

The Barbarous and the Divine: Ideologies of Language in Valle-Inclán

Ramón del Valle-Inclán had an extraordinary ability to put his own creative imprint on Spanish, and might have declared along with his character Max Estrella, ‘Soy poeta y tengo derecho al alfabeto’ [‘I am a poet and I have a right to the alphabet’] (2008, 103). He incorporated into his literary dialect the language of his Galician homeland; the American dialect of his Mexican travels; *caló*, the language of Spanish and Portuguese Romani; *germania*, the slang of Cervantine thieves; the contemporary slang of the streets of Madrid; and a range of archaisms, neologisms, jargon and popular, arcane and archaic words that drew eclectically and inventively on vernacular speech. A highly innovative dramatist and novelist, Valle-Inclán produced in writing what Unamuno defined as an *habla*, a mode of speech that was neither the national *lengua* nor a specialised *lenguaje*, but a combination of *idioma* and *dialecto*, ‘entendidos estos dos términos a derechas, en su originaria significación: “idioma,” propiedad¹; “dialecto,” lenguaje conversacional, coloquial’ (Unamuno 1936, 43) [‘if we understand these two terms correctly, in their original meaning: “idioma”, property; “dialecto”, conversational, colloquial language’]. This linguistic eclecticism and emphasis on the spoken word were the verbal medium for an artistic project that refused

¹ Unamuno, a classicist, would have known that in Latin *idioma* means ‘special property’, from the Greek *idiōma* and *idios*, meaning ‘special feature’ and ‘one’s own’ respectively. Though in Spanish *idioma* means simply ‘language’, Unamuno is giving it the sense of ‘idiolect’ here.

any form of picturesque or social realism, tending instead towards the immutable, symbolic and divine, to the alpha and omega of the alphabet. From the eclectic strands of the vernacular Valle-Inclán wove rich, cultured dialogues and novelistic prose, his language operating, in the words of his first biographer, as the ‘salvación estética de todas las crueldades y atrevimientos de vocablo y frase’ (Fernández Almagro, quoted in Amor y Vázquez 1958, 7) [‘aesthetic redemption of the crudeness and daring of word and phrase’]. Though his language was *castizo* or nationally authentic to the extent that it mined the *propio* rather than the foreign, it also tended towards barbarism in the sense that his injection of the unorthodox, of what was foreign to conventional language, was a deliberate and even aggressive attempt to reinvigorate Spanish. How and why did Valle make barbarism the foundation of a divine artistry? And what does his practice tell us about his ideology of language in the context of Spanish modernism?

Both the words ‘barbarous’ and ‘divine’ situate Valle-Inclán in a very particular context. The word ‘divine’ is precious in the manner of his *Sonatas* (1902–1905), highlighting the *modernista* context and influence of Rubén Darío’s reworking of Romantic, Parnassian and Symbolist poetics that played such an important part in his early work in particular. Rubén’s poem ‘El cisne’ (*Prosas profanas*, 1896) identified humanity’s *hora divina* or divine hour with the song of the Wagnerian Swan, herald of a new poetry conceived ‘en una gloria de luz y de armonía’ [‘in a splendour of light and harmony’] (Darío 1983, 134); and indeed both Wagner’s conception of total theatre and his idea that ‘it is reserved for Art to save the spirit of Religion’ (Wagner 1880, 213) are significant to Valle-Inclán. The word ‘barbarous’, for its part, not only belongs to the Dionysian aesthetic also famously ascribed to Wagner by Nietzsche, and to the ‘cult of primitive vitality, interest in popular superstition and the tension between pagan and Christian elements’ of D’Annunzio, possibly Valle’s source of Wagnerian aesthetics (Lyon 1983, 11), but also featured heavily in the cultural soul-searching that took place in Spain both before and after the ‘disaster’ of 1898. During that key period of Spanish myth-making associated with the loss of the Spanish-American War and the end of the Spanish empire, barbarism manifested itself both as a positive source of ancestral vitality in contrast to the perceived over-civilisation,

social degeneracy and decadence of an *afrancesado* [‘Frenchified’] modernity,² but also as a negative analogue to cultural philistinism and impoverishment. Valle-Inclán used the word in both these senses: in the *Comedias bárbaras* (1907, 1908, 1923) [*Barbaric Plays*] it is ‘sinónimo de primitivo, fuerte, violento, noble, espontáneo, sencillo, puro [...] Una significación que le acerca al pensamiento de Swinburne, de Sade y de Nietzsche’ (Doménech 2007, 11) [‘synonymous with primitive, strong, violent, noble, spontaneous, simple, pure [...] A meaning that associates it with Swinburne, Sade and Nietzsche’]; while in *Luces de Bohemia* [*Bohemian Lights*] ‘la barbarie ibérica es unánime’ (Valle-Inclán 1924, 105) [‘Iberia’s barbarism is absolute’] in a context where Spain is ‘una deformación grotesca de la civilización europea’ (169) [‘a grotesque deformation of European civilisation’]. But in spite of the differing use of the word in the heroic *Comedias bárbaras* and the grotesque *esperpento*—a tragi-farcical genre invented by Valle-Inclán in the 1920s that drew on the grotesque aesthetic of Goya for critical and satirical purposes—Valle did not divert from an essentially divine conception of art against which the barbarous was a source of movement and exaggerated contrast. The juxtaposition of the barbarous and the divine in Valle’s work refers us therefore not only to the range and development of his work from the arcanelly precious to the grotesque, but to the broader cultural context within which the harmonious classical ideals of *modernismo* were caught up in anxieties of decadence—which Valle-Inclán treated ironically—and the desire for cultural revitalisation, which he treated seriously but which he subordinated to his aesthetic concerns.

The question of how and why Valle made barbarism the foundation of a divine artistry supposes that barbarism is an expression of the barbarous, in conflict or at least in contrast with the divine. And to the extent that the barbarous is an expression of movement, in contrast with the stillness of

² As Azorín wrote: ‘El mundo muere de civilización. Antes, en Europa, cuando los viejos habitantes de una hermosa comarca sentíanse debilitados, caían sobre ellos, desde el Norte, bárbaros gigantescos, que vigorizaban la raza [...]’ (quoted in Schiavo 1988, 246) [‘The world is dying of civilisation. In the old days, in Europe, when the old inhabitants of a beautiful region felt debilitated, gigantic barbarians would fall on them from the North and invigorate the race [...]’]. The Catalan politician Alejandro Lerroux called on the ‘jóvenes bárbaros de hoy’ to ‘entra[r] a saco en la civilización miserable y decadente de este país sin ventura’ (quoted in Schiavo 1988, 200) [‘young barbarians of today, sack the miserable and decadent civilisation of this unfortunate country’].

the divine, and to the extent that movement is a quality of Valle's eclectic vernacular, this is true. But precisely by combining such diverse linguistic sources, registers and tones Valle generated a hyper-real mode, a mode suspended above the real, that offset its own movement through artifice. In this sense he achieved in language what he achieved in the dramatic technique of the *Comedias bárbaras*, where violent contrasts cancel each other out, such that even as they manifest the agonies of change the plays suggest archetypal stillness; or in the novelistic technique of *Tirano Banderas* (1926) [*Tyrant Banderas*], where the static, mathematical precision of the novel's structure contains the whirling turbulence of social revolution. The barbarous and the divine are therefore aesthetic bedfellows, and not merely forms of contrast. They also have in common a shared association with the primitive and the primary, and to that extent they are not in conflict.

