

The Don Juan Myth in Iberian Galician Literature

Carmen Becerra Suárez  
*University of Vigo*

Follow this and additional works at: <http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb>



Part of the [Comparative Literature Commons](#), and the [Critical and Cultural Studies Commons](#)

Dedicated to the dissemination of scholarly and professional information, **Purdue University Press** selects, develops, and distributes quality resources in several key subject areas for which its parent university is famous, including business, technology, health, veterinary medicine, and other selected disciplines in the humanities and sciences.

*CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture*, the peer-reviewed, full-text, and open-access learned journal in the humanities and social sciences, publishes new scholarship following tenets of the discipline of comparative literature and the field of cultural studies designated as "comparative cultural studies." Publications in the journal are indexed in the Annual Bibliography of English Language and Literature (Chadwyck-Healey), the Arts and Humanities Citation Index (Thomson Reuters ISI), the Humanities Index (Wilson), Humanities International Complete (EBSCO), the International Bibliography of the Modern Language Association of America, and Scopus (Elsevier). The journal is affiliated with the Purdue University Press monograph series of Books in Comparative Cultural Studies. Contact: [<clcweb@purdue.edu>](mailto:clcweb@purdue.edu)

---

### Recommended Citation

Becerra Suárez, Carmen. "The Don Juan Myth in Iberian Galician Literature." *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 13.5 (2011): [<http://dx.doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.1906>](http://dx.doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.1906)

This text has been double-blind peer reviewed by 2+1 experts in the field.

This document has been made available through Purdue e-Pubs, a service of the Purdue University Libraries. Please contact [epubs@purdue.edu](mailto:epubs@purdue.edu) for additional information.

This is an Open Access journal. This means that it uses a funding model that does not charge readers or their institutions for access. Readers may freely read, download, copy, distribute, print, search, or link to the full texts of articles. This journal is covered under the [CC BY-NC-ND license](#).

*CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture*, the peer-reviewed, full-text, and open-access learned journal in the humanities and social sciences, publishes new scholarship following tenets of the discipline of comparative literature and the field of cultural studies designated as "comparative cultural studies." In addition to the publication of articles, the journal publishes review articles of scholarly books and publishes research material in its *Library Series*. Publications in the journal are indexed in the Annual Bibliography of English Language and Literature (Chadwyck-Healey), the Arts and Humanities Citation Index (Thomson Reuters ISI), the Humanities Index (Wilson), Humanities International Complete (EBSCO), the International Bibliography of the Modern Language Association of America, and Scopus (Elsevier). The journal is affiliated with the Purdue University Press monograph series of Books in Comparative Cultural Studies. Contact: <[clcweb@purdue.edu](mailto:clcweb@purdue.edu)>

---

**Volume 13 Issue 5 (December 2011) Article 8**  
**Carmen Becerra Suárez,**  
**"The Don Juan Myth in Iberian Galician Literature"**  
<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol13/iss5/8>>

---

Contents of **CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture 13.5 (2011)**  
Special issue **New Trends Iberian Galician Comparative Literature.**  
**Ed. María Teresa Vilariño Picos and Anxo Abuín González**  
<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol13/iss5/>>

---

**Abstract:** In her article "The Don Juan Myth in Iberian Galician Literature" Carmen Becerra Suárez discusses the presence of the Don Juan myth as it has developed in Galicia. She presents a panorama of the ways in which Galician authors — studies independently of their belonging to the Galician or Spanish literary systems — have dealt with this myth. The aim is to study the presence of the myth in this culture and the causes giving rise to several versions: from the three possibilities of "Don Juanness" found in the work of Ramón María del Valle-Inclán up through a short story by Marina Mayoral, as well as examples drawn from the works of Adolfo Torrado Ballester, Álvaro Cunqueiro, Gonzalo Torrente, and Roberto Vidal Bolaño.

