# Ramón del Valle-Inclán and the Plastic Arts

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**Abstract** Taking as reference framework the renewal of artistic expression in the first third of the twentieth century, based on a fruitful dialogue between the arts, this paper aims to address the art-literature symbiosis that defines Valle-Inclán's work. Such a symbiosis is based on the brotherhood of the arts which in the Galician writer's case is guaranteed, on the one hand, by his biography linking him to the art world, thanks to specific posts in institutions and organisations related to different artistic and personal relationships with contemporary artists. On the other, it is guaranteed by his role as art critic in the contemporary press. These factors explain the incidence which art in general, and, more specifically, painting, had on his work and his conception of aesthetics, as expressed in *La Lámpara Maravillosa* (1916).
**Key words** Valle-Inclán; painting; visual arts and literature; symbolism; pre-raphaelitism; Romero de Torres

It is difficult to understand the renewal of artistic expression, which occurs in the first third of the twentieth century, without appealing to the "Brotherhood of the Arts," that Charles Baudelaire embodied in his famous sonnet of *Les fleurs du mal* (1857), the title of which, "Correspondances", is eloquent of the relation that he believed to perceive between the arts, as it contains all the Synesthetic theories which Parnassians and Symbolists are to develop in the second half of the 19th century. In fact, the above-mentioned poem becomes a sort of manifesto of Symbolism—not to mention the precedent of the lyrical-pictorial work of William Blake—which even relegated Jean Moreas' manifesto to be part of the background (*Le Figaro*, 1886). In this context, the art-literature symbiosis suggests a reinterpretation of the Horatian *ut pictura poesis* topic (Litvak 43), the assimilation of word and image which is evident in the terminology and the facts that both disciplines share over time.

Ramón del Valle-Inclan is one of themore significant exponents of this synthesis[1], for within the field of Valle-Inclanian research it is well known that the Galician writer had an intense and continuous relation with the arts (both the visual and plastic or applied arts like graphic design) and contemporary artistic trends (symbolism, impressionism, expressionism...), a relation which either influenced his aesthetics or received the stamp of his creation. In turn, such a relation had its effects on the protagonists of the artistic panorama of the end of the 19th and early 20th centuries, as expressly acknowledged by some of them. At the same time, the influence of the arts, painting in particular, but also music, dance or film in his work is of paramount im-

portance to understand its diversity and complexity. It also impossible to ignore the biographical trajectory. My aim here cannot be another than that to briefly present the hitherto features in order to offer a brief panorama of the writer's fecund relation with the arts, especially the painting of his time and other ones.

Valle-Inclánspoke frequently of Art, from the knowledge that certain details of his biography give proof of. In fact, his direct experience with the art world dates back to his youth, when as a student of law at the University of Santiago de Compostela (degree studies which he did not complete) he enrolled at the School of Arts and Crafts in the subject of "Drawing, Embellishments and Painting" (1888 – 1889). In 1916 he undertakes a trip to France (May-June) as the war correspondent of the *El Imparcial* newspaper, an experience reflected in what was from the narratological point of view, one of his more innovating works *La Media Noche. Visión estelar de un momento de guerra* (1917). Just weeks after his return from the Allied front, and due to the Minister of Public Instruction and Fine Arts Julio Burell—the writer's childhood friend—he was appointed professor of the Chair of Aesthetics at the School of Painting, Printmaking and Sculpture, a post which he held for three years: from July 19, 1916, when he takes office, until November 10, 1919, when he resigns (Alberca and Valle-Inclán Alsina 6 – 11). According to *La Gaceta de Madrid*, "the head of Aesthetics should be *a writer and a publicist acknowledged by critics and opinion* (Alberca and Valle-Inclán Alsina 7), circumstances that concur in the writer, who according to eyewitnesses, gave his classes in the Museum of the Prado (9). Besides his peculiar way of teaching, such an attitude reveals his clear interest in a direct bonding with his young students and painting masterpieces.

Since then therehas been much speculation as regards reasons for his resignation, speculation encouraged by Valle himself in his contradictory statements. In this sense, Alberca and Valle-Inclán Alsina (6 – 11) suggest that a probable reason for his resignation was the difficulty of reconciling his life in Galicia, where he had settled in 1912 with his teaching duties. These duties required his presence in Madrid during the academic year, especially following the ministerial measures implemented during 1918 – 1919, aimed at combating teacher absenteeism. It seems that, despite the guarantee of a monthly salary, Valle would leave this post in order to get rid of ties that would be a limiting condition in his complete dedication to literature.

Hereafter follows a long interval in the 20's, the most fertile period from the point of view of Valle-Inclanian literary creation, which in accordance with the development of the artistic vanguard in Spain, leans towards a vision of reality based on the grotesque, crystallising in the *esperpento*. In turn, in its aesthetic postulates, the *esperpento* is indebted to Francisco de Goya, the author of *Caprichos* and the *Pinturas negras*, which is specifically mentioned in the pages of *Luces de Bohemia* (1920/1924), the work in which *esperpento* poetics and its innovative stage praxis acquires full artistic status. After the proclamation of the 2nd Republic (1931) we again find Valle heading institutions or official organisms related to the arts world: besides being member of the Patronage of the Museum of Modern Art (1931), Manuel Azaña, President of the Government, promoted the appointment of his admired friend as Custodian of the National Artistic Patrimony (2/9/1931) and Director of the Museum of

Aranjuez (29/1/1932), positions from which Valle-Inclán noisily resigned a few months later, annoyed at the lack of official answer to his projects as the head of the department he had been entrusted with (Montiel Rayo 291 – 313).

