

# The Literature of Valle-Inclán Transposed to the Screen: A Problematic Rewriting

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**Abstract** In this paper I propose a reflection about the relationships between cinema and literary texts in which I emphasize the difficulties that texts with a clear predominance of discourse over story present in the process of translation to the screen. I also explain how Valle-Inclán's narrative work is characterized by an appreciable degree of creativity which almost entirely disappears in its transfer to the cinematographic format. After this, I proceed with an analysis of the seven adaptations that have been made of his works up until now, explaining the different solutions adopted by the respective directors and investigating the cold reception they had.

**Key words** cinematographic adaptation; film and literature; Spanish cinema; Valle-Inclán

Film has undoubtedly played a significant role in the divulgation of literary texts, and literature has provided an endless source of movie plots. As early as 1926, Boris Eikhenbaum referred to this relationship in these words:

Little by little all of literature files before the camera. Those who thought this relationship would have no future, that cinema would abandon its honorable concubine as soon as it grew up, seem to be in the wrong: despite certain infidelities, their relationship is growing more and more like a long-lasting marriage (...) For film, literature is an immensely rich source, and from this stems the natural temptation to revise it from the cinematographic point of view, to take it as cinematographic material, as a libretto for screenplays. (“Literatura y cine”, in Albèra 199-200)

But Eikhenbaum, who wrote these words when cinema had not yet acquired sound, was referring to “the curious fact that the literary genres adapted to the screen are precisely those that in literature have been demoted to the condition of “primary” and

whose reading is only addressed to children.” The reason for this—he explained—is that “literature is put into film for the aspects it has that satisfy the demands of style and genre posed by its evolution.” Thus, what is of most interest to film is “the plot outline” or “the construction procedure,” although there is also the possibility that the goal could be “to find the stylistic principles equivalent to literary works in cinematographic language” (Albèra 200-202).

This affirmation is again taken up by André Bazin when, referring to adaptations, he states that creativity should not be understood as a synonym for infidelity, since “those who are least concerned with faithfulness in the name of so-called screen requirements are the ones who simultaneously betray both literature and film.” Thus the affirmation he makes a few lines above this about the speciousness of presenting faithfulness as “a necessarily negative servitude to strange aesthetic laws,” given that these very differences in aesthetic structure “make the search for equivalencies even more delicate and therefore require much more imagination and capacity for intervention on the part of the filmmaker who wishes to achieve a resemblance,” which leads him to conclude that “in its command of language and style, cinematographic creation is directly proportional to faithfulness” (Bazin 116-118).

This means that great literary works can only be satisfactorily adapted to the screen when behind the camera there is a genius, equivalent to the author of the text, who can successfully carry out this operation of language transfer. This is something that rarely takes place, and it has led some theoreticians, despite their love of films, to have doubts about the adaptability of great works of literature to the screen, as when Pere Gimferrer maintains that “none of the great classic novels has become a great film classic, and a phenomenon of this type cannot be considered a matter of chance, but rather an indicator of the limits of adaptation.” He finds the explanation for the fact that “great novels can give rise to good films, but hardly great ones” in the problematical move from literary language to film language, to which he devotes a good part of his book: after citing several “worthy” and “estimable” adaptations such as *The Grapes of Wrath* (Steinbeck/John Ford, 1940), *The Trial* (Kafka/Orson Welles, 1962), *Lolita* (Nabokov/Kubrick, 1962) and *Young Törless* (Robert Musil/Scholöndorf, 1966), among others, he concludes that “they do not possess that disturbing wealth of implications present in the originals they seek to illustrate,” whereas minor or secondary works of great (and not so great) authors have given rise to authentic film classics (Gimferrer 77-78).

Much more frequent, however, are the cases in which the adaptation only seeks to disseminate a literary text and these are usually motivated by economic imperatives. This project involves a series of operations addressed to making the work more “digestible” for the target population of the new product: among these operations

are synthesis, universalization (to guarantee success in international markets), simplification of the message or the diverse modifications the plot is subjected to. In this respect, Cristina Manzano wonders whether adaptations actually favor literary works, and she decides that “they only favor their publicity”; and for this reason, she adds, “the reader/spectator should be educated in (...) thinking of the adaptation as an independent product, that is, however, indebted to the original” and be made aware of “the definite difference and different lives that the literary work and the audiovisual work take on beginning at that moment” (Manzano Espinosa 16-17)<sup>2</sup>.

The reason for this long preamble can be found in the need to explain the systematic failure of all the attempts made until now of taking the literary texts of Valle-Inclán to the screen. The creative sumptuousness of his language, the musicality attained in his works at the time of his fascination with Modernist aesthetics, or his brazenness and ability to deform reality in his *esperpentos* have not found their equivalent in any of the film versions made of either his narrative or dramatic texts. This linguistic potency in his writing is undoubtedly this author’s most defining characteristic, and is recognized by all scholars. One of them, Darío Villanueva, compares him to another genius of language, the Irishman James Joyce, a strict contemporary of Don Ramón, affirming that both of them “were mainly two great philologists, two geniuses in their command of language, from which they extracted everything they needed for their aesthetic recreation of a new and complex world” (Villanueva 360).

Creativity at the level of language is not a purely intransitive element but rather a vehicle upholding the creation of Valle-Inclán’s imaginary universes; although superficial, in approaching these universes it is advisable to distinguish between the aestheticism and idealist vision of his early texts and the degraded and ferocious caricature of his last *esperpentos*; they appear superimposed and mixed up in many of his works as an expression of a complex, polymorphous reality that cannot be reduced to any attempt of rational understanding.

This complexity of a world in which such divergent elements coexist is doubtlessly what makes it so difficult to transpose his works to the screen. And not only because all the verbal richness of his prose is lost (at the phonic, syntactic and lexical levels), but also because the universe resulting from that carefully worked writing, with its unreal, magical and oneiric dimension, is very difficult to translate into visual signs.

In the pages that follow I shall review the seven film adaptations that until now have been made of Valle-Inclán’s texts, ranging from *Sonatas*, directed by Juan Antonio Bardem in 1959, to *Martes de Carnaval*, the miniseries of three episodes produced by Spanish Television in 2008 and directed by José Luis García Sánchez.

Starting with a superficial analysis I then attempt to clarify the objectives pursued in adapting the texts to the screen and the reasons behind the generally limited success of these adaptations, attending along the way to certain comments by the critics, whose reception of them was lukewarm if not chilly.

***Sonatas* (Juan Antonio Bardem, 1959)**

This film, the first attempt by Spanish filmmaking to approach the work of Valle-Inclán, is a crystal clear example of the distortion of the text's contents and manipulation of characters to vehicle an ideological message very different from that of the original, commendable though that intention may have been (to denounce the situation of Spain under Franco). The film is based on two of the four stories (*Sonata de otoño* and *Sonata de estío*) that make up the tetralogy whose main character is the Marqués de Bradomín, the decadent seducer who narrates his sexual conquests in first person in four different scenarios: Italy (Spring), rural Galicia (Fall), the Carlist court in Estella<sup>3</sup> (Winter) and revolutionary Mexico (Summer). The contents of the two stories chosen was considerably reworked for the film, altering the character's condition (representative of the decadent and reactionary aristocracy) to place it at the service of a message with a progressive ideology. Bardem, a militant in the Communist Party at the time, had in mind a model of historical movie that, breaking with the sweetened and evasive view that Francoist filmmakers had been offering of the past, would be capable of providing a critical interpretation of it that in turn would be susceptible to being read as a reflection of the Spanish situation at the time the movie was made. He was directly inspired by Luchino Visconti's film *Senso* (1954), a movie that fully responded to his purposes of a socially committed film that at the same time was aesthetically attractive and had the possibility of commercial success: the exaltation of the Garibaldi revolution, from which a unified Italy emerged, is located in the sumptuous surroundings of an aristocracy doomed to disappear; if to this we add the romantic melodrama on which the plot development rests, Visconti's film brought together the three objectives—political, aesthetic and economic—pursued by Bardem and his producers and with a message diluted enough to be tolerated by government censorship.

