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**How to translate irony in Valle-Inclán's
esperpento: the analysis of John Lyon's
English translation of *Bohemian Lights***

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ABSTRACT

The “esperpentic world”, relating it to Valle-Inclán, has been a critical study for many years. An important example is his play *Bohemian Lights* which, together with other works he wrote, makes up and exemplifies an important part of the genre we now call *esperpento*. Irony is one of the main literary figures represented by this term and, at the same time, its translation would be a great challenge for the field of translational studies. The aim of this project is to search for the relationship between some of the ironic elements extracted from the play *Bohemian Lights* and to see if this irony is maintained through certain strategies used by John Lyon in his translation into English. As a result of this research, it will be concluded that the strategy of adaptation is the one that preserves the irony the most, although no specific pattern of the strategies used in the translation is completely clear.

Keywords: Valle-Inclán, *Bohemian Lights*, Esperpento, Irony, Spanish-English translation.

El mundo esperpéntico, relacionándolo con Valle-Inclán, se ha encontrado en el ojo de crítica durante muchos años. Un importante ejemplo es su obra *Luces de Bohemia* que, junto con otras obras que escribió, compone y ejemplifica una parte importante del género al que actualmente llamamos *esperpento*. La ironía es una de las principales figuras literarias que representa este término y a la vez, su traducción supondría un gran reto para el campo de los estudios traductológicos. El objetivo de este proyecto tratará de buscar la relación entre algunos de los elementos irónicos extraídos de la obra *Luces de Bohemia* y ver si esa ironía se mantiene a través de ciertas estrategias usadas por John Lyon en su traducción al inglés. Como fruto de esta búsqueda, se llegará a la conclusión de que la estrategia de adaptación es la que preserva más la ironía, aunque no se mantiene un patrón específico de las estrategias usadas en la traducción.

Palabras clave: Valle-Inclán, *Luces de Bohemia*, Esperpento, Ironía, Traducción español-inglés.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Introduction.....	1
2. <i>Bohemian Lights</i> : an illustration of Valle-Inclán's <i>esperpento</i>	2
2.1. <i>Bohemian Lights</i> : the plot.....	4
2.2. The use of irony in <i>Bohemian Lights (BL)</i> as a literary figure: the base at the <i>esperpento</i>	11
3. Spanish-English translations of <i>BL</i>	12
4. Objective: the (un)equal effect of Valle-Inclán's irony in <i>BL</i> 's Lyon's (1993) translation.....	15
5. Methodology.....	15
5.1. The English translation of character's names.....	16
5.2. The English translation of cultural references.....	19
5.3. The English translation of Spanish typical expressions.....	21
6. Conclusion.....	23
7. Bibliography.....	24

1. INTRODUCTION

Ramón María del Valle-Inclán is one of the most relevant Spanish playwrights. However, his works are not very well-known outside Spain. He belongs to the literary group *Generation of 1898* which defined the country as a cultural and historical identity. This group was characterised by its radicalism and rebellious spirit that broke with all classical literary genres. However, Valle-Inclán stands out from the rest of the members of this generation as the creator of a new genre called *esperpento*. This term had completely changed the literary approach to life, society and culture of the time. Nowadays, this genre, together with the so-called *picaresque*, constitutes the literary perspective most closely linked to the Spanish culture of all times.

This dissertation presents a comparative analysis of irony as a literary figure in the translation into English of different character's names, expressions and cultural references that constitute the play *Bohemian Lights* (1924), written by Valle-Inclán and its translation into English published in 1993 by John Lyon. Therefore, this project is meant to analyse how the cultural elements that constitute the true spirit of a country that maintains a very particular attitude towards life are brought into a target English-speaking culture. As the *esperpento* is an authentic literary reflection inherent to a Spanish point of view that only people with an intimate knowledge of Spanish culture, language and tradition can fully understand, the translation of *Bohemian Lights* (*BL*) into English is, to say the least, challenging.

This dissertation is structured in six different sections. In section 2, irony is described briefly as a literary figure which serves as the base of *BL* and shapes a common thread towards the understanding of the *esperpento* in this play. In order to understand how irony is related to the *esperpento*, it will be specified what this term means and represents. Then, several passages from *BL* will be provided to understand its dynamics through a short summary of the plot.

In section 3 different translation parameters referring to the translatability of irony in English translations of *BL* will be discussed; in section 4 the aim of this research is presented (i.e., to analyse a selection of the ironical elements present in *BL* and Lyon's translation). Then, section 5 shows the process of selection and compilation of the ironic elements in *BL* and also the analysis of the different translation techniques used by Lyon

(1993) in order to translate them. Finally, section 6 will cover the conclusions drawn from this dissertation.

2. *BOHEMIAN LIGHTS: AN ILLUSTRATION OF VALLE-INCLAN'S ESPERPENTO*

Esperpento is an invented literary genre originated in Spain in the early 20th century. According to Podol (1985), it is a type of grotesque and satirical drama that focuses on the absurdity of the contemporary Spanish society. *Esperpento* is characterized by the use of distortion, parody and satire to create an exaggerated version of reality. Furthermore, this term was coined by the Spanish writer Ramón María del Valle-Inclán, who is considered the father of the genre. In his works, Valle-Inclán aimed to create a unique and authentic Spanish style of theater that was distinct from the traditional forms of drama.

Valle-Inclán developed *esperpento* in response to what he saw as the limitations of the naturalist and modernist literary movements of his time. He believed that these movements failed to capture the true nature of the Spanish society and culture, and he sought to create a new genre that would be more faithful to the absurd and grotesque realities of the world. Consequently, Valle-Inclán sought to portray the world in a way that was both exaggerated and distorted, using a combination of humor and satire to comment on the contradictions and injustices of society. With that in mind, Valle-Inclán's style of grotesque art is characterized by a complex visual language that both reflects and distorts Spain's social reality¹. This style is intended to distort the subject matter and unsettle the audience (Podol, 1985). One of his plays, *Divinas palabras* (1920) is an excellent example of this style, using dialogue and stage directions to create a visually striking form of grotesque art that is crucial to the play's main theme (i.e. the play is set in rural Galicia at the beginning of the 20th century and it is a harsh criticism of the cruelty and hypocrisy of uneducated peasants found in many small Spanish towns and the society responsible for their way of thinking).

