

Specters of Bohemia: Music and Ghostly Appearances in the Dramatic and Musical-dramatic Adaptations of Pío Baroja's Short Story "Caídos"

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The short story "Caídos" by Basque-Spanish writer Pío Baroja (1872-1956) was written (1899) and published (1900) during an intense period of modernization in Spain and is one of many artistic and cultural depictions of the counterculture of bohemianism that arose in reaction to the new values of fast-changing, modern societies. "Caídos" is the story of the final encounter of two "fallen" bohemians, Ramón and Trini, who once shared an artistic, non-conventional lifestyle. Unlike romantic portrayals of bohemian life and love, in the words of scholar Richard Leppert, "poverty made ... pretty and pleasurable," Baroja's story contrasts the characters' past with their present reality and suffering (548).

Ramón is a failed artist who plans to leave Madrid to return to the countryside of his birth, and Trini, his ex-lover and once muse, now works as a prostitute on the streets of the Spanish capital. Although a work of prose narrative, "Caídos" has a dramatic text-structure as it begins with a description of the Madrid café where Ramón and Trini meet, and then transitions to the dialogue between the two characters.¹ The only other character that intervenes in the conversation is a waiter who simply asks if they would like, "¿Café?" (159).

At the conclusion of the story, Ramón and Trini leave the café and take the tram to an unknown destination. Seeing that Ramón is low on tobacco, Trini promises to buy him cigarettes. Exiting the tram Ramón states, "¡Es lástima! Si no estuviéramos los dos caídos...¿eh? seríamos buena gente" (162). Baroja ends the story with Trini's reply and with music: "¡Cállate!

¹ Antonio Gago Rodó describes Baroja's short story "Caídos" as "un cuento dialogado" (112).

¡No hables de cosas tristes[!] (*Cantando*): Tengo yo una bicicleta/ que costó dos mil pesetas, / y que corre más que el tren” (162).

In the essay that follows, I relate Baroja’s short story “Caídos” to its dramatic and musical-dramatic adaptations, specifically the play *Adiós a la bohemia* (1911) by Pío Baroja and the *ópera chica en un acto Adiós a la bohemia* (1933/1945) with libretto by Pío Baroja and music by Basque-Spanish composer Pablo Sorozábal (1897-1988). Using the essay “Music in the Background” (c. 1934) by German sociologist, philosopher, and musicologist Theodor Adorno (1903-1969), I argue that music plays an increasingly important role in each subsequent rewriting of the original story and serves to conjure up simultaneous visions of past ideals and present disillusionment, a process that reveals to Ramón and Trini that life has become a ghostly shadow of its former self.

Approach: Literature, Music, Society, and Performance in the Dramatic and Musical-dramatic Adaptations of “Caídos”

I approach Pío Baroja’s original short story “Caídos” and its dramatic and musical-dramatic adaptations as *Adiós a la bohemia* through the perspectives offered by Sociology of Literature and Sociology of Music, which study, in general terms, the relationship between literature or music and society. In this essay, I will focus on the particular aspects of these approaches that examine literature and music as important expressions of the symbols, codes, and collective imagination of a given society and its time, as well as the reactions of the writer and composer to or shaping of these socio-cultural trends. The essay “Music in the Background” by Theodor Adorno, an important 20th century theorist of culture, society, literature, and particularly music, in the modern age, is especially appropriate as it focuses specifically on café music, the same music, as we shall see, that mediates the final ghostly encounter between Ramón

and Trini in the dramatic and musical-dramatic adaptations of Baroja's original short story "Caídos."

Furthermore, this essay is informed by perspectives on the relationship between society and the performing arts (theater and music) offered by Performances Studies. I am particularly interested in the idea of the theater as a liminoid, "neither here nor there...betwixt and between," yet privileged space, both separate from and directly engaged with everyday life outside of the theater (Turner 79). As we shall see, for the people living in early 20th century Spain, everyday life was becoming increasingly theatrical, and the theater was in a unique position to showcase and highlight everyday life.

