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The artistic deformation of reality: an ideological portrait of tyranny in Tirano Banderas and El Señor Presidente

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THE ARTISTIC DEFORMATION OF REALITY: AN IDEOLOGICAL PORTRAIT OF TYRANNY IN TIRANO BANDERAS AND EL SEÑOR PRESIDENTE

A Thesis
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In Partial Fulfillment
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Master of Arts

by
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INTRODUCTION

Tyrants speak with many voices, hold many poses, and cast many shadows, but inevitably all wear the same face—the tragic face of tyranny itself. Many artists have painted the portrait; few have captured the essence of its tragedy. Valle Inclán and Asturias, each in his own way, depict the world of tyranny as grotesque and absurd in order to show the tragic condition of man. It is my intent to describe and analyze this grotesque world of tyranny, as portrayed in Tirano Banderas and El Señor Presidente; to compare the techniques used by each writer to create this world; to interpret the ideological differences implicit in such a world; and finally to discover if either writer offers or even suggests a solution for improving the absurd and tragic human condition as they portray it. Since relatively little critical study of Asturias's work has been done, El Señor Presidente offers the opportunity for an original investigative analysis. For this reason, major attention is devoted to Asturias's ideology rather than that of Valle Inclán's.

In this study, certain difficulties and limitations have been encountered. Often terms must be used in this paper the significance of which may be ambiguous. These terms are therefore defined as used in the course of this paper. In addition, what little critical material has been written on Asturias's work is found largely in journals and unpublished form and therefore not readily available. Some materials have been impossible to obtain.
Since it is assumed that this paper is of interest to those familiar with the works in question, I have not felt it necessary to make any preliminary introduction. I do wish to state that this study is specifically restricted to an artistic and ideological consideration of tyranny as portrayed in Tirano Bandera and El Señor Presidente, and that the conclusions reached are not intended to reflect any national or international events, movements, or specific philosophies.

In order to differentiate between the authors' ellipsis of material and my own omissions, I have used close dots to indicate their ellipsis and spaced dots to indicate my own.
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CHAPTER I

A GROTESQUE WORLD: AN INTERPRETATION OF REALITY

Through an artistic portrayal of tyranny, Ramón del Valle Inclán and Miguel Ángel Asturias unveil before us societies that are deformed and ridiculous. They effect this by completely stylizing the real world according to esperpentic standards.¹ This grotesque vision, the falsification of the real, serves two purposes: (1) it brutally condemns society by reducing it to absurdity; (2) it saves man from that absurdity by revealing him as a tragic figure. In an esperpentic world, the ridiculous and the false become an instrument of revelation. Both Valle Inclán and Asturias create such a world, but each has his own approach and methods. A description of the grotesque reality conceived by each provides several points for comparison: the point of view of each author in regard to his fictional world; the use of Esperpento versus esperpentic elements, to effect a grotesque world; the way in which we perceive this world—an intellectual versus an intuitive understanding;

¹ Esperpento in its traditional definition means, "una cosa o persona ridícula y extravagante o también disparate o desatinio." Cited in Eugenio G. de Nora, La novela contemporánea (Madrid, 1958), II, 82. Asturias uses it in this way to produce a chaotic world. Valle Inclán calls the distorted reflection in a concave mirror, such as may be seen at a carnival, an "Esperpento." Therefore, his world is produced by means of "una estilización que deforma y rebaja sistemáticamente la realidad." Cited in Nora, p. 82.

An esperpentically stylized world is designed to show truths obscured in the real world. Because stylization does not follow the pattern of nature, but rather an artistic convention, it produces a dehumanized picture, as Ortega y Gasset suggests. See La deshumanización del arte (Madrid, 1967), pp. 32-37.
the symbols of revelation; the author's purpose.

Valle Inclán intends to view reality as a detached, superior spectator. He feels that his position as narrator is objective and de-personalized for two reasons: first, he sees reality from above, looking down on it. From that angle, the world appears distorted and ridiculous. Thus, if Valle Inclán merely records reality as he sees it from this vantage point, it can only reflect this perspective and thus appear absurd. Second, in order to assure objectivity and accuracy, he depends exclusively on an infallible instrument which will function according to certain mathematical laws. That instrument is the concave mirror, which adds nothing and subtracts nothing, but consistently distorts and deforms whatever is reflected in its surface curve. This deformation is always a process controlled by law; that is, the same formula or norm applies impartially to everyone and everything.

Thus, in Valle Inclán's hands, the Esperpento goes beyond its

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2 According to Valle Inclán, there are three ways of looking at the world: (1) one may look upward, as if on bended knee, and visualize an idealized world; (2) one may look directly at reality, face to face, and see it realistically; (3) and one may view the world from above, from which perspective it must appear ridiculous and grotesque. Cited in Robert Lima, ed. and trans., Valle Inclán, Autobiography, Aesthetics and Aphorisma (Pennsylvania, 1966), from the section on La lampara maravillosa, pages unnumbered. Martin Esslin notes that it becomes a world seen through the eyes of a detached, dissociated spectator, one who looks back at life, having risen above and beyond it and thus freed himself from it. The Theatre of the Absurd (New York, 1961), pp. 286-87. Alfonso Sastre adds that Valle Inclán must be an objective spectator so that his perception is neither deformed, nor acts as a deformer. Anatomía del realismo (Barcelona, 1965), p. 59.

3 In discussing this phenomenon, Nora refers to it as a new artistic form of objectivity, p. 87.
generally accepted definition, for now the deformation of reality, or
the creation of the grotesque world, is accomplished by a systematic
destruction and recreation of reality. System and concave mirror dis-
tinguish the Esperpento⁴ as an artistic convention from Esperpento as a
view of life. (Thus, Tirano Banderas is an Esperpento, but El Señor
Presidente merely contains esperpentic elements.) In addition, and ex-
tremely important to this study, these two terms confirm the mathematical
and rational character of the Esperpento as conceived by Valle Inclán.
That this was his intent is evident in the words of the blind poet,
Máximo Estrella (Luces de Bohemia).

Max. --Los héroes clásicos reflejados en los espejos cóncavos
dan el Esperpento. El sentido trágico de la vida española solo
puede darse con una estética sistemáticamente deformada.

Don Latino. --¡Miau! ¡Te estás contagiando!

Max. --España es una deformación grotesca de la civilización
europea.

Don Latino. --¡Pudiera! Yo me inhibo.

Max. --Las imágenes más bellas en un espejo cóncavo son absurdas.

Don Latino. --Conforme. Pero a mí me divierte mirarme en los
espejos de la calle del Gato.

⁴Valle Inclán first formalized the Esperpento as a new literary
style and so named it in Luces de Bohemia, where he credits Goya with
its invention as an art form (Scene 12). Alfonso Sastre offers an inter-
esting hypothesis to refute this. He claims that Goya was not the inven-
tor of the Esperpento, but merely the adaptor of it to art. According to
Sastre the esperpentic character (the extravagant, the absurd, the
antithetical, the dualistic, in short, the tragicomic) is an intrinsic
and authentic part of Spanish life and always has been. In his words,
"Lo real esperpénntico es artísticamente esperpentizado" (pp. 56-57).
Moreover, Nora states that the origin of the Esperpento lies in the
attempt to express "lo español, la vida real española" (p. 83).
We learn from Max that reality is to be "transformed" according to the mathematical principles of the concave mirror. This means that the "normas clásicas" (traditional perspective) are to be replaced with "normas de locura" (esperpentic perspective) in order to systematically deform external reality. And this grotesque vision (which implies the incongruous, the illogical, and the disordered) is systematically ordered by means of a "geométrica ruina."  

5 This is, as Salinas aptly states, "un orden aplicado sobre desorden."  

If Valle Inclán can assume that mathematics is the truest and most abstract science, then he can impose through the "matemática de espejo cóncavo" a grotesque and absolute order on the disorder of reality. When we laugh at our distorted image in an ordinary concave mirror, we admit for a moment only our loss of corporal dignity. But when we laugh at our grotesque reflection in Valle Inclán's mirror, we admit our loss of human and spiritual dignity. The image is absurd, but what it reveals is tragic. The concave mirror has become an instrument of revelation—and more important, an instrument of truth. In summary, Valle Inclán creates a grotesque vision of human society by exposing all of reality to

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5 Ramón del Valle Inclán, Tirano Banderas (Madrid, 1968), p. 27. Hereafter cited as TB.

6 Pedro Salinas, Literatura española, Siglo XX (México, 1949), p. 100. In commenting on Valle Inclán's poetic artistry, Salinas refers to his "poderes ultralógicos" (p. 100). In addition, Sastre refers to the word sistematicamente as "La clave racional de esta postura poética esperpéntica" (p. 58).
the geometrics of the concave mirror, which deforms one's "true appearance." Society then is depicted, through this mirror, as a false society with the intention that this falsity reveal truth.

To heighten and emphasize the abstract mathematical character of the Esperpento, Valle Inclán employs geometric and cubistic terminology and symbolism. Balseiro states that Tirano Banderas borrows from Cubism that angular disfiguration and descriptive decomposition which ultimately achieves a total sum of destruction. In his words, "Concurrimos—en el cubismo y en Tirano Banderas—a un desgaste vital, sinóptico, que sacrifica a la humanidad." To illustrate, the following are examples of mathematical terminology:

Y los cocuyos encendían su danza de luces en la borrosa y lunaria geometría del jardín. (TB, p. 49)

... con el ceño fruncido y la manta tendida sobre las piernas, se había puesto a estudiar la geometría de un remiendo. (TB, p. 105)

... bajo la araña destellante de luces ante el espejo que proyectaba las figuras con una geometría oblicua y disparatada. (TB, p. 134)

... en la curva rotunda, labrada de olorosas maderas. (TB, p. 132)

Entre ángulos y roturas gramaticales, algunas palabras se encadenaban con vigor epigráfico. (TB, p. 132)

Con un esguince anguloso y oblicuo ... (TB, p. 133)

Otra vez los poliedros del pensamiento se inscriben en palabras ... (TB, p. 134)

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7 José A. Balseiro, Cuatro individualistas de España (Chapel Hill, 1949), pp. 164-65.

8 Note the use of the word destellante to reflect a breaking up or disintegration of light in accordance with cubistic technique and purpose. This is a device which Valle Inclán uses often and effectively.
En el fondo, el diáfragma parasol triangulaba sus candiles sobre el cielo verde de luceros. (TB, p. 38)

By means of cubist imagery, Valle Inclán effects the disintegration of external reality and its consequent reordering, by esqerpentie norms, in order to show the essence behind the usual appearance of things. The following is a particularly apt example:


Our usual impression of the Circo Harris has been drastically altered as has our perspective. Ordinarily, the Circo Harris would call to mind a place of amusement, enjoyment, and laughter. Suddenly, our entire concept is radically changed, as we view a group of men, a huddled mass, awaiting death. As the "lights of their individual lives" are extinguished, the entity "men" is broken up and grotesquely re-formed. In the disintegration process itself, a new perspective on reality is offered as the bodies hit the earth at angular positions. A new vision of the spatial foreground of the Circo and of its use becomes evident as that area is sectioned off and re-formed by "human boundaries." Now, instead of the mere appearance of reality (the Circo Harris), the tragic essence of that reality is perceived through an intellectual interpretation.

Valle Inclán portrays prisoners in jail as passive, distant and remote figures. "... y la luz triangulada del calabozo realizaba en un módulo moderno y cubista la actitud macilenta de las figuras." (TB, p. 117) Here despair and hopelessness are neither personalized nor
experienced by the reader. They are perceived in a new way, one which exceeds personal agony. The portrayal reveals the essence of despair, dehumanized, abstract, pure, uncorrupted by emotion or individual interpretation.

In order, therefore, to understand Valle Inclán's Esperpento (as distinct from esperpentic art in general), one must perceive it largely through the intellect. Systematically esperpentinized, Valle Inclán's reality is in essence a static and objective reality in which he never allows his reader to experience events or emotions subjectively. Instead, he must rationalize the significance of this new grotesque reality or at least become psychologically conditioned to it.

In contrast, Asturias, while he adopts the esperpentic agent, nevertheless, adapts it to and integrates it with other instruments of revelation within the broad scope of his novel. It will be shown (pp.46-47) that he is not only an objective viewer of reality, looking down upon it, but also a subjective empathizer, seeing it not only from the outside, looking inward, but also from the inside, looking outward. Valle Inclán intends to expose by means of his esperpentic reality, the intrinsic absurdity abounding in the world of La Tierra Caliente and the tragic

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9 For an interesting interpretation of the difference between the "lived" enjoyment of art versus an artistic and esthetic appreciation, see Ortega y Gasset, pp. 39-48.

10 In a discussion of modern dehumanized art of the cited work, Ortega y Gasset refers to this art as "el mediodía del intelecto" for "El llanto y la risa son estéticamente fraudes" (p. 40).
element of life itself, specifically Hispanic life. Asturias creates an esperpentically stylized vision of society which portrays life, the human condition as grotesque and absurd. Although he adheres to the basic principle of esperpentic art in general, it is in its application that he differs from Valle Inclán. The latter relies exclusively on a precision instrument—the concave mirror—which functions like a robot, objectively and antipathetically. It merely reflects. It neither feels nor reacts.

Asturias, however, although he exposes society even more brutally and savagely, does so selectively and, therefore, subjectively. In addition, his is a chaotic picture—kinetic and dynamic. His mirror not only reflects, but it responds with spasms of horror in violent protest at its own grotesque creations. An absurd world which operates at the level of crazed beasts must be perceived emotionally and intuitively, for such a world defies intellectual comprehension. Human agony can only be felt, never rationalized.

Asturias seeks not merely to prove the grotesque condition of human reality but, more significantly, struggles to probe and penetrate that reality in order to disclose the tragic human condition. To effect this, Asturias illuminates the true meaning of the esperpentic reality by superimposing upon it a surrealistically conceived dream world.

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11 That Valle Inclán's Esperpento is a reflection of the Hispanic condition, specifically, is evident in the passages previously quoted from Luces de Bohemia (pp. 3-4 of this work).

12 Surrealism, in this paper, refers to a subconscious reality expressed through the dream world by the chaotic disintegration of
is this dream world which will reveal through intuition, not intellect, the essence of the esperpentic tragedy.

In addition, Asturias interrelates these two realities so that together they represent the dual nature of reality itself; an authentic image of man and his condition. The interplay between these two worlds shows the constant struggle to distinguish between the appearance of things and the essence of things, between good and evil, truth and falsehood, tragedy and comedy--reality and unreality. This true image of reality, complex as it is, is obtained through the awareness of these contrasting and conflicting forces and elements in life. Good is not recognized until evil is experienced; authenticity is not realized until falsehood is recognized. This constant contrastive duality of life, the twofold truth, becomes a dominant and recurring theme throughout Asturias's novel. This theme is expressed as a thematic metaphor in the following passage: 13

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external reality (fantastic symbols, disjunctive imagery, fragmented and unrelated visions, and incongruous relationships). Such a world is absurd from the standpoint of common sense. Only through intuition, not analytical logic, can one decipher the hidden and innate order which will reveal some truth not otherwise evident. For further discussion of surrealism and of the dream world see Georges Lemaitre, From Cubism to Surrealism (Cambridge, 1941), Chapter V.

13 It is extremely significant that Asturias chooses to introduce this key passage during the fitful delirium of an idiot, dreaming on a garbage heap. Moreover, Asturias artistically emphasizes the philosophical nature of this message by interjecting it in that suspended moment, outside of time, when the idiot's brain is leaping from a state of agony to a state of ecstasy.

Note: Whenever reference is made to the term, "thematic metaphor," it implicitly connotes this dominant theme of a contrastive duality of life, a twofold truth.
La dicha no sabe a carne. Junto a ellos bajaba a besar la tierra la sombra de un pino, fresca como un río. Y cantaba en el pino un pájaro que a la vez que pájaro era campanita de oro:

—¡Soy la Manzana-Rosa del Ave del Paraíso, soy la vida, la mitad de mi cuerpo es mentira y la mitad es verdad; soy rosa y soy manzana, soy a todos un ojo de vidrio y un ojo de verdad: Los que ven con mi ojo de vidrio ven porque sueñan, los que ven con mi ojo de verdad ven porque miran! ¡Soy la vida, la Manzana-Rosa del Ave de Paraíso; soy la mentira de todas las cosas reales, la realidad de todas las ficciones!  