Valle-Inclán's unique literary genre has been analyzed by many different scholars. One of them, Zamora Vicente (1988), considers that, after Valle-Inclán's genre creation, the term *esperpento* has become a familiar common word that everyone knows to refer to a

¹ His artistic vision is influenced by Goya's art, the comical puppet show, and the fragmented editing style of cinematography.

person, thing or situation that is grotesque or bizarre. In the same line, López Bragado (2021) explains that the term *esperpento* was not actually invented by Valle-Inclán as this word already designates people and things that are characterized by being ridiculous, absurd, distorted, strange and deformed, as reflected in the definition of the RAE Dictionary². However, it is generally agreed that Valle-Inclán coined this concept to refer to a specific literary genre enriching it with a triple value that defines a drama category as follows:

- 1) It is based on aesthetics as it conceived as a piece of art showing a picture of grotesque and visualizing it especially through scene descriptions and characters' complex language (especially through the use of irony and sarcasm).
- 2) It gives rise to a new type of theater, as absurdity is at the base of the character's speeches, actions and descriptions.
- 3) It offers a distorted and grotesque view of the situation in Spain and the contemporary world.

Therefore, as a part of the objective of the *esperpento* its stylistic features concentrate on the following issues (López Bragado, 2021):

- a) Animalization of characters based on their physical or psychological characteristics.
- b) Description of sordid and emaciated places, as a part of the social criticism shown in the plays.
- c) Diversity of linguistic registers together with the use of literary figures like, for instance, irony to create certain contradictory impressions in the readers.

The combination of all these features leads the reader to experience a contradictory feeling of rejection and admiration as what Valle-Inclán achieves through this literary genre is to laugh at certain events that, in realistic circumstances will provoke shock and pain (López Bragado, 2021).

² Different definitions of *esperpento* in Spanish according to RAE:

1. m. Hecho grotesco o desatinado.

2. m. Género literario creado por Ramón María del Valle – Inclán, escritor español de la Generación del 98, en el que se deforma la realidad, recargando sus rasgos grotescos, sometiendo a una elaboración muy personal el lenguaje coloquial y desgarrado.

3. m. coloq. Persona o cosa notable por su fealdad, desaliño o mala traza.

In order to illustrate further the importance of *esperpento* as an innovative drama genre, for the present dissertation we have taken into consideration the play *Bohemian Lights* (1983) as the first work classified as *esperpento*. It was written by Valle-Inclán as one of the great classics of the Spanish theater and drama, and it appeared in the magazine *España* in weekly installments between July and October of 1920. The play was finally published in 1924 and, according to Zamora Vicente (1988), for those who already knew Valle-Inclán, *Bohemian Lights* represented a clear deepening of some exaggerated, and at first sight, caricatured traits that had already been present in other previous works of this author, such as *La pipa de Kif* (1919); *Farsa de la enamorada del Rey* (1920) or *La Reina Castiza* (1920). In the following section, the plot of *Bohemian Lights* together with the role of irony in this drama will be presented, as this literary figure and its translation into English will be the focus of the present dissertation.

2.1. BOHEMIAN LIGHTS: THE PLOT

According to the description given in the previous section, *Bohemian Lights* (*BL*) is a clear example of *esperpento* because this play reflects the absurdity and the grotesque aspects in the society of that time. In fact, it is one of the most representative plays of the “esperpentic” genre, and it reflects the insane and dark social and political context of Spain in the early 20th century and so denouncing, as López Bragado (2021: 7) puts it, the unbearable situation Spain was suffering: “*La acción tiene lugar en un Madrid absurdo, brillante y hambriento*”.

Therefore, the play, composed by 15 scenes, is a critique of the Spanish society at the turn of the 20th century, as well as a picture of the role of the artists in society. More specifically, *BL* tells the story of a blind and penniless poet (Max Estrella) accompanied by his friend Don Latino de Hispalis, wandering through the streets of Madrid on a cold winter’s night. A simple situation, in which both characters meet different acquaintances, old friends with whom they have jocular and ironic conversations, but which at the same time reveal the harsh denounce and criticism of the Spain in which they live.

At the beginning of the play, we observe how the main character, Max Estrella, lives in misery with his wife Madame Collet and his daughter Claudinita. In the first scene, Max refers to this misery by talking in a “funny” way about suicide, as it was probably the only way to alleviate the misery they were involved:

MAX.- ¡Collet, mal vamos sin esas cuatro crónicas! ¿Dónde gano yo veinte duros, Collet?

MADAME COLLET.- Otra puerta se abrirá.

MAX.- La de la muerte. Podemos suicidarnos colectivamente.

MADAME COLLET.- A mí la muerte no me asusta. ¡Pero tenemos una hija, Max!

MAX.- ¿Y si Claudinita estuviese conforme con mi plan de suicidio colectivo?

MADAME COLLET.- ¡Es muy joven!

MAX.- También se matan los jóvenes, Collet.

MADAME COLLET.- No por cansancio de la vida. Los jóvenes se matan por romanticismo.

MAX.- Entonces, se matan por amar demasiado la vida. Es una lástima la obcecación de Claudinita. Con cuatro perras de carbón, podíamos hacer el viaje eterno.

(*Luces de Bohemia*, Scene I, p.6)

It can be seen how this first dialogue in Scene I allow us to visualise the ironic capacity enshrined within the play. The most relevant ironic moment is when Max is dissapointed because his daughter disagrees with the idea of dying, which imbues this whole scene in ridiculousness and sadistic sarcasm. The idealisation of death and suicide as an escape route mask the intricacies of an impoverished society.