From Text to Performance: Bohemia, Esperpento, and Mirror-like Apparitions in the Publication and Performance History of Pío Baroja's Short Story "Caídos" and its Dramatic and Musical-dramatic Adaptations

Pío Baroja created, revisited, and revised his short story "Caídos" during an especially tumultuous period in Spanish history, a time marked by events that would set the stage for two great tragedies of the 20th century: The Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) and the dictatorship of General Francisco Franco (1939-1975).

It was during the Restoration (1874-1931) that Spain experienced its intense period of modernization, which would have also fostered the development of countercultures, such as bohemianism, in reaction to these widespread changes. With origins in Paris as early as the 1830s and taking its name from the Central European Kingdom of Bohemia, the supposed homeland of the gypsies, historian Christine Stansell remarks that "The turn to bohemia was one manifestation of gathering revulsion against a society that seemed locked in a stranglehold of bourgeois resolve" (14). Bohemianism, a performance of everyday life played out on the real-life

stage of the modern city, immediately inspired numerous artistic depictions in both the 19th and 20th centuries.² Although Pío Baroja denies that he followed a bohemian lifestyle, he was clearly influenced by the movement and gave it his own unique expression in the story of Ramón and Trini in “Caídos,” written during what Spanish literary scholar Víctor Fuentes calls the “Golden Age” of Spanish bohemianism (12).³

Pío Baroja revisited and first revised his short story “Caídos” as the play *Adiós a la bohemia* during a period of increased domestic and international difficulties for Spain, when both faith in the ideals of modernity, as well as “enthusiasm for the life of the spirit” embodied in bohemianism would have begun to greatly diminish (Graña 72). The play *Adiós a la bohemia* was first published in *El cuento semanal* in 1911 and then in Baroja’s collection of works *Nuevo tablado de Arlequín* in 1917 (Suárez-Pajares 11). During this time, Baroja lived the experience of the extreme right and left jockeying for power, the violent suppression of revolts, such as the one in Cataluña (1909), and major strikes in the principal cities of Spain (1917), which paralyzed the economy. Internationally, Baroja witnessed Spain’s involvement in conflict in Morocco, which would eventually lead to the disastrous defeat of the Spanish army at Annual (1921), and the outbreak of World War I (1914-1918), dividing the people of an officially neutral Spain. By 1923, when the military overthrew parliamentary government and Captain General Miguel Primo

2 Henri Murger (1822-1861) first captured the counterculture of bohemianism set to the urban backdrop of Paris in a series of magazine articles in the early 1840s, then in the play *La Vie Bohème* (1849), and finally, in the novel *Scènes de la Vie Bohème* (1851). Murger’s novel became the basis for not one, but two operas of the 1890s: The four-act *La Bohème* (1896) by Giacomo Puccini (1858-1924) and the four-act *La Bohème* (1897) by Ruggiero Leoncavallo (1857-1919). By 1904, Murger’s Parisian bohemia was adapted for performance in Madrid by the Spanish composer Amadeo Vives (1871-1932) and librettists Guillermo Perrín (1857-1923) and Miguel de Palacios (1863?-1920) as the one-act work of *género chico Bohemios* (1904).

3 In a section titled “Bohemia o pseudobohemia” from volume I of Baroja’s *mémoire Desde la última vuelta del camino* (1941-1952), the Basque-Spanish writer explains, “Muchas veces a mí me han dicho: <<Usted ha sido un bohemio, ¿verdad?>> Yo siempre he contestado que no. Podrá uno haber vivido una vida más o menos desarreglada en una época; pero yo no he sentido jamás el espíritu de la bohemia” (561). Víctor Fuentes specifically refers to the last decade of the 19th century and the first decade of the 20th century when he speaks of the height of bohemianism in Spain.

de Rivera (1870-1930) was named prime minister in order to give his nascent dictatorship legitimacy, Pío Baroja's text *Adiós a la bohemia* made an important leap from text to performance.

