

# Renderings of Don Juan in Valle-Inclán

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**Abstract** The aim of this paper is to develop a comparative thematic reading regarding the two Don Juan versions created by Valle-Inclán. In order to do so, three factors will be taken into account: those related to intertextuality, the different interpretations of the myth at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and the modernization Valle-Inclán subjects the myth to at different stages of his writing.

**Key words** myths; Valle-Inclán; myth of Don Juan; comparative literature

The aim behind this work is to analyse the multiple renderings the myth of Don Juan has received from the hands of Ramón María del Valle-Inclán. We will use comparative literature's theoretical frame, and, particularly, a thematological approach; that is, we will review the metamorphosis of a literary myth— Don Juan— throughout time, from the standpoint of “a strategic intersection of literary dynamics and connections with the imaginary, the history of ideas, of ideologies, of mentality, of sensibility”<sup>1</sup> a standpoint that, following Raymond Trousson (1965), represents the *raison d'être* of thematological studies. In other words, we aim to carry out a comparative thematological reading of the different masks Don Juan has worn in the fictional texts of the great Galician writer, taking into account intertextual concerns and the modernization of the myth in the cultural and temporal coordinates that gave birth to the texts.

However, we will also take into account other methodological approaches present in the rich cartography of comparative literature nowadays, new approaches that provide tools of great value in the pursuit of a deeper knowledge and a correct interpretation of myths. Thus, we will include some of the aspects favored by the structuralist approach to myth, namely the analysis of the text's structure<sup>2</sup>— mythic schema—, and the isolation and definition of its components and versatility, derived, among other things, from continuous intersections between myth and culture.

From the last decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and especially since C. Lévi-Strauss and Structuralism, myth studies have experienced an extraordinary growth.

Mythologists, anthropologists, philosophers, historians of religion, and literary theorists, among others, have endeavored to pinpoint the concept of myth. Modern research, such as Malinowski's Functionalism, Mircea Eliade's or Paul Ricoeur's Hermeneutics, Lévi-Strauss' Structuralism, the British Anthropological School, Myth Criticism, etc., regardless of tendencies, approaches or schools, coincide— even when they disagree about almost anything else— in insisting on the semantic polyvalence of the concept of myth, its plural content, and, consequently, the inherent difficulties when trying to define it.<sup>3</sup>

Let us bring to mind, for example, the plurality of meanings associated to Don Juan's myth: even when maintaining its essential features of transcendence, and the indissoluble connection between *eros* and *thanatos*, between the sacred and the secular, Don Juan has been read as a sinner and a criminal, as satanic, rebel, idealistic, as a romantic hero, constantly unfulfilled, as a homosexual, a jester, a seducer, etc.; moreover, we cannot forget that, in each historical moment, these judgments have carried either a positive or a negative connotation, depending on the ideological positioning, the cultural space or the aesthetic movement of the time or who was judging. That is, Rafael Lapesa hits the mark when he states (1976: 7):

Secular themes, common places, previously coined expressive formulae, ideas steeped in a specific cultural heritage, may change their meaning when they are put at the service of a new conception of the world or a different vital attitude ... In fact, every study in Comparative Literature, or in the influence one author may have on another, has in itself the need to signal contrasts.<sup>4</sup>

On the other hand, if we take into account Claudio Guillén's assumption that a theme is not only the result of a choice by an author, but also a construction by a reader,

Forms and themes, more than discreet entities, are partial elements whose construction is performed, at the end of the day, by the intervention of the reader. Regarding thematology, this intervention will be the greater ... the more relevant are the features of intertextuality identifying the theme through memories of previous representations (1985: 249).<sup>5</sup>

Following from this, when the theme is a myth, its sense will be related also to the presuppositions (“figurations”) that its mere name will activate in the receiver's memory; the receiver, on her part, will realize some of those presuppositions, turning her virtual richness into a unique vision, current and historical at the same time.

In his introduction to the *Dictionnaire des mythes littéraires* (1988), Pierre

Brunel suggests three functions in the process of identifying a myth:

1. Narrative function: the function that creates the model, or “mythic setting”; it carries a system of symbols and archetypes that become the narrative.
2. Explicative function: myths are etiologic narratives, hence their significance as cultural referents for the explanation of certain aspects of human life—or death.
3. Revelatory function: this function places myths in the sacred milieu; that is, following Eliade (1957: 17), myths are responsible for the appearance of the supernatural in the world.

These models, or “mythic settings” generated by the narrative function, are, without a doubt, the milestones of myths’ transmission and endurance in time, or, following Anna Trocchi’s phrasing (2002: 164), the model “secures the transmission of the myth’s identity and its resistance throughout the historical succession of its different versions.”

In an interesting and well-documented article on literary myths, Philippe Séliier (1984: 112-126) argues that both the myths that shape Western mythologies, even the oldest ones (Ancient Greek, Roman, Hebrew) and the new myths (Faust, Don Juan) share the following set of common features: firstly, they rest on symbolic constructs that elicit emotions in human beings; that is, they move the receiver, and this symbolic foundation provides myths with a very rich indeterminacy in meaning, an exceptional polyvalence. Secondly, myths possess a closed layout inside a complex structure. And, thirdly, they contain a metaphysical ‘warning,’ that is, man’s encounter with the hereafter. As a consequence of this, it becomes necessary to differentiate between common and specific traits. The former ones all myths share and they identify what a myth is. The latter ones are invariants belonging to each particular myth, shared by each version of it, differentiating it from other myths, and fixing its structure. Regarding Don Juan’s myth, Jean Rousset, in his classic study *Le mythe de Don Juan* (1973),<sup>6</sup> isolates the invariant features that build the ‘permanent Don Juan setting,’ namely, hero, feminine group and death.<sup>7</sup> Rousset points out that inside each invariant and the possible relations between them the numerous potential combinations will secure the myth’s mobility and, hence, its vitality.

As it is the case with every myth, Don Juan’s fantastical, magical or supernatural elements guarantee its status as such. A thorough review of every study devoted to Don Juan’s myth<sup>8</sup> proves the presence of Death—element that symbolizes the connection of the myth with the sacred—is the feature that lends the character its status of myth. Therefore, the mythical nature of Don Juan is essentially founded in his encounter with death, his confrontation with the hereafter. The intense link between

love and death established by the narrative implies that its dissociation, or, at most, its whole disappearance, would inevitably lead to distorting the nature of the myth, for it would mean stripping it of its transcendence.

