within this political context, it is clear that driving the terroristic dynamic is the will to power disguised as Robespierre’s patriotic moralism (Moravia 42).

Although *fin-de-siglo* Spain was no Revolutionary France, the terroristic method was nevertheless at the root of the *gente nueva/gente vieja* opposition, and it is what Valle-Inclán refashions in the *Sonata*.⁴⁵ As Moravia explains:

⁴⁵ The case of the Spanish anarchist-republican José Nakens is a good example of this method. Like the Girondists, Nakens suffered a rejection by the “new” revolutionaries, in his case, the modernistas. Nakens had edited the anticlerical periodical *El Motín* (1881-1926) and had been imprisoned for his involvement in the 1906 anarchist bombing that was intended to assassinate King Alfonso XIII. Cansinos-Asséns describes him as a “feroz revolucionario” whose articles “levantaron polvareda en su tiempo.” To the novísimos, however, he had become a reactionary by the mere fact that his literary interests were based on the outmoded genre of realism, which ultimately meant that he was incapable of being truly rebellious and subversive. Thus Nakens came to be seen as something of a rueful figure: “Aquel viejo león republicano que ahora se revolvió sin garras en aquella jaula estrecha, había sido en otro tiempo un terrible demolidor de prestigios..., un iconoclasta, un rebelde; pero ahora, no

the terror that approaches the purest state is that which is based on the “tempo” of the calendar; or, let us say, upon age. To say that such and such a person is backward, obsolete, conservative, traditionalist is always just somebody’s opinion; but to say that he is old is an affirmation one cannot refute. When real age gives the lie to such an affirmation, then one will say that the person’s *ideas* are “old.” For all these reasons, terror is a weapon in the hands of people young in age or in ideas (or of people who define themselves as such) against the aged and those accused of having “aged” ideas. (38)

Thus Clarín was right on target when he described the *joven/viejo* rhetoric as “groseramente fisiológica.”⁴⁶ We can now see that when he lamented that artists now disdain old, time-honored truths—“las verdades que tenemos encerradas en vetustos relicarios”—he was not being nostalgic, but was instead groping at something much more insidious and subtle. Indeed, what he was pointing toward was a terroristic weapon that arbitrarily equated the old with the erroneous and obsolete, and by implication, the young with the correct and useful.

The power of such a devious scheme lies in a simple maneuver whereby the young not only see themselves as inhabiting a realm outside of time—that is, the realm of the spiritual and the absolute—but also see the old as inhabiting the temporal and material realm.⁴⁷ For Moravia, this is precisely the maneuver that galvanizes the avant-garde. To illustrate this, he mimics the kind of reasoning that a Futurist would employ as he evaluates the Mona Lisa:

I don’t know exactly what the Mona Lisa is, I don’t know whether or not yesterday I admired it, I don’t know whether or not today I despise it. I know extremely well, however, what it is I am doing: I am placing the Mona Lisa in time and myself out of time. That is, I am placing my opinion, which is probably incomplete or, in any case, temporary, into the sphere of the absolute. And I am placing the Mona Lisa, a masterpiece which is by all appearances absolute, inside the sphere of time. By doing this I am transforming the relative (my opinion) into the absolute and the absolute (the Mona Lisa) into the relative. (39)

Thus the avant-garde’s terrorism is premised on a belief in time, not values.

In their forward-looking arrogance, then, the terroristic quarters of the *gente nueva* lost sight of what a truly effective social revolution might be. What they were protesting was less about what was wrong with Spain than what was merely “old” about

comprendía la rebeldía de los jóvenes y resultaba un reaccionario en la literatura. Siempre la misma paradoja” (Cansinos-Asséns 44).

⁴⁶ An example of the crudely physiological understanding of the age division can be found in Martínez Ruiz: “El primer delito de los viejos es ser viejos; es un delito ineludible, en que los jóvenes de ahora habremos incurrido dentro de algunos años” (*Artículos* 164). Following the terroristic method, he affirms that “nosotros [los jóvenes] valemos más, mucho más que ellos” (*Artículos* 165). And lastly, also in accordance with Moravia’s observations, he highlights the inescapability of time and the necessary invalidation of the old: “Pero el curso del tiempo es fatal e inexorable. La vida se engendra de la muerte, no podría haber formas nuevas si las antiguas no perecieran” (*Artículos* 166).

⁴⁷ This is basically Bark’s “protesta ... del espíritu contra la forma,” as cited above.

it.⁴⁸ Theirs was a revolutionary reaction that ruled out any deep moral considerations and resulted in a politics without substance.⁴⁹ This is the core of Clarín's criticism of Valle-Inclán's French-inspired *Epitalamio*.

We can see, then, that Valle-Inclán's originality lies in his constructing Bradomín's Satanism and snobbery as motifs of historical substance.⁵⁰ In essence, what the *Sonata* offers is a reverse image of the terroristic aesthetic, whereby the forward-looking snobbery of the *gente nueva* is refashioned into a backward-looking snobbery of an old man, Bradomín. If the *gente nueva* affirm that which is new, Bradomín affirms that which is old, and revels in it. Hence his fixation on the ancient ideals of religious devotion, aristocratic lineage, and chivalric duty and heroism, not to mention his obsessive use of age-evoking adjectives:

Yo recordaba nebulosamente aquel antiguo jardín donde los mirtos seculares dibujaban los cuatro escudos del fundador, en torno de una fuente abandonada. 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. . . .
¡Hermosos y lejanos recuerdos! Yo también los evoqué un día lejano, cuando la mañana otoñal y dorada envolvía el jardín húmedo y reverdecido por la constante lluvia de la noche. Bajo el cielo límpido, de un azul heráldico, los cipreses venerables parecían tener el ensueño de la vida monástica. (58-59)

Examples like this abound throughout the *Sonata*. In the passage just cited, we find that Bradomín goes into a near rapture by indulging in a fantasy of an ancient gallantry, lineage, and religious piety. For Bradomín, the further in the past his ideals are rooted, the more righteous and admirable they are. This is evident in the way he portrays Don Juan Manuel Montenegro, a grand, heroic figure whose (quasi-comical) lineage dates back to Roland, and who is spoken about as if he were a hero from an ancient epic, as the epithet uttered by Florisel suggests: “¡Gran señor, muy gran señor, es Don Juan Manuel!” (70). And it is also evident in the smallest details, as when Bradomín describes the tenant farmers who wait near the chests of wheat: “Sentados en escaños de roble, lustrosos por la usanza, esperaban los pagadores de un foral” (40). Even the sheen that the bench has

⁴⁸ See note 19, page 59, for an example of the forceful and violent tone of some of the *gente nueva*.

⁴⁹ This does not mean that they were wrong to criticize many aspects of the Spain's past and its traditional values. On the political front, they had good reason to deplore the outmoded system of government dominated by the church, the oligarchy, and the monarchy. They were also right to deplore Spain's disastrous nineteenth century, which was plagued by Ferdinand VII's absolutism, the Carlist wars, and the corruption of the Restoration regime. On the cultural front, there were clear signs that Spain's most prominent intellectuals—Menéndez y Pelayo, Palació Valdés—were out of step with modern Europe.

⁵⁰ In 1908 the politician Segismundo Moret gave a speech titled “Propaganda liberal” in which he addressed the terroristic tendencies of Spain's young liberal radicals. The wording and the motifs he uses exemplify the kind of materials that the *Sonata* puts to use in constructing Bradomín:

Y vosotros, los jóvenes: ¿Cómo marcháis? ¿En qué dirección vais? Para muchos de vosotros podría decir que he visto el demonio que os guía (*risas*): el demonio de la vanidad y de la soberbia. . . . La originalidad, la inmensa vanidad, marcada con la degradación del feminismo, es el demonio que le extravía. Por eso es preciso que toda esa juventud, si quiere ser algo, se virilice, procurando, ante todo, lograr esa libertad civil que garantiza la absoluta independencia de conciencia. (Moret 187)

acquired from such long-term use is seen by Bradomín as something glorious, as the dual meaning of “lustroso” suggests.

Following the terroristic logic, Bradomín affirms his ideals of oldness by placing himself and his opinion outside of time, in the realm of the absolute. He describes his stay at the Palacio de Brandeso as one of enchantment: “Concha, ... Ya a sabes que soy un príncipe a quien tienes encantado en tu Palacio. Si quieres que no se rompa el encanto, has de hacer de mi vida un cuento alegre” (68). Similarly, the Palace’s labyrinthine garden and ancient fountain—whose eternally gushing water is “sin alma y sin edad” (83)—creates a world of timelessness.⁵¹ The *Sonata*’s effort to situate itself in the extra-temporal realm was not lost on one of its earliest readers, Ciges Aparicio, who in his 1902 review wrote the following:

¿En qué época ocurre la acción de la *Sonata de Otoño*? El autor calla deliberadamente. Sólo por una frase de Concha que habla de la *reina Margarita y de la otra reina* podemos colegir que fue en tiempos de la última guerra civil. Valle-Inclán posee el secreto de que sus libros no tengan edad, porque pertenecen a todas. Los amores del marqués de Bradomín y Concha lo mismo pueden ser de hoy que del siglo XVI.⁵²

Despite the brief incursion into the historical, time has no sway over the society in which Bradomín is enmeshed: there, nothing changes, especially the social order. Boys such as Florisel have always existed to serve the palace: “parecía el hijo de un antiguo siervo de la gleba” (56); and tenant farmers have always waited on the same lustrous bench that sits in front of the palace’s stock of wheat. This archaic, unchanging society is based on what José Antonio Maravall called a “visión estática” (“La imagen” 234), in which the notion of time does not obtain.⁵³ We can see that Bradomín, in recounting his “memorias,” creates a world that by being disconnected from the notion of time and change grants absolute righteousness to his opinions, a key mechanism of the terroristic dynamic.

And yet as righteous as Bradomín may be, he nevertheless inflicts terror on the young Concha. To understand the implications of this, let us recall that the terroristic dynamic is based on the biological fact of age, whereby the accusation that one is old is not a matter of opinion, but an affirmation of fact. Building on this argument, Moravia explains that since the biological fact of old age is tied to the weakening of sexual prowess, the accusation of being old is fundamentally an accusation of impotency (38).

⁵¹ Several critics have already pointed out that the fountain and the garden in the Palacio de Brandeso symbolize the extra-temporal and the eternal. Robert J. Weber, for example, writes that Bradomín “convierte el jardín, la fuente y el laberinto en símbolos de lo eterno; el jardín existía antes que existieran Bradomín, Concha y su amor, y continúa existiendo después de que los últimos vestigios de ese amor son sólo fragancias” (192). Georges Güntert, for his part, writes: “Si el laberinto debe entenderse como metáfora del *enredo verbal* (¡‘enredo’ es otra palabra predilecta de Valle-Inclán!), la fuente, voz que canta en el laberinto, constituye igualmente una realidad artística y extra-temporal” (563).

⁵² This idea is echoed by Luis Bello, who also in 1902, wrote the following about Valle-Inclán and his *Sonata de otoño*: “con el estilo se defiende de su mayor enemigo, que es el tiempo” (qtd. in Serrano Alonso “Valle-Inclán” 289).

⁵³ According to Maravall, “Arcaísmo social es inmovilismo, es vida estática, pero es también falta de acción, falta de la noción de tiempo, ausencia de la individualidad psicológica” (“La imagen” 235).

Thus it is the righteous young novísimos who are potent ones, as reflected in their sexual prowess, while the old are the impotent, as reflected in their biological enfeeblement.

This is precisely the logic that the *Sonata* takes from its historical moment, refracted as an inverted mirror. The technique yields a reverse image of the terroristic dynamic, which is estranged but still familiar. Bradomín, a man with “casi todo el pelo blanco” (50), is the one who enjoys sexual prowess, while on the other hand, Concha, a young woman of thirty-one, who is still addressed as “señorita,” is the one who has become biologically weak and impotent. Although the world that Bradomín and Concha inhabit is one of timelessness, Concha, due to her illness, is nevertheless subject to biological deterioration, which is ultimately correlated to the prosaic reality of time and thus obsolescence. This was a point of which the novísimos never failed to remind the “anticuados,” to whom they attributed sickness and femininity as a metonym for old age and impotency. In contrast, the gente nueva embraced metaphors of vitality and virility, which were often represented by the wearing of a *melena*, or long hair (Thion Soriano-Mollá, “La Gente” 429-30). That Bradomín wore his “melena merovingia” and that Concha was weakened by illness must certainly have resonated with Valle-Inclán’s contemporaries.

So, too, the terror that Bradomín inspires in Concha. For Concha, Bradomín represents heresy and sin, and is thus the harbinger of eternal damnation. She fears his sadistic tendencies and glimpses his Satanism, especially when he asks her to whip him with her hair. Such scenes of terror, however, are not mere exercises in shocking the bourgeoisie. Instead, these scenes mimic the novísimos’ effort to terrorize the establishment. A good example can be found shortly after Bradomín arrives at the Palacio, when he and Concha sit down to eat and reminisce about the time when they were children. The scene reads as follows, with Concha addressing one of her servants:

—Llame usted a Candelaria que venga a servirnos.

Teresina salió, y nosotros nos miramos sonriendo:

—¿Por qué mandas llamar a Candelaria?

—Porque te tengo miedo, y la pobre Candelaria ya no se asusta de nada.

—Candelaria es indulgente para nuestros amores como un buen jesuita.

—¡No empecemos!... ¡No empecemos!...

Concha movía la cabeza con gracioso enfado, al mismo tiempo que apoyaba un dedo sobre sus labios pálidos:

—No te permito que poses ni de Aretino ni de César Borgia.

La pobre Concha era muy piadosa, y aquella admiración estética que yo sentía en mi juventud por el hijo de Alejandro VI, le daba miedo como si fuese el culto al Diablo. Con exageración risueña y asustadiza me imponía silencio:

—¡Calla!... ¡Calla!... (47)

Bradomín inspires fear in Concha, and he takes pleasure in it with his irreverent assertion about Candelaria being as indulgent toward their love as a good Jesuit might be. To readers in 1902, such an inappropriate remark was loaded with historical resonance with regard to the vicious anticlericalism of radical modernists; and more specifically, to the case of Adelaida Ubao and Galdós’s *Electra*. The reader will recall that in *Electra*, the priest Pantoja, who was believed to represent the Jesuit who coerced Ubao to enter a

convent, thwarts the relationship between Electra and Máximo. Hence the sarcasm of Bradomín's irreverence toward the Jesuits.

But Concha will have none of that. She insists that Bradomín not pretend to be Cesare Borgia, a cunning and duplicitous figure whom Bradomín has admired since childhood. Indeed, she considers Bradomín's admiration to be as frightening as worshipping the devil. And this too was not without its deeper implications for *fin-de-siglo* readers. The prevailing idea of those in the establishment was that political assassination and terror were perpetrated only by those who championed new and modern ideas. Alfredo Calderón, who was active among the *gente nueva*, was keenly aware of this, and complained about it: "Es cosa fácil atribuir los atentados que presenciamos a la influencia deletérea de las modernas ideas" (Calderón 76). He noted, however, that this ideological expedient, peddled by those in the establishment, was erroneous, because in reality the *fin-de-siglo* terror perpetrated by the champions of the new—be it in the form of anarchist assassinations or bombings—was nothing more than an atavistic expression of the political terror that has always existed throughout history. Among the examples he cites—which include Caligula, Alexander II, Enrique IV, and general Juan Prim—are the Borgias, who had no qualms about terrorizing and poisoning their rivals (76). Thus Bradomín's effort to emulate Cesare Borgia bears an atavistic quality that renders this scene much more than just an example of the affectation and quaintness practiced by lesser modernistas. On one level, the scene mimics the terroristic dynamic perpetrated by the *gente nueva* against the *gente vieja*. But on another level, by referencing Cesare Borgia, the scene also reveals the atavistic nature of such terror and suggests that the equating of terror with newness may be nothing more than an insidious political gambit of the political establishment.

In the article just cited, Calderón explains that a "regresión atávica" has taken root in Spain. On one hand, he notes that there is a return of the kind of progressive fanaticism that drove the Protestant Reformation; and on the other hand, there is also a return of the kind of reactionary fanaticism that had driven the crusade against the Albigenses. In this context of polarized entrenchment, only one thing has become certain: *plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose*:

Lo que hay de cierto es que atentados anarquistas, violencias internacionales, reviviscencias dogmáticas, veleidades dictatoriales, antojos regionalistas, añoranzas artísticas y neurosis literarias son otras tantas manifestaciones de una misma dolencia; el pasado hecho presente, la resurrección de cosas viejas bajo nombres nuevos. Son espasmos de una sociedad que muda de camisa pero que no muda de piel. (Calderón 80)

In this passage Calderón suggests that the terror and radicalism perpetrated by *fin-de-siglo* modernistas is merely the avatar of the terror and radicalism perpetrated by old religious zealots. In other words, terror has always been the province not just of the new, but also of the old. This is precisely the historical logic that plays out in the *Sonata* with Bradomín terrorizing the poor young Concha. Thus to equate terror with the new and the modern, as the most reactionary sectors of Spain had done, was ultimately unwarranted.

