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Contents

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Forms of Short Modernist-Symbolist Theatre in Spain

Abstract

The crisis of *fin de siècle* was for all of Europe an authentic theatrical revolution which – inspired by Belgian playwright Maurice Maeterlinck's earliest pieces – set out to transmogrify the traditional forms of Naturalism and projected itself across all the arts as a *réaction idéaliste* to Positivism. Spanish Modernism also responded to this renovated perspective on drama by means of a kind of localized Symbolism which promoted the phenomenon of 'poetization' of the theatrical event along with a new conception of the stage. This new kind of drama responded to an interconnected relationship between poetry and theatre, gesturing towards idealism in the treatment of certain themes or atmospheres, and finding in the one-act structure, which replaced the category of action with dramatic situation, the most suitable conditions to develop. Amongst the examples of brief Modernist-Symbolist theatre in Spain, we encounter Jacinto Benavente's *Teatro fantástico* (1892-1905), Gregorio Martínez Sierra's *Teatro de ensueño* (1905), Santiago Rusiñol's and Adrià Gual's Symbolist works, the several texts published in journals by Valle-Inclán or Pérez de Ayala, as well as other less known plays authored by the Millares Cubas brothers, Zozaya, Francés, Goy de Silva and López Aydillo.

A complete theatrical revolution took place throughout Europe towards the end of the nineteenth century. This also coincided with a much more complex cultural phenomenon, that is, the aesthetics of the *fin de siècle* and, more specifically, the Symbolist movement (Balakian 1969, 1982), which set out to transform the traditional forms of Naturalism and affected all artistic expressions as a *réaction idéaliste* in front of Positivism (Knowles 1934). In Spain, Modernism responded to this renewed perspective on drama by means of an indigenous Symbolism whose greatest achievements – aside from the extensive theatrical and stage productions of the

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so-called *género chico* which was enormously successful in the early twentieth century – depended on a wide array of influences. Some of these influences were among Shakespeare's plays those most characterized by fantastic elements or ambiguities, the most innovative examples of European drama (for example Henrik Ibsen's 'theatre of ideas' or Maurice Maeterlinck's earliest works), and the revisited carnivalesque short pieces of the Spanish tradition. All these generally contributed to promoting a form of 'poetization' and 're-theatricalization' of the theatrical event, as well as the emergence a new conception of the stage which is essential in order to understand the artistic revolution of the avant-gardes.

In his *Theory of the Modern Drama* (1956), Peter Szondi investigated the changes that took place at the turn of the century in the works of several playwrights who transformed the European stage – Ibsen, Chekhov, Hauptmann, Strindberg, and Maeterlinck – and which instigated a renewal of conventional dramatic forms. In considering these changes, the Hungarian scholar identified several 'attempts at preservation' of the traditional play, amongst which we may observe a preference for single-act plays, in which the brevity of the text requires greater concentration and dramatic tension. Indeed, this curiously became a model for many European and Spanish Symbolists:

> The fact that, after 1880, dramatists such as Strindberg, Zola, Schnitzler, Maeterlinck, Hofmannsthal, Wedekind, and, later, O'Neill, W.B. Yeats, and others turned to the one-act is not simply a sign that the traditional form of the Drama had become problematic. It also often represents the effort to save "dramatic" style from this crisis by presenting it as a future-oriented style. (Szondi 1987: 54)

The dramatic intensity of these plays is not solely related to their overall brevity, but to the depths that can be sounded in a particular scene, situation or visual frame: "The modern one-act is not a Drama in miniature but a part of the Drama elevated into a whole. The dramatic scene serves as its model" (ibid.: 55). Likewise, Köhler pointed out that the structural model for the short pieces – focusing not only on the conception of the literary work but also on the impression that it leaves – is related to the "unity of inspiration" to which Edgar Allan Poe referred in one of his most famous essays on poetics: "Symbolist drama met with its greatest success in one-act plays. In this, we might see an analogy with Poe's famous theory about the unity of inspiration which can be guaranteed only by a poem of short duration" (Köhler 1982: 420).

As regards the early twentieth-century Spanish stage, the production

of short drama responded not only to the success of the *teatro por horas* or *género chico*, but also to the revival of traditional subgenres such as the farce or *entremés* which were drawn from Baroque and eighteenth-century theatre and were present in Spanish theatre throughout its Silver Age and the twentieth century (Huerta Calvo 1992; Peral Vega 1999, 2001; García Pascual 2006). Although I will limit my analysis to Modernist-Symbolist theatre, it is worth pointing out here that some of these pieces, which derived from farce, were reformulated from a Symbolist perspective. We may even go so far as to suggest the existence of a "farsa simbolista" (Peral Vega 2001: 93-131) ["symbolist farce"], with special regard to works starring characters (Pierrot, for example) drawn from the *Commedia dell'arte* (see George 1995; Peral Vega 2007, 2008). Given the idealism in the treatment of certain themes or the presence of Symbolist resonances, these dramatic examples acknowledge the interlacing of poetry and theatre and the single-act format becomes the best framework for its development since the 'poetization' of drama generally takes place in short texts. (An exception is Valle-Inclán, who was one of the few playwrights to offer more extensive examples of this aesthetic in his *Comedias bárbaras* [*The Savage Plays*]).

In order to explore the Modernist-Symbolist short play in Spain, we must take into consideration several characteristic features of this sort of theatre. In the first place, an intriguing point of connection between poetry and theatre lies in the idealist reaction connected with *fin de siècle* aesthetics (more specifically, Symbolism). In the second place, we have to keep in mind the significant influence the Belgian playwright Maurice Maeterlinck exercised over the vast majority of these plays. Besides, the epoch's literary peculiarities and their widespread employment cannot be ignored if we are to understand the complex aesthetic traits of the theatrical forms produced in this cultural context. We must emphasize the fact that at the turn of the century the boundaries between literary genres, which had been until then more or less fixed, became blurred to such an extent that their features began to combine into a kind of hybrid genre whose purpose was to explore new expressive possibilities in order to enrich literary language. Yet, even though the Symbolist movement did acknowledge the artistic superiority of poetry as a genre, it also stressed that a poetic quality is not to be found only in poems: in their vision the "signo lirico" ["lyrical sign"] – to borrow the phrase coined by Pedro Salinas in a well-known 1940 essay – determines all the 'literary' expressions of an era, be they drama, novel, short story or essay.[1] In fact, Symbolist theatre ex-

[1] "Pues bien; para mí el signo del siglo XX es el signo lírico; los autores más impor

perimentations often gave rise to the production of closet dramas, whose composition was essentially looked at as a mere literary exercise. In such cases, the beautifully illustrated editions of these texts, published either in volume form or in magazines and journals, actually replaced their hypothetical staging (see Rubio Jiménez 1991). The expression "teatro para lectura" ["theatre for reading"] was invented and used as a derogatory term for the idea of a theatre that was not meant to enter the playhouse but to be 'staged' in our imagination. Indeed, these dramas 'shunned' the actual stage in order to attain a dramatic 'ideal' attuned with the Symbolist formulations of Musset, Hugo, Banville and particularly those by Mallarmé.