Asturias implies that the "Ave de Paraíso" is indeed life itself. The "Manzana-Rosa," through its biblical connotations, may well represent the two sides of life: evil (apple--forbidden fruit; serpent--evil) versus good (rose--Garden of Eden; God--good), or hell versus heaven--both realms of the total reality whether they be physical or mental concepts. Although the dual nature of this thematic metaphor is reflected in all aspects of life (as will be pointed out), it is particularly evident in the characters themselves. Miguel (like unto God) Casa de Ángel ("Era bello y malo como Satán") represents, as does the Bird of Paradise, the totality of life. He possesses the potential for good and for evil. The President may well symbolize eternal evil (particularly in his connection with Tohil, the god of fire). Camilia epitomizes goodness and love ("en ese momento salió una señorita de la casa del general, como llovida del cielo"). (SP, p. 39)

There can be no doubt that Asturias is saying that each human being has the capacity and the responsibility to distinguish good from

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14 Miguel Ángel Asturias, El Señor Presidente (Buenos Aires, 1948), p. 24. Hereafter cited as SP.
evil. To every man life gives un ojo de vidrio y un ojo de verdad. Because things are not always what they seem, one must not automatically conclude that an "eye of truth" invariably reflects truth; Asturias specifically warns that in every truth there is a lie (soy la mentira de todas las cosas reales), and that in every lie there is truth (la realidad de todas las ficciones). Thus there remains the dilemma of distinguishing between inner reality and external appearance, and of separating the two, if indeed they can ever be separated. The possible solution lies in the following: "... doy a todos un ojo de vidrio y un ojo de verdad: los que ven con mi ojo de vidrio ven porque suenan, los que ven con mi ojo de verdad ven porque miran!" Logically, it would appear that those who "see" truth must indeed see because they are consciously looking with a "real eye" (ojo de verdad); while those who see with a false eye (ojo de vidrio) must see only illusions--fictions, dreams--which exist in an imaginary subconscious realm. The question of which eye will serve as the instrument of revelation remains. And the answer emphatically denies reason and logic, for no amount of rationalization can capture the essence of human agony--particularly the tragic and grotesque moments. The answer must irrevocably be el ojo de vidrio. The false eye shows truth through a surrealistic dream world, unfettered by conditioned reflexes, freed from the boundaries of rationalization and intellectualism.

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15 One is vividly reminded of Unamuno's anguish as he wrestled with the problem of faith versus reason. See El Sentimiento, Trágico de la vida.
The symbols of the rose, the apple (fruit), the bird, the river, the bell, and the glass eye are continuously interpolated into both the esaperpentic world where they are perceived as pure phenomena and in the dream world where they assume their essential authenticity.

In this thematic metaphor, the intrinsic duality of life is presented as a static, fixed philosophical truth, but life itself departs from static truth. What makes life fascinating is that it becomes a drama as each man decides to live it. Life, then, is a kinetic process, a dynamic flow of choice and result, subject always to this fixed truth. This whole process—which is life—is represented in this thematic metaphor through concrete symbols (representing abstract truths and the duality of life); it is perceived in the esaperpentic world through grotesque and absurd events; and it is experienced in the dream world through an intuitive awareness of the tragic essence of that absurdity.

What Asturias shows is that man must make a choice. Even when he decides not to choose, and allows himself to live a life of conditioned responses, yet this is a choice, his own decision, and he alone must be responsible.

In summary then, Valle Inclán and Asturias each project a beautifully conceived artistic world. In the former's, reality is an absolute:

Max. --La tragedia nuestra no es tragedia.

Don Latino. --¡Pues algo será!

Max. --El Esperpento. (Luces, Scene 12)

This reality is systematically stylized with a mathematical formula which never deviates. Just as the concave mirror automatically distorts man's
corporeal appearance, so does Valle Inclán systematically distort man's moral condition. He artistically creates a static, antipathetic, objective reality whose intent is to show, through a grotesque picture of tyranny, the inner absurdity—the tragedy—of the Hispanic condition.

In contrast, Asturias's world is a dualistic one. It operates on two different levels of reality: the conscious and emotional; the subconscious and intuitive. It is an ambivalent and antithetical world, composed of two realities constantly reacting to and interacting with each other. Hence, while the stylized, grotesque world depicts the apparent reality (consciously acting), the dream world probes the inner reality (unconsciously reacting). Thus, the reader is simultaneously aware of conscious and subconscious thought juxtaposed against each other, and at the same time reflecting the contrastive duality symbolized in the thematic metaphor.

The total reality then is dynamically conceived with espermentic and surrealistic imagery. Asturias creates a chaotic, sympathetic, and subjective reality, perceived emotionally and intuitively, whose purpose is to show, through an incredibly grotesque picture of tyranny, the tragic and absurd condition of humanity. To perceive it in its essence, we must look through our false eye; we must see a false society, and there in the lie we must discover the truth.
CHAPTER II

THE ARTISTIC DEFORMATION OF REALITY

The Dehumanization of Reality

The world of Tiro no Barabasa and that of Il Señor Presidente have been described asesperpentically stylized and artistically dehumanized, in that each departs from nature's patterns. In a general sense, however, "dehumanize" means divest of human qualities. To create a grotesque world, Valle Inclan and Asturias use this general dehumanization process in the following ways:

1. They juxtapose against the "human" world an animal kingdom.
2. They impart, through artistic devices, bestial qualities or mannerisms to the human characters, or they simply describe people, plants or objects as animals.
3. They depersonalize society by portraying men as puppets. Valle Inclan also refers to people as collective entities and as masks.
4. Asturias heightens the loss of the human element by humanizing the inanimate and personifying nature. Valle Inclan does not do this to any significant extent.
5. They reduce the human figure or human events to abstract ideas.

Ultimately, both hope to show two things: first, that a world inhabited by beasts is a physical and spiritual jungle, operating by jungle law; second, that human beings, devoid of rationality and spirituality (the factors distinguishing man from beast), are absurd, tragic,
and therefore dehumanized figures.

In Tirano Banderas and El Señor Presidente, a world of animals serves as a presentiment of danger and death. In addition, this world complements and provides a fitting background for the inhuman or bestial acts of men. Neither nature itself, nor its creatures, is ever intended to be a protagonist. They function rather as an artistic device. The animals, presented singly or in small groups, call to mind only the beast itself in Tirano Banderas rather than the idea of bestiality.

Valle Inclán portrays this world as a static dimension. By depicting all animal activity as remote and restrained—as if passing by in slow motion—he creates an aura of uneasy calm, a passive realm where life is recorded, never experienced.

We see Valle Inclán's artistry at work in the following description of the home and land of Zacarias.

Algunos caballos mordían la hierba a lo largo de la acequias. Zacarías trabajaba el barro, estilizando las funebres bichas de chiromayos y chiromecas... Hosaban los marranos en el cenagal... Taciturno bajo una nube de moscas, miraba de largo en largo el bejucal donde había un caballo muerto. El Cruzado [Zacarías] no estaba libre de recelos: Aquel zopilote que se había metido en el techado, azolándole con negro aleote, era un mal presagio... Y recordó que la chinita... tenía descubierta una salamandra bajo el metate de las tortillas... El alfarero movía los pinceles con lenta miúcia, cautivo en un dual contradictorio de acciones y pensamientos. (TB, pp. 67-68)

This still scene exudes a restrained apprehensiveness. The mere mention of the lone vulture and the hidden salamander points to impending doom.

So skillfully and smoothly does Valle Inclán weave the animal world into the world of men that one is hardly aware of its effect or intention. In the following, the implication and the aura of the non-human is...
El Jardín de los Frailes, geométrica ruina de cactus y laureles, gozaba la vista del mar. Por las mornas tapías corrían amarillos lagartillos: En aquel paraje estaba el juego de la rana, ya crepuscular, recién pintado de verde. El Tirano, todas las tardes esparcía su tedio en este divertimiento... Un vaho pesado, calor y catínga, anunciaba la proximidad de la manigua, donde el crepusculo enciende, con las estrellas, los ojos de los jaguares. (TB, p. 27)

El Recamara Verde, iluminada con altarete de luces aceiteras y cerillos, atendía, apagando un cuchicheo, la pareja encuerada del pecado. Llegaba el romance prendido al son de la guitarra. En el altarete, las mariposas de aceite cuchicheaban y los amantes en el cabezal. (TB, p. 55)

By likening the lovers to butterflies, Valle Inclán has identified their act for what it is: a reflex action lacking passion, love and emotion.

In the Fuerte de Santa Mónica, a "theatrical castle,

Un viejo, sentado sobre el cantil frente al mar inmenso, ponía remiendos a la frazada de su camastro. En el más erguido baluarte cazaba lagartijas un gato, y pelotones de soldados hacían ejercicios en Punta Serpiente. (TB, p. 104)

El tumbo del mar batía la muralla, y el oboe de las alas cantaba el triunfo de la muerte. Los pájaros negros hacían círculos en el remoto azul... (TB, p. 106)

The animal world, remote and passive, is etched in bas-relief upon the human world. Although its influence is powerful, its role is confined to subtle inference rather than direct assertion.

In contrast, Asturias's animal world is a kinetic one. It overwhelms and oppresses through frenetic enumeration and exaggeration. Here all manner of animal life, whirling, stalking, crawling, creeping and slithering, relentlessly converge upon the reader until he feels distraught, frenzied and bewildered himself. Placed within the framework
of an urban society, animals symbolize all that is bestial and irrational in that society. Of particular importance is the powerful imagery of the predator and its prey, creature stalking creature. Nature and its creatures are always on the move, trying frantically to escape. This is a world that tears at our emotions and claws at our sensibilities. A series of quotations illustrates the emotional impact of this world.

Por el suelo, un pueblo de hormigas se llevaba una cucaracha muerta. Niña Fedina, bajo la impresión de los dibujos, creyó ver un sexo arrastrado por su propio vello hacia las camas del vicio. (SP, p. 109)

Cubrían el basurero telarañas de árboles secos vestidos de zapilotes, aves negras, sus ojos azulencos, echaron pie a tierra al verle inerte y lo rodearon a saltitos, brinco va y brinco viene, en danza macabra de ave de rapina. Sin dejar de mirar a todos lados, apachurrándose e intentando el vuelo al menor movimiento de las hojas o del viento en la basura, brinco va y brinco viene, fueron cerrando el círculo hasta tenerlo a distancia del pico. Un graznido feroz dio la señal de ataque. El Pelele desperto de pie, defendiéndose ya... Uno de los más astutos le había clavado el pico en el labio superior, enterrándolos, como un dardo, hasta los dientes, mientras los otros carniceros le disputaban los ojos y el corazón a picotazos. El que le tenía por el labio forcejeaba por arrancar el pedazo, sin importarle que la presa estuviera viva, y lo habría conseguido de no rodar el Pelele por un despenadero de basuras, al ir reculando, entre nubes de polvo y desperdicios que se desplomaban en bloque como costas. (SP, p. 19)

De islo en islo saltaba el contrabandista y el general, los dos pistola en mano, sin pronunciar palabra. Sus sombras los perseguían como lagartos. Los lagartos como sus sombras. Nubes de insectos los pinchaban... Largas babosidades de pulpo colmipaba el paxte sobre sus cabezas como postrera señal de vida. Ni las fieras se atrevían por donde ellos pasaban. Canales volvían la cabeza a todos lados, perdido en medio de aquella naturaleza fatídica, insoportable y destructora como el alma de su raza. Un lagarto, que sin duda había probado carne humana, atacó al contrabandista...

.......

sobre las selvas, pasaban las nubes con forma de lagarto llevando en los lomos tesoros de luz. (SP, pp. 195-96)
This imagery, though frightening and terrible in itself, is a prelude to the incredible bestiality of men. Man, as the beast, far surpasses the beast itself.

In addition to the world of animals, each writer effectively uses animal imagery: Valle Inclán to dehumanize his characters, Asturias to endow his with bestial qualities. Each produces these conclusions in a different way. Valle Inclán appeals to reason. At times, men or events become reduced to abstractions. Asturias gives no time for reasoning. We are to be completely caught up in the experience itself.

The following scene from Tirano Banderas is intriguing. The lap-dog, in its open hostility toward Don Celes, expresses the inner sentiments of his master, the minister of Spain. At the same time, the hypocritical minister, by his mannerisms and attitudes, takes on the qualities of a wild dog.

---Señor Ministro, sí interrumpo, me retiro.
---Pase usted, ilustre Don Celestino.
El faldero dio un labrido, y el carcamal diplomático rasgando la boca, le tiro de una oreja.
---¡Calla, Merlin! Don Celes, tan contadas son sus visitas, que ya le desconoce el Primer Secretario.

El carcamal diplomático esparcía sobre la fatigada cresitud de sus labios una sonrisa lenta y maligna, abobada y amable. Pero Don Celes miraba a Merlin, y Merlin le enseñaba los dientes a Don Celes. El Ministro de Su Majestad Católica, distraído, evanescente, ambiguo, prolongaba la sonrisa con una elasticidad inverosímil, como las diplomacias neutrales en año de guerras. Don Celes experimentaba una angustia pueril entre la mueca del carcamal y el hocico aguzado del faldero. Con su gesto adulador y pedante, lleno de pomposo afecto, se inclinó hacia Merlín:

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The minister also reflects Valle Inclán’s scorn and hostility toward an effeminate, degenerate Spain mesmerized into apathy by past glories.
The conversation between the two men (and the lap-dog) eventually centers on the issue at hand: politics and the flow of Spanish capital. It continues thus:

El Barón de Benicarlés, con una punta de ironía en el azul desvaiado de los ojos, y las manos de odalisca entre las sedas del faldero, diluía un gesto displicente sobre la boca belfona, untada de fatiga viciosa:

--¿Merlín, ten formalidad!
--¡Me ha declarado la guerra! (TB, pp. 23-24)

The passage is pregnant with innuendo. The lap-dog is "humanized" first by being named Merlin, not a typical Spanish name; Valle Inclán must have had something specific in mind. This name has two connotations. First, a "merlin" is a small falcon which lives in Europe and preys on small birds. Second, it reminds one of the magician, Merlin, advisor to King Arthur. In addition, the minister refers to the dog as the First Secretary, a very high office for a dog. Later, Don Celestino wants to know if the "First Secretary" is to be inherited with the post.

In this passage, the minister is dehumanized. By the use of such adjectives as "abobada" and "belfona," Valle Inclán depicts the diplomat as vain and foolist. There is an eerie affinity between this man and
his dog. The relationship between them is implicit in the use of the word "hocico." The Minister is described as having thick, fat lips (fatigada crasitud de sus labios). "Hocico" means not only the nose of a beast, but can also mean the mouth of a man with prominent lips. In addition, however, whenever the minister exhibits his slow, malignant smile, the dog at the same time bares his fangs. Thus, Valle Inclán says much without explicitly saying anything. Through the dog's actions, he exteriorizes the feelings of the minister. Not only is the insincerity of that official revealed through the dog, but also the wolf-like qualities of this beast are transferred to the Minister.

Valle Inclán directs his scorn at all levels of society. Ceaselessly and indefatigably, he dehumanizes with vivid animal imagery all who inhabit his fictional world. In the following illustrations, often through metaphor and simile, Valle Inclán portrays man in the beast's image.

El Coronelito . . . Escapa gateando. A Nachito, que asoma timorato la alcuza llorona, se le arruga completamente la cara: --¡Hay que ser gato! (TB, pp. 63-64)

In response to the declarations of loyalty and fidelity by Gándara, Filomeno Cuevas cunningly smiles.

Era endrino y aguileno. Los dientes alobados, retinto de mos-tacho y entrecejo . . . (TB, p. 81)

Cuevas exhibits not only the physical characteristics of the eagle and the wolf, but their traits as well.

The "ratonera," the local bordello, is run by a madam called Cucarachita. One of its clients is the mayor del Valle, who "se mesaba
la barba chivona" (TB, p. 64). The animal spectrum so far includes eagle, wolf, cockroach, goat, rat trap. Thus, it is not difficult to see how, after successive images of this sort, one can logically reach the intended conclusion: human beings who reflect beastly qualities eventually lose their human qualities. All levels of society are thus dehumanized:

Aquella india vieja ... Tenía esclava la sonrisa y los ojos oblicuos de serpiente sabia ... (TB, p. 23)

El Licienciado Carillo tendía la cola petulante ... (TB, p. 48)

Máster Contum alargó con un gesto desdénoso, su magro perfil de loro rubio ... (Emphases mine) (TB, p. 35)

Even the tyrant's own daughter does not escape Valle Inclán's concave mirror:

Tirano Bandera se acercó a la hija encamisada, que con el gesto obstinado de los locos, hundía las uñas en la greña y se agazapaba en un rincón, aullando ... (TB, p. 50)

Asturian dehumanizes men even more brutally. He transforms them not only into beasts, but into deformed beasts who epitomize all that is animalistic in men. This repugnant and perverted imagery stresses, not the loss of reason, but beastial madness itself. His personages become not only animals, but animalistic. He bombards with successive pictures of brutality and hideousness, until the total impression is bestiality without end. Such imagery is illustrated in the following samples:

Los pordioseros se encogieron como gusanos. (SP, p. 11)

Un gendarme ladino ... lo llevaban /Mosco, the legless and blind beggar/ de la mano, hamaqueándolo como a un mico. (SP, p. 12)

El Pelele engusanaba la calle de quejidos ... a veces sobre las manos, embrocado, dándose impulso con la punta de un pie,
raspando el vientre por las piedras, a veces sobre el muslo de la pierna buena, que encogía mientras adelantaba el brazo para darse empuje con el codo. . . . El Pelele tuvo miedo . . . con el ansia de las entrañas vivas en la lengua seca, gorda y reseca como pescado muerto . . . subió . . . a estirones de gato moribundo . . . (SP, p. 48)

Medio adormecido recordaba Cara de Ángel su visión. Entre los hombres de pantalón rojo, el Auditor, con cara de lechuza, esgrimía un anónimo, lo besaba, lo lamía, se lo comía, lo defecaba, se lo volvía a comer... (SP, p. 185)

Through such perverted pictures Asturias assaults the senses. One wonders if such madness is really possible. This entire world reacts and acts on instinct like beasts attuned to the instincts of predatoriness or of self-preservation.