Another significant scene in the play, concretely Scene IV, begins with both characters walking around Madrid, on their way to the *Buñolería Modernista*, when Max and Don Latino come across a group of young modernists who appear to be old acquaintances. Max's blindness and poverty are mocked by the modernists, and he responds with a stinging critique of their revolutionary ideals. This scene establishes the ironic tone for the remainder of the play, in which Max is constantly confronted with the harsh realities of Spanish society at the time, as well as his own poverty and marginalization. Max is drunk at that moment, and they have a run-in with the authorities as a result of the scandal:

UN GUARDIA.- Si quieren acompañar a su amigo, no se oponen las leyes, y hasta lo permiten; pero deberán guardar moderación ustedes. Yo respeto mucho el talento.

MAX.- Latino, dame la mano. ¡Señores guardias, ustedes me perdonarán que sea ciego!

UN GUARDIA.- Sobra tanta política.

DON LATINO.- ¿Qué ruta consagramos?

UN GUARDIA.- Al Ministerio de la Gobernación.

...

UN GUARDIA.- ¡Basta de voces! ¡Cuidado con el poeta curda! ¡Se la está ganando, me caso en Sevilla!

EL OTRO GUARDIA.- A este habrá que darle para el pelo. Lo cual que sería lástima, porque debe ser hombre de mérito.

(*Luces de Bohemia*, Scene IV, p.57-58)

As we can see in the previous example, there is a latent sarcasm in the expressions of both the authorities and Max himself, reflecting an abuse of power on the part of the guards with "¡Se la está ganando! ¡Me caso en Sevilla!" or "A este habrá que darle para el pelo". The abuse of power was very normalised in Madrid at the time and Max provokes the authorities with the sentence "Ustedes me perdonarán que sea ciego". Consequently, these sentences reflect a ridiculous situation and somewhat complex to understand, characterising the ironic basis of the *esperpento*.

Another noteworthy scene in the play occurs in *Café Colón*, when Max and Don Latino meet a group of bohemian artists, including Rubén Darío and a young apprentice (Scene IX). The artists are represented as frivolous and self-absorbed, preoccupied with their own egos rather than creative. Max, on the other hand, is portrayed as a serious artist dedicated to social issues. In this moment, Max is forced to confront the fact that his own poverty and marginalization make it difficult for him to have any significant impact on the world:

MAX.- ¡No pensemos!

DON LATINO.- Compartiría tu opinión, si con el café, la copa y el puro nos tomásemos un veneno.

MAX.- ¡Miserable burgués!

DON LATINO.- Querido Max, hagamos un trato. Yo me bebo modestamente una chica de cerveza, y tú me apoquinas la pasta de los que me había de costar la bebecua.

RUBÉN.- No te apartes de los buenos ejemplos, Don Latino.

DON LATINO.- Servidor no es un poeta. Yo me gano la vida con más trabajo que haciendo versos.

RUBÉN.- Yo también estudio las matemáticas celestes.

(Luces de Bohemia, Scene IX, p.106)

Following the sarcastic line of the previous examples, this excerpt highlights the moral superiority of the characters and at the same time their unhappiness. Don Latino is characterised as a cheeky man who takes advantage of others in order to survive but is still able to show a certain "moral decency" despite being a scoundrel. The fact that Rubén holds up Max and Don Latino as good examples (in moral terms) is humorous, as they clearly are the opposite. As we can see with the intervention of Rubén Darío, we can appreciate the mockery that is hidden through his words and again, an ironic criticism of the Spanish decadence of the time is presented.

In scene XI, maybe one of the most intense that the readers can experience with *BL*, we can see how the abuse of power is completely enhanced when a woman appears, weeping, grief-stricken over the death of her son. At the same place, a battle had taken place between the police and some workers, the latter making a protest because of starvation and unworthy wages. In the distance, the Catalan prisoner with whom Max had spoken in a dungeon (scene VI), is being shot by the authorities. As we can see, this situation ends with totally unfair deaths:

LA MADRE DEL NIÑO.- ¡Asesinos! ¡Veros es ver al verdugo!

EL RETIRADO.- El Principio de Autoridad es inexorable.

EL ALBAÑIL.- Con los pobres. Se ha matado, por defender al comercio, que nos chupa la sangre.

EL TABERNERO.- Y que paga por sus contribuciones, no hay que olvidarlo.

EL EMPEÑISTA.- El comercio honrado no chupa la sangre de nadie.

LA PORTERA.- ¡Nos quejamos de vicio!

EL ALBAÑIL.- La vida del proletario no representa nada para el Gobierno.

MAX.- Latino, sácame de este círculo infernal.

...

LA MADRE DEL NIÑO.- ¡Qué tan fría, boca de nardo!

MAX.- ¡Jamás oí voz con esa cólera trágica!

DON LATINO.- Hay mucho de teatro.

MAX.- ¡Imbécil!

(Luces de Bohemia, Scene XI, p. 127-128)

In the example above, after the tragic and unjust death of a young boy at the hands of the authorities, the different characters mention some accurate but ridiculous opinions. The death of the child shows this scene as one of the hardest seen in *BL*. However, characters such as the bricklayer and the concierge act as if the child's death were not important at that moment, stripping the situation of any sentimentalism and dehumanising it. This irony used by Valle-Inclán is heartbreaking within this scene and some sentences like "Hay mucho de teatro" reflect how the characters act in a surrealistic and implausible way after the sadistic death of an innocent child, showing the intricacies of a selfish and superficial society.

