Modernism and the Novel: Ramón del Valle-Inclán

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Abstract This paper points out the error of evaluating Ramón del Valle-Inclán (1866 – 1936) solely in a limited context, as a representative of Hispanic modernism, or as a prodigal son of the generation of '98. The creator of the esperpentos is in fact one of the major actors in the renovation of the forms of literature: his theatre ranks beside that of Jarry, Brecht, Beckett or Meyerhold, while at the same time there are equivalences between his narrative and the writings of Mann, Proust, Faulkner, Dos Passos, or Jules Romains. Valle-Inclán was the Spanish writer who most directly contributed to the international modernism of the first third of the 20th century.
Key words modernism; novels of valle-Inclán; Irish writers; point of view; timelessness; world literature

One of the most notable errors of scholars of Ramón del Valle-Inclán (1866 – 1936) has been to evaluate him solely within the context of Spanish-language literature, as a Spanish representative of Hispano-American modernism or, in Pedro Salinas' words, as "a prodigal son of the generation of '98." The creator of the *esperpentos* is in fact one of the major actors in the renovation of the forms of European literature. Some have related his theatre to that of Jarry, Brecht, Beckett or Meyerhold. Others (myself included) have established equivalences with the founders of the modern novel, including Mann, Proust, Faulkner, Dos Passos and Jules Romains.

Valle-Inclán was the Spanish writer most directly involved in that fertile wave of creativity that gave birth to the modernist renovation of literature during the first third of the 20th century. This is hardly surprising if we bear in mind the breadth of his interests and experiences. He was familiar with the literature of nations such as Italy and Portugal, which he translated. He was witness to two major historical events, the Great War and, during his second visit to Mexico in 1921, the institutional consolidation of the Mexican revolution. His theatre tour of Argentina in 1910, his visits to Cuba in 1893 and 1921, and his period in Rome as director of the Spanish Academy of Fine Arts in 1933 and 1934, all moulded and testify to his cosmopolitan character. And few European intellectuals followed so closely as he the course of the Soviet revolution, which together with events mentioned above was decisive for the change in direction taken by his writings between the publication of *La media noche* (1917) and the final version of *Luces de bohemia* (1924).

What we might call the prehistory of Valle's narrative art is embodied in a series of novellas and short stories published at the turn of the century, between 1895 and 1903. These writings are characterized by a symbolist and decadent aestheticism inspired by the author's early reading—mainly of European writers—and by the reinvigorating influence of the Nicaraguan Rubén Darío on the straitjacketed Spanish literature of the day. At the same time, this phase produced a kind of literary granary to which Valle would return again and again to recover resources, characters and settings for the more substantial narrative works published between the start of the *Sonata* series in 1902 and the end of the Carlist war trilogy in 1909—a period that also gave us the novel *Flor de santidad*. A writer in whom the Bohemian and the professional were inextricably intermingled, Valle-Inclán constantly wove and unwove his corpus, continually rewriting his works.

Though not marked by a radical aesthetic change, there is a clear change of tack in the writings of Valle's second period, following the publication in 1917 of one of his least renowned but most transcendental books: *La media noche. Visión estelar de un momento de guerra.* In 1920 this new phase also saw the first version of the play *Luces de bohemia*, which is so difficult to stage because of a vertiginous narrative syntax that already reflects the influence of the cinema—Valle was one of the first Spanish writers to follow Ricciotto Canudo in recognizing the cinema as "the seventh art." It is this play that includes, metaliterarily, the definition of a new expressionist aesthetics rooted in the nature of "Spain as a grotesque deformation of European civilization:" *esperpento*. In December 1926 *Tirano Banderas* was published, followed shortly afterwards by the first two volumes of the first part ("Los amenes de un reinado") of the unfinished cycle *El ruedo ibérico*. *La corte de los milagros* appeared in 1927 (though its final version was not published until 1931, when it appeared in instalments in the daily *El Sol*), and *Viva mi dueño* in 1928. "Vísperas septembrinas," the first part of the the third volume, *Baza de espadas*, appeared in *El Sol* in 1932, but was not published in book form until 1958, more than 20 years after Valle's death.