The two texts chosen pertain to the first stage of Valle-Inclán's works and follow a Modernist narrative model: static, prodigious in voluptuous descriptions, and short on action. The main character is an archetypal decadent aristocrat, but one who is refined, highly aware of his privileges, and smug about them. In short, a literary model and a plot that are hardly ideal to serve as a vehicle for the intended progressive message, which obliged Bardem to renounce any criterion of faithfulness and place the text at the service of his own ideology. We can say that he confines himself to

taking from Valle-Inclán's text the scenarios where the action takes place and the main character, the latter subjected to a profound mutation.<sup>4</sup> According to Cerón Gómez, Bardem wasn't very enthusiastic about the *Sonatas* and his intention had been to adapt *Tirano Banderas*. However, since that option wasn't possible (the whole film would have had to be shot in Mexico) he accepted with the condition of making his own mark and introducing social and critical elements that would mitigate the erotic-decadent tone of Valle-Inclán's stories. The distance in time in which the narrative was set would thus allow him to use the past to propose a critical look at the Spanish situation at the time of filming. The first part of the film, which corresponds to *Sonata de otoño*, is set in 1824 in full absolutist repression against the liberals who were still resisting the reign of Ferdinand the Seventh, thus establishing a parallel with the Francoist repression of the *maquis*, the last Republican holdouts against the Franco regime after the Spanish Civil War (1936-39). Bradomín finds himself unwillingly involved in the struggle and ends up exiled in Mexico where he will join other exiled liberals who are helping the Mexicans in their revolutionary struggle (Cerón Gómez 161-162).

Bardem carried out a profound transformation of Valle-Inclán's narrative material, much more drastic in the first part than in the second, since *Sonata de otoño* is noted for its extremely slow action, abundance of description and reflexive digressions. In *Sonata de estío* more narrative elements are used, although the alterations made to the original text are also considerable. In any case, when approaching this adaptation, as with any other, the issue is not about choosing between a faithfulness that consecrates the text or the director's right to intervene and impose his or her own reading, but about understanding the reasons for such a reading and verifying its effectiveness. As Cerón Gómez notes in relation to the *Sonatas*, it is a matter of considering the context that determined the manipulations Bardem made for what were obviously political ends, and not judging his intervention of Valle-Inclán's text as the result of mere whim. The director's reasons are explicit enough: faced with a commission regarding a text he did not identify with, he chose to adapt it to his own aesthetics and ideology, to his idea of what audiences expected from his films; his leftist leanings and his idea of film as an instrument of political consciousness-raising determined that option (Cerón Gómez 161-162).

Thus, what we must try to explain are the reasons for which this film was almost unanimously rejected, beginning with international criticism after its showing at the Venice Film Festival.<sup>5</sup> Bardem attributed this negative response at the Mostra to the fact that the "deeply Hispanic nature of the story" made it difficult for audiences unfamiliar with the vicissitudes and political confrontations characterizing 19th century Spain to understand it. To this must be added, again according to Bardem, that

the critics had in mind a cliché of his work based on his previous films and “*Sonatas* had nothing to do with this pre-established cliché and threw all of their previous judgments into disarray.”<sup>6</sup>

Among the reproving arguments with which the film was received there are some that do not hold up, either for being exclusively ideological (those writing for the pro-Franco press) or already obsolete for continuing to defend the criterion of faithfulness to the original text. Nevertheless, aside from these there were other critical responses that raised questions of considerable interest that will help us to explain the negative response to the adaptation of the *Sonatas*; among them is Bardem’s inexperience in a genre he had not dealt with previously and the impossibility of competing aesthetically with Visconti’s model or with Hollywood period drama super-productions. Underlying this rejection there could also have been the memory of previous historical films, with their falseness and attempts at indoctrination, and Bardem’s film would have been seen in the same light. On the other hand, the scarce suitability of the base text (in which everything presented is unreal, the product of a honing down and stylizing of literary and pictorial motifs) to the social-revolutionary message that the director wished to send must be pointed out; this did not occur in the case of the Visconti film that served as his model, since it was based on a story (by Camillo Boito) with a broad historical basis and strongly individual characters, with a solid dramatic intrigue for which the Garibaldi revolution served as a frame and both aspects worked together to perfection. Thus, in Bardem’s film there is a gap between the dramatic level and the ideological level, and furthermore, because of censorship, the message, presented through certain events in the past that are used as a metaphor for the Spanish situation at the time the film debuted, was not made explicit enough for most spectators (or for the foreign critics in Venice). Finally we should mention the film’s own indeterminate genre; in this respect Cerón Gómez says that the failure of the film derived from “putting such different registers into play, such as adventure films, romantic melodrama, ‘cinéma de qualité’ and political parable” such that the ideological density of the film and its political functionality ended up being far from satisfactory (Cerón Gómez 166-167).<sup>7</sup>

***Flor de santidad* (Adolfo Marsillach, 1973)**

In this other film based on a text by Valle-Inclán, filmed by Adolfo Marsillach some years later, rather than a distortion of the original story we find its amplification. But this amplification also involves, as we shall see, a certain intervention in the author’s message since the story loses its timelessness<sup>8</sup> to become located in a specific historical context: rural Galicia in 1853, where confrontations were still taking place among absolutists after the Second Carlist War. It thus offers a critical reflection on this moment in our past. This amplification may also be due to the fact that the

parsimony of the plot would not admit a long narrative (in contrast to the *Sonatas*). One may recall that it focuses on the adventure of Adegá the shepherdess who, having given shelter to a pilgrim in the stable she slept in, undergoes a kind of mystic crisis and confuses the pilgrim with Jesus Christ, a crisis that only gets worse when the pilgrim is killed by the locals because they believe he has brought an epidemic that is killing their sheep). Adegá abandons the village to walk the roads proclaiming that she is expecting a son from the dead man, thus acquiring an aureole of sanctity. The story has a somewhat open ending since it concludes with Adegá going to the pilgrimage of Santa Baya, where the countess of Brandeso (in whose house she had found work as a servant) has sent her to undergo an exorcism.

The film opens with a sequence in which the camera follows the pilgrim along a country trail and his subsequent arrival in a lonely city while a voiceover informs us of the modifications made to the original story: “A long and intermittent civil war has desolated Spain during the reign of Isabel II...”; there follows an explanation of the skirmishes between the Carlists, who defend an absolutist monarchy, and the liberals in favor of Queen Isabel, with the voiceover reminding us that “it is always the common people who suffer from the wars among the powerful.” Then we are warned: “Although it is an age-old story that could have taken place at any time and in any place, we wished to set it in this time and place, on a dark date with tragic consequences: Galicia 1853.” Later, testimony by Rosalía de Castro referring to that year is added: “Hunger led hordes of savage men and women to come down to our cities, men who had never walked the streets of a town, women who knew no horizons other than that seen in front of their huts, built in the loneliest isolation.” And it concludes with these words: “This is the background of the poetical world of Valle-Inclán: magic, violence, love, hope, everything can take place at this moment; miracles, faith, heresy..., everything. It is the year of hunger.”