In addition, the constant Spanish degradation of the time is greatly reflected in two more scenes. In one of them appears a well-known writer, Don Peregrino Gay, who has just returned from London. This arrival, together with shouts of "¡Viva España!" outside, leads the conversation between the four characters of this scene to focus on the situation in the country and the differences with England. Here, Valle-Inclán takes the opportunity to censure the strong Catholic influence that still exists in the country, a faith "in bad taste",

as he points out in the play (p. 18). Moreover, in the tenth scene Max and Don Latino return to the streets of Madrid after dinner. Their walk takes them to the *Paseo del Prado*, a street where the prostitution was really common and where two prostitutes try to convince them to be their clients that night. Don Latino will go with one of them but Max will stay with La Lunares, talking about different aspects of his personal life but also about her life. Both scenes exemplify a very strong criticism about religious and sexual aspects:

ZARATUSTRAS.- Sin religión no puede haber buena fe en el comercio.

DON GAY.- Maestro, hay que fundar la Iglesia Española Independiente.

MAX.- Y la Sede Vaticana, el Escorial.

DON GAY.- ¡Magnífica Sede!

MAX.- Berroqueña.

DON LATINO.- Ustedes acabarán profesando la Gran Secta Teosófica. Haciéndose iniciados de la sublime doctrina.

MAX.- Hay que resucitar a Cristo.

(*Luces de Bohemia*,
Scene II, p.19)

MAX.- ¿Y es siempre aquí tu parada nocturna?

LA LUNARES.- La más de las veces.

MAX.- ¡Te ganas honradamente la vida!

LA LUNARES.- Tú no sabes con cuántos trabajos. Yo miro mucho lo que hago. La Cotillona me habló para llevarme a una casa. [...] Yo guardo el pan de higos para el gachó que me sepa camelar. ¿Por qué no lo pretendes?

MAX.- Me falta tiempo.

(*Luces de Bohemia*,
Scene X, p. 118-119)

In these two passages, irony plays a key role in the way the characters express themselves. The first passage is surrealistic and they try to "establish" a religion to "rescue" the Spanish commerce but not the rest of humanity, wanting to resurrect Christ (jokingly) only for financial benefits. They are not interested in what is most human, but in materialism in the form of trade. In the second excerpt, we can observe a moral issue as in so many other scenes that constitute *BL* when Max expresses his "astonishment" by stating that the prostitute earns an honest living. The prostitute tries to disguise the situation by asserting her "untouched" virginity, but the situation seems doubtful. Consequently, this plethora of contradictions expressed by the characters is reflected through irony.

Before the end of the play (Scene XII), Max perishes tragically while he is escorted by Don Latino. Max's final breath vanishes on the doorstep of his house, in a state of drunkenness and drama. Don Latino then takes his friend's wallet under the guise that it should not be stolen, abandoning Max on the streets of Madrid that frigid night. This scene is filled with irony and tragedy: before dying, Max attempts to end his life with a sarcastic death speech, revealing Don Latino's true nature: a coward and selfish human being who has never truly cared about his friend. The irony of the situation is highlighted by Don Latino's ironic words: "Te la devolveré mañana" (p.137), because there will be no tomorrow for Max.

In the last scene, located at the *Taberna de Pica Lagartos*, Don Latino appears drunk and pretending to feel a great sorrow for Max's death. A lottery ticket bought by Max in a previous scene has finally been won and turns out that it is Don Latino who is enjoying it. Then, all the members of the bar try to take advantage of the prize with false accounts they had with the deceased. They begin to argue but, in the end, the dispute is interrupted by the announcement of the death of a woman and a girl. It is revealed that they are Max's daughter and wife, who have committed suicide. This scene is full of ironic moments because the lottery ticket favours Don Latino after all. That money, as Pica Lagartos argues, could have assisted Max's daughter and wife, but Don Latino appears unconcerned. At the end of this scene, Don Latino makes another allusion to the *esperpento* in regard to the absurdity of existence. The ending is grotesque: the final character to speak is a drunken boy who repeats the same words he yelled before (Scene III): "¡Cráneo privilegiado!" (p.177), referring to Don Latino as an eminence (but he proved the opposite) and leaving a great sense of ridiculousness.

As pointed out in this section, throughout *BL* the Spanish society at the turn of the 20th century is vividly portrayed by Valle-Inclán with a mixture of irony, satire, surrealism, and social criticism through most of the play's memorable characters and scenes, making *BL* a lasting masterpiece of Spanish literature. As illustrated in the following section, it is especially notable the use of irony or even sarcasm as a literary figure which is present in the most of scenes and which help the reader to understand (or not) the absurdity of the social situation of Spain at that time.

2.2. THE USE OF IRONY IN *BL* AS A LITERARY FIGURE: THE BASE AT THE “ESPERPENTO”

As mentioned in section 2, one of the most significant characteristics of *esperpento* is the distortion of reality, which is accomplished with the use of absurd representations of characters and scenes (some of them illustrated in 2.1). Particularly, in *BL* Valle-Inclán twists the characters and events to depict society's horrific features. In the play, for example, the police officers are corrupt and cruel, and they use their power to extort citizens. The prison is depicted as a place where convicts are abused and their rights are infringed (Scene VI), while the church is depicted as a hypocritical institution that abuses people's faith (Scene II).

Consequently, *esperpento* also emphasizes the role of language in the distortion of reality. In *BL*, Valle-Inclán uses language to create a grotesque and absurd atmosphere using puns, slang, and vulgar expressions to reflect the degradation of language in the Spanish society. This technique highlights the corruption and decay of the Spanish culture and emphasizes the need for social and political reform (Aznar Soler, 2017).

