

Introduction

Edward Baker is a scholar of modern and early modern Spanish letters. He has taught in American and Spanish universities, and is the author of La lira mecánica. En torno a la poesía de Antonio Machado (Madrid, 1986), Materiales para escribir Madrid: literatura y espacio urbano de Moratín a Galdós (Madrid, 1991) and La biblioteca de Don Quijote (Madrid, 1997). At present he is working on An Archeology Of Spanish Literature, a book-length study of the origins of Spain's national literary canon.

Let us begin with a simple observation of fact: prior to the decade of the 1970s there was virtually not a single piece of critical work on Madrid literature that conformed to contemporary methodological standards. This is a remarkable statement because it suggests that the intellectual level not solely of literary criticism but, more broadly, of literary writing on Madrid around the middle of the twentieth century was inferior to that of the middle of the nineteenth. Nonetheless, it is not exactly the case that authors writing about Madrid's literature and culture forty or fifty years ago did not measure up to, let us say, Mesonero, for if they failed to do so it would be unfortunate but this, of itself, would pose no serious critical problem. Spain's past, including its cultural past, presents to the beholder a picture of marked discontinuities, and this would be one among many others; no more, really, than a pale reflection of that far more dramatic historical discontinuity, the civil war and the dictatorship's thirty-six-year state of emergency. The truth, however, is that the writers of our mid-century were not exactly inferior to Mesonero; rather, they were trying to emulate him and, what is worse, more often than not they succeeded. I will not burden the reader with a list of authors and titles, but anyone familiar with the writings from those years of Federico Carlos Sainz de Robles, Antonio Díaz-Cañabate, the sea of anecdote that comprises Federico Bravo Morata's pur-



ported history of Madrid, and virtually every article on Madrid themes printed in the pages of *ABC* and *Blanco y Negro* between 1939 and the present, knows whereof I speak.¹ This compels us if not to a conclusion at least to a working hypothesis, however roughly hewn: although *costumbrismo* as a viable form of literary expression with an internal aesthetic dynamic of its own disappeared following the *septembrina*, the revolution of September, 1868 (Ferrerías), there existed at mid-twentieth century, and, although in a diminished form, still does, a sensibility that connected with and responded to *costumbrista* forms of literary expression and, more broadly, the repertoire of social and discursive gestures, in short, the structures of sentiment that constitute Madrid *casticismo*. That sensibility floated comfortably on the anecdotized trivialization of the city's history and it deployed a methodology which could function only by going unrecognized. The method entailed the reduction of the city's inhabitants and their culture, especially the working classes and popular culture, to a nature, and the further reduction of that nature to a collection of tics, so that with the aid of a complicit public, art imitated life, but only to the extent that life imitated the *género chico*.

This unhappy state of affairs was deeply rooted in romanticism, and that fact should make us mindful of something which, as historians of literature and culture, must command our attention. Romanticism, unlike all literary and artistic movements prior to the nineteenth century, cannot simply be the object of an archeological recuperation, for it is the only one which, long after it was emptied of aesthetic life, did not disappear. On the

contrary, as the originary artistic moment of a bourgeois culture long ago turned in on itself, it remains with us in a static or involutive mode of existence as a zombie, the aesthetic and ideological undead lurking in our collective unconscious.² All of this suggests that there persists in Madrid, or has until very recently, a *casticista* culture anchored to a reactionary ideology, oligarchic populism, whose characteristic expressions are derived from *costumbrismo* with or without music, and a sensibility whose organs of perception are intellectually and almost biologically incapable of registering its own vulgarity.