In his aesthetic treatise *La lámpara maravillosa* (1916) [*The Lamp of Marvels*], which is heavily influenced by the language if not the substance of gnosticism and Eastern mysticism, Valle-Inclán describes the artist as a priest who aspires to reveal the truth behind the movement of time and surface experience that characterise daily life. For him, the essential problem of the relationship between language and art is that the former is mutable while the latter should aspire to be immutable. In true Symbolist fashion, it should aspire to be more than just a record of something immediate, revealing instead the essence of things by means of acute sensation. Valle-Inclán places particular emphasis on sight and hearing as ways of perceiving, and on rhythm, music and dance as non-verbal aesthetic ideals. He counter-intuitively separates ideas from words, associating knowledge and ideas rather with the rhythms and sensations of action and experience: 'Todo el sistema de las palabras es un sistema de larvas, de formas embrionarias, de matrices frías que guardan yerto el conocimiento de las ideas adquiridas bajo el ritmo del Sol' (1916, 1941) ['the entire system of words is a system of larvae, of embryonic forms, of cold wombs that contain in them, sterile, the knowledge of ideas acquired beneath the rhythm of the Sun']. The job of the writer is to restore to words the sensation, if not the meaning, that once inspired them: 'La suprema belleza de las palabras sólo se revela, perdido el significado con que nacen, en el goce de su esencia musical' (1941) ['the supreme beauty of words, once the meaning they are born with is lost, is revealed only in the pleasure of their musical essence']. It is in the human voice that the *ideología* of language is restored (1941), by which he appears to mean its culturally determined network of ideas and beliefs. In

this context Valle-Inclán describes an atavistic return as productive, even necessary, for the writer seeking to overcome the emptiness of words. In a somewhat startling image he describes the mask of his face in a mirror, followed by the successive stripping of a hundred masks to reveal the face of a primitive man ‘que [...] predicaba el amor de todas las cosas con rugidos’ (1921) [‘who [...] preached the love of all things in bellowing howls’]. This evangelising but inarticulate ‘Daemonium’ dances to a changing rhythm, ‘moderno y antiguo, como si en la flauta panida oyese el preludio de las canciones nuevas’ (1921) [‘ancient and modern, as if he could hear in Pan’s flute the prelude to new songs’], supplying Valle with the mental image he needs to proceed as a writer, who only has something to say ‘cuando la palabra es impotente para la expresión de sus sensaciones’ (1921) [‘when the word is powerless to express his sensations’]. A return to the primitive, to the non-verbal movement of dance and to the inarticulacy of music and howling, supplies the conditions for a divine—and modern—artistry.

LATIN OR BABEL? UNITY AND DISPERSAL

It is not surprising, then, to find a series of atavistic returns and a correlative interest in language in relation to both the primitive and the divine in Valle’s work, as we will see in ‘Babel’ (1888), *Divinas palabras* (1919) [*Divine Words*] and the *Comedias bárbaras*.³ ‘Babel’, a short, comical story published by the twenty-two-year-old Ramón del Valle de la Peña⁴ in the magazine *Café con gotas*, takes Babel as the symbol of vernacular dispersal as God’s punishment for man’s arrogance. The story recounts the meeting between a monolingual man, the narrator, and Babel, a sexually indeterminate being who speaks a ‘verdadero popurrí lingüístico’ (2007c, 1318) [‘veritable linguistic potpourri’]. ‘Hombre de los fenómenos atávicos y de las transmigraciones’ (1317) [‘A man of atavistic phenomena and transmigrations’], Babel was born

³This is the only chapter to deal with theatre as well as narrative fiction, a fact that in Valle-Inclán’s case is justified by the generic fluidity of his work: the famously novelistic quality of his stage directions on the one hand, and the theatrical, even cinematic, quality of much of his prose fiction on the other. In addition there is an emphasis on the voice and musicality in his work, congruent with other multilingual writing that tends towards an integrative vision, such as we will see in relation to Hemingway and Arguedas.

⁴By 1891 he was using the name Valle-Inclán.

male but as an adult has become neither fish nor fowl, ‘ni chicha ni limoná’, as the narrator likes to colloquially express it. The *atavismo* to which he is prone has caused the ‘dispersión de su nombre’ [‘dispersal of his name’], itself ‘ocasionada por la diversidad de lenguas’ (1317–1318) [‘brought on by linguistic diversity’], such that he now produces a *pintoresca charleta* or picturesque chatter of Latin and Romance languages. His mix of Italian, French, Catalan, Portuguese and Galician constitutes an extreme version of the ‘habla romana’ [‘romanian speech’] Unamuno claimed was Valle-Inclán’s true literary language (1936, 43). The narrator bumps into Babel in the street and is hard pressed to understand a word he says, though a reader with some knowledge of Latin or Romance languages can guess at most of his meanings; in response to Babel’s clearly heartfelt efforts to communicate, the narrator says something insipid about the weather. The most enigmatic of Babel’s statements—‘Locus autus insidias’—is the only one the narrator thinks he has understood; but he misunderstands it to mean that Babel is a ‘loco insidioso’ (2007c, 1319) [‘an insidious madman’]. This frightens him, and he worries he’ll be murdered; he doesn’t want to die before becoming a ‘padre de familia’ [‘family man’], which he might do so long as he can hold off ‘el maldito atavismo’ (1319) [‘the damned atavism’]. This is enigmatic but implies that to be a *padre de familia* one needs to be very unitary and whole: the atavistic is the primitive state to which the good narrator hopes not to regress, with hermaphroditism and barbarism its sexual and linguistic corollaries. He shakes Babel off him, who then falls to the ground in fear exclaiming, in French, ‘Mon Dieu pardon’ [‘Dear God pardon me’], a prayer for forgiveness that surely evokes the scattering by God of men and their languages for their pride in building a tower to reach heaven. Subsequently the word *pardon* follows the narrator around ‘como un remordimiento’ [‘like remorse’], and the story ends with the triply marked exclamation, in Spanish, ‘¡¡¡Perdón!!!’ (1319). The narrator’s own need for forgiveness puts us in mind not only of the myth of Babel but of original sin, as if the confusion of sexes and languages were a fall from grace and multilingualism a form of punishment; but the story’s ironic humour lies in the depiction of the story’s narrator, in all his masculine, monolingual wholeness, as dull, trite and conventional in contrast with the expressive and touching Babel. Even at this early stage of his career, then, Valle-Inclán perceives the aesthetic possibilities of a ‘montage of languages

which clash and collide' (Delgado 1997, xxxviii), and begins to manifest what would be a consistent rejection and subversion of the bourgeois.

At the opposite end of the spectrum of linguistic unity and dispersal, at least where Romance languages are concerned, is Latin. In 'Nochebuena' ['Christmas Eve'], the final story in the collection *Jardín umbrío* (1903) [*Shaded Garden*], Valle brackets Latin along with grammar, which he detested, and priests, whom he detested even more, contrasting it with a faithful yet playful, versified and irreverent Galician. As a young boy, the narrator was forced to do Latin conjugations by a joyless, disciplinarian Archpriest on Christmas Eve (in the story he does them incorrectly: Valle failed both Latin and Spanish at school); from outside come the joyful strains of a song in Galician, prayerful at first but suddenly satirical, mocking the priest's sexually ambiguous domestic arrangements with his niece. This is of course the story of a child's rancour, and his joy at the locals' mocking of his enforcer, so perhaps we should not read too much into its linguistic contrasts. But they do nevertheless support Valle's idea that the living language is the spoken language, and not the dead language in its tabulated grammar. His later play *Divinas palabras* (1919) is more problematic: here he introduces Latin as a source of the miraculous and as a moral corrective to natural vice. The play revolves around the base instincts and lawlessness of an avaricious peasantry, and the sacred Latin of a primitive church (both early and rustic). A 'tragicomedia de aldea' ['village tragicomedy'], the play is set in a Galicia of lustful, pagan energies and hard-nosed commercial interests. In addition to staging a linguistic encounter between Galician and Spanish, the play attaches to Latin a magical authority that 'miraculously' prevents a crime: the punishment of an adulteress, Mari-Gaila, by a bloodthirsty crowd after she is found naked in the fields with the diabolical Séptimo Miau. Mari-Gaila is unscrupulous and greedy but also, perhaps, the embodiment of natural liberty, her rhythmic body resplendent on the hay cart that returns her to the village where she is to be punished. The exacting of the villagers' summary justice is prevented by her husband Pedro Gailo, a grotesque sacristan who fails in his attempt to pacify the crowd in Spanish but succeeds when he repeats the words in Latin: 'Qui sine peccato est vestrum, primus in illam lapidem mittat' ['He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her']. After this, 'una emoción religiosa y litúrgica conmueve las conciencias, y cambia el sangriento resplandor de los rostros' (142) ['a religious, liturgical emotion moves the crowd's conscience and alters