As part of the use of language to create an atmosphere of social and political decadence and deterioration in Spain at that time, Valle-Inclán employs an effective literary figure in *BL*, i.e., irony. This literary phenomenon is used in *BL* through parody (scene II), sarcasm or even black humor (scene IV and VII) and we can understand it better with the examples given in the previous section. This figure is at the base of this play and to understand it in a more lucid way, it is worth highlighting the ironic language by which a person or group is designated by the opposite of what it really is (Aznar Soler, 2017). This is a Madrilenian trait that can sometimes be misinterpreted if one does not carry out a deep search for meanings. For example, La Pisa-Bien, who is a character dedicated to prostitution, ironically describes the modernist poets as "bankers" (scene IV, p. 56), when they really are "beggars" but at the same time those who pay for her drinks; The Usher describes Don Latino and the modernists as "capitalists" (scene VII, p.73), when they are people who live by taking advantage of others; and Max Estrella himself is known as a "hyperbolic Andalusian" and describes his companion Don Latino as "my intendant" (scene II, p.15) and the irony is shown because that profession does not resemble the situation of Don Latino, which is one of extreme poverty (exaggeration of economic background). This ironic and hyperbolic language constitutes another typical feature of

popular Madrilenian speech, which is also reflected in the use of a diametrically opposite expression to the real one, in order to emphasize the situation (Aznar Soler, 2017).

Following the nature of irony as a phenomenon, it deals about expressing a hidden message in such a way that the reader needs to decode the information received (González, 1996). Finding the meaning to decode depends to a great extent on the knowledge of the receiver, on his or her ability to interpret the clues -often in a parodic tone- that the writer throws at the reader to help him or her in his or her research (González, 1996). This decodification implies that certain cultural and linguistic aspects are shared by the writer and the reader, forcing the ironic interpretation (González, 1996). In this way we can see how Valle-Inclán creates an ironic link with the audience he is addressing as he makes them fall into the trap of meaning (Ramírez, 2006). For this reason, irony is directly related to the *esperpento* and the necessary search for meaning or sense that must be carefully observed in order to understand it.

Finally, regarding the ironic field in *BL*, all these different forms of irony are meant to dehumanize characters and situations (scene XI). The *esperpento* also employs the technique of dehumanization in *BL* and the characters reflect the degradation of society. This technique aims to expose the inhumanity of the institutions and the people who run them (Argote, 2000).

As we have seen different examples where the importance of irony plays a fundamental role in *BL*, in the following section we will present the relation of irony and the different existing translations into English of *Bohemian Lights* in order to further develop the objective of our project.

3. SPANISH – ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS OF *BL*

The translation of texts from one language to another is a complex process that requires a deep understanding of both the source and target languages. In the case of Spanish-English translations of *BL*, the translator faces additional challenges related to cultural and linguistic differences between the two languages. To the best of our knowledge, López Bragado's (2021) study of Spanish-English translation of *BL*, specifically translated by María Delgado (1997), is the only critical work focused on the translation of Valle-Inclán's play, which makes it a valuable contribution to the field of translation studies. It is of vital importance to know that our study approach is not based on Delgado's

translation as such, since we have not been able to have complete access to it. In fact, the only English complete translation we have been able to access is that of John Lyon's (1993), which is the text we will have as a reference for our own analysis, together with López Bragado's analysis (2021) of Delgado's translation. Apart from María Delgado's translation, there are other English translations of *BL*, e.g., David Johnston's (1993) and Anthony Zahareas' (1967). The search for a complete English version of any of these translations proved to be a difficult task, as there was no copy available in any library of Spain and some editions were non-existent anymore and others did not include the whole original text. Finally, we managed to find Lyon's (1993) translation, which includes a complete English translation of the whole play, which serves properly to the main objective of our dissertation.

Despite of the almost non-existent critical works on Valle-Inclán's *BL* translation into English, Valle-Inclán's works have been translated and performed successfully outside of Spain³. However, the density of Valle-Inclán's work comes not only from its contemporary complexity, but also from a style that opposes resistance because, especially in the *esperpentos*, the text is closely linked to the context. The use of Valle's Castilian language implies a stylization that from the beginning distanced him from his contemporaries on an aesthetic level, and it became even more complex and as difficult to translate as poetry and humor (Swansey, 2017).

López Bragado (2021) examines the strategies employed by Delgado's translation of *BL* to convey the nuances of the texts. Through a detailed analysis of *BL* translated from Spanish into English, López Bragado identifies different translation techniques, such as the use of cultural references and the adaptation of expressions that are specific to the source language. In Delgado's translation, the use of irony reinforces the criticism of social norms and highlights the absurdity of some situations. However, the effect of Valle-Inclán's irony in Delgado's translation is not always equal. Some instances of irony might lose their impact in translation, while others might gain new meanings or losses in translation due to cultural differences (López Bragado, 2021).

³ María Delgado (1997) offers some examples: *Luces de bohemia* was translated and staged in Paris at the Théâtre de l'Odéon in 1984 and 1987 under the direction of Lluís Pasqual. In 1992, *Tirano Banderas* was adapted and staged at L'Odéon with a cast of 12 actors and then went on a tour of Spain, Italy, and Latin America. Jean-Marie Broucaut staged *Divinas palabras* in France towards the end of the 1980s, while in 1991 Luis Lavelli and Juan Carlos Plaza staged *Comedias bárbaras* in French and Spanish, respectively, at the Avignon Festival and at the *Teatro María Guerrero* in Madrid.

Following the previous idea and specifically referring to the use of irony in the translation of *BL*, Johnston (1998) explains how this literary figure is deeply related with the term *esperpento*. Precisely, this term must be named in order to be part of the English-speaking audience's experience when they delve into the play. If this is not clarified to the English audience, they would not grasp the artistic capacity and even less the ironic sphere that sets the tone for the entire work. The real issue is that the translator must take into account the "horizon of expectations" of the English-speaking audience and be actively involved in addressing it (Johnston, 1998).