**Carmen BECERRA SUÁREZ**

**The Don Juan Myth in Iberian Galician Literature**

Translated from the Galician by Karen J. Duncan-Barlow

Since its origins in seventeenth-century Spain, the Don Juan myth has given rise to literary discourses of all genres and in literatures of many languages. Spanish Galician authors have also paid homage to Don Juan. In this article, I present a panorama of the several ways in which Galician authors, both those writing in Castilian and those writing in Galician, have dealt with the Don Juan tradition. Within Galician literature, the first approximation to the Don Juan myth is that of Román María del Valle-Inclán. This is not at all surprising when we bear in mind that the myth is one of the themes preferred by turn-of-the-century authors. It can be seen as natural that these writers should pay attention to this theme if we take into account their understanding of mythology: myths provide them with a path leading to a knowledge of reality which can be dealt with from metaphysical, transcendental, and symbolic perspectives. I am not referring to classic mythology, but, rather, to a number of "characters" to be found in all literatures, related to themes such as decadence or melancholy. As far as Spanish authors are concerned, these figures are exemplified in Don Juan, El Cid, or La Celestina. Myths can be adapted to the philosophical attitudes of each author and act as a channel for his thoughts: the course of time in Azorín, the disestablishment of the "I" in Miguel de Unamuno or ethics in Antonio Machado. Valle-Inclán's incursion into Don Juan territory is not, therefore, a product of happenstance. His three versions of the myth reflect three different views of the character, views which were inaugurated by Romantic versions of the myth. These three perspectives are expressed in the main characters of Valle-Inclán's great productive cycles: the Marquis of Bradomin from *Las Sonatas*, Don Juan de Montenegro from *Las Comedias Bárbaras*; and Juanito Ventolera, a character from one of his *esperpentos* (a word used by Valle-Inclán to describe a literary technique characterized by a grotesque distortion of reality) in *Las Galas del Difunto*.

Between 1902 and 1905 Valle-Inclán published four sonatas containing memoirs written by the Marquis of Bradomín "in his old age," (unless indicated otherwise, all translations are by Becerra Suárez and Duncan-Barlow) whom the Marchioness of Tor describes as "ugly, Catholic, and sentimental," a description that is repeated by the editor in his introductory note. I do not intend to embark upon an analysis of the adjectives "ugly" and "sentimental," their ironic usage is evident since they invert the original scheme according to which beauty was a necessary quality of the seducer whose lack of sentimentalism is revealed time and again in his acts. Suffice it to say that the author seems willing to project the character he creates onto a specific religious background, installing him in the line of the Catholic Don Juans, which started in *El Burlador de Sevilla* attributed to the seventeenth-century dramatist, Tirso de Molina. The reference here is to those Don Juans who know that they will save their souls if they, at least in the final instant of their lives, repent, an attitude which explains the phrase "I won't worry about that just yet!" of the foundational text. The following words by Bradomin could be understood in this sense: "God willing, I would do as the gentile marchionesses of my days do, who go to confession every Friday, after having sinned every day. In fact, some, tempting and beautiful, have repented, forgetting that a hint of contrition is enough when feeling age draw nigh" (Valle-Inclán, *Sonata de Estío* 99).

We cannot forget that the genre used is that of the memoir. It is for this reason, and despite the many allusions which, throughout the discourse of the the sonatas refer to the European libertine tradition (Casanova or Sade), Valle-Inclán does not create a character of this figure, but, rather, recreates an old myth. The responsibility for the perversity of this old myth lies more in who constructs it — namely the aged Bradomin — than in the protagonist of the sentimental adventures narrated. Adapting himself to the poetics of his day and age, Valle-Inclán intermingles different styles and integrating into his work innumerable elements whose origin lies in outside sources. In the wake of modernism and taking as starting point the features which the character bears at the turn of the century — old age, paternity, repentance, melancholy — Valle-Inclán creates a decadent Don Juan in whom there are hardly any traces of the baroque *burlador*. Valle-Inclán's second incursion into the Don Juan theme takes place in his *España Nueva* and in *Águila de Blasón* (1906). This is the territory

of Don Juan Manuel de Montenegro and this is how his creator, in the stage directions preceding the second scene of *Águila de Blasón*, frames him: Don Juan Manuel de Montenegro is one of those womanizing, despotic gentlemen to be found like old portraits, in silent and dead villages, in villages whose feudal names bring to mind the rusty sound of armour" (*Águila de Blasón* 53).