Finally, one of Valle's greatest aspirations is fulfilled when he is appointed Director of the Academy of Fine Arts of Spain in Rome (Santos Zas *et al*. *Todo Valle-Inclán*…)[2], where he shared households with his painting, sculpture, architecture, engraving and music pensioners during the three years of mandate that, intermittently he spent in Rome. In the election process he received the warm support of famous Spanish artists, headed by Zuloaga, who considered to the writer the suitable person to direct the Academy and to give it back, as he aimed to do, its "lost prestige". However, a number of several types of obstacles, including the slowness or the silence of the public administration—the Academy directly depended on the Ministry of State—, the internal conflicts with the artists granted a scholarship, his precarious health, which turned even worse in the years in Rome, prevented him from carrying out his revitalising project for the Academy. Disappointed and very ill, he returned to Spain in the spring of 1935 and died a few months later (January 5, 1936) in Santiago de Compostela. A bust of Valle, carried out by Victorio Macho, one of his opponents to the direction of the Academy, stands as memory to him in San Pietro in Montorio, the current site of said Academy.

If all these posts, not without controversy and fabulations, are eloquent of the close links that joined Valle to the world of art, personal relationships do not do more than confirm it, since he was a friend of painters, engravers and artists with whom he rubbed shoulders daily in Madrid gatherings, particularly in the Nuevo Café de Levante (Santos Zas, "Valle-Inclán y las tertulias…" 13 – 15).[3] I'll dwell on it for a while, since it constitutes one of the most significant meeting-places of the turn-of-the-century Madrid, crucible of artistic modernism, according to the unanimous opinion of critics, and a showcase for a generation, whose socio-literary gatherings Valle led from 1903 and until 1916, when it is dissolved by the division between pro-Germans and pro-Allies (Baroja 99). The extensive list of fellow members who participated in "That Music Hall" (Tudela 160) includes the complete list of the so-called 98ists and modernists, whose names speak for themselves of the interartistic sign of that cenacle, although, as Baroja again remembers (99): "the majority were painters, sculptors, engravers and sketchers… If previously, Literature was the favourite subject, later sculpture and painting were almost always the main objects of discussion." Of that nourished group (whose cartoon published in Pharos the 4 of April of 1912), it is possible to mention to Anselmo Miguel Nieto, Arteta, Ricardo Baroja, Juan de Echevarría, Gutiérrez Solana, Julio Antonio, Victorio Macho, Ricardo Marin, Mir, Moya del Pino, Penagos, Rusiñol, Regoyos, Romero de Torres, Vivanco, Zuloaga, the Zubiaurre brothers… And circumstantially, they were joined by a young Picasso, Diego Rivera or Matisse on their passing through Madrid.

In the early 20th century, they were united by the search for the renewal of artistic expression, the subversion of established codes, which they identified with the realist school: "We were scornfully called "modernists" (. . .) We wanted to do something impossible or least very difficult, to go ahead of our time or go back to the past

one" (Baroja 99). In 1907, under the motto "Independent Painters," they carried out an exhibition in the Circle of Fine Arts, bitterly contested by those who did not understand their similarity of aesthetic criteria. In this regard, in his lecture "Modernism in Spain", issued in Buenos Aires in 1910, Valle recalled, how "bravely they had struggled against prejudice (...) of the critics". In the early days, he adds, these painters hardly obtained any honorary mention at the Salon de Madrid" (J. and. J. del Valle-Inclán Alsina 48).

Within this common awareness of singularity, the Café de Levante played the role of an eye critical as to the artistic reality of the times: "Our meeting acquired great importance when the National Exhibitions of Fine Arts came around (…) The academic scholars, the consecrated artists , teachers in formal schools of art feared us like the plague" (Baroja 101), Valle-Inclán adds: "the Café de Levante has exerted more influence on literature and contemporary art than two or three Universities and Academies" (Baroja 101).

This unique atmosphere of artists left a deep impression on the writer, who evoked the newly appointed Director of that Academy of Fine Arts of Spain in Rome, where he intended, as he told the newspaper *El Sol* (10/3/1933), to play the role of adviser of young pensioners: "I have always lived surrounded by artists, rather than by writers in the old gatherings at the Café de Levante, and now I intend to continue this co-existence, resume those family discussions, and at the same time guide those boys" (Santos Zas *et al*. *Todo Valle-Inclán*… 116).

Such friendships also find proof in his books, designed and illustrated by some of his artist friends (Romero de Torres, Anselmo Miguel Nieto, Arteta, Moya del Pino, Vivanco and Ricardo Baroja). In the field of applied arts, the best example of this art-literature synthesis is *Voces de Gesta* (Veiga Grandal 183 – 212), written a century ago, a preview of which Valle read to the other members of these gatherings. In this regard, reference should also be made to the careful attention paid by Valle in book-designing, obedient to the idea that the book is a work of art, whose covers deserve as much attention as its content. From this perspective, the whole of the Galician writer's work is, by its originality and excellence, one of the best examples of the renovation in graphic design of the first third of the 20th century.[4]