The modernism in which Valle-Inclán may be inscribed is not the poetic movement represented principally, in Hispano-American letters, by Rubén Darío, but rather the grand international upheaval that occurred chiefly in the first third of the 20th century and afforded its best results in the 1920s, the years in which Valle-Inclán was writing his major works. His own concept of modernism—a question that has remained polemical to this day—was first expressed in print in 1902, the year of his first novel (*Sonata de otoño*), in an article so titled in *La Ilustración Española y americana* (an article he later reworked and republished several times). Here, though warning that the word "modernism" had acquired a meaning "as broad as it was suspect," he wrote that the essence of the idea consisted in the "analogy and equivalence of sensations," which was not mere extravagance but a consequence of a "progressive evolution of the senses;" (Valle-Inclán, Ramón del 1463), and in the 1908 version of this essay ("Breve noticia acerca de mi estética cuando escribí este libro" [*Corte de amor*]), he concludes that "If anything in literature may be called modernism, it is certainly a keen yearning for personality, and that is doubtless why

we see young writers more bent on expressing sensations than ideas."[1] It must be borne in mind that the authors named by Valle as examples of modernism in 1902 were not Rubén Darío, José Martí or Gutiérrez Nájera, but French and Italian writers: Théophile Gautier (as represented by his prologue to Baudelaire's *Les fleurs du mal*), Rimbaud, René Ghil, Carducci and Gabriele d'Annunzio.

The parallelism between Valle and other European authors was noted in the obituary written in 1936 by Juan Ramón Jiménez, who defined him as "a genuine Celt" on a par with "his contemporaries the best Celtic writers of Ireland." Among them, he saw greatest kinship with Synge and Yeats: "That similarity is to be seen in everything, body and soul. Galicia and Ireland remain twins. And just as Ireland freed Yeats and—especially—Synge, Galicia freed Valle-Inclán from exoticist modernism, which he fortunately entertained only fleetingly, and from the Castilianist modernism that has had such a lamentable and lasting influence on some others."[2]

Yeats was born in 1865, just a year before Valle-Inclán. In the year in which *Sonata de otoño* was published, he presented the final, augmented version of *The Celtic Twilight*, a bunch of anecdotes inspired by Irish folklore that Joyce described as his happiest book.[3] His essay "The Celtic Element in Literature" begins with quotations from Ernest Renan and Matthew Arnold, for whom the Celtic peoples—Valle's Galicians among them—were characterized by their passion for nature, imaginativeness, and melancholy (Yeats *The Major Works* 370). Yeats' peasants, like Valle's, talk with the dead, for in Ireland, as in Galicia, there is no discontinuity between this world and the next. There thus arises a kind of "timid affection" between men and spirits in that damp green land where emigration (Yeats *The Celtic Twilight* 92), shipwreck and Fenian bands share everyday life with fabulous treasures and faery beings. There, in the words of the verse that introduces *The Celtic Twilight*, "time drops in decay / like a candle burnt out . . . ," but in the spirit of the folk there lives on a tradition of imagination that modern society has cast from its bosom.

There are tales in *The Celtic Twilight* that are very close to the Galician world of *Flor de santidad: historia milenaria*, which Valle published in 1904 before concluding the *Sonatas*. Thus "Happy and Unhappy Theologians" relates the glorious death of a serving-maid who hangs herself for love of God; while Adega, the heroine of *Flor de santidad*, is an ingenuous shepherdess who is seduced by a pilgrim *en route* to Santiago de Compostela and, following the pilgrim's death, believes herself to have been left with child by God Himself. And in "The Last Gleeman," the events surrounding the burial of the blind Dublinese rhymer Michael Moran are genuine *esperpento*, in the same aesthetic sense of the concept as is shared, for example, by *Luces de bohemia* and Joyce's *Ulysses*. These *motifs*, and many others that could be mentioned, reappear elsewhere in Valle, notably in the "tales of saints, souls in torment, sprites and thieves" collected in *Jardín umbrío*.

In "And Fair, Fierce Women," one of the shortest pieces in *The Celtic Twilight*, the "heroic beauty" that had been "fading out of the arts since that decadence we call progress set voluptuous beauty in its place" was reclaimed by Yeats in a hybrid English as thickly peppered with Irishisms as Valle's Spanish is peppered with Galicianisms, slang, Romany and Americanisms of all origins. This is one of the

marks of kinship between the Irish and Galician writers: they all enriched the language of the metropolis from its outer regions, with zero regard for maintaining its purity. Juan Ramón Jiménez described Valle, together with his Irish peers, as "loose-tongued," because "each word of his was a tongue, and I believe he cared for nothing but to let loose his tongue, for better or for worse."[4]