the bloodthirsty light in their faces’]. Latin is therefore the language of ‘divine words’ with which even a corrupt sacristan can mollify a baying crowd. The play ends with the symbolic entry into the church of the naked Mari-Gaila with the sacristan Pedro Gailo, in a ‘marriage’ of pagan and Christian elements that suggests the idealised mutual influence of magic and morality.

The ending of *Divinas palabras* has caused problems for some critics, who do not like to see Valle impose institutional order (represented by Latin and the church) on natural liberty so easily. For Francisco Umbral, ‘Mari-Gaila es la metáfora, mucho más violenta que la Bovary, del sueño de la libertad’ (1998, 234) [‘Mari-Gaila is the metaphor, a much more violent one than Mme Bovary, of the dream of freedom’], and in that context Latin can be no form of salvation, aesthetic or moral. He chooses therefore to read the ending as pessimistic and ironic: ‘*Divinas palabras* no supone el triunfo del latín sagrado sobre el mal, [...] sino el fracaso de la libertad en un universo aldeano de alma, regido por los muertos. Y sabemos que los muertos hablan siempre en latín’ (235) [‘*Divine Words* does not represent the triumph of sacred Latin over evil, [...] but rather the failure of liberty in a world that is rustic to its heart and ruled over by the dead. And we know the dead always speak in Latin’]. Though the play’s cruelty and violence make it hard for me to read it as an affirmation of natural vitality and freedom, as David Ling (1972) does (Lonsdale 2011, 454), Umbral’s reading of the ending is appealing, not least because it supports what seems to be evident elsewhere in Valle’s writing: his preference for the spoken, living vernacular over grammatical authority, the language of the dead.

The problem with Umbral’s reading, however, is that it relies on the fact that the Latin words are spoken by Pedro Gailo, a particularly unpleasant representative of the church who numbers among Valle’s many puppet-like caricatures of institutional authority (though officially he pre-dates the *esperpento*). Umbral’s reading presumes that if such a character can assume moral authority through Latin, the author’s use of Latin must be ironic. This is one way of getting around the problem that, in the very process of trying to give the words moral and aesthetic autonomy, Valle inevitably reinforces the institutional power of Latin. The *divinas palabras* are meant to float free of their context, physical and social, in spite of its ruinous nature, to recover their collective ‘ideología’ in the depersonalised human voice, shedding the ‘ideología’ of their dead or deadening institutional form. As we know, for Valle the

aesthetic ideal is to be found in words rich with musical and cultural resonance but stripped of their surface meaning; his aesthetic ideology requires language to shed its meanings and re-acquire them in such non-verbal properties as rhythm and music. If there is aesthetic redemption, it is of the order described by Wagner in his 1880 essay, 'Religion and Art': 'One might say that where Religion becomes artificial, it is reserved for Art to save the spirit of religion by recognising the figurative value of the mythic symbols which the former would have us believe in their literal sense, and revealing their deep and hidden truth through an ideal presentation' (1880, 213). Of music he says that 'Only her final severance from the decaying Church could enable the art of Tone to save the noblest heritage of the Christian idea in its purity of over-worldly reformation' (224), an idea that also lends itself to consideration in this context. But for all Valle-Inclán's emphasis on musicality and on language as tone and form, language stubbornly clings to ideologies more immediate and more tangible than the vague collective 'ideología' the author evokes in *La lámpara*: the church precisely benefits from the musical, ritual properties of spoken and sung Latin in maintaining its institutional authority over the faithful. Consequently Valle runs the risk of celebrating the power of the incomprehensible to provoke meek obedience in a 'naturally' vicious congregation.

But perhaps Valle does not, in fact, strip the words of their meaning: after all, the audience hears the words in Spanish first and then in Latin, ensuring their specific ideological content, their message of collective compassion and responsibility—'He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her'—is fully communicated and understood. Arguably then, Valle preserves their meaning but gives the words aesthetic and ideological autonomy by sheer force of contrast, their power reinforced precisely *because* they are spoken by a grotesque puppet, rescuing their primitive ideology—their primary, sacred ideology—from mundane, institutional and even individual contamination. In this case, Latin is less the sum of its institutional and grammatical parts and more a kind of primary text, a language in which essential truths can be spoken 'desde la otra ribera' ['from the other side'], to take a phrase normally associated with the *esperpento*, because their meanings are no longer in flux.⁵ This

⁵In his *esperpento* of 1921, *Los cuernos de Don Friolera*, the *otra ribera* or other side of the River Styx is the ideal position from which to develop a suitably detached, unsentimental aesthetic perspective.

unity and authority make Latin catholic—all-encompassing—and ‘divine’. But how to explain the contrast between ‘Babel’, which glimpses the aesthetic possibilities of multilingualism, and the catholicity of *Divinas palabras*?

At the heart of these depictions of the extremes of linguistic unity and dispersal is surely Valle’s own acute sensitivity towards a Galicia that was diglossic if not bilingual, and to a Spain whose former empire was united only by the bonds of language. That is to say that his understanding of the aesthetic possibilities of a hybrid language, and his sense of the historical source from which the Romance languages were derived, came from his own linguistic background in Galicia, where Portuguese, Galician and Spanish shaded into one another,⁶ and from contrasting the rhythms and tones of its particular modes of speech with those he came across in Madrid and Mexico, to name two of the strongest influences on his literary vernacular. For the poet Juan Ramón Jiménez, Valle was:

un escritor deslenguado, ‘el primer fablistán de España’, empecinado en la empresa de crear una lengua total, ‘como la que se hubiera formado natural y artificialmente en Galicia, sede eterna, piedra de Santiago, si hubiese estado en Galicia la Presidencia de las Españas, la Presidencia de la República inmensa española (de cuya República él hubiese sido [...] el Rey o Pretendiente).’ (Villanueva 1994, 58, quoting Juan Ramón Jiménez)⁷

[a brazen writer, ‘Spain’s most accomplished loudmouth’, set on creating a total language, ‘such as would have formed naturally and artificially in Galicia, eternal See and rock of St James, if the Presidency of all the Spains had been in Galicia, the Presidency of the enormous Spanish Republic (of which he would have been [...] either King or Pretender).’]

But, as Juan Ramón’s words more or less explicitly recognise, in a context in which Spanish was a battle ground for cultural prestige in the wake of the loss of empire abroad and separatist sentiment at home, there was an ideological component to Valle’s artistic engagement with

⁶According to Amor y Vázquez, the Galician spoken in Valle’s native Pontevedra is particularly influenced by Portuguese (1958, 11).