Much has been written about the relationship between theatre and poetry at the turn of century but criticism has not always clarified a framework for discussion, since the generalizing term 'poetic drama' has been frequently applied to texts almost exclusively in verse and of either historical or nationalist bent.[2] More recent critical perspectives have preferred the term "drama lírico" (Hübner 1999, 2005) ["lyrical drama"], a purely Symbolist expression drawn from one of Szondi's essays (1975) and specifically applied to one-act plays. However, there are also examples of longer pieces. Amongst the most representative instances of lyrical drama in Europe, we find a number of works authored by poets who tried their hand at playwrighting: Claudel in France, Maeterlinck and Verhaeren in Francophone Belgium; W.B. Yeats and T.S. Eliot in the English-speaking world, D'Annunzio in Italy, Hofmannsthal in Germany, Pessoa in Portugal, and, to mention just one poet-playwright beyond the European borders, Tagore in India. Mallarmé also wrote two dramatic scenes: the monologue *L'après-midi d'un faune* (1865), well-known thanks to Vaslav

tantes de ese período adoptan una actitud de lirismo radical al tratar los temas literarios. Ese lirismo básico, esencial (lirismo no de la letra, sino del espíritu), se manifiesta en variadas formas, a veces en las menos esperadas y él es el que vierte sobre novela, ensayo, teatro, esa ardiente tonalidad poética que percibimos en la mayoría de las obras importantes de nuestros días" (Salinas 2001: 35) ["In short; for me, the twentieth century is characterized by lyricism; the most important authors of the era adopt an attitude of radical lyricism when dealing with literary themes. This basic lyricism, essential (not lyricism in terms of words but of the spirit), is manifested in several forms, sometimes in the forms one would least expect and it is what gives the novel, essay, theatre that ardent poetic tone that we may detect in the majority of the most important works of our era"].

[2] Most histories of literature or theatre of the twentieth century refer to 'poetic drama' as a form of commercial theatre, written in verse and of a historical, mythical or nationalist nature. According to the late José Paulino Ayuso, these manifestations – represented by Marquina, Villaespesa, the Machado brothers, amongst many other authors – are a kind of "pacto … entre la tendencia del teatro hacia la lírica y los intereses sociales del público" (Paulino Ay uso 2014: 59) ["pact … between theatre leaning towards lyricism and the social interests of the audience"].

Nijinski's performance of Claude Debussy's musical version (1894), and *Hérodiade* (in its 1864 version), one of the first theatrical points of reference for the myth of Salomé. Nevertheless, it is Belgian dramatist Maurice Maeterlinck's earliest works that undoubtedly represent the most important contribution to short Symbolist 'lyrical drama'. I am referring here to the so-called "petite trilogie de la mort" ["little trilogy of death"] (*L'Intruse*, 1890; *Les Aveugles*, 1890; *Les Sept Princesses*, 1891) and *Intérieur* (1894), *Alladine et Palomides* (1894), and *La Mort de Tintagiles* (1894) [*Intruder*; *The Blind*; *Interior*; *The Seven Princesses*; *Alladine and Palomides*; *The Death of Tintagiles*.]. All these single-act *drames statiques* feature both the anticipation of death, which had already been formulated in Mallarmé's *Hérodiade*, and a conception of 'everyday tragedy', inspiring Hofmannsthal's short plays, W.B. Yeats's *The Land of Heart's Desire* (1894), and J.M. Synge's *Riders to the Sea* (1904), to name just a few writers who reprised the same compositional pattern.

Short "lyrical drama" redefines the traditional elements of drama with the intention of transferring the mechanisms of poetic discourse to the theatre whilst, at the same time, exploring the dramatic potential of poetry. Often defined as 'static', this theatre suggests a particular *état d'âme* or state of consciousness rather than a familiar dramatic plot, as the genre itself gives rise to a theatrical poetics which replaces the category of action with the one of dramatic situation. The *dramatis personae* are indeed the personification of ideas and feelings transmitted not only through words but also through gestures and pantomime, foregrounded either by the staging (set, lighting, etc.) itself or by the systematic use of a series of rethorical artifices. These artifices (such as repetitions of verbal structures, pauses and silences, ellipses, exclamations, and rhetorical questions) accelerate or delay the dramatic rhythm and endow it with musicality. Some characters are denied psychological individuality and a new orientation is also given to acting as happens with the idea of the "marionetas metafísicas" ["metaphysical puppets"] in Maeterlinck's early brief pieces (see Abirached 1994). In fact, he did not use puppets or marionettes, but rather he introduced new forms of performance especially based on gestures and body language which radically broke with the traditions of Naturalist theatre.