There remains one last question to consider: if the terroristic dynamic manifests itself in both the new and the old, and in the progressive and the reactionary, then how

can the good and the moral that Clarín had insisted on be evoked? The answer, of course, was given by Clarín himself, when he equated “hermosura” with the morally good. That Valle-Inclán polished his *Sonata* “con la paciencia amorosa de un lapidario,” as Ciges Aparicio observed, and that he constructed it in such a way that it overcame the amateurism of *Epitalamio* and achieved aesthetic worth, suggests that the *Sonata* was not a mere expression of “preciosismo” but was ultimately, and despite all appearances, a sly affirmation of the good.

As noted above, Clarín explained that unlike the *gente nueva*, he was always one to defend something on the basis of its being good, regardless of whether it was old or new. Similarly, the fact that the *Sonata* is cast as the memoir of an old, catholic aristocrat but is polished to the utmost “hermosura” forces one to recognize its aesthetic achievement, regardless of whether it was “written” by an “anticuado” or a “novísimo.” Consequently, the *Sonata* forces an ideological readjustment of one’s basis of valuation. This was Valle-Inclán’s “trágala” for the *gente nueva*. As such, the *Sonata* broke from the derivative tendency of modernismo and became a watershed moment in the history of Spanish modernism.

Chapter 4

Miguel de Unamuno's *Niebla* and the Critique of Spain's Revolutionary Culture

The year of *Niebla*'s publication, 1914, was a fraught one for Unamuno, and indeed for Spain and Europe in general. This, of course, is the year in which the First World War breaks out; and for Unamuno, it is the year in which he is dismissed from his fourteen-year rectorship at the University of Salamanca for his public criticism of Spain's Restoration government and for his participation in a much-publicized campaign for land reform. This dismissal meant that Unamuno was now a public intellectual without any ties to the Spanish state, which in turn enabled him to ramp up his efforts to bring ideological soundness and ethical dynamism to Spanish liberalism, an effort which Juan Marichal refers to as Unamuno's "recuperación liberal"—"recuperación," that is, from those who had reduced liberalism to the doctrine of free-market capitalism and to the brusque separation of church and state (Marichal, *El secreto* 131-48). It goes without saying that with such an ominous convergence of events, 1914 was no time for jokes or philosophical speculation. And yet 1914 was precisely the year in which Unamuno decided to publish one of his most rarified and humorous novels: *Niebla*.¹

This is the anomaly that this chapter seeks to address. One might argue that the publication of *Niebla* is hardly an anomaly if we consider that its book sales might have served as a supplement for the income that Unamuno would lose on account of his dismissal from the rectorship. This may certainly be the case, but, as this chapter will

¹ Mario J. Valdés, in the introduction to his Cátedra edition of *Niebla*, claims that the manuscript of this novel is dated "agosto, 1907," a claim which he bases on having seen that date written on the first *cuartilla* of the manuscript, which he consulted in the Casa Museo of Unamuno in Salamanca (Valdés, Introduction 47). However, Andrea Briganti, in an article published in 2001, has looked into the matter and has found that the manuscript at the Casa Museo does not have the first *cuartilla* Valdés claims to have seen, and he notes that such a *cuartilla* has never been catalogued or reproduced anywhere. He also notes that an inventory of Unamuno's collection in the University of Salamanca, drawn up in 1966, states that the first *cuartilla* is missing ("falta la primera hoja del prólogo," in the words of the inventory), precisely the one that Valdés claims to have seen.

In reconsidering Valdés's dating, Briganti cites a letter that Unamuno wrote in the summer of 1907 in which Unamuno says that he is not writing anything, except for some poetry. The fact that Unamuno was always forthright in his letters about his activities makes it hard for Briganti to accept Valdés's date of August 1907 as being that of the manuscript for *Niebla*. Based on the evidence in Unamuno's correspondence and in *Niebla* itself, Briganti believes that Unamuno started writing the manuscript in 1911, then abandoned it, and finally came back to it in 1913 to recast it as the "nivola" we now know. Of course, Briganti admits that these dates are based on the only available evidence. What he is sure of, however, is that Valdés's date of 1907 is wrong.

It should be noted that there are two letters by Unamuno that support Briganti's datings but are not cited by him. One is dated January 21, 1913 and is addressed to F. Antón Casaseca. There Unamuno writes: "hace tres días he terminado una novela, o novila [sic] (esto de nivola [sic], que es palabra de puro capricho, se explica ahí) fantástica y humorística y llena de cínicas crudezas, de desnudo, no de desvestido. Hace «pendant» a mi *Amor y Pedagogía* pero es más novela y más entretenida, creo" (qtd. in Tellechea Idígoras, "Unamuno y Francisco" 180). The other letter is dated April 5, 1913 and is addressed to Joaquín Montaner. There Unamuno writes: "he escrito en una veintena de días una novela con su prólogo y su epílogo" (qtd. in Tarín-Iglesias 234).

argue, there are significant implications within *Niebla* that suggest that it is much more than a commercial venture or a frivolous game of philosophy and humor. A close reading of the novel will demonstrate how *Niebla*, through its aesthetic construction, gives expression to some of Unamuno's most pressing political concerns by reordering elements of the sociopolitical world in such a way that they become estranged and thus liable to new forms of critique. The purpose, then, is to demonstrate that *Niebla*, against all appearances, harbors a critical potency with deep historical and political implications.²

More specifically, what the critical impetus of *Niebla* responds to is the sorry state of Spain's revolutionary culture, which during the Restoration was little more than a second-rate imitation of its French counterpart. This chapter will survey some of the ways in which left-wing intellectuals mindlessly imitated French political and literary culture. It will then analyze how, in *Niebla*, Unamuno plays with such mindless imitation by mocking the greatest poet of nineteenth-century France: Baudelaire. We will see, moreover, that within this critique something surprising emerges: a vindication of bourgeois idleness and unproductiveness, which in light of *fin-de-siècle* modernity, and against our habitual forms of thinking, becomes a truly progressive gesture. Conversation, self-contradiction, and reconciliation are shown to be foundational for a liberal polity. Ultimately, this chapter will demonstrate that within *Niebla* there is both a critique of the noxious acquiescence by left-leaning Spaniards to the French model, and a vindication of a Spanish tradition that despite being denounced by those same Spaniards is in fact salutary for their revolutionary cause. Read this way, *Niebla* becomes a work that refuses to echo the dominant liberal ideology of the time. And yet, while refusing to

² The following is a summary of *Niebla*'s plot: *Niebla* tells the life and mysterious death of Augusto Pérez, who is a wealthy but solitary man whose mother has recently died. He lives in an unnamed city and has no purpose or direction in life, as is made clear in the opening scene, where he holds his hand out to see whether or not it is raining, and lets the first dog passing by decide the direction in which he'll walk. Having been sheltered by his overly protective mother, Augusto rarely has contact with life outside his home. In his boredom, he meditates on his own existence, which he considers to be without reason or objective. He suffers from this *abulia* until he meets Eugenia and decides to pursue her. Eugenia is a music teacher who hates music. She rejects Augusto's advances because she is in love with Mauricio. Augusto abandons the idea of pursuing her and instead decides to offer to pay her debts on a home mortgage.

Augusto discusses love and other philosophical concerns about existence with Víctor Goti, who hangs out in a local casino and writes a "nivola." Augusto takes in a stray dog, names him Orfeo, and shares with him his meandering thoughts. Augusto finds refuge with Rosario, the laundress, but then eventually Eugenia changes her mind. Eugenia promises to marry him, but then she betrays him and stays with Mauricio now that Augusto has paid her mortgage. This situation aggravates Augusto and he begins to fear that he might ultimately be a mere fiction. Having realized this, he threatens to commit suicide. He reads an article on suicide and decides to go to Salamanca to visit his author, Unamuno, to discuss the issue. Unamuno tells Augusto that he, Augusto, is a fictional entity, and that the author is the absolute creator. Augusto rebels against Unamuno by telling him that he too may be a fiction created by an even higher power, and that Unamuno might really just be a sum of all his fictional characters. Both men become furious, and Unamuno threatens to kill Augusto at that moment rather than grant him the ability to commit suicide. Augusto begs for his life, but Unamuno realizes that Augusto cannot live forever and must die. Augusto returns home, meditates on what death means for a fictional entity. He begins to eat extreme amounts of food and reduces death to an absurd philosophical statement: *Edo, ergo sum*. He dies of an apparent heart attack. Unamuno regrets making him die, but then notes that Augusto came to him in a dream and told him not to resuscitate him because fictional entities could not come back to life.

echo liberal ideology, Unamuno nevertheless uses liberalism's language and emblems, treats them as historically sedimented materials, and reconfigures them in such a way that makes *Niebla* "less than praxis and more," to use Adorno's pithy phrase (*Aesthetic* 241). To put it differently, this chapter demonstrates that although *Niebla* is not a work of political praxis, it nevertheless has political implications in its critique of the framework and habits of mind within which praxis in *fin-de-siglo* Spain takes place.

But prior to all that, it is worth surveying some of the reception history of Unamuno's life and work to show how *Niebla* has been neutered of its critical capacity. There is something of an orthodoxy which holds that Unamuno abandoned the political radicalism of his youth after suffering a spiritual crisis in 1897, and that out of this crisis emerged the brooding, rarified thinker whose central concern was no longer the social but rather the philosophical and the introspective. This narrative has made it easy to see two neatly divided Unamunos: one a radical, the other a reactionary; one who looked outward, another who looked inward; one who was a political figure, and another who was a philosopher and writer. Even though much work has been done to reveal that Unamuno remained politically engaged after his purported crisis of 1897, the binary way of looking at his life and work continues to persist.

As a result, *Niebla* has been read primarily as a work by Unamuno the introspective philosopher, which has discouraged the possibility of reading it for its broader sociohistorical critique. Those who have set the tone for the philosophically inflected reading of *Niebla* are some of Hispanism's most influential critics: Carlos Blanco Aguinaga ("Unamuno's"), Leon Livingstone ("Interior"), Jaime Alazraki ("Motivación"), and Ciriaco Morón-Arroyo ("*Niebla*"), just to name a few. It is worth pointing out that some of these critics may have taken their cue from an earlier Hispanist heavyweight, Angel del Río, who read works like *Niebla* as avatars of Unamuno's philosophical concerns, as the following claim makes clear: "Cuando Unamuno comprendió que le faltaba el ensayo filosófico al querer expresar con toda claridad su concepto de la angustia, trató de expresarlo a través de la vida de sus entes de ficción." (qtd. in Alazraki 247). There have, however, been critics who have attempted to steer away from this tendency by claiming to focus on the interplay between form and content rather than the strictly philosophical aspects of *Niebla*. But despite their stated intent, the philosophical ultimately has tended to assert itself over the formal and its play with content. One example of this is R. Batchelor's "Form and Content in Unamuno's *Niebla*."³

More recently, important progress has been made to revise the standard account that has held Unamuno's work as being detached from the sociopolitical. One superb example comes by way of Stephen G. H. Roberts, who has convincingly argued that Unamuno's philosophy, politics, and literature cannot be compartmentalized, for they are all part of his larger project (14). Additionally, Pedro Cerezo Galán aptly describes this larger project as a "revolución o renovación en la raíz" that avoids both the top-down approach of *regeneracionismo* and the bottom-up approach of socialism. By getting to the root of the problem, Unamuno's project goes beneath the prevailing oppositions in politics—that is, between liberalism and conservatism, the church and the state, modernity and

³ The exceptions to this philosophically inflected trend in criticism are Janet Pérez ("Rhetorical") and Germán Gullón ("Juego"), who offer insightful analyses of *Niebla*'s use of language and formal construction.

tradition, the intelligentsia and the masses—in order to address what resides at the root of it all: the individual. Because without that effort, any talk of “regeneración” was ultimately empty rhetoric, as Unamuno makes clear when he writes: “Todos estamos mintiendo al hablar de regeneración, puesto que nadie piensa en serio en regenerarse a sí mismo. No pasa de ser un tópico de retórica que no nos sale del corazón, sino de la cabeza. ¡Regenerarnos! ¿Y de qué, si aun de nada nos hemos arrepentido?” (qtd. in Cerezo Galán). For the individual, then, this means that a change in sensibility and attitude must precede or at least be concomitant with any regenerationist project.

These reassessments by Stephens and Cerezo Galán are of great value, but by focusing primarily on Unamuno’s essays and articles they leave open the question of how his literary work fits within this “revolución en la raíz,” or regenerationist project, as Unamuno envisions it. Answers to this are scattered throughout Unamuno’s writings. But two clues are important to note. One can be found in a letter, addressed to a young intellectual named Luis de Zulueta in 1904, where Unamuno writes: “Ahora voy dando en creer que las mejores obras han sido obras de ocasión, escritas bajo la apretura de coyunturas exteriores, para responder a un fin concreto. Son obras más sociales que individuales. Cuando yo muera, si dejo algo que valga la pena de ser leído, no será lo que he escrito para mi público, sino lo que mi público me ha obligado a escribir, lo que ha escrito él en mí” (Unamuno, Zulueta 65). The other clue can be found in an article that Unamuno published in Buenos Aires on December 12, 1907. In commenting on the relation between history and the novel, he writes: “en rigor las novelas que perduran son las que de un modo o de otro tienen un fondo histórico o autobiográfico. Esto cuando la novela no es más que un mero pretexto para disertaciones filosóficas, sociológicas o morales” (“Historia” 230-31).

These passages suggest that for Unamuno the quality of a literary work has something to do with its social substance. The terms of these assertions are, in typical Unamuno fashion, paradoxical: literary works may respond to “coyunturas exteriores” and may bear a “fondo histórico,” but they cannot be reduced to the historical moment, for there is something within them by which they endure (“perduran”) as great works (“las mejores obras”). Moreover, such works seek to consciously address a social need—“responder a un fin,” as Unamuno puts it—but they offer no explicitly stated messages, or “disertaciones filosóficas, sociológicas o morales.” With these paradoxical assertions, Unamuno steers away from the idea that if literature aims to advance Spain’s *regeneración*, then it ought to “reflect” the sociopolitical reality or communicate a political slogan. This idea that Unamuno is rejecting is, in essence, the imperative informing anarchist and socialist culture at the time, which takes for granted that social reality can be correctly reflected and that a given slogan can be the correct one.

Thus in order to understand Unamuno’s aesthetic it is more productive to think in terms of “mediation,” a term which must be distinguished from “paradox.” The latter notion, though often used to describe Unamuno’s thought, belongs to the domain of positivism or at least to a positivistic mode of thinking in which certain “facts” of the world, when juxtaposed, result in logically inconsistent conclusions, or paradoxes. By thinking in terms of “mediations,” and thus conceiving the social and the literary as being interpenetrated, as each bearing the imprint of the other, as opposed to having one merely “reflect” the other, we can begin to move away from the “hechología” that had always annoyed Unamuno. That is, by viewing Unamuno’s statements as moments of a complex,

contradiction-ridden reality, we can begin to see how his literary work, in this case *Niebla*, bears a critical capacity beyond the merely philosophical and the humorous.

This is a capacity that has largely gone unnoticed, especially by the left-leaning intellectuals of Unamuno's time who believed that if literature had a critical function, it was only to the extent that it showcased certain political principles. Unamuno's mentee, Luis de Zulueta, is a typical example of the insistence that literature be upfront about its intention: "Me parece su tendencia de usted, o su no-tendencia, un inconveniente para la acción. Sus trabajos emocionan poco, arrastran poco, no convierten. Más que un camino, son un laberinto espiritual" (Unamuno, Zulueta 77). The lack of a clear-cut politics in Unamuno's work—his "no-tendencia"—provoked annoyance and frustration for those intellectuals who sought to transform the social world. However, their impatience to revolutionize the social world ultimately blinded them to the fact that Unamuno's literary work had all along been concerned with the social, though in ways that were not obvious and did not pander to any political slogan.⁴

The Spaniards' Ideological Enthrallment to France

What, then, are the "coyunturas exteriores" and "fondo histórico" with which *Niebla* is concerned? One principal answer is this: the reckless habit that Spain's revolutionary intellectuals—those "fanáticos necios de Marx," as Unamuno had once called them (qtd. in Blanco Aguinaga, *Juventud* 95)—had of modeling themselves on French anarchism and socialism while paying little heed to the local realities and exigencies of Spain. Without breaking this habit, Spain's revolutionary culture was ultimately doomed to be ineffective and misguided—and this was of great concern to Unamuno. When he insisted, as early as 1895, that socialist intellectuals ought to "chapuzarse algo más en el pueblo, ganar contacto con él" he did not mean to reprimand intellectuals for planning out a revolution from their ivory towers of privilege, or anything like that. Instead, what he meant was that these intellectuals must pay careful attention to the social circumstances of Spain—that is, to its specificity—otherwise the revolutionary intelligentsia "caería en un intelectualismo conducente a un jacobinismo suicida" (qtd. in Blanco Aguinaga 119; Unamuno, "Las fuerzas" 558). Unamuno's use of "jacobinismo" might be read in its generic acceptation, as merely meaning "political radical," but reading it as a reference to the historical Jacobins suggests something else: that Spain is not France, and to pretend that it is, is the great mistake of the Spanish socialists.