The references to the historical context described in this introduction are reiterated throughout the film, and they can be said to constitute the leitmotif in that they interfere decisively in the development of the story in its original form. The first sequence after the credits places us directly in an atmosphere very different from that of the archaic rural world of the original: a squad of soldiers parades into an urban square, the officer reads a proclamation declaring martial law to fight the Carlist uprising. They nail the edict on the door of the church and a large number of people, hovering under their umbrellas, groups around to read it. A man comes forward, tears off the proclamation and shouts “Long live Don Carlos!” inciting everyone to rebel against the liberal government of Isabel II. At this moment an archpriest appears and calls for calm, although he recognizes that the liberals are subjecting the Church to persecution. He then has a dialogue alone with Electus the blind man about the

preparations for the uprising and he hands him a bag of coins. Throughout the film there are many other sequences that include the civil conflict that is taking place in the country: a squad of Carlist soldiers stops and mistreats the pilgrim (after the latter has met with Adegá who thought he was an enemy agent). A group of Carlist soldiers is having a good time in a brothel; when Adegá's mistress arrives with a sick sheep one of them tells her what spell she should use to cure the sheep and discover the cause of the epidemic. The Carlist soldiers participate in the ritual held to cast the spell (throwing a live sheep into the fire) and it is also they who harass and kill the pilgrim who appears while the ritual is being carried out, and they identify him as the author of the curse that provoked the epidemic. In another vein, the clergy has taken advantage of the saintly fame that Adegá has acquired among the peasants to incite them to rise up against the liberal government; they take her out in procession for the pilgrimage of Santa Baya proclaiming her "the little saint." A detachment of the liberal army watches over the pilgrimage and decides to intervene when Electus the blind man begins to sing verses against the Queen and a masked performance is organized to ridicule her. The attack comes during the nighttime procession when the archpriest is haranguing the peasants from a balcony to get them to rise up against the liberal government. After that there is a significant sequence in which the heads of the liberal army demand that the bishop put an end to the cult to Adegá that the archpriest has been encouraging, suspend the archpriest from his duties, and hand him over to be judged; then a heated argument takes place about whether he is to be judged by the civil or religious authorities. However, at that moment news arrives that the Queen has decreed a general amnesty to celebrate that Pope Pius IX has granted her the Golden Rose for her efforts in defending the Catholic faith.<sup>9</sup> What in the book is a meeting of hunters at Brandeso's country estate when Adegá is in service to the countess, in the film is turned into a meeting of Carlists who are preparing an attack against the liberals, since the Count of Brandeso is the ringleader of the uprising.<sup>10</sup> During the supper, Adegá recognizes one of the soldiers who killed the pilgrim. Overwhelmed by her curse, they are defeated in the confrontation with the liberal army and the count himself is killed. The supernatural character of this battle is underscored by a ghostly sequence in which the Carlist band goes into a wood with charred trees shrouded in fog; while the wind whistles and the figure of the pilgrim stands up in a threatening way, the soldiers advance overawed, disperse and fall to the ground even though the enemy army is nowhere to be found.

As can be observed, considerable work in amplification has been carried out on the material of the original text in an attempt to locate the story in a specific historical context and connect the vicissitudes of the shepherdess with a time in Spain's past in which the Catholic Church, allied with the defenders of absolutism and opposed



to the liberal government, had no qualms about fostering superstitions deriving from popular culture in order to further their objectives. As in Bardem's film, this cinematographic version of *Flor de santidad* differs considerably from the original contents. Nonetheless, the changes made here do not have such a strong ideological or Manichean bias as in Bardem's film: the critique of the absolutists and their alliance with the ecclesiastical authorities to win the will of the people does not entail an idealization of the liberal bands whose representatives and objectives actually appear very blurry. Furthermore, it must also be said that the director did not limit himself to just amplifying the original plot but rather tried to connect it to Valle-Inclán's modernist aesthetic premises, endowing the atmosphere with the poetic dimension that Valle transmits through his stylized view of rural Galicia but in which the counterpoint to the misery and brutality of its inhabitants' lives is not lacking. Nevertheless, in this case as in that of other films to which I will refer further on, the naturalizing power of film prevails over the stylization of reality that, cruel as it is, Valle-Inclán achieves with the musicality of his prose, the richness of his adjectivization, and his wise choice of a vocabulary that sounds archaic and timeless at the same time. The film does not manage to offer the idealized picture that the author achieves with his verbal preciousness but rather a document about a miserable society that is impactful for its veracity and primitiveness. The disappearance of the narrator, "immersed in the subjectivity of the protagonist" who "almost always expresses himself with devoted unctuousness (an aesthetic unctuousness that avails itself of religious language)" (Fernández Roca 100) leaves us with the crude reality of the document, although at certain times the film tries to replace the expressive discoveries of the author with other audiovisual procedures that are as excessive in their shocking nature and theatricality as they are unfortunate: I refer specifically to the second to last sequence where the ritual exorcism of the possessed takes place by submerging them into the sea during the pilgrimage of Santa Baya de Cristamilde. In contrast, the closing sequence with its sobriety does manage to transmit an emotion very much in tune with the ambiguous ending of Valle-Inclán's narrative:<sup>11</sup> Electus the blind man walks along the beach at dawn next to his guide, singing along with his vihuela (an early guitar) a ballad about the story of Adegá and her mysterious disappearance; at the same time, the old housekeeper of the Brandeso estate and Rosalva the maid anxiously run about the beach calling out the name of the shepherdess.

The critics' response to the film, with the exception of Antonio Colón writing for the *ABC* newspaper, was not very enthusiastic. Among their objections we can cite the "narrative insufficiency" of the director and his lack of "minimal knowledge of cinematographic language"<sup>12</sup> (Álvaro Feito, *Cinestudio*, 119, April 1973); or his use of "grandiloquent" and "shocking" language, which gave rise to a "disproportionate

adaptation, more sensationalist than effective” (Pedro Crespo, en *Arriba*, March 28, 1973). Miguel Rubio in *Nuevo Diario* called the film a “hodgepodge of scenes” that loses sight of the “possible poetical, religious, and spiritual contents;” furthermore, “the figure of the little shepherdess is overshadowed by the many interests that come into play: political, religious, social, atavistic ... In the end we don’t even know what her place in the story is.” The yearbook *Cine para leer* (Cinema for Reading) also referred to the theatrical component that weighs down the film as a consequence of the director’s experience in the theater, since he doesn’t seem to know that “in films, rather than make persons and things speak, you have to let them be so that they can express themselves from their very inner selves and their routine.” And it adds the following considerations regarding the transposing of literature into film:

Let us admit that a literary basis does not have to be copied word for word in a film adaptation. We are more in favor of a re-creation based on a first inspiration, a re-creation that is usually characteristic of the greatest film directors in the history of film. However, it is clear that this re-creation either has to improve the literary work or at least be of the same quality based on the new inspiration in images. (*Cine para leer*, 1973, pp. 127-131)

### ***Beatriz* (Gonzalo Suárez, 1976)**

If in the adaptations of the two preceding narratives Valle-Inclán’s texts were used to propose critical readings of the political and social situation in 19th century Spain (with a more ideologically biased message in *Sonatas*), in the film by Gonzalo Suárez the changes made to the original texts responds to very different aims. We must recall that the permissiveness that abounded after the death of Franco and the lifting of censorship was used by Spanish filmmakers to increase explicit sexual content in films, a practice that often went too far. The idea of this film moves along these lines begun in the final years of the Franco dictatorship,<sup>13</sup> although dressing it up with a certain dignity. For this reason a literary source was resorted to, and the film can be categorized within a genre that was very popular in Hollywood but scarcely cultivated at all in Spanish film: a gothic narrative which brings together sex and horror linked to supernatural experiences.

Suárez’ screenplay (in collaboration with playwright Santiago Moncada) fuses two stories by Valle-Inclán included in his book *Jardín umbrío: Beatriz and Mi hermana Antonia*. The first is the story of the young daughter of an aristocratic family who seems to be the victim of diabolical possession. When the mother discovers that her daughter’s hysterical depression is the result of her having been raped by a friar

who attended the estate's chapel, she commends the witch whom she had asked for help in exorcising her daughter to make the culprit disappear by means of a spell. The friar appears dead in the countryside the next day. In the second story, the first person narrator looks back to his childhood to tell the story of his sister, courted by a student their mother rejected. After making a pact with the devil, the student takes his revenge on the mother, who begins to suffer from a kind of obsessive dementia in which she is tormented by a cat, while the daughter lives in a permanent sleepwalking state. When her mother dies, Antonia wakes up mysteriously on the roof of the house while the narrator sees the student with a bandage covering his ears, as if he had received the punishment that the old servant had inflicted upon the family cat.