To emphasize this bestial aura, Asturias animalizes the inanimate as well as the animate.

Del ropero se descolgó un levitón como ave de rapina. (SP, p. 32)

Adelante, calle arriba, se colaron en una cantina llamada "El Despertar del León." (SP, p. 45)

Las sombras, perseguidas por el cloror que iba subiendo, ganaban los muros paulatinamente como alacranes. (SP, p. 149)

Un foco rojo alumbraba la calle en la puerta de El Dulce Encanto. Parecía la pupila inflamada de una bestia. (SP, p. 152)

Through such animal imagery and analogy, Valle Inclán and Asturias destroy our idea of a human being. The former extracts from man his human identity, leaving him an empty shell. The latter imparts to him a bestial identity that smothers and kills all human essence.

Both further dehumanize man by portraying him as a physical, mental and moral puppet. This de-personalizes him, stripping him of his human identity. Valle Inclán in particular uses masque imagery and collective groups to further strip man of his individuality.
In *Tirano Banderas* the characters act and react with the mechanical staccato movements of marionettes. They are puppets, physically and mentally, manipulated by the grand puppeteer (himself the most puppet-like of all), Tirano Banderas. (See pp. 65-66) This outer automatism indicates an inner moral rigor mortis. The human being becomes a soulless entity, nothing more or less than a piece of carved wood.

Tu-Lag-Thi tenía la voz flaca, de pianillos desvencijados, y una movilidad rígida de muñeco automático, un accionar esquinado de resorte, una vida interior de alambre en espiral. Sonreía con su mueca amanerada y oscura . . . (TB, p. 145)

El Cabo de Vara, en el sombrizo de la puerta, hacía sonar la pretina de sus llaves: Era mulato, muy escueto, con automatismo de fantoche . . . (TB, p. 103)

Marco Aurelio sentía la humillación de su vivir, arremansado en la falda materna, absurdo, inconsciente como las actitudes de esos muñecos olvidados tras de los juegos . . . (TB, p. 106)

La momia se inclinó con rígida mesura, sesgando la plática . . . (TB, p. 46)

Valle Inclán refuses to allow man any degree of individuality or personal passion. Mestizo soldiers turn into "un grupo de uniformes" (TB, p. 18), faceless and nameless. The individuals of the "Colonia Española" always react in lock-step.

. . . se inclinaban en hileras ante la momia taciturna con la verde salivilla en el canto de los labios. (TB, p. 17)

La fila de gachupines asintió con murmullos. (TB, p. 17)

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17Cf. the unit of gendarmes who carried out the execution at the Club Harris. This scene is reminiscent of Goya's "El dos de mayo." Here also, the executioners, their faces covered with black hoods, portray a collective entity. Group action denies personal identity and rejects personal responsibility.
Se descompuso la ringle de gachupines... Las manos, enguantadas y torpues, se movieron indecisias, sin saber dónde posarse. En un tacito acuerdo, los gachupines jugaron con las brasílenas leontinas de sus relojes. (TB, p. 17)

Y la ringle de gachupines balanceaba un murmullo, señalando su aduladora disidencia.18 (TB, p. 18)

The lowly Indians are pictured as things instead of men: "Las graderías de indios ensabanados se movían en oladas" (TB, p. 41). Human prisoners, each with his individual agony and despair, are merely "sombras taciturnas" (TB, p. 66). Through masque imagery, Valle Inclán takes away man's own face and replaces it with a mask. Moreover, he conditions the reader to think of people not as the man or the woman, but simply as a symbol, a mask. Zacariás, when he realizes the horrible mutilation of his child, never reveals any human emotion. The scene merely ends. Next we see him as he lifts the metate and finds the pawn ticket for his wife's ring. On his way to the pawnshop, with the remains of his child slung over his shoulder, the Indian wears his enigmatic, expressionless mask, which hides his personal agony but reveals an abstract idea of agony, which surpasses individual torment:

Inmóvil el gesto de su máscara verdina, huráno y entenebrecido, con taladro doloroso en las sienes, metióse en las grescas y voces del real, que juntaba la feria de caballos. (TB, p. 94)

Valle Inclán's man has been stripped of all human identity. He is absurd, nameless, faceless, emotionless, and soulless--a completely dehumanized thing. Valle Inclán's world, by sealing itself off from human

18 In Valle Inclán's Sonata de primavera, this impression of collective entities is evident in the actions of María Rosario's sisters who usually act and react in complete unison.
considerations, has become an esperpentic absurdity.

In Asturias's work the puppet world is far more complex. Asturias creates two puppet dimensions which provide a finely balanced counterpoint. On the one hand, there is the grand puppet-master, the President, who manipulates members of a society allowed to exist only so long as they remain puppets. And the only way they can conform is by becoming deformed. They become mechanical men swinging crazily on the ends of the puppet-master's strings. But "mechanical man" is a contradiction in terms, for man supposedly has a heart, a soul and conscience. When man rebels against what he is, he becomes a machine gone berserk, programmed to laugh when he should cry. Such men are puppets, not so much in their movements as in their deeds.

Within this society, however, there is a "real" puppet-master: el titiritero del Portal. Asturias so unobtrusively weaves him into the fabric of society that he almost slips by, as just another of the President's puppets. Nevertheless, it is through this puppet-master's marionette show that we realize the tragic absurdity of his society. The only "persons" able to cry at the grief of others are the little cardboard puppets of Don Benjamin, the absurd little puppet-maker. We first meet him peering out into the street from his doorway where four drunken men are carrying the Pelalet's dead body.

Don Benjamín no medía un metro; era delgado y velludo como murciélago y estaba aliviado si quería ver en lo que pasaba aquel grupo de gentes y gendarmes a espaldas de dona Veniamín, dama de puerta mayor . . .

--Pero solo vos quieres ver... --se atrevió don Benjamín con la esperanza de salir de aquel eclipse total.
Al decir así, como si hubiera dicho; abrete, perejil!, giró doña Venjamón como una montaña, y se le vino encima.

—¡En prenda te cargo, chu-malía!—le gritó. Y alzándolo del suelo lo sacó a la puerta como un niño en brazos.

El titiritero escurrrió verde, morado, anaranjado, de todos colores. A lo lejos, mientras él pateaba sobre el vientre o cofre de su esposa, cuatro hombres borrachos cruzaban la plaza llevando en una camilla el cuerpo del Pelele... (SP, p. 54)

Pero su teatro de títeres salió ganancioso de aquel lance singular. Los muñecos se aventuraron por los terrenos de la tragedia, con el llanto goteados de sus ojos de cartón-piedra, mediante un sistema de tubitos que alimentaban con una jeringa de lavativa metida en una palangana de agua. Sus títeres sólo habían reído y si alguna vez lloraron fue con muecas risueñas, sin la elocuencia del llanto, corriendoles por las mejillas y anegando el piso del tabladillo de las alegres farsas con verdaderos ríos de lágrimas.

Don Benjamín creyó que los niños llorarían con aquellas comedias picadas de un sentido de pena y su sorpresa no tuvo límites cuando vio reír con más ganas, a mandíbula batiente, con más alegría que antes. Los niños reían de ver llorar... Los niños reían de ver pegar... (SP, pp. 54-55)

This mystified the simple puppet-master for it did not make sense that children—especially children—should find his little tragedy comical. And not understanding at all, he concludes:

—¡Ilógico! ¡Ilógico!...
—¡Lógico! ¡Relógico!—le contradecía doña Venjamón.
—¡Ilógico! ¡Ilógico! ¡Ilógico!¡Ilógico!
—¡Relógico! ¡Relógico! ¡Relógico!
—No entremos en razones! —proponía don Benjamín.
—No entremos en razones! —aceptaba ella...
—Pero es ilógico...
—¡Relógico, vaya! ¡Relógico, recentralógico!
Cuando doña Venjamón la tenía con su marido iba agregando alabas a las palabras, como válvulas de escape para no estallar.
—¡Ilolololológico! —gritaba el titiritero a punto de arrancarse los pelos de la rabia...
—¡Relógico! ¡Relógico! ¡Recontralogico! ¡Requtecontrarrelógico!
Lo uno o lo otro, lo cierto es que en el teatrillo del titiritero del Portal funcionó por mucho tiempo aquel chisme de lavativa que hacía llorar a los muñecos para divertir a los niños. (SP, p. 55)

This seemingly ridiculous conversation is more revealing than it appears. It has been stated that an esperpentic world is absurd and
therefore illogical. The puppet-master merely confirms the absurdity. The irony lies in the fact that he, a mere puppet himself, should be the only one to recognize it. On a different level, two opposing worlds are implied: the logical and the illogical. These may be but different extensions of the Rose-Apple, the Bird of Paradise. The most striking analogy is between the marionette show where cardboard puppets cry to make children laugh, and the esperpentic drama where human puppets laugh with hysteria at the tragic comedy of life.

In the chapter entitled "Casa de mujeres malas" is a perfect example of the kind of tragicomic situations that abound throughout the work:

Un ferrocarril de gritos pasó corriendo. Bajo sus ruedas triturantes, entre sus ámboles y piñones, se revolcaba una mujer ebria, blanda, livida, color de afrecho, apretándose las manos en las ingles, despintándose las mejillas y la boca con el llanto. ---Aj, mis o... vaaaaARios! /Ay mis ovAAArios! /Ay, mis o... vaaaaAAAARios! /Mis ovarios! /Ay... mis ovarios! /Ay...!

Sólo los borrachos no se acercaron al grupo de los que corrían a ver que pasaba. En la confusión, los casados preguntaban si estaba herida para marcharse antes que entrara la policía, y los demás, tomando las cosas menos a la tremenda, corrían de un punto a otro por el gusto de dar contra los compañeros. Cada vez era más grande el grupo alrededor de la mujer, que se sacudía interminablemente con los ojos en blanco y la lengua fuera. En lo agudo de la crisis se le escapó la dentadura postiza. Fue el delirio, la locura entre los espectadores. Una sola carcajada saludó el rápido deslizarse de los dientes por el piso de cemento. (SP, pp. 162-63)

The real point that Asturias makes is that these people, no matter how tragic they may be, are not allowed the dignity of appearing so.

The puppet worlds imply two things. First, there are two puppet-masters, both of whom are puppets themselves. Second, man is absurd precisely because he is a puppet. Occasionally, as if to remind us of man's
puppet-like nature, Asturias refers to his characters as grotesque puppets. He particularly reserves the staccato, jerky, automatic response for the most grand puppet-master, the President. And one may well wonder who controls him. (See p.677)

Both Valle Inclán and Asturias have their characters react like puppets to human tragedy and pathos. Asturias, however, goes one step further. He reverses the role of men and things. In fantastic metaphorical language is portrayed man's refusal to recognize or combat evil. Whenever one human being calls out to another for human compassion, the esperpentic man turns his back, as does God. The only forces that empathize with the human plea are things, which can neither hear nor feel. There are innumerable examples of this, but two in particular will suffice. When danger or death is imminent, society retreats, but things come forward. After the Pelele is senselessly destroyed by Vasquez, the entire human world, as if in unconscious agreement, remains silent. Its members neither see, hear, nor feel. A paralytic fear makes them impervious.

19 . . . para aumentar el escarnio era preciso que a los ojos del Señor Presidente cruzara la imagen de Cristo en agonía y pasó con los ojos nublados bajo un palio de oro que era infamia, entre filas de monigotes, al redoble de músicas paganas. (SP, p. 217)

20 There is one exception to this statement which is discussed on p. 59.

21 As the Pelele rolls down the steps of the Cathedral Porch, a saint watching from a window perfunctorily gives him absolution. At first glance, it appears that the Pelele has received divine salvation. In reality, if one understands Asturias's condemnation of formal religion, the priest's blessing is absurd and meaningless, for it does not fulfill any human need. It merely fulfills the Church's need to seem a saving force. See p. 81 for other examples.
Otro disparo puso fin a la obra. Los turcos se encogieron entre dos detonaciones. Y nadie vio nada... (SF, p. 51)

The inanimate "world," however, reacts with quivering emotion:

A las detonaciones y alaridos del Palele, a la fuga de Vásquez y su amigo, mal vestidas de luna corrian las calles por las calles sin saber bien lo que había sucedido y los árboles de la plaza se tronaban los dedos en la pena de no poder decir con el viento, por los hilos telefónicos, lo que acababa de pasar. Las calles asomaban a las esquinas preguntándose por el lugar del crimen y, como desorientadas, unas corrían hacia los barrios céntricos y otras hacia los arrabales. (SP, p. 52)

Por el Palele lloraban los mingitorios públicos. (SF, p. 54)

In the following, the higher echelons of society also meet the same total negation. General Canales's daughter, Camila, finds that her uncle and aunt not only refuse to admit her into their home (because she has fallen into the President's disfavor), but also seem to want to forget that she exists. Even their dog, Ruby, through his ferocious and vicious barking, echoes this complete alienation. After frantic but fruitless knocking, Camila realizes that she has been completely abandoned by those she depended upon to save her. Later, ill and delirious, she fitfully dreams about the incident. It is in her nightmares that the depth of her terror and her need is revealed. Whereas in the original incident only her controlled and conscious despair is shown, in the dream the uncontrolled, subconscious essence of that despair is heightened as the house and its objects try vainly to open the door.

... Tan... tan... tan... Tambor de la casa... Cada casa tiene su puertambor para llamar a la gente que la vive y que cuando está cerrada es como si la viviera muerta... a tan de la casa... puerta... n tan de la casa... El agua de la pila se torna toda ojos cuando oye sonar el puertambor y decir a las criadas con tonedita: "/A-y tocan!", y repelarse las paredes de los aros que van repitiendo: "/A-y tocan, vayana-brirrr!" "/A-y tocan, vayana-brirrr!", y la
ceniza se inquieta, sin poder hacer nada frente al gato, su centinela de vista, con un escalofrío blando tras la cárcel de las parriñas, y se alarman las rosas, víctimas inocentes de intransigencia de las espinas, y los espejos, absortos medios que por el alma de los muebles muertos dicen con voz muy viva: "¡Ay tocan, vanabrir!"

La casa entera quiere salir en un temblor de cuerpo como cuando tiembla, a ver quién está toca que toca el puertambor; las cacerolas caracolando, los floreros con peso de lana, las palanganas ¡palangan! ¡palangan!, los platos con tos de china, las tazas, los cubiertos regados como una risa de plata alemana, las botellas vacías precedidas de la botella condecorada de lágrimas de sebo que sirve y no sirve de candeler en el último cuarto, los libros de oraciones, los ramos benditos que cuando tocan creen defender la casa contra la tempestad, las tijeras, las caracolas, los retratos, el pelo viejo, las aceiteras, las cajas de cartón, los fósforos, los clavos...

...Sólo sus oídos fingen dormir entre las despiertas cosas inanimadas... (SP, p. 179)

Besides humanizing the inanimate, Asturias also personifies nature, so that it becomes a force that both empathizes with mankind and protests the disruption of harmony, for Nature adheres to a certain order. When the innate order in the world is threatened or disturbed, Nature feels her own order disrupted.