Although Baroja claims in his *mémoire Desde la última vuelta del camino*, "Yo he tenido poca curiosidad por los autores dramáticos, por el teatro y por los cómicos...he ido poco al teatro," we know that from the very beginning of his professional career, when, by 1902, he worked as a theater critic for the newspaper *El globo*, he, like other authors of his time, had an eye towards the theater (I. 542-43). Spanish literature and theater scholar Dru Dougherty explains that Spanish theater from the time of the Revolution of 1868 to the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War in 1936, "Poised at the center of social and intellectual life in urban centers and enjoying a popularity that no other art form could rival until the advent of film," can be best characterized as a "syncretic stage" because of the diverse range of aesthetic and ideological approaches (211, 220). Works written and performed during this time varied from those influenced by foreign trends to others that utilized experimentation in line with avant-garde movements, incorporated political or social issues, and, on the other side of the spectrum, commercial theater with popular themes geared towards mass audiences.

Adiós a la bohemia was first performed at the *Teatro Cervantes* in Madrid in 1923 and again in 1926 at the inaugural session of *El mirlo blanco*, a theater group founded by Pío Baroja's older brother Ricardo Baroja (1871-1953) and Carmen Monné de Baroja (dates unknown) (Lima 36).⁴ Importantly, around the same time that performances of Pío Baroja's dramatic version of *Adiós a la bohemia* were taking place in Madrid, Ramón María del Valle-

⁴ *Adiós a la bohemia* was performed at the Cervantes Theater alongside the theatrical adaptation of Baroja's second novel *El mayorazgo de Labraz* (1903) from the trilogy *Tierra Vasca* (1900-1909). At the opening session of *El mirlo blanco*, *Adiós a la bohemia* was performed with Baroja's sainete *Arlequín, mancebo de botica o Los pretendientes de Columbina*.

Inclán (1866-1936) published (1920) and revised (1924) his famous theatrical work *Luces de bohemia*, which describes the last night in the life of the failed writer Max Estrella, a character inspired by the historical Spanish bohemian writer Alejandro Sawa (1862-1909).⁵

In *Luces de bohemia*, Valle-Inclán develops the aesthetic of *esperpento*, a type of grotesque deformation of reality, or in the words of the main character Max Estrella, “El sentido trágico de la vida española sólo puede darse con una estética sistemáticamente deformada” (162). Through *esperpento*, it is as if society is placed in front of a fun-house mirror that distorts and projects back its absurd image, becoming a powerful tool of reflection and critique. In the case of the play of *Adiós a la bohemia*, Pío Baroja, as we shall see, uses music to create a mirror-like moment in which the past is reflected in the present for the characters of Ramón and Trini. Clearly, writers reacted to the increasingly tragic nature of modern life in Spain by experimenting with aesthetics that engaged popular notions of bohemia and created *esperpentos* or other mirror-like projections that found their full expression in theatrical performance.

In 1926, Pío Baroja’s play made its way to San Sebastián, where the young musician Pablo Sorozábal participated in the performances as violinist. By the 1930s, Sorozábal, now an established musician and composer, began to seek out a new textual foundation and collaborator for his next musical-dramatic project.⁶ It was during this time that he remembered Pío Baroja’s play *Adiós a la bohemia*, stating “El recuerdo de esa comedia empezó a obsesionarme...” (202). Sorozábal contacted Baroja, who agreed to serve as librettist and collaborator for a musical-

⁵ *Luces de bohemia* was performed for the first time in Paris in 1963 and for the first time in Spain in Valencia in 1970.