There are abundant examples that attest to the Spaniards' tendency to pay intellectual obedience to France. This tendency can be traced back to the eighteenth

⁴ In one of the many letters Zulueta and Unamuno exchanged, Unamuno explained, in reference to Spain, that "La sacudida aquí tiene que ser religiosa. Los jóvenes deben agruparse, pero es para combatir a la Iglesia y al catolicismo" (Unamuno, Zulueta 92). These are typical of Unamuno's arcane way of thinking, to which Zulueta answers: "Lo de que la sacudida ha de ser religiosa—como dice usted—, es una verdad; pero religiosa sin que se hable de religión y sin que nos demos cuenta de que lo es. Hable usted de las subsistencias, o del servicio obligatorio, o de lo que quiera. Sobre todo, de educación. Pero ¡por amor de Dios, no nos hable usted de Dios! Sería a la vez una falta de diplomacia y de conciencia" (Unamuno, Zulueta 94). Zulueta's impatience and frustration couldn't be more evident.

century, when the *afrancesados* looked to France for their cultural and political models. Restoration Spain was no different. Spanish socialism, anarchism, and federalism all took their ideological programs—including their anticlericalism and positivism—from their French counterparts. The Spanish anarchists, for instance, founded their Confederación Nacional de Trabajo in 1910 after the French Confédération Générale du Travail. They also adopted their theory of the general strike directly from the Confédération. This imitative gesture can also be found throughout Spain's radical liberal publications. *La Revista Blanca* and *Germinal*, both founded in 1897, took their inspiration from *La Revue Blanche* and from Zola's socialist-leaning novel *Germinal* (1885). Even Martínez Ruiz's early anarchist tract, *Charivari* (1897), drew its title directly from the anarchist review, *Le Charivari*. The same could be said of the revolutionary doctrine that circulated in these Spanish publications: they were taken from French political theorists and philosophers such as Proudhon, Reclus, Renan, and Lafargue.

But it was not just France's political theory that held Spanish intellectuals in thrall. French literature was just as guilty. Unamuno did not hesitate to inveigh against Rubén Darío, who seemed to glamorize the Hispanic world's fealty to all things French. In Unamuno's view, Darío and his minions were delusional to think that Madrid was anything like Paris. For Unamuno, "la tan cacareada influencia francesa" peddled by Darío was more apparent than real. It was, to Unamuno's chagrin, a falsification of what Madrid was and could be (qtd. in Tellechea Idígoras, "Unamuno y Francisco" 165). Because if anything, Madrid has been much more influenced by South Americans and Andalusians than by the French: "Madrid no es España; Madrid es una capital sudamericana, argentina o paraguaya o venezolana, lo mismo que Lisboa es una colonia del Brasil. A Madrid la han conquistado andaluces y sudamericanos" (qtd. in Tellechea Idígoras, "Unamuno y Francisco" 164-65).

Perhaps the most striking example of Spain's ideological dependence on the French example was that of the Montjuich affair in Barcelona in 1896. On June 7, during a Corpus Christi procession that year, a bomb was thrown into the crowd, killing six people. The public reaction to this event was one of horror and revulsion. Martial law was declared as a result, and some four hundred arrests were made of anarchists, republicans, workers' leaders, lay teachers, and anyone else who was known to hold or publicize "ideas avanzadas." The arrested were held in the Montjuich fortress overlooking Barcelona, and shortly thereafter reports and rumors of torture began to emerge. Several of the prisoners were forced to sign false confessions; some of them were sentenced to death; and many others were given long prison sentences. Although the Catalan press had its constitutional guarantees suspended, that did not keep several socialist and republican newspapers, including *El país*, from running stories denouncing the treatment of the prisoners and the irregularities in the investigation of the bombing.

Spanish intellectuals, as well as liberal, republican, and socialist leaders, took the Montjuich atrocities as their battle cry against the establishment and viewed it as their version of the Dreyfus affair. The ever-present French example led Alejandro Lerroux, a republican ideologue and newspaper editor, to state that "France had its Bastille but Spain has a Montjuich whose very walls are notorious" (qtd. in Alvarez Junco, *The Emergence* 61). These intellectuals and labor movement leaders used the Montjuich affair as a way to galvanize and radicalize the workers' movement. To achieve this, they turned to the newly emerging liberal press for the influence they believed it could have on popular

opinion. Their aim was to pit the public against the state in matters not just pertaining to Montjuich but also to larger political and social issues.

But in Spain such a mobilization was wishful thinking. The intellectuals and leaders who raised the banner against Montjuich overestimated both their influence and the interest of the public. Alvarez Junco explains that while French intellectuals achieved a great deal after the Dreyfus affair—such as forming a coalition government, curbing military privileges and Catholic influence in education, instituting social welfare legislation, and integrating the working class into the state system—their Spanish counterparts achieved almost nothing and were even half-hearted in their commitment. The influence of the Church and the military remained strong throughout Spain due to the high rate of illiteracy and the indifference of the large rural population. Spain's politically oriented intellectuals were basically appealing to the unconcerned masses. As much as they viewed themselves as avatars of their French counterparts, there were no leading intellectuals among them of the caliber of Galdós, Clarín, Joaquín Costa, or Giner de los Ríos. Unlike French intellectuals, who enjoyed a large cultural market and economic independence, Spanish intellectuals, even those who enjoyed the most prestige, were still dependent on the state and other kinds of patrons (Alvarez Junco, *The Emergence* 63-65). Moreover, unlike their French counterparts, Spanish intellectuals tended to understand Spain's Restoration crisis in spiritual and moral rather than political terms. Their views were informed by high-minded aristocratic ideals—as opposed to practical and political goals—and were, in effect, proof that the *ancien régime* had remained firmly entrenched in Spain.

Thus Unamuno was right to criticize those “fanáticos necios de Marx” who envisioned and plotted their revolution through ill-considered abstractions taken from French socialism and anarchism. It is almost as if Spanish intellectuals didn't know their own history, or were blinded to it by their zeal and impatience. Marx himself, the object of their fanaticism, would certainly have echoed Unamuno's indictment against them, especially when considering Marx's observation that “There is perhaps no country, except Turkey, so little known to, and so falsely judged by Europe as Spain” (Marx, “The Details” 285; qtd. in Brennan xv). Elaborating on precisely this point, Gerald Brennan states that “Spain, both economically and psychologically, differs so greatly from the other countries of Western Europe that the words of which most history is made—feudalism, autocracy, liberalism, Church, Army, Parliament, trade union and so forth—have quite other meanings there to what they have in France or England” (xv). Here Brennan writes in reference to a fallacy that historians often commit when studying Spain. And it is the same fallacy that Unamuno finds in the rhetoric of Spain's progressive-minded intellectuals. So strong was their enthrallment to revolutionary France that Unamuno once remarked that “en los movimientos revolucionarios actuales, ¡qué grande es la influencia de la historia de la revolución francesa!” (Unamuno, “Historia” 236).

Although Unamuno was known for his self-proclaimed “misogalismo o francofobia” (“Literatura” 247), this does not mean that he was not well versed or appreciative of French history and culture. The French Revolution had always been of great interest to him, so much that in 1901 he translated Thomas Carlyle's massive historical volume, *The French Revolution*.⁵ As for French literature and art, Unamuno

⁵ See Franz for a study of Unamuno's translation of Carlyle.

believed that there was another, more down-to-earth France that differed from the glitzier, Paris-centered one that had infiltrated Spanish culture. It was to the former that Unamuno owed a great deal: “Pocos deberán más que yo a esa literatura francesa, verdaderamente educadora, y confieso que en ella he aprendido mucho” (“Literatura” 247). But this was a France that was not known in Spain: “esa Francia más íntima, más recogida, con raíces más allá del siglo XVIII y muy fuera de Versalles. . . Esta Francia de los franceses ha sido muy poco conocida aquí” (qtd. in Meier 141).⁶

Thus Unamuno’s disdain for French culture—or certain aspects of it—was not so much due to a Spain- and especially Castile-centered nationalist project but was instead part of a larger critique that was directed at the habit of adopting French models of politics and modernity and foisting them onto Spain.⁷ With all his erudition and knowledge of current affairs, Unamuno certainly had the capacity to write literature that denounced the political and economic ills of Spanish society. But what he was targeting was much more fundamental, something which lay at the root, or “raíz,” of the problem. Intellectuals may continue to denounce the facts of exploitation, authoritarianism, and corruption, but as long as those denunciations were based on foreign models, the reforms and revolutions that were attached to them were destined to fail due to Spain’s unique set of sociohistorical circumstances. When Unamuno complained about the self-satisfied efforts to regenerate Spain without engaging in any self-critique—“¡Regenerarnos! ¿Y de qué, si aun de nada nos hemos arrepentido?”—he was referring to the habits of mind that rendered Spain’s revolutionary movements futile and derivative. With France as the major source for Spanish culture and politics, other possible sources—that is, sources that might be more fitting and productive for Spain—were thus excluded. And among the excluded was Spain itself, whose history, customs, and religion were believed by Unamuno to offer untapped possibilities for political and cultural revolution, or *regeneración*. For Unamuno, then, the cosmopolitan and political fixation on France resulted in a disastrous narrowing of mind.⁸ And this was the situation that needed, urgently, to be critiqued.

Baudelaire and *Niebla*

This is where *Niebla* comes in. This novel sets out to show how ridiculous and even comical it is to transplant to the Spanish context an emblem of something utterly Parisian: the flâneur. Unamuno draws this emblem from Charles Baudelaire’s *Les Fleurs du mal*, which was one of France’s most important—and most Parisian—works of the

⁶ To this Unamuno adds: “Y contra la otra visión, la del cosmopolitismo parisiense—el parisienismo cosmopolita—, peleé toda mi vida. En tal sentido fui y soy un decidido antiafrancesado. No ocultando tampoco mi escasa simpatía por el llamado neoclasicismo-francés” (qtd. in Meier 141).

⁷ Jesús Torrecilla, in his book *La imitación colectiva: modernidad vs. autenticidad en la literatura española*, has studied the love-hate relationship that Spanish writers since the eighteenth century have had toward French modernity. On one hand, they admire the culture emanating from France, but on the other hand, they are aware that it is a foreign culture and often view it as inauthentic when transplanted to the Spanish context. Among the writers that Torrecilla studies are Cadalso, Larra, Galdós, Ganivet, Unamuno, Baroja, and Antonio Machado.

⁸ This is what Unamuno meant when he stated that “el llamado cosmopolitismo es lo que más se opone a la verdadera universalidad” (*Contra* 74).

nineteenth century.⁹ What results from this transposition, as we will see, is not only jarring and comical, but also deeply implicated in Unamuno's critique of Spain's revolutionary culture.

⁹ It seems strange that *Niebla* has not yet been read with Baudelaire in mind. Some commentators have mentioned the idea of Augusto as being a *flâneur*, a term strongly associated with Baudelaire's conception of Parisian life. But not much has been done to elaborate this point. (One exception—and a superb one at that—is Antonio Candau's article "The City of *Niebla*: From Urban Setting to Urban Itinerary in Unamuno's *Nivola*." Although Candau does not focus on the relation between *Niebla* and Baudelaire, he does offer some valuable insights on the peripatetic aspects of urban walking as a *fin-de-siècle* motif that is played out both formally and thematically in *Niebla*).

There are four possible reasons why *Niebla* has not been read with Baudelaire in mind. One has to do with the fact that Baudelaire's work, famous as it was in France, did not receive much attention in nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century Spain. This might seem strange considering that Spanish writers followed so closely the literary trends set by France; but it may also not be surprising considering the persistence of Christian moralism in Spain. Indeed, it is easy to see how Spanish intellectuals may have been revolted by the insolence and heterodoxy of Baudelaire's work. The second reason may have to do with Unamuno's virtual silence regarding Baudelaire, a silence which seems to have been read by critics as a rejection of the French poet. But to give credence to any such rejection would be too precipitous. The few comments that Unamuno makes of Baudelaire make it difficult to come to any definitive conclusion regarding his true opinion of the French poet. The third reason may have to do with Unamuno's explicit refusal to submit to the artistic trends emanating from France. Unamuno always remained an adamant *castizo* who insisted on valuing the Spanish tradition. The fourth reason why *Niebla* has been divorced from Baudelaire may have to do with the political tendencies informing *Niebla*'s reception history. These are the same tendencies that read Unamuno either as a politically conscious intellectual or as a writer-philosopher. With this binary firmly established in Unamuno criticism, it was almost inevitable that *Niebla*, with its explicit concern with the philosophical, would fall within the domain of Unamuno the writer-philosopher. This philosophically inflected mode of reading has long dominated *Niebla* criticism and has kept attention away from other modes of reading.

Unamuno's views on Baudelaire, expressed on just a handful of occasions, evolved from aversion to disfavor to admiration. The evidence for this evolution is fragmentary and offers no more than a toehold for an accurate appraisal of Unamuno's true valuation of Baudelaire. In an article on Antonio Machado, published in 1903, Unamuno expressed, as an afterthought, his initial aversion to Baudelaire: "Y lo mío es que prefiero todo estampido bravío y fresco que nos pone a descubierto las entrañas de la vida, que no todas esas gaitas que acaban en los sonetos de Heredia o en las atrocidades de Baudelaire" (qtd. in Aggeler 26). Harsh words indeed. Several years later, in 1912, Unamuno published an article in which he contested José Asunción Silva's claim that Baudelaire was greatest poet of the latter half of the nineteenth century. To this end, Unamuno reminded his readers that "en esos años hubo en Francia otros poetas a quienes suele ponerse por encima de Baudelaire" (qtd. in Aggeler 38). It is not until 1934 that we find evidence of Unamuno's appreciation of Baudelaire: "Baudelaire . . . nos ha dado la más profunda interpretación—teatral, ¡claro!—de Don Juan cuando nos le describe entrando en los Infiernos" (qtd. in Aggeler 68).

Although Unamuno was known for his hostility toward the glitzy forms of Parisian culture, it did not mean that he was unaware of what was happening in France, both culturally and politically. There is good reason to believe that Baudelaire's work was no exception to this. Unamuno's personal library contained an edition of *Les fleurs du mal* with several of his markings, which suggests that Unamuno read Baudelaire with some attention (Valdés, *An Unamuno* 24, xxxvii). It should also be noted that his readings of the French poet were not limited to this one copy. In an article on the work of the Spanish painter Adolfo Guiard, Unamuno explained how he owed to Guiard his first readings in the naturalist and decadent literature of France: "El fue quien primero me dio a conocer a los Goncourt, a Huysmans y a Baudelaire; en ejemplares suyos los leí" ("La obra" 537).

Where *Niebla*'s capacity is most evident is in its opening chapter, which plays on Baudelaire's most memorable illustration of the flâneur, the poem titled "A une passante." In the Parisian imaginary of the nineteenth century, the flâneur was a dandy, a fop, a haughty and idiosyncratic eccentric, who meanders and dawdles through the urban metropolis, taking in all the stimulus and fleeting personal encounters that the modern metropolis has to offer. "A une passante" plays out a scene in which the poet-flâneur, amid the clamor and chaos of a Parisian street, encounters a woman passing by. The encounter is as fleeting as lightning, and the woman remains forever anonymous. This experience electrifies the poet and becomes emblematic of life in nineteenth-century Paris. The poem reads as follows:

La rue assourdissante autour de moi hurlait.
Longue, mince, en grand deuil, douleur majestueuse,
Une femme passa, d'une main fastueuse
Soulevant, balançant le feston et l'ourlet ;

Agile et noble, avec sa jambe de statue.
Moi, je buvais, crispé comme un extravagant,
Dans son œil, ciel livide où germe l'ouragan,
La douceur qui fascine et le plaisir qui tue.

Un éclair... puis la nuit ! – Fugitive beauté
Dont le regard m'a fait soudainement renâitre,
Ne te verrai-je plus que dans l'éternité ?