⁷Villanueva is quoting Jiménez’s ‘Ramón del Valle-Inclán (Castillo de quema)’, reprinted in Doménech 1988, 46–57.

both Spanish and Galician that is worth considering before turning to his engagement with the two languages in the *Comedias bárbaras*.

SPANISH AND GALICIAN: MODERN LANGUAGES?

Though, as I have indicated, Valle subordinated social to aesthetic concerns (or at least addressed problems of the first order with reference to the second), his aesthetics did not of course arise in a vacuum. Rather, they were the product of a very particular set of historical circumstances in Spain and the Spanish-speaking world, within which Spanish became a symbolic battle ground for prestige and cultural dominance (see del Valle and Gabriel-Stheeman 2002). In the mid to late nineteenth century, the ‘question of whether Spanish [...] might undergo a process of change and fragmentation analogous to the development of the vernacular Romance languages after the fall of the Roman Empire’ (Landreau 2002, 167) was felt as an acute possibility. By the early to mid-twentieth century this had largely passed where the Americas were concerned, but the possibility of Spain’s own linguistic fragmentation into Iberian dialects—of which Castilian was just one—became more manifest as separatist feeling grew in Catalonia, Galicia and the Basque country. In this context the Spanish language became a metonym, not only for anxieties of power but also for wider concerns about modernisation. Valle’s concern with revitalising Spanish and with incorporating Galician into such works as the *Comedias bárbaras* is worth considering in this context, with a view to going a little deeper into the value he places on the barbarous and the divine.

Valle’s depiction of the Spanish language in *La lámpara maravillosa* is a good example of the way in which aesthetic and social concerns combine in his thinking about art. For all its concern with ‘aesthetic quietism’ and the aspiration of the artist to symbolic essences, the treatise highlights the importance of the human voice and the presence of words in time if language is to have aesthetic power. This aliveness and this voicing are, paradoxically, means of transcending the present moment and reaching back into the long history of words to the sensations and experiences that first brought them into being. The emphasis on the voice, on singing and sound, is important in providing the living connection between words and the environment, and between words and the ‘ideology’ that sustains them.

In the first section of the book Valle explains that, in the early stages of his writing career, he experienced ‘extreme difficulty’ in expressing ‘el secreto de las cosas, para fijar en palabras su sentido esotérico, aquel recuerdo borroso de algo que fueron, y aquella aspiración inconcreta de algo que quieren ser’ (1916, 1920) [‘the secret of things, to fix in words their esoteric meaning, the hazy memory of something they were, and the vague aspiration towards something they might be’]. If words are inadequate it is because they do not convey the *secreto de las cosas* [secret of things] in terms of a connection to both the past and the future: this is key insofar as it reveals Valle’s concern with language as a repository of tradition that only remains alive for as long as it glimpses what is to come, an important point for a writer so often described as nostalgic. For Valle the past is nothing without a corroborating sense of the future. Words must have actual presence if they are not to be sterile; consequently a language that has become fossilised is impotent and, moreover, absurd. Of Spanish he says:

En la imitación del siglo que llaman de oro, nuestro romance castellano dejó de ser como una lámpara en donde ardía y alumbraba el alma de la raza. Desde entonces, sin recibir el más leve impulso vital, sigue nutriéndose de viejas controversias y de jactancias soldadescas. Se sienten en sus lagunas muertas las voces desesperadas de algunas conciencias individuales, pero no se siente la voz unánime, suma de todas y expresión de una conciencia colectiva. Ya no somos una raza de conquistadores y de teólogos, y en el romance alienta siempre esa ficción. [...] Nuestra habla, en lo que más tiene de voz y de sentimiento nacional, encarna una concepción del mundo, vieja de tres siglos. (1916, 1937)

[In its imitation of the so-called Golden Age, our common romance language, Castilian, ceased to be a lantern in which the spirit of the race burned brightly. Since then it has been given not the slightest vital impulse, and so it sustains itself on old controversies and soldierly bragging. In its dead spaces you can hear the desperate voices of a few individuals, but there is no unanimous voice to bring them together in the expression of a collective consciousness. We are no longer a race of conquerors and theologians, but that fiction lives on in our romance language. [...] Our speech, even at its most natural and authentically national, embodies a conception of the world that is three centuries out of date.]

With this statement the apparent esotericism of Valle-Inclán's views on language begins to take ideological shape: the 'sterile womb' of words is not just a property of language in general but a property of a particular language that reflects a culture in decline: Spanish. In this he seems to coincide with Unamuno, who in his consideration of the 'paleontological' character of debates on *casticismo* [cultural authenticity] in late nineteenth-century Spain reflected that to attempt to preserve the language's purity was to cut off its lifeblood:

Se alzan lamentos sobre la descastación de nuestra lengua, sobre la invasión del barbarismo [...] sin recordar [...] que la invasión de los bárbaros fue el principio de la regeneración de la cultura europea ahogada bajo la senilidad del imperio decadente. Del mismo modo, a una invasión de atroces barbarismos debe nuestra lengua gran parte de sus progresos [...] El barbarismo será tal vez lo que preserve a nuestra lengua del *salvajismo* [...] El mal no está en la invasión del barbarismo, sino en lo poco asimilativo de nuestra lengua, defecto que envanece a muchos. (Unamuno 1895, 141–142)

[People lament the inauthenticity of our language, the invasion of barbarisms [...] without remembering [...] that the invasion of the barbarians sparked off the regeneration of a European culture suffocated by the senility of the decadent empire. Our language owes a large part of its progress to the invasion of dreadful barbarisms [...] It may be barbarism that saves our language from *savagery* [...] The problem is not the invasion of barbarisms, but the resistance of our language to their assimilation, a defect that fills many with pride.]

As Velleman explains, Unamuno was deeply sceptical of the Real Academia's attempt to stabilise and preserve Spanish, encouraging rather its mobilisation, 'aunque para conseguirlo tengamos que ensuciarla algo y quitarle algún esplendor' (quoted in Velleman 2002, 28) ['even if it means dirtying it a bit and taking away some of its splendour']. Unamuno is referring here to the Academy's oddly domestic motto, 'limpia, fija, y da esplendor' ['it cleans, it fixes, and it gives splendour']. The richness of a language was not to be found in its current state but in its future possibilities; consequently 'the future of the Hispanic language cannot and must not be a mere expansion of pure Castilian, but rather an integration of differentiated variants upon its base' (Unamuno quoted in Velleman 2002, 34). Both writers highlighted the need for a regeneration of Spanish, for an 'impulso vital' ['vital impulse'] that would

make the language a medium fit for the present and a promise for the future, an impulse which implicitly or explicitly opens up literary language to barbarism and colloquialism, and not just as a form of realism. This is potentially radical and displays a marked contrast with the many writers of this period, not just in the Spanish-speaking world, who expressed anxiety about the infiltration of foreign or cosmopolitan elements into the national language (see, for example, Taylor-Batty 2013 on Anglophone modernism). And yet Unamuno, the great ideologue of language in Spanish modernism, was typically paradoxical on this subject. For if he looked to both popular and outside sources of linguistic regeneration it was ultimately to shore up the hegemony of Spanish, at a significant cost to the other Iberian languages with which it co-existed—not least, in Unamuno's case, the Basque of his homeland, which he considered a 'domestic' language unfit for the modern world (1907, 524)—and which had begun in the late nineteenth century to carve out a public space for themselves. Unamuno's passionate defence of a quasi-spiritual Hispanic community united by sacred bonds of language, the idea that '*la sangre de mi espíritu es mi lengua*' ['the blood of my spirit is my language'], as he wrote in his Sonnet LXVII,⁸ is not to be found explicitly in Valle-Inclán, though, as we have seen, Valle appears to have aligned his artistic project in Spanish with basically regenerationist principles. Moreover, both authors express a desire for singular units and timeless essences in religious language that runs counter to the revitalising impulse. Is Valle's opening up of Spanish therefore an imperialist gesture, swallowing up smaller languages along with everything else, or is it rather a subversion of the catholicity of Peninsular Spanish? In other words—and remembering his political evolution from Carlism to socialism, his virulent anti-liberalism and his extremely modern rejection of modernity—is his artistic posture conservative or revolutionary?