The strong personality of Valle-Inclán, as could be expected, also attracted the artists of his time to the extent that he is probably one of the writers of his generation who has received more attention by painters, illustrators and cartoonists, who featured a picture of the Galician author in a gallery of portraits (Echevarria, Zuloaga and Anselmo Miguel Nieto, Gregorio Prieto, Victorio Macho or Vázquez Díaz) and cartoons (Cilla, Sancha, Bagaría, Castelao, Fresno, Moya del Pino, Penagos, Corredoira, Massaguer...)[5], agree in emphasising the strongest features of his face: its extreme thinness, his long beard, his piercing gaze, filtered through his round spectacles, and his lack of an arm[6], hidden under the Spanish cloak he was wont to use. His unique appearance and attire earned him defining expressions as ingenious as that coined by Ramón Gómez de la Serna: "he was the best mask on foot crossing the street of Alcala" (Gómez de la Serna 56), or the dictator Primo de Rivera, who called him an "eminent writer and extravagant citizen" (Gómez de la Serna 159). At

the same time, several of these painters recognized the aesthetic teaching of the writer in their pictorial practice; *great teacher*, he was called by his admired friend Romero de Torres (Santos Zas, "Valle-Inclán, de puño…" 435) and not without reason, as Rivas Cherif remembers in an interview published in *España* (11/5/1916):

> (...) all those who are in the habit of going to artistic centres andcliques, know, for example, to what extent his ingenious suggestions have influenced the criteria of painters such as Anselmo Miguel Nieto and Julio Romero de Torres, who owe him much of the deserved popularity which they enjoy, first because of his acute advice, and, above all because of the subtle literary interpretation with which he has provided the pictorial renovation that these two young artists represent in Spain. (J. and J. del Valle-Inclán Alsina 163)

Such a statement is corroborated by Moya del Pino in the tribute that the magazine *La Pluma* rendered Valle in 1923: "The influence of Valle-Inclán's aesthetic norms in contemporary Spanish art has been very great. All the artists (…) were influenced to a lesser or greater degree by his doctrines and they spread them by means of his works" (63).

However, Valle-Inclán's admiration for contemporary artists was no less, as is proven in his praise of Ignacio Zuloaga in his essay on"La pintura vasca" (1919)[7], or his reference to Anselmo Miguel Nieto in the above quoted lectures in Buenos Aires (1910), as an exponent of the aesthetic conception that Valle defended. On some he wrote chronicles in the press or in the catalogues of their exhibitions (f. inst: Romero de Torres and Juan de Echevarría), others were the subject of lectures, such as Anglada Camarasa, in a cycle-tribute to the painter in Madrid in 1916, in the same way as he participated in the Julio Antonio *in memoriam* lecture series, in March 1918.[8] Valle himself mentioned his favourites in an interview with Juan Lopez Núñez (1/1/1915): "Ricardo Baroja, the most attractive and strong personality that in Spain exists; Romero de Torres, a most brilliant painter; the sculptor Julio Antonio; Moya del Pino (...); Penagos, the Villalbas; Anselmo Miguel Nieto, and the wonderful Arteta…" (Dougherty, *Un Valle-Inclán…* 60).

In line with these considerations, Valle left a written record of his knowledge in the field of arts, architecture, sculpture, dance, film, music, and above all, his passion for painting: "painting delights me" (Dougherty, *Un Valle-Inclán...* 55), a fascination which he shared with that of Baudelaire for Delacroix, John Ruskin for Turner, Rubén Darío for Watteau or of Proust for Vermeer, very eloquent proof of the syncretism of the arts which is a sign of the period under study. In this sense, Serge Salaün (116 – 131) rightly points out that:

> Valle-Inclán, whilst not being a painter, like Gual or Rusiñol, visualises (...). His pictorial cultureis encyclopedic, covering both national and international, the contemporary and the preceding heritages. In this, again, he shows his strict identification with the Symbolist and Expressionist intellectuals who gave painting a decisive paper in the exercise of modernity and worked closely

> with painters. It is no exaggeration to say that even the aesthetic rupture, in Europe, is essentially based on painting, both as regards works and as theoretical writings of some painters very prone to doctrinal reflection. (121)

As for Valle, together with the explicit reference to contacts and personal friendships above-cited, revealing the shared interest of the "brotherhood of the arts" as echoed in magazines and publishing houses, we know of Valle's particular pictorial preferences which according to his own statements range from the "primitive" Italians to the English Pre-Raphaelites, whom he vindicated together with the Brotherhood theorist, John Ruskin, and from Botticelli, Titian, Raphael, El Greco or Velázquez to Goya.

Valle's fascination with these and other artists finds its witness in his works, full of references to the art world (Eva Lloréns) which, as a tribute, can be traced from his four Sonatas—art about art and literature about literature—to his later novels (*Tirano Banderas* or *El Ruedo Ibérico*), from his first book of poems, *Aromas de Leyenda* (1907), to *Claves líricas* (1930), a book that brings together his poetic work. Such a relationship can be extended to all his dramatic production, a compendium of the renewal of the performing arts in the first third of the 20th century. In all cases, plasticity is the dominant note, perceptible in the linguistic construction of his images, in which luminous and chromatic games in their most varied shades and gradations, come together in search of an intensification of sensations, as Valle himself stated in his 1902 article, "Modernism"[9], which his work in the early years of the 20th is ascribed to. With the same aim, he uses *ékfrasis* in numerous passages of his texts, identifiable with specific pictorial works; as well as other technical resources, seeking to produce plastics and visual effects. They are indicative of his attraction to painting, which goes beyond mere contemplation to form an integral part *of his view of reality* and is projected onto his own work as a critical component of it, a fact which, by the way, has not gone unnoticed.