From its birth circa 1630 until its maturity, provided by Mozart's version with Da Ponte's libretto (*Don Giovanni*, 1788), Don Juan's 'mythic setting' has crossed borders, has been expressed in several languages, has been fitted to suit different generic models and has met considerable transformations, but none as important in the history of the myth as the one it suffered upon its encounter with Romanticism and, more specifically, the transformation carried out by E.T.A. Hoffmann (*Don Juan, eine fabelhafte Begebenheit*, 1813). This stage in the evolution of the myth, inaugurated by Mozart-Da Ponte, consists of demythologizing the hero by killing off its inconsistency, making him choose time over the fleeting moment, permanence over the ephemeral. After this changing process, in which the Baroque myth dies, a new myth rises from the former's ashes: the Romantic myth. Hence, from the hero of freedom arises the hero that searches for an ideal, for the eternal feminine.

Hoffmann's unusual interpretation of Mozart-Da Ponte's opera,<sup>9</sup> an interpretation that signals the starting point for the inclusion of the romantic character in the 'mythic setting', is responsible for the newfound imbalance in the narrative, namely, placing Ana in Don Juan's path, an Ana that is unique, predestined, meant to save the male character through the miracle of love, an Ana that the hero has been incessantly searching for, but inevitably finds too late.

Now I have already averred that Donna Anna is the Don's foil. How, then, given that Donna Anna had been destined by heaven for such a role, could the Don be apprised of his fundamentally divine nature— and thereby wrested free of the despair of his empty striving— through love, which, thanks to Satan's artifices, was bespoken as the agent of his destruction? He encountered her too late, during the epoch of his most outrageous excesses, when he was pervaded by such diabolical lusts as could only corrupt her. She was not rescued!<sup>10</sup>

Moreover, with Hoffmann, the myth makes its first appearance in narrative form and, from that moment onwards, Don Juan's feelings and thoughts will be of more interest than the action in itself. The Romantic authors conceive Don Juan in their own image and likeness, they turn him into their accomplice and, understandably, they glorify and absolve him.

Every Don Juan narrative from the turn of the century and most of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century, because of something or other, erase from the setting the figure of the Commander, that is, they demythologize Don Juan by depriving him of this encounter

with the hereafter. The character, thus stripped of its mythic nature, after the narrative imbalance the Romantic writers have introduced in its structure, and reeling from the new scientific approaches that have apparently accomplished its complete demystification, arrives at the 20<sup>th</sup> century transformed into a man in love, repented; a sick man suffering from identity crises or confusing pathologies; an old man that is ridiculed and laughed at; a character subject to every type of humiliation or parody and grotesque or degrading situations.<sup>11</sup> On the one hand, all the versions whose inspiring source is Merimée (*Les Âmes du Purgatoire*, 1834), that is, those versions that melt together the legends of Don Juan and the Sevillian knight Miguel de Marañá, show a converted and sanctified Don Juan, completely alter the ending and, consequently, remove the character from the mythological milieu—Alexandre Dumas (*Don Juan de Marana ou le chute d'un ange*, 1836), Manuel and Antonio Machado (*Juan de Marañá*, 1927), Miguel de Unamuno (*El hermano Juan o el mundo es teatro*, 1934). On the other hand, the versions that ensue from the scientific interpretation or the anti-romantic reaction present an old Don Juan—Azorín (*Don Juan*, 1922), Jacinto Grau (*El burlador que no se burla*, 1930)—or a sexually ambiguous one—H.R. Lenormand (*L'Homme et ses fantômes*, 1921), Ramón Pérez de Ayala (*Tigre Juan o el curandero de su honra*, 1926)—and produce exactly the same result as the former ones. There is no room for the Commander's vengeance. Don Juan will die in his own bed or, in any event, his death will have nothing to do with the supernatural.

At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century medicine, psychology and psychiatry began to display a newfound interest in Don Juan and, following from this, began to study the myth and offer their particular interpretation. Psychoanalysts have had him stretched on their divan, trying to discover hidden traumas, complex pathologies... so much so that his path is explored, an absent mother<sup>12</sup> is discovered, and in this maternal lack a sense that has been missing is thought to have been discovered. The psychoanalytic version of the myth, although it has proven enriching, especially regarding the discovery of the deep motivations behind human behaviour, has a considerable inconvenient: it reduces the theme to an inner conflict, ignoring any other factor, following from the assumption that everything related to human behaviour is psychic and unconscious.

It could be stated that Don Juan's scientific interpretation has had little impact in literature, if we take into account the amount of works it has led to. However, it is also true that this interpretation contributed, along with the fin-de-siècle disillusionment, to create a realist and objective approach to the myth. Consequently, it must be underlined that, although the Romantic Movement had already placed the 'mythic setting' in a precarious balance, it was mostly the anti-romantic and scientific reactions that, either via a physical or psychic degradation, or via a psychological

analysis, dissociated Don Juan from his structural context, inciting a rapid process of demystification. The final result of this process is the apparent disappearance of the myth and the birth of a new type: the ‘donjuán’.<sup>13</sup> From this moment on, the name of Don Juan will be used to designate innumerable love heroes whose fragile connection with the myth rests mostly on their ability for seduction, on the number of love affairs the hero is involved in. That said, this was the state of affairs when Valle-Inclán started to show an interest in the theme of Don Juan.

Just by reviewing a simple inventory of titles it is easy to see that Don Juan’s myth was a favorite theme of the fin-de-siècle generation. The myth, adapting to each author’s philosophical approach and channeling each author’s thought, provided a path to reach an understanding of reality, understanding that, having been proven to be unattainable by positivist reason, was now being approached by metaphysical, transcendental and symbolic perspectives. It is neither surprising nor random, then, that Valle-Inclán uses the legendary Spanish hero in his creations. However, although it is commonly thought to be so, his first donjuanesque scenario is not in *Sonatas*, nor is Bradomín his first donjuanesque hero; some years previously, in the beginnings of his career, we already find a few masks that hide the mythical seducer.