Whenever evil manifests itself, Nature reacts. She serves as a warning force; she interprets or she reflects man's inner feelings; she shows the compassion completely lacking in man. For example, Cara del Ángel's innermost thoughts are symbolically expressed through an analogy with Nature. He has felt a great anxiety. He cannot understand why he has hesitated to possess Camila's body by force. As the general's protector, this was his inherent right. But he now feels these "given rights" overshadowed by something more powerful, something unfathomable, ineffable. In the following metaphorical analogy is sensed a new vital kind of birth.
Un viento extrañamente corría por la planicie de su silencio. Una vegetación salvaje alzaba su sed de sus pestañas, con esa sed de los cactus espinosos, con esa sed de los árboles que no mitiga el agua del cielo. ¿Por qué será así el deseo? ¿Por qué los árboles bajo la lluvia tienen sed? (SP, p. 71)

Cara del Ángel's sexual thirst can be assuaged, but he senses that there is something more. That something is love.

After the Pelele's murder, the wind, in mourning with the grieving streets, instinctively protests man's inhumanity to man.

Una confusa palpitación de sien herida por los disparos tenía el viento, que no lograba arrancar a soplos las ideas fijas de las hojas de la cabeza de los árboles. (SP, p. 52)

Deep within a prison cell, a somber voice predicts man's doom, as foretold in the deterioration and decay of nature. When the bloom of humanity dies in man, nature too reflects that decay.

Las calles van a cerrarse un día de estos horrorizadas. Los árboles ya no frutecen como antes. El maíz ya no alimanta. El sueño ya no reposa. El agua ya no refresca. El aire se hace irrespirable. Las plagas suceden a las pestes, las pestes a las plagas, y ya no tarda un terremoto en acabar con todo. ¡Veanlo mis ojos, porque somos un pueblo maldito! (SP, pp. 201-02)

Finally, Nature affirms the truth of the thematic metaphor by reflecting the contrastive duality inherent in life itself, always a two-fold Truth.

El cielo parpadeaba sobre su eterna partida de ajedrez. (SP, p. 225)

Los pajaritos saludaban la aurora en los jardines de los parque públicos y en los del interior de las casas, los pequeños jardines de los patios. Un concierto celeste de músicas trémulas subía al azul divino del amanecer, mientras despertaban las rosas y mientras, por otro lado, el tanteo de las campanas, que daban los buenos días a Nuestro Señor... (SP, p. 129)

Amanecía...
Los zopilotes se disputaban el cadáver de un gato a picotazo limpio. Los perros perseguían a las Perras, jadeantes, con los ojos
enardecidos y la lengua fuera. Un perro pasaba renqueando, con la cola entre las piernas, y apenas si volvía a mirar, melancólico y medroso, para enseñar los dientes. A lo largo de puertas y muros dibujaban los canes las cataratas del Niágara. (SP, p. 130)

An Altered Perspective: The Conscious Awareness of the Grotesque

The grotesque deformation of the real world is produced by destroying the usual perspective with which we view that world. When these standards are distorted or destroyed, we feel disoriented, off balance, and out of tune. Moreover, we adjust more easily to new standards. One of the ways in which Valle Inclán achieves this disorientation is through incongruous and antithetical imagery. This peculiar type of imagery has a functional purpose in that it conditions the reader's perspective. Valle Inclán systematically undoes the word by distorting our logical and sensorial perceptions. 22 He makes the reader perceive in a new way in order to effect an insight not normally attained. Over and over, he uses such terminology as "una luz humorística" (p. 117), "una lógica absurda" (p. 132), "los poliedros del pensamiento" (p. 133), "el rejo maligno del Tirano" (p. 139), "una serpiente biomagnética" (p. 151), "Entre ángulos y roturas gramaticales" (p. 132), "la luna chocarrera y cacareante" (p. 51), "un piano hipocondríaco" (p. 53), "la luz lúvida" (p. 53), "un sinfónico fondo herético" (pp. 60-61), "casta pasión" (p. 53).

To understand such language, the reader must alter his normal

22 In Luces de Bohemia, Max Estrella remarks: "Latino, deformemos la expresión en el mismo espejo que nos deforma las caras y toda la vida miserable de España" (p. 107).
way of viewing reality. A particularly apt illustration is Vaguillas's description of Tirano Banderas as "un vice-versa magnético" (p. 124). Such imagery points out, through a mathematical and abstract principle, the repulsive character of the tyrant and, by analogy, of tyranny. A magnet, by traditional norms, attracts. A vice-versa magnet, by esperr- pentic norms, repels. In this way, Valle Inclán uses concrete imagery to represent abstract ideas.

Asturias is neither so technical nor so intellectual. He affirms the absurd and incongruous condition of society through metaphorical language, but he does not deform language itself, as does Valle Inclán. Instead of juxtaposing incongruous words, he contrasts antithetical images and ideas; for example, in the dream world of the idiot lies buried a cryptic statement on the human condition:

De espaldas se hizo al delirio sonando una campanilla. ¿Nieve para los moribundos! El nevero vende el viático! El cura vende nieve! ¿Nieve para los moribundos! Tilín, tilín! ¿Nieve para los moribundos! ¿Pasa el viático! Pasa el nevero! Quitate el sombrero, mudo baboso! ¿Nieve para los moribundos! (SP, p. 22)

Asturias is merely saying, in symbolic language, that the world is absurd. To survive in such a world, man thinks he must become an absurdity, himself. In order to understand reality in this new way, we must accept Asturias's definition and interpretation of that reality.

Both Valle Inclán and Asturias break down classical norms by destroying order and, with it, truth, morality and justice. When this is done, man seems to have no choice but to adapt to and accept the esper- pentic norms—or perish. In an absurd "conversation" between the impris-
destroys the attorney and, by analogy, the meaning of law itself. The reader, however, has been subtly pre-conditioned. Veguillas has been pictured as anything but a complete man. He has always exhibited some characteristic or mannerism typical of amphibians or birds. Such imagery leads to a fragmented and distorted picture of him:

El Licenciado Nacho Veguillas, sesga la boca y saca los ojos remedando el canto de la rana:
--¡Cuá! ¡Cuá! (TB, p. 48)

El Licenciado Nacho Veguillas, finchandose en el pando compas de las zancas, sacó el pecho y tendió el brazo en arenga...
(TB, p. 49)

Nacho Veguillas, sacando los ojos a flor de la cara, saltó en el alfombrín...
(TB, p. 57)

Nacho Veguillas, con alegre transporte de botarate, saltó de cucas, remendando el canto de la rana...
Nacho Veguillas, muy festijado, a medio vestir, sueltó el chaleco... saltaba mimando el duó del sapo y la rana. (TB, p. 58)23

In the jail scene which follows, we witness the lawyer's total destruction and his grotesque reformation:

Entre la dobla fila de hamacas saltó, lloron y grotesco el Licenciado Veguillas:
--¡Cuá! ¡Cuá!
La momia remegió la boca,
Macaneador:
--¡Cuá! ¡Cuá!
--No seas payaso.
--¡Cuá! ¡Cuá!
--Que no me diviertes horita esa bufonada.
--¡Cuá! ¡Cuá!
--Tendré que apartarle con la punta de la bota.
--¡Cuá! ¡Cuá! (TB, p. 124)

23 Note again the reference to the mating call and, by implication, the subsequent act of procreation itself, devoid of any human quality.
The deformation has affected the human image in three ways. First, Veguillas in his social function as a lawyer has been transformed into a frog. Consequently, he is completely depersonalized and deprived of intellect, reason, and human dignity. Next, his ethical code, the law (reason, logic, and rhetoric) has been reduced to an empty croak. Finally, mankind itself is stripped completely of human worth, reduced to a complete and grotesque absurdity. As if sensing this new realm of the absurd, Veguillas at one point before his arrest and imprisonment says to the student: "Aquí estoy, noble joven. Solamente pido para serenarme un trago de agua. Todo es un sueño" (TB, p. 65). Thus, the new law and order is the tyrant, a deformation himself. "... la más sólida garantía del orden es todavía Don Santos Banderas" (TB, p. 25).

Asturias reduces law to a macabre farce, leaving it devoid of dignity, logic, and strength. At the same time, he so deforms justice that it is beyond recognition. The lawyer Abel Carvajal is unjustly accused of the murder of José Parrales Sonriente, the President's dearest friend. He is promptly arrested and thrown into a dark, dank subterranean cell. Here he is given a ridiculously long indictment to read, except that it is much too long and the light growing much too dim. After an interminable and tormenting night of counting the yet unread ninety-one pages, of trying to read them anyway, of desperately feeling the print with his

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24 Veguillas's remark recalls Goya's Caprichos where grotesque deformity symbolizes the sleep of reason. In particular, Capricho 43, entitled "El sueño de la razón produce monstruos" shows this tragic condition. According to José López-Rey, "... such forms and attitudes are meant to expose man's departure from reason, the core of his very self." Goya's Caprichos (London, 1953), I, 83.
fingertips, of straining and hoping and praying, he is finally taken to the Central Prison. Here he is shoved into the chamber where the potentous Council of War is sitting.

"Pero, señor presidente! --Adelantése a decir Carvajal al general que presidía el consejo--. ¿Cómo podré defenderme, si ni siquiera me dieron tiempo para leer el proceso? --Nosotros no podemos hacer nada en eso-- contestó aquel--; los términos legales son cortos, las horas pasan y esto apura. Nos han citado para poner el "fierro." (SP, pp. 204-05)

Half a ritual, half a farce, what follows seems like a dream to the innocent Carvajal. Every detail of the trial appears to be in order, meticulously correct and proper. The tribunal table is covered by a flag, as prescribed by law. There is an array of military uniforms. The mechanical reading of the documents drones on endlessly. Last, the taking of the oaths is formally carried out. But concealed beneath this rigid order is the most flagrant disordering of law and justice. The witness stand is occupied by the beggars, the bestial dregs of society:

Patshuesca, con cara placentera de borracho, tioso, peinado, colochó, cholo, no perdía palabra de lo que leían ni gesto del Presidente de Tribunal. Salvador Tigre seguía el consejo con dignidad de gorila, escarbándose las narices aplastadas o los dientes granudos en la boca que le colgaba de las orejas. El Viuda, alto, huesudo, sinistre, torcía la cara con mueca de cadáver sonriendo a los miembros del Tribunal. Lulo, rollizo, arrugado, enano, con repentes de risa y de ira, de afecto y de odio, cerraba los ojos y se cubría las orejas para que supieran que no quería ver ni oír nada de lo que pasaba allí... Ricardo el Tocador hablaba a solas, fijos los ojos en el vientre abultado de la sordomuda que bababa las bancas y se rascaba los piojos del sobaco izquierdo. A la sordomuda seguía Pereque, un negro con sólo una oreja como bacchina. Y a Pereque, la Chica-Miona, flaquisima, tuerta, bigotuda y hediendo a colchon viejo. (SP, p. 205)

These are the witnesses sworn to tell the truth. The trial continues.

After the reading of the indictment, the Prosecutor demands the death sentence. Carvajal, his trained legal mind alert to every possibility, looks
at the members of the tribunal. He searches frantically for one sign of judgment or integrity, but to no avail. His eye takes in only disaster—a drunk, an inebriated officer, and the President, so intoxicated that he is on the verge of passing out. The sentence of course has been decided in advance, but, unable to believe this madness, a quivering Carvajal hoarsely demands an appeal:

... ¡Apelo de la sentencia! ¡Dejése de cuentos--respiro el Auditor--; aquí no hay pelo ni apelo, será matatusa! (SP, p. 206)

And with that capricious explanation, Carvajal's fate is forever sealed. As a lawyer and as a man, he will be completely destroyed by this new grotesque order.

The police entomb him in a subterranean dungeon three yards long by two and one half yards wide in which there are twelve other live corpses:

... inmóviles por falta de espacio, unos contra otros como sardinas, los cuales satisfacían de pie sus necesidades, pisando y repisando sus propios excrementos. Carvajal fue el número 13.

... La hedetina de los excrementos removidos y la falta de aire le hacían perder la cabeza y rodaba solo él, arrancado de aquel grupo de seres humanos, contando los gritos del emparedado, por despenaderos infernales de la desesperación. (SP, p. 207)

Carvajal's wife, after agonizing and fruitless efforts to have her husband released, is informed of his death in an anonymous letter, which reads in part:

Las víctimas se retorcían con los ojos cerrados, como queriendo huir a tientas de la muerte. Un velo de humo nos separaba de un puñado de hombres que al ir cayendo intentaban lo imposible por asirse unos con otros, para no rodar solos al vacío. Los tiros de gracia sonaron como revientan los cohetillos, mojados, tarde y mal. Su marido tuvo la dicha de morir a la primera descarga. (SP, p. 230)
Against this mad disordering of law, morality, and justice is juxtaposed a symbolic reminder of an innate harmony and order which is always possible, if man will only choose it. The anonymous correspondent, unaware of the true significance of what he is describing, writes:

Arriba se veía el cielo azul, inalcanzable, mezclado a un eco casi imperceptible de campanas, de pájaros, de ríos. (SP, p. 230)

In destroying Carvajal, the President has deformed the law. Order has become disorder. Law as we know it in this society is replaced by fortune, symbolized by the "lotería."

Although symbols from the thematic reality are an integral part of the dream world (discussed on pp. 45-61), they are also carefully interpolated into the daily life of the esperpentic society, where by their mere presence they subtly emphasize the contrastive duality of life. The following examples illustrate this:

Las toses de la fondora, para darles a entender que los dejaba a solas y sus improperios al encontrar a Vásquez completamente borracho tirado en el patiecito oloroso a rosas de cachirulo . . . (SP, p. 84)

--Te digo que dejes a ese animal si vas a salir --le gritó dona Judith desde el patio, donde podaba los rosalés aprovechando que ya había pasado la fuerza del sol. (SP, p. 106)

Camila, threatened by progressive anemia, tuberculosis, and madness, finally finds renewed life in the country, described with some of the same symbols of the thematic metaphor and in much the same language:

Por entre los pinos de sombracesmante, los árboles fruteros de la huertas y los de los campos más altos que las nubes, aclaró un día en la noche de su pena . . . (SP, p. 278)
Not only is the lottery the only law in the land, but its caprice is rigidly controlled by the President who, for all practical purposes, has become fortune and, by analogy, law itself.

Con decir que si no fuera por mi presidente, no existiría la fortuna ya que hasta de diosa ciega tengo que hacer en la lotería... (SP, p. 258)

Mr. Gengis, the American businessman, sums up the whole tragic demise of rational thought and moral conduct as he remarks, "Pero yo 'creo' que debe ser muy triste ser poeta; solo ser licenciado debe de ser la más triste cosa del mundo" (SP, p. 256).

With order destroyed, it is not difficult for Valle Inclan and Asturias to deform truth beyond recognition. They do so through an insidious conditioning process. The more these tragic puppets tell the truth, the more brutally they are punished. The more they spy, cheat, and lie, the more they are temporarily rewarded. In *Tirano Banderas*, after the pawnbroker has falsely informed on Zacarías's wife, his behavior is commended as exemplary by the police inspector:

En el casillero de sospechosos busque la ficha del pájaro. Señor Peredita, nos vemos. Muy meritoria su aportación! (TB, p. 85)

Later in this novel, this same pawnbroker attempts to cheat an old blind man and his granddaughter. He justifies his immorality with the following explanation:

--El deseo no basta, y debe ser acompañado de los hechos. Están ustedes muy atrasados. A mí me gusta atender las circunstancias de mis clientes, aun contrariando mis intereses: Esa ha sido mi norma y volverá a serlo, pero con la revolución, todos los negocios marchan torcidos. (TB, p. 73)

The Spanish colony, in order to assure their financial solidarity feel that "... en el inflexible cumplimiento de las leyes [deformadas]"
esta la única salvaguardia del orden y el florecimiento de la República" (TB, p. 17). In short, ethical order—law, truth, justice, morality are represented as disorder, while deformed law becomes the new order. Nachito Veguillas, the lawyer, sums up the entire absurd condition of a society which rationalizes its deformed conduct in order that evil appear good and chaos become order. "Muy triste morir inocente. Me condenan las apariencias!" (TB, p. 105)

In El Señor Presidente, a similar distortion of truth is effected. Beasts that they are, society is conditioned like Pavlov’s dog. When its members lie, they too are rewarded. When they tell the truth, they are inhumanly punished. Two examples are the legless and blind beggar (perhaps the only truly noble character since he refuses to accept the lie as the truth) and Fedina Rodas. The more the beggar, physically half a man, obeys the Judge Advocate’s command to tell the truth, the more enraged that official becomes:

--¡Diga la verdad! --grito el Auditor cuando restallaba el latigazo en las mejillas del viejo... ¡...La verdad o se está ahí colgado toda la noche!
--¡No ve que soy ciego?...
--Niegue entonces que fue el Pelele...
--¡No, porque esa es la verdad y tengo calzones!
Un latigazo doble le desangró los labios...
--¡Es ciego, pero oye; diga la verdad, declare como sus compañoses...
--De acuerdo --adujo el Mosco con la voz apagada; el Auditor creyó suya la partida--, de acuerdo, macho lerro, el Pelele fue...
--¡Imbecil!
El insulto del Auditor perdióse en los oídos de una mitad del hombre que ya no oiría más. Al soltar la cuerda, el cadáver del Mosco, es decir, el torax, porque le faltaban las dos piernas, cayó como plomo como péndulo roto.
--¡Viejo embustero, de nada había servido su declaración, por ora ciego! --exclamó el Auditor al pasar junto al cadáver. (SP, pp. 16-17)
In this society man is lost and alone. Irrevocably conditioned
to injustice as just, man eventually loses all sense of justice. One
such as this is "ese animal" condemned to torture and death by the Presi-
dent for overturning a bottle of ink on some official papers.