My aim is not to inventory the influences or "reminiscences" of the "immense pictorial *intertextual* apparatus of Valle-Inclán" (Salaün 121), an impossible task due to the multiplicity of examples that could be adduced. On the other hand, in his work "Valle-Inclán y la pintura" Salaün himself offers a tight and eloquent review of these instances, which infer, as the French critic indicates, "the amplitude of Valle's knowledge, his capacity for absorbing or impregnating and his eclecticism when reusing so much iconographic material" (121).

For my part, I am going to pause in a single example, paradigmatic of the versatile literature-painting overlapping in Valle's work: Italian Pre-Renaissance painting goes hand in hand with that of the English Pre-Raphaelites and the French Symbolists in the recreation of female portraits that Valle offers in his Sonatas, faithful to two end of the century prototypes.

Firstly, the *angelicata donna*, the frail woman, virginal and naive, shrouded in mysticism, whose more emblematic iconography is represented by Pre-Raphaelite paintings like *May Morris*, *Reverie*, *Study of a girl Holding a leaf* or *Beata Beatrix*, by Dante Gabriel Rossetti, which share a plastic reference in the figure of Mary in Fra Angelico's *The Annunciation*, without forgetting John Everett Millais' *Ophelia*, or the

female portraits by William Morris, Holman Hunt and Edward Burne-Jones, to name the most representative names of the Brotherhood, moreover often illustrators of literary works. In the *Sonata de Primavera* (1904) we find descriptions, almost taken at random, in which the writer expressly refers to his pictorial models:

> The other daughters of the Princess, seated in a circle embroidering Santa Margherita Ligure's mantle, talked to each other in low voices, their heads joining, and left the room murmuring cheerfully, a chaste and springlike group like that painted by Sandro Botticelli. (Valle-Inclán, *Obra*... 355, I)

Or this other passage, referred to the youngwoman, about to profess in a convent, whom Bradomín tries to seduce: "she seemed lost in a reverie: her face, pale with nostalgic ideals, was full of hope as if talking to invisible souls and her motionless eyes, contemplating the infinite, watched without seeing" (344, I). Her figure awakens clear echoes of Pre-Raphaelite paintings set out above, which in a further description Valle relates to their predecessors, the Italian primitives, in this new quote:

> Maria Rosario wept silently, and shone like a beautiful, candid Madonna (...) I remembered then the old paintings often seen in a former monastery in Umbria, Pre-Raphaelite tables,that a unknown monk painted in the retirement of his cell. (349, I)

Compare these descriptions with theone of Ádega in *Flor de Santidad* (1904), in which it is possible to perceive the same pictorial tastes, recreated by painters and contemporary writers:

> In the shelter of Celtic stones, turned golden by millenarian lichens, a shepherdess sat spinning (…) Her forehead was as golden as honey, and she had a candid smile. Her eyebrows were blond and delicate and her eyes, where a blue violet trembled, were mystical and fiery, like prayers. Guarding the flock, she spun her skein with rhythmic and slow moderation. She had a beautiful old name: she was called Ádega. She was very devoted, with a shadowy, inlandish and arcaic devotion. (Valle-Inclán, *Obra*… 606, I)

Coexisting with this *angelicata donna* prototype, and at the same time its opposite, the Symbolist painters recreated the second and no less emblematic of the end of the century archetypes, that of the *femme fatale*[10], which finds its best expression in the portraits of the biblical Salomé—the Hebrew princess who asks Herod for the head of John the Baptist as a reward for her dancing.[11] The more representative painters of this archetype are Gustave Moreau[12] or Odilon Redon and among Spanish painters from the Café de Levante, Romero de Torres Anglada Camarasa, who also recreated the myth so dear to Fin de Siécle tastes. These women share beauty features and the ability to seduce, women who exert a diabolic fascination on the men who under their

"infernal" dominion eventually lose control. A prototype—a female master in the art of temptation—in which characteristics of diverse feminine personages with distant antecedents converge. [13]

Consider the description of the Niña Chole, the seductiveprotagonist of *Sonata de Estío* (1903), whom the Marquis de Bradomín—narrator of the story, presented in the form of memoirs—describes the first time he sees her, in an exotic Mexican setting, the natural environment of the girl who with her beauty seduces the Marquis, a newcomer to the Aztec country:

> It was a bronzed, exotic beauty, with that strange and undulating grace of the nomadic races, a hieratic and serpentine figure whose contemplation evoked the memory of those princess daughters of the sun, who in Indian poems shine with the double sacerdotal and voluptuous enchantment [···] Her long black mane fell loosely, herhuipil playing across her classic breast. Unfortunately I could only see her face the rare times that towards me she turned it. But I made up for the face at the sight of that which her wimple did not manage to cover, admiring the morbid suppleness of her shoulders and the contour of her neck. God help me! It seemed to me that that body burnished by the fiery Yucatan suns exhaled languid effluvia, and that I inhaled and drank them, was intoxicated with them... [...] On seeing her face, my heart sank. She had the same smile as Lili. The Lili I do not know whether I loved, or hated! (Valle-Inclán, *Obra*··· 393 – 394)

However, this feminine prototype which Valle uses in his early works has a later manifestation in a poem of the *El Pasajero* (1920) entitled "Rosa de Oriente". This composition, in its original and handwritten version (ca. 1914) is dedicated to the exotic dancer Tórtola Valencia[14], who symbolises the artistic syncretism—which the author had such a liking for—, by uniting movements, gestures, music and plasticity in her dancing. Last but not least, in her performances, which Valle went to in the second decade of the last century, she added the sensuality, the beauty and the mystery that emanated from her. These features are condensed in the following verses of the mentioned iconographic sonnet:

> Tiene el andar la gracia del felino
> Es toda llena de profundos ecos.
> Anuncian sus corales y sus flecos
> Un ensueño oriental de lo divino
> Los ojos negros, cálidos, astutos,
> Triste de ciencia antigua la sonrisa
> Y la falda de flores una brisa [···][15]

(*Her swaying is of feline grace/she is full of deep echoes. / her corals and fringes announce/ An oriental dream of the divine/, warm, smart, black eyes/ her smile, the sadness of old science/and her floral skirt, a breeze* [...])