In a way, the *Sonatas* are another hybrid in their relationship with their fictitious narrator, a character conceived by Valle prior to 1902 and destined to reappear in *Águila de blasón* (1907), *Los cruzados de la causa* (1908), *Una tertulia de antaño* (1909), *Luces de bohemia* (1920 – 1924), and the above-mentioned three episodes of *El ruedo ibérico* (1927 – 1932), as well as in *El Marqués de Bradomín* (1907), the stage play based on the *Sonatas*. On the one hand, Bradomín evidently delights in narrating a series of amorous adventures and the tangled situations associated therewith; his model as a writer of memoirs is Giacomo Casanova, whom he cites explicitly when in *Sonata de invierno* a shocked Sister Simona reveals that his latest conquest is his own daughter. But it is no less evident that throughout the tetralogy Xavier de Bradomín strives to establish the singularity of his persona, constructing it with deliberate artifice, rather than sincerely to record his personality. The cynicism and diabolic aura that characterize the Marquess undoubtedly place the *Sonatas* closer to the letters of Pietro Aretino (1537 – 1557), the gallant memoirs of Casanova (1822) or the libertine literature of the Marquis de Sade than to the *Confessions* of St. Augustine—the late 4th century germ of autobiography—or to those of Rousseau (1771 – 1778), both of whom are mentioned in a famous passage of *Sonata de invierno*.

Anautobiography is necessarily characterized not only by the chronophanic nature deriving from the semantic value of time, but, above all, by its focus on the identity of a single individual. And as a "rereading" of the author's past experience, it tends to reconstruct his or her life as a coherent whole, incurring thereby in excessive rationalization and making sense of events that may have had other senses or none at all. But the *Sonatas* go much further, their creator seeking not just to endow his legend with meaning, but to construct it from scratch. For if anything characterizes Bradomín it is his constant striving to adapt his behaviour, Lon-Chaney-like, to fit models to whom he is especially attracted. Thus at the beginning of *Sonata de estío*, upon disembarking in Veracruz, Xavier struts before the Niña Chole "as proud and arrogant as a *conquistador* of old," remembering his ancestor Gonzalo de Sandoval, founder of the Mexican kingdom of New Galicia.

The "autobiography" of the Marquess of Bradomín is thus doubly fictitious: Firstly, because its narrator is a fictitious character, not the real author Ramón del Valle-Inclán, in spite of continual insinuations of genuine *alter ego* status; and secondly because Xavier is a great impostor of himself, of what he wishes to be for others, regardless of his authentic personality. When he acts before others rather than speaking as narrator, he leaves us with an intense sense of theatricality, of for ever acting the part of a Don Juan *à la* Tirso de Molina or Zorrilla, though with certain singularities of his own—notably his cynicism. Thus the theme of the four *Sonatas* is not the life of Bradomín, but how Bradomín gradually created his persona by dint of imposture, finally consolidating his *opus* by means of what is always but another, subtle

form of pretence: autobiography. In short, literature to the power of two, full of oblique allusions aimed at readers who can no longer be innocent. Herein lies the chief originality of the *Sonatas*: with Xavier de Bradomín, Valle-Inclán concocts the immoralist literature of a feigned self in continual ironic and metaliterary defiance of reality. And finally, we should not overlook the significance of the designation of these four works as *Sonatas*: for the sonata is both a form in which musical themes may be organized, their initial presentation being followed by successive variations and a final recapitulation; and that conjunction of four independent, conventionally structured movements that culminated in the sonatas of Haydn and Mozart.

Notwithstanding the foregoing, *Sonata de invierno* also contains elements that exemplify that "fictitious sincerity" that I have contrasted with the theatrical cynicism with which Bradomín constructs himself. I refer to its Carlist setting and subject matter, which make this novel a bridge between the *Sonatas* and the Carlist War trilogy published between 1908 and 1909. Right from the first description of Carlos VII in the church of San Juan, the narrator exhibits an allegiance to the Pretender that is no less effective for having an aesthetic basis—an origin acknowledged explicitly in a well-known passage in which Bradomín confesses that he has always found fallen majesty more attractive than majesty enthroned, and that he defends tradition on aesthetic grounds, seeing in Carlism the solemn charm of the great cathedrals.[5] Margarita Santos Zas[6] finds proof in these words that, at the time he was writing *Sonata de invierno*, Valle-Inclán had not only a profound knowledge of the history of Carlism and the personality of its leader, but also pronounced ideological leanings in that direction—in spite of which he would later support the Mexican and Soviet revolutions, and later still be seduced by the paraphernalia of early Mussolinian fascism.