Valle-Inclán himself states that, in the figure of Don Juan Manuel de Montenegro, he aims to renew "the Galician aspects to be found in the Don Juan legend." Insisting on the features which, in his eyes, are characteristic of Don Juan — "impiety, bullying, and women" — Valle-Inclán writes that "this last one, the Don Juan of women, is the Seville Don Juan, nostalgia of a harem. The peevish bully is the Don Juan from Extremadura, a borderlands Galician. The impious Don Juan is the Galician Don Juan, the original one, as our beloved Said de Armesto has explained" (Valle-Inclán qtd. in Reyes 75). Galician and impious, Montenegro defies the laws of both man and god and this defiance seems to be the sign of his vitality. His is a figure full of contrasts: old but still possessed with strength and desire; proud and impious, but god-fearing; a father who curses his own offspring; a seducer of women, but who loves his wife until the very end. He projects himself onto the Galician landscape and rural environment and medieval Galicia, superstitious and miserable, is the poetic stage on which Montenegro becomes believable. A detailed analysis of the materials with which Valle-Inclán builds the *Comedias Bárbaras* reveals some of the sources in which he may have found inspiration. In my opinion, Don Juan Manuel de Montenegro is the result of the mixture of the original myth of Don Juan, the Don Juan of medieval romances, and the Spanish legend of the historical Miguel de Mañara. The beginning of *Romance de Lobos* — encountering La Santa Compañía (a ghostly procession part of Galician folklore), a vision of burial, repentance, and the sharing out earthly goods — are all elements which appear in the Miguel de Mañara legend. The "Don Juanness" of Montenegro represents one of the lines followed by some versions of the Don Juan myth in the twentieth century, namely, those which, related to the Mañara legend, present a repentant Don Juan converted to an almost saintly figure.

There is a third thematic line which develops the Don Juan myth in the twentieth century and so in almost all literary genres: that of parody and farcical imitations. Along these lines Valle-Inclán recreates in a unique and innovative manner the Don Juan myth through the character of Juanito Ventolera in *Las galas del difunto* (1930). José Ortega y Gasset was the first author to establish the relationships existing between *Las galas del difunto* and José Zorrilla's *Don Juan Tenorio*, relationships which in scholarship has often described as a deforming inversion, a systematic *esperpentización*, a grotesque deformation, or a game of paradoxes. Furthermore, it must be borne in mind that the play, using the war in Cuba as a contextual reference, is articulated thematically around a value system based on concepts as heroism or piracy. Juanito, therefore, is not only a grotesque metamorphosis of the seducer, but also the embodiment of the idea of subversion as opposed to heroism. To reaffirm Don Juan's traditional qualities — as opposed to attempts to destroy the myth, to reinvent it by exposing it to a Galician characterization, or to use it as a vehicle through which a feature of sociocultural nature is presented — are the three paths that Valle-Inclán follows, as Manuel Aznar points out.

In 1931, the Coruña-born playwright, Adolfo Torrado, published a play called *Don Juan contra Don Juan*, a four-act play written in verse and classified by the author as a dramatic farce. The play, which is in no small way indebted to other works (those of Molière and Zorrilla, for instance), is based on the development of a thematic motif which, while not original, is novel in the way it becomes the central axis of the Don Juan plot. Here we also find a woman seducing hero: his list or catalogue of deceived women does not pale in comparison with the other Don Juans. However, his end does not come with death, but, rather, with the discovery that his seducing abilities do not lie in his social power, in his physical endowments, or his way with words, but in his fame. In other words, any one who introduces himself using Don Juan's name will obtain the same results with women. It is not, therefore the man who seduces, but the fame of the name. The challenge, placed by a character named Urbino, is met by Don Juan, and he allows his servant, Clarín, to take on his identity. Clarín does this, and woes and wins Elvira. Torrado's version follows that of Mozart and his librettist Lorenzo Da Ponte. It is in this opera that Don Juan's servant, Leporello, reaches his highest function. Not only

does he set himself up as the definite depository of the hero's memory, but he becomes his substitute, his perfect supplanter, developing the same role as his master's towards his female victims.