For critics and scholars, the remarkable persistence of *casticista* discourse has had important unintended and often unrecognized consequences, the most notable of which is an almost obsessive concern for the status of modernity in the city's literature and culture. That concern, variously interpreted, supplies the motor force of nearly every article in this collection and, necessarily, of this introduction. The concern is logical and perhaps even inevitable, for it is embedded in essential aspects of Madrid's historical evolution. Madrid is not an ancient city or a modern one. It is neither the outcome of many centuries of historical continuities and breaks whereby a complex urban civilization undergoes a process of construction, sedimentation, destruction and recreation, as in London or Paris, nor is it the result of a modernity built on a vast and accelerated process of capital formation, as in New York and Berlin. Rather than ancient or modern, Madrid has been intermittently, precariously modern and profoundly and lastingly archaic, as befits a city that is both relatively new by European standards and simultaneously the

synthesis of an archaic and crisis-ridden social order. Josep Pla observed nearly eighty years ago:

Viniendo de Barcelona, lo que más sorprende de Madrid es encontrarse con una ciudad acabada de hacer, sin ningún vestigio antiguo, sin raíces en el pasado profundo. Madrid data realmente de Felipe II; en cambio, Barcelona hunde sus raíces en un pasado fabuloso y lejano. (163)

A few years later, a very different sort of observer, Ernest Hemingway, arrived by a different route at a not dissimilar conclusion. For Hemingway, Spain was defined by local color, and Madrid struck him as an oddly modern place because of the relative absence of the immediately perceivable local color that he sought everywhere in Spain (Baker 191).

Although strictly speaking Madrid pre-dates the Habsburg monarchy by more than half a millenium, Pla was substantially correct: Spain's capital city really does date from Philip II. In the early Middle Ages, Madrid was a Moslem settlement, a small fortress town guarding the northern approach to the most important city in the region, Toledo, which fell to Christian conquest in 1086. Toward the end of the Middle Ages and the early Renaissance, it remained a third-rank Castilian city,³ although one that was much to the liking of Ferdinand and Isabel, until Philip located the court there in 1561. Madrid, then, was a new and rather artificial capital, an invention of early modern absolutism, the pure expression of political willfulness,⁴ a city which had little or no social, economic, or military *raison d'être*. Thus, there is a very real sense in which by the end of the seven-

teenth century Madrid, as the capital of an empire in permanent crisis and historical involution, was simultaneously a new and archaic city. The already bureaucratized state that was placed in the midst of that small Castilian city engendered an ongoing conflict between town and court, *villa* and *corte*, in which, as David Ringrose has justly observed, the latter consistently overwhelmed the former (Juliá et al. 124-29).⁵

Madrid's precarious modernity began in the nineteenth century with three important developments. The first was spatial, beginning with the *desamortización* of 1836. A glance at Teixeira's map of Madrid dating from 1656 shows that Madrid was a city of convents, and it remained so throughout the first third of the nineteenth century. Mendizábal's disentailment expropriated and nationalized the real properties of the religious orders and sold them to the highest bidders, who in many instances were real estate speculators. The new and desperately needed housing built under the pressure of speculation was often of four and five stories, a great novelty that Larra had already noted in an article, "Las casas nuevas" which actually predates the disentailment by nearly three years. Madrid's four and five story houses led, as they did in other European cities, to a new phenomenon, vertical social zoning, which, until the advent of the elevator in the late nineteenth century, imposed an inverse relation between altitude and social status whereby the rich occupied the bottom floors and the servants lived in the attics.

The corollary to that undertaking, from the 1850s to the 1868 Revolution, was the tearing down of the *cerca*, the wall built in the 1620s during the reign of

Philip III, which in turn made possible the full development of the *ensanches*, the modern neighborhoods built on a grid, particularly Salamanca and Chamberí (Navascués.) This centrifugal movement of Madrid for the first time in nearly two and a half centuries created a new horizontal social zoning, with the bourgeoisie occupying the areas of the *ensanches* nearest the center and fronting the main arteries, and workers and a marginalized semi-proletariat living on the outskirts. Thus, modern Madrid began with a spatial dynamics of internal reform of the medieval and early-modern center that had been enclosed by the wall, and the building of the modern expansions. Beginning in the 1870s, the two were connected by mule-drawn tramways which were electrified, along with a good many other things, in the early years of the twentieth century.