It should be in mind that *BL*, being a theatrical work, poses several complications when it comes to implementing irony in its translation. We already know that plays are written to be performed and reading them on paper is too short for an English audience to fully understand the correlation between irony and *esperpento*. Therefore, adaptation to the target language is not only a good idea but a necessary strategy (Johnston, 1998). According to Swansey (2017), the translation of *esperpento* as a literal translation would lead to an unsatisfactory result and that cultural adaptations would work much better. Moreover, stylistic elements such as irony also affect the translation and are more related to the author's personal sensibility or experiences lived during his time (Lodi, 2017). Consequently, part of the lexicon used by Valle-Inclán requires some attention when translated into another language because the temporal distance may reduce the freedom to introduce calques or neologisms and creates the need for research: if in the target language (English) there is no equivalent, it may be advisable to substitute it with a new locution that activates the same semantic marks perceived in the source language (Lodi, 2017). In fact, in the process of translating *BL* is not advisable to achieve believable realism speech, but to create a target language understandable by English readers.

As we have seen throughout this section, irony as an element present in the translation of *BL* can entail syntactic differences, cultural inheritances and connotations that can create a risk in its translatability. In the following section we will set out the specific aim of this work, which is to analyse the English translation of irony in *BL* and observe if the realism behind the use of irony is reflected in the English version as well.

4. OBJECTIVE: THE (UN)EQUAL EFFECT OF VALLE INCLAN'S IRONY IN *BL*'S LYON'S (1993) TRANSLATION

Valle-Inclán's use of irony is a distinctive feature of his writing, and it is no surprise that this element is also present in *BL*, which becomes a complex matter due to the difficulty of translating irony from one language into another. The objective of this study is to analyze how Valle-Inclán's irony is reflected in John Lyon's (1993) translation and how it impacts the interpretation of the play, since this is the only complete English translation we have been able to access.

This process will consist of extracting from this work expressions, proper names, or cultural references from the popular Madrilenian speech, which as mentioned in section 2, is characterized by ironic language.

One of the main challenges of translating irony is that it relies heavily on cultural references and context (Mateo, 1995). A joke or a statement can be ironic in one language or culture, but not in another. Delgado's translation strives to maintain the original meaning of Valle-Inclán's text while adapting it to the cultural references of English-speaking audiences. However, the challenge of translating irony also provides an opportunity for creative choices, and Delgado's translation shows a good balance between staying faithful to the original text and adapting it to the target audience but not always (López Bragado, 2021). As our English translation referent will be that of Lyon's (1993), we will observe if this balance between literal translations and adaptations when translating irony is also present in his translation.

5. METHODOLOGY

This section will be divided in four subsections according to the theme of the play where the irony has been used and how it was translated into English in Lyon's (1993) translation: section 5.1 shows the compilation of some character's names in *BL*; section 5.2. shows how some cultural references were translated; and section 5.3 reflects the translation of irony in different Madrilenian expressions of the period when the play takes place. Therefore, only ironic elements related to these 3 elements (i.e., names, cultural references and expressions) in the original play and their corresponding English translations have been compiled, since their analysis is the objective of our project.

5.1. THE ENGLISH TRANSLATION OF CHARACTER'S NAMES

In order to understand the importance of the character's names in *BL* and its translation into English, table 1 shows different examples of the source text (ST, Spanish) and the target text (TT, English), including the corresponding translation technique that has been used. These selected names could be the source of ironical issues as the meaning of the name (in the most cases) is completely literal but we can see how the English translation does not capture the real essence of the ST's names.

Table 1. Compilation of characters' proper nouns and their translation

ST- SPANISH	TT - ENGLISH	TRANSLATION TECHNIQUE
Max Estrella	Max Estrella	Calque
Pica Lagartos	Lizard Slicer	Literal translation
Enriqueta La Pisa Bien	Henrietta the Hooper	Adaptation
Serafin El Bonito	Serafin the Paint	Adaptation
La Vieja Pintada	Painted Tart	Adaptation
El Pollo del Pay-Pay	Fantail the Pimp	Adaptation

The characters that appear on the pages and scenes of *BL* are a combination of recognisable real figures from the period or contemporary times; real characters hidden under invented names; and fictional characters. Specifically, the characters in the play could be classified into proper names, nicknames and common names. Basically, most of them have a comical and ironic meaning that is directly related to their appearance, personality or profession. Following the examples given in Table 1, some of them will be grouped according to the translation technique that has been employed:

A. The case of calques:

- Max Estrella/ Max Estrella: this proper name is recognizable both in English and Spanish. Max is the main character of the play: a blind, bohemian, alcoholic and misunderstood Andalusian poet who lives in conditions of poverty, as we have seen in the examples in section 2.1. He also considers himself the first poet in Spain with a sarcastic and witty humour and a criticism of social injustice, but at the same time he owns a selfish behaviour.

Consequently, this name acquires an ironic value because shows a reputation that he does not have. Furthermore, irony prevails in this calque since both latinate names (“Máximo” and “Estrella”), easily recognizable in English, would render an equivalent ironic (or sarcastic) effect in the target readers. In fact, Lyon could have translated “Estrella” as “Star”, but this name would have deprived the character from his (ironic) literary value.

B. The case of literal translations:

- Pica Lagartos/ Lizard Slicer: the English translation remains faithful to the original text, but the essence of the meaning is lost unless the reader has a deep knowledge of who this character was or was engaged in. He is a tavern keeper who plays an important role in the conversations of the different characters who come to his tavern, and he always has some shrewd opinion that leads him to obtain some benefit. An appropriate definition of “lagarto” referring to a person is, according to RAE, “persona pícaro o taimada”. However, this connotation also exists in English, and according to Cambridge Dictionary, “lizard” means “a cunning person skilled in deception” but the translated connotation would be “crafty devil”: crafty> astute; devil> someone whose behaviour is bad. This explanation justifies perfectly how irony has been kept when translating this name into English.