⁶ At this point in his career, Sorozábal was looking to develop his talents away from symphonic music and towards the more lucrative musical theater. Influenced by the push to modernize Spanish musical theater, he wished to move away from what he believed to be the frivolous characters, simplistic storylines, and regional settings of musical-dramatic works. He writes in his his *mémoire Mi vida y mi obra* (1986): “...empecé a pensar seriamente en los temas y ambientes teatrales que me gustaría componer.... Mi mente buscaba un camino. Me hubiera gustado hacer un teatro más humano, con seres vivos y no con personajes refabricados, de guardarropía. Un teatro con menos oficio, menos carpintería teatral y más emoción...” (201-202).

dramatic version of *Adiós a la bohemia*. The *ópera chica Adiós a la bohemia* premiered in Madrid at the *Teatro Calderón* in 1933, recalled by Sorozábal as a time of strikes, violence in the streets, and, as a result, poor audience attendance (210-11).

Although separated by the ensuing Spanish Civil War and its aftermath, Pablo Sorozábal and Pío Baroja came together again in 1944 to collaborate on a second revised version of their *ópera chica Adiós a la bohemia*.⁷ This second version premiered at the *Teatro Apolo* in Barcelona in 1945, the same year that Sorozábal was hired to take a company to South America to showcase his musical work. As a result, this second version of the *ópera chica Adiós a la bohemia* was performed in South America when Sorozábal spent a season in Buenos Aires (1946) and then traveled to Montevideo.⁸

A close reading of Pío Baroja's successive rewritings of his original short story "Caídos," makes it evident that the Basque-Spanish writer plays with the association between bohemia, music, and modern life, adapting music as the lively expression of the world of the spirit embodied in bohemia, to something that literally opens the door to the spirit world.

Music, Ghostly Appearances, and Specters of Bohemia in the Dramatic and Musical-Dramatic Versions of *Adiós a la bohemia*

In the play *Adiós a la bohemia*, the central story of Ramón and Trini from "Caídos" largely remains the same. However, the action is now entirely centered in the café and the setting

⁷ The libretto of the second versión of the *ópera chica en un acto Adiós a la bohemia* largely remains the same. However, the storyline of Ramón and Trini is now framed by a prologue and epilogue by a Vagabond. The Vagabond's most stirring lines are, "¡Realismo! Realismo, cosa amarga, triste.../ Vale más vivir en el sueño" (111; 144). In his *mémoire*, Sorozábal takes credit for the idea of adding the Vagabond's prologue and epilogue, but is not sure if Baroja created the speech expressly for this project, or if he transplanted it from another character in one of his novels (213). Carlos Ruiz Silva points out that this prologue may have been inspired by the opera *Pagliacci* (1892) by Ruggiero Leoncavallo in which the character Tonio directly addresses the audience to remind them that the story they are about to see on stage is based on real life (68-69). Interestingly, Leoncavallo's *Pagliacci* is typically performed alongside Pietro Mascagni's *Cavalleria Rusticana*, the music played by the café violinist and pianist in the dramatic and musical-dramatic versions of *Adiós a la bohemia*.

⁸ Antonio Gago Rodó lists that the *ópera chica Adiós a la bohemia* was also performed in Mexico in 1954 (130).

is enhanced through the addition of various other characters such as a man who reads a newspaper, a group of young artists, and a pair of café musicians, a violinist and a pianist, who play music in the background from the opera *Cavalleria rusticana* (1890) by Pietro Mascagni (1863-1945). In his essay “Music in the Background,” Theodor Adorno explains that music, for the most part, is silenced by modern life, forcing listeners to travel to spaces separate from everyday existence and routine – such as the concert hall – to experience music. However, according to Adorno, music is still very much a part of everyday life, although pushed into the background, in the café. It is here that Adorno writes,

Music belongs; it may have been shooed off the street, but not to the distant reaches of formalized art. Rather, it keeps the customers company – the tired ones with their stimulating drink, the busy ones at their negotiations, even the newspaper readers; even the flirts, if there still are any. The first characteristic of background music is that you don’t have to listen to it. No stillness surrounds it with an insulating layer. It seeps into the murmur of the conversations. (507)