This reconciliation of the musical and plastic arts, which finds an exemplary blend in dancing, according to the writer, sustains his notion of "the work of total art", a goal Valle aspires to.

This same type of woman, although in a version of a very different sign may be glimpsed at behind the figure of another character, who appears in work published after the ones seen hitherto. I'm referring to La Pepona, the protagonist of the play *La Cabeza del Bautista* (1924), whose title refers specifically to the biblical figure associated with the myth of Salome. This instance presents the peculiarity that Valle carries out a re-reading of *ut pictura poesis*, using a grotesque and distorting mirror game—typical of the *esperpento*—which he submits the figure of the woman to, thus moving away from his Symbolist origins and approaching pictorial Expressionism, in a set of loose brush strokes that make up her portrait: "A big woman with black curls, dark circles under her eyes, rouge on her cheeks, at the back of the café plays with the cat" (Valle-Inclán, *Obra*… 1175, II), "The big woman tied a garter, showing her striped stockings to the eyes of the cat and the Spaniard" (1178, II), "Rearranging her hair and patting her hips, she approaches the window…" (1184, II). To sum up, the *femme fatal* prototype, the female seducer par excellence shows its enormous vitality in the turn-of-the-century literature and painting. As regards Valle, he was particularly attracted by such a figure as is proven in his wide range of works from 1895 to 1935.

However, beyond the specific citations or allusions, the interest shown in the work of the great individuals of the past or contemporary artistic currents (Pre-Raphaelitism, Symbolism, Impressionism or Expressionism), which caught his eye and also left a clear imprint on his texts, Valle carries out reflections on Art. From this perspective, controversial son of his time and this time, Valle was intolerant and uncompromising with the artistic vulgarity, distilled, in his opinion, by the then-current exhibitions which hosted a conformist art, indebted to obsolete aesthetic premises. Valle denounced such an artistic conformism in his chronicle of the Closing of the national Exhibition of 1908, in no uncertain terms:

> The exhibition has closed its doors. Those thousand emotion-less pictures and that art-lessbustle of statues, a farce of hospice plasterers. All that world of triviality and vulgarity that in my memory now appears to me with an exact expression of its value [...]

In opposition to thisrealistic and mimetic art, the Galician author presents models in consistence with his own vision of art, in which the image, the visual and the plastic acquire a unique role, an art fleeing from ephemeral fashions in search of a synthesis, a notion central to Symbolism, which involves an effort to combine elements to produce a self-referential reality:

> The work of art that has lasted a thousand years is one that is more likely to last another thousand. What was present for centuries is what will remain so in the

> future, with the august force, disdainful of works that only have the present time of a day. The fashions that another fashion buries without ever reaching the lofty prestige of tradition! (Valle-Inclán, *Obra*... 1498)

It is precisely in the two aforementioned series of chronicles, published in two newspapers of Madrid—*El Mundo* (1908)[16] and *Nuevo Mundo* (1912)—[17], on the occasion of the National Exhibition of Fine Arts in those same years, where Valle presents observations and opinions about contemporary Spanish artists. In these artists, he finds a deep aesthetic harmony[18], allowing for a gleaning of ideas, which whilst not giving shape to a doctrinal corpus, reveal the unequivocally idealistic source of their concept of art, following the path traced from Plato to Bergson.

However, Valle later re-elaborated his thoughts in order to incorporate them in his aesthetic postulates developed in *La Lámpara Maravillosa. Ejercicios espirituales* (1916), his treatise on aesthetics, where they make perfect sense, taking into account that two of the pillars of this work are: the Neo-Platonic and the ocultist traditions, which were also, a fact not to be forgotten, the pillars of symbolism and related currents.

Without aiming to construct a theory, which we are still far from outlining, I will now refer to some original examples from these Valle-Inclanian texts, pointing to the idealistic conception of art that the writer defends. As a starting point, Valle establishes a difference between "the low truth that the eyes discover" and "the essential truth that only the spirit discovers" from which an essential aesthetic principle exudes: "Nothing is as it is but as recalled" because "memory—we read in *La Lámpara Maravillosa*—is the alchemy that purifies all images" (Valle-Inclán, *Obra* ··· 1952, I). That is to say, the painting must be the truth seen through memory. With this approach Valle undermines those who use Velázquez as the flag of that "painting of photographic reality", without understanding that the Velázquez' brush "spreads all images in light, moving them away in space and coating them with a quiet charm as memory does when evoking the images that are distant in time" (Valle-Inclán, *Obra*... 1945, I).[19]

This idealistic conception of art brings to mind the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood theorist, not in vain were Ruskin's works part of Valle's personal library.[20] In one of the lectures delivered in Buenos Aires Valle says: The Pre-Raphaelite trends in Spain have the highest representative in Julio Romero de Torres, who has the distemper of the old masters, the richest..." (Garat 109).[21] In the chronicle "Del retrato" (*El Mundo*, 12/6/1908), which he dedicates to the Andalusian painter Romero de Torres, Valle affirms:

> For the work of artnothing is as it is but as memory recalls it. And in this process of evocation—like in that other one of forgetting—the road that memory goes down is the same for all even when the intensity varies in each individual: expression is the first thing to be recalled, then the characteristics of the line and finally, colour, almost as an accident. But what is never defined in the memory is light and chiaroscuro: memory is a sum of different times, and chiar-

> oscuro and light the impression of just a moment, so ephemeral that it changes whenever we move or whoever we look at moves. Therefore, [there is] nothing so absurd or lacking in artistic sense as the way of those painters who grant the accident of light the sole importance in the picture, and on the other hand, turn expression into something more accessory than the reflection of a red or blue curtain. (Valle-Inclán, *Obra*… 1508)

From this text it possible to gather that Valle gave priorityto line, colour and composition, which formally means a classicist vision of painting, hence his criticism of "illuminism" as represented by Sorolla in his personal way of assimilating French impressionistic concern with light[22] and translating it to the canvas. Furthermore, he grants superiority to concept over technique, a literary vision of painting which once again overlaps an "idealistic" concept of art. All "exalted art", meaning by exalted "that which captures the fundamental condition of things, is idealistic", he wrote in his 1912 article concerning the Cordovan painter Julio Romero de Torres, whose paintings, according to all the experts, is best defined as *idealistic*. Labelled as literary, the work of Romero de Torres is inscribed within Symbolism, with a determining influence of Italian painting particularly of the Florentine school of the Spanish masters, mainly of El Greco, and English Pre-Raphaelitism. Such are the aesthetic coordinates which gave rise to a personal style, following a crucial artistic journey, made in 1907, on the advice of Valle-Inclán, to France, England, Netherlands and Italy, where he came into direct contact with his main sources (Zueras Torréns 32).

In his articles and in *La Lámpara Maravillosa* Valle will disseminate other notes, revealing that idealistic affiliation, which in turn may be recognised in pictorial currents close in time, but also in the great figures of the past. Thus in Raphael —"the most wonderful of painters"—Valle finds that "supreme knowledge" which may be glimpsed at in the way in which he "always changed the line his models offered, but he did it in such a subtle manner that the eyes only can discern it when they are applied to studying it and compare the living images with those of his pictures. Then we see that none of those figures could move with the grace that the brush gave them" (Valle-Inclán, *Obra*… 1923, I).

This stylisation is achieved, says Valle in the catalogue he writes for Romero de Torres' 1922 exhibition, by "renewing formulas bequeathed byItaly. The Latin tradition gives them the contour and the definitive attitude of statues (...) The supreme condition of mystery that makes them worthy of Art." Valle emphasises the sculptural nature and the embodiment of classical painting, associated with the sense of stillness, one of the fundamental notions in *La Lámpara maravillosa*, in one of whose passages of the chapter "El quietismo estético" we read: "To discover in the vertigo of movement the supreme aspiration to stillness is the secret of aesthetics" (Valle-Inclán, *Obra*…, 1955, I). The latter seeks the embodiment of the eternal—constructed outside space and time—as opposed to the ephemeral, which, in his opinion El Greco was able to capture. According to Valle, El Greco, "under the insignificance of our daily attitudes, knew how to inquire the unique gesture, that one gesture which only death can give us back." As an instance, Valle refers to the portrait of

Cardinal Tavera, which El Greco painted from the mortuary mask "traced by Alonso de Berruguete" (Valle-Inclán, *Obra*… 1962, I).

The importanceacquired by memory as a filter in the perception of reality is complemented by two other essential notes: ambiguity and mystery. We must bear in mind that the French painter Odilon Redon, in *Notes to himself*, referred to the sense of mystery as "a question that always is immersed in ambiguity" (Lucie-Smith 75-6). According to the Symbolists, behind the shapes and colors arranged on the painted surface, there is always something more, another field, another order of meaning. The ability to suggest, the ambiguity—there is no codified equivalence between symbol and meaning—the essence of Symbolist art: "Suggestion, that is the dream", said Mallarmé (see Lucie-Smith 55). Thus, behind the images and symbols another reality is locked which must be unraveled, and in order to reveal it, Valle demands the artist "to have perceptions beyond the limit that eyes and ears establish", a route to emotion and truth, qualities inherent to every work of art, as is expressed in "Divagaciones" (*El Mundo*, 11 May, 1908):

> Certainly, it is notnew virtues what the artist of today requires to be personal, but a new gradation, on adding to himself and his work, those two unique and eternal ones: Emotion and Truth.
>
> Since thedistant magnificent dawn of the great Florentine revival, there is no man who has the brilliance of the teachers, in whom something so unique appears that it cannot already be seen in the work of that one divine grandfather who was Sandro Boticelli. Everything, oldest and newest, has been in his brushes, that the only thing that could change was the several proportion in the two virtues of the aesthetic sum, which I would call the two wings whereupon, in time and space, Art flies. (Valle-Inclán, *Obra*…, 1501, II)

For the work of art to be one, Valle lays his stakes on that "archaic and modern charm, which is the essential condition of the work of art aspiring to be beautiful in order to prevail over time". According to the Galician writer, archaic "is nothing but the condition of eternity" (Santos Zas, "Valle-Inclán de puño…" 416) or in other words, the reverse "of the fashions that only have the present time of a day. The fashions—he adds—that another fashion buries without ever reaching the prestige of tradition" (Santos Zas, "Valle-Inclán de puño…" 416).