C. The case of adaptations:

- Enriqueta La Pisa-Bien / Henrietta the Hooper: in Spanish, it is a nickname that refers to the way she walks. She also sells flowers, specifically "varas de nardos", later translated as “flowers for your button-hole”, maybe alluding (ironically) to the sexual aspect of her job. This woman is also known as *La Marquesa del Tango* and its translation into English is adapted to the characteristics of the character in the ST. The word “hooper”, according to WordReference Dictionary, means “dancer”, which could serve to keep the humoristic name behind this character, but it may also refer to “hoof” (meaning “pezuña”) or “to hoof” (in Slang English, “ir a pie”). Therefore, the irony is maintained in this case as the English translation as Lyons play with the double sense of “hoof(er)”, not a very elegant dancer.
- Serafin El Bonito/ Serafin the Paint: the English translation is clearly different from the ST as “paint” could be used as general word to refer to a work of art,

not as “bonito” specifically. However, Lyon succeeds in maintaining the original irony, as Serafin, an inspector who uses perfume and has a bright hairstyle, even though at work his name is preceded by “Don” (*Mister*), common people refer to them using a nickname (*bonito* > *piece of art or paint*).

- La Vieja Pintada / Painted Tart: in the case of this common name, it is really curious how the meaning tries to be explained through the translation into English. According to the Cambridge Dictionary, the word “tart” means “a woman who intentionally wears the type of clothes and make-up that attract sexual attention in a way that is too obvious”. Additionally, “tart” means prostitute as well (in Slang English) but the point is that the word “vieja” does not appear in the translation. However, if you say aloud “Painted (T)art”, it sounds like “Painted Art”, which serves to keep the irony behind her name, as it is the opposite, an old woman with a lot of make up in her face and which is far from being a “piece of art”.
- El Pollo del Pay-Pay/ Fantail the Pimp: this character is a greedy man who tries to take advantage of other people's money, better known as a "chulo putas" in Spanish and whose appearance may resemble that of a chicken using a hand-held fan (“pay-pay”). In this case it is a totally ridiculous appellation, and its translation into English has been done by means of an adaptation to closer referents in the target culture: according to the WordReference Dictionary, “fantail” means “a breed of domestic pigeon having a large tail that can be opened like a fan” and according to Cambridge Dictionary, “pimp” means “a man who controls prostitutes, especially by finding customers for them and takes some of the money that they earn”. This case it is also an adaptation to the anglosaxon culture and it would mean “un chulo con cola de pavo real” if we translate it literally, so in this case the translator adapts “pay-pay” to “pavo real” (“pavo-pollo”) but then Lyon uses again a general term (“chulo/pimp”) and so the irony is kept only partially. So, again Lyon opts for adapting the proper noun using more general terms but keeping the essential traits of the character which still make it sound ridiculous in English.

As we have observed in the previous examples; the irony, humor or absurdity could be kept (or not) according to the type of translation technique used by Lyon. Concretely, in

the case of the translation of proper names, all the translation techniques seem to serve for the purpose of rendering a similar and understandable irony in the target name.

5.2. THE ENGLISH TRANSLATION OF CULTURAL REFERENCES

The translation of cultural elements found in *BL* is a major challenge for the translator because it implies more external (or social) factors than in the case of the character names as there exists a strong irony related to the Spanish culture, which may be not easy to render in the translation.

Table 2. Compilation of cultural references and their translation

ST – SPANISH	PAGE	TT – ENGLISH	PAGE	TRANSLATION TECHNIQUE
Cuatro perras de carbón	6	Fourpenn'orth of charcoal	39	Literal translation
Vara de nardos	25	Lovely flowers/ Flowers for your button-hole	53	Adaptation
Guindillas	60	Flatfoots	73	Adaptation
Fondo de Reptiles	98	Reptiles' slush fund	101	Semi-literal translation
Pápiros de piel del contribuyente	105	Sheets of taxpayer 's skin	105	Literal translation

A) The case of literal or semi-literal translations:

- Cuatro perras de carbón/ Fourpenn'orth of charcoal: this reference is quite complicated to understand, as in Spanish it has a very implicit meaning. In the original SP text of *Bohemian Lights*, as Zamora Vicente (1983) explains in a note, deaths due to the stench of a badly lit brazier were very frequent during the period. This is what the expression alludes to, suicide by poisoning, which was also very cheap (4 coins). A sordid meaning that links money and death, which is further lost in the completely literal translation in the TT. If we observe the English translation, according to Collins Dictionary, there exists

the idiom “your two penn'orth” which means “your opinion about something but nobody asked for it”. This expression is now old fashioned in English but it is important to note that “penn'orth” is the contraction of “pennies' worth”. The irony remains in the ST as it is directly related to a social background but in the TT the main part of the sarcasm is lost as a full explanation of this term would be necessary, but Lyon only refers to the monetary value and not to burn to death.

- Fondo de Reptiles/ Reptiles' slush fund: the use of this term in Spanish was very common in Valle-Inclán's time. “Fondo de reptiles”, as Zamora Vicente (1973) explains, was known as a monetary amount that existed in some ministries and that was secretly used to perform favours between politicians. We can see how there is an identification between reptiles (according to the RAE, said of a vile and lowly person) and politicians. Also, we can observe how the addition of “slush” is added in the English translation. The concept “slush fund” means “fondos empleados con fines legales” but the translator keeps “reptiles” in order to keep the image of politicians as “reptiles” and consequently irony is kept in order to depict the real meaning.
- Pápiros de piel de contribuyente/ Sheets of taxpayer's skin: the Spanish example was typically used in the popular Madrilenian language that existed at the time and according to RAE, “pápiro” would mean “billete de banco con mucho valor”. Moreover, the translation seems mechanical because if we translate “sheets of taxpayer's skin” literally, it would mean “hojas de piel del contribuyente” alluding to the suffocating economic situation at the time when the population was paying certain injustices with their “own skin”. The irony remains in both cases being reflected in the translation.