Ailleurs, bien loin d'ici ! trop tard ! *jamais* peut-être !
Car j'ignore où tu fuis, tu ne sais où je vais,
Ô toi que j'eusse aimée, ô toi qui le savais ! (186)¹⁰

Unamuno was also aware of, and most likely read, Eduardo Marquina's translation of *Les fleurs du mal*, which was published in 1906. Marquina and Unamuno were good friends, who exchanged correspondence and read and critiqued each other's work, especially their poetry. Before publishing his translations of Baudelaire, Marquina promoted them through public readings that received great acclaim. His reading in Madrid's Ateneo on December 5, 1905, made the rounds in the cultural sections of several newspapers. It was a highly anticipated event that prompted several reports on its success. (One of these reports can be found in Caramanchel, "Lectura"). Unamuno must have certainly heard or read about these events in the newspapers. In a letter written in December 1906, Unamuno asked Marquina, "¿Publicó usted ya su traducción de Baudelaire?" and added, "A ver si traducido por usted me gusta más que en el original. Es un hombre que me da frío" (qtd. in Tellechea Idígoras, "Miguel" 170). Unamuno was obviously no fan of Baudelaire, but he seems to have been willing to give him another read, at least through his friend's translation.

¹⁰ In Francis Scarfe's prose translation: "The darkening street was howling round me when a woman passed on her way, so tall and slender, all in black mourning, majestic in her grief, with her stately hand lifting and swaying the scallop and hem, / light-footed and noble and with a statuesque leg. And I, tense as a man out of his wits, drank from her eye – a pallid sky in which a tempest brews – that gentleness which bewitches men, that pleasure which destroys. / A flash of light – then darkness. O vanishing beauty, whose glance brought me suddenly to life again, shall I never see you once more except in eternity? / Elsewhere, far from here, too late or perhaps never? For whither you fled I know

This poem reveals that experience in nineteenth-century Paris was no longer rooted in the kind of tradition that offered a comforting stability that one could forever count on. In a city as large as Paris, chaos and change had become the norm. The things that were bought and sold moved discontinuously and incoherently throughout the city; and the people crowding the streets were anonymous and unfamiliar to each other. Fleeting encounters with anonymous passersby, the hustle and bustle of the streets and the market, and the novelties of fashion and technology—all of these experiences produced what Walter Benjamin called the “shocks” of life in the modern urban metropolis.

Although these “shocks” may generate surprise and wonder, they were, at a fundamental level, felt by the urban dweller as being meaningless, arbitrary, and without any transcendental purpose. A simpler form of life—one that offered firm and stable meaning—was no longer feasible. Much of urban life had been absorbed by the logic of the commodity, whereby things and people were, or at least were perceived as being, stripped of individuality and had become exchangeable items whose value was determined by the market dominating city life. This loss of coherent, meaningful experience brought to the urban dweller an obscured and muted sense of hopelessness and futility. Despite the great technological advances, the development of industry, and the growth of the capitalist market, there was a sense in which experience had become, to use Benjamin’s term, “withered.”

Even though Spain’s largest cities had become modernized in significant ways, it was in Paris that modernity took on hyperbolic dimensions. With a population of almost 2 million at the time of *Les Fleurs du mal*’s publication, and almost 3 million at the time of *Niebla*’s, Paris was indeed a modern metropolis, one which emanated culture and fashion as well as liberal thought and political theory. In Benjamin’s extensive analysis of Parisian modernity, the flâneur stands as a heroic figure whose appearance in the streets of nineteenth-century Paris was owed to the changed conditions of life under capitalist modernity. Baudelaire, as Benjamin reads him, was keenly aware that something had changed in the experience of dwelling in such a crowded and commodified city. The labyrinthine crowds and the reduction of everything to salable wares—including the human body in the form of prostitution—is the veil through which the poetic voice of *Les Fleurs du mal* experiences the city. Thus the power of Baudelaire’s poetry, and especially of “A une passante,” lies in the fact that it registers this new urban experience.

Now to return to Spain. The first chapter of *Niebla* shows that Spain is everything that Parisian, cosmopolitan France is not. In the opening scene we see a Spanish “paseante”—that is, a flâneur, but also a *passant*—named Augusto who has a chance encounter with a beautiful woman passing by. However, instead of “drinking” from her eyes and deliberately becoming intoxicated, as we see in Baudelaire’s poem, Augusto is mindlessly drawn to her: “y tras de sus ojos se fue, como imantado y sin darse de ello cuenta” (110). And rather than experience the exhilaration of the encounter, he instead becomes distracted by his own random and whimsical thoughts.

Moreover, while Baudelaire’s flâneur is a heroic figure who ventures into the darkening street that howls (“La rue assourdissante autour de moi hurlait”) and into the tempest that germinates in the eye of the woman passing by (“Dans son œil, ciel livide ou

not, nor do you know whither I am bound – O you whom I could have loved, O you who knew it!” (Baudelaire, *The Complete* 186).

germe l'ouragan”), Unamuno’s “paseante,” on the other hand, is paralyzed, unheroically, by the ridiculous fear of opening his umbrella for a mere “llovizna,” something quite far from a tempest. This incongruity is further stressed when we see that Baudelaire describes the woman as “Agile et noble, avec sa jambe de statue”—that is, as a classical beauty, stately and majestic, but also supple and sprightly—while Unamuno, on the other hand, describes Augusto as a lofty and bygone statue, at once rigid and obsolete: “quedóse un momento parado en esta actitud estatuaria y augusta.” This is what the heroic flâneur becomes when he is brought to a Spanish city, where instead of large urban crowds, the most that one can expect to see is a dog passing by: “Esperaré a que pase un perro,” Augusto says to himself, “y tomaré la dirección inicial que él tome” (109-10).

The city or town in which this takes place is never named, but as Antonio Candau has pointed out, the setting is a provincial town with an urban repertoire (546). The narrator’s description is reminiscent of Baudelaire’s Paris:

Y siguieron los dos, Augusto y Eugenia, en direcciones contrarias, cortando con sus almas la enmarañada telaraña espiritual de la calle. Porque la calle forma un tejido en que se entrecruzan miradas de deseo, de envidia, de desdén, de compasión, de amor, de odio, viejas palabras cuyo espíritu quedó cristalizado, pensamientos, anhelos, toda una tela misteriosa que envuelve las almas de los que pasan. (117)

We are told that what is taking place in the opening chapters of *Niebla* is an urban, big-city experience but, as we have seen, there is something that isn’t jibing: Augusto comes off as a second-rate flâneur, and the details about his flânerie undercuts the pretension that Spain is like Paris.

Instead of an intoxicating urban crowd, Augusto finds a sad and pathetic scene: a crippled man dragging himself on the ground, a chocolate seller pretending to work, a wastrel wasting away his time, and a child on the ground who seems to be looking at an ant. This last detail is an important one, because it alludes to one of Baudelaire’s favorite adjectives, “fourmillante,” derived from “fourmi,” or ant, which he uses to describe the urban crowds. In Spanish, the translation is “hormigueante”; and in English, it is the more generic term “swarming,” thus giving us a Paris in which the crowds move about like a swarm of ants. In Baudelaire’s words, Paris is a “Fourmillante cité” (177) and a “fourmillant tableau” (181) in which prostitution infests the streets as if it were a “fourmilière,” or ant-heap (189), which in turn infests the brains of city dwellers: “Serré, fourmillant, comme un million d’helminthes, / Dans nos cerveaux ribote un peuple de Démons” (54).¹¹ None of this, of course, is the case in Spain, where the swarm of ants—that is, the urban masses—is reduced to one measly ant that some “chiquillo” on the ground is playing with.

Niebla’s opening chapters also play on the theme of the anonymity experienced in the modern metropolis. “A une passante” is famous for giving expression to a new conception of love within a world of ephemeral encounters. As Benjamin explains, “What this sonnet conveys is simply this: far from experiencing the crowd as an opposing, antagonistic element, the city dweller discovers in the crowd what fascinates

¹¹ In Francis Scarfe’s prose translation: “A compact seething horde of Demons orgies in our brains like a million worms in the bowels” (Baudelaire, *The Complete* 54).

him. The delight of the urban poet is love—not at first sight, but at last sight” (“On Some Motifs” 185). But this is not so in Augusto’s unnamed city, where he crosses paths with the same woman multiple times but is too absorbed in his thoughts to even notice (117, 124). Augusto’s town is a place where one can still make simple inquiries to find out the name and circumstances of any passerby, which is exactly what he does. Having followed the woman mindlessly to her building, Augusto asks the doorwoman, or “portera,” about the “señorita” and learns that her name is Eugenia Domingo del Arco and that she is a piano teacher, lives in Avenida de la Alameda, 58, and has a boyfriend. And what is more, her mother, as Augusto later finds out, was well acquainted with his own recently deceased mother, doña Soledad (136). This is hardly the anonymity experienced in a large urban city. If there is any estrangement in *Niebla*, it is only in Augusto’s head, because the setting that surrounds him is something more akin to that of a small-town or village, where everyone knows, or knows about, each other. These opening scenes, then, reveal the incongruence between Augusto’s self-invented alienation and the socially integrated life of his unnamed city.

Unamuno does something similar with Baudelaire’s use of the concept of “correspondances.” In the Parisian cityscape, the challenge that Baudelaire’s flâneur faces is that of wresting meaning from the meaningless chaos of city life, and of wresting pleasure from an impoverished sense of existence. Stripped of the possibility for a tradition-bound and meaningful experience, the flâneur must salvage what he can of those redemptive aspects of urban life that have been obscured by the wreckage and chaos of modernity. For Baudelaire, those aspects lie in a secret and natural correspondence of the diverse elements of the world, each being individuated and animated as if embodying a soul. In the poem “Correspondances,” Baudelaire describes the world as being made up of “forêts de symboles” (61) in which objects, ideas, and sensations suggest each other in a fundamental harmony and unity that, once perceived, enables a deepened, ecstatic experience of the world.

But in a Spain as humdrum and prosaic as Augusto’s, the only *correspondances* that can concern him are those of grammar. When he inquires with the “portera,” or doorwoman, about the young woman who just walked into the building, the conversation becomes quite comical:

- Dígame, buena mujer ... ¿podría decirme aquí, en confianza y para *inter nos*, el nombre de esta señorita que acaba de entrar?
- Eso no es ningún secreto ni nada malo, caballero.
- Por lo mismo.
- Pues se llama doña Eugenia Domingo del Arco.
- ¿Domingo? Será Dominga...
- No, señor, Domingo; Domingo es su primer apellido.
- Pues cuando se trata de mujeres, ese apellido debía cambiarse en Dominga. Y si no, ¿dónde está la concordancia?
- No la conozco, señor. (111)

Here the “magie suggestive” of the *correspondances* that fascinated Baudelaire is reduced to a petty and inconsequential concern over gender agreement, that is, over “la concordancia”—which translates from French *correspondance*—between a Christian

name and a family name. The doorwoman, moreover, brings Baudelaire's rapturous and esoteric experience of *correspondances* down to the level of common knowledge when she says that "Eso no es ningún secreto"; and then brings it down even further to level of rustic mundaneness when she thinks that Augusto's question about "la concordancia" refers to a person. That is, she thinks that Augusto is using the rustic or substandard grammatical form that places a definite pronoun before a personal name (which would also explain Unamuno's choice of the word "concordancia" over "correspondencia" in this scene; the former allows for the joke about the article and personal name, while the latter would have made a more direct and obvious allusion to Baudelaire).

Valle-Inclán, several years after *Niebla's* publication, in *Luces de Bohemia*, would capture exactly what is going on in these opening scenes when his decrepit poet-protagonist, Max Estrella, describes Spain as "una deformación grotesca de la civilización europea" (162). Although nothing political is mentioned in these scenes, they nevertheless reveal the absurdity of the logic at work in Spain's progressive political culture: that of mindlessly transposing the French model onto Spain, and of thinking that Spain is on equal footing with France—both of which involve a tacit refusal to see Spain on its own terms and a rejection of the modes of life that are rooted in the Spanish context.

Vindicating a Spanish Tradition in *Niebla*

While *Niebla* critiques the impatience to imitate and pay less-than-critical deference to France, it also offers us the opportunity to ponder the progressive but muted aspects of the Spanish tradition. In the socialist and anarchist worldview, an idle *señorito* like Augusto represents much of what is wrong with Spain. But as we will see, *Niebla* upends this facile and knee-jerk reaction to Augusto by showing that within his idleness there lies a valuable key to confronting the "problema de España."

Besides the habit of imitating France, much of what *Niebla* critiques has to do with the predominance of positivism within Spain. For Unamuno, one of the greatest ills to befall Spain was what he called "informacionería" (*Unamuno y el socialismo* 147). He referred to this phenomenon by a variety of other names: "hechología," "analiticismo," "psitacismo," and "papagayismo"—the last two meaning 'to learn by rote memory and repetition' (*Unamuno y el socialismo* 147, 160, 168, 168). Though not exactly synonymous, these terms refer to the situation in which the intellectual precincts of Spain—either political, educational, or cultural—have become entirely dependent on ready-made facts about the social world. Indeed, Unamuno detects a destructive "manía" that seeks to reduce all of reality to facts, and in the case of the social, to psychological facts. In doing so, that is, in subsuming concrete reality under ready-made abstractions, this "manía" ends up destroying precisely what it seeks to analyze (*Unamuno y el socialismo* 160). Thus the pernicious appearance of the "especialista," that figure who churns out fact after fact and has come to hold young Spanish intellectuals spellbound. As a result, authentic forms of communication are no longer feasible between individuals, because each one has become an "hombre canal" and a "mercader de ideas"—that is, a mere vehicle for the circulation of ideas—to such a degree that Unamuno ventures to declare that "los espíritus se hacen impenetrables" (qtd. in Roberts 89).

Elsewhere, he refers to the reality created by this culture of “especialistas” as a “tosco realismo” in which subjectivity is sacrificed to objectivity. As Unamuno explains, “Han predicado la objetividad y han acabado por hacer del hombre un objeto, una cosa, y no un sujeto, un alma, una conciencia íntima.” This, for Unamuno, is “una barbarie racionalista. O sea barbarie de la razón, inhumanidad de la razón.” (“Realismo inhumano” 185). Accordingly, there has been a tendency toward uniformity in thinking—“amor a la uniformidad,” as Unamuno once described it—and a concomitant move toward “el odio a lo arbitrario, a lo íntimo,” which at one point led Unamuno to complain, in a letter he wrote to Ortega y Gasset in 1906: “Me ahogo en este ambiente de ramplonería y de mentira” (Ortega y Gasset 51).

In this atmosphere of mindless acquiescence to the rationalist and positivist dictates of “especialistas,” it is confusion and idle conversation that, against all intuitions, suddenly become subversive. And this is precisely the dynamic at work in *Niebla*, which is made up almost entirely of Augusto’s idle conversations about his amorous and existential confusions. It is scene after scene, or chapter after chapter, in which Augusto converses with his servants; his friend Víctor; his love interests, Eugenia and Rosario; don Avito Carrascal (a character from Unamuno’s 1902 novel, *Amor y pedagogía*); and the scholar Antolín Paparrigópulos. In terms of action, there is very little happening in the novel—indeed, so little that the reader’s patience is often put to the test. In place of action, there is only dialogue, with little intervention from the narrator; and it is often the case that the dialogues run on for so long without any speaker identification that it becomes difficult to keep track of which character is speaking.

Niebla fulfills Unamuno’s prank aesthetic of the “nivola,” which is explained through Augusto’s friend Víctor, who is at work on a nivola of his own: “Lo que hay es diálogo; sobre todo diálogo. La cosa es que los personajes hablen, que hablen mucho, aunque no digan nada” (199). To this he adds: “Mi novela no tiene argumento, o mejor dicho, será el que vaya saliendo. El argumento se hace él solo. . . . Mis personajes se irán haciendo según obren y hablen, sobre todo según hablen; su carácter se irá formando poco a poco” (199). What Víctor seeks is “el encanto de la conversación, de hablar por hablar, del hablar roto e interrumpido” (200). Thus both Víctor’s and Unamuno’s nivolas have no ready-made psychology or predefined argument or message; they only have dialogues that are laden with divagations, interruptions, and confusions. In this sense, they constitute a refusal to conform to the culture of utility and positivism, and in doing so they insist on a subjectivity that is free to think and consider ideas freely.

Throughout *Niebla* there are many examples of divagations that add nothing of substance to Augusto’s conversations and only serve to interrupt their flow. As an example we can point to one that takes place when Augusto consults Víctor about his romantic troubles. Their conversation deviates into a trifle about an interrogative pronoun:

- . . . Pues bien, Augusto: cástate y cástate cuanto antes.
- Pero ¿con cuál?
- ¡Ah!, pero ¿hay más de una?
- Y ¿cómo has adivinado también eso?

—Muy sencillo. Si hubieses preguntado: pero ¿con quién?, no habría supuesto que hay más de una ni que esa una haya; mas al preguntar: pero ¿con cuál?, se entiende con cuál de las dos, o tres, o diez o ene.

—Es verdad.

—Cásate, pues, cástate, con una cualquiera de las ene de que estás enamorado, con la que tengas más a mano. (250-51)

Interruptions are also common, and are often signaled by ellipses. For example:

—Este caballero, hija mía, que ha hecho por una feliz casualidad...

—Sí, la del canario.

—¡Son misteriosos los caminos de la Providencia! —sentenció el anarquista.