Should I want to summarise the series of loose brush-strokes presented hitherto, there would benothing better than the following passage, taken from a lecture entitled "Concepto de la vida y del arte"[23], in which Valle Inclán summarises these ideas, in a manner both synthetic and eloquent:

> It is, then, the aspiration of art to perpetuateforms, to perpetuate rhythms, and to give all things an esoteric sense of eternity and unity. And, thus, every artist has to discipline his spirit with such an austere discipline that all things will reveal to him the ephemeral and the permanent or, at least, durable, that lie therein. In order to achieve that discipline, it is necessary to be trained in evo-

king remembering, because in art, and as regards the work of art, nothing is as it is, but everything is as it is recalled (...). (Dougherty, "Valle en Valencia" 14)[24]

## Notes

1. Indeed, the International Conference, "Valle-Inclán y las artes", held at the University of Santiago de Compostela (25 – 28 October 2011) and organized by the Valle-Inclán Chair of this University gathered a large group of specialists who dealt with Valle's relationship with the arts: film, music, dance, visual, performing and graphic arts as thematic fields of said conference. The keys to all these arts-related fields have been deciphered within this conference, with innovative contributions. Congress Proceedings will be published in 2012.
2. Besides the aforementioned monograph on the three years that Valle was Director of the Academy of Rome, see Santos Zas, Mascato and Dominguez, *Valle-Inclán, Director de la Academia de Roma: estudio y documentación*, in *Anuario Valle-Inclán V/ ALEC*, 30.3. 2005.
3. From the late 19th century until the European war of 1914, the literary gatherings in the cafés of Madrid were the gravitational centre of writers, journalists, people of the theatre world, musicians and artists. They all formed part of the so-called new people, the modernists, the rebels, iconoclasts, the Bohemians..., who Valle would skilfully portray in *Luces de bohemia* as fellow adventurers of Max Estrella. The end of the Great War (1918), the dictatorship of Primo de Rivera(1923 – 1930) and the Second Republic(1931 – 1939) mark the transition to maturity and the birth of new artistic currents, which provide those literary cenacles with their own signs of identity, which used to take place in parallel with those of their predecessors. Valle was a regular attendant of the cafes and frequented, -and often presided over – the literary gatherings that enlivened the cultural life of Madrid. For more information, see the monographic number of *Ínsula*, 738, June (2008) and on the social gatherings Valle attended (see Santos Zas, "Valle-Inclán y las tertulias…" 13 – 15).
4. See Portal "Cátedra Valle-Inclán" in the Virtual Library Miguel de Cervantes which contains a wide selection of the designs of his works: http://bib. cervantesvirtual. com/portal/catedravalleinclan/. For more information see Joaquín del Valle-Inclán Alsina, *Valle-Inclán y la imprenta*…
5. On the cartoons and pictorial portraits, I would quote the catalogues of two recent exhibitions: *Valle-Inclán debuxado / Valle-Inclán dibujado* (1888 – 1936), Serrano Alonso and De Juan (eds.), and *Retratos de Valle-Inclán* (*Catálogo*…) that are accompanyAied by literary portraits of the writer, made by contemporary writers and intellectuals.
6. It is well known that Valle lost his left arm following a dispute with the journalist Manuel Bueno, held at the Café de la Montaña in 1899. The medical diagnosis indicates that the blow that Manuel Bueno struck him with his walking cane produced the rupture of the bones of the forearm, whose later necrosis determined the amputation (Hormigón, 256 I). This dramatic episode has been the subject of fanciful explanations by the writer himself and his contemporaries. Valle novelised the episode in *Sonata de Invierno* (1905, in which his hero, the Marquis of Bradomin has his arm amputated after being shot in a military skirmish between Carlists and Liberals. On the other hand, in the poem "Rosa del sanatorio," from *La Pipa de Kif* (1919), Valle presents the anesthetic effects of chloroform in poetic terms: "Bajo la sensación del cloroformo / me hace temblar con alarido interno, / la luz de acuario de un jardín moderno/ y el amarillo olor del yodoformo" (Under the sensation of chloroform/ the light of an aquarium of a modern garden/ and the yellow scent of iodoform/ make me tremble with an internal howl) (Valle-Inclán, *Obra...*, 1311 – 1312, II).
7. This essay was published in the book *La pintura vasca* 1909 – 1919. [Bilbao]: Biblioteca de Amigos del País, 1919, 3 – 10 (reproduced, among others, in Serrano Alonso 262 – 66).
8. For more information, see the following papers: Santos Zas ("Valle-Inclán, de puño…" 405 –

50); Mascato Rey ("Valle-Inclán y Anglada Camarasa..." 183 – 96) and Dougherty ("Valle-Inclán y la pintura…" 66 – 87), who analyse the relationship Valle with the painters mentioned.

9. Published in *La Ilustración Española y Americana* (22/2/1902), Valle extended and clarified the ideas outlined therein for the prologue of the book by Almagro San Martín, *Sombras de vida* (1903). He further rewrote them for the edition of *Corte de amor* (1908): "Brief news about my aesthetics when I wrote this book" (the article can be seen in Valle-Inclán, *Obra*…, 1461, I)

10. A detailed analysis of this turn-of the-century prototype and its legendary and literary antecedents can be found in my "De 'Raquel' a la 'Niña Chole'…" 91 – 107.