Towards the end of the 1950s, Álvaro Cunqueiro created a fantastical version of Don Juan, a result of the merging of the essential characteristics of the myth and other elements derived from popular beliefs and folklore. In 1955 the Galician edition of *Merlín e familia* was published and two years later, in 1957, the work is published in Castilian Spanish. However, in this edition some more chapters, unpublished in the Galician version, are added. These additional chapters are maintained in the final edition, published in Galician in 1968 (one of these additional chapters is *O Galo de Portugal*). Fragmentary in nature, Cunqueiro's work is structured in a succession of stories adapted to an almost invariable pattern: a traveler's arrival at Miranda, presentation of a problem before Merlin, and the solution of the problem. All the stories are narrated retrospectively by an aging Felipe de Amancia, a one-time servant of the magician, currently living with Queen Guinevere in the Lands of Miranda (a area in Galicia). All these stories, therefore, amount more or less to the memoirs of this narrator/character. Despite the work's brevity and beneath its apparent simplicity, it is not difficult to find an important number of traditional Don Juan characteristics which reveal not only the author's knowledge of this centuries-old myth, but also highly self-reflexive discursive construction, whereby the mythical nature is maintained. Don Esmeraldino da Cámara Mello de Limia, Viscount of Ribeirinha, is the name and title of this Don Juan, famous throughout Portugal for his amorous abilities. The admiration and envy of all and sundry, Don Esmeraldino is vain and a braggart: each of his conquests is made public by means of a notch which he himself carves into in a small mahogany slab he hangs on the door of his country house. One day, after he had obtained the favors of an opera singer who had been on a stage in Braga, his fellow neighbors decide to render him homage. In a gathering of the nobles and villagers who acclaim him, the Marquis of Évora, on the balcony of the hero's house shouts: "By Braga twice enfavored! Here we have the Portuguese Rooster!" and in the same instant, Don Esmeraldino is changed into a rooster. Since the physicians are unable to provide a remedy, a decision is made: he must be taken to Santiago de Compostela, to see if the saint can work a miracle. On the way, the rooster, locked up in a cage, swings on the mahogany slab that represents his amorous conquests. On reaching Meira Abbey, the committee takes a rest. The rooster escapes from the cage and is found in the abbey's henhouse, taking a good account of the hens, thereafter called Portuguese hens. Having returned him to his cage, the committee starts off again, but, on arriving at Melide, the rooster falls ill. On reaching Santiago, the rooster, consumed by fever, surrenders his soul to god.

The plot of the play suggests that Cunqueiro maintains the basic features of the myth: the hero's seductive abilities, the feminine group, and the transgressor's punishment. However, they are all subject to his overwhelming imagination and to his knowledge of the Don Juan tradition. Don Esmeraldino is the most handsome man in Portugal, although he is rather short in size with skin full of moles. His ability to seduce is not to be found in tricks or in false promises, but in his "big, black eyes" This is a neo-Platonic tradition, taken up again by Cunqueiro, which in the Renaissance acquired a more sensual orientation and that merged with the Christian tradition of the seducing power of the devil's eyes (such a demoniacal characteristic has also been traditionally attributed to Don Juan as an explanation of his power to fascinate). On the other hand, this Don Juan does not seem interested in seduction for its own sake, but in the effects it produces in others: envy and general admiration. Hence the importance the mahogany slab has in this tale as proof of Don Juan's triumphs. Traditionally, the catalogue or list of women scorned, which was originally due to dramatic economy (to avoid the repetition of seduction scenes on stage), in time came to represent past times, the hero's memoirs, always in somebody else's hands, normally those of the servant. By resorting to the slab, Cunqueiro not only reduces the amount of conquests to one — the seducing of Carla the prima-donna — he also emphasises the vain, bragging nature of the hero. In traditional presentations the Don Juan theme is structured at two levels: on the moral level, where Don Juan is a transgressor of the norm for which he had to be punished and on the theological level, where god intervenes saving or condemning the sinner's soul. Cunqueiro deals with both of these levels, but in a different fashion: he does not seem to be interested in the morality or immorality of Don Esmeraldino's behavior, in fact all the inhabitants of Braga are proud of their countryman and when he is changed into a cockerel they

are saddened. From a theological point of view, divine punishment is presented in two stages: a first stage, when he is changed into the rooster, which does not change this Don Juan's behavior, and a second, the death of this fornicating cockerel. It is precisely the hero's punishment that presents the most original feature.