... pensando [ese animal] no como el resto de los mortales, que
aquel castigo era inicuo; por el contrario, que bueno estaba que
le pegaran para enseñarle a no ser torpe-- ¡y no poder gritar
para aliviarse! --, para enseñarle a hacer bien las cosas, y no
derramar la tinta sobre las notas --¡y no poder gritar para
aliviarse!... (SP, p. 35)

To produce this absurd world and establish its validity, Valle
Inclán and Asturias deliberately create scenes which shock our innate
sensibilities. In Tirano Banderas, this shock effect is conveyed
through both the depiction of horror and absurdity and the dispassion-
ate manner in which they are accepted by society. The realisation that
gross deformity has somehow become the norm produces an electrifying
impact. Two scenes in particular show this. In the first, Zacarias's
innocent baby is mutilated and devoured by pigs and vultures. When
the Indian returns home and finds his child strewn over the pig pen,
he methodically picks up the pieces and places them in a sack. Then he
sits down in the doorway of his hut, the sack between his feet, and
tries to fathom why. Meanwhile, the lizards unconcernedly bask them-
selves in the setting sun. The child, de-formed into its parts (head,
hands, heart, trunk), has been re-formed into a new image--a sack of
garbage. The whole senseless tragedy is accepted without a tear, with-
out a word.

Zacarías llega: Horrorizado y torvo, levanta un despojo san-
griento. Era cuanto encontraba de su chamaco! Los cerdos
habían devorado la cara y las manos del niño: Los zopilotes le habían sacado el corazón del pecho. El indio se volvió al chozo; Encerró en su saco aquellos restos, y con ellas a los pies, sentado a la puerta, se puso a cavilar. De tan quieto, las moscas le cubrirían y los lagartos tomarían el sol a su vera.

(TB, p. 92)

Later Zacarías carries out his bizarre revenge without any personal or outward display of emotion. That quality is inherent in the scene itself:

El Cruzado, con súbita violencia, rebota la montura, y el lazo de la reata cee sobre el cuello del espantado gachupín, que se desbarata abriendo los brazos. Fue un dislocarse aterrorizante de las figuras, al revolverse del guaco: Un desgarre simultáneo. Zacarías, en alborotada corveta, atropella y se mete por la calle, llevándose a rastras el cuerpo del gachupín . . . El jinete, tendido sobre el borreñ, con las espuelas en los ijares del caballo, sentía en la tensa reata el tirón del cuerpo que rebota en los guijarros. Y consuela su estoica tristeza indiana Zacarías el Cruzado. (TB, p. 99)

With this combination of senseless brutality and eerie calm in the face of unspeakable agony, Valle Inclán intends to completely disorient and shock our senses.

In another scene, which takes place in the bordello, prostitution becomes the accepted standard by which purity and chastity are judged, while religion is pictured as the handmaiden of immorality. (Indeed, the incongruous comparison of Lupita to Jarifa, an image of virtue and platonic love, is grotesquely ludicrous and completely absurd.)26 A brief description of the lovemaking between the prostitute, Lupita, la Romantica and her lover, Nachito Veguillas, will point this out.

26 The reference to the platonic image is implicit in the following passage from El Abencerraje y la hermosa Jarifa, edited by Francisco López Estrada (Madrid, 1965), p. 34. "Viva en las aguas de la fuente al propio como ella era, de suerte que donde quiere que volvió la cabeza, hallaba su imagen; y en mis entranas, la más verdadera."
--¡Ángel puro de amor, que amor inspira! ¡Yo te sacaré del abismo y redimiré tu alma virginal! ¡Taracena! ¡Taracena!

--Nachito, no seas sonso y déjame rezar este toque de ánimas.

--¡Béseame, Jarifa! ¡Béseame, impúdica, inocente! ¡Dame un osculo casto y virginal! ¡Caminaba solo por el desierto de la vida, y se me aparece un oasis de amor, donde reposar la frente! (TB, p. 60)

By comparison, Asturias's shock technique lacks the impassionate tone and the exquisite delicacy of Valle Inclán's portrayal. The shock effect in Asturias's work results from the immediate and horrifying impression of violent, crazed beasts who relentlessly stalk humanity. The description of Fedina Rodas's interrogation by the Auditor, shows the extent of this physical and mental degradation. The latter demands to know the whereabouts of General Canales, a political fugitive. Savoring each moment of his victim's agony, he viciously threatens to keep her from suckling her starving infant son if she does not tell him the "truth."

In the background can be heard the now weakening cries of the dying baby. But Fedina Rodas can do nothing, for she does not know where the general is. Desperate and bewildered, terrified for her child, she begs, implores, and beseeches the Auditor, but to no avail. She fervently calls on the Virgin but receives no answer. She is beside herself. The more she swears that she has told the truth, the more the Auditor screams at her like a demented animal, "¿Dónde está el general?" (SP, p. 116)

In comparison with the quiet inner pathos of Zacarías's tragedy, Fedina Rodas's torment overflows with emotion when she realizes her son is dead.

Su hijo había dejado de existir... Niña Fedina alzó el cadáver que pesaba como una cáscara seca ... Lo besaba. Se lo untaba. Mas pronto se puso de rodillas ...
Con la carita plegada como la piel de una cicatriz, dos círculos negros alrededor de los ojos y los labios terrosos, más que niño de meses parecía un feto en pañales. Lo arrebato sin demora de la claridad, apretujándolo contra sus senos pleatoricos de leche. Que-jábase de Dios en un lenguaje inarticulado de palabras amasadas con llanto; por ratitos se le paraba el corazón y como un hipo agónico, lamento tras lamento, balbucía: ¡hij!... ¡hij!... ¡hij!... ¡hij!... (SP, p. 148)

The grotesque descriptions of unbearable human agony and torment are repulsive and incredulous, but through them the full extent of man’s bestial metamorphosis is realized, for not even beasts display such insane madness—the lust to destroy for the joy of destruction. Moreover, one cannot help wondering why both man and God appear to have deserted man. The most shocking realization is that the Auditor has no intention of believing Fedina Rodas, for he thirsts for blood, not truth; he feeds on injustice, not justice. If he allows himself to believe Fedina Rodas’s story, he must give up his prey and, with it, his opportunity to destroy. It is this understanding, along with the total depravity, which causes a feeling of sickening disillusionment with men. It is the triumph of pure evil over love, the betrayal of humanity by man.

The mind tries desperately, but unsuccessfully, to escape the thought that human beings can really be like this. And yet, Asturias insists on the truth of his portrayal. The lawyer’s wife, in her despair, incredulously reaches the same conclusion:

27 When Fedina Rodas, begging to be allowed to suckle her baby, calls on the Virgen de Carmen, she is harshly told, "—¡Aquí no hay Virgenes del Carmen que valgan!" (SP, p. 116) In addition, even the divinity and sanctity of God is attacked by equating him with sexual symbolism. "Y se veían /en la pared de la celda de Fedina Rodas/ la palabra Dios junto a un falo un número 13 sobre un testículo monstruoso . . ." (SP, p. 109).
Once the monstrous truth about mankind is accepted, the responsibility for this monstrousness must also be accepted by man. Man feels his own guilty existence. In an esperpentic world, however, this sense of guilt is not often overtly manifested. If it appears at all, fear rapidly obliterates it.

**The Dream World: A Subconscious Experience of Reality**

Valle Inclán and Asturias, through a grotesque deformation of the real world, have shown society as it really is—absurd and tragic. This tragic factor, the one at the basis of their caricatural design, is the realization that the world as it appears to us—external reality—is just as absurd as the grotesque and preposterous representations these authors offer. This absurdity results from the ludicrous portrayal of the most respected features of our world, which makes it impossible to take seriously the original models of the esperpentic imitations.

Valle Inclán's portrayal is intended to be a synthetic one in which the subjective element is always revealed through an exterior manifestation. Nora refers to this artistic device as "una visión desde fuera" which he explains thus:

El moralista psicólogo dice: "En el fondo, somos esto y aquello." Valle, sin declararlo explícitamente siquiera, enseña: "En la
superficie, es decir, por lo que se ve y puede verse, somos eso: seres esesperpéticos." 28

Asturias, however, is not content merely to create esperpentic beings. He seeks, in addition, to illuminate their esperpentic tragedy by subjectivizing the external world. Where Valle Inclán systematically imposes order upon disorder (geometrica ruina), Asturias chaotically disorders reality by creating a surrealistc dream world. 29 This dream world is a subjective realm in which intuition, not reason, becomes the instrument of revelation. 30

According to Lemaitre, it is in the dream world that the unsuspected potentialities of our innermost being surge forth when in contact with the elemental forces of nature. In this subjective realm, man can return to his most spontaneous approach to life. He soon learns (as does Cara de Ángel) that there is no clear-cut separation between his imagination and his surroundings. In El Señor Presidente, the dream world always reflects some aspect of external reality, but in a disordered illogical fashion. 31 This is effected in several different ways. First, the

28 Nora, pp. 86-87.

29 Asturias, during his stay in Paris (1922-1927) not only met and counted as his personal friends many of the early Surrealist leaders (André Breton, Paul Eluard and Gertrude Stein), but also was himself involved in the early Surrealist movement. See the unpublished dissertation (University of Washington, 1965) by Ray A. Verzasconi, "Magical Realism and the Literary World of Miguel Ángel Asturias," p. 5.

30 Salvador Dali has openly advocated the adoption "of a delirious attitude of mine for our appraisal of the outside world." Cited in Lemaitre, p. 208.

31 The dream world, as used in this study, includes such forms of subconscious activity as dreams themselves, hallucinations, nightmares, and a type of "stream of consciousness" rumination.
dream world heightens reality by depicting past or future events in a strange and different context. Second, it interprets, symbolically, phenomena which seem meaningless or insignificant when viewed rationally. Third, it acts as a prophetic force. Fourth, it releases man's conscience from the inhibitions of fear and reason, revealing his innate sense of decency and his feelings of culpability. Fifth, it contrasts the falsity of the external world with truths revealed in the subconscious realm. In summary, the dream world is an instrument of revelation, a subjective, intuitive dimension which cannot be separated from the external world it illuminates.  

Moreover, woven into the fabric of these dreams are the symbolic allusions to Asturias's thematic metaphor, which recognizes man's potential for good or for evil. Furthermore, it insists that man is perfectly capable of and responsible for distinguishing between these two forces. To realize this capacity, he must do more than merely see with his real eye (reason) the surface reality; he must intuit with his false eye (dreams) the intrinsic meaning of that reality. These two realms are inextricably related to each other, and together represent both the conscious and the subconscious state of mind. ("Soy la mentira de todas las cosas reales, la realidad de todas las vicciones.") Only in his dreams, then, can man see the world and himself, not as they seem, but

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32 Although I am dealing now only with Asturias's novel, at the same time, I am also by implication showing what Valle Inclan did not do.
as they really are.33

It is not by accident that the idiot's dream is the first to be revealed. Perhaps it may be the most important one, for it gives an insight into those that follow. If we accept the theory that reason only hinders our intuitive perception, then the idiot's mentality should be the one most receptive to truth, for he is a creature devoid of intellect and unencumbered by reason. As an idiot (the lowest of the mentally deficient), his mind is closest to the childlike, innocent stage of life, where imagination and fantasy prevail. Asturias explicitly tells us that during the idiot's delirium, his mind hovers in a dimension somewhere

33 According to Lemaitre, Surrealists feel that the best time to grasp the meaning of our dreams is during the moments "when our spirit half awake, half asleep, is already liberated from the influence of outer contingencies and yet not completely sunk beyond the reach of our perceptive faculties into absolute darkness." The purpose of the Surrealist is to find the essence of live, divorced from reason and logic (p. 22; emphasis mine).

In addition, Surrealists stress that reason is the one thing that can not help them in their search for this higher reality (p. 188). Whether directly influenced or not by Surrealist thought and method, Asturias obviously is saying much the same thing in metaphorical language, and doing much the same thing by using the dream world as an interpretive instrument of his esperpentic society. This conclusion, although independently arrived at, is supported by the following evidence.

In a discussion of his latest novel, Mulata de tal, Asturias alludes to a surrealistic dream world and its counterpart, external reality:

Mi realismo es "mágico" [the reference is to Magical Realism] porque el revela un poco de sueno, tal como lo conciben los surrealistas. Tal como lo conciben también los mayas en sus textos sagrados. Leyendo estos últimos yo me he dado cuenta que existe una realidad palpable sobre la cual se injerta una otra realidad, creada por la imaginación, y que se envuelve de tantos detalles, que ella llega a ser tan "real" como la otra. Toda mi obra se desenvuelve entre estas dos realidades: La una social, política, popular, con personajes que hablan como habla el pueblo guatemalteco; la otra imaginaria, que les encierra en una especie de ambiente y de paisaje de ensueño." (Cited in Verzasconi's dissertation, p. 20)

Mr. Verzasconi advises that the above passage is an excerpt extracted from an article on magical realism by Asturias. For further discussion on magical realism, consult pp. 9-22 of Verzasconi's cited work.
between the conscious and the subconscious: even before his dream occurs, he is beginning to approach a realm divorced from commonplace reality. Terrorized by the cry, madre, he wildly races through the streets to any place and to no place:

Medio en la realidad, medio en el sueño, corría el Pelea
perseguido por los perros y por los clavos de una lluvia fina.
Corría sin rumbo fijo, despavorido, con la boca abierta, la lengua fuera, enflecada de mocos, la respiración acelerada y los brazos en alto. (SP, p. 19)

Lost in his own terror, he finally reaches the outskirts of town. He sinks down on the rubbish heap where his mind begins to conjure up fantastic, illogical imagery:

Las úlceras aceradas de la fiebre le aserraban la frente.
Disociación de ideas. Elasticidad del mundo en los espejos.
Desproporción fantástica. Huracán delirante. Fuga vertiginosa,
horizontal, vertical, oblicua, recien nacida y muerta en espiral...
...erre, erre, ere, ere, erre, erre, erre... (SP, p. 20)

As his mind wanders in this hallucinatory realm, the idiot is attacked and wounded by vultures. Seeking respite from the agonizing pain, he fitfully falls in and out of a delirious sleep. Again Asturias calls attention to this twilight zone between wakefulness and sleep:

...medio despertó, medio dormido, entre bocas grandes y pequeñas, con dientes y sin dientes, con labios y sin labios,
con labios dobles, con pelos, con lenguas dobles, con triples
lenguas, que le gritaban: "¡Madre! ¡Madre! ¡Madre!" (SP, p. 21)

In his dream the idiot sees his agony magnified to incredible heights. He hears once again the drunkard’s tormenting battle cry, "Madre!" For a moment he awakens and feels a tremendous sense of desolation, of complete aloneness. This is conveyed by the simple "Nadie, Nadie," as he gazes dumbly about with sad eyes. And then he again takes refuge from pain "en la noche de sus ojos" (SP, p. 22). He continues dreaming. And
in the dream of an idiot is reflected the tragic condition of humanity. El Pelele finds himself in a large patio, surrounded by masked spectators, watching a cockfight. As one of the combatants dies, without pain, the glassy eyes of the crowd light up with pleasure at the sight and smell of blood. The puppet-master's tragedy is re-enacted. Grief produces laughter. (See p.27 of this study.)

More disjunctive images torment the idiot until he hears someone tiptoeing through his dream. It is his mother, the mistress of a cock-breeder. His mother's image produces a far different effect upon him than did the malicious shrieking of the word "mother." With tears in his eyes, he runs toward her, not away from her; and in her bosom he finds relief from his excruciating agony. In the esperpentic world, the maternal symbol has a deformed, grotesque connotation; it is a stimulus which automatically produces laughter, terror or dementia. But in the dream world of the Pelele, the maternal symbol regains its tel-luric significance. It is a haven and a symbol of love and harmony:

En el pecho materno se alivió. Las entrañas de la que le había dado el ser absorbieron como papel secante el dolor de sus heridas. ¿Qué hondo refugio imperturbable! ¿Qué nutrido afecto! ¡Azucenita! ¡Azucenota! Carinoteando! Carinoteando!