With a very free combination of elements from both tales, and the addition of others that contribute to the violence and eroticism, a plot was drawn up that closely fits the mold of the chosen genre, in which a voice in off of the narrator, remembering his distressing childhood experiences, acts as the leitmotif: his initial encounter with bandits in the forest, the appearance of the friar-pilgrim that the bandits try to attack, and the friar's putting them on the run after killing some of them; the servant of the house (the attractive Basilisa, quite different from the old lady of the same name appearing in the second tale), who in order to save a dying baby transfers the spell to Beatriz, the narrator's sister, by placing on her pillow an ear given to her by the "wise woman"; the arrival of the friar at the house, where the mother (doña Carlota) offers him hospitality, and his attraction to Beatriz, whom he tries to seduce by resorting to the "wise woman" while the young girl suffers from pain and nightmares because of the transfer of the spell; the terror felt by the narrator-child who is overwhelmed by the unexplainable events that he sees all around him, and who finds solace in his talks with Máximo Bretal (very different from the diabolical character of the same name in *Mi hermana Antonia*), the young student who gives him Latin classes and who is also in charge of inventorying the library. There is no lack of more or less veiled sexual contents (between the friar and Beatriz, between Basilisa and the boy) and some completely explicit sexual contents in the sequence of the bandits' nocturnal attack on the mansion with the aim of gang-raping Basilisa. Unlike the two original stories, the film has a happy ending: the wise-woman's cave is set on fire by the bandits, who were looking for the friar, the friar gets over his passion for Beatriz and moves away from the house, Beatriz is cured of the spell, the mother survives and the young narrator sets out on a journey to Santiago to carry on with his studies.

This happy end was to a certain extent a requirement of the film's genre, at the same time that the many elements that were not part of the original literary text help to attain the "gothic" atmosphere sought and the dynamic nature of the action (especially the three episodes with the bandits: the initial attack on the friar, the nighttime raid on

the mansion and the fire in the “wise woman’s” cave) counteracts the slow rhythm of Valle-Inclán’s narrative.

But once again we see the problems involved in translating this writing to the screen: all the suggestive capability that the author achieves in these tales which engulf the reader by sowing the seeds of doubt as to a logical explanation for the events presented is lost to some extent in the cinematographic images, which are much more explicit but incapable of attaining the nuances of verbal language when handled by a master like Valle-Inclán. It must be said as well that several of the added characters are noticeable as just that (particularly the bandits), because they are drawn more like caricatures. They would be more apt to use in representing some of the author’s *esperpentos* rather than a narrative sustained by psychological horror like these tales.

As I have pointed out in the cases of other adaptations, the problem is a lack of fit between the literary language of the texts and the cinematographic language used by the adapter. And here, the commercial interest in making a film able to satisfy the great majority of spectators has evidently predominated. That is what determined the choice of a genre in which diverse elements could be brought together to attain the broadest following possible: horror, the mix of erotic and religious elements, violence, the contrast between a stately and aristocratic world and the misery of the peasants, and of course a certain concern with aesthetic aspects to give the resulting product an attractive wrapping.

As regards the critical reception of the film, the media were once again unanimous in underscoring the impossibility of adapting Valle-Inclán to the screen and in pointing out the enormous distance between the film and the original texts. However, when making an overall assessment the critics can be said to be divided between the “apocalyptic” ones and the “integrated” ones: among the former, Hermes in *ABC* calls the film a “pastiche that only vaguely brings to mind the themes that served as its inspiration” (*ABC*, December 12, 1976) and Pascual Cebollada commented in *Ya* that Suárez “imposes himself on the author, whose work ends up distorted, fragmented, and incomplete” (*Ya*, December 10, 1976). Among the latter, Arroita-Jáuregui in *Arriba*, admitted that “as long as you don’t look for Ramón María (Valle-Inclán) and accept the conditions of a horror film, *Beatriz* is not a negligible film” (*Arriba*, December 8, 1976), and Fernández Santos in *El País* was of the opinion that “apart from allowing greater freedom, perhaps the fact that he didn’t choose one of the author’s fundamental works turned out to be a good idea, (...) [and] the style, as regards dialogue, atmosphere and scenery, is on target” (*El País*, December 12, 1977).

***Luces de bohemia* (Miguel Ángel Díez, 1985)**

This adaptation and that of *Divinas palabras*, to which I shall refer in the next section, were the first to bring the plays of Valle-Inclán to the screen. His dramatic works, breaking with the naturalist models still prevailing in the Spanish theater of his day, brought to the stage a tremendously distorted view of reality, based above all on the creation of a personal language with extraordinary powers of invention, transformation, and deformation. That language drank from highly diverse sources, but was subjected to a systematic process of re-creation that turned it into a vehicle of an astonishing literary universe peopled by characters reduced to the condition of masks. The result is a cruel satire about the human condition whose harshness is exacerbated by the absolute nihilism that presides over it, by the absence of any ethical postulate to support it. This universe of Valle-Inclán seems to demand the stage as its only possible context; Anthony Zahareas has pointed out in this respect how “formally the central characteristic of the *esperpento* is theatricality, but in the broad sense of the word” given that “the development of the action on the stage entails the unmasking of appearances” (Zahareas, 1979:319). Thus, they are fables that can work perfectly on the stage because of the familiarity with which the spectator admits hyperbole and implausibility and the absolute normality with which he or she can take in atmospheres and characters constructed from schematic suggestions. When seen on the screen, however, they are difficult to assimilate because the naturalist tradition of film has determined that the pact of suspension of disbelief with spectators is much more tenuous.

The transposing of this powerful stage language to the screen would only be possible if the film director had the same creative capacity and identical groundbreaking intentions with which Valle-Inclán radically confronted the theatrical conventions of his time. As I noted at the beginning, a film adaptation of a great literary text can only be satisfactory if behind the camera there is another genius capable of translating that text into a new language with the same innovative and revolutionary dimension as the original. This would mean forgetting about the literality of the text but taking its capacity for subversion to make it work in a new medium and a new context.

This was not the case with Miguel Ángel Díez, who confined himself to offering a strictly literal version of Valle-Inclán’s text, faithfully respecting the letter of the text when taking to the big screen the nocturnal wanderings of the blind poet, Max Estrella, and his guide, Don Latino, through the Madrid underworld. The characters’ speech is transmitted word for word through excellent actors (Francisco Rabal and Agustín González in the two main roles, as well as the entire cast of secondary

roles); the locations of the action were extended and filmed in exterior locations that faithfully reflect the Madrid of that time, and the indoor sets and costuming also transmit the impression of truthfulness. Even the screenplay, the work of Mario Camus, attempts to break through the spatial and temporal limitations of a play for the theatre and adapt the action more to film narrative. To do so, he structures the film narrative through a flashback by placing at the beginning of the film the lamentations of the mother and daughter standing before the corpse of Max Estrella. It can be said to be a “commendable” adaptation, but, as Lázaro Carreter noted in an article written when the film version of *Divinas palabras* debuted, “when compared with genius, ‘commendable’ is not worth much.” The spectator leaves the movie theater knowing the plot but ignorant of the revolutionary and aesthetic dimension of a play that, starting from Strindberg’s *stationendrama* model, not only makes a total break with all of the premises of naturalist drama but also goes beyond it by taking full advantage of the resources of expressionist aesthetics to give a devastating view of the social misery and intellectual coarseness of Spain in the 1920s, at the same time that its scenography was the precursor of many expressive discoveries in film.

Miguel Ángel Díez was undoubtedly not the ideal person to undertake this adaptation since, besides several short subjects his career as a film director was limited to two purely commercial and inconsequential films: *Pecado mortal* (1977) and *Fresa, limón y menta* (1978). For this reason his decision when facing *Luces de bohemia* was to approach it with exclusively artisanal criteria, which provided this final product, correct from the academic point of view, but which, limited to reproducing the stage action and dialogue, sidestepped all the emotion and suggestive capacity of a stage representation. This procedure has worked in many adaptations of plays when the essential element is intrigue, but this is not the case with *Luces de bohemia*, where the intrigue is closely linked to the language.