It was this affinity and familiarity of Valle's with Carlism—the affinity half aesthetic and half ideological, the familiarity both personal and derived from his readings and research—that gave birth, immediately after the last *Sonata*, to the trilogy comprising *Los cruzados de la causa*, *El resplandor de la hoguera* and *Gerifaltes de antaño* (this last title taken from a line of Rubén Darío's "Los cisnes"). All three are set in Galicia and feature such important Valleinclanesque characters as Bradomín himself, the family of Don Juan Manuel Montenegro, and Cara de Plata, who also links this trilogy to the world of the *Comedias bárbaras*. In contrast to the cynicism, distance and imposture of the *Sonatas*, the prose of *La Guerra Carlista* strikes a note of authenticity, of involvement with the vicissitudes of the Cause, and displays a narrative treatment that tends to the epic sublimation of the story told and its protagonists. Gaspar Gómez de la Serna once noted[7] that in a talk given in 1910 Valle stated that in this trilogy he had tried, in painting its characters, "to augment them with what they had not been." A beggar must be like Job, a guerillaman like Achilles—the very opposite of what characterizes the *esperpento* of the banana republic of the tyrant Banderas or the Isabelline court of miracles of *El ruedo ibérico*. In the twelfth scene of *Luces de bohemia*, Max Estrella defines *esperpento* thus: "Classical heroes reflected in concave mirrors produce *esperpento*. The tragic sense of Spanish life can only come about through a systematically deformed aesthetics;"[8] which is not to say that certain premonitory hints of esperpentic expressionism are not already present in *La Guerra*

Carlista and the *Sonatas*.

In September 1902, in the same month as *Sonata de otoño* was published, Émile Zola died. Sixteen years earlier, Clarín had written that "naturalism is a thing of the past; if you do not believe me, look at decadentism and symbolism, which if they have not yet had much impact, soon will do. Fashions, isms! *Vade retro*! We have all sinned, let us all repent. Long live art, long live artists!" This state of opinion typifies the parting of the ways that was perceived in the autumn of French naturalism, and which gave rise to the vast literary process—studied by Michel Raymond in *La crise du Roman. Des lendemains du Naturalisme aux années vingt* (2nd edn., 1967)—that renovated and modernized the European and American novel. Far from sentencing to death a *genre* that in the 19th century had indeed reached its highest degree of influence and social acceptance, this process of renovation simply replaced the narrative system or poetics of the 19th century with something better fitted to the society and ways of thought of the 20th, innovative narrative forms springing simultaneously from the pens and typewriters of authors who were not in contact with each other, but who responded in the same way to some of the profound social, philosophical and artistic changes that were afoot.

In my book *Estructura y tiempo reducido en la novela*[9] I have discussed extensively the fundamental ingredients of this renewal of the forms of the novel. Some limit the omniscience of author and narrator, imposing a relativist perspective; others eliminate the traditional hero, who in some cases simply disappears (Kafka, Musil), and in others is replaced by a collectivity; while an important third group concern time as the central pillar of the structure of the novel. In contrast to the linearity and chronological progression of the 19th century novel, time is now the object of all kinds of significant manipulations: timelessness is achieved by weakening the sense of duration, or by making time cyclic; the tyranny of strict chronological order is overthrown to allow divers anachronies; or the time narrated is strictly limited, enhancing the vividness of its duration and opening the way to the achievement of simultaneity.

It would be hard to point to a European writer who can be better identified with this renovational project than Valle-Inclán—which is why his works retain an attractiveness that has been lost by those of some contemporaries. By his own efforts, Valle arrived at conclusions that set him on a par with the great figures of modernism—Marcel Proust, Thomas Mann, Virginia Woolf, André Gide, Aldous Huxley, William Faulkner, Hermann Hesse, or James Joyce himself—conclusions that allowed him, without in any way reneging his previous work, to reorient his writings in consonance with an aesthetic and ideological *avant garde*.

The year 1916 is crucial in this respect. For one thing, it was the year in which Valle acquired first-hand acquaintance with the Great War. This had a considerable influence on his relationship with history: whereas previously it had been characteristic of him to identify with the past, he was now open to the present and the future—a change immediately reinforced by the Soviet revolution of 1917 and shortly afterwards by his travels in post-revolutionary Mexico (1921) and by the political upheavals in Spain, where the monarchy was replaced first by the Dictatorship of Primo de Rivera and then by the Second Republic. Secondly, 1916, marked by the death of

Rubén Darío, is a turning point in Valle's aesthetic evolution, the year in which he put behind him that "other modernism." His essay *La lámpara maravillosa*, parts of which had already appeared in 1914 and 1915, was placed at the front of the collected works that began to be published that year, as a recapitulation of the aesthetic theory underlying the period now brought to an end; by October he was publishing by instalments a work that showed his transition to other aesthetic positions (distinct but not in all respects radically different; see below) and his integration in the modernist renovation of narrative: *La media noche. Visión estelar de un momento de guerra* (1917).