Conqueiro's choice of the animal into which Don Esmeraldino is metamorphosed is a premeditated one. The rooster symbolises masculine vanity and braggadocio, "cockiness." All these components are combined in a perfect symbiosis in Cunqueiro's text, for Don Esmeraldino is transformed into a rooster at the mere pronouncing of the Marquis of Évora's words. Thus Cunqueiro presents the power of the word within the Judeo-Christian tradition; the creative power of the divine word which is found in the Holy Book; the power of the Adamical tongue, lost in Babel; that primitive language whose secret was kept by King Solomon, and, from him onwards is transmitted to those initiated in magic; it is the language of Merlin. Here Cunqueiro's version attains the level of fantastical literature. If the traditional stone statue represented the supernatural element that based its verisimilitude on religious beliefs, the extraordinary element in Cunqueiro (the conversion into a rooster) is present in more ancient traditions, certain remnants of which can still be found in Galician culture. There is a spatial and temporal distance between Ovid's *Metamorphosis* and Galician oral legends, such as, for instance, "O lobishome," "A doniña cerva," or "A cobra do encanto," but not an ontological one. The mythical elements Cunqueiro uses are of diverse origins: classical culture, the Don Juan tradition, the popular religious traditions of the Camino de Santiago, all combined with elements belonging to Galician and Portuguese culture. This blending of traditions makes up an apparently simple mosaic, in which the author's narrative complexity lies hidden.

In 2000, the Santiago de Compostela playwright Roberto Vidal Bolaño was asked by the Galician Drama Center — an organization created by the autonomous government of Galicia to promote the staging of plays — to write a Don Juan play. From its title, *A burla do galo* (The Mocking of the Cockerel) reveals the Don Juan line to which Vidal Bolaño credits his work and if the title were not enough, the subtitle makes it definite: "Vida e amores de Don Esmeraldino da Cámara Mello de Lima e Galo de Portugal." Before the *dramatis personae* Vidal Bolaño states that "what I have gathered about his real adventures was left written in *Merlín e familia* by Álvaro Cunqueiro, a man of fine pen and refined word, held by many as a glory of letters on this and the other side of the Miño" (26; Miño being the river acting as a natural border between Galicia and Portugal). Leaving aside Vidal Bolaño's professed admiration for Cunqueiro, the statement "what I have gathered about his real adventures was left written" implies that he accepts Cunquero's marvellous conceptualization which extends the limits of reality further than what is commonly accepted, thus making the border between reality and fiction blurry and imprecise. Such a position, however, will allow him not only to maintain one of the essential features of the basic Don Juan structure — the hero's death by means of a supernatural element, present since the foundational drama — it also allows the author to use supernatural elements drawing on convictions which are far from religious beliefs.

Vidal Bolaño's play presents a fascinating intertextual dialogue with Cunqueiro's short story, and, indirectly, with the centuries-old tradition of the Don Juan myth. By returning the theme to the place that, according to the majority of the experts is its natural element — the theater — the author produces a contemporary Galician dramatic piece on the Don Juan myth. Besides this, another achievement is that he gives back to the character one of its essential characteristics: the passion for mobility, for diversity, and inconstancy as a specific time experience. However, this is but one of the many themes that Vidal Bolaño recovers from the mythical tradition which has no place or is merely hinted at in Cunqueiro's text. The retrieval of mythical spaces, such as the cemetery; Porfirio, the servant, as a character and as dramatical element; the intensification of demonism in the hero's character; the seductive powers of fame — which could be an allusion to Torrado's version — are some of these themes. Many are the features which reveal the modern tone of this play such as the fragmentation of the dramatic material, the intensity of the dialogues from which all traces of narrativity are absent, and above all the meta-theatrical forms lead the audience to question the relationship between fiction and reality.