As we have noted, given Valle's concern with reviving Spanish it is not unreasonable to read his artistic practice in the light of Unamuno's fierce espousal of the cause of *Hispanidad*, against both the revival of Spain's regional languages and the spectre of post-colonial fragmentation in Spanish America. Indeed, Unamuno used Valle-Inclán's linguistic artistry

⁸ Unamuno's Sonnet LXVII reads: '*La sangre de mi espíritu es mi lengua / y mi patria es allí donde resuena / soberano su verbo, que no amengua / su voz por mucho que ambos mundos llene*' ['The blood of my spirit is my language / and my homeland is where its word is sovereign / for its voice is not diminished / for all that it fills both worlds'].

to score political points on precisely this subject, writing after Valle's death in 1936 (just a few months before his own) that the author's Galician-in-Spanish was far more authentic than the falsely concocted Galician of the *galleguistas* [Galician nationalists]:

Valle-Inclán se hizo su habla—hablada y escrita—con las hablas que recogió en su carrera de farándula. Empezando, ¡claro está!, con el castellano galaico, propiamente gallego, de su niñez y de su mocedad. ¡Qué alma galaica [...] la de su habla hispánica! En rigor, romana; él lo sabía. Mucho más galaica y mucho más alma que la de ese gallego en formación de los galleguistas—el de los “hachádegos de cadeirádegos,”⁹ que dije otra vez—, de esa especie de esperanto regional o comarcal.¹⁰ Lo galaico va en el ritmo, en el acento, en la marcha ondulatoria y, a las veces, como oceánica de su prosa, en su sintaxis, con más arabescos que grecas, con más preguntas que respuestas. Y para ello tuvo que acudir al caudal popular de todos los pueblos de España y de la América de lengua española. El gallego regional no le habría servido. (Unamuno 1936, 43)

[Valle-Inclán fashioned his speech—in speech and in writing—from the modes of speech he encountered in his career as a showman. Beginning, it goes without saying, with the Castilian spoken in Galicia, the true Galician of his childhood and youth. How truly Galician is the spirit [...] of his Hispanic speech! Or to be more precise, his romanian speech, as he knew it to be himself.

⁹The project of linguistic (and, by extension, cultural) regeneration of Catalan, Galician and Basque in the late nineteenth century included an attempt to exclude Spanish loanwords from these languages, with a view to developing their lexical range. A highly sceptical Unamuno was therefore ridiculing a Galician neologism, based on the Spanish formulation ‘hallazgos de catedráticos’ [professorial findings], which for him exemplified the artificiality of the language the Galician nationalists were intent on creating. The phrase ‘haxádegos de caderádegos’ was revived by the reactionary Galician writer Julio Camba in an article of 1935 published in the right-wing newspaper ABC, in which he claimed that the Galician language had not been put on the earth to talk about professors or their findings, but rather about the earth, the sky, and all things natural, human and divine.

¹⁰For Unamuno, Esperanto was shorthand for misguided utopianism, akin to anarchism in political terms. In his 1914 novel *Niebla* [*Mist*], Don Fermín's enthusiasm for both is ridiculed: ‘Todo es uno, señor, todo es uno. Anarquismo, esperantismo, espiritismo, vegetarianismo, foneticismo [...] ¡todo es uno! ¡Guerra a la autoridad! ¡guerra a la división de lenguas! ¡guerra a la vil materia y a la muerte! ¡guerra a la carne! ¡guerra a la hache! ¡Adiós!’ (Unamuno 1914, 106) [‘All is one, sir, all is one. Anarchism, Esperantism, vegetarianism, phoneticism [...] all is one! Death to authority! Death to the division of languages! Death to vile matter and to death! Death to the flesh! Death to the ‘h’! Good riddance!’]. The *h* is silent in Spanish and therefore absurd and reactionary, in Fermín's view.

There was far more of Galicia and far more spirit in his language than in that Galician-in-the-making of the *galleguistas*—of their ‘hachádegos de cadeirádegos’ [professorial findings], as I once said—, of that regional or provincial Esperanto, so to speak. Galicia is in the rhythm, the accent, the undulating and even oceanic tempo of its prose, its syntax, characterised more by arabesques than straight borders, by questions more than answers. And for that he had to go to the popular source of all the peoples of Spain and Spanish-speaking America. Regional Galician would not have been enough for him.]

A linguistic magpie, Valle-Inclán undoubtedly reserved a special place for Galician in his work. Though Valle’s sentimental attachment to Galicia distinguishes the region’s language from other sources of his linguistic innovation, he spoke, in the idiom of his day, in terms of national and spiritual essences that characterised the language in accordance with his idea of Galicia as a place of ancient magic and peasant ritual. He was also, at best, ambivalent about the revival of Galician and its claims for cultural legitimacy, an ambivalence that, for Francisco Rodríguez, is evidence of a ‘sentimiento de atracción y repulsa que no sintió sólo como dialéctica literaria o estética sino como contradicción vital’ (quoted in Pereiro-Otero 2006, 751) [‘a feeling of attraction and repulsion that he experienced not only as a source of literary or aesthetic tension but as a fundamental contradiction’]. In 1926 Valle-Inclán earned himself a scathing and sarcastic dressing down in the newspaper *Vida Gallega* for dismissing Galicians as inferior and cowardly and Galicia itself as ‘una idiotez’ [‘idiotic’], the most backward region of a backward nation (1926, 326). But in 1935 he was to give a eulogy of his native land that attributed the low esteem in which Galicians were held to the fact that, ‘like the Jews’, they were more intelligent than everyone else (Dougherty 1994, 111). Neither of these statements should be taken at face value; where Galicia was concerned, as with himself and everything else, Valle liked to deal in artifice. Nonetheless, even in his student days in Santiago de Compostela, he consistently defended ‘la inquebrantable unidad nacional’ (Fernández Almagro 1943, 11) [‘the unbreakable unity of the nation’], with reference, of course, to Spain.

In spite of this, for some critics Valle’s incorporation of Galician words, phrases and rhythmic constructions constituted a positive contribution to the ‘revalorización’ of the language undertaken by authors as central to the Galician revival as the nineteenth-century poet Rosalía de Castro (Amor 1958, 1). But it has been galling to others that he not only wrote very little in Galician—Lorca, who didn’t speak the language, wrote *Six Galician Poems*, precisely six more than Valle—but that