In *La media noche* Valle tackled two issues of major importance in the renovation of the novel: the point of view of the narrator, and the spatio-temporal coordinates of the narration. Illuminated by the extraordinary experience spoken of by Corpus Barga (288 – 310)[10], his night flight over the battlefront in a French fighter (later described in esoteric, occult vein by Valle himself), he managed to provide a structural, holistic vision—a vision proper to what Benjamín Jarnés would call the "polygraphic novel"—of such a typically collective event as a great battle, combining a multiplicity of narrative perspectives with the simultaneity of a text conceived as the depiction of a single timespan in multiple arenas. That this enterprise was not wholly divorced from his earlier aesthetics is clear from his having written, in *La lámpara maravillosa*, of human limitations being overcome by an eagle's eye view, a view such as he had from the fighter over the battlefront; but beyond this confused, imprecise phraseology, his actual narrative praxis in *La media noche* shows him advancing in a modernist direction taken by John Dos Passos in *Manhattan Transfer* (1925) and *U. S. A.* (1930 – 36), by Gorky when he proposed the *A Day in the World* project (later realized on film, twice, by Dziga Vertov), and, in particular, by Jules Romains in the unanimism that began to appear publicly in his novels in *Mort de quelqu'un* (1911). In his prologue to the first two volumes of *Les hommes de bonne volonté*, Romains claimed that his unanimist style of composition freed him from focusing on the individual; and according to André Cuisenier Romains lifts us out of the world of individuals to a higher level, a vantage point from which they can be surveyed like the individuals of a hive or ants' nest (Romains 42). Nothing defines this superior vantage point better than the *visión estelar*, from "beyond the bounds of geometry and chronology," that was discovered and mythified by Valle in *La media noche* (Valle I 904)

It may be pointed out that, together with Valle, the great novelists mentioned above, and others that might have been, another to pursue the goal of holistic presentation was that archetypal renovator of contemporary narrative, James Joyce. *Ulysses*, a complete metaphor of human life condensed in a single day, is paralleled by the total vision of the collective drama of war presented by Valle-Inclán in a few hours of nocturnal flight. The stellar perspective that allows Valle to see simultaneously the separate fates of the aviators in Chapter IV (or in Chapter XXVIII to take in the coming of dawn, the roads behind the front, the bombed villages and cities in ruins, the military cemeteries, and the recuperation barracks of the exhausted troops) is the same as is adopted in *Ulysses*, in Episode 10 ("Wandering Rocks"), for example;

according to Stuart Gilbert, Joyce too aspired to rise above the category of time and see a simultaneous universe, adopting, as it were, God's view of the cosmos. Elsewhere[11] I have observed that *Ulysses* has compositional, thematic and aesthetic similarities with *Luces de bohemia*, in spite of one being a novel and the other a play, the explanation of this apparent paradox being Valle's having identified narrative and dramatic forms when he found that dialogue was ideal for guaranteeing objectivity in the narration of action. This impassiveness of the narrator, which conforms to the objectivist trends current in the theory and practice of the novel of the time (Joyce, Faulkner, Pérez de Ayala and others resorted to dialogue for identical reasons), already stood out in *La media noche*, where the stellar vision placed the narrator at a distance that promoted objectivity.

In a conversation with Gregorio Martínez Sierra published in *ABC* at the end of 1928, Valle explains quite transparently one of the fundamental aspects of the composition of *La media noche*, *Tirano Banderas* and *El ruedo ibérico*:

> I believe that the novel advances parallel to history and political movements. In these days of socialism and communism, I don't think society's principal hero can be the human individual, but social groups. History and the Novel scrutinize the phenomenon of the masses with the same curiosity.[12]

A few years earlier, in a letter to Cipriano Rivas Cherif published under the title "Autocrítica" in the magazine *España*[13], he had already presented a perfect rationalization of the most decisive temporal characteristic of all his post-1916 works:

> You are quite right in saying that the action walks a tightrope; it's like an oniric stage effect, with larvae talking with the living. True. This effect is contributed to by what we might call the *straitness of time*. An effect similar to that of El Greco, with the straitness of space. Velázquez is full of space. His figures can change their posture, spread out and make room for others. But in the *Entombment* only El Greco could arrange them in such a small space [...]. This straitness of space is straitness of time in the *Comedias*. The scenes that appear to be placed quite arbitrarily are consequents in the chronology of the events. *Cara de Plata* begins at dawn and ends at midnight. The other parts also take place without interruption. In something I'm writing now I'm occupied with this idea of filling time like El Greco filled space. Some of the Russians understood all this.[14]

As he explains later in this letter, the work in progress to which he alluded was "An American novel of tyranny and Spanish avarice,"[15] *Tirano Banderas: novela de tierra caliente*, a prodigious creation that was Valle-Inclán's own favourite among his novels, and in which we once more detect the presence of renovational narrative poetics and further foretastes of *El ruedo ibérico*.