In 1895, Valle-Inclán publishes his first book: *Femeninas (Seis historias amorosas)*. It contains six short novellas, all of them a partial or wholly reworking of his own materials, most of them already published.<sup>14</sup> These materials will show up again in later works, whose leads are played, as the titles anticipate or suggest, by a woman: “La Generala,” “Octavia Sandino,” “Rosarito,” “La Condesa de Cela,” “Tula Varona” and “La Niña Chole”. Two years afterwards, in 1897, he publishes a new short novella, *Epitalamio*.<sup>15</sup>

Regardless of the Spanish literary influence signaled by the critics,<sup>16</sup> influence that is undoubtedly there, since Valle was well-read, what we find essential is that *Femeninas* and *Epitalamio* reflect a foreign cultural environment, and also a conscious aesthetic creation supported by outside models or ideas. *Rosarito* aside—which we will look into later on—, in these brief stories the Galician writer creates a mirror image of the myth. The male characters, puppets whose strings are pulled by the women in the stories, are built upon a donjuanesque type very common in the gallant literature of the time. The sarcasm the narrator uses against the former increase the ridicule stemming from their failed attempt to act as a Don Juan. The female characters, on their part, embody a female version of Don Juan, a kind of Don Juana. In fact, these women respond to an image that is overly present in artistic manifestations at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century: the *femme fatale*.<sup>17</sup> According to Mario Praz (1965: 165), this lustful, ruthless and cynical woman, a woman that punishes the male heart, is the mythic model that in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century substitutes

the diabolical and perverse Don Juan predominant in the first half. Lourdes Ramos-Kueth (1983: 51), who agrees with this assessment, analyzing these women's skills and conduct in *Femeninas* (and *Corte de Amor*), states that “donjuanism in these narrations manifests itself as feminine libertinism.” In *Femeninas*, the most representative example of this model is Niña Chole, a lewd and cruel woman, amalgam of eroticism and exotism, a very frequent combination in Modernism.

Only in *Rosarito*'s pages can we find a genuine Don Juan. Don Juan Manuel de Montenegro, whose personality contains the basic traits of Don Juan's myth, causes the others to feel, according to the narrator's ‘authorized’ voice, “el poder sugestivo de lo tenebroso.”<sup>18</sup>

Tenía don Juan Manuel los gestos trágicos y las frases siniestras y dolientes de los seductores románticos (...) El viejo libertino la miraba intensamente cual si sólo buscase el turbarla más. La expresión de aquellos ojos verdes era a un tiempo sombría y fascinadora, inquietante y audaz; dijérase que infiltraban el amor como un veneno, que violaban las almas y que robaban los besos a las bocas más puras. (p.185)<sup>19</sup>

The signs that forebode the presence of Montenegro in the “pazo”<sup>20</sup>—signs that only the victim can feel—, his mysterious appearance, the fascination he exerts over Rosarito (and also over the old Countess of Cela), the narrator's descriptions (“sombria figura”, “gallardía donjuanesca”, “mirada y sonrisa siniestras”, “frente altanera que parecía encerrar todas las exageraciones, lo mismo... las celestes que las diabólicas”), Montenegro's own words (“si no creo en Dios, amo a los ángeles”),<sup>21</sup> and all of this tied up to the tragic ending of the tale, identify the character with the Prince of Darkness. This identification of the character with the devil is not something new in the myth's history: let us not forget most critics believe the demonic nature of Don Juan is an essential trait in the original drama that founded the myth.<sup>22</sup>

Rosarito, Montenegro's young and naive victim, undoubtedly represents the second feminine model created at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century: the fragile, weak, spiritualized woman exalted by Pre-Raphaelism:

Vista a la tenue claridad de la lámpara, con la rubia cabeza en divino escorzo, la sombra de las pestañas temblando en el marfil de la mejilla, y el busto delicado y gentil destacándose en la penumbra incierta sobre la dorada talla y el damasco azul celeste del canapé, Rosarito recordaba esas ingenuas madonas pintadas sobre fondo de estrellas y luceros. (p.168)<sup>23</sup>

The story's tragic ending, Rosarito's unexplained death and the suggested identity of her killer, allow for a wide range of interpretations but, above all, these elements put forward one of Valle-Inclán's thematic constants: sin, which, apart from being one of the myth's keys, stems from Modernist sensuality, and it will also become later on proof of his concern about evil, and, ultimately, the verification of a constant in human reality.

Between 1902 and 1905 Valle-Inclán writes *Sonatas*, after having introduced in different times and places some of its plots, characters, landscapes and discursive strategies.<sup>24</sup> *Sonata de Otoño (Autumn Sonata)* (1902), the first one in the series to be published, includes a Preface ('Nota')<sup>25</sup> that categorizes the protagonist as a Don Juan. This preface— whose authorship the reader is left to wonder about—, gives guidance and drives the reading of the text by means of situating the diegesis inside a specific literary and cultural framework, a framework that is well-known by the reader. In other words, the implied reader, even before starting the narrative proper, will know that she is about to discover a new version of the most universal myth of Spanish origin: Bradomín is, from the very start, a Don Juan.

Not only is the author aware that he is re-writing a mythic theme ("En ellas intenté tratar un tema eterno. El tema, si es eterno, por mucho que esté tratado no está agotado nunca. El tema eterno es donde se mide el esfuerzo y el mérito de cada autor, y por ello todos debemos intentarlo"<sup>26</sup>), but also is the character, who, in numerous passages, shows that he is aware of his mythic origins, and tries to follow the myth's guidelines; that is, Bradomín is a self-aware creation, and he is also aware of the effect his presence and his reputation cause on everyone around him, especially women:

Yo tuve un momento de vanidad ante aquella acogida que mostraba cuánta era mi nombradía en la Corte de Estella. Me miraban con amor, y también con una sombra de enojo. Eran todos gentes de cogulla, y acaso recordaban algunas de mis aventuras (*Sonata de Invierno (Winter Sonata)*, 108-109).<sup>27</sup>

Most studies, when examining this aspect of Valle's work, identify Bradomín unequivocally as a Don Juan.<sup>28</sup> However, in our opinion, this character, described by critics with concepts such as inversion, reinvention, renovation or demystification of the legendary figure of Don Juan, ends up being only a literary type: a 'donjuán'. Valle-Inclán's rendering of the myth does not respond to its traditional notion, but to thematic lines that derive from the metamorphosis the myth suffers during its Romantic phase. One of these thematic lines, the irresistible lover, the fascinating man, is used by Valle-Inclán to create his Marquis of Bradomín; however, the Galician author avoids the well-trodden path and adds new ingredients to his literary game: the

Romantic spirit, turn-of-the-century decadentism, and Modernist aesthetics, among others.