—Este caballero, digo —agregó la tía—, que por una feliz casualidad ha hecho conocimiento con nosotros y resulta ser el hijo de una señora a quien conocí algo y respeté mucho (145)

Even Augusto's own thoughts are a discordant jumble of confusion when they splinter off in different directions, as in the following example, where he moves between the topics of love, chess, and commercial signs:

¡Quién había de decirlo!... Pero ¿tendrá razón Víctor? ¿Seré un enamorado *ab initio*? Tal vez mi amor ha precedido a su objeto. Es más, es este amor el que lo ha suscitado, el que lo ha extraído de la niebla de la creación. Pero si yo adelanto aquella torre no me da el mate, no me lo da. ¿Y qué es amor? ¿Quién definió el amor? Amor definido deja de serlo... Pero, Dios mío, ¿por qué permitirá el alcalde que empleen para los rótulos de los comercios tipos de letra tan feos como ése? Aquel alfil estuvo mal jugado. (123)

Instead of using dialogues and monologues to advance a narrative argument, Unamuno prefers to let these devices develop by chance and on different planes simultaneously. Thus instead of the deductive logic at work in the realist novel, where the specific moment can be derived from the whole, what we find in *Niebla* is virtually all play and fickleness.

And yet as fickle and confused as Augusto's thoughts and conversations may be, there is nevertheless something positive about them in that they keep thought from settling and becoming fossilized. Much scholarly effort has gone into trying to get at the meaning of the philosophical discussions and thoughts expressed in *Niebla*—to pin them down, so to speak—but what ultimately matters in this *nivola* are the dynamic acts themselves of thinking and discussing. For Unamuno, too little of this is done in Spain, and the result has been catastrophic.

Augusto may not be the most rigorous of thinkers, but his idleness and his whimsical speculation, as well as his aimless and leisurely conversations are spaces for exercising thought and for piecing together sudden associations and insights. This means that what appears to be blitheness and self-indulgence, on Augusto's part, turns out to be a seedbed for thinking in ways that are not in thrall to the less-than-critical culture of "especialistas." In his *Minima Moralia*, Adorno once noted that

Behind the pseudo-democratic dismantling of ceremony, of old-fashioned courtesy, of the useless conversation suspected, not even unjustly, of being idle gossip, behind the seeming clarification and transparency of human relations that no longer admit anything undefined, naked brutality is ushered in. The direct statement without divagations, hesitations or reflections, that gives the other the facts full in the face, already has the form and timbre of the command issued under Fascism by the dumb to the silent. (*Minima* 42)

As a novel riddled with idle conversations and divagations, *Niebla* resists the direct reifying statement, or what Unamuno had called “informacionería” and “hechología.” In 1914, fascism was still distant in Spain, but something about Spanish politics and culture was certainly moving in that direction. Indeed, Unamuno was privy to the fact that the impatience and expediency of radical liberals was not only discouraging flexible forms of thinking but was also displacing the spaces and the culture that made those forms of thinking possible. Thus the fact that *Niebla* does not offer any clear-cut answers to this disturbing trend does not make it indifferent to Spain’s many crises. On the contrary, by insisting that the reader work through the dialogues and even feel Augusto’s confusion, Unamuno’s nivola ultimately stands as a potent antidote to the noxious and uncritical culture of “hechología.”¹²

The difficulty of claiming that *Niebla* harbors progressive and critical potency has much to do with the fact that Augusto embodies everything that had, since the eighteenth century, been believed to be a Spanish vice, namely, the idleness and unproductiveness of the aristocracy.¹³ Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Spain’s backwardness was seen by France and other “enlightened” European countries as owing

¹² A seedbed for *Niebla*’s critical potency can be found in Unamuno’s mentorship of Luis de Zulueta. As a young, left-leaning intellectual, Zulueta admired Unamuno’s work but was impatient with his mentor’s “no-tendencia” and distrust of scientific rationality. To Unamuno, he wrote: “El libertarse de la razón no me parece bueno, ni religioso, ni cristiano. Lo satánico no es el racionalismo, sino lo opuesto. La razón es norma, es regla, es ley, es principio general y objetivo. Someterse a ella es piadoso” (Unamuno, Zulueta 236). For Unamuno, this was precisely the kind of easy acquiescence to reason that needed to be countered. This is why, when Zulueta confesses to Unamuno that he has been suffering a “crisis de crecimiento espiritual” (40), his mentor congratulates him: “Le felicito a usted por el estado de ánimo que revelan sus dos últimas cartas. Nada más sano que esa inquietud y ese desasosiego . . . El más terrible síntoma de la decadencia española . . . es la multitud de gentes contentas con su suerte y satisfechas con el ideal religioso que les inyectaron en la mente. Abrase a todo, deje que entre en usted el mundo a borbotones, aunque esa invasión le angustie y le sofoque” (42-43). Rather than passively adopt ready-made ideas, whether religious or political, Unamuno preferred that young intellectuals like Zulueta contend with perplexity and that they engage in conversations rather than listen to more tendentious rhetoric: “más me fío de la acción personal, de las conversaciones privadas, de la entrevista con este o aquel joven acobardado que de los discursos” (29).

¹³ Although Augusto is not a feudal aristocrat, he does in several ways resemble one, in particular, Calisto of *La Celestina*, a resemblance which was likely was not lost on Unamuno’s readers. Proof of this is the fact that both Augusto and Calisto are led by a bird into the house of their love interests; that both suffer from love and are constantly attended by servants; and that both turn to a go-between—Calisto to Celestina, Augusto to the *portera* Margarita—in their efforts to win the hearts of Melibea and Eugenia.

to the Spaniards' penchant for idleness and to their aristocratic disdain for industry. This was the charge that had been launched by France's most infamous Spain-basher, Nicolas Masson de Morvilliers, who in 1782 complained that the principal defect of the Spanish character was an "oisive gravité," and that the Spaniard "s'échauffe plus pour des misères que pour des dogmes essentiels" (565). In Masson's enlightened view, if Spaniards had fallen by the wayside of modernity, it was because they got more worked up about trifles than about practical matters. This view persisted well into the twentieth century, and Unamuno was quite aware of it, as he made clear in his 1906 article "Sobre la europeización (arbitrariedades)": "Los españoles somos, dicen, unos charlatanes arbitrarios, que rellenos con retórica los vacíos de la lógica, que utilizamos con más o menos ingenio, pero sin utilidad alguna, que carecemos del sentido de la consecución y la ilación, con alma escolástica, casuistas..." (925).

But for Unamuno, who sees that in 1914 Spain is becoming increasingly authoritarian, and Europe ineluctably bellicose, the Spanish penchant for avoiding the direct statement and its "naked brutality" turns out to be more of a virtue than a vice. This is what Unamuno meant when he said "Nuestros defectos, los que llaman los demás nuestros defectos, suelen ser la raíz de nuestras preeminencias; los que se nos motejan como nuestros vicios, el fundamento de nuestras virtudes" ("Sobre la europeización" 934.). In the same article, Unamuno evokes St. Augustine as the emblem of this scholastic, casuistic mode of thinking and refers to him as "el gran africano, alma de fuego que se derramaba en oleadas de retórica, de retorcimientos de frase, de antítesis, de paradojas e ingeniosidades" ("Sobre la europeización" 925-26). The fact that this description is so apt for *Niebla's* protagonist, Augusto, strongly suggests that he is based on this conception of St. Augustine, "el gran africano," which in turn renders the long-standing joke that Africa begins at the Pyrenees into an ironic vindication of a particularly Spanish tradition. And what is more, this vindication takes place while Europe is sinking into the utter barbarity of 1914.

A key to understanding *Niebla's* double articulation—as both a critique of the French model and a vindication of Spanish tradition—can be found in Unamuno's article "Algo sobre la crítica," which he published in Buenos Aires' *La Nación* in 1907 and reprinted as the lead article of his *Contra esto y aquello*, which appeared in Madrid in 1912. In this article, Unamuno responds to the harsh criticisms launched against him by the Chilean writer Ernesto Montenegro. The polemic between these two men was due to the harsh reviews that Unamuno wrote about several Chilean works that represented what he called "la patriotería irreflexiva."¹⁴ For Unamuno, or rather, for Unamuno the "crítico rabioso" and "fugoso libelista," as Montenegro preferred to call him, "la patriotería irreflexiva" was a form of nationalist chauvinism and Francophile snobbery that was prevalent both in Chile and Spain, and was pernicious enough to get Unamuno to abandon his usual decorum and levelheadedness in order to attack it ("Algo").

Unamuno explains that the Chilean works he reviewed "me tocaron en dos de mis puntos doloridos, en dos que estimo fatales errores de no pocos hispanoamericanos, y no sólo chilenos" ("Algo" 14). Spaniards, too, it bears repeating, were no less guilty of this.

¹⁴ The Chilean works that Unamuno criticized are *Vida nueva* (1902) by Emilio Rodríguez Mendoza; *Un país nuevo* (Paris, 1903) and *La ciudad de las ciudades* (1905, Paris) by Vicuña Subercaseaux. See Unamuno "La ciudad," "Un libro," "Vida" for his critiques. For an overview of this polemic, see Chaves 307-17, and Arancibia Clavel.

Unamuno then lays out what these errors are: “Es el uno la fascinación que sobre ellos ejerce París, como si no hubiese otra cosa en el mundo y fuera el foco, no digo ya más esplendente, sino único, de civilización.” And he goes on: “Y el otro error, y más que error injusticia . . . es el de creer que los pueblos llamados latinos son inferiores a los germánicos y anglosajones y están destinados a ser regidos por éstos” (“Algo” 14). These, of course, are the two “puntos doloridos” that I have been outlining in *Niebla*. On one hand, we’ve seen how the narrative ridicules the reflex affirmation of all things Parisian; and on the other, how it works against the disparagement of the “Latin”—and one might add, “Augustinian”—tradition by vindicating one of its unexpectedly redemptive aspects: idle conversation.

Unamuno repeats this contrapuntal movement when, in “Algo sobre la crítica,” he writes the following: “La cultura es algo muy íntimo que no puede apreciarse tan sólo en un paseo por las calles de una ciudad y tal la hay que teniéndolas mal encachadas, llenas de baches y tal vez de fango, y careciendo de refinamientos, de comodidad y de policía, puede encerrar formas de espíritu de muy elevada y muy noble prosapia” (10). Although here Unamuno is responding to the shortsightedness of those Chilean writers, it is almost as if he is describing *Niebla* itself. Augusto, as a second-rate and absentminded flâneur, mocks the idea that one can stroll through a city’s streets and somehow apprehend the culture’s intimate secrets, or even its mystical *correspondances*. The other side of this is that even though the streets of Augusto’s Spanish town lack the orderliness and luxury of a city like Paris, there is nevertheless something about the mode of living in such an unrefined town that is valuable and worth vindicating, especially in light of the unhealthy and myopic “patrioterías” that have undermined the “sano patriotismo.”

The Critique of Socialism in *Niebla*

At this point we can now understand the deeper implications of Augusto’s obsessive love for Eugenia. An important clue comes by way of the pejorative suffix “-ío”/“-ía” that marks the distinction between “patriotería” and “patriotismo,” which is the same one that marks the distinction between Augusto’s “amorío” and “amor.” Such a distinction is made in chapter 3 by Augusto’s friend, Víctor, during a game of chess that they play in their “casino,” which in Spanish actually refers to a “social club.” Unable to concentrate on the game at hand because of his fascination with Eugenia, Augusto makes an announcement to Víctor:

—Bueno, pues voy a darte una gran noticia.

—¡Venga!

...

—Pues allá va: ¿sabes lo que me pasa?

—Que cada vez estás más distraído.

—Pues me he enamorado.

—¡Bah! Eso ya lo sabía yo.

—¿Cómo que lo sabías?...

—Naturalmente, tú estás enamorado, *ab origine*, desde que naciste; tienes un amorío innato.

—Sí, el amor nace con nosotros cuando nacemos.
—No he dicho amor, sino amorío. Y ya sabía yo, sin que tuvieras que decírmelo, que estabas enamorado, o más bien enamoriscado. Lo sabía mejor que tú mismo. (121-22)

By “amorío,” then, Víctor refers to the fact that Augusto has always been predisposed to servile idealizations; and by “enamoriscado,” he refers to the kindred idea that what Augusto feels is nothing more than an infatuation, an intense but foolish and short-lived passion. To prove this, Víctor asks Augusto about the woman he claims to be in love with:

—...dime ¿es rubia o morena?
—Pues, la verdad, no lo sé. Aunque me figuro que no debe de ser ni lo uno ni lo otro; vamos, así pelicastaña.
—¿Es alta o baja?
—Tampoco me acuerdo bien. Pero debe de ser una cosa regular. Pero ¡qué ojos, chico, qué ojos tiene mi Eugenia! (122)

Augusto is clueless about the woman he claims to love. The fact that he only praises her eyes reveals just how fixated he is on the Symbolist cliché of the eyes as being guiding beacons, as being windows to the soul, and as being sources of a mysterious beauty amid the chaos of urban modernity. It should also be noted that we see this delusion of Augusto from the very moment he meets Víctor in the “casino”:

—Hoy te retrasaste un poco, chico —dijo Víctor a Augusto— ¡Tú, tan puntual siempre!
—Qué quieres..., quehaceres...
—¿Quehaceres, tú?
—Pero ¿es que crees que sólo tienen quehaceres los agentes de bolsa? La vida es mucho más compleja de lo que tú te figuras. (120)

One wonders, like Víctor, what those “quehaceres” could be when Augusto couldn’t even decide which direction to take when stepping out of his house, and when stepping out, the only thing he expected to see was a measly dog pass by. The incongruity of this moment in *Niebla* becomes even more marked when we consider that for Unamuno the term “quehaceres” was linked to the hustle and bustle of large cities, as he made clear in a lecture he gave in 1912:

El ajetreo de las grandes urbes febriles, a la caza del negocio o del placer, es una de las cosas más dañinas para ciertos espíritus. En esas ciudades atormentadas, tentaculares, las gentes viven y se mueven en continuo desasosiego y con movimientos inarmónicos. Hay el temor de ser atropellado. Todos, aun los más desocupados, y acaso más éstos que los otros, marchan apresuradamente, como si quehaceres perentorios les hostigaran.” (“Discurso” 280)¹⁵

¹⁵ Unamuno’s lecture also contains a version of Augusto’s rambling remarks on “topofobia” and “filotopía” in chapter 1 of *Niebla*. The lecture reads as follows: “Observad, además, que esa fiebre de

In Augusto's quixotic vision, Spain is like Paris: modern and alienating, and ready for revolutionary upheaval. In the same manner, Augusto believes himself to be a Parisian flâneur: electrified by the beauty of the *passante's* eyes. In essence, Augusto suffers from the same manner of delusion as Don Quixote, who believed he was a knight errant in a world of adventures, and was enthralled *ab origine*, as Víctor might say, by the beauty of Dulcinea.

But the consequences of Augusto's delusion in chapter 3 do not stop there, for they extend into what is essentially a critique of Spanish socialism, or more precisely, what Unamuno called "el socialismo romántico, generoso y soñador, preñado de ideal y de utopías" ("El movimiento" 38). It is now well known that in his early career as an intellectual, especially those the years prior to 1897, Unamuno had been actively engaged in Spain's socialist party. His writings from that time reveal a young and studious intellectual who was under the spell of this "socialismo romántico." But all this changes by the time of *Niebla's* publication in 1914, when Unamuno's youthful commitment to socialism had matured into a more critical posture, one which was still committed to socialism but was wary of its shortcomings and corruption. And just as importantly, this was a posture that was attentive to the unorthodox and unforeseen possibilities of socialist thought.