And the Pelele lifts up his head and without speaking says perhaps the most poignant and significant line in the whole novel:

--¡Perdón, nanola, perdón! (SP, p. 24)

Through his childlike and simple plea for forgiveness, the idiot's personal suffering takes on the universal agony of all mankind. But even

34It is not my intention to suggest the idiot as a subject for a
more important, his apology is essentially enigmatic. (Perhaps it is a symbol of the inherent culpability man feels in having been born at all.) It may be an intuitive realization of man's refusal to recognize the existence of evil and to assume responsibility for it. Ironically then, it is the idiot who perceives what man does not; it is the idiot who admits, for man, his inherent guilt, his tragic condition.

The reply of the apparition is also puzzling:

Y la sombra que le pasaba la mano por la cara, carinoteando respondió a su queja:

"¡Perdón, hijo, perdón!" (SP, p. 24)

By merely echoing his agony, the mother answers, yet offers no solution. Her response is more a tremendous reflection of tragedy and of an empathy too often lacking in the real world. When the idiot murmurs, "Nanola, me duele el alma!" the apparition tenderly strokes his cheek but merely repeats, "¡Hijo, me duele el alma!" (SP, p. 24) Perhaps Asturias is saying that God weeps with and for man, who has relinquished his humanity and joined the beasts. The well of despair springs from deep within the idiot and reflects the tragic condition of society, of humans who have forgotten they even have souls--tragic puppets. The idiot emerges as the only one to whom the inner meaning of life has been revealed.

And just as suddenly as he found his mother the idiot jumps off her lap and runs to watch what seems to be a circus but is really a

Christ figure; however, I would not disavow the possibility in a purely humanitarian context. It does appear that he suffers the combined agonies of man and, by analogy, for man. His plea recalls Christ's words from the cross, "Forgive them, Father, for they know not what they do."
disordered representation of Asturias's thematic metaphor and a graphic comment on the preceding scene:

Ironically, only the idiot, the lowest form of humanity, finds happiness in the dream world—perhaps that happiness can even be interpreted as God. The rest of society are condemned to see only the brutality of their existence. Although the idiot appears to receive absolution in the real world, he does not. It is only in the dream world that he finds true paradise, an inner harmony of mind and of soul.

In the dream of Genaro Rodas, man's conscience is freed from the confines of the rational world. It springs forth from his brain as a single monstrous eye ("el ojo de vidrio") which clings tenaciously to his hands, takes possession of him, and envelops him in his own guilty conscience. From his child's cradle, death rises as a deformed, grotesque fetus. Slowly the spectre changes into a woman's skeleton with hanging breasts, like dead rats. As the eye travels over his entire body,

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35 The idiot's total lack of reasoning power and his spiritual intuition are reminiscent of Unamuno's idiot (in San Manuel Bueno, Martir), who represented blind faith as opposed to reason (San Manuel).
hand, he tries to crush it, but when he opens his hand it reappears crawling over his fingers, "... no más grande que el corazón de un pájaro y más horroroso que el infierno" (SP, p. 59). Again Asturias interposes a clue to interpret the dream. The mention of the heart of the bird recalls the bird of paradise, love-heaven. The inferno represents evil-hell. Rodas tries to hide from the accusing stare, but he cannot escape his own culpability. Terrified, he falls on his knees and desperately embraces his wife's legs as she stands by the cradle. He cannot contain himself. He proceeds to tell her about the circumstances of the idiot's death, just as he "saw" it with his own eyes (ojo de verdad):

--Sobre las gradas, sí, para abajo, rodó el cuerpo del Pelele chorreando sangre al primer disparo, y no cerró los ojos. Las piernas abiertas, la mirada inmóvil... ¡Una mirada fría, pegajosa, no sé...! ¡Una pupila que como un relámpago lo abarcó todo y se fijo en nosotros! ¡Un ojo pestáñudo que no se me quita de aquí, de aquí de los dedos, de aquí, Dios mío, de aquí!... (SP, p. 60)

The sightless, staring eye of the idiot has reappeared to Rodas in his nightmare. But Rodas doesn't recognize it as such. He describes it thus:

--¡Un ojo..., sí, un ojo redondo, negro, pestáñudo, como de vidrio! (SP, p. 59)

It is the false eye ("ojo de vidrio") of truth which forces Rodas to recognize the inner immorality of the idiot's murder and to sense its tragic presentiments and implications.

Although it is Vasquez who actually murders the Pelele, Rodas deeply feels the horror of the act. Subconsciously, he assumes the guilt for man's inhumanity to man. In a sense, he is even more guilty than Vasquez, for at least he recognizes that a crime has been committed.
Yet he chooses to do nothing to prevent evil from taking place. Thus, by his silence and his inaction, he abandons the Pelele and humanity. As a result, he becomes the instrument of his own child's destruction and of his wife's physical and mental debasement. The staring eye is neither the eye of God nor the eye of the devil as the couple thinks. It is Rodas's conscience in the form of the idiot's accusing eye. Although the guilt is his to bear, it never manifests itself in the real world, but remains buried deep in his subconscious where he does not have to face it.

The bestial metamorphosis of Chabelona heightens the inner bestiality of this esperpentic society. The old nurse, driven mad, as much by the madness about her as by the open gash in her skull, in savage revenge, tries to destroy her reflection in the fountain and her shadow on the patio floor, both of which seem to be pursuing her. Kicking, stomping, and screaming in rage at the images of her own bestiality, she succeeds only in destroying her eyes, the mirrors of herself. The shadow and the reflection remain beast-like, a grotesque and indestructible memorial to tragedy. The old nurse cannot escape what she does not want to believe, or what she herself has become, a demented beast:

Mordida por la cólera se puso en pie y le tomó contra su sombra y su imagen golpeando el agua y el piso, el agua con las manos, el piso con los pies. Su idea era borrarlas. La sombra se retorcía como animal azotado, mas a pesar del furioso taconeo, siempre estaba allí... Aulló con berrinche de fiera rabiosa, al sentirse incapaz de destruir aquel polvito de carbon regado sobre las piedras, que huía bajo sus pisotones como si de versa sintiera los golpes; y aquel otro polvito luminoso espolvoreado en el agua y con no sé que de pez de su imagen que abollaba a palmotadas y punetazos.

Ya los pies le sangraban, ya botaba las manos de cansancio y su sombra y su imagen seguían indestructibles. (SP, p. 88)
Obviously, the only way to erase bestiality is to attack it from within, for what man is will always manifest itself. Chabelona, however, in desperation, bashes her head into the fountain and is blinded by the thorns of a rose tree branch. Here again, Asturias's thematic metaphor is interposed:

Dos rosas cayeron en el agua...
La rama de un rosal espinudo le había arrebatado los ojos...
Saltó por el suelo como su propia sombra hasta quedar exánime al pie de un naranjo que pringaba de sangre un chorro de abril.

(SP, p. 88)

The juxtaposition of the flower and the fruit tree symbolizes, as does the Rosa-Manzana, good and evil, irrevocably intertwined. This duality is further emphasized in the dual possibilities of the rose tree itself, which offers either pleasure (flower) or pain (thorn). The whole palpitating dichotomy of life is poignantly expressed in this metaphor. Asturias is saying that life always offers us two choices. We choose our own destiny. We make ourselves.

In the juxtaposed dream worlds of Camila and Cara de Ángel is effected a delicate counterpoint of this tragedy. As the latter ruminates on the gossip surrounding his relationship with Camila, he becomes more and more infuriated, partly because society judges him by its own immorality and partly because he almost wishes that the malicious insinuations were true. Subconsciously, he begins to feel arise in him a protective instinct for Camila, "Como yo llegue a averiguar que han dicho media palabra mal de ella, los hago miembros de La Juventud Liberal"

(SP, p. 143). At the same time, he experiences a tinge of regret for not having enjoyed her physical charms, "Y la hizo suya se dirán ...
Si supieran que no es así, que aquí estoy medio arrepentido de mi proceder caballeroso" (SP, p. 143). And he vacillates between the spirit and the flesh, between the flower and the fruit. Disgruntled, disgusted, erotically aroused by his own mental pictures, he concludes:

A la droga con los tornillos del sentido común. Mejor el sueño, la sinrazón, esa babosidad dulce de color azul al principio . . . (SP, p. 142)

But he experiences great difficulty in falling asleep. His instinct accuses him because he did not take Camila by force. Tormented by the blackness of his own thoughts, he envisions suicide as the only means of escape:

"Ya no seré más!"... se decía. Y todo el temblaba en su interior. (SP, p. 142)

At this point he is still unable to recognize the ironic truth, that his frustration stems from a spiritual need rather than a sexual one. He senses, however, that in conquering a part of his bestial self he has denied evil, but he regrets the price he has had to pay. In a strange intuitive way he feels a void in himself, but he does not yet consciously

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36 By this remark, Cara de Ángel shows that he senses his eventual destruction brought about by his own decisions. Later, as he tries to justify to himself his departure to a new land and, consequently, his desertion of his own, he is haunted with a vague apprehensiveness, a suspicion of which he is not consciously aware. Having compromised with evil, he feels his very existence threatened. Consequently, he later tries to assure that existence in the only way he knows how—by depending upon the President. Thus he desperately repeats to himself, "pienso con la cabeza del Señor Presidente, luego existo, pienso con la cabeza del Señor Presidente, luego existo..." (SP, p. 263). This remark reveals the tragic flaw in Cara de Ángel, for obviously Asturias implies that if he depends upon the President for existence, conversely he must be prepared to accept evil and death—non existence. Moreover, in order to conform to the President's way of thinking, he must deform himself and thus destroy his own humanity.
realize that what he is seeking is love to replace the evil he has rejected:

Y al sobreponerme a mí mismo para liberar a Camila de mis intenciones, deje una parte de mi ser sin relleno y por eso me siento vacío, intranquilo, colérico, enfermo, dado a la trampa. El hombre se rellena de mujer--carne picada--como una trips de cerdo para estar contento. (SP, p. 143)

Still in this eerie twilight zone, he again hears Camila frantically knocking at the door of her uncle's house. The knocking persists, growing louder and louder, until he realizes that the banging is a shovel hitting against the earth. Suspended by his own eyes from the ceiling, he sees Camila digging her own grave. The dream illuminates the awful truth that is to come. In addition, the thematic metaphor again exerts its powerful imagery. The duality of life is ever present. As Cara de Angel is touched by love, the struggle between good and evil is constantly increased. His nightmare continues, growing more terrible in its tragic implications. Now, like the Pelele, he has completely succumbed to his subconscious:

... casi dormido, aún despierto, despierto a una azulosa combustión angélica. Y poco a poco, ya dormido, flotando bajo su propio pensamiento, sin cuerpo, sin forma, como un aire tibio, móvil al soplo de su propia respiración... (SP, p. 146)

In this formless dissolution of reality, only Camila persists in his awareness. He sees her body like a cross, tall, sweet and cruel, in a graveyard. The dream engulfs him. He is dragged aboard the boat of dreams, where his inevitable doom is prophesized:

--Llevadle a la barca de... el Sueño dudo-- ...los enamorados que habiendo perdido la esperanza de amor ellos, se conforman con que les amen. (SP, p. 146)
In this suspended state, he is startled by a loud knocking on the door. A messenger, a small boy, informs him that Camila is very ill. As he frantically dresses, the god of Sleep (El Sueño) reveals Camila's fate. The bloom of her womanhood will slowly fade and wither away.

--¿Quién es?--preguntó el Sueño. Sus hombres acababan de pescar en las aguas sucias de la vida, una rosa en vías de marchitarse.
--Camila Canales...--le respondieron... (SP, p. 147)

Camila is now definitively equated with the rose of the thematic metaphor. She is love, the opposite side of evil. As Cara de Ángel is infused with this love, it will leave less room for evil. Physically, he will die, but not before being redeemed through love. Camila, deprived of love, is destined to shrivel like dried fruit, unwatered, unnourished.

In addition, Asturias, in metaphorical language, indicates which of the two realities—the world about us (reason) or the dream world (intuition)—is the key to an understanding of our lives. The phrase, "El Sueño, señor que surca los mares oscuros de la realidad" (SP, p. 146), equates the god of sleep with truth. Juxtaposed against that reality is the unreality of our daily lives. "Y los hombres del Sueño le conducían obedientes a esa barca, caminando por sobre esa capa de irrealidad que recubre de un polvo muy fino los hechos diarios de la vida . . ." (SP, pp. 146-47). Not to be forgotten, however, is the fact that these two realities are integrally related. After Cara del Ángel saves Major Farfán's life in exchange for Camila's, he returns to her sickbed. There he feels a strange, palpitating sense of apprehension. He muses:

Entre la realidad y el sueño la diferencia es puramente mecánica. Dormido, despierto, ¿Cómo estaba allí? (SP, p. 178)
Swirling about in his brain are chaotic images, which when rationally viewed seem unrelated and fantastic. In this disjunctive imagery, however, there exists an innate order. Such a phrase as "... en la jaula de Dios" (SP, p. 178) may mean nothing when viewed alone; however, when interpreted within the context of ethical conduct, it takes on meaningful significance. It becomes another way of saying the Garden of Eden. Another symbolic reference is "la misa del gallo de un gallo ... picotea la hostia...", which recalls the fierce contestant in the cockfight. And this contest is reminiscent of the struggle between love and hate, good and evil, heaven and hell, which man fights every moment of his existence. In addition, the rooster pecking at the Host may symbolize man's desire for salvation and, by analogy, his spiritual metamorphosis—from the flesh to the spirit. (Cara de Ángel, 37)

Cara de Ángel's chaotic and fantastic visions give the impression of flowing in and out of Camila's dream world. Subconsciously, the couple appear to be seeing their own fatal destinies at the same time. Camila, near death, also envisions a surrealistic re-enactment of her experience at her uncle's home. As she calls out desperately for help to her father, to her nurse, to her uncle, only Cara de Ángel hears her plea and answers it. By saving Camila, he spiritually saves part of himself. In the esperpentic society, he is the only person who answers

References to religious symbology need not presume any formal religiosity. Such references, in my opinion, go beyond any formal doctrine of any church, to assume a universal significance.
a human cry of agony. His metamorphosis, realized through love, symbolizes man's capacity to conquer. Nevertheless, this is not enough, for Cara de Ángel merely withdraws his support from the President. In doing so, he does deny evil, but he does not positively affirm good, for his is a passive action and a negative approach. He thinks he can escape and leave evil behind him. Asturias says he cannot, that he must actively and passionately confront and combat that evil, that each man, in being responsible for himself, is in some way responsible for his brothers. Repeatedly, in their juxtaposed dream worlds, Camila and Cara de Ángel intuit the bitter inner reality of their lives and witness the struggle between good and evil, and between the real and the unreal. As Cara de Ángel sees grotesque visions of opaque men tossing their heads, like balls, up in the air and letting them crash as they fall, he is awakened by a loud banging. He thinks to himself in relief:

"¡Qué horrible pesadilla! Por fortuna, la realidad era otra. El que regresa de un entierro, como el que sale de una pesadilla, experimenta el mismo bienestar. (SP, pp. 183-84)

Unfortunately, what Cara de Ángel welcomes as reality is only a vain illusion. The nightmare, the unreality, is to be the terrible truth. In the last dream of Camila, when she is completely without hope and

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38 Fedina Rodas does, of her own volition, attempt to warn General Canales. However, this act cannot be interpreted in the same manner. Fedina Rodas neither answered nor denied a human plea. She merely decided spontaneously to act humanely, mainly because she was interested in Camila as her child's intended god-mother.

39 During his dream, as Cara de Ángel frantically tries to reach Camila (love), he sees in the distance Mount Carmel, where Elijah overcame his evil adversary, the pagan god, Baal.
in a state of semi-sleep, she foresees the destruction of her husband and, at the same time, the creation of her son. The universal theme of death and life, the eternal contrastive duality of life, is reflected in a scene in which she sees herself in a large patio. She is lying in a hammock and playing with a caramel and a little black rubber ball. The caramel is in her mouth and the ball in her hands. As she accidently drops the ball, it slowly rolls away, becoming smaller and smaller, until it disappears completely. Meanwhile, the caramel in her mouth begins to grow larger. She awakens suddenly, terrified, but manages to proceed with the day's activities, which include haunting the government offices for a piece of news or a drop of hope, but in vain. At the end of the day, she remembers the rest of her dream. Her husband had tried to pick up the little ball but, as he followed it, he too became smaller and smaller, and finally disappeared, while the caramel continued to swell in her mouth. The scene is symbolic of Cara de Ángel's death and the new life beginning to grow within Camila's body. Moreover, although Cara de Ángel has chosen to pursue the black ball (death), his love has created a new life. The poignant words of "the Teacher" are recalled: "--Make thee another self for love of me!..." (SP, p. 213)
CHAPTER III

THE TYRANT AND TYRANNY: AN IDEOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION

At the center of the esperpentic society stands the tyrant, represented not only as a "man" deformed but as a deformer of men. Operating under the guise of law and order, he relentlessly disorders the natural laws of moral and ethical conduct. Essentially, he is the deformed norm to which men conform in order to assure their own existence. The tyrannical portrait reflects all aspects of the evil which grips society. Both Banderas and the President, although seeming to be individuals, represent symbolically an abstract and a grotesque concept of tyranny. Each author effects this conclusion in a distinct way.