However, a traditional theme and a popular character—Don Juan—, together with the conceptual syncretism of the myth—a product of the confluence of several sources— and a certain aesthetic— of the Modernist kind— are not enough to explain the result obtained by Valle in *Sonatas*; other factors were involved, and one of them was certainly the chosen generic pattern. Bradomín's Memoirs allow the author the chance to introduce a chain of inter-textual games with other very meaningful Memoirs quoted in the text:<sup>29</sup>

María Rosario, un poco confusa, murmuró:  
 -¡Vuestro padre espiritual! ¿Quién es vuestro padre espiritual!  
 -El caballero Casanova.  
 -¿Un noble español?  
 -No, un aventurero veneciano.  
 -¿Y un aventurero...?  
 Yo la interrumpí:  
 -Se arrepintió al final de su vida.  
 -¿Se hizo fraile?  
 -No tuvo tiempo, aun cuando dejó escritas sus confesiones.  
 -¿Cómo San Agustín?  
 -¡Lo mismo! Pero humilde y cristiano, no quiso igualarse con aquel doctor de la iglesia, y las llamó Memorias.  
 -¿Vos las habéis leído?  
 -Es mi lectura favorita.<sup>30</sup>

The Memoir style, above all, allows for a specific structure, the manipulation of the diegetic time, and a deliberate fragmentarism. It also imposes certain features on the character-narrator, and permits the construction, re-construction and even the invention of a life. Darío Villanueva states that autobiography, as a literary genre, is endowed with a poiesis virtuality, rather than a mimetic one, and, consequently, is the perfect tool to obtain “a truthful construction of the identity of self” (1991: 108).<sup>31</sup> Now, a shrewd reader will easily note the frequency with which Bradomín plays a role: what he wants to seem like in front of others. As a consequence of all these factors, it is possible to assume the essential artificiality/fictionality of the character, specifically a Don Juan type of artificiality, and this assumption would lead us to the logical conclusion of Bradomín's nature being typical, not mythical.

The character has been built following some of the basic traits defining the

legend of Don Juan (an outstanding ability to seduce, the absence of a moral compass, pride of class), but some other features he displays distance him from the myth, namely: neither is he an impersonal seducer, nor does he hide his identity by pretending to be somebody else; he is not capable of love, he merely loves the idea of love, he follows the seduction ritual, but he still awakes his victims' love; he does not seek the ending of his affairs, rather, each ending is the product of a variety of circumstances, but never his doing; he is not a rushed lover, without memories of the past, on the contrary, he invests as much time as it is necessary in each affair and he remembers them with pleasure.

Another aspect of the character that refers back to the original *Burlador* is the satanic qualities attributed to him,<sup>32</sup> however, at this point, it is important to remember the consciously deceptive nature of the character: Bradomín feels very much at home when he is playing this specific part, he is pleased by the mixture of fear and admiration his mere presence evokes, a presence that he displays for his audience like a painstakingly designed staging:

—Me das miedo cuando dices esas impiedades... Sí, miedo, porque no eres tú quien habla: Es Satanás... Hasta tu voz parece otra... ¡Es Satanás!...

(*Sonata de Otoño*, p. 97)<sup>33</sup>

—¡Lo sabía usted! ¡Lo sabía usted!

Y de pronto clavándome los ojos ardientes y fanáticos, hizo la señal de la cruz y estalló en maldiciones. Yo, como si fuera el diablo, salí de la estancia.

(*Sonata de Otoño*, p.174)<sup>34</sup>

Valle-Inclán is using, as José Luis Varela points out, a “literary convention that has proven quite fruitful in the theatre (...), the numerous Romantic-satanic connotations of Bradomín’s character (...) also explain the scenographic slant in this conduct” (1997: 269); he continues, “the four novels are bursting at the seams with annotations, gestures, exclamations, all of which have a staging purpose” (1997: 273). This scenographic feature feels at home in the author’s chosen genre: Bradomín-as-narrator constructs a Bradomín-as-character that is self-reflective, a character that is consciously aware of performing a role.

The modifications Valle performed on the myth affect not only the character but also the generic pattern; thus, despite the chronological continuum needed by the genre in order to present a whole life, Bradomín’s Memoirs are full of isolated episodes, arbitrarily placed in the narrative discourse. The Preface (‘Nota’) that precedes *Sonatas* justifies the Memoirs’ fragmentarism: the preface’s author acts as an intermediary that selects, among all the anecdotes, four specific moments—

of amorous content— in Bradamín’s life, but is silent as to the rest. The narrated time in each ‘sonata’ is extremely reduced, its scope nothing more than a couple of days, really. The ellipsis among novels is uncommonly wide, but the implied reader, already aware of the donjuanesque nature of the character, is able— and expected— to fill in the textual gaps with romantic affairs similar to the ones old Bradamín describes in the novel; as a result, we can state that it is not the author, but the receiver of the narrative who, being in possession of the catalogue or list of women seduced by Don Juan— through her cultural imaginary—, decides to attribute these anecdotes to Bradamín himself.<sup>35</sup>

The presence of Death or any of its signs (funeral rites, mourning clothes, tolling of bells) is a constant element in *Sonatas*. Valle-Inclán explores the relationship between love and death—a relationship that is essential in Don Juan’s mythic scene— by keeping it in his narrative, but with a clear twist: whereas in the mythic versions Death represents punishment for the transgressor, in Valle-Inclán’s text, ironically, this punishment seems to be directed only at Bradamín’s victims.