Many of the key ideas by which Unamuno understood socialism, political economy, and Spanish politics are present in the humorous and seemingly benign conversation between Augusto and Víctor that we have been analyzing. One of these ideas comes by way of Augusto's reproach to Víctor: "Pero ¿es que crees que sólo tienen que hacer los agentes de bolsa? La vida es mucho más compleja de lo que tú te figuras" (120). I've already commented on the importance of the term "quehaceres" and the idea that life is "mucho más compleja de lo que tú te figuras," but what is now of interest is Augusto's reference to the "agentes de bolsa," or stockbrokers, who, quite significantly, epitomize the workings of capitalism. Moreover, Augusto's self-assured remark that life is more complex than Víctor thinks is not just an allusion to life in a modern urban setting, but is also an expression that resonates with the Marxist and sociological mode of thinking that had come into vogue in early twentieth-century Spain. As Unamuno explained, "El siglo XIX, siglo del movimiento social y del sentido histórico, lega a la humanidad un concepto del progreso más rico, más complejo y más fecundo que el mecánico y rudo que antes existía" ("El movimiento" 45). This mode of thinking was also linked to what came to be known as "la realidad de las cosas" and "el problema

movimiento, lo mismo que la manía de viajar más, se debe a topofobia, que no a topofilia. Estas gentes que devoran leguas, ahora en automóvil, no es que buscan el lugar adonde van, es que huyen de aquel en que están: huyen de todas partes" ("Discurso" 281). Worth noting as well in relation to Augusto's remark to Víctor that "La vida es mucho más compleja de lo que tú te imaginas" is the following passage written by Unamuno in an article he published in Buenos Aires's *La Nación* on June 3, 1909: "La vida de civilización, con su complejidad creciente, con la multitud de acomodaciones sensoriales y volitivas que exige, pide un sistema nervioso de una cierta complejidad también. Sin llegar al trabajo fisiológico nervioso, que pide el aprender a leer, escribir, contar, rudimentos de ciencias y letras, etc., simplemente un paseo por las calles de una gran ciudad moderna, nos trae una serie de excitaciones sensoriales e impresiones variadas, para recibir las cuales se necesita un sistema cerebro-espinal y nervioso mucho más exquisito y delicado que para vivir en la vida, relativamente uniforme y monótona, de los campos" ("El alcoholismo" 154-55).

social,” two subjects that filled the pages of the most important periodicals and newspapers of the time and made their way into the universities, academies, and countless publications and treatises (Gómez Molleda 27). But despite all the interest that this historically and sociologically oriented mode of thinking received, it quickly became commonplace and clichéd. And Augusto’s self-assuredness, coupled with his absentmindedness, seems to mock the arrogance and self-seriousness with which sociology and history came to be enveloped.

Another phrase with a political inflection turns up when Víctor bids farewell to Augusto and whispers into his ear: “Con que Eugenia la pianista, ¿eh? Bien, Augusto, bien; tú poseerás la tierra” (122). More than just an erudite or tongue-in-cheek allusion to the well known beatitude—“Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth” (Matthew 5:5)—Víctor’s remark actually echoes one of the popular slogans of Spanish libertarianism and socialism, for which the issue of land possession was of great importance. In Restoration Spain, this concern was at the center of the political fray and made the rounds in countless periodicals and pamphlets.¹⁶ Unamuno himself, during his youthful enthusiasms for socialism, used the same slogan when, in a letter from April 1898, he explained his allegiance to the socialist cause: “Y ahora sí que me siento socialista de veras. Sólo que veo claro que el procurar bienestar temporal a todos y emancipación es para que libres de la cadena de las necesidades absorbentes despierten del sueño y vean la vida a la luz de la muerte y eleven así el espíritu y desasiéndolo de la tierra lo dominen. ¡Bienaventurados los mansos porque ellos poseerán la tierra!” (Unamuno, Gutiérrez Abascal 46).

With capitalism and socialism as an undercurrent of chapter 3, Augusto’s exclamation for winning Eugenia over—that is, his slogan “lucharemos!”(120)—suddenly assumes deeper implications. For not only does the term “luchar” resonate with the revolutionary politics of the time, but having Unamuno as the author, it also resonates with the socialist periodical *La lucha de las clases*, with which Unamuno was closely associated, and to which he contributed regularly between 1894 and 1897, and occasionally between 1898 and 1927. And the fact that Augusto commits himself to “luchar” after becoming entranced by Eugenia’s eyes might also be seen as an allusion to Baudelaire’s prose poem “Les Yeux des pauvres.”¹⁷

But that is not all, for there are two other terms that are central to Unamuno’s conception of socialism and are key to understanding *Niebla*’s critical impulse. These terms are “juego” and “distracción,” and they come up when Augusto, during his chess match with Víctor, finds himself distracted by his thoughts about life as being a game of either chance or logic:

—¡Jaque! —volvió a interrumpirle Víctor.

—Es verdad, es verdad... Veamos... Pero ¿cómo he dejado que las cosas lleguen a este punto?

¹⁶ For example, the periodicals *Tierra y Libertad* and *Tierra Libre*, and articles with titles such as “Tierra y anarquismo,” “El reparto de la tierra,” and “El hombre y la tierra,” just to name a few.

¹⁷ It should be noted that besides the motif of the eyes, there is no other textual evidence to support this last claim; but since Baudelaire has been present in the first two chapters, it is worth considering the possibility that his prose poem might have something to do with Augusto’s romanticized commitment to fight for his idealized conception of Eugenia.

- Distrayéndote, hombre, como de costumbre. Si no fueras tan distraído serías uno de nuestros primeros jugadores.
- Pero dime, Víctor, ¿la vida es juego o es distracción?
- Es que el juego no es sino distracción. (121)

To make sense of this passage it is necessary to look at how Unamuno used these two terms, “juego” and “distracción,” in his political writings. Although there may be other articles, two are of interest here: “A propósito del juego,” published in *Las Noticias* on October 12, 1894, and “El movimiento social en el siglo XIX,” published in Buenos Aires’s *La Nación* on January 1, 1901. In these articles Unamuno explains, in schematic terms, the function that “juegos” and “distracciones” have in political economy, a function which Unamuno draws from the work of the Italian political economist Achille Loria. Unamuno’s explanation begins with the well-established concept of the reserve army of labor, which is that sector of society that is economically unproductive or unemployed, and is maintained in such a condition by the bourgeoisie through charitable institutions, gaming, and the consumption of luxuries. The purpose of charitable institutions and of “el juego *en todas sus formas* (lotería, frontones, bolsa, etc. etc.)” is not benevolence or wasteful recreation but rather the perpetuation of a surplus population that allows the bourgeoisie to maintain downward pressure on salaries. And as for the purchase of luxuries by the bourgeoisie, the aim here is to keep part of the capital from being productive and thus from raising the salaries of the working classes. As Unamuno explains, “Lo hondo de todo ello estriba en distraer improductivamente capital para que no se vierta [en] producción reproductiva y con la demanda de brazos, más creciente que el aumento de éstos, suba el salario tanto que el dividendo mengüe y hasta corra el interés peligro” (“El movimiento” 42). For Unamuno, then, much of capitalism is based on the principle of “juego” and “distracción,” or more precisely, on the principle that ensures that a certain sector of capital and society remains unproductive through distraction and play.

It is on this point precisely that Unamuno deviates from the radical socialists who insist that all land and means of production be handed over to all the workers so that all the capital that is produced is channeled into something useful for them (i.e. the workers). Basically, Unamuno deviates from the idea that nothing should remain idle or unproductive. For him, this model of “producción reproductiva,” which is essentially Marx’s concept of “simple reproduction,” has an adverse consequence, which is that it precludes progress and liberty the same way that “simple reproduction” precludes economic expansion. Simple reproduction, stated in the most simple of terms, “is the repetition of the productive process in its *previous proportions* (the newly produced goods simply compensate for the consumption of *means of production* and *individual consumer items*)” (*Marxist* 20). Or to put it differently, in simple reproduction all outputs of production are redirected as inputs, thus leaving no idle or accumulated capital in any subsequent period (Howard 182). Disturbed by this model of production, Unamuno warns his readers about the rash and impetuous demand that the land be turned over to the workers: “Si llega un día en que ese interés reduzca a cero, el día en que la tierra y los instrumentos de trabajo sean de los trabajadores, si llega ese día ¡adiós progreso!, ¡adiós libertad!” (“A propósito” 141).

In these articles Unamuno is taking a stand against those romantic and impatient socialists who have convinced themselves that Spain is ready for its socialist revolution when in reality it is not. Unamuno, at least in the years prior to 1897, remains firm, and at times even fervent,¹⁸ in his conviction that socialism “tiene que venir por la fuerza misma del proceso económico” that the bourgeoisie has already established (“La propiedad” 114-15). What is important to note about Unamuno’s socialism is that he finds some redemptive value in the nonproductivity essential to capitalism. Idleness, game, and play—all of these nonproductive distractions, despite the moral protestations against them, form a kind of political space that is free from the demands of utility. It’s no coincidence, then, that it is in a casino that Augusto and Víctor play their game of chess and discuss the affinity between “juego” and “distracción.” It goes against all revolutionary intuition that Unamuno should consider as an important precinct of progress and freedom the casino—that haven of *señoritos* who waste away their capital and capacity to work by distracting themselves with games and idle conversation. This explains why in an article on chess, “Sobre el ajedrez,” published in Buenos Aires’s *La nación* on July 3, 1910, Unamuno stated the following: “Lo que hay que promover y fomentar es la conversación íntima y libre, el cambio de ideas. Hay que hacer de los casinos verdaderos hogares de ideas” (200).

The casino, then, becomes a place where intellectual laziness can be counteracted by non-utilitarian conversation. For Unamuno, this kind of laziness was one of the great defects of Spanish and European society that led to total disaster in 1914. And the ugliest expression of this defect came in the form of political dogmatism, which was nothing more than “cobardía mental” and “pereza de pensar” (“Sobre el profeta” 241). This was precisely the malady that Unamuno held to be responsible for Europe’s disastrous situation:

Mientras haya entre nosotros tantos brutos completamente persuadidos de la verdad de cuanto dicen y perfectamente convencidos de su propia existencia maciza y duradera, estamos los demás perdidos. Porque con esa gente no se puede vivir en paz. . . . Y habrá usted visto, señor mío, que ahora, con motivo de la guerra europea, nuestros trogloditas se han salido de sus cavernas y están mostrando a toda luz las vergüenzas de sus inquebrantables prejuicios. Son todos los convencidos antes de haber estudiado, todos los que no quieren oír, todos los que de nacimiento saben a qué atenerse. Dios nos libre de los hombres que no dudan ni tiemblan. (“Matar” 202-203)

What is interesting about this passage is that it explains much about Augusto, a character who is blithely convinced of his own existence (an existence which is placed in doubt as the novel develops); who is dazzled by glamorous ideals and by the “dulce resplendor”

¹⁸ For example, at the end of “A propósito del juego” he writes: “El capitalismo se suicida, el proletariado va adquiriendo conciencia de su razón y su fuerza, la guardia pretoriana de los improductivos que viven de las migajas del capitalismo va avergonzándose de su suerte fatal, sacudiendo su canino servilismo y volviendo contra el tirano las armas que él le dio, y parece que se acerca el día hermoso en que brille la paz del trabajo después de la última batalla de esta guerra secular, de la batalla encarnizada que se inició el día en que levantó el inmortal Marx la bandera de la gloriosa Internacional de trabajadores” (142).

(120) of a woman's eyes (all while paying no heed to the reality that surrounds him); and whose commitment to these ideals and to this woman has already been determined by an innate predisposition of his that stems "*ab origine, desde que naciste,*" as Víctor explains (121).

But although Augusto embodies everything that is wrong with Spain and Europe, there is a redemptive moment that flashes into view during his conversation and chess match. This happens in one of the passages quoted above, when Víctor asks Augusto:

—...dime ¿es rubia o morena?

—Pues, la verdad, no lo sé. Aunque me figuro que no debe de ser ni lo uno ni lo otro; vamos, así pelicastaña.

—¿Es alta o baja?

—Tampoco me acuerdo bien. Pero debe de ser una cosa regular. Pero ¡qué ojos, chico, qué ojos tiene mi Eugenia! (122)

Here we see how Augusto's habits of mind get interrupted, which is significant considering that we are dealing with an absentminded "paseante de la vida" who is happy to let others, even dogs, lead him "a la izquierda o a la derecha" when he first steps out of his house (109-10). It is significant, then, that Augusto should answer Víctor's polarizing questions—"¿es rubia o morena?" "¿es alta o baja?"—with conciliatory responses that avoid dialectical extremes ("ni lo uno ni lo otro," "pelicastaña," "una cosa regular"). Something has changed in Augusto's way of thinking, even if for a moment, and it owes much to his idle conversation with Víctor, a conversation laden with disquisitions and interruptions that break open Augusto's unexamined certainties. The casino, the game of chess, and the idle conversation with his friend thus become spaces and activities that enable Augusto to think outside his enthrallments and delusions.

The fact that Augusto now shows signs of thinking seems to hearten Víctor. And here we turn once again to the moment that Víctor bids farewell to Augusto after their chess match is over:

Al despedirse, Víctor, poniéndole la diestra, a guisa de yugo, sobre el cerviguillo le susurró al oído:

—Conque Eugenia la pianista, ¿eh? Bien, Augusto, bien; tú poseerás la tierra.
(122)

As discussed above, this phrase resonates with some of the slogans of socialism and anarchism, but just as importantly, it also resonates with Unamuno's view of the contemplative life. Unamuno comments on this view in an article he wrote in 1904 on Izaak Walton's famous seventeenth-century work, *The Compleat Angler* ("El perfecto"). Reflecting on Walton's part pastoral dialogue, part fishing manual, Unamuno admires the idea that contemplation and action are joined together in the "honestísimo, ingenuo, tranquilo e inocente arte de pescar a la caña" (450). He notes that the peace and tranquility of fishing enables one to be free from the hustle and bustle of productivity; and this freedom in turn makes it possible to gain new revelations that go against the flow of worldly existence: "Y suele suceder entonces que va poco a poco convirtiéndose nuestra quietud en aparente marcha, opuesta a la del curso fluvial" ("El perfecto" 452).

This leads Unamuno to one of the principal motifs of *The Compleat Angler*: “En recreo tan tranquilo, sosegado e inocente, contemplando al corcho en medio del agua o al agua en derredor del corcho, se hace el pescador contemplativo y manso, y de los mansos y contemplativos es la tierra” (“El perfecto” 453).

With this in mind, the significance of Víctor and Augusto’s exchange becomes clear. In the spirit of Walton’s angler, Augusto has become contemplative, at least for a moment, as evidenced by his more judicious answers to Víctor’s polarizing questions. Although this change is slight and situated in a different context, it is enough for Víctor to put his right hand on Augusto’s neck “a guisa de yugo,” as if his hand were a yoke on a meek and docile animal. Thus Víctor’s portentous comment—“tú poseerás la tierra”—takes on a different coloring from that of its socialist and anarchist connotation. For as Unamuno’s essay on Walton suggests, it is the “mansos y contemplativos” like Augusto who will inherit the land. It is they who will make possible a salutary form of socialism, one that gives idleness its due as a space where free forms of thinking are possible.

And although, in this scene, we see a flash of insight on Augusto’s behalf, a flash that frees him from his shortsighted “amorío,” we see that it suddenly dissipates when Augusto hears Víctor refer to Eugenia as “Euginita,” and leaves the casino thinking: “«¡Pero esos diminutivos —pensó Augusto—, esos terribles diminutivos!» Y salió a la calle” (122). And here the joke is this: that Augusto, in his obliviousness, complains about the diminutive form of Eugenia’s name rather than about what really matters: the pejorative suffix of his “amorío.” Like the romantic socialists, Augusto stops thinking and surrenders to his sentimental enthrallment.

Unamuno, in a letter written to his mentee, Luis de Zulueta, and dated April 23, 1913—which was just around the time that he was revising, or at least considering revising, the manuscript of *Niebla* into a nivola—stated the following: “La barbarie de nuestras derechas pone pavor, y sólo le encuentro comparable la de nuestras izquierdas” (Unamuno, Zulueta 242). We have already seen one of the many reasons why Unamuno bemoaned the sorry state of Spain’s revolutionary culture, but one of the principal ones worth discussing was that the most strident proponents of the left were unable to think in terms of social, political, and economic contradictions. This was something that Unamuno experienced firsthand during his many interactions with Spain’s leftist and labor movement intellectuals. And it was a point that caused him a great deal of frustration. We see this, for instance, in 1906, after a three-week visit to Barcelona, where Unamuno did a conference circuit and became acquainted with Barcelona’s labor and revolutionary culture (Dendle). This is the impression he had of Barcelona: “Mi viaje a Barcelona ha contribuido a entristecerme. Me ha arrebatado una última ilusión. Hoy creo en Barcelona menos que en Madrid, y cada día que pasa, menos. Aquello no es serio. Y luego no toleran la contradicción, y al que no les dice lo que querían que se les dijese le declaran memo o poco menos” (Unamuno, Zulueta 190-91). To hear only what one wants to hear, and to want to hear it in a neat and consistent form—that, for Unamuno, was what progressive politics in Spain had become.

And to make things worse, this was all a matter of groupthink and collective narcissism. There is a passage by the Italian poet Giusue Carducci that Unamuno once used in a letter, dated July 14, 1911, to describe exactly what the Spanish literary and

political intelligentsia had become: “E poi tutti d’accordo si sbacucchiano l’un con l’altro per le appendici, con le dedicatorie nelle rassegne; e denudano in conspetto del pubblico le loro pubertà, cantando in coro: noi siamo i giovini, i giovini, i giovini” (qtd. in Tarín-Iglesias 215). The letter is redolent with Unamuno’s frustration and bitterness. In it he goes on to explain that the narcissistic self-importance of Spain’s intelligentsia “no le impide que se agarren a los faldones de cualquier viejo macho cabrío, conductor de rebaños,” and then he offers his addressee, a young aspiring writer, the following sarcastic advice: “No pierda tiempo en las cosas clásicas, lea a los amigos sólo y mejor a sí mismo y mejor no leer lo que no escribe. Parta del aforismo de que aquí todos somos unos” (qtd. in Tarín-Iglesias 215).