The first work of literature corresponding to this incipient modernization of Madrid was Benito Pérez Galdós's story, "La novela en el tranvía," published posthumously but dating from 1871, the year Madrid's first tram line was inaugurated. The story begins with a Cervantine gesture in which reading, the city, and reading the city are intertwined. In this urban fable a nameless protagonist rides the line, which ran from Salamanca through the center of Madrid and then northwest to Pozas. As our protagonist rides he quixotically reads the fragment of a *folletín*—the newsprint has been used to wrap a packet of books—into the tram he is riding while, figuratively speaking, he writes his fellow passengers into the *folletín* he is reading. At this point his field of vision, just like that of Cervantes's mad *hidalgo*, is circumscribed by the printed page, for Don Quixote saw only what he

had read, and that, and no more, is what the protagonist of "La novela en el tranvía" sees. Galdós's character deploys an archaic narrative form to apprehend a modern reality, just as Don Quixote had deployed chivalric romance to confront a fallen world and redeem it through knight errantry. Galdós's rider/reader/writer fails to interpret accurately an essential encounter of modern urban life, the one in which strangers are thrown together in a public conveyance and, in ocular and auditory proximity, intersect the urban landscape. "La novela en el tranvía" is a cautionary tale on how not to read the city and a brief but knowing lesson on how to write it.

In the 1880s Galdós returned to the motif of the *folletín* in the figure of D. José Ido del Sagrario, who first appeared in *El doctor Centeno*, reappeared in *Tormento* and *Lo Prohibido*, and finally in *Fortunata y Jacinta*. Galdós regarded the *folletín* as part of a fashion—*la moda*—that flowered in mid-nineteenth-century as a manifestation of readers' taste for foreign literary goods and in *Fortunata y Jacinta* he returned to the theme of fashion—*los trapos*—that in the Balzacian mode he had already taken up in *La de Bringas*, and examined its material and symbolic role both in the economy and in the origins of the modern realist novel. In part I, chapter II.v Galdós furnishes us with a fictional history of nineteenth-century Madrid commerce. To all appearances, those pages are among the least reflexive, the most purely denotative in all of Galdós's work, and yet it is here that he mounts a narrative and metanarrative operation in which he inscribes the very conditions of possibility of writing modern novels into the novel that is unfolding before us.

What are those conditions? For Galdós the key is a worldwide economic

transformation engendered by the industrialization of cloth production and the corresponding changes in fashion, which, the narrator tells us, both anticipate and configure ideas and letters: “El vestir se anticipaba al pensar, y cuando aún los versos no habían sido desterrados por la prosa, ya la lana había hecho trizas a la seda” (30). Wool, as gray as the skies of the countries where it was produced, had soundly defeated silk; the industrial goods of northern Europe had dethroned the colorful shawls called *mantones de Manila* because the point of shipment of these poetic Chinese creations was Spain’s colony in the Asian Pacific. And prose, the gray prose of British industry—the modern world—had removed the romantic poetry of Chinese silk from center stage.⁶

At this point a question of scale becomes all-important, because a central conceit of Galdós’s Madrid novels is that the city is a self-contained world. As Farris Anderson has pointed out, the last house on the last street at the outskirts of town is a *finisterre*, the outer limits of a semantic field; beyond lies the void. In the case of *Fortunata y Jacinta*, however, that field encompasses the entire world and its economy and that economy is the condition of possibility both of Madrid commerce and of the modern novel. Because the fate of characters who live halfway between the Puerta del Sol and the Plaza Mayor is determined to a considerable extent by what happens in England, France, Belgium, not to mention Singapore and Suez. All because of fashion:

¡Los trapos, ay! ¿Quién no ve en ellos una de las principales energías de la época presente, tal vez una causa generadora de movimiento y vida? Pensad un poco en lo que representan,

en lo que valen, en la riqueza y el ingenio que consagra a producirlos la ciudad más industriosa del mundo, y, sin querer, vuestra mente os presentará entre los pliegues de las telas de moda todo nuestro organismo mesocrático, ingente pirámide en cuya cima hay un sombrero de copa; toda la máquina política y administrativa, la Deuda pública y los ferrocarriles, el presupuesto y las rentas, el Estado tutelar y el parlamentarismo socialista. (30)

Galdós had already posed the problem of a transition from the Romantic novel to modern realism in an important critical essay, “Observaciones sobre la novela contemporánea en España.” Written a year before “La novela en el tranvía,” it can be read as a partial anticipation of the story, or, conversely, the story can be read as a fictionalized version of the essay. In it Galdós argued:

... el gran defecto de la mayor parte de nuestros novelistas, es el haber utilizado elementos extraños, convencionales, impuestos por la moda, prescindiendo por completo de lo que la sociedad nacional y coetánea les ofrece con extraordinaria abundancia. Por eso no tenemos novela.... (105)

What Galdós meant by this is that, faithful to the fashion imposed from without by European romanticism, Spain’s novelists of the Isabeline period were writing, figuratively speaking, in poetry rather than in prose, that is, the romantic “poetry” of the *folletinistas* who met what he perceived as a public demand:

El público ha dicho: Quiero traidores pálidos y de mirada siniestra, meretrices con aureola, duquesas averiadas, jorobados románticos, adulterios,

extremos de amor y odio," y le dan todo eso. (107)

It is precisely this kind of "poetry" that Galdós parodied in "La novela en el tranvía."

At the very time that the British empire displaced Spain's, imposing the kingdom of wool over that of silk, in the Spain of 1870 and in the midst of a revolutionary process, Galdós argues that Spanish novelists continue to write the way they had when the finest Chinese artists such as Ayún, Senqua and "el sucesor de estos artistas, el fecundo e inspirado King-Cheong"(29) were producing their best shawls, as though their poetic creations had not been displaced from the market by the European woolens industry. In Galdós's analogy Ayún, Senqua and King-Cheong are Ayguales de Izco and his successors and the evolution from romantic poetry to realist prose should reproduce the transition from Chinese shawls to British woolens. In sum, the King-Cheongs of the novel had to be left behind.

How? Galdós answered the question in his essay on the novel by insisting on what amounts to thematic nationalism, that is, using material that "la sociedad nacional y coetánea ofrecía con extraordinaria abundancia" (105). But in his mature novels of the 1880s he provided another answer: what Spanish society offered in great abundance was not only raw material, the teeming world of a city and its people, but an infinitely rich novelistic tradition stemming from Cervantes and the picaresque, offering countless lessons in the tactics and strategies of telling stories about what Hegel called the prose of the modern world. In these metanarrative pages on the history of Madrid commerce, Galdós wrote the conditions of

possibility of writing *Fortunata y Jacinta*.

The global economy that Galdós posited as the condition of possibility of his narrative project is reflected in the second factor in Madrid's relative modernization, the process of concentration and centralization both of political power and material resources that took place during the Restoration. Obviously, centralization was not a new phenomenon, but the centralization that took place in the last quarter of the nineteenth century and the early decades of the twentieth entailed a modernizing process, especially in transportation and communications—from railways to telegraphy and telephones—as well as finance (Juliá, "De población"). The construction of the railways created a national transportation network, and the placing of its center in Madrid was both a consequence of and a powerful incentive to centralization. In Madrid itself, we must not forget the electrification of the tramway system and especially the creation of the first metro lines immediately after WWI. If the national rail nexus was Madrid, that of the capital's metro was—is—the Puerta del Sol, truly making that historic plaza centralized Spain's "kilómetro cero." As regards communications, we should take into account the creation first of a telegraph network, and then a telephone system, and the building of the Palacio de las Comunicaciones (1904), today's Correos, in the early years of the century and, two decades later La Telefónica (1926), Madrid's first skyscraper. Thus, transportation and communication made for those singularly modern—and singularly American—vertical expansions of urban space, downward to the metro, and upward to the skyscraper. But centralization was not limited to a transportation and communications network. The Restora-