From the point of view of the dramatic structure, the presence of dialogue is one of the most relevant issues, given that in Symbolist plays it ceases to have a communicative function and becomes instead subjected to the effect that the play is designed to inspire in the audience. This is especially evident with reference to a series of speeches featuring a high level of 'poetization' which often do not relate to each other and yet con-

tribute to investing the texts with a semantic or affective unity; this unity does not necessarily have a repercussion on the advancing of the dramatic action which is customarily to be found in traditional theatre. Monologues, dialogues, and stage directions are not neatly separated since they are no longer functional from a purely dramatic perspective but are rather modes of expression of the 'poetic', be it in verse or in rhythmic prose. This is the case, for instance, of Maeterlinck's *Les Aveugles* in which we can clearly detect that "the dialogic form is insufficient as a means of presentation" (Szondi 1987: 33). Interactions are limited to a constant series of questions and answers which do not always obey a logical correspondence as they often take place simultaneously and are of a choral nature. The fact that the dialogues have no dramatic functionality indicates that the replies do not serve a communicative purpose either, but rather that they express a particular emotional state or the characters' general feelings as if this were a poem recited by many voices. Likewise, the lack of communication favours a theatre of silence, which underscores the sonorous and musical possibilities of the verbal signifier and assists the introduction on stage of other theatrical languages, such as music, mime, and dance.[3]

The staging possibilities for this kind of theatre may be associated with the 'theory of correspondences' coined by Baudelaire in a famous sonnet referring to reality as a 'forest of symbols'. He also alludes to the Wagnerian concept of *Gesamtkunstwerk* [total work of art] and its application to theatrical practice in which all arts can coexist by means of a renovated stage poetics that seek to create "un marco dramático para la poesía" (Balakian 1969: 154) ["a dramatic framework for poetry"]. Baudelaire considered the German composer as the genial precursor of 'future drama' in his quest for new modes of expression by means of integrating all arts on the stage, even though in practice music became the dominant force. This was attuned with the idea of the musicality of poetry – "la musique avant toute chose" ["music before everything"] as Paul Verlaine had it in his poem "Art poétique" (1882) – which became the norm in the works of Symbolist-Modernist poets. In this sense, thanks to the synaesthesia of objects, colours, gestures, music, and even perfumes and in

[3] In his famous study *Theories of the Symbol,* Todorov alluded to a sequence of symbolically interpretative leads in Symbolist drama, for example by referring to Maeterlinck's *Pelléas et Mélisande*. Todorov's observations can be applied to the analysis of short drama. These leads are 'repetition' (words are repeated because they do not have a conventional meaning but rather a deep meaning), 'discontinuity' (dialogue does not serve a communicative function because questions go unanswered), and 'indeterminacy' (the negative sentences, extremely vague space-time references, ellipsis, etc.); see Todorov 1983: 34-5.

cense, as was done at Paul Fort's Theâtre d'Art (see Fleischer 2007), the expression of an emotional state and the ability to produce emotions were intended to be projections of human fear and loneliness facing the mystery of the unknown and death (see, for example, Maeterlinck's and other Belgian playwrights' works). The use of objects charged with symbolic significance as well as the mixture of light and sound (a clock striking the hours, the sound of waves or of the wind, variations in the colour of the setting or of backdrops, focalization of specific scenographic elements by means of a deliberate use of lighting, etc.) were intended to induce a 'dream state' in the audience and suggest the impression of correspondences between the material (the senses) and the spiritual (the mind). Perhaps the best examples of these new stage poetics can be found in the famous performances at Lugné-Poe's Théâtre de l'Œuvre. (See on this Knowles 1934; Robichez 1957; Bablet 1965: 148-56, 156-67; Deak 1993: 134-83, 184-247).

The resonances of the Symbolist aesthetics in the forms of Spanish short drama gathered this varied score of influences in different aspects, all converging in a theatrical writing style, more than in stage practice, which is identified with the introduction of 'poetry' in the theatre as a dramatic and aesthetic category. In some cases the notion of "teatro de ensueño" (Rubio Jiménez 1993) ["dream theatre"] has also been used, in so far as it deals with attempts to employ an antirealist poetics closer to the world of dreams rather than to reality.

There are some precedents in the introduction of the 'symbolic' in Spanish theatre. Juan Valera's *Asclepigenia. Diálogo filosófico-amoroso* [*Asclepigenia. Philosophical-Amorous Dialogue*], included in *Tentativas dramáticas* (1879) [*Dramatic Attempts*], may be a suitable example. However, the first playwright to echo a kind of aesthetics that we may more precisely define as 'symbolist' was Jacinto Benavente, the author of *Teatro fantástico* [*Fantastic Theatre*], a small book first published in 1892, with a second version appearing in 1905. This book comprises texts that cannot be associated to a single theatrical tendency as they are an exploration of diverse dramatic forms. Benavente appropriated a new dramatic concept related to the dream state and fantasy taken from European Symbolism, which also included the sexual ambiguity of many of Shakespeare's comedies (I am referring in particular to *Twelf Night*, *As You Like It*, *Much Ado About Nothing* and especially *A Midsummer Night's Dream*). These ideas formed the basis of Spanish theatre from the Modernist regeneration up to Valle-Inclán and García Lorca. This foundational discourse of a new type of theatre has been investigated by various critics. According to Serge Salaün, *Teatro*

fantástico is "la más temprana y la más explícita tentativa de teatro simbolista o por lo menos no realista en España" (1999: 54) ["the earliest and most explicit attempt at Symbolist drama, or at least non-Realist drama, in Spain"] and its modern editors agree that "no parece exagerado considerar el *Teatro fantástico* como el texto fundacional del teatro modernista (simbolista) en España" (Benavente 2001: 19) ["it is no overstatement to consider Teatro fantástico as the seminal text in Modernist (Symbolist) theatre in Spain"].

Four dramatic pieces, which were included in the 1892 edition, are representative of the most innovative dramatic forms of the day: *Amor de artista* [*An Artist's Love*], *Los favoritos* [*The Favourites*], *El encanto de una hora* [*The Charm of an Hour*], and *Cuento de primavera* [*A Tale of Springtime*]. The first one is a kind of poetic manifesto which consists in a metaliterary piece of commendation of Modernism. The second is an adaptation of the Shakespearian model (in this case of *Much Ado About Nothing*) intended here as a tool for dramatic renovation by means of a courtly comedy. The third employs puppet theatre (in this case represented by porcelain figures) as a stylized version of this ancient form of popular theatre and as an expression of a dehumanized or depersonalized art. The final play (beyond the scope of this study as it is a longer piece) is an anti-realistic piece of 'dream theatre', also inspired by Shakespeare, which clearly defines the triumph of juvenile fantasy over the reality of an outmoded bourgeoisie.