In essence, the source of Unamuno’s indignation was the adversarial impulse that kept the Spanish left imprisoned in its self-satisfied narcissism and rabid chauvinism. This was an impulse that viewed the world as a Manichean struggle between the left and the right, between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, and between the forces of progress and those of reaction. This facile, knee-jerk way of understanding the sociopolitical world not only precluded any form of self-scrutiny but also made it impossible to think in terms of contradictions and interdependencies between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. Indeed, these are the habits of mind that *Niebla* seeks to break, because without these flexible and critical forms of thinking, Spanish progressives would remain mired in what Unamuno called “pueriles fantasmagorías sindicalistas” (“La lección” 228).

For Unamuno, one of the principle manifestations of this adversarial impulse was the idea that the proletariat alone could take the land and means of production and just magically carry on with production in an efficient and socially beneficial manner. This was the myth that socialists and anarchists had made themselves believe—the myth that they could eliminate the bourgeoisie and achieve a more just and well-functioning society on their own. Unamuno, however, was keenly aware that the reality was different, because although the worker in a factory might know how to carry out his task, in the wider world of political economy, he was doomed because he knew nothing about the other non-production related processes with which the bourgeoisie was familiar.¹⁹ Whether the socialists and anarchists liked it or not, the bourgeoisie, with its excess capital and excess time, had the important function of taking risks and of taking the initiative to achieve important scientific and technological advances. On this note, and against all revolutionary decorum, Unamuno explains that “Una organización colectivista está muy expuesta a caer en la rutina, al no exponerse al riesgo, a ahogar la iniciativa. Las colectividades son conservadoras y rutinarias; sólo el individuo es progresista, sólo el individuo afronta el azar. Jamás una colectividad descubrió ni inventó nada” (“La lección” 228).

Two things can be said about these comments by Unamuno. One, which has already been discussed, is that the bourgeois luxury of unproductive capital and unproductive time lends itself to practices involving chance and play, which then make possible forms of thinking and creating that are unburdened by the demands of utility.

¹⁹ On this note, Unamuno writes: “Los obreros de una fábrica serán capaces de hacerla producir sin la dirección técnica del amo —y esto no siempre—; pero es dudoso que sepan dónde, cómo y cuándo adquirir las primeras materias, y dónde, cómo y cuándo vender mejor el producto. Las pueriles fantasmagorías sindicalistas, toda la novelería del bolcheviquismo, fracasará, sin duda, en el campo mercantil” (“La lección” 227).

The other thing that can be said is that Unamuno's comments insist on vindicating the imaginative capability of the individual, whose dignity risks being absorbed by the revolutionary collective. In Unamuno's view, if there is something valuable to be rescued about bourgeois culture, it is precisely its vindication of the individual's ability to exercise a certain cognitive play and self-indulgence that is not available to those who are devoted entirely to economic productivity or to a revolutionary program.

Both these points have one thing in common: they insist on the autonomy of imaginative energy. Which brings us to the realm of art making and *Niebla*'s place within it. A long-standing critical assumption has been to view *Niebla* as an exercise in spontaneous expression, "a lo que salga," as Víctor explained with respect to his nivola. But if that is the case, then it is questionable whether *Niebla* has any place in the realm of art making, that is, with "art making" understood as a process of imaginative construction as opposed to a process of essentializing production, whereby an author declares himself an artist and whatever he writes is consequently "art," even if it's written "a lo que salga." There have, however, been some efforts to show that *Niebla* was written, not "a lo que salga," but as carefully constructed artwork. One effort that stands out is Janet Pérez's 1983 article "Rhetorical Integration in Unamuno's *Niebla*." Here, Pérez reveals how *Niebla* is made up of a complex web of motifs, metaphors, symmetries, and contrasts; and of a series of prefigurations and rhetorical devices that create the illusion of being written spontaneously, and "sin plan previo."

But as this chapter has attempted to demonstrate, the aesthetic illusion at work within *Niebla* was not without its political implications. Unamuno valued those literary works in which "palpita . . . el fragor de las luchas contemporáneas" (qtd. in Tarín-Iglesias 210). But by "palpitar" he did not mean merely those works that reflect the sociopolitical reality, or that novelize a sociological thesis, or that attempt to communicate a political slogan. For Unamuno, all these schemes are too facile, and conform too readily to existing norms and political exigencies. The only thing they would do is add to what Spain does *not* need: more conformism and more facileness. Instead what Unamuno's comment points to is that he seeks an art form that embodies sociopolitical complexity but that doesn't make explicit and readily understandable—and thus reductive—statements about that complexity. Thus Unamuno's preference for a work in which "palpita . . . el fragor de las luchas políticas" comes very close to what Adorno had in mind when he noted that "What crackles in art works is the sound of the friction of the antagonistic elements that the art work seeks to unify" (*Aesthetic* 177).

With these aesthetic principles at work in *Niebla*, we can now understand what this nivola is attempting to do as an artwork. And it is this: to reconcile its sociohistorical substance with its artistic autonomy. By steering away from any tendentious engagement, *Niebla* maintains its autonomy and ability to critique that which gets obfuscated by ideology. And by being more than a mere exercise of careless writing "a lo que salga," it maintains its critical capacity and relevance to the social. Thus *Niebla*'s aesthetic can be described more accurately as one of mediation, whose meaning emerges from the reader's negotiation of its different elements. Even though *Niebla* may not have been political, it nevertheless had the capacity to help prepare the ground for a more critical politics. Whether or not it was read that way is a whole other story. What is clear, however, is that in this novel Unamuno knew that he had achieved a remarkable feat. It is no wonder, then, that twenty-one years after publishing *Niebla*, he wrote the following:

“Yo no me equivoqué, pues desde un principio supuse —y lo dije— que ésta que bauticé de novela habría de ser mi obra más universalizada” (*Niebla* 90).

Conclusion

The reception history of Spanish modernism has been subject to numerous ups and downs, especially with regard to the writers who have been habitually assigned to one or the other side of the noventayochismo/modernismo binary. Indeed, the sorting of writers according to this divide has been a scholarly encumbrance that Hispanism has had to contend with ever since Martínez Ruiz coined the term “Generación de 1898” in 1913, and ever since the term “modernismo” was reduced, roughly around 1907, to being nearly synonymous with the literary pursuit of aesthetic beauty.¹ In the last couple of decades, however, this binary has been the subject of much critical scrutiny and has brought Hispanist scholarship to another phase in its history.

Why the noventayochismo /modernismo binary obtained for so long can be explained by the sharp ideological divisions brought about by the Spanish civil war. Many of the scholars who remained in Spain under the Franco dictatorship helped to solidify the binary model in such a way that it whitewashed the politically radical backstories of some of Spain’s greatest twentieth-century writers: Unamuno, Valle-Inclán, Martínez Ruiz, Ramiro de Maeztu, and Pío Baroja. For a regime that sought to silence any left-wing opposition, it was hardly convenient that the early leftist radicalism of some of its most cherished writers should be brought to light.

It was only until the mid 1960s that a group of scholars—namely, Rafael Pérez de la Dehesa, E. Inman Fox, and Carlos Blanco Aguinaga—began digging into the archives to recover the early radicalism of the “noventayochistas,” who had a more explicit concern with the social and the historical than their counterparts, the “modernistas.” It is not insignificant that the training of these scholars took place outside of Francoist Spain, or that their publications began to appear at a moment when the Francoist dictatorship had begun to loosen its grip on academic censorship. Although these scholars produced some of the finest work in Hispanist scholarship, it is evident that they could not fully escape the burden of the noventayochismo /modernismo divide. As a result, one of the principal questions that they contended with was why the noventayochistas suddenly shifted from political radicalism to artistic apoliticism, that is, why they abandoned their concern with the history and society of Spain and turned instead to a modernista-like “ensoñación,” to use Laín Entralgo’s term. Although these scholars advanced several hypotheses—which ranged from the claim that the noventayochistas’ shift was due to a disillusion with Spanish politics, to the claim that their early radicalism was merely an

¹ According to Javier Blasco Pascual, between 1907 and 1913, the term “modernismo” began to lose its original and broader meaning as a political-cum-artistic tendency that embraced progressive ideas and artistic genres. During this period the term began to refer more and more to merely the artistic renewal of literary language, and became roughly synonymous with “Rubendarianismo.” The name “Generación del 98” traces its origin to as early as 1902, when the term “generación,” which was drawn from the field of sociology, became associated with those intellectuals and writers who came of age after the crisis of 1898 (Fox, “La generación” 23-24). Although the term had been used on several occasions to refer to these individuals, it was in November 1913, when Martínez Ruiz published a series of articles, titled “Generación de 1898,” that this name became a full-fledged historiographical term that was applied to literary study.

existential gesture—a firm and solid answer to the question was never fully settled on, thereby leaving the noventayochismo/modernismo model largely intact.²

With the end of the Franco dictatorship in 1975, and with Spain's rapid economic growth, a curious thing happened: the terms "postmodern" and "postmodernism" were enthusiastically embraced by Spanish critics and artists, who sought to shake off any stigma of cultural backwardness. But as Donald L. Shaw notes, this embrace took place prior to there being a fuller understanding of what was meant, in the Spanish context, by the term "modernismo," which was still caught in an awkward and symbiotic opposition to "noventayochismo" (897). Why Spanish postmodernism was seen as part of a larger artistic tendency—and not "modernismo" or "noventayochismo"—is a question that was largely bypassed given the decades-long political entrenchment of the binary.

In more recent years, however, the binary has been placed under a great deal of scrutiny, and in many academic quarters it has been collapsed in favor of the term "Modernism," understood in the broader Anglo-American sense. This claim was originally made in the early 1980s by critics such as Ricardo Gullón³ and José-Carlos Mainer ("La crisis"), and was further developed and strengthened by Christopher Soufas and Alex Longhurst, and has been solidified in more recent years by Andrew A. Anderson, Mary Lee Bretz, and Nil Santiáñez (Shaw 898-903).⁴ For these scholars, "modernismo" no longer refers only to the artistic movement that followed Rubén Darío's stylistic innovations; now it refers to the broader artistic developments that took place throughout Europe and the Americas. Thus those artists who were divided along the noventayochismo/modernismo binary had all along been part of the much larger artistic phenomenon we know as Modernism. These critics have demonstrated that Spanish modernism is not a marginal or lesser literature when compared to other European modernisms, but is rather a highly consequential part of cultural modernity.

This dissertation has benefited from the unburdening of the generational model in Hispanist scholarship, and has sought to return to the question that Pérez de la Dehesa, Fox, and Blanco Aguinaga had contended with—the question, that is, of explaining the apparent shift from political radicalism to political detachment in the work of the early

² This is one of the reasons why these scholars did not focus on the Valle-Inclán, whose early work, the *Sonatas*, were generally considered the epitome of modernismo's rejection of social and historical concerns.

³ Gullón, in his *Direcciones del modernismo*, attributed this broad-based understanding of "modernismo" to Juan Ramón Jiménez, who in 1935 wrote: "El modernismo no fue solamente una tendencia literaria: el modernismo fue una tendencia general.... lo que se llama modernismo no es cosa de escuela ni de forma, sino de actitud. Era el encuentro de nuevo con la belleza sepultada durante el siglo XIX por un tono general de poesía burguesa. Eso es el modernismo: un gran movimiento de entusiasmo y libertad hacia la belleza" (qtd. in Gullón 30). It is likely that Jiménez drew this definition from Federico de Onís, who one year earlier, in 1934, had written: "El modernismo es la forma hispánica de la crisis universal de las letras y del espíritu que inicia hacia 1885 la disolución del siglo XIX y que se había de manifestar en el arte, la ciencia, la religión, la política y gradualmente en los demás aspectos de la vida entera, con todos los caracteres, por lo tanto, de un hondo cambio histórico cuyo proceso continúa hoy" (xv).

⁴ Two collections of essays have also played an important role in questioning the noventayochismo/modernismo divide: *¿Qué es el modernismo? Nueva encuesta, nuevas lecturas*, published in 1993, and edited by Richard A. Cardwell and Bernard McGuirk; and *Modernism and Its Margins: Reinscribing Cultural Modernity from Spain and Latin America*, published in 1999, and edited by Anthony L. Geist and José B. Monleón.

Spanish modernists. My chapters on Martínez Ruiz, Valle-Inclán, and Unamuno have sought to demonstrate that the seemingly politically detached and rarefied novels of these authors—*La voluntad*, *Sonata de otoño*, and *Niebla*—were in fact deeply grounded in their sociopolitical moment. Consequently, these novels are not the product of a shift from the political to the fanciful, but are rather part of a dual process in which they not only deepen into the sociopolitical but also transcend it. As novels, they are constructed out of materials drawn from the social world; but as artworks, they transcend the social world by means of the aesthetic imagination.

In this sense, the aesthetic theory of Adorno has been of great benefit to this project. Many of the insights presented in the previous chapters are owed to the fact that Adornian and Frankfurt School Critical Theory has rarely been associated with the study of Spanish literature. The reason for this is not entirely clear, but may very well be due to the fact that Hispanism's generational model marginalized the study of Spanish literature from the broader theoretical discussions of European modernism.

Although Spanish translations of several works of Frankfurt School Critical Theory have circulated in Spain since the late 60s, serious study of them was slow to catch on. A scholar who in recent years has traced the reception history of Critical Theory in Spain suggests that during the transition to democracy, Adorno's relentless negativity and Marcuse's démodé utopianism made Critical Theory seem "difícilmente provechable" for any ideological purposes (Gómez 16). Although this is one of Critical Theory's greatest strengths, it has also been one of the biggest barriers to its diffusion in Spain and, especially, in Spanish literary studies.

Working with a critical approach that resists being serviceable—or "provechable"—and cannot simply be "applied" to a set of literary texts is no easy task. One cannot, in other words, do an "Adornian" reading of a novel, because what Adorno ultimately offers is merely a theory of what art is and how it relates to the social. What the outcome of that relation is depends entirely on the particularity of the artwork and the uniqueness of the historical moment to which it belongs. Consequently, a critical approach that insists on the particularity of an artwork and its historical moment—that insists, in other words, on immanent critique—precludes the possibility of having a theory-based reading practice that works universally for all literary works.

Such an approach can be maddening for the student seeking a reading model that offers easy guidance; but it can also be refreshing in that it enables the texts being studied to speak on their own historical terms. This is especially so with literary works that have long been read through the ideologically inflected rubrics of "noventayochismo" and "modernismo." For precisely this reason I have placed less emphasis on reading *La voluntad*, *Sonata de otoño*, and *Niebla* according to any genre-type rubric—whether it be "noventayochismo," "modernismo," or "Modernism"—and more emphasis on reading them as reconstellations and expressions of their historical moment. The chapters of this dissertation have demonstrated that even though these works seek autonomy from their politicized context, they nevertheless, by virtue of that same autonomy, reveal unforeseen truths about the politics from which they distance themselves.

In this sense, each work is like a monad that is autonomous but also a "perpetual living mirror of the universe" (Leibniz 263). This idea finds an aesthetic echo in Valle-Inclán's *esperpento*, which in *Lucas de bohemia* is likened to a concave mirror that

systematically deforms Spanish history and society.⁵ One might say that this dissertation has sought to explore what Valle-Inclán meant by “estética sistemáticamente deformada,” a principle which has more to do with carefully reordering the sociopolitical world than with merely replicating it.

Accordingly, the previous chapters have focused on the political import, as opposed to the political impact, of *La voluntad*, *Sonata de otoño*, and *Niebla*. It has examined the artistry that was involved in their systematic “deformación” of the political culture of Restoration Spain, and has demonstrated that such artistry yields new forms of critical thought that are not bound by the prevailing ideologies of the moment. What these ideologies were, and how they limited critical thought, was the task of chapter one. By examining the fervent reception of Dicenta’s *Juan José* and Galdós’s *Electra*, the chapter outlined the ways in which positivism and liberal radicalism merged to create a progressive culture whose understanding of society was trapped in the assumptions of bourgeois ideology. Moreover, the chapter argued that Martínez Ruiz, Valle-Inclán, and Unamuno paid careful attention to the impotence of Spain’s progressive culture and created artworks that broke free from it, thereby granting readers an opportunity to exercise the kind of critical thought and agency that was stunted by leftist radicalism and its dogmas.