The film left many people indifferent and earned scarce attention from the critics in the media; the few who addressed it were unanimous in their rejection. In this respect it would not be amiss to ask ourselves why this text by Valle-Inclán (and *Divinas palabras*, to which I refer below) and other literary texts were chosen to adapt to the screen during the 1980s, all filmed correctly but all equally characterized by identical flatness and an incapability of transcending the literality of the text. This necessarily brings to mind the project of Pilar Miró, General Director of Cinematography during the government of Felipe González, which was consolidated in the so-called “Miró Law” (December 1982), an attempt to raise Spanish film production to a “dignified” level where it could compete internationally. This quest for “dignity” led filmmakers to seek out prestigious literary texts and produce a set of similar films that adapted texts in a literal and routine way. The existence of certain

common traits in most of them—based on a work of literature, with formal correctness and insignificant style—allows us to speak of a perfectly definable genre fostered by the government policy mentioned above. This ended up by “imposing a refinement in the writing” and producing a “standard linguistic model with no room for dissension,” concerned only with stylistic correction (Losilla 124). Special attention was paid to adapting contemporary authors already almost a part of the canon, most of which appeared, significantly, in the literature textbooks of upper-secondary school. We may therefore surmise that the choice of texts may also have been made in part with this potential young audience in mind.

The film, financed by Spain’s Ministry of Culture and Spanish Public Television, debuted in what could be called an almost clandestine way (at the end of August and in a very small number of theaters) and the scarce critical reviews<sup>14</sup> coincided in their negative assessment. Antonio Gutti commented in *Cinco Días* that “the substantive, unrepeatable dialogue of an uncomfortable, ferocious, and loquacious genius” made it inadvisable to attempt to take the work to the screen; he adds that the director had worked “with the literal criterion of an artisan who fails to obtain inspiration because he is crushed by theatrical rules which are not compatible with film in pursuit of dignity” (*Cinco Días*, September 4, 1985). The comments by Mary Santa Eulalia in the newspaper *Ya* were in the same vein, saying that Miguel Ángel Sánchez, limited by his devotion to the author, had not used “as much daring and formal subversion as needed to translate this excruciating story to the screen with a more cinematographic language” (*Ya*, 24.8.85). To end, I quote the opinion given by Gil de Muro in the yearbook *Cine para leer*:

The greatest failure of the version of *Luces de bohemia* by Miguel Ángel Díez lies precisely there: in having remained obsequiously respectful to a determined conception of Valle-Inclán that the work does not ask for, that Valle-Inclán detested, and that, to boot, is most responsible for the production of a cold, distant film that seems afraid of the material being handled in it (...). The film (...) appears unbalanced and sketchy. Comfort with the narration and a sense of what the director wanted to do are perceived in the story only at the odd moment. This imbalance impedes us from entering the world of Valle-Inclán, which obviously demands something more than faithfulness to the texts. It demands inspiration, brazenness, and feeling. Things that are easy enough to say, difficult to define but obviously scarcely attainable by someone who confessed that he had “been constantly measuring and comparing.” Valle-Inclán is an immeasurable and incomparable genius, and that is where the difference lies (*Cine para leer*, 1985, 187-189.)

***Divinas palabras* (José Luis García Sánchez, 1987).**

This second adaptation of a Valle-Inclán play shows the same inadequacies that we saw in *Luces de bohemia*, although its broader plot development lends itself better to the big screen. The vicissitudes of Mari Gaila, the wife of the sacristan, her rivalry with her sister-in-law, Marica del Reino, for the usufruct of exhibiting a hydrocephalic dwarf at fairs and pilgrimages, her seduction by the gypsy Miau, the peasants' discovery of her adultery, after which they drive her naked to the church door to stone her in front of her husband, her husband's intervention citing the "divine words" of the Gospel, and so on, provide a plot line with sufficient drama that is furthermore complemented by the presence of secondary actions that gradually shape the frame of primitivism, superstition, misery, avarice and cruelty that provides the background to the story. But just as in the case of *Luces de bohemia*, that story is inseparable from the great discursive construction that vehicles it. And in his work as adaptor, García Sánchez has limited himself to transposing the skeleton of the plot, thus depriving the story of certain elements essential for its understanding, such that we cannot even speak of a work of illustration.

One advantage of the film is its careful and evocative photography of rural Galicia, which faithfully takes the spectator to Valle-Inclán's universe; but this universe is just that, only a starting point for Valle to carry out his distortion operation. And the results of this operation are very difficult to take to the screen if the director is only trying to merely narrate the story. Putting this play into images necessarily involves a process of "naturalization" which in contrast to the author's cruel and sarcastic vision presents a universe and certain characters that are much more "human:" with the loss of most of the original dialogue it is difficult to replace the power of Valle-Inclán's language with mere photography, just as it is problematic to place the cruel caricatures of characters such as Pedro Gailo, Marica del Reino, Compadre Miau or Miguelín el Padronés in human actors such as Francisco Rabal, Aurora Bautista, Imanol Arias or Juan Echanove, who moreover were very familiar to audiences at the time the film was made. Apart from the fact that the filmmaker eliminated many of the intentionally degrading traits of the original text (Miguelín's homosexuality, Miau's cold cruelty, the sacristan's puppet-like condition), the medium of film tends to emphasize their humanity further by not admitting the outrageous and histrionic acting that these traits would require. Likewise, the verbal power of the stage directions, their sarcasm and sense of pain, end up enormously weakened in the film. The lens of the camera does not usually go beyond recording the reality in front of it, and the richness of Valle-Inclán's secondary text is lost as the stage directions



are used only to mark the development of the action.

Thus the astounding universe of Valle-Inclán is reduced to a realistic and enormously flat dimension: the photography of the beautiful landscape filtered through the fog, the crowded pilgrimages and the somber interiors undoubtedly respond to the author's view, but in no way do they transcend it or subject it to the deforming violence they acquire in the text. Aware of this impossibility, García Sánchez opted for a realistic reading, not so decidedly documentary as the adaptation of García Lorca's *Yerma* carried out some years later by Pilar Távora, but definitely one that underscored the "normality" of the world it presents, with sequences such as the opening with Mari Gaila buying milk and responding with friendliness to the greetings of her neighbors while she makes her way home., or the domestic scenes in the family kitchen. Likewise, the many sequences of processions, pilgrimages, and dances, although necessary to situate the action, have a certain *costumbrista*<sup>15</sup> air.

Following the logic imposed by the reading the director chose to make of the play, he has to do without the eighth scene of the third day since its hallucinatory nature makes it impossible to fit in with the universe presented in the film: as many will recall, it is about Mari-Gaila's encounter with the Trasco Cabrío while she is dragging the cart with the now dead dwarf, and how he transports her "in a long cavalcade through lunar rainbows" ("en una larga cabalgada por arcos de luna") to the threshold of her house.

Jorge Urrutia has shown how in the dramatic works of Valle-Inclán's second stage his distribution of stage space "offers a means of access to a fictitious universe that does not correspond to that of the essence of classical theatrical communication" (Urrutia 18). This has led many scholars to emphasize the cinematographic nature of his plays. However, as Urrutia points out in relation to *Divinas palabras*, this cinematographism does not lie in the themes, in the greater or lesser mobility of the characters or in the breadth of the stage set, but "in the actual internal structure of the plays, in the conception of the dramatic that emerges from the parceling out of space and time" (Urrutia 18). In the case of *Divinas palabras*, although the director does not limit himself to following the text word for word, he has demonstrated that he did not understand it: the liberties taken and the dignity of the resulting film are but the "product of an insufficient reading and understanding of the play." Likewise, a need is created to complete certain aspects that, once the consistency is suppressed, the spectator may be missing (for example, to introduce the character of the priest and justify his absence). And the rhythm that the spacialization of the drama builds is replaced with another plot-driven rhythm (for example, by giving more importance to the woman's outing to go begging and the preparation of her love affair).