Valle Inclán purposely portrays the tyrant as fragmented. In cubist style, he affords multiple and simultaneous views of Tirano Banderas. Gradually, one forms a composite portrait from these fragments. The end result, however, is not a concrete representation of the tyrant, but rather an abstract idea of tyranny itself, the purpose of which is to make man see himself as he really is, a human creature, devoid of humanity—a frightening contradiction in terms. The tyrannical portrait exposes this fatal flaw in man by reducing mankind to a hideous absurdity. Ultimately it reveals him as a tragic figure—man fallen from the human realm—unable to realize or fulfill his human destiny.

Thus, Valle Inclán's design is not to describe one petty tyrant, but rather to illuminate the whole spectrum of tyranny (particularly as it relates to Hispanic life). By making the reader intuit and
intellectualize its meaning, Valle Inclán is able to show, through an absurd view of life, the tragic essence of life. To realize this, he goes beyond the external appearance of the tyrant to the inner reality of what that tyrant truly represents. Thus, in the tyrannical portrait, as it is artistically developed by Valle Inclán, is implicit its ideological significance.

We first meet Tirano Banderas in a dismantled convent now converted into his fortress. The odd, incongruous description of him is disoriented. He seems to be nothing more than a series of fragments to which the reader must give meaning. Seen first as a profile in a distant window, he suddenly is pictured as a bare skull, framed by black eye glasses and a clerical collar. Attention is then drawn to his lips from which drips a venomous green saliva. Framed by the window, he seems to take on the aura of a sacred cow and, at the same time, he is the crooked beak of an owl—an artistic distortion.

From this description are perceived several aspects of the same entity. Never, however, is that entity seen as a whole man or as a human figure. Taciturn and immobile, the tyrant seems completely lifeless. The mention of him as a skull suggests not only death but the absence of the body. The black spectacles cover only empty sockets, sightless eyes; the green venom evokes the image of the serpent and, by analogy, the devil. The crow, a black bird, imparts a sacred, remote and eerie quality. But

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40The title of this chapter, "Icono del tirano," (Book One of the First Part), is extremely significant in that it artistically defines the tyrant's true role in the novel. He is not intended to portray any personage. He is, instead, an image drawn according to a fixed representation.
It is not by chance that Valle Inclan uses the word "garabato" to describe the owl's beak. By so doing, he hango upon Banderas the slaughtered carcasses of his victims. The portrait, conceived in this way, is black, bodiless and detached: a skull with spectacles and a clerical collar, an owl's hooked beak and lips stained with poison. From these fragments and others that follow, the reader must build, step by step, his own composite of Tirano Banderas.

He is repeatedly pictured as remote and impersonal, "una momia taciturna" (TB, p. 17). Moreover, like his victims he exhibits characteristics associated with the animal kingdom, "Tirano Banderas, con un gesto cuaquero" (TB, p. 42), and "El Tirano le despidio, ceremonioso, desbaratada la voz en una cucana de gallos" (TB, p. 21). Often he is reduced to a rodent, prying and sniffing away at humanity, "Tirano Banderas, con oisaca de rata fisgona"; or he is seen scurrying through dungeons, "Cruzo la momia siempre fisgando, y paso a la celda donde solia tratar con sus agentes secretos" (TB, p. 43). The senseless, irritating "Chac, chac" sound he constantly emits dehumanizes him completely. So
often is he identified by the word **mueca** that finally he is reduced to just that, a green slimy grimace, "Niño Santos, con una mueca de la calavera" (TB, p. 18); and "Tirano Banderas, rasgada la boca por la verde mueca . . ." (TB, p. 47).

The puppet-like reactions of society are emphasized by and reflected in the tyrant's exaggerated, mechanical movements. "El Tirano se inclino, con aquel ademan mesurado y riovido de figura de palo" (TB, p. 46). Although the tyrant's movements are those of a marionette, in a sense, he is even more the puppet-master of society. For it is he who controls the movements of the puppets who, at the pull of the strings, willingly dance in this grotesque carnival of tragedy. Distorted himself, he constantly seeks to deform the law and the morality and will of those about him. It is Filomeno Cuevas, a rancher and rebel leader, who defines the tragic capitulation of society. Colonel Gandara, an army deserter, has sought Cuevas's help in escaping from the tyrant. The rebel leader replies, "Y muy posible que . . . vengas echado para sacarme una confidencia. Tirano Banderas os hace a todos espías" (TB, p. 81).  

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41 The deformation of civil law and order is an inevitable result of the decay and break down of natural and moral laws, the internal harmony upon which the social and political code of conduct is based in a civilized society. When this happens, distorted norms of conduct are easily imposed and accepted. This deformation of morality is artistically revealed in the following conversation between the tyrant and the **honrados gachupines**. In this scene, puppet-like responses are particularly evident. Don Celestino Galindo, the spokesman for the group, hypocritically addresses Tirano Banderas with these words:

''La Colonia Española eleva hus homenajes al benemerito patricio, raro ejemplo de virtud y energia, que ha sabido restablecer el imperio del orden, imponiendo un castigo ejemplar a la demogogia revolucionaria . . . (TB, p. 17)
The degenerate and tragic condition of society is analogized in Don Celea's reference to Juvenal and Quevedo, two bitter satirists of the social conditions of their times. The tyrant arrogantly addresses Don Celes:


That figure of which Tirano Banderas speaks is not his own but the ideological form which tyranny has assumed. Indeed, upon his death the tyrant literally will become a figure dispersed across the land:

Tirano Banderas salió a la ventana, blandiendo el puñal, y cayó acribillado. Su cabeza, beñada por sentencia, estuvo tres días puesta sobre un cadalso con hopas amarillas, en la Plaza de Armas: El mismo auto mandaba hacer cuartos el tronco y repartirlos de frontera a frontera, de mar a mar. Zamalpos y Nueva Cartagena, Puerto Colorado y Santa Rosa del Titipay, fueron las ciudades agradadas. (TB, p. 157)

By connecting these four corners (at which the quartered fragments of the tyrant's body have been placed) with straight lines, Tirano Banderas is reduced to and conceived of as a geometric figure, an intellectualized

Without a word of dissent, like the obedient marionettes they are, "la fila de gachupines asintió con murmullos" (TB, p. 17).

In response to the farce being enacted, Tirano Banderas, playing his roles of puppet and puppeteer, replies:

--Me congratula ver como los hermanos de raza aquí radicados, afirmando su fe inquebrantable en los ideales de orden y pro-
cess . . . me congratula mucho este apoyo moral de la Colonia Hispana. Santo Banderas no tiene la ambición de mando. . . . El gobernante muchas veces precisa ahogar los sentimientos de su corazón, porque el cumplimiento de la ley es la garantía de los ciudadanos trabajadores y honrados (TB, p. 17).
symbol of tyranny. 42

Constantly deforming man in his image, the tyrant breaks down all means of communication by deforming and distorting the news. Man is no longer allowed to speak the truth; indeed, he knowingly propagates the lie; and, what is worse, he doesn't allow himself to feel any guilt:

El vaticito murmuró palpitante, inclinándose al oído de Fray Mocho: ---¡Quién tuviera una pluma independiente! El Patron quiere una crítica despiadada...
Fray Mocho sacó del pecho un botellín y se agachó besando el gollete:
-- Muy elocuente!
--Es un oprobio tener vendida la conciencia.
--¡Qué va! Vos no vendés la conciencia. Vendés la pluma que no es lo mismo.
--¡Por Cochinos treinta pesos! (TB, p. 39)

With all sense of social and moral responsibility lost, man, driven by greed and fear, has deserted mankind, and thus has forfeited his own right to be called a man. This is why Valle Inclán depicts him as he is, an ignoble and tragic being.

In El Señor Presidente, the first impression of the tyrant is that of a whole personality rather than a series of fragments. Although he is not completely natural, neither is he grotesquely deformed as is Tirano Banderas. The true significance of the President, is gleaned through his own deformed conduct and through the reactions and attitudes of society.

42 At the end of this passage is a geometric drawing in the shape of a cross, obviously a symbolic reference to the four corners of the land, each graced with a fragment of the tyrant's trunk. Lines connecting the points of this drawing would produce a geometric abstraction as illustrated.

In addition, this quartering of Tirano Banderas is a bizarre but just retribution for the depraved mutilation of the tyrant's own daughter and of Zacarías's (El Cruzado) child.
The more we learn about the President, the less real he becomes as an individual. As a human entity, he will recede farther and farther into the background, ultimately to emerge as a hideous symbol of tyranny. In this way the tyrant, nameless, faceless and soulless, is reduced to a total abstraction—tyranny. As such, he ceases to exist as a real personality. He is, we realize, a non-personality: not only a puppet who embodies all the evils of society but also the grand puppeteer who sets these evils into motion.

He is first seen in a conversation with Dr. Barreno, the man who dared to criticize the government:

El Presidente de la República le recibió en pie, la cabeza levantado, un brazo suelto naturalmente y el otro a la espalda, y, sin darle tiempo a que lo saludara, le cantó:

--Yo le diré, don Luis, ¡y eso sí!, que no estoy dispuesto a que por chismes de mediquates se menoscabe el crédito de mi gobierno en lo más mínimo . . . (SP, p. 31)

The next description of him is even more revealing. Miguel Cara de Ángel, the President's favorite and confidential advisor, has just arrived for an appointment with the tyrant. The President receives him in his private chamber:

El Presidente vestía, como siempre, de luto riguroso: negros los zapatos, negro el traje, negra la corbata, negro el sombrero que nunca se quitaba; En los bigotes canos, peinados sobre las comisuras de los labios, disimulaba las encías sin dientes, tenía los carrillos pellejudos y los párpados como pellizcados. (SP, p. 36)

The slow mechanical movements of the President suggest a dehumanized being. Moreover, like Tirano Banderas, he is not only puppetlike but remote and impersonal.

This is obvious in the chapter entitled "Todo el Orbe Cante!"
Here the "puppet society" equates the tyrant with Christ by hysterically chanting verbatim the Sanctus of the Mass. During this apotheosis, Cara de Ángel persuades the President to step out onto the balcony to say a few words to the prostrate masses. The President agrees, but reluctantly. Deified and distant, he stands isolated from the frenetic hysteria of the crowd.

The President's reluctance to expose himself to the people and his instinctive measures to protect his heart are indicative of the insidious fear which permeates and controls not only society but the tyrant as well. Fear overrides every other emotion, leaving its victims completely helpless and hopeless.

It is through this abnormal fear that the tyrant is able to deform all normal life and natural order. His victims quickly learn that innocence or guilt has no bearing on their destiny. What does control their fate is the tyrant. Society thus becomes mesmerized by a paralytic fear.

Tirano Banderas is also viewed as God-like by his society. The Indians, particularly, are completely servile and bow before his sinister presence, "La pelazon de indios ensabanados, arrendándose a las aceras y porches, o encumbradas por escalerillas de iglesias y conventos, saludaba con una genuflexión el paso del Tirano. Tuvo en gesto humorístico la momia enlevitada." The word momia also invokes analogy to the Egyptian pharaohs, remote, deified, and separated from the populace. (TB, p. 121)

A study of fear as a central protagonist in El Señor Presidente is offered in Carlos Navarro's article, "La Hipotiposis del miedo en El Señor Presidente," Revista Iberoamericana (XXXII), 51-61.
which always surrounds everyone and invades even one's most private moments and, particularly, one's dreams. The deformation of law and order is revealed in the mental torment of General Canales as he agonizingly recalls the ominous conversation between himself and Cara de Angel, his betrayer and his benefactor:

Sin aflojar el paso Canales apartó los ojos de su fotografía de gala, sintiéndose moralmente vencido. . . .

"¡Pero si soy inocente!" Y se repitió con la voz más persuasivo de su corazón: "¿Pero si soy inocente? ¿Por que temer...?"

"¡Por eso!-- le respondía su conciencia con la lengua de Cara de Angel-- ¡por eso!...Otro gallo le cantaría si usted fuera culpable. El crimen es precioso porque garantiza al gobierno la adhesión del ciudadano. ¿La Patria? ¡Sálvese, general, yo sé lo que yo digo; que patria ni que indias enmuelite! ¿Las Leyes? Buenas son tortas. ¡Sálvese, general, porque le espera la muerte!"

"¡Pero si soy inocente!"

"¡No se pregunte, general, si es culpable o inocente: Pregúntese si cuenta o no con el favor del amo, que un inocente en mal con el gobierno, es peor que si fuera culpable!"

Aparto los oídos de la voz de Cara de Angel. Mascullando palabras de venganza, ahogado en las palpitaciones de su propio corazón. (SP, p. 64)

As the portrait develops, the President becomes a force which paralyzes men with fear. Society is completely helpless before its onslaught. Perhaps its members might know how to deal with a man, but the President is not a man but a strange supernatural power which invades their whole being. Even the Secretary of War is startled and terrified by the mysterious aloofness which mesmerizes all of the President's Constituents:

El auditor de Guerra se precipitó hacia el Presidente, que volvía del balcón seguido de unos cuantos amigos, para darle parte de la fuga del General Canales y felicitarle por su discurso antes que los demás; pero como todos los que se acercaron con este propósito, se detuvo cohibido por un temor extraño, por una fuerza sobrenatural. . . . (SP, p. 99)
The infrequent appearances of the President in the story make him seem remote and far away. Whenever he does appear, his role is comparatively minor. In addition, he is defined, not so much by what he does as an individual, but by what others do and say about him. Their deeds and remarks often set off violent chain reactions which seem almost prophetically controlled.

Only toward the end of the novel (beginning with the chapter, "El Señor Presidente") does the President become a visible and strong participant. And then he is pictured as disoriented and incoherent. He becomes more unreal, more shadow than substance, "Se sobó el bigote cano con la punta de los dedos transparentes, frágiles, color de madera de carrizo . . ." (SF, p. 258). One such scene is his meeting with Cara de Ángel. In an intoxicated state, the President points his finger at the "favorite," now in disfavor, and with ominous laughter howls repeatedly, "En artículo de muerte. ¡Ja! ¡Ja! ¡Ja! ¡Ja! Cara de Ángel noticeably pales at this verbal onslaught. The President, a glass of whiskey trembling in his hand, continues, royally referring to himself in the third person: 45

-- El Se...
-- NORRR Presidente todo lo sabe.
. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .
Su Excelencia persegú una mosca.
-- Miguel, ¿tu no conoces el juego de la mosca...?

45 Tirano Banderas often refers to himself in the third person also. ("Santos Banderas les garantiza que el día más feliz de su vida será cuando pueda retirarse . . ." (TB, p. 17). Kings and dictators often refer to themselves in this way and one who immediately comes to mind is Charles DeGaulle. This device not only singles out the said individual as omnipotent but also sets him apart from himself and from others.
--No, Señor Presidente...
--/Ah, es verdad que tūuUUU..., en artículo de muerte...
/¡Ja! ¡Ja! ¡Ja! ¡ja!... ¡Ji! ¡ji! ¡ji! ¡ji!... ¡Jo! ¡jo! ¡jo!
¡jo!... ¡Ju! ¡ju! ¡ju! ¡ju!... (SP, p. 222)

The President's conception of Cara de Ángel is an accurate portrait of society. Its members, dispensable and disposable, are no better than flies who buzz about the tyrant at their own risk. Cara de Ángel, on hearing the President threaten him with death, feels a violent nausea and indignation arise in him. For a brief moment the choice between good and evil is open to him. For that one moment he is tempted to put an end to such madness. For one moment in time he almost refuses to play the "fly game" any longer. But he restrains himself. Reason begins to control his human outrage. The vital moment of choice is past; he feels empty and disgusted with himself:

Seguía siendo el perro educado, intelectual, contento de su ración de mugre, del instinto que le conservaba la vida. (SP, p. 222)

Thus, the tyrant continues to play the "fly game" because Cara de Ángel allows himself to be a fly.