The *Sonatas* female characters are María Rosario [*Sonata de Primavera (Spring Sonata)*], la Niña Chole [*Sonata de Estío (Summer Sonata)*], Concha [*Sonata de Otoño (Autumn Sonata)*] and María Antonieta y Maximina [*Sonata de Invierno (Winter Sonata)*]. The latter, when juxtaposed to the common female types included in Don Juan’s tradition (such as young virgins, married women, novices or women destined to a convent, aristocrats or commoners,...), becomes a novelty that is not connected to her virginity, or her being destined to be a nun, or even her extreme youth, but in the fact that she is Bradamín’s daughter. None of the previous versions displayed this type of victim, but, after her inclusion in Valle-Inclán’s narrative, she will reappear in some of the later interpretations of the myth.<sup>36</sup> For this twist to take place— Don Juan, seducer of his own daughter—, the character needs to age,<sup>37</sup> and so Valle-Inclán’s chosen genre, the memoir, once again serves its purpose.

Concha, as a character, also represents a clear deviation from previous female types. Concha embodies the fragile type: the sick woman, the voluptuousness and eroticism of Death, so in vogue at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. She takes the lead, for a change, and begs Bradamín to come to her (“me llamaba a su lado con súplicas dolorosas y ardientes”<sup>38</sup>). This role inversion explains why she has been branded as “la peor de las mujeres” (‘the worst kind of woman’),<sup>39</sup> formula frequently used to brand Don Juan himself, but only in those versions written after the combination, encounter or fusion of the myth with the legend of Miguel de Mañara, penned by Prosper Mérimée, whom Valle-Inclán makes sure to acknowledge, directly or indirectly, as the source for some of the donjuanesque features of his character.

In the wake of Modernism, Valle-Inclán creates in *Sonatas* a decadent Don Juan

that has little to do with the mythic character. Using as a starting point the features the character inherits from the turn of the century— old age, repentance, melancholy— Valle-Inclán creates Bradomín: a Don Juan facing, as the archetype does, the devil, the world and the flesh, but also a fourth and new element, following from an interview with the author: “Previous Don Juans react to love and to death; they lack Nature. Bradomín, more modern, also reacts to the landscape” (Dougherty, 1983: 161).

Although its presence is less explicit, the theme of Don Juan<sup>40</sup> is also a discernible trait in *Comedias bárbaras* (Barbaric Comedies). In a notation from *Águila de Blasón* (Heraldic Eagle) (1907)<sup>41</sup> second scene, Valle-Inclán describes the imposing figure of Don Juan Manuel, head of the Montenegro family: “Es uno de esos hidalgos mujeriegos y despóticos, hospitalarios y violentos, que se conservan como retratos antiguos en las villas silenciosas y muertas”<sup>42</sup>. As we shall soon see, both in the composition and the evolution of this character the original donjuanesque traits have been interlaced with other foreign elements.

Don Juan Manuel— old, but full of life and desire; ungodly, and yet God-fearing; proud and defiant, but later contrite; a father who curses his own lineage; a womanizer, but a loving husband— displays (just like Bradomín) some of Don Juan’s myth basic features— arrogance, seduction ability, ungodliness, rule-breaking—, but these features are combined with other traits that have their origins in other socio-historical and literary sources. To give but one example, we should remember that Valle-Inclán’s *Comedias* display an evident thematic connection to literary works by Galician authors, in which the ‘pazo’, as a social and economic unit, supports some plot lines and also justifies certain features of the characters that inhabit it.<sup>43</sup> Regarding this aspect, however, we are more interested in the literary sources Valle-Inclán draws on, for they supply the necessary keys to unlock certain characteristics. Thus, Valle’s treatment of Montenegro’s death certainly connects his work with the supernatural events present during the death of the mythic Don Juan:

La blanca procesión pasa como una niebla sobre los maizales [...] la procesión se detiene a la orilla de un río donde las brujas departen sentadas en rueda [...] Por la otra orilla va un entierro [...] los fantasmas han desaparecido en una niebla, las brujas comienzan a levantar un puente [...] En la orilla opuesta está detenido el entierro [...] las brujas huyen convertidas en murciélagos. El entierro se vuelve hacia la aldea y desaparece en la niebla.”<sup>44</sup> (*Romance de Lobos (A Romance of Wolves)*; fragments from Scene I annotations)

These fragments prove the author used and mixed several traditions: ‘la Santa Compañía,’ or the Procession of the Souls from Purgatory— a deeply-rooted popular

belief in Galician culture—, the coven of witches he stumbles upon— very common in a lot of Celtic regions—, and the vision of one’s own burial, whose origin can be traced to *Leyenda del estudiante Lisardo*, compiled by Antonio de Torquemada in *Jardín de flores curiosas* (1570). The latter motif can also be found, narrated as if it were a real event, in *Breve relación de la muerte, vida y virtudes de Miguel de Mañara*, published by Jesuit priest Juan de Cárdenas, in 1680, one potential source for Mérimée work,<sup>45</sup> and also possible origin for a notable amount of versions, amongst which we can find Espronceda’s, admired by Valle-Inclán himself. We may conclude that Valle resumes the motif, adding a Galician flair to it: the funeral Montenegro witness at the beginning of *Romance de Lobos* (Day I, Scene I) is preceded by the vision of ‘la Santa Compañía’ that heralds, tradition holds, his approaching death.

Most 19<sup>th</sup>-century Don Juan versions are geared towards the hero’s salvation, which in turn originates two paths: a path of approximation to the original drama (presence of the religious dimension, which had been getting weaker and weaker since Tirso; massive influx of the sacred factor), and a path of detachment from the mythic source (feminization of the myth). Both paths converge in Zorrilla’s play. The fusion of Miguel de Marañón’s Spanish legend with the mythical Don Juan gives way to a new demystifying process: the converted Don Juan makes his entrance. So, the sinner’s transformation, his repentance, the partition of goods (although in this case it is not due to charity, but to pride, for it is an attempt to clean his lineage), come about in the last ‘*comedia*.’