The title of *Tirano Banderas* is somewhat misleading in that the objective of this work is not so much the portrayal of a tyrannic individual as the denunciation of the

degradation of man by tyranny. The pursuit of holism that characterizes Valle leads him to conceive an imaginary republic, Santa Trinidad de Tierra Firme, as the quintessence of Spanish America with its three castes: the creoles, the despised Spanish *gachupines*, and the Indians—among these last the tyrant Santos Banderas, who is not modelled after just a single dictator but, as Valle revealed in a letter to Alfonso Reyes in 1923, after "Dr. Francia, Rosas, Melgarejo, López, and don Porfirio." (Hormigón 310) This complete social and historical plan, which rules out any possible epic or individualistic interpretation of the novel, extends to its language, which as the same letter goes on to explain is "an aggregate of all the Spanish-speaking countries, from vulgar slang to the speech of the gauchos."[16] In *Tirano Banderas*, the dialogue does not only contribute to objectivity, but also to the sense of holism that permeates this work, which Ricardo Gullón, in his excellent study of Valle-Inclán's techniques, describes as "a sketch for a gigantic parable declaring the destiny of mankind" (35).

What Borges wrote of *Ulysses* in a sonnet dedicated to Joyce in *Elogio de la sombra* ("*En un día del hombre están los días / del tiempo . . . Entre el alba y la noche está la historia / universal*") is also to be seen in *Tirano Banderas*, in which time is characterized by straitness, anachrony or flashback, and simultaneity. Its structure as a sequence of fragments, which so facilitates the achievement of narrative simultaneity, is at times reminiscent of cinema, of the aesthetic and expressive potential of which Valle was already convinced in 1926. Valle's work in fact provides fine examples of the experimental fusion of theatre, novel and cinema, and this syncretism may in large part explain the air of modernity that his literary work still exhales. In *Tirano Banderas* time is registered in multiple spatial enclaves of Sante Fe de Tierra Firme, providing us with an in-depth perception of the contrasts among the various social classes and individual positions, the wrongs suffered by the people, how the rebellion is forged, and the pitfalls placed in the path of the just cause by the tyrant and his allies. For this purpose, the technique chosen by Valle is ideal; seven years later, André Malraux would employ it in *La condition humaine* (*Man's Fate*) to recount the collective, unanimous and simultaneous impetus of communist freedom-fighters in 1927 Shanghai. Both in Malraux and Valle-Inclán, simultaneity is not just a technical tour de force, but a tool that is essential for a comprehensive treatment of the theme of the novel.

The simultaneity of *Tirano Banderas* also emerges in a suggestive fashion, one that is likewise related to space, but in this case the space of painting. I refer to those concise, swift sketches such as the famous passage that ends Don Roque Cepeda's meeting in Part 2, Book 2: "The police began to swipe right and left with their swords. Splinters of broken lamps, cries, hands raised to heaven, bloody faces. Convulsion of lights going out. The angled ring broken. A cubist vision of Harris' Circus."[17] Cubist art certainly consists of a kind of visual simultaneity, since it allows details from all dimensions of space to be contemplated in a single plane, that of the canvas. Valle makes masterful use of this procedure, generally on the last page of one of the books that constitute the second of the three levels into which *Tirano Banderas* is divided (part, book and chapter), combining extreme narrative economy with a

gripping climax; though elsewhere the cubist paragraphs of the novel seem to be put together following artful techniques of film editing, such as cross-cutting (rapidly switching to and fro among two or more arenas of action).

Compositional circularity, perfectly achieved in *Tirano Banderas*, is the fundamental aesthetic element in the conception of *El ruedo ibérico*, where it moreover has implications of alternative history and timelessness that I believe to be absent from the "*novela de tierra caliente*". Temporal circularity, alternative history and timelessness, which were also present in other landmark novels of the twenties and thirties, had indeed been rooted in Valle's aesthetic ideas since *La lámpara maravillosa*, but alternative history—in spite of the hesitant assertions of certain critics—only appears in *Tirano Banderas* as a suggestion at the end of Part 5, Book 2. In *Tirano Banderas* time is strait but also active and progressive, leading towards the final downfall of the tyrant; the reader perceives the tense maintenance of the moment as a painful parenthesis, not an inexorable property of history—remember that Valle was writing under the influence of the excitement produced by the Soviet and Mexican revolutions at a time when he was himself suffering the effects of the Dictatorship of Primo de Rivera in Spain. That the prologue and epilogue are chronologically adjacent does not mean that the novel is a circular negation of time, but that, thanks to the unstoppable advance of time, the barbarity now firmly seated in power may tomorrow be swept away by the hitherto downtrodden.