11. On the fascination that the character enticed among many different artists, from its first representation by Henry Fuseli (h. 1780 – 1790) to achieving its fullness in symbolism and decadence, see Molíns (17 – 65) and Wollen (89 – 93), in the catalogue of the Salomé exhibition, *Salomé un mito contemporáneo*.

12. Gustave Moreau dedicated more than 120 drawings, watercolours and oils to the figure of Salomé whom he considered "The emblem of that terrible future reserved for pursuing an unnamed ideal, inspired by sensuality and morbid curiosity" (see Molins 23).

13. Among those antecedents the name Lilith, also quoted by Valle is common-place. In Jewish mythology, she is considered Adam's first wife, whose Hebrew legend has its origin in an interpretation of the Genesis. Lilith is represented as a beautiful woman with long curly hair, usually red, and the many variants of the legend are associated with the demonic, rebellion and sexual freedom. In the same vein, it is necessary to recover the name of Delilah, Samson's seducer, who makes him lose the strength that lay in his hair, by cutting it while he slept, with all the erotic connotations that the gesture entails. My own contribution to this list of women would be to add that of Rachel the Jewess, who seduces the King Alfonso VIII, who abandons his royal duties for his lover, according to medieval chronicles, and has a long history in Spanish literature (see Santos Zas, "De 'Raquel' a la 'Niña Chole'… 91 – 107).

14. I have already dealt with this figure in the above-mentioned article ("De 'Raquel' a la 'Niña Chole'…). For more information about the dancer, her relationship with Valle-Inclán and the role he attributes to dancing, see Rosario Mascato, "Valle-Inclán, contemplatêur" 67 – 76.

15. As for the autographic poem "A Tórtola" (see Amor y Vázquez, 11 – 32), which I have transcribed in part, we know of several printed versions with different titles: "Rosa gitana. Poema de las rosas" (*El Imparcial*, 24/6/1918), "Rosa de Oriente. Clave III" (*El Pasajero*, 1920; and *Claves líricas*, 1930), and finally, "Rosa de Zoroastro", *Ciudad*, Madrid, 23/1/1935 (a poem that nothing has to do with the one published under the same title in *Claves líricas*). H23e publishes the same poem, under the title "Rosa gitana. Autógrafo" [1935], dedicating it to José María Castroviejo.

16. For this newspaper Valle wrote ten chronicles, whose titles are: "Exposición de Bellas Artes. La primera palabra" (29, March); the other nine under the generic title "Notas de la Exposición", are subtitled: "Las intrigas" (2, May); "Un pintor" (3, May), "Las tres Esposas" (6, May); "Divagaciones V" (11, May), "Santiago Rusiñol VI" (19, May); "Ricardo Baroja VII" (1, June); "Del retrato VIII" (12, June); "Las hijas del Cid IX" (30, June); and "La clausura X" (4, July). Henceforth quoted as Valle-Inclán, *Obra* . . . , 1494 and ff. See Eliane Lavaud (115 – 128).

17. The new series of 1912 chronicles is formed by: [:] "Divagación" (23, May); "Romero de Torres" (30, May); "Santiago Rusiñol" (6, June); and "Notas de la Exposición" (20, June). In what follows, I will cite as Valle-Inclán, *Obra* . . . , 1557 and ff. See Jean Marie Lavaud (286 – 311).

18. Such is the case of the Cordovan painter, Julio Romero de Torres, to whom he dedicates two chronicles in 1908 and 1912 as well as the catalogue of the Exhibition that he presented in Buenos Aires in 1922 (see Santos Zas, "Valle-Inclán, de puño…" 405 – 450; autograph facsimile, 421 – 30).

19. Invoking Valle, Romero de Torres said about Velázquez "the sublime painter gives line, colour and composition a serenity, which reality never has and is so far from it in an ultra-realistic sense as is the Beato Angelico with his wonderful idealism" (see Santos Zas, "Valle-Inclán, de puño . . . " 413 and 435).

20. Specifically, *Las siete lámparas de la arquitectura* and *The Modern Painters*. On the other hand, Ruskin, when dealing with Turner's painting, stated: "He did not paint this directly, he retained it, and a long time later, he put it on canvas (Ruskin. *Prerrafaelismo*··· 82 – 83; see Santos Zas, "Valle-Inclán, de puño···" 445 – 46, n. 54).

21. As regards this, it is significant that in 1910 Romero de Torres entitled one of his paintings *Flor de Santidad* in open tribute to the homonymous Valle novel possibly one of the works that best exemplifies the shared background of Pre-Raphaelitism in their respective works.

22. "Iluminismo" or "luminismo" is defined as a way of approaching reality starting from the fascination about the fullness of light. Its main representative is Joaquín Sorolla (1863 – 1923), whose palette is characterised, in his major stage (1900 – 1911), by strong light contrasts, in an effort to capture movement and drawing to barely recognisable limits, an effort which he applies to themes related to customs. Therefore, it is necessary to emphasise that Valle does not reject pictorial impressionism, but rather the assimilation of the French school that some Spanish painters such as Sorolla carried out (see Santos Zas, "Valle-Inclan, de puño. . . " 443 and the bibliography cited therein).

23. See *El Mercantil Valenciano*, 31/5/1911.

24. This study is part of the Research Project: "La obra y el legado manuscrito de Valle-Inclán", subsidised by the Ministerio de Ciencia e Innovación and FEDER funds (FFI2011 – 24 130). The Spanish text was translated by Karen J. Duncan Barlow (Universidad de Vigo).

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