¡Yo he sido siempre el peor hombre del mundo! Ahora siento que voy a dejarlo y quiero arrepentirme. La luz que ellos apagaron se enciende en las tinieblas donde el alma vivía, y para que mi linaje, donde hubo santos y grandes capitanes, no lo cubran mis hijos de oprobio, acabando en la horca por ladrones, les repartiré mis bienes y quedaré pobre...<sup>46</sup> (*Romance de Lobos*. Day II, Scene IV)

These motifs— the vision of one’s own funeral and the sinner’s repentance— are part of Miguel de Marañón’s legend; even Montenegro’s line, “he sido siempre el peor hombre del mundo” [“I have always been the worst man in the world”], is a reminder of the one Marañón arranged to be his epitaph: “Aquí yace el peor hombre que en el mundo ha habido” [“Here lies the worst man the world has ever known”]. Valle-Inclán reworks both and creates a character that, as stated by Lasaga Medina, “even maintaining his peers’ identity, is radically new” (2004:158).

*Comedias bárbaras* is not the last dwelling for Don Juan in Valle’s work; in his *Esperpentos* a new and demystifying mask of the myth makes its appearance. Ortega y Gasset<sup>47</sup> established, for the first time, the connection between *Las galas del difunto*

(The Dead Man's Duds) and *Don Juan Tenorio*, character that Valle's 'esperpento' refers to explicitly. This play constitutes an exemplary illustration of Valle's grotesque inversion on the fundamental traits present in the Romantic drama: the conquest, the novice's kidnapping, the scenes at the cemetery... Following Gonzalo Sobejano, the variations inflicted on Don Juan in the theatrical scene during the 20<sup>th</sup> century are not of importance,

The only exception being the parodic inversion of Tenorio conceived by Valle-Inclán in the 'esperpento' *Las galas del difunto* (1926), a theatrical piece much more original and funnier than those [he is referring to plays by Dicenta, Marquina, Álvarez Quintero, Machado, Unamuno, Martínez Sierra, Grau, Ramón Sender, among others], and, in my opinion, far superior to other attempts by Spanish playwrights, and even to foreign versions as worthy as the ones penned by George Bernard Shaw, Edmond Rostand, Jean Anouilh or Henri de Montherland (Sobejano, 1995: 300).<sup>48</sup>

Comparative and evaluative studies such as these are common, and we would not add anything new.<sup>49</sup> However, we should underline that Valle-Inclán is not interested in producing another of the numerous 20<sup>th</sup>-century demystifications of Don Juan. Valle's scope is wider, his ambitions deeper than mere parody or grotesque imitation. He uses the myth as a means for his critique. In *Las galas*, the character carries an ideological and cultural message: the demystification of heroism in modern society, reduced now to mere junk ("este calvario" ["this ordeal"], "tinglado" ["mess"], are the words Juanito Ventolera uses to refer to his war decorations), and the degradation present in Spanish Restoration public life.

Valle-Inclán mixes up, following his time's poetics, different styles, incorporating to his works a large number of elements from outside sources. From his literary beginnings, and later on, linked to the three great cycles of this production—*Sonatas*, *Comedias bárbaras* and *Esperpentos*— he repeatedly uses the traditional literary theme of Don Juan, stamping it with an original and innovative slant. The achieved results cause the mythic model to blur, as it acts as a background landscape, more or less evident, more or less obscured, on which he projects his creation.

## Notes

1. Cf. Trocchi (2002: 161). All quotes from outside research have been translated from their original language.
2. We use the concept in singular because we will not take into account other structural levels—such

as the archetypal or symbolic ones, promoted by the founder of Myth Criticism, Gilbert Durand (*The anthropological structures of the imaginary*, 1960). We will use the concept of ‘structure’ as proposed by French ethnologist, founder of Structural Anthropology, Claude Lévi-Strauss, that is, we will concentrate on its synchronic and diachronic aspects alone.

3. The most cited of them all may be Mircea Eliade’s definition (1968: 12-13): “myths tell a sacred story; it narrates an event that has happened in primordial times, the legendary times of the ‘beginnings’. (...) Thus, myths are always the story of a ‘creation.’”

4. “Temas seculares, lugares comunes, fórmulas expresivas previamente acuñadas, ideas procedentes de un legado cultural, pueden cambiar de sentido cuando se ponen al servicio de una nueva concepción del mundo o de una actitud vital distinta (...) En realidad, todo estudio de literatura comparada, o de influencias de un autor sobre otro, lleva en sí la necesidad de señalar contrastes.”

5. “las formas y los temas, más que entidades discretas, son elementos parciales cuyo montaje se debe en definitiva a la intervención del lector. Tratándose de temalogía, esta intervención será tanto más importante... cuanto más relevantes los fenómenos de intertextualidad que identifiquen el tema mediante la memoria de figuraciones anteriores.”

6. This is an indispensable study for the structural analysis of the myth’s evolution. Rousset’s theory of invariants (1973) stems from Lévi-Strauss’ methodology (*Anthropologie structural*, 1958), especially in determining the concept of “mythème”—minimal unit with mythic meaning.

7. With the presence of death, or the tool of divine justice—represented in the archetypal model by the Stone Guest—, the supernatural factor bursts into the play. Many years before, Micheline Sauvage, in his essay *Le cas Don Juan* (1953), had already proposed a list of invariants very similar to Rousset’s: “The Hero, the Dead man’s Daughter, Death-carrier of the Hero’s eternal punishment. Or, in other words, seduction, rebellion, choosing time versus eternity.”

8. Apart from Jean Rousset’s study, already quoted, we can add, among others, the works of Leo Weinstein, *The Metamorphoses of Don Juan* (California, Stanford University, 1959) and Jean Massin, *Don Juan: Mythe littéraire et musical* (Paris, Stock Musique, 1979).

9. Hoffmann’s brief short story has little to do with the text found in Da Ponte’s libretto. However, Hoffmann’s contemporaries, even when well versed on Mozart’s work—musicians, poets—, accepted his version of the myth; such was the case of both Weber and Beethoven. Leo Weinstein (1959: 69) believes that Hoffmann’s interpretation of Ana’s significance in the opera, which is openly at odds with the material category of the character—scene time, number of arias, Don Juan’s interest, etc.—, stems from what Mozart’s music suggests.