tion was also the first great moment of capital's dominance in Spain, and banking reflected the general tendency toward centralism in two ways. One was a considerable growth and concentration of capital, and simultaneous to it was the tendency of banks to place themselves in close proximity to state power (Tortella). This, in turn, created Madrid's financial district on and alongside the Calle de Alcalá, flanked on the one end by the Ministry of Finance and on the other by the newly-constructed Banco de España (1891). In other words, the banks mounted the same political operation in the Restoration as did the religious orders in the early modern *villa y corte*: they positioned themselves in the proximity of the state.

At the same time this was the historical moment—the 1910s and 20s—in which a modern *intelligentsia* emerged in Madrid centered on, but surely not limited to, the figure of José Ortega y Gasset, and in which the labor movement began to consolidate its power in Madrid and elsewhere. Thus, the framework of Madrid's infrastructural and financial modernization is that of its social and intellectual modernization as well. Further, these two sectors—labor and the intellectuals—were, along with the secularized petty bourgeoisie, the basis of the opposition to the Monarchy. In this crucible, the Restoration political system, the oligarchic *partitocracia* that don Antonio Cánovas del Castillo created in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, was shattered and, in turn, shattered the polity it was designed to govern. This, in turn, opened the way not only to the Primo de Rivera dictatorship in the Fall of 1923 and the Republic in the Spring of 1931 but, more broadly, to an extended legitimization cri-

sis in which an entire society found itself in a state of prolonged and mortal discord regarding the fundamentals of sovereignty and, in consequence, the need to decide by force of arms who would govern, within what kind of institutional framework, with what methods and to what end. That crisis, far from being junctural in nature, lasted roughly from the failed General Strike of 1917 to the death of Francisco Franco in the early hours of November 20, 1975, which brought to a close a thirty-six year state of exception and the transition to relatively consensual forms of governance.

The simultaneous centralization and modernization had contradictory consequences for Madrid. Modernization began to transform the *villa y corte* into a city, whereas in the area of political culture and cultural politics, as distinct from infrastructural reform and the emergence of finance capital, centralism did little more than confirm Madrid's status as the overgrown village that at bottom it had been from early modernity to the pre-war decades. In the early years of the twentieth century, the Madrid of culture and politics was a very small and extremely compact place in which the agencies of knowledge and power were relatively few in number and their agents encountered one another day in and day out in the Cortes, the Senate and the ministries; the university, the academies and professional associations, the Ateneo and similar institutions; the newspaper offices, theaters, cafés, and so on, virtually all of which were located within a stone's throw of one another in an area of the *casco antiguo* which was never much more than a kilometer's radius from the Puerta del Sol. And although these encounters took place across ideological and political dividing lines that

were perfectly real and should not be dismissed, those lines did not turn irremediably into trenches until the advent of the Republic, because until then the protagonists of Madrid's cultural and political life belonged, with very few exceptions, to contiguous fractions of a single class. Thus, when we look at the global space in which pre-War Madrid's cultural politics and political culture evolved, we must never forget that we are discussing a place that both geographically and socially was astonishing in its compactness.