The remaining chapters are case studies of how *La voluntad*, *Sonata de otoño*, and *Niebla* invite new forms of cognition that bring into view aspects of the social world that have been occluded by the stridency of leftist politics. In the chapter on *La voluntad* I demonstrated how Martínez Ruiz’s text plays with the logic at work within liberal ideology’s absolutizing and Manichean tendency, which not only flattens out a complex social reality made up of historical particularities but also absorbs individual thought and agency into a set of abstract liberal principles. It is against these two forces that *La voluntad* positions itself as an artwork. On one hand, it depicts the interplay between its abstract themes and the particular and concrete things of its narrative world, which is something that liberal culture has lost sight of. And on the other hand, it offers itself as a counter to liberal culture’s absorption of the individual’s thought and agency; and it does this by seeking formal innovations that elicit the kind of affective responses that break open the hardened ideology the reader may hold. Lastly, the chapter showed how the novel’s sense of despair and defeat is not a gesture of political indifference, as is usually thought, but is instead a counter to liberal triumphalism and utopianism. In essence, the novel posits an ethics based on compassion rather than on the overly abstract principles of progressive ideology. Chapter 2, then, has shown that *La voluntad* is not a withdrawal from the political but is rather a product of the author’s deep awareness of its subtle and unforeseen workings.

In the chapter on Valle-Inclán’s *Sonata de otoño* I showed how it, too, is a product of the lessons learned from the folly of leftist politics. The chapter argued that the *Sonata* draws its artistic materials from its political context and refashions them into a narrative world that is estranged but also familiar to *fin-de-siglo* readers. The *Sonata*’s historical context is one in which radicalized and self-proclaimed “modern”

⁵ In the words of Max Estrella: “El sentido trágico de la vida española sólo puede darse con una estética sistemáticamente deformada... La deformación deja de serlo cuando está sujeta a una matemática perfecta. Mi estética actual es transformar con matemáticas de espejo cóncavo las normas clásicas.”

intellectuals—the *gente nueva*—set up the terms of political discourse by recklessly equating the new with the righteous, and the old with the obsolete. The *Sonata* takes these terms and inverts them to create the figure of the marqués de Bradomín, whose utopian, narcissistic, and snobbish attitude mimics that of the *gente nueva* and brings to light the profane and terroristic underside of his—and by implication, the *gente nueva*'s—high-minded and righteous posturing. Chapter 3, then, has shown that even though the *Sonata de otoño* seems radically detached from any political concern, it is in fact constructed out of a deep understanding of the insidious logic informing the radical aspects of Spain's progressive culture.

In the chapter on *Niebla* I demonstrated how Unamuno's text mockingly reimagines the folly of leftist political culture and posits a surprising corrective to it. The chapter argues that *Niebla* constructs its protagonist, Augusto Pérez, in such a way that it mocks the situation in which Spanish liberal radicals looked to France as their political and cultural model while paying little or no heed to the fact that Spain was utterly different from France. Thus the humor that is provoked by Augusto's blitheness and dandy-like behavior, which is that of a Baudelairean flâneur out of context, was not some rarified or frivolous literary exercise, but was instead deeply resonant with a Spanish socialist culture that looked across the Pyrenees, rather than to Spain, for its revolutionary and cultural program. Against this erroneous and foolish logic, *Niebla* posits the productiveness of idle conversation, which has long been seen as a particularly Spanish vice. Through the aimless and speculative conversations of Augusto and his interlocutors, it becomes evident that these are spaces not of wasted time, but of the free exercising of thought, which is something that has been lacking in Spain, where the habit to imitate all things French dominates the political and cultural discourse of the left. The chapter, then, has shown that *Niebla* is profoundly attentive not only to the progressive politics of Restoration Spain but also to the unheeded sources, embedded in the Spanish tradition, that are necessary for a truly advantageous revolutionary polity.

Having studied the political import of the three novels, this dissertation has sought to address the question of why Spain's most important *fin-de-siglo* writers shifted from political engagement to artistic apoliticism. The answer is somewhat paradoxical. *La voluntad*, *Sonata de otoño*, and *Niebla* are works that strive for autonomy from the demands of political praxis, but at the same time, as they revel in their autonomy, they insinuate forms of critique that penetrate into the subtle workings of progressive politics. The previous chapters have shown that Martínez Ruiz, Valle-Inclán, and Unamuno, as artists who are deeply concerned with their political world, sought and found an alternative to the sharp division between political praxis and artistic apoliticism.

This dissertation has also sought to contribute to the recent inclusion of modern Spanish literature into the broader study of Modernism. One of the reasons that some Hispanists have resisted adopting the term "Modernism" as a broad-based rubric for noventayochismo /modernismo is that the term is often seen as a colonial imposition from the Anglo-American scholarly tradition. This need not be so. For one thing, as the Valle-Inclán chapter showed, the term "modernismo" was, from the beginning, a broad and capacious term that embraced all modern forms of political and artistic expression. This is why I have studied *La voluntad*, *Sonata de otoño*, and *Niebla* without dividing them along the noventayochismo /modernismo divide. Indeed, I have strived to show that even if these works are individual expressions of the broad cultural trend of Modernism,

they can still be read on their own terms. That is to say, the fact that they are Modernist does not undermine their historical particularity. This is the point that I have sought to demonstrate.

Lastly, an important motivation for this dissertation was a simple desire to renew interest in the novels by Martínez Ruiz, Valle-Inclán, and Unamuno. This is not to say that interest has been lacking with respect to their works. Indeed, they are part of the Spanish literary canon and are still read by scholars and students. But as part of the canon, they are often derided as being little more than historical curiosities whose insights have been exhausted by their long reception history. My aim, then, has been to insist on the unforeseen critical capabilities still harbored by these seemingly benign literary works.

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Appendix A

Palique

Vuelvo de la aldea y sobre el cartapacio prosaico de mi mesa de trabajo veo un libro chiquitín y bien impreso que se titula *Epitalamio*. Alzo los ojos y leo en el almanaque americano colgando en la pared, bajo el retrato de Víctor Hugo: 23 de junio.

Es decir, el 23 de junio estaba yo preparándome para decir de *Epitalamio* algo. Y como aquel día salí de veraneo (contra los consejos del famoso médico de *La Correspondencia* que opina que no se puede veranear higiénicamente más que en Talavera), hasta hoy no he vuelto a ver el librito del señor Valle-Inclán; que así se llama el autor.

¿Quién es Valle-Inclán? Un modernista, *gente nueva*, un afrancesado franco y valiente, que no se esconde para hablar de los *flancos* de Venus.

Según mis noticias, Valle-Inclán, aunque *nuevo*, es listo y ha leído. Me lo ha dicho persona de tanta autoridad y tan malas pulgas críticas como el autor de *Maximina* y *La fe*, Armando Palacio.

En este mismo *Epitalamio*, que es inmoral, si los libros pueden ser inmorales, que desmoraliza... al que desmoralice, porque a mí, francamente, no me ha inspirado ganas de *hacer de cadete*; en este mismo librito, que el señor Valle-Inclán por mi consejo no hubiera escrito, se ve que el autor tiene imaginación, es capaz de llegar a tener estilo, no es un cualquiera, en fin, y merece que se le diga, que, hoy por hoy... está dejado de la mano de Dios.

Todo eso que él cree *originalidad* y *valer* es modernismo puro, imitación de afectaciones, *artículo de París*... de venta en las ferias de Toro o de Rioseco.

¡Dios mío, quien convencerá a estos muchachos que hablar del boulevard, desde Madrid, y hablar casi en francés, y escribir y pensar y sentir (o hacer que se siente) como los *chicos* de París... del año 85... no es la última moda ni cosa formal ni digna de verdaderos artistas!

Por donde quiera que se abre el *Epitalamio*... hay algo en cueros vivos y una contorsión gramatical o retórica. «Amaba con el culto olímpico de las diosas desnudas.»

Ni se ama con el culto ni las diosas tributan culto, sino que lo reciben, ni hay diosas desnudas... así, por antonomasia; porque claro que, a ratos, todo dios y todo filósofo, como diría F. y González, está desnudo.

Augusto, la desnudísima y sin vergüenza Augusta, le pone a su esposo unos cuernos... olímpicos.

Y su amante le llama madona.

También un Sr. Sawa comparaba el otro día en *El Liberal* no sé qué porquerías con el culto de la Virgen.

Y no diré que los debían llevar a ustedes presos, por decir esas cosas, pero sí que, por lo menos, merecen ustedes que los anden buscando.

«Alma extraña, que si rezase buscaría a Cristo en el Olimpo y a Júpiter en el cielo.»

Esas cosas son sencillamente... locuras, incongruencias, señor Valle-Inclán.

Llamar *salmos* a una colección de versos sucios es de mal gusto, y no es valentía ahora que no se tuesta por eso.

Si el señor Valle-Inclán hubiera publicado todas esas blasfemias y eso sacrilegios en tiempo de Felipe II... *seguiría* dando pruebas del mal gusto, pero hubiese sido un valiente.

En fin, el librito, al fuego.. pero el autor... a estudiar más todavía y a olvidar también muchas lecturas malsanas.

¿Le gusta al señor Valle-Inclán ser carnero de Panurgo?

Pues, escribiendo cosas como *Epitalamio* se es *vellocino*, *toisón*, de la manera más ridícula que cabe en vaga y amena literatura.

Y si Valle-Inclán no me cree ahora... al tiempo.

En general, el libro no está escrito en lengua libre, de esa que suelen emplear los anarquistas de la gramática; pero no faltan palabras que no pueden ser españoles. ¿Qué significa 'dorevillesca'? ¿Es vocablo derivado de la mitad de un apellido francés? Pero, ¡quién admite eso!

En cuanto al cinismo repugnante que es el fondo de *Epitalamio*, no crea el autor que ha encontrado ningún estercolero nuevo. Coja los folletines (o *folletones*) críticos de París de hace unos diez años... Allí verá palizas muy bien dadas de Lemaitre, y otros, a comedias y novelas de falso *naturalismo* (entonces era naturalismo lo que ahora es *pentélico*, olímpico) que se basaban en transacciones asquerosas semejantes a la de la *madona* (¡qué horror!) del príncipe Attilio...

En ese Attilio hay todo un símbolo del disparatado sistema literario que sigue Valle-Inclán. En español no hay pronunciación especial para dos tes seguidas, y nada se escribe con dos tes. ¿A qué viene escribir lo que en castellano se puede decir, y se dice bien, con ortografía bárbara? Pero esto importaría poco, si no fuera lo que significa. El autor falta a muchas cosas respetables, por un vicio literario en parte... que no es más que una traducción de cosas atrasadas.

A Valle-Inclán se le ha venido a la boca el mal sabor de una orgía... de algún literato cínico de París, de hace dos lustros.

¿Se puede ser listo escribiendo libros así? ¡Sí Un gazmoño como Navarro Ledesma no tiene enmienda; un muchacho extraviado, pero franco, decidor, de fantasía, como Valle-Inclán, puede arrepentirse. Y trabajar en la *verdadera viña*.

Clarín

(qtd. in Gamallo Fierros 351-53)

Appendix B

Señor don Leopoldo Alas.

Señor de mi mayor y más distinguida admiración y respeto: Doy a usted gracias muy sinceras por el Palique que en «Madrid Cómico» le dedica a mi libro «Epitalamio». Los reparos que usted pone al libro, y los consejos que da al autor los acepto y agradezco de muy buena gana. Pero todavía agradezco más la bondadosa parquedad con que usted acota defectos de estilo, y de lenguaje. No se me oculta que en esa tarea pudo usted haber ido lejos, muy lejos... ¡Si usted viese que de tachas y enmiendas tengo yo hechas en un ejemplar de «Epitalamio»...

Dice usted que puedo arrepentirme y trabajar en la verdadera viña –con toda el alma agradecí a usted ese final alentador. En cuanto a «arrepentido» ya lo estoy; pero lo otro...! ¡lo otro es tan difícil!

Reciba usted con estas líneas la expresión más sincera de mi reconocimiento, de mi admiración, y mi amistad.

Ramón del Valle-Inclán

Madrid, 29-IX-97
s/c Calvo Asensio, 4

(qtd. in Gamallo Fierros 355)

Palique

Señor don R. del Valle-Inclán:

Estimado señor y compañero: Mucho me alegro de que usted haya entendido mi *Palique de Madrid Cómico* y no lo haya tomado por donde parece que quema.

A los majaderos y a los *espíritus falsos*, como diría Paulhan, se les conoce pronto, sean misoneístas o modernistas. El que tiene algo bueno dentro, como creo que lo tiene usted, lo deja ver a través de cualquier uniforme.

Cuantos han dicho que soy enemigo de la *gente nueva*, así como suena, o mienten o se engañan. Yo también he sido *nuevo* y he tenido pruritos que he dejado después.

Lo que hago es combatir la *pose*, la servil imitación, el descaro y la falta de respeto. –Unos, *saltan*, porque solo atienden al amor propio o son malos o tontos; otros distinguen y hacen justicia a mi intención. Usted ha sido de estos. Dios se lo pague.

Sí; servirá usted para la viña. Consejo para ello; el de Horacio *versate manu*. –Muy sobado... Como están sobadas las sacras imágenes que besan generaciones y generaciones.

Yo no sé como hay *artistas* que desdeñan las verdades que tenemos encerradas en vetustos relicarios. El error-Matusalén... a la hoguera; la verdad-abuela ¡es tan venerable!

Cuando uno ha visto a su madre llegar a anciana, ha soñado muchas veces con el absurdo... de que no muriese; de que siguiera envejeciendo siempre... y viviendo. *Las madres*, de Goethe, cumplen este ensueño. Envejecen, a veces parece que chocean... y viven, viven.

En el arte, como en la vida ordinaria, en punto a moral, no hay más que dos *novedades* posibles: o ser moral o no serlo.

Hay que ser moral (por moralidad). *Hortus inclusus*.

Pero ahí, ahondar.

El más atrevido pensamiento que tolero, no por exacto, sino por inocente, es el del joven escritor francés Pujo (*Idealismo integral*) que pone lo bello sobre lo moral.

Pero es que lo bello es moral también, según su concepto.

En cierto sentido, en la *gloria* soñada, ya todo es estética.

Sí; lo primero que se ve de Dios es la hermosura.

Pero la hermosura no está hecha de *decadentismos* y desvergüenzas.

Otra cosa.

He visto que algunos de la *gente nueva* quieren despertar interés en favor de *sus literaturas* con la llamada cuestión social, es decir, la del pan de los pobres.

Huya usted de tales profanaciones.

Las cosas santas deben tratarse santamente.

Y el pan del pobre es pan bendito.

¡El pan! el símbolo de la cuestión social; ¡el pan!, el símbolo, y para el creyente el misterio, de la *cena*!

No me gusta el nombre *socialismo*, no es exacto ni expresivo. Un joven tratadista, Andler, acaba de probar que el socialismo es el individualismo absoluto.

No; no es eso. *Socialista*, no; *ebionista*, *pobrista*, si no fuera absurdo el vocablo; ebionita, violentando un poco el significado antiguo.

¿Me pregunta usted si soy ebionita?

Todavía no; más adelante, si llego a ser más bueno.

El socialismo obrero me rechazaría, por burgués.

Yo me abstengo, por impuro. –Francisco de Asís llegó a ebionita; pero antes, besó la lepra.

Y la *gente nueva* (algunos) quiere divinizar otros besos.

Es muy fácil seguir a Marx, a Lasalle, a Rodbertus, porque esos van sin cruz.

La literatura de esas escuelas nuevas, diabólicas, egoístas, hedonistas, místicas, con el misticismo que supo tener y separar del puro, del leal, santa Teresa; tal literatura, o es un capricho o viene de una filosofía empírica, hedonista, en nombre de la cual se pide, como hacen algunos italianos lógicos, que se abandone a los niños enclenques y a los ancianos inútiles.

Dar lecciones de ebionismo; ejercer el apostolado ebionista desde papeles que deifican el adulterio, que rodean de aureola a las meretrices... es como ofrecer a un mendigo honrado, mejor, a una hambrienta casta, un pedazo de pan, a condición de que venga a recogerlo sobre la mesa de una orgía.

No enseñar al pobre más que a sublevarse y a ser crapuloso, es tomarlo por una fiera lasciva.

Y no es el pobre, sino el *decadente*... traducido, el verdadero piticoide obsceno.

Suyo,

Clarín.
(qtd. in Gamallo Fierros 356-58)

Appendix D

Sr. don Leopoldo Alas.

Mi distinguido amigo y maestro.

Doy a usted gracias por su bondadosa carta. No he podido hacerlo antes, porque la *influenza* me tuvo quince días en cama. Todavía hoy muevo la pluma con bastante trabajo.

La publicación de su carta de usted en *El Herald* ha sido un trágala para ciertos caballeros, que se regodeaban asegurando no me dejaba usted hueso sano en el palique de *Madrid Cómico*. Esta pobre gente no quiere convencerse de que un poco de justicia administrada por usted, puede ser más agradable que el bombo anónimo de los periódicos, o los elogios de Burell.

Me dice usted que huya de cierta literatura socialista que ahora me estila. ya he huido. Mejor dicho, nunca quise ser de esa *escuela*. Las razones que así me aconsejan son casi las mismas que usted puntualiza en su carta.

Crea usted en mi amistad, y disponga de su afectísimo amigo s. s. q. b. s. m.,

Ramón del Valle-Inclán.

Madrid-18-X-97

(qtd. in Gamallo Fierros 360-61)