The "miracle" worked by the sacristan's words in Latin and with which he avoids

his wife's stoning turns out to be unfeasible in the naturalistic context chosen for the film by García Sánchez; that is why in the film it is not the husband's words that move the angry townspeople and make them go away but rather their contemplation of the naked Mari Gaila, who strips off her clothes in the door of the church.<sup>16</sup> In this respect, Asunción Gómez notes that it is not the linguistic otherness that moves the consciences of the townspeople, disturbed by this act of collective voyeurism, but rather the otherness of gender, represented through the nakedness of the adulteress (Gómez 178-179). This same author comments on how the polysemous opulence that Valle-Inclán's work offers with its moral ambiguity (attained through ironic winks to the reader) and the superposition of apparently contradictory aesthetic (theatricality / naturalism) and cultural (Christianity / Paganism) elements comes undone in this naturalist reading chosen by García Sánchez, where all types of theatrical stylization are eliminated and the human dimensions of the tragedy are emphasized (Gómez 180).

The critics paid more attention to this film than to *Luces de bohemia* and even though they pointed out the distance existing between the universe of the original play and the naturalizing version that García Sánchez put on film, they recognized the validity of the enterprise in its attempt to bring the text closer to readers. For example, José Luis Guarner in *La Vanguardia* celebrated the fact that the adaptation had known how to "dodge the fastidious and sterile academicism of the typical ministerial literary productions of prestige today," although he wouldn't have "dared to attempt the extreme path and the deranged stylization typical of the author" (October 17, 1987). Octavi Martí in *El País* felt that the only way the play could work on the screen was by naturalizing it, and that "this realist option may not be shared by all but is legitimate." He ends by valuing the film "for its meaning as a cultural product and the investment effort made," the latter with a view to the need for "filmmaking that needs to increase its capacity for export" (*El País*, September 22, 1987).

But the most critical and lucid review was the one written by Fernando Lázaro Carreter in *ABC*. He considered that García Sánchez' version confined itself to offering "the bare bones of the plot" of which only remains "the showing of elemental passions" (lust, avarice) although considerably mitigated by the sketchy way in which the characters are presented; therefore

The film tones down the frenzy, lightens the plot, slows down the rhythm, and makes the drama opaque, rainy and shy. This could well be acceptable and even noteworthy if it were original, if we didn't have to watch it through the interposed light of the play, which watches over it almost shot by shot.

He goes on to argue that the director, instead of responding to the incitement of the stage directions in the text (often described as cinematographic) by attempting to do on the screen what is unfeasible on stage, “retreats from them” and “by eliminating so much that it seems to leave the stage, the film becomes more ‘theatrical’ than the text.” And he concludes with a reflection about the illicitness of this kind of operation, “an alarming example of our cultural pauperization, which permits, moreover applauds, and even exhibits at international festivals the savage reduction of its heritage.” He argues that no country would tolerate such a devaluation of one of its great classics, “because, if anyone is heir to works still alive, the greater the right of the people (as co-owners of its value) to demand respect for their legacy” (“Divinas palabras,” *ABC*, October 25, 1987).

***Tirano Banderas* (José Luis García Sánchez, 1994)**

In the case of the fourth adaptation of a narrative text by Valle-Inclán we again come across the same difficulties noted for the previous films, but amplified by the characteristics of the novel, which is a polished exercise in verbal creation in which the author deploys his enormous idiomatic ability. In 1923 in a letter to Alfonso Reyes he says that in this novel he had tried to incorporate “idioms from all the countries in America... from the uncouth mode to the gaucho mode,” but in the pages of *Tirano Banderas* we also find, as Darío Villanueva has pointed out, “many lexical and syntactic *galleguismos*, archaic words—his verbal frenzy not only projected into space but also in time— as well as jargon” (Villanueva 1991, 361-362). If language is a primordial factor in all of Valle-Inclán’s works, in this novel it becomes the protagonist on which is built the hallucinatory universe of the dictator and the life forms—victims and spokesmen— that swarm around him. To this is added the multiplicity of language registers put into play, which help to make evident the complexity of that universe: from the political harangues to the conversations in taverns, or from bureaucratic prose to colloquial dialogues, all integrated to perfection in the narrator’s discourse, who, from his omniscience, maintains at all times a position that is distant and above his creatures. This complexity is furthermore underscored by the kaleidoscopic structure of the novel, made up of short narrative units usually no longer than a page; although the apparent chaos that could derive from this fragmentary composition is mitigated through the studied symmetrical arrangement in a prologue and seven parts (constituting the same number of thematic units), each of which is divided into three books with the exception of the central part (or fourth part, focusing on the narration of the revenge that Zacarías takes on the usurer Pereda for the death of his little son), which has seven books.<sup>17</sup>

Director José Luis García Sánchez, who also adapted *Divinas palabras*, tackled

his version of the novel with a considerably large budget and the collaboration of Rafael Azcona, a screenwriter of unquestionable prestige. But despite this budget, which meant that filming could be approached without money worries, and the intervention of Azcona, whose screenplays have been considered a faithful expression of *esperpento* aesthetics,<sup>18</sup> once again the film was not up to the quality of the original literary text. It constituted a new example of Spanish film policy (under the auspices of Socialist governments) aimed at raising the level of film production, which consisted of endowing filmmaking with a quality label by resorting to the adaptation of prestigious literary works. The result in this case is a film that is correctly made, with a reputable cast and a large deployment of money, in which the episodes taken from the original novel provide enough elements to construct an interesting plot that would capture the interest of (and even take in) the spectator. It includes the most significant episodes from the original novel, subjecting them to a linear narration that gives an account of the last days of the dictator, from the preparations for the uprising to the final assault on the palace and his death. The careful spatial setting that faithfully recreates the imaginary tropical republic (the scenes were filmed in Cuba and Mexico) and the setting in time (the 1920s) contributed to giving it the look of a quality product, which is what was intended. But adaptation to the norms of film narration already meant an impoverishing reduction that was quite the opposite of the revolution against traditional narrative molds that Valle-Inclán carried out in *Tirano Banderas*, apart from the fact that the transfer of the story to an audiovisual medium annulled almost all of the linguistic potential on which the story was based. Nonetheless, the language was preserved to a small extent with the use of actors from many different nationalities and accents; this permitted a kind of Hispanic *koiné* achieved by the author in his prose through idioms and expressions from all over Latin America.

As regards the acting, we must highlight the unquestionably excellent decision to cast Gian Maria Volonté in the role of Santos Bandera; his expressionistic interpretation (the critics pointed to *Nosferatu* as his model) allowed him to construct a suggestive image of the sinister character described by Valle as “a death’s head with black eyeglasses and a clerical bow tie” (“una calavera con antiparras negras y corbatín de clérigo.” His acting contrasts with that of the rest of the cast (with the exception of Javier Gurruchaga in the role of the homosexual Barón de Benicarlés, Spanish ambassador), who with their excessive naturalism do not attain the *esperpento* tone that permeates the characters in the book.

Once again, we see the difficulties involved in transposing to the screen a text in which the quality of the story is inseparable from the discourse which upholds it, characterized by its high level of linguistic creativity. The solution, if the director

will not run the risk of seeking the film equivalent of the literary discourse (or does not possess the means to do so) is to confine the film to the plane of the story and attempt only to illustrate the plot, which always results in an impoverishment of the original work. This solution is used especially when the text being approached has such magnitude and prestige that it automatically induces a reverential attitude and annuls any intervention that would modify it. This can be seen clearly if we compare the manipulation of the different texts serving as the basis of the first three films addressed here with the paralysis felt by the directors of the last three films, which were based on works with an undeniable aura of being classics.