A third factor in Madrid's modernity is culture in a very broad sense, that is, in a world driven by scarcity and riven by class, how did that society produce, transmit, and contest meaning. In a superb essay written in the 1920s Manuel Azaña drew attention to Madrid's cultural archaism, and it is undeniable that Madrid's *casticismo*, the oligarchic-populist sensibility that characterized the city's pre-War forms of self-representation, the culture of *zarzuela*, *sainete*, and *cuplé*, is the dominant note in a city that, as Azaña insisted, was more *corte* than *villa* and never truly functioned as a capital. Nevertheless, the Madrid of the 1920s had a curiously modern air about it, and observers as disparate as Ernest Hemingway and Josep Pla attested to it (Baker 189-90). We can find both tendencies united in several works of pre-War creative artists and writers, some of whom, like Valle-Inclán, belong to the Generation of 98, while others were younger. The painter and writer José Gutiérrez Solana is a curious figure in early twentieth-century Madrid culture with his odd mixture of Nietzschean disdain and *nostalgie de la boue*. Solana was ultimately a monotonous writer just as he was a monotonous painter. I mean by this that his expressive range

was very narrow, but his one note, nonetheless, was very well played, and on occasion he captured perfectly the sense of a city simultaneously living in two different times, almost two different geological strata. He did this particularly well in an article titled "La Gran Vía," to which Luis Fernández Cifuentes has alluded. Written in 1923, it memorialized the conclusion of the first section of the Gran Vía from Alcalá to the Red de San Luis, and the beginning of the second, from the Red de San Luis to Callao. In a fury of nostalgic anti-capitalism he wrote:

[...] se exhiben automóviles lujosos, ideal de los nuevos ricos, que luego concluyen por irse a los grandes hoteles para hacer vida de borregos y sociedad en comandita y evitar los enormes gastos que ocasionan las recepciones y servidumbre.

Grandes escaparates con pianolas, gramófonos, música mecánica, alternando con fotografías y autógrafos de divos más o menos melencólicos; fondas, pensiones, manicuras y círculos y cafés exhibicionistas y, sobre todo, los restaurantes, muy frecuentados por las tardes y en los que se baila con música de negro.

Hay también bares americanos, en que es necesario encaramarse como un mono sentado en un alto taburete para llegar al mostrador; han tenido poca aceptación; pero no deja de verse en ellos siempre algún idiota vestido de *smoking* fumando una pipa. (Gutiérrez Solana 44)

What is utterly fascinating about the picture that Solana paints is that for the first time we see the unfolding of a North American cultural model in a Spanish setting. After registering the series of phenomena to which Carlos Ramos has al-

luded, the Jazz Age trappings of the Gran Vía's ultramodernity, Solana catalogues with his customary display of necrophilia the displacement and expropriation of "las víctimas de todos estos lujos y adelantos [...], los antiguos vecinos de estas viejas calles" (44). What sets off this brilliant performance is the encounter of an urban world that had not changed substantially since Mesonero with what looks like a set from an Adolphe Menjou movie in which everyone wears a tuxedo, strikes a pose and listens to jazz, the two momentarily fused by the wrecking ball. And this, in turn, is an object lesson in the city's intertwined archaism and modernity, for as a character in José Díaz Fernández's *La Venus Mecánica* observes, "Madrid, con rascacielos y aeródromos, sigue siendo un lugar de la Mancha" (58). A walker in the city could stroll down the Gran Vía toward Callao and the Cine Capitol—one of the very few lastingly excellent works of Madrid's modern architecture, with its strategic placement, its superb sense of proportion, the rhythmic flow of its Erich Mendelsohn ribbon windows—turn a corner and re-enter the world if not actually of Mesonero then of Galdós. When Azaña wrote: "Reconozco que el no ser Madrid una 'vieja ciudad prócer' es acaso el más elegante atractivo que para mí tiene este pueblo" (806), this surely has something to do with what he meant, for the Gran Vía, the privileged space of Madrid's perfectly real modernization, is at the same time a Potemkin village. The Gran Vía is, after all, a Haussmann-like intervention in the *casco antiguo* and it is an important one, really the only important one. It was conceived simultaneously as 1) a corridor linking Salamanca and Argüelles; and 2) a zone of modernization—commerce, hotels, leisure, including the great movie

house and modern bars, that complemented the fusion of state power and capital on Alcalá—. But, in Haussmann's Paris the newly fashioned boulevards betokened the social transformation of entire neighborhoods. Nonetheless, although the Gran Vía displaced the old inhabitants in order to put up modern buildings and even erased a few streets, it did relatively little to transform the surrounding neighborhoods, which did not undergo a consistent process of gentrification. Once again, *La Venus mecánica*, a novel built around the axis of the Gran Vía, proves to be an informed source of lived observations of a Madrid that is both modern and archaic:

El auto atravesó la Castellana, la calle de Alcalá, la Gran Vía, a esa hora de las cuatro en que la ciudad pone otra vez en juego su musculatura de titán. Después dejó la avenida de Pi y Margall y atravesó calles estrechas como tubos. Otra ciudad gibosa y parálitica se agarraba a la urba moderna, como una vieja raíz difícil de extirpar. (76)⁷

In this and similar passages, it was the genius of the avant-garde Madrid novel of the twenties and thirties to capture the atmosphere of a city that, more than any other Western European capital, presented the beholder with a single—although not at all homogeneous—urban space that encompassed a multiplicity of historical times.

In some of the greatest works of Spain's pre-war culture, Solana's and Díaz Fernández's clashes of new and old took place at another level, that of determinate absence. I will try to explain this term by reference to Luis Buñuel's remarkable documentary of las Hurdes, *Tierra sin pan*.

In 1932, in a kind of “misión pedagógica al revés,” Buñuel documented the unrelieved misery of a place where, just as in Carlo Levi’s superb memoir of political exile in a southern hamlet of Mussolini’s Italy, *Cristo si è fermato a Eboli*, Christ, that is, civilization itself, never ventured. What did go forth with Buñuel to las Hurdes was a deity of modern culture and, like God, it is the one thing we never see, but it is also the thing by virtue of which we see what had been rendered invisible, the misery of an entire people. That thing is the movie camera, virtually the only object involved in Buñuel’s film that could not have been found in that ghastly place five centuries earlier. The most stunning aspect of this film is its very condition of possibility, the unregistered encounter between the wealth, power and knowledge objectified in the technology of that most modern of artistic machines, and the millennial wretchedness which it had been brought from Madrid to record. There is, then, a very real sense in which *Tierra sin pan* reproduces in a different context Solana’s encounter on the Gran Vía, for it is very nearly as much about asphalt, that is, about Madrid, its *intelligentsia* and their culture, as it is about land and bread, Las Hurdes and its inhabitants.

Something roughly similar had already been wrought in *Lucas de bohemia*, with its dialectic of the most modern expressive devices conceived by a pre-War Spanish writer and the archaism of its object of representation, a *fin de siècle* bohemia in the Madrid of the Austrias. In the Madrid of *Lucas* the modernity to which Hemingway and Pla called attention is nowhere to be found. But the new Madrid of the first two decades of the twentieth century which Valle suppresses as representation returns with immeasur-

ably more power as modernity of form. The aesthetic effect of this dialectic is particularly forceful because the mechanism that creates the alienation effect is the language of Madrid’s *casticismo*, the language of the streets filtered through the Teatro Apolo and rendered grotesque.

Let us look briefly at an important aspect of the real and figurative geography of Madrid’s streets in Valle’s masterpiece. We have seen that Galdós’s first work of narrative of contemporary Madrid, “La novela en el tranvía,” turns on a geographic metaphor, the transformation of the plains of La Mancha that Don Quixote traverses mounted on Rocinante into the Madrid streets that the protagonist of “La novela en el travía” crosses on the trolley. (That metaphor is no less real for being unstated, because inevitably it is present in the reader’s mind; its actual statement will have to wait ten years, when it is made perfectly explicit in *La Desheredada*). Just so, Valle has recourse to another geography that is almost as familiar, for we rediscover it every time we open the *Odyssey* or the *Aeneid*. What we rediscover, of course, is the Mediterranean, and Valle turns Madrid’s streets into the place of Odysseus’s wanderings—although Max Estrella never quite makes it home—or, even more to the point, Aeneas’s final destination, the founding of Rome. And that is the other thing we rediscover, the epic, in this case the learned epic, and its central theme, the foundation of an imperial polity by heroic means. *Lucas de bohemia* is, from this perspective, not an epic, however, but a tragic and grotesque counter-epic in which we do not witness the founding but rather the involution and degradation of a polity that simultaneously is imploding and exploding. Valle’s ability to capture that dialectic and make it vis-