he also apparently forbade the translation of his works into Galician. The author's grandson Joaquín del Valle-Inclán has dismissed this as an urban myth (Rodríguez 2009), though the estate's ongoing refusal to permit it is certainly not one, and neither is the still-contentious nature of the issue (see, for example, Hermida 1998; Bugallal 2009). In an early article entitled 'Relembanzas literarias' (1888) ['Literary Reminiscences'], Valle-Inclán appears sympathetic to the championing of the Galician language in the context of the nation's cultural revival. He begins by quoting a poem by Víctor Balaguer, a major figure of the nineteenth-century Catalan cultural *Renaixença*, which famously reads: '¡Ay Castella castellana / No t'hagués conegut may!' [*Oh Castilian Castille / If only I had never known you!*]. (There are two errata in Valle's quoting of this line, at least as it is reproduced in the *Obra completa*, which are typical of his poor spelling and, no doubt, his ignorance of Catalan). Balaguer's poem, entitled 'Delenda est Carthago' ['Carthage Must be Destroyed'], borrows a phrase from Roman orator Cato the Elder who, fearful of the power of the great city-state of Carthage, proposed its destruction to protect the integrity of the Roman empire; Balaguer uses Cato's phrase to indicate the inherent violence in the imposition of Castilian culture on Catalonia (King 2005, 22). Valle goes on to admire and praise the Galician revival, condemning in no uncertain terms those 'nuevos Judas que vendían la patria, que negaban la lengua, que escupían en el fuego del hogar que era sagrado' (Valle-Inclán 1888, 1322) ['new Judases who would betray the homeland, deny the language, spit in the fire of the sacred hearth']. This is not because he has embraced Galician nationalism—he observes that Galician nationality is 'ancient' but has never been 'well defined' (1320)—but because he perceives in the revivalist movement a reawakening of the heroic spirit of the past, an antidote to the apathy and 'disenchantment' of the present (1320). Referring implicitly to Galicia's own nineteenth-century *Rexurdimento* and its key figures, Manuel Murguía and Rosalía de Castro, Valle evokes 'aquella lucida hueste de artistas y poetas que a lo adelante habían de anunciar al pueblo la buena nueva de su resurrección y levantar del polvo la idea de la grande obra que volvería a hacerse carne y a vivir' (1323) ['that magnificent host of artists and poets who would tell the people the good news of their own resurrection and raise from the dust the great work that would once more be made flesh and live']. But this 'resurrection' is not the 'good news' of political independence: 'Ya no se perseguían fantasmas, ni era la vuelta de otro Rey Arthur como el de la tradición bretona lo que esperaban todos' (1323)

['They no longer pursued ghosts, nor did they hope like the Bretons for the return of a King Arthur']. If the spirit of Pardo de Cela, fifteenth-century Marshall and 'legendary liberator of Galicia' is still invoked, 'no era ciertamente para vestir su armadura, y embrazar su escudo y empuñar su espada y levantar su enseña azul y blanca y acometer su temeraria empresa, sino para pedirle un hálito de aquel entusiasmo que animara su alma de héroe' (1323) ['it was certainly not in order to put on his armour, and take up his shield and grasp his sword and lift his white and blue ensign and take on his daring enterprise, but to ask him for a breath of that enthusiasm that stirred his heroic spirit']. It is the idea of the past and its power to infuse enthusiasm into the present that Valle-Inclán celebrates, not any concrete political project.

With respect to the language, he observes that, 'entre todos', Murguía is 'aquel que ha sentido mejor la idea regeneradora, aquel que, sin escribir en gallego, hizo por él más que todos juntos' (1888, 1323) ['of all of them, the one who has best expressed the idea of regeneration, the one who, without writing in Galician, did more for it than all of them combined']—though on his death in 1913 Valle was to hail him not as a Galician but as 'patriarca de las letras castellanas' (1913, 125) ['patriarch of Castilian letters'].¹¹ Referring to a literary history of Catalonia in French (1910), he observes that its author worked in favour of the language of Oc while writing in that of Oil (2007e, 1324), concluding that 'las voces de los primeros apóstoles han de ser oídas en todos los ámbitos del mundo' (1324) ['the voices of the first apostles must be heard in all parts of the world']. Indeed in his book *Los Precursores* Murguía himself defends the use of 'the national language' on certain occasions and 'the national and provincial one' on others, for 'hay veces que conviene que nos oigan y entiendan fuera del país' (Murguía quoted in Pereiro-Otero 2006, 107) ['there are times when we need to be heard and understood outside our own country']. In sum, Valle seems to celebrate the revival of Galician culture and language, though cautiously and in Castilian for strategic and practical reasons.

When he re-published his article five years later, however, he made some changes that imply even less commitment to the Galician linguistic cause. Most significantly, for José Manuel Pereiro-Otero, in the second

¹¹Valle does not name him explicitly but clearly alludes to his literary history of Galicia, *Los precursores*.

version of 'Relembanzas' Valle not only changed its title to read, in Castilian, 'Remembranzas', but shifted the focus of his admiration for Murguía from the regeneration of *gallego* specifically to the 'idea regeneradora' more generally (2006, 755). Between the publication of these two articles Valle also wrote three 'Cartas galicianas' ['Galician Letters'] for the newspaper *El Globo* (1891), the first of which repeats parts of 'Relembanzas' word for word, but in a tone that has become contemptuous, even mocking, of the Galician cause (Valle-Inclán 1891, 122). In this context the later 'Remembranzas' is a kind of compromise between these two positions, the cautiously open-minded one of 'Relembanzas' and the outright dismissive one of the 'Carta galiciana'. Pereiro-Otero reflects on Valle's attempt to find a middle way:

las dos versiones [Relembanzas, Remembranzas] marcan la búsqueda de un pretendido equilibrio que nunca llegó a resolverse porque, sencillamente, no tenía solución. La interdependencia es tal que solamente podría definirse como mestizaje: causa y efecto mutuos e indiferenciables. (756)

[the two versions [Relembanzas, Remembranzas] mark the search for a supposed equilibrium that could never be achieved because, frankly, there was no way to achieve it. Their interdependence is such that it can only be described as 'mestizaje,' the interplay of mutual and indistinguishable causes and effects.]

The critic is of course referring to the interdependence between Galician and Spanish in the author's work, as much as to the interdependence between his Galician and Spanish identities, which the poet Juan Ramón Jiménez identified as an important source of aesthetic balance in his work: 'Galicia libró a Valle-Inclán del modernismo exotista, que pasó pronto en él, por fortuna de todos, y del castellanista, de tan lamentables y duraderos resultados en algunos' (quoted in Villanueva 1994, 57) ['Galicia not only released Valle-Inclán from the clutches of an exoticising *modernismo*, a passing phase in his work, thankfully, but from the Castilianist *modernismo* that had such unfortunate and lasting effects on others']. The use of the word *mestizaje* to describe this interdependence echoes a description of Valle by the contemporary Galician poet and novelist Xosé Luis Méndez Ferrín (2005) as both 'mestizo e marxinal', in an interesting appropriation of this essentially Latin American term for the Iberian context. Interesting because *mestizaje*,

though referring normally to racial mixing, was reclaimed by the Cuban José Martí ('Nuestra América', 1891) and, much later, his compatriot Roberto Fernández Retamar ('Calibán', 1971), as a positive social and cultural formulation in the face of racial hierarchies and cultural dichotomies (specifically that of civilisation and barbarism). The use of the word in an Iberian context evokes that Hispanic cultural history but comes also to stand for other, positively valued forms of cultural hybridity, against the backdrop of entrenched linguistic nationalisms in Spain. To claim Valle as *mestizo* is perhaps a means of reclaiming him for the Galician context beyond the strict linguistic criterion that typically determines membership of the Galician literary canon (see García-Liñeira 2015), as well as ensuring the persistence of his Galician identity within the Spanish canon.