It is worth dwelling on two of these plays as they show two typically Modernist-Symbolist motifs. *Amor de artista* [*An Artist's Love*] presents a dialogue between the Poet, a rebellious and apathetic young man like all the artists of his generation, and Don Prudencio, a conformist who lives up to his name and with whom the young man shares his ataraxia:

> ¡Ah, la voluntad…! No creo en su poder. Necia pretensión del hombre que no se resigna a ser juguete de una fuerza invencible y ciega. ¿Qué acción hay en nosotros voluntaria? Desde el nacer, fatalidad que en nada depende de nosotros, hasta el morir.
>
> (Benavente 2001: 206)

> [Ah, willpower...! I do not believe in its power. It is the sad aspiration of man who will not resign himself to being the plaything of a blind and invincible power. Which of our actions is truly voluntary? From birth, an act of fate over which we have no control, to death.]

This general lack of willpower results into a preoccupation with poetic meaning itself, expressed in this case through the dialogue between the

Poet and the Muse and beneath which we may identify Benavente's own thought. This dialogue appears in the final scene of the play, in which the Muse confronts the Poet about the capacity of literary language to express feelings: "Por eso eres poeta, porque tus lágrimas tienen palabras" (ibid.: 212) ["That's why you're a poet, because your tears are words"]. Finally, in front of the Poet's concern for immortality, the Muse confirms his hopes of perpetuating in the future the same ideas and feelings which have inspired his works:

> Pero de tu inmortalidad, poeta, ¿quién duda? No sé si la conciencia de tu yo subsistirá a través de la eternidad. ¡Qué importa! Como en tus hijos hay carne de tu carne, sangre de tu sangre y, aun en la parte espiritual, ideas hijas de las tuyas y sentimientos que fueron tuyos; como por ellos luchas y te afanas, acaso porque sientes que en ellos continúas viviendo, y en ellos está tu vida futura, así, en tus obras transmites el espíritu que les dio formas, y a través de los siglos vivirás despertando, al contacto de otros espíritus, las mismas ideas, los mismos sentimientos que animaron en ti. ¿No es esto la inmoralidad? ¿Qué más quieres?
>
> (Ibid.: 215)

> [But who could doubt your immortality, poet? I do not know if your self-awareness will last through eternity. Who cares! As in your sons there is flesh of your flesh and blood of your blood and, in their spirit, ideas of yours and affections that were yours; as you struggle and toil for them, maybe because you feel that you go on living in them, and your future life is in them, so, in your works, you pass on the spirit which shaped them, and you will live through the centuries arousing, in contact with other spirits, the same ideas, the same feelings that they inspired in you. What is it if not immortality? Can you ask for anything more?]

El encanto de una hora [*The Charm of an Hour*] is a completely anti-realistic piece starring two porcelain figures that come to life and spend a night discussing the transience of existence and the fragility of emotions, which are as vulnerable as the very material they are made of. As we might expect, since we are dealing with a Modernist piece, the traditional puppets or marionettes, which provide the framework for this type of theatre, turn here into refined eighteenth-century Sèvres porcelain figures whose anxieties are rewarded with a night of love. Yet, dawn will come and show them the futility of their impossible longings:

MERVEILLEUSE. ¡Una hora de encanto!
INCLOYABLE. ¡La hora del amor…! La única que vale la pena de vivir … Si en este instante concluyera nuestra existencia y otra vez inmóviles quedara en nosotros solo la facultad de recordarla, ¿valdría la pena de recordar allí eternamente estos momentos de vida ficticia…? Pero no: estamos solos y, por diferentes caminos, hemos llegado al mismo sentimiento: el vago anhelo de algo, que es vida de la vida. (Ibid.: 96)

[MERVEILLEUSE. An hour of charm! // INCLOYABLE:. The hour of love...! The only hour worth living … If our existence were to end in this instant and once again motionless all that remained within us were the capacity to remember it, would it be worth eternally remembering those moments from a fictional life...? But no: we are alone and on different paths we have arrived at the same feeling: a vague longing for something, the life of life.]

Teatro fantástico was reprinted in 1905 and underwent some changes including the removal of one piece and the inclusion of several others that had appeared in journals and newspapers from 1892 onwards. Benavente set aside *Los favoritos* [*The Favourites*] and added *Comedia italiana* [*Italian Comedy*] (a humoristic farce starring Columbine and Harlequin), *El criado de Don Juan* [*Don Juan's Servant*] (a piece in which a servant tries to steal a conquest from the famous *burlador* with tragic results), *La senda del amor* [*The Path of Love*] (a 'comedy for marionettes' interlaced with metatheatrical elements and containing a libertine message), *La blancura de Pierrot* [*Pierrot's Whiteness*] (a subject for pantomime), and *Modernismo. Nuevos moldes* [*Modernism: New Forms*] (a metaliterary argumentative dialogue on Modernist aesthetics).[4] In this case, the playwright promoted the recovery of farce and puppetry as a means for renewal which sowed the seeds not only for Benavente's subsequent masterpiece *Los intereses creados* [*The Bonds of Interest*] but also for other playwrights' works. The direct influence of these farcical texts, which might as well have been pantomime or grand-Guignol shows in suburban Parisian theatres, became a kind of grotesque counterpoint to Benavente's symbolist dreams that would later draw their inspiration from Maeterlinck's theatre and poetic fantasy. Amongst these

[4] As suggested by Peral Vega (2012), this edition owes much to the publication of Martínez Sierra's *Teatro de ensueño* [*Dream Theatre*]. The contact between the two artists, who were close friends and collaborated on several projects, could have been the decisive factor for Benavente to recuperate the texts from a book he had published many years before and include them in a new volume which would be much more relevant with regard to Modernism.

pieces, *La blancura de Pierrot* [*Pierrot's Whiteness*] stands out as the first in a series of mime plays later cultivated by other playwrights. Pierrot moves away from his usual melancholic characterization and, as already occurred in some French mime dramas, ruthlessly commits a murder out of greed. This is foregrounded by an obsessive presence of chromatic symbolism linked to silence and absence:

> La idea del crimen se fijó negra, como cerrazón de tormenta, en el alma de Pierrot … Una noche de invierno salió Pierrot del molino y, como la luna clarísima blanqueaba su figura humana, internóse, arrastrándose casi entre los árboles, hacia la choza de la vieja. Antes de penetrar en ella tiznóse la cara y las manos con tizones de brasas … ¿Quién podría conocerle, negra la cara y negra el alma, en la negrura de la noche y del crimen? Roja la cara, rojas las manos, salía poco después apretando convulso un bolsón de cuero mugriento rebosante de monedas de oro … Ni el agua, ni el carbón, ni la harina, borraban ni encubrían la sangría roja. ¡Pobre Pierrot, rojo para siempre, espectro terrible del crimen! … Pierrot hubiera querido sepultarse en la blancura de la nieve inmaculada, deshacerse con ella en blancura; blancura del cielo, fría como perdón sin amor y sin misericordia. La nieve cubría su cara y sus manos con nueva blancura, borrada la negrura del tizón, borrada la sangre roja del crimen. Pero el calor más tenue fundiría la máscara protectora, y el mísero Pierrot, desde entonces, vive en la frialdad de una eterna noche. (Ibid.: 126-8).
>
> [The idea of the crime stuck in Pierrot's soul, black like a threatening storm … On a winter night, Pierrot left the mill and, while an extremely clear moon whitened his human figure, he headed to the hut of the old woman, almost dragging himself among the trees. Before entering, he painted his face and hands with charred logs of wood … Who could recognize him, with his face black and his soul black, in the blackness of the night and crime? He emerged after a short while, with his face red and his hands red, clenching a greasy leather bag, filled to bursting with golden coins. No water, no coal, no wheat could erase or hide the red blood. Poor Pierrot, red forever, terrible ghost of the crime. Pierrot would have wished to bury himself in the whiteness of the untouched snow, melting with it in the whiteness; whiteness of the sky, cold as forgiveness without love or mercy. The snow covered his face and hands with new whiteness, wiping out the blackness of charcoal, wiping out the blood of the crime. But the slightest heat would melt the protective mask and sad Pierrot, since then, lives in the darkness of an eternal night.]

Although this new edition of *Teatro fantástico* was not highly regarded by the critics, neither on its publication nor later, it did not go unnoticed

by Rubén Darío. In an article entitled "La joven literatura" ["Young Literature"], included in the column on contemporary Spain (later collected in a volume entitled *España contemporánea* [*Contemporary Spain*]) that he run in 1899 for Buenos Aires *La Nación* and published in 1900, he claimed:

> Dejo como última nota el *Teatro fantástico* de Benavente, una joya de libro que revela la fuerza de ese talento en que tan solamente se ha reconocido la gracia … Es un pequeño 'teatro en libertad' … Son delicadas y espirituales fabulaciones unidas por un hilo de seda en que encontráis a veces, sin mengua en la comparación, como la filigrana mental del diálogo shakesperiano, del Shakespeare del *Sueño de una noche de verano* o de *La tempestad*. El alma perspicaz y cristalinamente femenina del poeta crea deliciosas fiestas galantes, perfumadas escenas, figurillas de abanico y tabaquera que en un ambiente Watteau salen de las pinturas y sirven de receptáculo a complicaciones psicológicas y problemas de la vida. (Darío 2013: 117)[5]

Benavente's works were followed by the *Diálogos fantásticos* [*Fantastical Dialogues*], written by Gregorio Martínez Sierra (and his wife) and published in 1899. Immersed in the contemporary debate on the problematic and growing hybridazation of the literary genres, this volume includes nine "dialogues" – or prose poems? – representing a sort of experiment in poetic, narrative, and theatrical discourse. The titles of each of these texts (*Sursum corda*, *Hadas* [*Fairies*], *Obra de amor* [*Labour of Love*], *Rapsodia* [*Rhapsody*], *Musas* [*Muses*], *Vida* [*Life*], *Sirenas* [*Sirens*], *Esponsales* [*Betrothal*], and *Noche* [*Night*]) are related to oneiric Modernism in their reference to fantasy, in their being suggestive of various feelings, and in their ambition of creating instances of intellectualized beauty. In this sense, the most representative pieces may be *Sursum corda* (which features a Poet who enters a dialogue with Nature in order to recover his ability to dream), *Hadas* (inspired by the myth of Pygmalion, in which an Artist asks the Fairies to help him give life to a statue he has created), *Sirenas* (a piece that refers back to the mythological song of the sirens which, on this occasion, is

[5] "My final note is on Benavente's *Fantastic Theatre*, a gem of a book that demonstrates the force of a talent which has so far only been recognized for being funny … It is a small 'theatre of liberty' … These are delicate and spiritual fables linked by a strand of silk where you will often find, notwithstanding the comparison, the mental acrobatics of Shakespearean dialogue, the Shakespeare of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* or *The Tempest*. The shrewd and crystalline feminine soul of the poet creates delightful gallant parties, perfumed scenes, fine fan and snuffbox figurines that seem to emerge as if from an atmosphere created by Watteau and which act as receptacles for psychological complications and the trials and tribulations of life"

sung for a man striving for glory), or *Noche* (in defence of silence, which is allegorically introduced as the essence of poetry and necessary condition for various poetic creatures to find shelter at night).

Another notable example of Modernist-Symbolist drama is Martínez Sierra's 1905 *Teatro de ensueño* [*Dream Theatre*], which contains four pieces inspired by the turn-of-century aesthetics: *Por el sendero florido* [*Along the Floral Path*], *Pastoral*, *Saltimbanquis*[6] [*Tumblers*], and *Cuento de labios en flor* [*A Tale of Flowering Lips*]. As Serge Salaün has pointed out, "este libro ofrece un terreno privilegiado para 'observar', muy concretamente, la penetración de las corrientes modernas en España, la relación – estrechísima – del Modernismo con el Simbolismo europeo y cómo funciona el proceso de europeización de la cultura y del arte" (Salaün 1999: 13). ["this book is a vantage point from which to 'observe', very specifically, the penetration of modern currents in Spain, the (extremely) close relationship between European Modernism and Symbolism, and how the process of Europeanization of culture and art functions"].