Adorno adds, however, that live-performance café music, one of the last remnants of musical life in the modern world, is not based in original creation but rather arrangements of sections of much more extensive and established past works, arrangements Adorno calls “bouquets of dead flowers” (508). These musical fragments then, in the words of Adorno,

awaken the ruins to a new, ghostly life. If our art music lingers in the comforting realm of Orpheus – here its echo sounds from Eurydice’s mournful region. Its glow is netherworldly ... the melodies wander around as ghosts, one need not fear any disturbance from them, no matter how present they are. For they are quoted from the unconscious memory of the listeners... (509)

In both the dramatic and musical-dramatic versions of *Adiós a la bohemia*, the café arrangement of music from *Cavalleria rusticana* “awakens the ruins” of Ramón and Trini’s past life together, with Ramón stating “¡Esta música cómo me recuerda aquellos tiempos! ¿Te acuerdas de nuestro estudio?” (97).⁹ Initially, the memories are comforting as Ramón and Trini recall how he carried her up the stairs to the studio, the first night she spent there with him, the good times they shared in that space together, and their adventures outside of the studio in Madrid. However, as the music continues to play, “wandering ghosts” from their common past accompany their memories:

RAMÓN: ... ¿Y cuando vino aquel poeta enfermo a casa, no recuerdas?

TRINI: Sí.

RAMÓN: Lo estoy viendo entrar... (99-100)¹⁰

A Catalan sculptor, a French performer who recited the poetry of Paul Verlaine (1884-1896), an anarchist, and a dandy all follow the initial ghostly appearance of the poet with tuberculosis.

Although they “need not fear any disturbance from them,” this present encounter with the “wandering ghosts” of their past does become intensely disturbing for both Ramón and Trini, as they come to the realization together that all of these people have either fallen into disgrace or are deceased, becoming “specters of bohemia” and “specters of the past,” to use terminology employed in other works by Baroja and in works by contemporaneous writers such as the aforementioned Ramón del Valle-Inclán.¹¹ Their encounter with these specters forces Ramón and

⁹ In the *ópera chica* by Baroja and Sorozábal, the text is similar, with Ramón singing “¡Esta música, cómo me recuerda aquellos tiempos! ¿Recuerdas nuestro estudio?” (128).

¹⁰ Again, the text of the *ópera chica* is similar, but this time Trini is the one who “sees” the poet, not Ramón: “RAMÓN: ¿Y cuando vino aquel poeta/ enfermo a casa, no recuerdas?/ TRINI: Sí, lo estoy viendo entrar./ ...” (132).

¹¹ Pío Baroja has a poem titled “Espectros de bohemios” published in *Canciones del suburbio* (first edition 1944), which begins: “Cuando el mísero escritor/ despierta al día temprano/ en el hospital inmundado/ donde yace abandonado./ una serie de visiones/ se apoderan de su ánimo./ que en ocasiones le alegran/ y otras más le dan espanto./ Vive una vida ficticia/ en casinos y teatros./ en reuniones y cafés./ en escenarios y en palcos./

Trini to recognize that they are not only “fallen” bohemians (“Caídos”), but also that their entire world is obsolete and has come to an end (*Adiós a la bohemia*):

RAMÓN: ...Las cosas están igual; nosotros únicamente hemos variado.

TRINI: No, chico, todo no es igual.... (104)¹²

While there seems to be hope of an escape for Ramón as he plans to leave Madrid, Trini is resigned to her fate and expects that she will one day soon enter the ranks of “specters of bohemia”:

TRINI: Más pronto me olvidarás tú a mí. Tú tienes vida por delante. En tu pueblo te casarás...; puedes tener mujer..., hijos...; yo, en cambio... ¿Qué le queda a una como yo? El hospital..., el Viaducto... (105-106)¹³

In the play *Adiós a la bohemia*, Trini is called away from Ramón by her pimp, while in the *ópera chica* *Adiós a la bohemia* a chorus of prostitutes summons her from the café back to the streets (“¡Noche! Noche triste y enlutada/ como mi negro destino....”) (138). After Trini departs, the waiter reassures Ramón that when one woman leaves, another will come. But Ramón replies, “Es que no es una mujer la que se va, Antonio. ¡Es la juventud..., la juventud...,y esa no

Se yerguen ante sus ojos/ sus compañeros de antaño,/ y le interpelan hablándole con un brío extraordinario...” (Fuentes 42). Ramón del Valle Inclán also uses the term “espectro de la bohemia” in *Luces de bohemia* (130).