The reaction of the critics after the film debuted at the Valladolid film festival was generally negative, emphasizing once again the gap between the original text and the film and in some cases wondering if it was really worth the effort to try to take Valle-Inclán's universe to the screen. Gil de Muro expressed himself on the matter with these words in the yearbook *Cine para leer*:

García Sánchez's film, made with evident seriousness, poses the following problem right from the start: what can be done with literature as elusive and stunning as the works of Valle-Inclán? And the response may once again be to give in to the temptation to abduct it and restructure it, but it could also be that of "leave well enough alone" what you know can never be reconverted. Do the inventing yourselves—if you can—of other stories not yet written. (*Cine para leer*, 1994, p. 431)

Other reviews stressed with more or less vehemence the failure of García Sánchez's venture, justifying it in light of the difficulties involved in transposing Valle-Inclán's novel to the screen. Alberto Bermejo wrote in *El Mundo* that given the two options, "translating the richness of the original text to the screen or using its plot," the director had chosen the latter of the two, and as a consequence "the result does not sound like Valle-Inclán. He is there but you cannot see him; you listen for him but you cannot hear him" (*El Mundo*, October 30, 1993). In *ABC*, Martínez Cascante (in a chronicle meaningfully entitled "Tirano banderas, when a word is worth a thousand images"), after referring to the plot of the novel "developed in fragments that make up a complete mosaic [and] in a way similar to cinematographic expression" maintains that "giving cohesion and unity to these fragments on the screen is the main problem of the film, and in this case García Sánchez's 'glue' hasn't worked" (*ABC*, October 30, 1993). More condescending was Augusto M. Torres in *El País* with his comment that those responsible for the film "did not let themselves be influenced by the literary brilliance of the original and its false cinematographic tone" but rather,

they “have taken the novel as a starting point for making a free version, but as much in accordance as possible with the spirit of the original, and they have attained their goals effectively.” In short, he considers that it is a “good adaptation” which “can only be reproached for its excessively cold narrative style” (*El País*, January 17, 1994).

***Martes de Carnaval* (José Luis García Sánchez, 2008)**

To end I would like to spend some time on this most recent adaptation, conceived in the form of a television miniseries and once again with José Luis García Sánchez as the director of an adaptation of a work of Valle-Inclán. Unlike the previous adaptations, in this case the operation can be said to have been a success to the extent that the resulting product comes very close to the aesthetic and ideological purposes of Valle-Inclán in these texts. They are from his last period in which the technique of the *esperpento* and its systematic puppet-like distortion of reality is placed at the service of a cruel satire of the military caste raised to power after the military coup of General Primo de Rivera (1923). It can be said that García Sánchez had finally found texts by Valle-Inclán that synchronized fully with his own aesthetic and ideological premises; this allowed him to personally rewrite them by transferring to the screen a message and expressive forms that, give or take some obvious differences, come quite close to those of the author. Starting with his very first film, *Las truchas* (1978), this director’s career was characterized by a satirical view of reality that puts into play distorting comic mechanisms to make a cruel caricature of contemporary Spain. In many of his films he collaborated with Rafael Azcona, a screenwriter who has also often come close to the aesthetics of the *esperpento* through the grotesque and relentless humor with which he approaches his description of Spanish reality; we need only cite films such as *La corte de Faraón* (1985), *Pasodoble* (1988), *El vuelo de la Paloma* (1989), *Suspiros de España (y Portugal)*, (1995), *Siempre hay un camino a la derecha* (1997), *La niña de tus ojos* (1998) or *La marcha verde* (2001). Furthermore, the three plays that make up *Martes de Carnaval* are the most polished expression of the aesthetics of the *esperpento*, and by taking caricature-like deformation to its maximum degree of expression, unlike *Luces de Bohemia*, they do not offer the slightest relief in the form of tenderness and therefore lack the tragic dimension that provided the latter with an undeniable degree of humanity. Finally, it must be taken into account that, since the adaptation was conceived for the medium of television, the director had much greater freedom to develop the three stories without excessive time limitations<sup>19</sup> to use the metafictional approach from which he conceived the narrative, and to put into play the strategies that foster the necessary distancing.

The three plays, although published separately on different dates (*Los cuernos de don Friolera* in 1921; *Las galas del difunto* in 1926, with the title *El terno del difunto*;

*La hija del capitán* in 1927) and having different subject matter (all have in common that the main characters are from the military) were brought together into one volume and received some finishing touches by the author to give them uniformity.<sup>20</sup> In this adaptation for Spanish public television, García Sánchez preserves part of the individual character of each play by devoting an episode to each one, but at the same time he is concerned with underscoring the thematic and stylistic unity that Valle-Inclán gave them in their joint and definitive edition of 1930. And it is in this attempt to make them uniform where García Sánchez shows his aesthetic and ideological affinity with the author by evidently treating the stories and characters as caricatures, which helps him develop a critique of the contemporary history of Spain that transcends the strict frame of the Primo de Rivera dictatorship. The success of this operation is based above all on having replaced the procedures through which Valle upheld his deforming view of reality (many of which would be difficult to take to the screen) with certain metafictional strategies that enable the necessary distancing with respect to the reality represented; these strategies are not limited to the insertion of a second level of fiction (stories framed within a first level of fiction) but also introduce the critical commentaries of the characters who are watching them from the first level. I shall now describe them with the brevity imposed by the scarce space available, but I encourage readers who are interested to consult the recent and exhaustive analysis that Professor Simone Trecca has made of this adaptation (Trecca 95-120).

Each of the three episodes opens and closes with some brief documentary references (photographs and films from the 1920s, reproduction of the author's declarations) that contextualize the stories in their historical frame, add references to the theater of the time, and comment on Valle-Inclán's poetics of the *esperpento*. After this level, which could be described as parafilmic, the level of the fictional frame opens in which Don Manolito and Don Estrafalarío, the two characters of the prologue and epilogue of *Los cuernos de Don Friolera*, appear as presenters and spectators of the framed fiction and situate it in a specific historical context.

After the parafilmic documentary references, *Las galas del difunto* opens with a superimposed text: "Madrid, 1928. Spain suffers under the dictatorship of Primo de Rivera." We are then taken to the Círculo de Bellas Artes (Fine Arts Theater), where a very small audience made up of Don Estrafalarío, Don Manolito and a representative of the State Office for Security are going to hear a reading of *Las galas del difunto* done by a group of actors, since no theater has been allowed to put it on as a play. After some words by the director of the theater company, the reading begins while on the screen the figures of the actors disappear and we see (in color, as opposed to the black and white of the preceding images) Don Sócrates and his wife coming out of the pharmacy. This marks the beginning of the framed action, to which elements

have been added that were not in the original texts, but which help to achieve Valle's degraded view of reality with scenes relating to gluttony, lust, and avarice as the motors that unleash the behavior of the characters.

*Los cuernos de Don Friolera* also opens after the parafilmic documentary references with the stage direction "Madrid, 1928. Spain watches as Primo de Rivera's dictatorship starts to wobble" and then introduces us to the frame story in which Don Manolito and Don Estrafalarío are getting ready to attend the representation of the esperpento of the same name at a carnival theater in Madrid. The transition from the framing action to the framed action is marked by changing from the initial sepia tones to the strong and saturated colors of the play, which takes place on a set that is scarcely naturalistic. This set and the overplayed acting constantly accentuate its theatricality,<sup>21</sup> which is furthermore reinforced by the incursions of the camera on the level of the framing fiction to show the reactions of the spectators and pick up the comments of Don Manolito and Don Estrafalarío. The return to the framing fiction takes place when the police burst in and arrest the actors in the theater company.

*La hija del capitán* also begins with brief superimposed stage directions that refer to the spatial and temporal context, which in this case is: "Madrid, 1930. Spain breathes in the winds of change." The framed action, in this case filmed in scratchy black and white like an old film, presents the two characters attending a party at the beginning of the filming of a movie based on the *esperpento* of the same name. The questions that Don Manolito asks the actor playing the general to ascertain what relation his character has to Primo de Rivera, and those the journalists ask the actor playing the Captain inquiring whether the incestuous relationship that this character had with his daughter will be eliminated from the film provide information about the actual facts that served as inspiration for the *esperpento*. In a subsequent sequence, Don Manolito and Don Estrafalarío attend the debut of the film as spectators. The beginning of the film is marked by the transition from black and white to color, the transition from the framing fiction to the framed fiction. The latter ends with the arrival in the movie theater of the news that the Republic has just been proclaimed. Don Manolito's first comment upon learning the news ("Let's see how long it lasts!") is confirmed by the extradiagetic documentary voice that informs of a period of turbulence that will open with the new regime and will lead to a civil war and a much longer and crueler dictatorship than that of Primo de Rivera.