This is perhaps the work that best summarizes Symbolist poetics, since it integrates multiple artistic manifestations, also perceptible in the typographic features of the book. These manifestations are completed by Rubén Darío's "Melancólica sinfonía" ["Melancholic Symphony"], which acts as a prologue, and the "Ilustraciones líricas" ["Lyrical Illustrations"] that Juan Ramón Jiménez wrote as an introduction to the texts. There are also constant references to the dichotomy between reality and dream, here identified with love, death, the transience of life or the impossible ideal. In particular, *Por el sendero florido* makes good use of the juxtaposition of the real world (Castile) and the world of dreams (identified with a cart run by disillusioned itinerant Hungarians); this combination refers to the topos of life as a road whose destination is tragically revealed by the death of one of the female characters. *Pastoral* depicts a confrontation between Alcino – who cannot see the beauty that actually stands beside him – and Rosa María – a young woman who wishes to relive her experiences in a fantastic dimension in the very moment they occur to her: "Si oigo cantar un pájaro, paréceme que tengo corazón de pájaro" (Martínez Sierra 1999: 189) ["If I hear a bird sing, it seems to me that I have a bird's heart"]. In the final piece, *Cuento de labios en flor*, two sisters, Rosalina and Blanca, although living in harmony, face each other showing a different perspective on life, which is also reflected by the sym-

[6] It is beyond the scope of this article to examine the world of circus, as its scale far exceeds the brevity of the texts analysed herein.

bolic opposition of chromatic fields. Nevertheless when a man comes between them, they choose to commit suicide in order to avoid conflict.

With regard to Catalonia, two figures prove fundamental in order to understand the dissemination of Symbolist ideas in Spain: Santiago Rusiñol and Adrià Gual. Both supported the launch of cultural initiatives, such as the *Festes Modernistes del Cau Ferrat* at Sitges (Barcelona) and the *Teatre Íntim*, and their work was a decisive step towards theatrical and artistic renovation. Amongst their dramas we may find Rusiñol's *L'alegria que passa* [*Passing Joy*] (staged in 1899 with music by Enric Morera), which examines the conflict between the poet-artist seeking an ideal (here represented by a company of strolling players) and a materialist bourgeois society. In its day, it was considered "una preciosidad; cliché maravilloso de un rincón de la vida en un pueblo; modelo de observación, de verdad y de arte, obtenido por Rusiñol en un momento de genial inspiración, y cuya lectura deja en el alma no sé qué voluptuoso pesar de vaga e indefinible tristeza" (Martínez Espada 1900: 125) ["a beautiful thing; a wonderful cliché from a corner of life in a village; it is a model of observation, of truth and art, obtained by Rusiñol in a moment of genius and whose reading leaves a residue in the soul of vague and indefinably voluptuous sadness"]. *El jardí abandonat* (1900) [*The Abandoned Garden*] is another of Rusiñol's interesting creations; it is set in a garden, once again symbolizing the conflict between the individual and reality, in which the world created by the artist is represented as set aside from a society insensitive to art. On the other hand, the painter and playwright Adrià Gual, better known for his work as stage director, also penned works which exemplify the assimilation of Symbolist ideas both in theoretical form and in their theatrical application. The most important of these are *Nocturn* (1895) [*Nocturnal*] and *Silenci* (1898) [*Silence*], two pieces which do not hide their debt to Maeterlinck's early works.

In addition to the introduction of idealistic currents in theatre, the other line of investigation on brief forms is indeed related to the reception of Maeterlinck's work (see Salaün 2002). Critics have emphasized the Belgian playwright's extraordinary ability to express "la lucha del hombre contra el vacío al darse cuenta del poder de la muerte sobre su conciencia" (Balakian 1969: 204) ["the struggle of man against the void on discovering the power of death over his conscience"].[1] Likewise, his interest in giving dramatic form to the invisible and the unperformable as well as to silence are at the source of his spiritually and metaphysically inspired theatre. His first pieces – *L'Intruse*, *Les Aveugles*, and *Intérieur* – display a symbolic dimension of reality and project a complex world of sensations, mystery, and unreality in which thematic concerns determine the creation of situations or

atmospheres to the disadvantage of dramatic action. There is no progression in the plots of these *drames statiques*, but on the contrary they contain a clear 'tension' caused by the imminence of death as an inexorable destination. Jesús Rubio Jiménez has identified the reasons for which Maeterlinck became an aesthetic model for Spanish Symbolists: "Sin extremar sus planteamientos como Mallarmé, su originalidad radicaba en unir las reacciones de los personajes, su drama interior, a los fenómenos naturales exteriores. Suprimía el decorado descriptivo (vieja aspiración de Banville) y renunciaba a cualquier análisis psicológico sistemático, sustituyéndolo por una sugerencia continuamente cambiante. Buscaba transmitir la interdependencia existente entre los fenómenos físicos y los espirituales. Voces y silencio, estatismo y movimiento, se combinaban de manera extraña. Sus personajes trataban de penetrar el misterio de la realidad, de percibir sus voces más profundas (recuérdese Baudelaire), una realidad enigmática y angustiosa a fuerza de ser hermética. El fatalismo maeterlinckiano impresionó a los simbolistas y generó toda una literatura derivada de sus cánones." (Rubio Jiménez 1993: 106) ["Without taking as extreme a position as Mallarmé, his originality stemmed from linking the reactions of the characters, their inner drama, to the external natural phenomena. He removed the descriptive scenery (Banville's old aspirations) and renounced any kind of systematic psychological analysis, replacing it with a constantly changing suggestion. He sought to transmit the interdependence existing between physical and spiritual phenomena. Voices and silence, static and movement, form strange combinations. His characters sought to penetrate the mystery of reality, of perceiving the deepest inner voices (remember Baudelaire), an enigmatic and anxious reality sealed off by force. Maeterlinckesque fatalism impressed the Symbolists and generated a body of work derived from his canons"].

Since the Catalan performance of *L'Intruse* during the second Modernist festival at Sitges (which took place in September 1893 in Barcelona and was supported by Rusiñol) and the staging of *Intérieur* at Gual's *Teatre Íntim*, the presence of the "poet of mystery", as Ortega y Gasset defined Maeterlinck in 1904, became a constant one. In those days, many articles were dedicated to him and his works and testify to the initial impact his theatre made on the Catalan media, soon followed by Madrid newspapers and journals. This interest coincided with the first translation of *L'Intruse* into Spanish in 1896, carried out by a young José Martínez Ruiz, known as 'Azorín'. In addition to Rusiñol, Gual, Benavente, and the Martínez Sierras, who were Maeterlinck's main translators in Spain, many others, such as Ramón Pérez de Ayala, recognized his contributions, if not totally

absorbed his influence in their theatrical projects. The first performances of his dramas (at small venues or before small audiences) and the 1904 visit to Barcelona and Madrid of his company, which included his partner Georgette Leblanc as the leading lady, are evidence of the modernity of his dramatic lesson, although much of the audience and many critics did not understand it.