THE *COMEDIAS BÁRBARAS*: A LANGUAGE IN BETWEEN

Valle's use of Galician has been studied extensively, though not in terms of the association between linguistic barbarism and the barbarous. Yet the *Comedias bárbaras*, the first example in Valle's oeuvre of works requiring a long glossary (especially of Galician words and phrases), seem to invite this association. Though arguably, as I have pointed out, it is false to refer to the incorporation of Galician in terms of barbarism because for Valle-Inclán the language belonged to the *propio* rather than the foreign, he nevertheless characterised Spanish and Galician quite differently¹² while asserting that in Galicia 'no se habla gallego, sino una lengua contaminada de castellano' (quoted in Ruiz Fernández 1981, 65) ['no-one speaks Galician, but rather a language contaminated with Castilian']. The *Comedias bárbaras* opened up a new phase in Valle's literary career and initiated the Goyesque, grotesque, expressionistic mode that was ultimately to morph, in ironic and satirical rather than heroic form, into the *esperpento* or grotesque farce. But the *esperpento* is an urban genre responsive to the 'bohemian lights' and concave mirrors

¹²'Yo que vengo de Galicia, región de campo dulce y bello, he pretendido darle al castellano el sentido labriego que no tiene, porque el campo de Castilla no es amable' (Valle quoted in Amor 1958, 1; from a speech given in 1932) ['I who come from Galicia, a sweet and pleasant land, attempted to give Castilian the rural sound that it lacks, because the Castilian countryside is not kind'].

of Madrid, whereas the aesthetic context for the *Comedias bárbaras* is a fertile Galicia of primitive energies and archetypal characters, of superstitious peasants at the mercy of despotic noblemen and incompetent priests, a stage for exaggerated contrasts and violent, heroic gestures.

Though, as John Lyon observes, historical readings of the *Comedias bárbaras* are likely to founder given the plays' studied timelessness (1983, 54), they were undoubtedly an aesthetic response to a lost world, the semi-feudal, agrarian Galicia transformed, belatedly even by the standards of other parts of Spain, by economic reforms in the late nineteenth century. As Valle-Inclán explained:

He asistido al cambio de una sociedad de castas (los hidalgos que conocí de rapaz), y lo que vi no lo verá nadie. Soy el historiador de un mundo que acabó conmigo. Ya nadie volverá a ver vinculeros y mayorazgos. En este mundo que yo presento de clérigos, mendigos, escribanos, putas y alcahuetes, lo mejor—con todos sus vicios—era los hidalgos, lo desaparecido. (Quoted in Dougherty 1983, 147)

[I witnessed the transition from a society of castes (the noblemen I knew as a child) and what I saw nobody will see again. I am the chronicler of a world that ended with me. Gone are the granary overseers and the lords of entailed estates. In this world of clerics, beggars, scribes, prostitutes and pimps, the best thing—with all their vices—was the noblemen, and they have disappeared.]

The *Comedias bárbaras* present a particular challenge to the reader accustomed to reading Valle's grotesquery in a satirical key, because the arrogance and violent despotism of the noble Montenegros, especially the degenerate sons, lend themselves easily to such a reading. But as critics have consistently observed, the plays are written in heroic mode, and in that context barbarism is a form of resistance, a last gasp of vital energy before its assumption by a modernity still largely absent from the plays themselves, but engaged with fully in the *esperpento*. In *Luces de Bohemia*, the first and most important *esperpento*,¹³ barbarism takes on quite a different meaning associated rather with the cultural backwardness embodied in the Black Legend, which, in these 'días menguados'

¹³First published in 1920 in *España* and revised for definitive book publication in 1924.

['diminished days'] has become for Max Estrella the true history of Spain (Valle-Inclán 1924, 164).¹⁴ *Luces de Bohemia* defines the *esperpento* as a mathematically precise deformation of reality, a grotesque fairground image of the tragic and heroic in a context of social and political absurdity. The fact that the word 'barbarie' ['barbarism'] reappears in *Luces de Bohemia* with reference to the Black Legend indicates that, notwithstanding other differences in the meanings he attached to it, barbarism was for Valle a pre-modern state, and his ambivalence to modernity explains his ambivalence, at least aesthetically, to barbarism. The barbarism of the *Comedias* is associated with the feudalism embodied in the Montenegro family and, while it is heroic, it is also expressive of the inadequacy of certain forms in certain contexts, precisely the insight that would lead Valle to create the *esperpento* in the 1920s.¹⁵ In the case of the *Comedias* the insight is nostalgic, whereas in the *esperpento* it is ironic. There is nonetheless a strong sense in the *Comedias bárbaras* that epic heroism is already souring into the grotesque, that the plays' barbarism is already partly of the second order and not only of the first; and it is significant in this context that Valle should have returned to the *Comedias bárbaras* precisely in his esperpentic phase, publishing *Cara de plata* [*Silver Face*], often considered an anomaly in his production (Serrano Alonso 2010, 247), in 1923. Though it retains the heroic spirit of the earlier plays, the 'feudal acceptance and dependence' of the earlier two is replaced by a 'more emancipated and aggressive outlook' (Lyon 1983, 53), reflecting perhaps the shift in Valle's political sympathies towards revolutionary socialist republicanism, but also indicating that there is at least some congruence between the apparently differing meanings of 'barbarie' in the two phases of his work.

Though it is not unusual for Valle's works to require a glossary, it is especially the case in those works that borrow heavily from the Galician

¹⁴In *Luces de Bohemia*, the 'bárbaros' who might torture the revolutionary Catalan prisoner are, in Max's words, the very people who dare to protest about the Black Legend. By means of the reference to torture, Valle seems to align the prison guards with the Inquisition, and identifies those who defend order and authority against revolution as barbarians. His use of the word 'bárbaro' also calls to mind the political rhetoric of the First World War, in which Spain was neutral: those on the right who aligned themselves with the Germans spoke precisely in terms of 'order' and 'authority', while liberals, socialists and republicans supported the Allies in the name of 'civilisation'.

¹⁵The *esperpento* is derived from the tragedy, but it distorts the image of the tragic hero in a concave mirror to reflect the absurdity of contemporary pretensions to heroism.

lexicon. Though Galician was nostalgically present in such earlier works as *Jardín umbrío* (1903) [*Shaded Garden*] and *Flor de santidad* (1904) [*Flower of Sanctity*] in the form of songs, rhymes and place names, it is more tightly woven into the verbal fabric of the *Comedias bárbaras* and later Galician works, as he marks a transition in his own artistry—from the precious to the ferocious—as well as in the world he depicts. In the *Comedias bárbaras* language is orchestrated into a dramatic world in which ‘gritos y denuestos, pregones, clamor de mujerucas, salmodia de beatas, reniegos y espantos’ [‘shouts and insults, proclamations and the hawking of wares, the clamouring of hags, the droning of pious women, cursing and scaring off’] are listed as *dramatis personae* (*Cara de plata*, 1923). Shouting and exclamation are particular features of Valle’s dialogue both in and after the *Comedias bárbaras*. Umbral claims that in *Divinas palabras* characters shout because they are lying (1998, 237); but for Valle-Inclán shouting was an essential component of any theatrical work that wanted to reflect the character of Spanish and the Spanish people. He claimed that the ‘grito’ or shout was one of the ‘*términos capitales a cuyo régimen debe someterse en nuestro teatro toda creación genuina que aspire a tocar el alma del pueblo*’ (quoted in Sobejano 1988, 116) [‘most important stipulations of a regime to which any genuine creation in our theatre should submit, if it wants to touch the spirit of the people’]. Language is orchestrated into a dramatic world of inarticulate but personified sounds nonetheless brought together in aesthetic harmony, in which the choral and musical nature of the dialogues is very marked. As critics have observed, the plays owe a great deal to Wagner’s conception of total theatre and are profoundly Symbolist in their treatment of character and theme, such that the plays’ violence and extreme contrasts, their depiction of rape, grave-robbing, sex and death, do nothing to detract from the perception of a divine aesthetic, a desire for stillness and wholeness, beneath the movement of the plays’ action. And indeed the principal character and ‘bárbaro’ of the play, the Don Juan-esque aristocrat Don Juan Manuel Montenegro, is riven between the animalistic and the spiritual, proceeding from ‘lobo salido’ or sexually predatory wolf to messianic figure through the course of the trilogy.