According to Manfred Schmelting's theory, we are dealing not only with "peripheral modalities," such as the prologue or the existence of a focalizing character, but also with "complete forms"



because of the moment of utterance. The fact is that *A burla do galo* contains within it Cunqueiro's story, the end of which, by means of a game of imaginative skill, is modified, extending the story content. Nonetheless, we could also state the exact opposite: the cockerel from Portugal (Cunqueiro's story) contains within it the dramatic piece by Vidal Bolaño, inserted in the temporal ellipsis that goes from Don Esmeraldino's carving the biggest and best carved notch on the mahogany slab, after prima-donna Carla's departure from Braga until the tribute that the people of Portugal render him. This is the temporal space omitted in Cunqueiro's story, which Vidal Bolaño uses to create Don Esmeraldino's dream, where he becomes a rooster. From a thematic perspective, the ambiguity in which the story ends is of great interest. Vidal Bolaño, like Cunqueiro, concludes with the tribute to Don Esmeraldino. Here, too, the Marquis of Évora shouts in front of the people of Portugal: "By Braga twice enfavoured! Here we have the Portuguese Rooster!" This is the last line of the play, followed by a stage direction that says "they put a crown on his head. During the fade-out, after a storm of vivas, a deep silence broken only by the cock-a-doodle-doo of the rooster (*A burla do galo* 208). The possibility of metamorphosis is thus left up to the audience and we do not know whether the dream was a premonition or a nightmare. Thus the play is maintained within a sufficiently realistic aesthetic framework without completely excluding the extraordinary or supernatural element necessary to maintain the myth.

In 1963, the Ferrol-born author Gonzalo Torrente Ballester published a novel entitled *Don Juan*. Not only does Torrente Ballester update the myth, he also tries to provide the reader with the reasons which justify Don Juan's behavior (the seducing of women). In this version, in the cause of his behavior lies his nature: "my personal perception of love serves, then, as a basis of my novel *Don Juan*, and at the same time within the novel there lies expressed ... a yearning for cosmic love which is reduced to mere individual sexuality, something that does not give what is expected, something that disappoints ... I believed that with that I had achieved my aim, I had found a cause and a motive for Don Juan's behavior" (100-01). Thus, the updating of the Don Juan myth and the justification of his "Don Juanness" are the basis for the version and are also responsible for its complex and playful structure. The result of all this is a work with several levels of meaning. A suitable understanding thereof demands a detailed analysis of the many loans borrowed from literary tradition (not only the Spanish one). At the same time, the transformation, reinterpretation, or subversion of all these levels, together with the author's personal vision, lead to the rebirth of the myth, offering at the same time original answers to the questions the myth has presented down the centuries. A calculated combination of cultural and fictional elements provides Torrente Ballester's version with the ambiguity necessary to confer verisimilitude to a plot that, taking place in Paris in the 1950s, tells of the strange relationships between a Spanish journalist (the narrator of the story), well-acquainted with the mythical theme, a atheist woman student, the philanderer's latest victim and author of a Ph.D. dissertation on Don Juan, and a very peculiar couple who introduce themselves as Don Juan and his servant Leporello. The reader (and the narrator) will never know for certain whether they are two actors, two humbugs, or if they really are whom they claim to be: the mythical Don Juan and his servant Leporello. In fact in a lecture delivered in 1966 in Madrid, Torrente Ballester stated that his homage to the Mozart/Da Ponte version, *Don Giovanni* was an obvious one.

The Cervantine technique of the novel within the novel allows a verisimilar presence of the invited guest of stone, a character of the drama who, together with the narrator and Sonja, the student, we will be "witnesses to" at the end of the novel in which Leporello and Don Juan take part as actors: Don Juan dies on stage, as the cultural tradition imposes, but then he bursts into real life, becoming part of our cultural reality as a myth: "I have died as Don Juan, and I will be him eternally. The place where I'll be him, what difference does it make? I am hell itself ... And, now, Comendador, I leave to be myself forever. He jumped and fell into the stalls which were suddenly lit up. With firm steps he walks toward the door at the back, which is also lit" (341-45). This would justify the presence of Don Juan in mid-twentieth century Paris: myths do not die. Besides this, however, the hero's age explains, not without a certain sense of humor, the changes in amatory techniques of a Don Juan who, despite his appearance, is old. Music is his current instrument for seducing women, since his physical condition is, logically enough, limited. In comparison with preceding narrative versions, Torrente Ballester's novel presents an important number of modifications which confer on the novel originality. One of these,