His early influence on Spanish playwrights, deriving from his presence in the media a year ahead of his company's arrival, found expression in a series of pieces whose themes revolved around the anticipation of death. Valle-Inclán's *Tragedia de ensueño* (2006a), initially published in the first issue of the journal *Madrid* in 1901, is perhaps the most representative example of Maeterlinck's influence, since this work features an old lady who knits and laments the death of her seven children, knowing that the same fate will befall her grandchild. *Comedia de ensueño* (2006b) [*Dream Comedy*], published in 1905 by the same author, also contains elements of Decadentism and Symbolism. Ramón Pérez de Ayala's *La dama negra. Tragedia de ensueño* [*The Dark Lady. A Dream Tragedy*], published in the journal *Helios* in 1903, is set in a greenhouse in which a young man strives to forget a woman who represents death, while José Carner's *Cuento de lobos* [*A Tale of Wolves*], also published in *Helios* in 1903, insists on the notion of *le tragique quotidien* and contains scenic elements suggesting the inexorability of man's destiny.

The direct impact of Maeterlinck's darkest pieces is diluted in a singular volume entitled *Teatrillo* (1903) [*Little Theatre*], published by the Millares Cubas brothers, two intellectuals from Las Palmas de Gran Canaria who founded an important literary association and a *teatrillo*, a 'domestic' theatre based in their own house, and whose main concern was the dissemination of artistic novelties in the Canary Islands. This book includes short pieces which effectively summarize the aesthetic cornerstones of a Symbolism more closely identified with Christian idealism than with Modernist heterodox spirituality. It includes the inheritance of Maeterlinck's earliest theatre in the dramatization of several situations in which waiting for death is the central theme. The six texts contained in the volume are *José María*, *Espantajos* [*Scarecrows*], *¡Viva la vida!* [*Hurray for Life*], *La del alba* [*The Lady of Dawn*], *Pascua de Resurrección* [*Easter Resurrection*], and *Pura y sin mancha* [*Pure and Unstained*]. The most relevant piece is perhaps *Espantajos* which features two indolent old men who wait at a crossroads ("Toda nuestra existencia se ha pasado esperando" (Millares Cubas 1903: 77); "We've spent our whole lives waiting") for a stroke of destiny that may allow them to put an end to their dull and boring monotony of their lives and prove their Christian charity.

Also indebted to the Belgian dramatist, however indirectly, is Antonio Zozaya's volume *Misterio* (1911) [*Mystery*], a "tríptico campesino" ["rural tryptich"] composed of three independent pieces of Symbolist nature, here called "actos" and arranged as a tableau featuring stories which recreate a primitive and archaic world enveloped by a mysterious halo that causes unexpected twists in the dramatic action. The first "acto", entitled *Los relicarios* [*The Reliquaries*], is made up of thirteen scenes, and the second one, entitled *La vaca muerta* [*The Dead Cow*], has the same internal organization. The symbolism of the number thirteen alludes to the bad luck, normally associated with this number, that looms over the characters. The third "acto" is *Lo que lleva el correo* [*What Came With the Post*].

There are also several miscellaneous publications of short texts which represent a current of eclectic Symbolism. Amongst these we should mention novelist, playwright and renowned art critic José Francés. As happened with many contemporary volumes, the publication of his *Guiñol. Teatro para leer* (1907) [*Guignol. Theatre for Reading*] was organized both as a Modernist *retablo* (an altarpiece or polyptych) and as an imitation of wall paintings such as those by Julio Romero de Torres. The use of the term *retablo* is not casual, as *Guignol* is composed of five texts set out as if they were a harmonic painting divided into several parts: the longest one, *La leyenda rota. Drama en una tarde* [*The Broken Legend. Drama in the Afternoon*], occupies the central portion of the 'panel' which is framed by two shorter pieces. The book recreates mystical spaces which transport us to a ritual and tragic past reminiscent of Gabriele D'Annunzio in *La fuente del mal. Tragedia* [*The Source of Evil. Tragedy*]; of scenes of gallantry taking place in an imaginary Versailles-like country in with musics by Beethoven, Wagner and Grieg intertwine, in *Cuando las hojas caen… Paso de comedia* [*When the Leaves Fall... A Brief Comedy*]; of visions of a motorized and bohemian Quixote pursuing the unattainable, in *La leyenda rota. Drama en una tarde*; of childish romances and scenes of love within a convent, in *Una tarde fresquita de mayo… Sueño* [*A Cool May Afternoon... A Dream*]; and of the colourful strokes of rural Asturias where death is the only possible response to an idealized conception of love, in *Ofrendas de vida. Drama en cuatro estancias* [*Life Offerings. Drama in Four Stages*]. All is seasoned with literary, visual, and musical references that turn this work into a model of 'artistic theatre', although from a poetic rather than dramatic point of view since these were not meant to be performed.

The most interesting aspect of Francés's work is its close link to Symbolist poetics and to the aesthetics of Decadentism. Although the word 'Grand Guignol' initially suggests marionettes or puppets, in these pieces,

as in the theatre of Maeterlinck, the term takes on a metaphysical meaning; as Peral Vega has pointed out, the characters are "marionetas de un destino cruel – de diversa condición, aunque en su mayoría nacido de la imposibilidad para vivir en plenitud el amor – que manipula sus vidas sin que les quepa la mínima capacidad de resistencia" (2011: 14). ["marionettes of a cruel destiny – of a diverse nature, although mostly born of the impossibility of living the fullness of love – which manipulates their lives without the slightest resistance from them"]. In the same way, it is interesting to note the correlation between a number of dramatic situations – or plastic descriptions included in the stage directions which are similar to those written by Valle-Inclán – and early twentieth-century European and Spanish painting, since, one should not forget, Francés was one of the most important Spanish art critics of the day. This ongoing dialogue between writing and painting is one of the most innovative and original aspects of the book, in which the traces of a recognizable imagery and iconography may be easily detected: Gustave Moreau's and Franz von Stuck's sphinxes, the Pre-Raphaelite angelic faces, Modesto Urgel's sunsets, Ricardo Marín's Quixote sketches, Julio Romero de Torres' mystic or profane women, Ramón Casas' nuns, Santiago Rusiñol's morphine addicts, and Darío de Regoyos's rural landscapes.