John Lyon describes the world of the *Comedias bárbaras* as a world of absolutes that reflects, as much as being reflected in, the character of Spanish:

[For Valle] Castilian is a language of emphasis and powerful stress, suited to the expression of strong and naïve emotional extremes, of spontaneous and categorical feeling: a language of ‘labriegos, clérigos y jueces’ [‘farm workers, clerics and judges’]. For Valle, one of the main functions of dramatic dialogue was to express the genius of a language, and the genius of Castilian lay in its definitive and uncompromising modes of expression: ‘la sentencia, la imprecación, el denuesto, el grito’ [‘the sentence, the imprecation, the insult, the shout’]. A glance at almost any scene from the *Comedias Bárbaras* would suffice to demonstrate his predilection for these forms of expression. The dialogue does not reason, argue, describe, analyse or relate; it alternates between the expression of spontaneous emotion and ageless choral feeling. (1983, 22)

But though Lyon recognises that Valle writes ‘Galician Spanish’ as the Anglo-Irish playwright J.M. Synge writes ‘Gaelic English’—Galicia and Ireland being ‘gemelas’ or twins, as Juan Ramón expressed their cultural affinity (in Villanueva 1994, 57)—he does not account for the fact that in this world of absolutes and alternations the heavily inflected language of the dialogues is a language in between, tending away from the absolute. This unsettled in-betweenness takes us back to the idea that Valle uses linguistic variety to generate movement within language, only to incorporate it into an aesthetic of stillness. He also uses it to generate localism while transcending the local, and to generate meaning while transcending meaning. Galician precisely supplies a local context while being incorporated into a soundscape designed to work upon the ear and not the intellect, in which the inarticulate and incomprehensible fight for prominence with verbal meaning, in which human sound is given bodily presence and in which non-human sounds take on the character of voices. The distancing effect produced by the incorporation of a second language contributes powerfully to this orchestration of voiced sound ranging from the inarticulate to the poetic. But the in-betweenness of the language also coincides with a key motif, that of the threshold. In *Cara de plata* the synaesthesia of sound and colour marks a threshold

between the senses,¹⁶ while romanesque archways mark a semi-circular meeting and crossing point between the otherwise polarised and extreme contrasts that characterise the *Comedias bárbaras*. It provides an image for the proximity between life and death, sin and virtue, the primitive and noble, ancient and modern, barbarous and divine, that underlies and provides the context of wholeness within which the plays' contrasts assume aesthetic meaning. In this context the meeting of Spanish and Galician in the dialogue is not just an aesthetic reworking of a local context or a defamiliarising device, but a linguistic embodiment of the threshold across which opposing forces play out. This is not to characterise Spanish and Galician as opposing forces, but rather to highlight their interpenetration, their marking of a linguistic threshold that reflects the significance of other thresholds, temporal, social and thematic, within the plays. The notion of a linguistic threshold is implied by Amor y Vázquez when he highlights two of the most stylistically interesting ways in which Valle incorporates Galician into Spanish: firstly, by combining it with other sources to generate hybrid words (e.g. the adjective *lipuda*, which takes the form of *bicuda* in Galician, meaning thick-lipped; the noun *lunar*, from the Galician *luar*, for the light of the moon (1958, 6)); and by employing words common to both Spanish and Galician, but listed in the Real Academia's dictionary as archaic:

Considerados en conjunto, los casos que caen en esta última categoría son del mayor interés estilístico por ser muchos de ellos los que dan a la prosa de nuestro autor una de sus tonalidades características, la de un arcaísmo poético, sutil, que elude una delimitación temporal. No se avenía al carácter de Valle-Inclán el andar a la búsqueda de estos vocablos anacrónicos diccionario en mano. Es al gallego, en el que son de uso corriente, al que hay que referirlos. En su Pontevedra natal tuvo oportunidad Valle-Inclán de escuchar estas palabras de boca de otros y de pronunciarlas él mismo para apreciar así su patina libre del polvo que opacaba a sus gemelas castellanas. (1958, 10)

¹⁶In the introductory stage direction to scene 4, for example: 'Son remotas lumbres las cimas de los montes, y las faldas sinfónicas violetas. Pasa el rezo del viento por los maizales ya nocturnos, y se están transportando a la clave del morado los caminos [...]' (1923, 85) ['The mountain peaks are distant fires, the hillsides symphonic violets. The wind utters its prayer in the nocturnal cornfields, and the roads transpose themselves to the key of purple [...]']. For Valle, the 'analogía y equivalencia de las sensaciones' ['analogy and equivalence of sensations'] was central to modernism's interest in the 'desenvolvimiento progresivo de los sentidos' ['progressive development of the senses'] (1903, 203).

[Taken together, the examples that fall into this last category are of the greatest stylistic interest, because many of them lend the author's prose one of its most defining tonal characteristics: its subtle, poetic archaism, eluding any temporal classification. It was not in Valle-Inclán's nature to go looking for these words dictionary in hand. It is to their contemporary usage in Galician that we must refer them. In his native Pontevedra Valle-Inclán had the opportunity to hear these words in the mouths of others and to articulate them himself and appreciate their patina, free of the dust that obscured their Castilian equivalents.]

As we will see, this particular technique can be likened to Hemingway's use of Spanish-in-English in *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1940), and marks the particular sensitivity to range and depth of meaning, as well as to spoken context, shared by these otherwise very different writers. The threshold marked for Valle-Inclán the proximity as well as the distance between contrasting forces, allowing him to glimpse the totality to which his divine art aspired; and in language he was able to enact that threshold at the level of the individual word.

In its very aspiration to divine wholeness Valle-Inclán's technique absorbed Galician, broke up Spanish and defied the authority of Latin, achieving the catholicity of diversity in unity. In the Iberian and Hispanic linguistic contexts such a notion was potentially progressive and emancipatory, though bound up in anxieties of fragmentation it also had the potential to become reactionary, as it did in Unamuno (see Resina 2002). It would be a truism to say that Valle-Inclán veered between traditionalism and more revolutionary political sympathies, and another truism to say that Spanish modernism was defined by its cultural essentialism and ambivalence to modernity, though both supply some context in considering the question of linguistic ideology in Valle-Inclán. But how closely can we determine such an ideology? Though his practice chimes in a number of ways with the views of Unamuno, it is not helpful to circumscribe as reactionary an author whose artistic modernity was beyond question; not because artistic modernity is in itself a guarantee of progressive ideology, but because, to quote a useful Baudelairean paradox, 'rien de plus cosmopolite que l'Eternel' (quoted in Allegra 1983, 130) ['nothing is more cosmopolitan than the Eternal']. Baudelaire was referring, again with reference to Wagner, to the 'analogie morale' between the myths and legends of different countries, which he regarded as the 'estampille divine de toutes les fables populaires' (quoted in

Allegra 1983, 130) [‘divine stamp of all popular fables’]; but the cosmopolitanism of the Eternal could also be understood in terms of its inevitable transcendence of the meanings of a single language. For Benjamin it is precisely in translation, in the interaction between languages, that a ‘pure’ language can be glimpsed (1996, 257). For better or worse, Valle’s incorporation of Galician into Spanish mined the living vernacular of both languages in the generation of a linguistic mode that pushed outwards in neologism and downwards in archaism, and which took pleasure in hovering on the threshold between words that were simultaneously filled with and emptied of meaning. In *Luces de Bohemia*, the poet’s ‘right to the alphabet’ is at once a baptism—of the Catalan revolutionary who will bring about a new world order—and an aesthetic redemption of the poet himself. The redemption is not the artist’s social usefulness per se, but the readying of a language rich with its own history for the articulation of revolutionary forms.

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