probably the essential one, is the way in which modality is dealt with. What we have is a first person narrative in which a protagonist in the first person (the Spanish journalist) narrates — from the present point in time — something that happened to him in the past. The presence of this "I" who tells of his Parisian adventure ensures unity in the discontinuous and fragmentary universe of the novel. However, this narrator, far from holding all the keys of the story, provides the information at the same time that he obtains it, while other items of information are given him by others. Therefore, in general terms, he is on the same level as the reader, since he obtains information at the same time and in the same way. Thus, for instance, everything he relates about Don Juan is knowledge he acquires from the words and actions of Leporello, Don Juan's servant, who at times is essential to the understanding of this version (the specific reference here is to "Leporello's narrative" and "The poem of Adam and Eve") establishes a communication which is at the same time direct and double between the reader and the narrator, since both know the facts at the same time. This function, conferred to Leporello, enables him to become the basic narrator of the novel, in detriment to the character who, structurally speaking, fulfils this role.

It is chapter four where we find out about Don Juan's history. The person now writing is the Spanish journalist, but he writes as the prophets did, in the Biblical manner, that is, inspired or "breathed upon" by someone else and that someone else is Don Juan, who narrates his own memoirs. Such a procedure is another of the resources used by Torrente Ballester in order to achieve a mythical treatment of Don Juan. The author wants to tell Don Juan's story in the first person (let us bear in mind that one of the bases of this version is to explain the essential nature of Don Juan), for only Don Juan knows his own past, only he knows the reasons of his behavior. But how to manage it? How to do so if he is a character who belongs to the story that someone else tells us, a story in which he is not the main character? How to tell a story that takes place four hundred years earlier and in different places at the same time as another, that takes place nowadays without changing the narrative perspective? Torrente Ballester could have chosen the Parisian Don Juan to tell his story directly to the journalist. Such a solution, however, would not be suitable: throughout the novel Don Juan is a character who, while at the fore, physically is placed on a level distant from that occupied by the narrator. We never see his face and the only time we are near Don Juan's face is in the theater when he changes from being a person and becomes an actor carrying out a role. In this case, however, Don Juan's face has been transformed with make-up. It is possible to consider that this character is only real when he is part of a fiction; that is why, in the instant in which he enters life, his physical person is hidden from us. We are presented with a faceless man, an inapprehensible figure who never speaks directly and he always does so through someone else, and although he is almost always absent, he is always being talked about. All these ways of narration are aimed at emphasizing the character's mythical nature, hence his lack of concreteness, his physical absence. And this is why I consider Torrente Ballester's use of modality a success: had Don Juan become a direct character-narrator of his story, his figure would be seen as a person with a physical presence, the charm would be broken and the myth would no longer exist. If the myth is something that belongs to collective sub-consciousness, here it is possible to see it in the fore, slipping from the narrator's sub-consciousness, lacking the deformations that any interpretation, no matter how objective, would add to it. Nevertheless, we cannot lose sight of the fact that we are faced with authorial games, the use of a literary resource that provides an answer to the formal problems posed by his personal vision.

In 1998, Marina Mayoral published a work entitled *Recuerda, cuerpo*, a collection of short stories inhabited by mythical characters who have been reincarnated as everyday characters. The connecting thread is the evocation of desire. The story "Adiós, Antinea" is a version of the Don Juan myth: Solita, a young woman and a dreamer temporarily bedridden with a slight tuberculosis has been told by friends and relatives who visit her of the arrival at the village of a handsome young man whom everybody talks about and without having even met him she falls in love: "Far before I saw him in person, I had received successive and several snippets of information about him. They all coincided in his handsomeness, in his extraordinary attraction, and in the strangeness of his behaviour, unusual in a person of his condition" (34). The man, Don Juan by name, is none other than the new village priest. Don Juan's beauty gives rise to a great amount of flurry among the women in Brétema, who pursue and harass him despite his age and social condition. Solita, restored to health, is perturbed