Another miscellaneous volume, which has received little critical attention, is Galician author Eugenio López Aydillo's *País de abanico. Teatro de ensueño* [*Fan Nation. Dream Theatre*], published in 1912. The volume contains eight pieces which share a similar poetic style and evoke a 'dream theatre' which combines the themes and forms of Modernist-Symbolist imagery in the form of a poetic-dramatic tableau. *País de abanico* is dedicated to Jacinto Benavente, which is hardly surprising since it shares many similarities with Benavente's most antirealistic comedies, in particular with his *Teatro fantástico*. The title, *País de abanico*, refers to a 'nation' of fans which is indeed a space made of cloth trussed by ribs and embellished by floral motifs, landscapes, figures, and other decorative patterns. Symbolically, Aydillo's short dramas represent the embodiment of these same ornamental printings, which come to life on stage thanks to the dream-like and unreal dimension of dramatic art itself which allows us to accept that those painted characters come to a three-dimensional life. The multiple labels appended to the various texts (madrigal, comedy, tragedy, eclogue, legend, tale, etc.) are faithful reflections of the generic indeterminacy of that period and the variety of proposals into which the adherence to the fantastic was channelled. *País de abanico. Madrigal romántico* [*Fan Nation. A Romantic Madrigal*] dramatizes an evening encounter between a poet and a

countess. He woos her by reciting his poems and the whole scene expresses the relish of what is ephemeral. *Comedia de mininos* [*Comedy of Kitties*] is a kind of fable set in an eighteenth-century dining room and featuring three cats who at first seem harmless but whose evil characters gradually emerge as the text unfolds. Although the drama features animals – and we must not forget the symbolic importance of the cat as a sacred, mysterious, arrogant, idle, and feminine animal in the *fin de siècle* imagery –, the fairy-tale characterization of this piece makes it possible to ascribe human features and behaviours to its characters. *Tragedia de gnomos* [*Gnome Tragedy*] is set in a dream-like forest inhabited by fairies and princesses. *La humillación de Hércules* [*The Humiliation of Hercules*] is a dialogue between Classical statues and figurines which rest on a shelf, inevitably reminiscent of *El encanto de una hora* [*The Charm of an Hour*] from Benavente's *Teatro fantástico*. *El príncipe martirio* [*The Martyr Prince*] is a fairy-tale about a wanderer who seduces a young girl who lives in the hovel of an old *copla* singer. *Los esclavos lloraban* [*The Slaves Wept*] is a scene set in the ancient Classical world, but with a recognizable social backdrop referring to the contemporary pitiful situation of workers. *Idilio en la sierra. Égloga pastoril* [*Idyll in the Mountains. A Pastoral Eclogue*] is a dialogue between shepherds who speak of their loves. Finally, *La leyenda de Floridel. Cuento fantástico* [*The Legend of Floridel. A Fantastic Tale*] features Amarantina, a Princess who, against the will of her insensitive and tyrannical king-father, falls in love with a troubadour who once sang for her but later went his way and carried on wandering through the world. The young Princess kept thinking of him and waiting for him to come back to her until the Maga, a figure that draws on the Celestina, helped her understand that both art and love are unreliable and insecure:

> Un trovador! Un camarada mío; otro más de la caravana errante; uno que ama la libertad, que no reconoce patria ni reconoce rey, que no sabe dónde está el poder ni dónde el vasallaje. Sin patria, ni rey, sólo el amor, la belleza y el bien pueden dominar sobre nuestros pensamientos.
>
> (Lopéz Aydillo 1912: 117)

> [A troubadour! A friend of mine; one more member of the errant convoy; one who loves freedom, who has neither country nor king, who does not know where power or vasallage are. Without country nor king, only love, beauty and good can rule our thoughts.]

At the end of the tale, a melody reminiscent of the returning troubador's song is heard, and the young woman elopes with the man she loves going against social conventions and patrirachal rule in search of an ideal,

which in her eyes the troubador's himself embodies. And the Maga eventually declares the triumph of youth and love:

> ¡Oh, la mariposa de las alas de nieve! ¡Oh, la luz del amor, que atrae y mata con el poder de su brillo! ¡Bendita juventud, que así sacrificas el bienestar y sabes sustraerte a las ruindades de la vida!
>
> (Ibid.: 120)

> [Oh, the butterfly of wings made of snow! Oh, the light of love that draws in and kills with the power of its glow! Blissful youth, that thus you sacrifice comfort and remove yourself from the meanness of life!]

Finally, we should also mention two books by the poet and playwright Ramón Goy de Silva as examples of the oriental exoticism or mystical fantasy which is also characteristic of the genre: *Sueños de noches lejanas* (1912) [*The Dreams of Distant Nights*], including four single-act "poemas dramáticos" ["dramatic poems"], and *La de los siete pecados* [*The One of the Seven Deadly Sins*], published in 1913 but also known as *El libro de las danzarinas* [*The Book of the Dancers*] from 1915 onwards. The latter, in prose, consists in a selection of 'vignettes' on the legendary women of the antiquity (Mary Magdalene, Salomé, Cleopatra and Belkis, Queen of Sheba), who carry out pantomime dances, a theatrical form of expression closely linked to Symbolism (see, for example, its relevance in the theatres of suburban Paris).[7] Far from being mere examples of technique or bravura, these dances allude to the possibility of exploiting the movements of the body, here brought forward as a symbol, as a proper language or even as the expression of a state of mind. Among the most relevant examples of this 'theatre without words' there are Ramón Gómez de la Serna's well known 'pantomimas sensuales' (see Peral Vega 2008: 57-74).

The route initiated by Symbolism and its progression into theatrical Modernism later gave way to a series of contributions on the part of the avant-garde in which the presence of poetry on stage becomes a definitive fact, understood as an interdisciplinary relationship between the stage arts. I have here introduced only a few brushstrokes of a form which has not received much attention in the histories of theatre, but is of decisive importance in order to comprehend Spain's cultural context between the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century. The idealistic currents, the relationship between poetry and theatre, and Mae-

[7] See, in particular, Emilio Peral Vega's interesting and recent analyses of this theatre (2007, 2008).

terlinck's influence must all be kept in due consideration in order to gain a full perspective of the characterization and meaning of the brief 'poetic theatre' inspired by Modernism-Symbolism, which must be looked at as an important step in theatrical history.

English translation by Simon Breden

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