

# Valle-Inclán: Comparative and Thematic Approaches

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In issue 4/1 (April 2012) of *Forum for World Literature Studies*, we presented a collection of five essays focused on a comparative reading of some of the main European and Latin American referents of the vast literary output of Ramón del Valle-Inclán (1866-1936), one of the most important Spanish writers and playwrights of his time. The essays by Darío Villanueva, Robert Lima, Margarita Santos, Antonio Pedrós-Gascón and Rosario Mascato-Rey allowed us to delve into the prose, the stage works, the thought, the poetry and the interartistic links that characterize Valle-Inclán's work and make it so current. At the same time, we were able to show the unique way Valle-Inclán's aesthetic integrated the key points of the historical reality that the author experienced personally and intensely. It is an aesthetic that continued to be reformulated over the years. The author did this to gain the public favour, but he also felt a need to interpret with the most effective tools the historical and cultural changes he was living, as well as their direct consequences in the public and political spheres and the private and local ones.

In this second series of essays, four in total, we do not completely abandon these perspectives, but the analysis and the problems we deal with are generally less broad and focus on somewhat more tightly framed questions. Various of the perspectives to which I am referring appeared, in a way, in the previous series. One case is the attention paid to war. To war as a historic constant and also to some of the concrete examples in which Valle-Inclán was interested as a writer and somewhat as a chronicler: the First World War, the Carlist Wars in 19th-century Spain, and the great European and Latin American revolutions at the beginning of the 20th century. Another case is the re-interpretation of some classical and modern myths and the exploration of the dramatic and narrative results of interartistic relations. However, as I have indicated, this time either the scope of the studies has been reduced or we have introduced additional points of view in order to extend the critical debate about

the author to very current issues. Among these issues, for example, are film-literature relations or the consideration of Valle-Inclán in light of the concept of world literature.

The article by Dru Dougherty, one of the best-known international Valle-Inclán experts, opens this issue and presents an analysis of the devices used by the author in his prose and dramatic work—among others, *situational irony*—to reveal the backdrop of interests, beliefs and political corruption that fed the last Spanish civil war of the 19th century (1872-1876). Valle-Inclán managed to uncover like no one else the simulation of grand public discourses and the management of oft-manipulated values, such as patriotism, heroism or progress.

Carmen Becerra contributes to this issue with an essay on the modern emergence of the Don Juan myth and its noteworthy persistence in Valle-Inclán's work, with quite different treatments in the turn-of-the-century tales of *Feminines* and the *Barbaric Comedies*, completed in 1922. She draws a thematic-comparative analysis not only of the diverse critical orientations of the study of the myth in literature and the arts, but especially of the various representations of Don Juan that have been produced from the Baroque to modernism, by way, naturally, of Mozart, Hoffmann and Mérimée, among others.

The third article is by José A. Pérez Bowie and focuses on the seven television and film adaptations of Valle-Inclán's dramatic and prose works, which are generally approached with reticence by specialists in the author's work and even by film studies scholars, despite the undoubted technical and artistic relevance of the directors who took up the challenge. In particular, the essay notes the complexities inherent to the transposition of literature to film, which scholars have been analyzing since Russian formalism, and which are accentuated in Valle's case by his discursive and aesthetic uniqueness and by the aesthetic specificity of the fictional worlds in question.

Lastly, César Domínguez looks at the theoretical notion of *world literature* from a point of view in which translation becomes an axis, in practice to a measure, of the concept and of its very empirical applicability. He takes as a case study *Tirano Banderas* (1926), the novel that Valle-Inclán published in 1926 and that was translated to English three years later, and uses it to argue for a stronger dialogue between Comparative Literature and Translation Studies. In any case, it is a dialogue nuanced by an unavoidable contextualization that incorporates historical, cultural, institutional and even commercial references in order to understand the inter-systemic switch implied by any incorporation of a literary work into a different cultural system by means of translation.