and obsessed: "it was in the chorus where I first saw him ... there was something in him I couldn't identify, but I shivered all over, looking at him, and that made me squeeze my legs against each other, something that peeked out of his eyes and was hinted in his lips" (40). The priest is finally sent off to a mountain parish as a cautionary measure against possible and rumored mishaps. He does not, however, leave Brétema on his own: he is accompanied by the bishop's niece, who, a week later, returns to the village, ashamed, to enter a convent some time later. Mayoral's story demythifies Don Juan and presents a character who maintains some of the features of the traditional myth, more or less transformed: the hero, young, handsome and fascinating; the group of women, scorned or seduced, and the sinner's punishment, as he eventually heads for exile in either Cuba or with the Foreign Legion. He is even repeatedly said to be in possession of a diabolical fascination which casts him in the mode of the classical Don Juan figure. However, it is obvious that we are not dealing with a mythical Don Juan: the absence of death, the facing of the hereafter, intimately related to love, deprives him of one of the features intrinsically necessary in granting him such a condition (one of its invariables), changing him into a Don Juan type.

In conclusion, Galician authors who have dealt with Don Juan are not manifold. Moreover, the only two versions in Galician take the myth further, by blending it with ancestral popular motifs, in which it is possible to identify ancient beliefs and traditions that constitute the Galician cultural substratum, which has not been completely lost. The Galician matriarchial structure may have something to do with the apparent disdain for this masculine myth, born in patriarchal society. However, it is also possible that Don Juan is no longer of any interest nowadays. He may have to be reinvented and divested of transcendent moral and religious elements. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that he will turn up again, here and there, with the versatility characteristic of myths and that allows each author to reshape Don Juan in his/her own way.

Note: The above article is a translated and revised version of Carmen Becerra Suárez, "El mito de Don Juan en la cultura y la literatura gallega," *Hispanística* 23 (2006): 511-27. Copyright release to the author.

### Works Cited

- Aznar, Manuel. *Guía de lectura de "Martes de carnaval."* Barcelona: Anthropos, 1992.  
Cunqueiro, Álvaro. *Merlín e familia*. Vigo: Galaxia, 1968.  
Mayoral, Marina. "Adiós, Antinea." *Recuerda, cuerpo*. By Marina Mayoral. Madrid: Alfaguara, 1998.  
Reyes, Alfonso. *Tertulia de Madrid*. Mexico: Austral, 1950.  
Schmeling, Manfred. *Métathéâtre et intertexte. Aspects du théâtre dans le théâtre*. Paris: Lettres Modernes, 1982.  
Torrado, Adolfo. *Don Juan contra Don Juan*. A Coruña: Imprenta Moret, 1931.  
Torrente Ballester, Gonzalo. *Don Juan*. Barcelona: Destino, 1963.  
Valle-Inclán, Ramón María del. *Las galas del difunto in Martes de Carnaval. Esperpentos*. Madrid: Espasa Calpe, 1990.  
Valle-Inclán, Ramón María del. *Águila de Blasón*. Madrid: Espasa Calpe, 1996.  
Valle-Inclán, Ramón María del. *Romance de Lobos*. Madrid: Espasa Calpe, 1998.  
Valle-Inclán, Ramón María del. *Sonata de Primavera. Sonata de Estío*. Madrid: Espasa Calpe, 1999.  
Valle-Inclán, Ramón María del. *Sonata de Otoño. Sonata de Invierno*. Madrid: Espasa Calpe, 2001.  
Vidal Bolaño, Roberto. *A burla do galo*. Santiago de Compostela: IGAEM, 2000.

Author's profile: Carmen Becerra Suárez teaches literary theory and comparative literature at the University of Vigo. In addition to numerous articles, Becerra Suárez's book publications include *Gonzalo Torrente Ballester* (1982), *Mito y literatura. Estudio comparado de Don Juan* (1997), *Guardo la voz, cedo la palabra* (1990), and *La historia en la ficción. La narrativa de Gonzalo Torrente Ballester* (2005). E-mail: <[cbecerra@uvigo.es](mailto:cbecerra@uvigo.es)>

Translator's profile: Karen J. Duncan-Barlow teaches English at the University of Vigo. Her interests in research include English studies, English-Spanish and Spanish-English translation, and translation theory. E-mail: <[barlow@uvigo.es](mailto:barlow@uvigo.es)>