The interaction among these different fictional levels and the hybrid set up between them and the documentary format are meant, according to Simone Trecca, "to broaden, condense or multiply the aspect of metatheatricality and metadiscursiveness of Valle-Inclán's trilogy" by playing with the resources of the medium of television (Trecca 117). That is why this adaptation can be considered the closest to the author's



own intentions. The richness and creativity of his language are very difficult to transfer to the screen, as our analysis of the previous adaptations shows; however, in this case film and television media are used to advantage to reproduce the distancing mechanisms of the author and the degrading view that, through them, he offered of the situation of Spain in his time in particular and of the human condition in general. Nonetheless, the audiovisual re-creation of the three works that comprise the framed fiction in each of the three television episodes still suffers from the naturalism inherent to film treatment of theatrical works; it can therefore be said that the degrading view of reality that the miniseries achieved through relentlessly sarcastic language and the systematic dehumanization of the characters is still a far cry from that presented in the original texts.

### Notes

1. This work forms part of research project FFI2011-26511 financed by the Spanish State Office for Research of the Ministry of the Economy and Competitiveness.
2. In these pages, to explain the vicissitudes of the transformation that a literary text may go through in its adaptation to the screen, she resorts to the example of the oral tradition of transmitting stories; a traditional story “works as a starting point to create universal types, situations, and teachings, has an oral tradition, has been adapted to different eras, readers have taken it over and furthermore it has itself been the object of audiovisual interpretation and changes, according to the different times, audiences, and ideologies” (Manzano Espinosa 17).
3. Don Carlos lived in this city in Navarre and held his court there. He was the candidate for the throne of Spain supported by the absolutists who refused to recognize the legitimacy of Queen Isabel II, who was supported by the liberals.
4. When the film debuted, Bardem justified these manipulative operations by virtue of a film director’s freedom to propose a personal reading of literary texts, but he also alleged in his defense the ideological evolution that the author of the *Sonatas* went through to affirm that the film was completely in tune with the critical stance Valle-Inclán developed in relation to Spanish society in the second stage of his literary career and that he would even approve of the film: “What I wanted to do was change the sign of this anti-hero, this maximum prototype of the egotist that is the ‘ugly, Catholic and sentimental Marquis of Bradomín.’ I wanted to transform him into a human being who confronts other human beings, make him confront his situation, let his conscience go into crisis” (Interview *Film Ideal*, n°. 36, Oct. 1957).
5. An example of this negative response was the article published by François Truffaut in *Cahiers du Cinéma* with the title “Mort d’un Bardem.”
6. Interview in *Film Ideal*, no. 36, Oct. 1959.
7. A broader analysis of this film and its critical reception can be found in Pérez Bowie-González

García 329-352.)

8. Recall that Valle-Inclán subtitles this work as “An Age-old Story ,” conferring on it a timeless dimension.

9. This episode of Vatican honors being bestowed is recreated by Valle-Inclán ironically in book II of *La corte de los milagros* (with the title “La Rosa de Oro”) where he narrates the intrigues that took place to convince the Pope, who was not very happy with Queen Isabel’s support of the liberals. However, the honor was bestowed in 1868, 15 years after the date on which the action takes place in the film.

10. Bardem, in the political reading he proposes of *Sonata de otoño*, also turns this character, whose wife Concha is Bradomín’s lover, into the person who orders the persecution of the survivors of the liberal army (who are fighting as guerillas in the Galician forests) decreed by Ferdinand VII.

11. Critics have pointed to ambiguity as one of the defining characteristics of this story. Fernández Roca points out in this respect how the calculated distance that the narrator maintains does not allow us to guess at his own position regarding the story being told (true holiness or miracle farce?) and readers find themselves involved in a systematic ambivalence: “the ambivalence of the story itself (flower of holiness or source of scandal?), underscored in the discourse (charged with sensuality and mysticism), of the spatial setting (somewhere between toponymic specificity and an idealizing vagueness), of the time (...), of the protagonists (demon-possessed saint and wolf-angel), and finally, of the author (love-hate relationship with Galicia, fascination with mystery and repudiation of fraud and tricks). (Fernández Roca 2011, 100-101).

12. This film marked the cinematographic debut of director Adolfo Marsillach, already well-known as a prestigious theater director.

13. An undeniable antecedent is *Vera, un cuento cruel* (Josefina Molina, 1972), based on the story of the same name by Villiers de L’Isle Adam).

14. For example, *Diario 16* did not address it until two years later, when it was programmed on Spanish television (*Diario 16*, September 4, 1987).

15. A style providing quaint descriptions of local manners and customs.

16. Recall that in the written play the townspeople bring her in the cart already naked.

17. A detailed description of the structural symmetry of this novel can be found in Bêlic 1968.

18. Santos Zunzunegui has underscored this parallelism of Azcona’s screenplays with the deforming aesthetics of Valle-Inclán’s *esperpentos*: “deep down, we can affirm that the creative proposal of Azcona comes from his twisting of the world of *costumbrista* populism (that universe we have called ‘non-symbolist’) in order to displace it towards a satirical realism” (Zunzunegui 163).

19. The television miniseries was presented in three episodes of similar duration: 1 hour and 18 minutes.

20. In his introduction to the Clásicos Castellanos edition, Ricardo Senabre points out these noteworthy differences and the operations carried out by Valle to make them more uniform when grouping them under the common title *Martes de Carnaval*. Although all three involve the military,

their subject matter, stage treatment, and themes had notable differences in their first editions. The maximum level of deformation occurs in *Los cuernos de Don Friolera*, which was conceived by the author as a farce for puppet theater; for its part, *El terno del difunto* was first published as a novel in dialogue and the main character's military connection (an ex-combatant in the war of Cuba) is irrelevant. The most authentically anti-militaristic one is *La hija del capitán*, conceived as a satire on the Primo de Rivera dictatorship: the main character, who is a general and the lover of the daughter of a subordinate, is obliged to carry out a coup d'état in order to avoid a scandal from the affair. For detailed information of the gestation and transformation of the three texts, see Senabre 7-28.

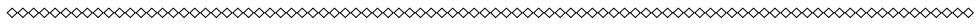
21. Simone Trecca comments on how the film turns out to be consistent with Valle-Inclán's aesthetics, highlighting the anti-naturalness of the amorous dialogues among the trio formed by Friolera, Loreta and Pachequín (a clear parody of the plays of Echegaray) by means of the frames and the montage effects (Trecca 109-110).

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### **The 2nd Convention of Chinese/American Association for Poetry and Poetics & International Symposium on Literatures in English (June 8-9, 2013)**

In order to further promote literary scholarship and international academic exchange, the University of Pennsylvania-based Chinese/American Association for Poetry and Poetics (CAAP) will collaborate with the School of Foreign Languages and School of Humanities of Central China Normal University, *Foreign Literature Studies*, and *Forum for World Literature Studies* in hosting "The 2nd CAAP Convention and International Symposium on Literatures in English" (June 15-16, 2013) in Wuhan, China. Scholars and writers all over the world are welcome.

Topics of the conference are: 1. Modern and Contemporary Literary Movements and Ethnic Literature; 2. Ethical Criticism of Modern and Contemporary Literature; 3. Ethnic Perspectives on Modern and Contemporary Literature; 4. Ethnic Literature: Theoretical Reflections; 5. *Avant-garde* Poetic Practice and Theory in the Contemporary Times; 6. Art and Politics in Ethnic Poetry; 7. Translation, Diffusion and Teaching of Modern and Contemporary Literature.

A completed Registration Form and a paper abstract are expected to be submitted by May 31, 2013 to the conference organizing committee at [caapconvention@gmail.com](mailto:caapconvention@gmail.com). The official invitation will be sent by mail upon the reception of the above-mentioned documents.