10. Hoffmann’s quote refers to the Spanish translation: *Don Juan. Aventura fabulosa ocurrida a un viajero entusiasta*, included in *Cuentos de Hoffmann* (Madrid, Espasa Calpe, Colección Austral, 1998): 254.

11. For the evolution of the myth, from the Romantic period onwards, and the different thematic lines that have conveyed the myth throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, refer to my work *Mito y Literatura. Estudio comparado de don Juan* (1997).

12. Out of the well stocked Don Juan narratives written until the first decades of the 20th century, only in two is his mother present: Lord Byron's *Don Juan* (1818/24) and *L'Homme et ses fantômes*, by H.R. Lenormand (1921), even though her presence and function in both texts is quite different. In Byron's version, Don Juan is fatherless and his education is trusted exclusively to women. Byron brings to his work something unknown until that moment: Don Juan's past; and he offers the reader a rather naïve perspective on the hero's sentimental education and, with it, an explanation for his womanizing behaviour that bears no relation to the traditional meaning of the term 'donjuanism'. Furthermore, the character of the mother only appears in the first canto. Lenormand also includes the absent father, and a mother who, although only present at the end of the plot, has become the protective figure. This hero is a skilled and accomplished womaniser, but, at the same time, he feels a hidden and unacknowledged attraction towards his own sex.

13. Roughly translated as 'womaniser' or 'ladies' man'.

14. To give but an example, "La Niña Chole", "Octavia Santino" or "La Generala" had been previously published in the press, in the form of more or less elaborate sketches, or closer to their definitive version. (cf. Lavaud, 1991: 91).

15. In later editions, this novel will be titled *Augusta*.

16. The list of authors that, according to the critics, Valle-Inclán owes literary debts to, is numerous and diverse: Barbey d'Aurevilly, D'Annunzio, Gautier, Verlaine, Zorrilla, Eça de Queiroz ... are part of it.

17. See, as an illustration, Lily Litvak's work (1979), Daniella Gambini's (1992) or Teresa Trueba's (2002). According to Eliane Lavaud, "in his short novellas, Valle-Inclán reflects the feminist grievance that takes hold of Spain at the end of the 19th century" (1991: 127).

18. "The suggestive power of the sinister".

19. "Don Juan had a tragic countenance, his speech was the faithful and grieving speech of a romantic seducer. (...) The old libertine gazed at her intensely as if to upset her even more. Those green eyes were both somber and fascinating, disturbing and bold; it could be said they injected love as if it were a poison, they ravished souls and stole kisses from the purest mouths." [Fragments from Valle-Inclán's works are translated from their original in Spanish]. The quote refers to the following edition: *Femeninas. Epitalamio* by Joaquín del Valle-Inclán (Cátedra, Madrid, 1992, 185).

20. A 'pazo' is a Galician manor house whose origin is always related to nobility or the Church.

21. ("somber figure", "seducing gracefulness", "sinister gaze and smile", "brow that seems to behold every exaggeration, heavenly as well as diabolical" ... "I may not believe in God, but I love angels")

22. According to Aurora Egido, "the devilish aspects of the *Burlador* stand [...] for more than just mere characterizations of the protagonist's wickedness, for they are in keeping with the story's central thesis and they articulate its structure" (Cf. "Sobre la demonología de los burladores (de Tirso a Zorrilla)", in *Cuadernos de Teatro Clásico*, 2, Madrid (1988): 37).

23. "Glimpsed through the soft light of the lamp, blond head divinely bent, the shadow of her eyelashes trembling against her ivory cheek, delicate and graceful chest surrounded by uncertain

shadows, golden sculpture against the sky-blue of the settee, Rosarito reminded me of those candid Madonnas painted on a starry sky background.”

24. For example, the main characters from *Autumn Sonata*, the essential parts of the Pazo’s gardens description and the romantic relationship between Bradomín and Concha can already be found in “¿Cuento de amor?”, published in *La correspondencia de España* (Madrid, 28/VII/1901) with the following subheading: “Fragmento de las memorias íntimas del Marqués de Bradomín”. Cf. Éliane Lavaud (1991: 245-75).

25. “Estas páginas son un fragmento de las “Memorias Amables” que ya muy viejo empezó a escribir en la emigración el Marqués de Bradomín. Un Don Juan admirable. ¡El más admirable tal vez! Era feo, católico y sentimental” (“These pages are a fragment from the “Elegant Memoirs” that the Marquis of Bradomín started to write as an old man, already an emigrant. An admirable Don Juan. Maybe the most admirable! He was ugly, Catholic and emotional.”)

26. “In these [pages] I attempted to deal with an eternal theme. A theme, if it is eternal, no matter how often dealt with, is never exhausted. Only an eternal theme can weigh each author’s effort and merit, and that is why all of us authors should try it.” Cf. Dougherty (1983: 160).

27. “I had a moment of vanity when facing in Estella Court a welcome that clearly showed my renown. I was regarded with love, and also with a hint of anger. They were all pious people, and perhaps they remembered some of my adventures.”

28. We also find examples of the opposite attitude: “we absolutely reject Bradomín as a Don Juan, or, at least, as a typical Don Juan. He may have ‘donjuanesque’ attitudes, but he is not an unquestionable Don Juan”. This sweeping denial comes from Fernando de Toro Garland, “La última derrota de Bradomín”, in *Cuadernos Hispanoamericanos*, 199-200 (July-August 1966): 537-544. That said, what is widely felt is actually the opposite, as we can see in Luciano García Lorenzo’s forceful reply to the previous thesis; cf. “Don Juan... Y siempre al final la muerte (De Valle-Inclán a Martínez Sierra),” *Segismundo*, 17-18 (1973): 49-74.

29. Sometimes these inter-textual games are hidden—by avoiding explicit acknowledgement—, but are soon discovered by either the author or the reviewers (see, for example, the reference to Chateaubriand’s *Mémoires d’Outre-Tombe*).

30. “María Rosario, slightly confused, muttered,

‘Your spiritual father! Who is your spiritual father?’

‘A gentleman called Casanova.’

‘A Spanish nobleman?’

‘No, a Venetian adventurer.’

‘But how can an adventurer...?’

I interrupted her,

‘He repented at the end of his days.’