A very different attitude, if not the very opposite, is shown by the author of *El ruedo ibérico*, a work impregnated with pessimism *vis-à-vis* the history of the Spain portrayed in *La corte de los milagros* and *Viva mi dueño*: corrupt and decadent from palace to people, an immense and tragic cacophony, a paradise of conflict and dissent, violence and death. Technically, *El ruedo ibérico* does indeed conform to the new narrative poetics that we have seen developing since 1916. In a famous interview with José Montero Alonso in 1926, Valle explains that

> *El ruedo ibérico* will have no leading character. Its principal character is the social medium, the atmosphere ... I want to bring to the novel the Spanish perception of things as shown by Spanish reactions to events of importance. For me, how a people reacts to such events reflects and is the measure of its perception of things (296).[18]

In this same interview he speaks of *El ruedo ibérico* as pointillist—just as *Tirano Banderas* was cubist—in its simultaneist fragmentation of its narrative discourse. This characteristic is especially conspicuous in *Viva mi dueño*, where Queen Isabel's chief minister González Bravo attempts in vain to control a situation in which the anti-Isabelline conspirators include revolutionaries, *espadones*[19] and Montpensierists in Spain, political exiles in Paris, Lisbon and London, and the pretender Don Carlos in Gratz. *Viva mi dueño* exhibits a kind of revolutionary unanimism that is continued in *Baza de espadas* (though now concentrated in Madrid, London and Cadiz, where the revolution of 1868 was brewing), and that makes these works comparable with Eisenstein's *October* (1927), Malraux' *La condition humaine* (1933), and the second part of

Sartre's *Roads to Freedom* trilogy, *Le sursis* (*The reprieve* 1945).

Valle-Inclán's idea of the tempo with which history should be narrated shows a radical change of mentality when compared, for example, with Benito Pérez Galdós' *Episodios nacionales*. Galdós aimed to relate the progressive course followed by Spanish history over three-quarters of a century, between the battle of Trafalgar and Cánovas del Castillo. Valle, in spite of his declared intention of portraying the evolution of Spanish perceptions between the revolution of 1868 ("*La Gloriosa*") and the death of Alfonso XII in 1885, in practice demonstrated his preference for the strait, profound account of events—the best fitted for their holistic, structural interpretation in contrast to their mere concatenation in a linear sequence.

However, temporal straitness and multiplicity do not by themselves suffice to define the narrative form of *El ruedo ibérico*. On the contrary, the predominant impression in these volumes is of *timelessness*, a result of the circular structure that Valle had already experimented with, to different effect, in *Tirano Banderas*. From the stellar vantage point first assumed in *La media noche*, Valle sees Spain as a vast bullring in which a never-ending spectacle of violence and death is staged. Violence engenders violence, over and over—witness the periodic series of Spanish civil wars—but nothing changes. *Viva mi dueño*, like the belated prologue "Aires nacionales" (1931), begins and ends with the same sentence, trivial variations apart:

> Disingenuous tidings spread the revolutionary message throughout the roundness of the Iberian Arena. And in old cities, under the arcades of the square, and in the sunbaked forecourts of little towns, and in Andalusian wineshops, and in the drinking houses of Madrid and Asturias, and in Basque playing courts, among grey seas and green meadows, the gossiping parrot opens the day with the news that the Darling One is coming. And the Darling One staying out every night to sleep in theoffing![20]

At the beginning of the last of the surviving books of *Baza de espadas* we likewise read: "In all the roundness of the National Arena there circulated messages written in invisible ink, the accompaniment *de rigueur* of any revolutionary spree."[21] Space in Valle-Inclán realizes the metaphor contained in the title of the whole series: *El ruedo ibérico*. Spain, as already noted above, like an immense bullring seen from the stars—hence a circular space. But this initial narrative dimension goes over into what E. M. Forster called pattern (140). In *La corte de los milagros* and *Viva mi dueño*, the text itself, as a written spatial object organized in nested units (chapters, books, etc.), exhibits a clearly circular pattern such that the correlations among these units can be visualized as four concentric annuli and a circumference—theme and form—reinforcing a certain concept of time that in turn has an ideological interpretation. Behold here the clearest possible proof that an artistic text is a structure, a system of subtly interdependent formal and meaningful elements, and that time and space in the novel are two of the most intimately related compositional factors.