The pent up bitterness and misery of the mestizo spill out in the President's continued invective. In a strange sense, he is the most pathetic creature in the novel because he is a tortured, negative entity. The President, always insecure, exhibits paranoid symptoms. In the following scene he reflects that madness itself rather than the man:

--¡Ingratos! --anadió, después, a media voz--. Quise y querré siempre a Parrales Sonriente, y lo iba a hacer general, porque potré a mis paisanos, porque los puso en cintura, se repase en ellos y de no ser mi madre acaba con todos para vengarme de lo mucho que tengo que sentirles y que solo yo se... ¡Ingratos!...Y no me pasa --porque no me pasa-- que lo hayan asesinado, cuando por todos lados se atenta contra mi vida, me dejan los amigos
se multiplican los enemigos y ... ¡No! ¡no!, de ese Portal no quedará ni una piedra... (SP, p. 223)

As the President deliberately divorces himself from the people, from the Cathedral Porch, from humanity, his identity slowly fades, lost in the hate and evil he leaves behind him. Yet, what he really is has not yet been completely defined. At times he personifies death:

En la cara de jade, le brillaban los ojos entumecidos y en las manos pequeñas las unas ribeteadas de medias lunas negras.

Por la sala en desorden pasó /El Presidente/ la mirada llena de cadáveres...

(SP, p. 223)

When he greets Camila, he is like ice, reduced to a substance.

Cara de Ángel presentó a su esposa. El amo dispensó a Camila su diesta pequenita, helada al contacto, y apoyó sobre ella los ojos al pronunciar su nombre como diciéndole, "¡Fíjese quién soy!" (SP, p. 245)

The warning, "Take notice who I am," emphasizes the enigma of his identity. When he next appears, with his black hat pulled down over his forehead and his coat collar turned up, his face seems to have disappeared. The black suit appears empty. And the President is always nameless—merely the President. His own remark to Cara de Ángel places him in proper perspective. "La muerte ha sido y será mi mejor aliada Miguel" (SP, p. 258).

It is Tohil, the god of Fire, who definitively reveals the true essence of the tyrant. 46 During the latter's final conversation with

46 It is particularly appropriate that the tyrant should be revealed in an Indian pagan ceremony, and one seen as an hallucination: first, because the President himself is of Indian blood; second, because Asturias believes the mestizo's inherent character may be best interpreted through Magical Realism (see footnote 33); third, because this is a dream world, the instrument of revelation.
Miguel the President orders him to undertake an official mission for the country. But Cara de Ángel is apprehensive. He vacillates between two decisions, between two emotions: the desire to force the President to exonerate him from the false charges made by the Secretary of War, and the fear of losing altogether the opportunity to escape. But the President refuses the request for a review of the charges. He commands Cara de Ángel to set out immediately for North America. Of course, the President has no intention of allowing Cara de Ángel to go anywhere except to his death. The favorite's desperate persuasions are useless. Instinctively, he senses the futility of hope. Insanely terrified, Cara de Ángel becomes acutely aware of the passage of time, of a pulsating rhythm. In an hallucinatory state, he envisions a macabre scene:

Por una ventana abierta de par en par entre sus cejas negras, distingüía una fogata encendida junto a cipresales de carbón verdoso y tapias de humo blanco, en medio de un patio borrado por la noche, amasía de centinelas y almácigo de estrellas. Cuatro sombras sacerdotales señalaban las esquinas del patio, las cuatro vestidas de musgo de adivinaciones fluviales, las cuatro con las manos de piel de rana más verde que amarilla, las cuatro con un ojo cerrado en parte de la cara sin tiznal y un ojo abierto, terminado en chichita de lima, en parte de la cara comida de oscuridad. De pronto, se oyó el sonar de un tún, un tún, un tún, un tún, y muchos hombres untados de animales, entraron saltando en filas de maíz. Por las ramas del tún, ensangrentadas y vibrátiles, bajaban los cangrejos de los tumbos del aire y corrían los gusanos de las tumbas del fuego. Los hombres bailaban para no quedar pegados a la tierra con el sonido del tún para no quedar pegados al viento con el sonido del tún, alimentando la hoguera con la trementina de sus frentes. De una penumbra color de estiércol vino un hombrecillo con cara de güisquil viejo, lengua entre los carrillos, espinas en la frente, sin orejas, que llevaba al ombligo un cordón velludo adornado de cabezas de guerreros y hojas de ayote; se acercó a soplar las macollas de llamas y entre la alegría ciega de los tucuaátines se robó el fuego con la boca masticándolo para no quemarse como copal. Un grito se unió a la oscuridad que trepaba a los árboles y se oyeron cerca y lejos las voces planíferas de las tribus que abandonadas en la selva, ciega
de nacimiento, luchaban con sus tripas--animales del hambre--, con sus gargantas--pájaros de la sed--y su miedo, y sus bascas, y sus necesidades corporales, reclamando a Tohil, Dador del Fuego, que les devolviera el ocote encendido de la luz... (SP, p. 260)

Obviously, the entire vision is a surrealist presentation in which the tyrant is depicted as tyranny--evil. The cypress grove is greenish-black, the color of the tyrant's face and nails. The priestly figures, with their dichotomous appearance, obviously reflect the contrastive duality of the thematic metaphor. The eye on the dark side of their face is open, seeing only the surface ritual; the eye on the bright side of their face is closed, a symbolic reference to the deeper meaning of the ceremony. These men, high priests of brutality, dressed in greenish-yellow frog skins (the color of the President's complexion) recall not only the President's chosen few but the many, like ese animal, who are terrorized by them. The Indian tribes, paying homage to Tohil, represent the esperpentic society--downtrodden, oppressed, always controlled. As the tribes in animal costumes dance for Tohil, so does society dance for the tyrant. He is symbolized by Tohil, who arrives at the ceremony on a river of pigeon breasts which flow like milk. ("Tohil llegó cabalgando un río hecho de pechos de paloma que se deslizaba como leche" SP, p. 260) The concrete symbols of the river and the bird juxtapose the good of man against the evil of the tyrant. Moreover, they remind one of Fedina Rodas, whose son starved to death for lack of his mother's milk. How ironic, but fitting, that the tyrant should arrive on a river of pigeon breasts which flows like milk!

All life is posed on the threshold of acquiescence, sensitive to Tohil's every wish and whim, as are the President's victims. The beasts
of the forest and the birds of the heavens come rushing to pay tribute to Tohil, giver of fire. Cara de Ángel in his subconscious sees the hideous truth about society, a truth too terrible to face in the real world. All the frenzied desperation, the misery, and the hysterical fear suffered for centuries by the mestizo (this espermptic society) is brought out in this passage. The people beg Tohil to return to them the lighted torch of fire, which they need to be fully their own masters. In the same way, the President's victims believe that it is he who holds the key to their existence. Tohil demands human sacrifice, but no more than the tyrant does. The pagan god puts the whole picture in proper perspective with the following question, "Y estos hombres; ¿qué!; ¿cazarán hombres?" And the animal men prophetically reply, "Como tu lo pides ... ." (SP, p. 261). As the tribes bargain with Tohil, one is reminded of the members of this espermptic society who, like their ancestors, believe evil can be eliminated by compromise!

"... con tal que nos devuelvas el fuego, tu el Dador de Fuego, y que no se nos enfríe la carne, fritura de nuestros huesos, ni el aire, ni las úñas, ni la lengua, ni el pelo! ¿Con tal que no se nos siga muriendo la vida, aunque nos degollemos todos para que siga viviendo la muerte!" (SP, p. 261)

What this espermptic society does not realize is that man's soul (Fire), the hearth of his body, cannot be bartered and still remain free. Tohil can only take fire if the people relinquish it to him. In the same way, 

47 Although I am fully aware of Asturias's intense interest in the mythological element, no attempt is made here to explore that facet. I am principally concerned with the universal significance of the ceremony.

48 This calls to mind the previously quoted remark made by Cara de Ángel, "Si pienso con la mente del Presidente, existo." See footnote 34.
the tyrant, rather than controlling the people, is actually limited by them. He can only possess man's soul if man allows him to take it. This is implicit in the response of Tohil, "¡Estoy contento! Sobre hombres cazadores de hombres puedo asentar mi gobierno" (SP, p. 261). Only if men hunt men can tyranny exist. One of the few persons in the entire novel who at any time consciously refrains from hunting man is Cara de Ángel. Although he warns the general and saves Major Farfan's life for a personal reason—his deep love for Camila—still this is a positive affirmation of love, not a negative reaction against evil. Hope then exists, says Asturias, even among the degradation and the depravity. That it does survive, particularly in this environment, is significant. More important, there always exists the capacity and potential to love rather than to hate, if only man will choose love. If not, then he must continue to exist in a wasteland somewhere between true life and true death. "No habrá ni verdadera muerte ni verdadera vida. ¡Que se me baile la jícara!" (SP, p. 261). These primordial Indians, dancing in homage to the fire god, are no other than modern men dancing like puppets to the mad tune of tyranny.

That the President is symbolized by Tohil is significant, for Tohil is a mythological god, and therefore a non-existent entity, as is the President, whose personal identity has been lost in his universal symbolism. What does persist is the idea of tyranny which he engenders in the minds of men. They alone create a tyrant; they alone nourish him. Only they can destroy him. When men agree not to carry tyranny in their hearts, then will tyrants die.
One further point should be made. Although the tyrant is now seen as pure evil, even he, at one time, possessed the potential for good. That Asturias believes in the innate goodness of every man is implicit in Doña Chon’s description of the President in his younger years:

... su pañuelo de seda blanco amarrado al cuello con un nudito, el sombrero limeno, los botines con orejas rasandas y el vestido azul... (TB, p. 169)

Precisely because the tyrant is the symbol of evil, truly the blackest character in the novel, is it significant that this one time he is wearing white (the opposite of black), pink (the rose), and blue (sky), a symbolic allusion to his once uncorrupted state. Thus the twofold truth, the contrastive duality of life, constantly manifests itself. In the blackest evil, good lies dormant; in the purest good, evil is always possible.  

"Soy la mentira de todas las cosas reales, la realidad de todas las ficciones" (SP, p. 25). Asturias says that each man makes his own choice as to which shall prevail; and he alone is responsible for that choice.

The espermentic man, however, refuses to accept responsibility for himself. The people in this grotesque society blame the tyrant for

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49 This is particularly evident in the description of Cara de Ángel and Camila. The former has a golden complexion and blond hair. He looks like an angel, "El que le hablaba era un angel" (SP, p. 27); yet he has black eyes and acts like the devil. Camila, however, who is Love, acts like an angel (figuratively speaking) but has a satanic appearance. "¿Mas diablo que yo?", respondía Camila, el pelo en llamas negras alborotado, la cara triguena lustrosa de manteca de cacao para despercudirse, naufragos los ojos verdes, oblicuos y jalados para atrás." (SP, p. 77)
their misery; and the tyrant bitterly blames the people for his. Although each blames the other, in truth they are only tragic reflections of each other. Frustrated and desperate, society tries to find a way out. They turn to God, but he does not seem to hear them. They turn to revolution, but an incipient revolution is aborted before it begins. They turn to the student, portrayed by Asturias as a possible hope. Venerable and zealous, he advocates action—in the form of a grand revolution. But the student, who scorns resignation and condemns prayer, never takes an active stand against anything. This search by frightened and lost men for an answer to misery is reflected in the following prison scene:

---...No hay esperanza de libertad, mis amigos; estamos condenados a soportarlo hasta que Dios quiera... ¡Véanlos mis ojos, porque somos un pueblo maldito!...

El sacristán:
--¡A Dios, que es Todopoderoso!
El estudiante:
--¿Para qué, si no responde?
El sacristán:
--Porque esa es Su Santísima voluntad...
El estudiante:
--¡Qué lastima!
La tercera voz:
--Es mejor rezar...
La voz del sacristán regó de cristiana conformidad el ambiente de la bartolina. Carvajal, que pasaba entre los de su barrio por liberal y comecuras, murmuró:
--Recemos.
Pero el estudiante se interpuso:
--¡Qué es eso de rezar! ¡No debemos rezar! Tratemos de romper esa puerta y de ir a la revolución! (SP, pp. 201-02)

In the Epilogue, we again meet the student and the sacristán, now released from prison. They are engaged in conversation. Both are delighted to see each other. Both automatically pick up their lives where they left off before their arrest. Both are grateful that they still exist, owing to the tyrant's "grace." And most important, both willingly
accept freedom—a living death—at the price of tyranny:

El estudiante se quedó plantado a la orilla del andén, como si nunca hubiera visto un hombre con sotana. Pero no era la sotana lo que le había dejado estupefacto, sino lo que el sacristán le dijo al oído mientras se abrazaban por el gusto de encontrarse libres:

--Ando vestido así por orden superior... (SP, p. 286)

Juxtaposed against their capriciously endowed freedom is the sight of men still enslaved:

Y allí se queda aquél, de no ser un cordon de presos que entre fila y fila de soldados traía media calle. (SP, p. 288)

The student and the sacristán view them with pity as they pass by, dejected and defeated. But these two (religion and education) do nothing. Suddenly, the puppet-master dashes up, plants himself directly in front of them and begins to recite a nonsensical ditty:

--¡Figurín, figurero
quién te figuró
que te fizo figura
de figurón! (SP, p. 286)

--¡Benjamín tiritero,
no te figuró...!
¿Quién te fizo jura
de figurón? (SP, p. 287)

Once again the insignificant puppet-master assumes a prophetic role. Again, he sees the terrible truth about this society. Implicit in his question, "Who made you a figure of absurdity?" is the answer to man's tragic condition. Through the puppet-master's absurd song, Asturias is saying that man makes himself absurd, no one else, not circumstances, not tyrants, not God. In true esperpentic fashion, Doña Benjamón through el ojo de verdad logically concludes that her husband is mad, and thereby herself reflects the madness of society:
No le hagan caso, señores, no le pongan asunto, que está loco; no se le quiere hacer a la cabeza la idea de que ya no hay portal del Señor!

Figúrese como estará de loco que dice que vio toda la ciudad tumbada por tierra como el Portal! (SP, p. 287)

The puppet-master, in his madness, is the only one sane enough to realize the bitter truth, that in tyranny (evil) lies the destruction of humanity.

The student, the obvious hope of the people, looks scornfully at the debris of the Porch, and then calmly goes home, "situada al final de una calle sin salida. . . . " (SP, p. 288). There he finds his mother praying:

Por los agonizantes y caminantes...Porque reine la paz entre los Príncipes Cristianos...Por los que sufren persecución de justicia...Por los enemigos de la católica...Por las necesidades sin remedio de la Santa Iglesia y nuestras necesidades...Por las benditas ánimas del Santo Purgatorio...

Kyrie eleison (SP, p. 288)

The salvation of the people lies neither in government, revolution, nor religion. It lies only in themselves, in the triumph of humanity over evil. The only force powerful enough to defeat evil is love. Such power lies only within the individual. The human element, lo humano, is men's ultimate salvation, the only miracle that he can expect. Cara de Ángel senses this during Camila's strange illness. He repeats the doctor's words, "Solo un milagro":

Un milagro, la continuación arbitraria de lo perecedero, el triunfo sobre el absoluto estéril de la migaja humana. Sentía la necesidad de gritar a Dios que le hiciera el milagro, mientras el mundo se le escurreía por los brazos inútil, adverso, inseguro, sin razón de ser. (SP, p. 211)
Cara de Ángel, not God, brings about this miracle. It is a human miracle, not a divine one. And it is only realized through an act of love emanating from the human spirit. This is Asturias's message. Man will prevail over the beast only so long as lo humano prevails, and love is the basis of all true human endeavor.
CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

In summary, both Valle Inclán and Asturias attempt to point out the tragic condition of man through an artistic portrait of tyranny. Both depict, but in different manners, tyrants who ultimately are reduced to an abstraction, a symbol of tyranny. Valle Inclán portrays Tirano Banderas as a series of cubist fragments which when formed into a composite picture reveal not the tyrant, but the essence of tyranny, particularly as it relates to Hispanic life. To Valle Inclán, man is an absurdity because he denies the one element that ennobles him, his human dignity. Therefore, he can only be a tragic figure.

Asturias initially portrays the President as a complete entity which is artistically reduced to a universal symbol of tyranny and, by ideological extension, to pure evil. However, juxtaposed against that evil is the belief in the innate goodness of man; the recognition of man's potential to realize that goodness; and hope for man's redemption as a human being. This faith in man is evident in the symbolic triumph of love over evil. Although the man, Cara de Ángel, is physically destroyed by evil—brought about through his own decisions—mankind itself is spiritually saved through love.

While Valle Inclán without pity or mercy shows man to himself—a grotesque being without humanity—he offers no solution for improving the tragic human condition. But Asturias, although he portrays life as absurd and tragic, insists that through love man can regain his human dignity and his lost humanity.
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