ible and audible and palpable through the aesthetics of the *grand guignol* is what makes *Luces* one of the great works of European urban modernism, a body of literature that in the span of some fifteen years gave us Andrei Biely's Petersburg, Alfred Döblin's Berlin, and James Joyce's Dublin.

In sum, the multifaceted question of modernity is at the heart of Madrid's literature and culture beginning with the rejections of romanticism in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, and of the repertoire of *casticista* gestures in much of the twentieth. Consequently, that questions surrounding modernity, its multifarious expressions and its discontents, are at the heart of this collection of essays on Madrid, its letters and its culture. The collection is offered in a critical spirit, with the hope of opening a space in the North American academy for the historically informed and methodologically rigorous discussion of Madrid culture.

Notes

¹ I do not wish to convey the idea that Mesonero was an inferior writer, for at times he was a very good one, but he has also been a victim of *casticista* trivialization, a tradition that he inaugurated in his *Memorias de un setentón*. Moreover, it is not my intention to globally condemn the aforementioned writers. Sainz de Robles was a man of unfailing generosity whose love of his native city is quite probably unequaled in this or any other century, and Cañabate was a singularly and discreetly charming conversationalist. My quarrel is not with them as individuals but with an archaic mode of apprehending the city, its culture and its people.

² I would like to stress the point that what interests us is *collective* sensibility, for in a far narrower sense neo-classicism undergoes a similar process, but if a romanticism that has outlived its usefulness is the dead sensibility of civil society,

classicist academicism in architecture, sculpture and all its public forms of empty monumentality, is that of the state.

³ On p. 14 of *La revolución de las comunidades de Castilla (1520-1521)*, Joseph Pérez furnishes data on the population of 23 cities in the kingdom of Castile taken from the census of 1530. In it, Madrid is fourth from the bottom with a population of 4,060, just above Soria (4,040) and appreciably below both Zamora (4,755) and Santiago (5,380). By way of comparison, the manufacturing center of Medina de Rioseco has nearly three times the population of Madrid.

⁴ David Ringrose has identified four urban systems in Spanish history. Three of them—a Mediterranean one centered in Barcelona; a Cantabrian one that occupies the entire northern coast; an Andalusian one located in the Guadalquivir basin—are the outcome of centuries of economic imperatives. By way of contrast, “[o]f Spain's four urban systems, only that of the Castilian interior appears to have been integrated primarily by political factors” (249). The same author reiterates in his conclusion that “the interior region centered on Madrid has been characterized as one that was predominantly political in its rationale” (394).

⁵ And we might add that in a sense still does, for Madrid, no less than the periphery, was, historically, and is still today one of the chief victims of the modern, centralized megastate.

⁶ William Sherzer's observations on the kimono in Elvira Lindo's novel *On de road again* suggest a perfectly real and yet slightly hallucinatory and distinctly post-modern turnabout, in which Carabanchel can now be read as a colony.

⁷ La Avenida de Pi y Margall, named after the federalist political thinker and second president of the Republic of 1873, was the middle section of the Gran Vía. The first, La Avenida del Conde de Peñalver, was named for the mayor of Madrid who most actively promoted the creation of the new street, while the conservative monarchist political figure, Eduardo Dato, killed in 1921 by syndicalists in reprisal for General Martínez Anido's depredations in Barcelona, graced the last of the Gran Vía's three *tramos*.

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