B) The case of adaptations:

- Vara de nardos/ Lovely flowers or Flowers for your button-hole: in Spanish, “vara de nardos” was known as a floral symbol of “the dangerous or guilty pleasures” of the Madrilenian culture. In its translation we can observe a sexual connotation (“button-hole”) which results in an ironic expressiveness referring to what the term represents in Spanish.
- Guindillas/ Flatfoots: the term “guindilla” in Spanish is a derogatory appellation referring to policemen. In addition, the uniform they wore was red,

typical of Madrilenian culture and comparable to the colour of a "guindilla" as a foodstuff. In the case of the term used in English, "flatfoot" also exists in English as a derogatory reference to a policeman. Therefore, the irony could be kept with "flatfoots" as men with a physical condition which prevents them to join the military.

When discussing the translation techniques used by Lyon in the case of cultural elements, the translation technique that stands out is related to the field of adaptation. This technique prevails over literal translation in this case, as cultural references (which are not so "physical" or evident as in the case of proper nouns) are more difficult to render in the target culture. However, again, Lyon manages to keep the parodical and absurd sense of these cultural elements using different techniques, especially adaptation, only failing in one case (i.e., *cuatro perras de carbón*), where the irony is only rendered partially.

5.3. THE ENGLISH TRANSLATION OF TYPICAL SPANISH EXPRESSIONS

As we have seen in section 5.2, the cultural references in *BL* require a great effort when translating them into English. In particular, this effort is quite comparable in the case of the typical expressions used by Valle-Inclán in the play. These expressions are also directly related to a comic and ironic meaning which is difficult to reflect in the TT, as we can see below.

Table 4. Typical Spanish expressions and their translation

ST - SPANISH	PAGE	TT - ENGLISH	PAGE	TRANSLATION TECHNIQUE
Cabruto viudo	27	Billy goat	55	Adaptation
Yo guardo el pan de higos para el gachó...	119	I keep my jampot for the bloke...	115	Literal translation
Recibir la visita del nuncio	122	Start the curse	117	Adaptation

Por tener el fiambre unas horas más en casa	149	Just for the sake of keeping the stiff at home a few hours longer	137	Literal translation
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As we observe in table 4, the richness of speech and expressions of Madrilenian origin lies directly in the ironic level as far as their translation into English is concerned. Being a wide field that it is not possible to cover due to the vast number of examples, only the most relevant ones will be taken into account. Specifically, it will be necessary to explain some of the examples that may create more confusion for the reader of the TT.

A) The case of literal translations:

- Yo guardo el pan de higos para el gachó/ I keep my jampot for the bloke: the Spanish expression is related to "preserving virginity", which is rather sarcastic when mentioning "pan de higos" as this refers to the woman's private parts comparing them to sweet food. According to Collins Dictionary, the English term "jampot" means "a type of container for preserves" and it was specially used to keep jam or other foodstuffs. Consequently, irony in Lyon's translation is kept since it resembles succinctly the same ironic "essence" of the ST.
- Por tener el fiambre unas horas más en casa/ Just for the sake of keeping the stiff at home a few hours longer: in Spanish, irony is reflected if we identify "fiambre" with the dead man (Max Estrella) and with food (hunger) which is not kept in the English version.

B) The case of adaptations:

- Cabrito viudo/ Billy goat: in this case we could see the irony in the Spanish expression because it means "a (animal) kid or goat with horns who is also a widower". "Horns" makes reference to being cheated by his wife when she was alive, understanding a succinct irony behind this expression. In the English adaptation, "billy goat" refers, according to Cambridge Dictionary, to a "macho cabrío" (male goat) which also has horns but without mentioning the "widower" part. Therefore, irony is partially lost in the English expression.
- Recibir la visita del nuncio/ Start the curse: the Spanish term is directly associated with menstruation and it was widely used in popular Madrilenian

speech to give the idea of female puberty. However, according to RAE, “nuncio” means “anuncio o señal” or “apostólico” and intentionally it is associated with religious issues. In addition, “start the curse” is a fixed expression in English but it is old-fashioned nowadays. According to Cambridge Dictionary, it was a humoristic expression related to a woman’s period and we can understand it as something that brings problems, or blaspheme, and so, with a religious sense as well. Then, Lyon’s translation is successful maintaining the irony.

At the typical Spanish expressions translations, the ironic level is practically reduced to literal translations or adaptations. It is extremely complex to be able to "move" the true meaning of the ironic expression in Spanish into a translation that is similar in its entirety in the English language, since the Madrilenian language that develops throughout *BL* is deeply rooted in the source language. However, Lyon’s work as a translator shows how the irony can still make sense in the TT working really hard on target equivalents that could render the same humorous sense than that in the Spanish version.

6. CONCLUSION

After carrying out the selection, explanation and comparison of the most relevant ironic elements in the original work of *Bohemian Lights* and its translation into English by John Lyon (1993), we can establish the conclusions we have reached. The aim of this project was to show the similarities or differences between the ironic elements belonging to the ST and their translation found in the TT. The fact that most of the translated ironic elements shown in section 5 are based on literal translations and adaptations, shows there is not a clear pattern to translate irony. Only some elements of each division (6 character's names, 5 cultural references, and 4 expressions) have been explained according to our understanding of the interpretation in their ironic level in translation. As we have mentioned in section 3, literal translations have supposed a less satisfactory result in order to keep irony in the English translation of these elements because not in all the cases the irony is maintained completely. However, adaptation’s strategy has generally shown more consistency to adequate the ironical aspect to the target language. This process must have required exhaustive research on the part of the translator, but also on our part analyzing

Lyon's English translation, as the sources of research on this topic are very limited or even completely absent.

Finally, we can deduce from a literary and translational point of view how Lyon's high-quality translation can be read with great vividness but without intending to find all the vast and complex irony world reflected in the original Spanish text. Therefore, it is a respectable translation of *Bohemian Lights* that renders a high linguistic complexity and it is a great challenge that many other translators would have shied away from. This may be the reason why there is such a limited variety of English translations of Valle-Inclán's *esperpento* works (some of them are even difficult to access, as we mentioned in section 3).

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