12 The text is the same in the *ópera chica*. The only variance is in the punctuation: “RAMÓN: ...Las cosas están igual: nosotros, únicamente, hemos variado. TRINI: No, chico; todo no está igual....” (138).

13 In the *ópera chica*: “TRINI: Más pronto me olvidarás tú a mí. Tú tienes la vida por delante. En tu pueblo te casarás, puedes tener mujer, hijos... Yo, en cambio...¿qué le queda a una como yo? El hospital... el Viaducto...” (139). José Luis Téllez explains that the viaduct in Madrid was (and still is) a popular place for suicides (20). These lines also seem to reference *Scènes de la Vie Bohème* by Henri Murger in which scholar Peter Brooker notes that bohemia is described as a stage that inevitably ends at the academy, the hospital, or the morgue (2). Furthermore, in the section “Bohemia o seudobomia” of his *mémoire*, Baroja comments on how bohemian life in Spain ultimately affects men and women differently: “Todavía por Madrid se puede encontrar algo parecido al hombre bohemio; lo que no se encontrará es algo parecido a la mujer bohemia. Y la razón es comprensible. Con la vida desordenada, el hombre puede perder algo; la mujer lo pierde todo” (I. 561).

vuelve.... Sí, me voy a dar un paseo largo..., muy largo,” leading the audience to believe that Ramón may ultimately choose to leave Madrid by ending his own life (109).¹⁴

Contribution and Conclusions: Reality, Fiction, Dreams, and Nightmares

The study of the development of Pío Baroja’s short story “Caídos” into the dramatic and musical-dramatic versions of *Adiós a la bohemia*, spanning a period of over 46 years of Spanish history, society, and culture, shows us that there is an important relationship between literature, music, performance, and modern life.

19th- century Spain saw the beginning of a powerful period of modernization. In reaction to these fast-paced changes in Spanish society, and in opposition to the expansion of the new values of the modern world, countercultures, such as bohemianism, developed, grew, and evolved.¹⁵ Reality and fiction became intertwined as, almost immediately, writers such as Pío Baroja began to represent Spanish society under transformation and incorporate these new “urban specimens” into their literary works (Stansell 17). As Christine Stansell explains, “bohemia proved to have enduring fascination. As a lived experience it was never quite separate from its celebration (and condemnation) in print and on the stage” (17).

Theodor Adorno’s essay “Music in the Background” show us that music both expressed the spirit of the modern world embodied in bohemia and was silenced and relegated to the background of modern life. In order to experience “the distant reaches of formalized art” music, people became audience members who travelled to the theater, an increasingly important social, intellectual, and entertainment space in the urban sphere. As life in Spain became progressively more difficult in the successive years of the early 20th century, the theater would have further

14 In the *ópera chica*: “RAMÓN: Es que no es una mujer la que se va, Antonio. ¡Es la juventud, la juventud!...Y ésa no vuelve.... Sí; me voy a dar un paseo largo... ¡muy largo!...” (144).

15 Brooker notes, “The bohemian was the product of and reaction to changing forms of modernity, and the persona correspondingly altered” (7).

provided a temporary disconnect for audience members, who could theoretically sit back, relax, and watch modern life staged and performed. However, writers such as Pío Baroja and Ramón del Valle Inclán incorporated new aesthetics and techniques in their theatrical works, such as *esperpento* and other mirror-like apparitions, brought on by everyday background music, blurring the division between reality and fiction, and forcing audience members to reflect back on their own lives outside of the theater. Instead of a nostalgic, dreamy remembrance, Ramón and Trini's final encounter in the café, framed by music in the background, becomes spectral, perturbing the minds of the two characters and, by extension, audience members.

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