Notes

1. "Si en literatura existe algo que pueda recibir el nombre de modernismo, es, ciertamente, un vivo anhelo de personalidad, y por eso sin duda advertimos en los escritores jóvenes más empeño por expresar sensaciones que ideas." Valle, Vol. I, p. 200.
2. "Ramón del Valle-Inclán (Castillo de quema)", in José Esteban (ed.), *Valle-Inclán visto por ...*, Las Ediciones del Espejo, Madrid, 1973, pp. 220 – 221.
3. James Joyce, "The soul of Ireland", *Daily Express*, Dublin, May 26th 1903.
4. "Cada palabra suya era una lengua, y yo creo que no le importaba nada que no fuera su lengua buena o mala, deslenguarse." See J. Esteban(p. 221) as shown in Note2.
5. Valle, Vol. I, p. 589.
6. Santos Zas, M., *Tradicionalismo y Literatura en Valle-Inclán* (1889 – 1910), Society of Spanish and Spanish American Studies, Boulder (Colorado), 1993.
7. G. Gómez de la Serna, "Las dos Españas de don R. M. del Valle Inclán", *Clavileño*, No. 17, October 1952, p. 26.
8. "Los héroes clásicos reflejados en los espejos cóncavos dan el Esperpento. El sentido trágico de la vida Española sólo puede darse con una estética sistemáticamente deformada." R. del Valle-Inclán. *Obra completa*, Vol. II. Espasa-Calpe, Madrid, 2002, p. 933.
9. Published by Bello, Valencia, 1977; 2nd edition Anthropos, Barcelona, 1994.
10. "Valle-Inclán en la más alta ocasión", *Revista de Occidente*, 44 – 45, 1966, pp. 288 – 301.
11. "Valle-Inclán and James Joyce: From *Ulysses* to *Luces de bohemia*", *Révue de Littérature comparée*, 1, 1991, pp. 45 – 59.
12. "Creo que la Novela camina paralelamente con la Historia y los movimientos políticos. En esta hora de socialismo y comunismo, no me parece que pueda ser el individuo humano héroe principal de la sociedad, sino los grupos sociales. La Historia y la Novela se inclinan con la misma curiosidad sobre el fenómeno de las multitudes." Joaquín and Javier del Valle-Inclán (eds.), *Ramón María del Valle-Inclán. Entrevistas, conferencias y cartas.* Pre-Textos, Valencia, 1994, p. 396.
13. *España*, March 8th 1924. Cited through Joaquín and Javier del Valle-Inclán (eds.), *Ramón María del Valle-Inclán. Entrevistas, conferencias y cartas.* Pre-Textos, Valencia, 1994, p. 259 – 260.
14. "Hace usted una observación muy justa cuando señala el funambulismo de la acción, que tiene algo de tramoya de sueño, por donde las larvas pueden dialogar con los vivos. Cierto. A este efecto contribuye la que pudieramos llamar *angostura del tiempo*. Un efecto parecido al del Greco, por la angostura del espacio. Velázquez está todo lleno de espacio. Las figuras pueden cambiar de actitud, esparcirse y hacer lugar a otras forasteras. Pero en el *Enterramiento*, sólo el Greco pudo meterlas en tan angosto espacio (...). Esta angostura de espacio es angostura del tiempo en las *Comedias*. Las escenas que parecen arbitrariamente colocadas son las consecuentes en la cronología de los hechos. *Cara de Plata* comienza con el alba y acaba a media noche. Las otras partes se suceden también sin intervalo. Ahora, en algo que estoy escribiendo, esta idea de llenar el tiempo como llenaba el Greco el espacio, totalmente, me preocupa. Algún ruso sabía de esto." Joaquín and Javier del Valle-Inclán (eds.), *Ramón María del Valle-Inclán. Entrevistas, conferencias y carta* (Pre-Textos: Valencia, 1994)260.
15. "Una novela americana de caudillaje y avaricia gachupinesca."
16. "Una suma de todos los países de lengua Española, desde el modo lépero al modo gaucho".
17. "Los gendarmes comenzaban a repartir sablazos. Cachizas de faroles, gritos, manos en alto, caras ensangrentadas. Convulsión de luces apagándose. Rotura de la pista de ángulos. Visión cubista del Circo Harris." Valle Vol. I, p. 1003.
18. "*El ruedo ibérico* no tendrá protagonista. Su gran personaje es el medio social, el ambiente ... Quiero llevar a la novela la sensibilidad Española, tal como se muestra en su reacción ante los he-

chos que tienen una importancia. Para mí, la sensibilidad de un pueblo se refleja y se mide en cómo reacciona ante esos hechos." Joaquín and Javier del Valle-Inclán, *op. cit.*, p. 296.

19. Politically involved military leaders.

20. "Chismosos anuncios difundían el mensaje revolucionario por la redondez del Ruedo Ibérico. Y en las ciudades viejas, bajo los porches de la plaza y en los atrios solaneros de los villorrios, y en el colmado andaluz, y en la tasca madrileña, y en el chigre y en el frontón, entre grises mares y prados verdes, el periquito gacetillero abre los días con el anuncio de que viene la Niña. ÏY la Niña, todas las noches quedándose a dormir por las afueras!..." Valle Vol. I, pp. 1417 and 1718.

21. "Por toda la redondez del Ruedo Nacional circulaban los papeles escritos con tinta simpática, que son el obligado acompa ? amiento de todas las jácaras revolucionarias." Valle Vol. I, p. 1878.

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