‘Did he become a monk?’

‘He run out of time, although he left his written confessions behind.’

‘Just like St. Augustine?’

‘Exactly the same! But, being a humble Christian, he didn’t want to presume any connection to that doctor of the Church, so he called them Memoirs.’

‘Have you read them?’

‘It’s my favourite reading material.’”

(*Summer Sonata*. Madrid: Espasa Calpe, 1965: 62).

31. Later on, regarding *Sonatas*, Villanueva will insist on the same idea: “[Xabier de Bradomín] wants to make abundantly clear the uniqueness of his person, and thus pays more attention to building it with deliberate artifice than to reflecting his own personality” (Villanueva, 1995: 251). Following this line of thought, Eliane Lavaud also highlights the narcissism present in *Sonatas*, which consists of “the construction of the story of self” (1990: 547).

32. This specific feature gives credence to his incredible ability for seduction. William Little explains it so: “don Juan is the human myth that reflects the supernatural myth of Lucifer and inverts the mythic structure of Jesus. Thus, the same way Lucifer—the Archangel expelled from Heaven—is an evil deceiver and the sterile seducer per se, don Juan is the noble rebel par excellence, expelled from society because of his arrogant independence, and he becomes the martyred lover because he tries to love many women without ever being able to love any absolutely” (“Varios aspectos de don Juan y el donjuanismo”. *Hispanófila. Literatura-Ensayos*, 80 / Year XXVII, 2, January 1984: 14). According to Aurora Egido, “the devilish aspects of the *Burlador* stand [...] for more than just mere characterizations of the protagonist’s wickedness, for they are in keeping with the story’s central thesis and they articulate its structure” (Cf. “Sobre la demonología de los burladores (de Tirso a Zorrilla)”, in *Cuadernos de Teatro Clásico*, 2, Madrid (1988): 37).

33. “You scare me when you say such shocking impieties... Yes, you scare me, because it’s not you talking: It’s the Devil... Even your voice sounds different... It’s the Devil!”

34. ““You knew! You knew!” And, suddenly, fastening her burning and fanatic eyes on me, she made the sign of the cross and burst into damnations. I, like the Devil himself, left the room.”

35. In the mythical versions, Don Juan’s servant acts as the depository of the hero’s memory; in this version, however, the depository is the receiver, who is unaware of her role.

36. One of the few examples would be Jacinto Grau’s *Don Juan de Carillana* (1943). In this play a mature Don Juan will court a lady, who, unbeknownst to him, is his daughter. Her husband will reveal her identity to him.

37. We should remember that the first older versions of Don Juan do not begin to emerge until the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Two examples of this are Gustave LeVavasasseur’s *Don Juan Barbón* (1848), a play written in verse, and Jules Virad’s *La Viellese de Don Juan* (1853).

38. “She beckoned me with doleful and burning pleas.”

39. Soledad, Bradomín’s mother, sends a letter to Concha, in which she calls her “la peor de las mujeres” (*Sonata de Otoño*, ed. Leda Schiavo, Madrid, Espasa Calpe, 1990: 84).

40. In a lecture read at the Círculo Mercantil de Málaga (18 October 1926), Valle-Inclán states: “And

after the Marquis of Bradomín, ugly, catholic and sentimental, I wrote another version of Don Juan: *Comedias bárbaras*, representation of a rural Don Juan". Cf. Javier Serrano Alonso (2006).

41. This is the first volume of *Comedias bárbaras*, according to the year of publication.

42. "He is one of those womanizing and despotic, welcoming and violent noblemen that are kept around as if they were old portraits in dead and quiet mansions."

43. We are referring to *Los Pazos de Ulloa* (1886) and *La Madre Naturaleza* (1887), by Pardo Bazán, but also *Os camiños de vida* (1920), by Otero Pedrayo, *La sangre* (1952), by Elena Quiroga or the trilogy *Los Gozos y las sombras* (1957-1960, 1962), by Torrente Ballester. Valle-Inclán also shows in *Comedias* one of the historical stages in the development of the 'pazo' culture: the decadence of Galician feudal nobility, the isolation of civilization, primitivism in behaviour and beliefs, etc.

44. "The White Procession [the Procession of the Souls from Purgatory] floats like mist over the cornfields [...] the procession stops at the bank of a river where a coven of witches sit in a circle and commune [...] Along the other bank a funeral advances [...] The ghosts have disappeared into the mist, the witches start to build up a bridge [...] On the opposite bank, the funeral has stopped [...] the witches, shape-shifting to bats, fly away. The funeral turns back to the village and disappears into the mist."

45. The extraordinary events connected to Don Juan's death are replaced in some versions of the myth with the vision of his own funeral, which is said to have happened in real life to Miguel de Maraña and have caused his conversion. This motif is used for the first time in the history of the myth by Prosper Mérimée in *Les âmes du Purgatoire* (1834), which tells the story of Mañara, and also introduces elements belonging to the mythic tradition, thus inaugurating the versions that fuse both legends. Regarding Spanish literature, dramatic poem *El estudiante de Salamanca* by José de Espronceda is the first story to introduce this motif.

46. "I have always been the worst man in the world! Now I dread I am leaving this world and want to repent. The light they have snuffed out is now burning bright amidst the shadows where my soul dwells, and, so that my lineage, which includes saints and great captains, avoids shame through my sons, ending up in the gallows for thievery, I will distribute my property and wind up destitute..."

47. "La estrangulación de Don Juan", *El Sol*, 17th November 1935.

48. "la única excepción me parece la inversión paródica del Tenorio concebida por Valle-Inclán en el esperpento *Las galas del difunto* (1926) pieza mucho más original y graciosa que aquellas [se refiere a las de Dicenta, Marquina, Álvarez Quintero, Machado, Unamuno, Martínez Sierra, Grau, Ramón Sender, entre otros] y, en mi opinión, superior a cuanto en España se ha intentado, e incluso a versiones foráneas tan apreciables como las de George Bernard Shaw, Edmond Rostand, Jean Anouilh o Henri de Montherland" (Sobejano, 300).

49. Cf. Avalue-Arce (1959), Manuel Aznar (1992), Eliane Lavaud (1988), among others.

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