

# Valle-Inclan

**THE TYRANT.**  
By Ramon del Valle-Inclan  
... Translated by Margarita Pavitt ... New York: Henry Holt and Company ... \$2.50.

Reviewed by  
A. FLORES

**A** ONE-ARMED, goggled, hispid-bearded old man strolls, at the rush hour, through the very heart of Madrid's Broadway. He is reciting a sonnet to a group of young men. Trolley car conductors and taxi drivers yell at him stentoriously. Indignant waiters lunge from traffic policemen's whistles. To no avail. Imperturbably, Don Ramon del Valle-Inclan moves on, sipping with delight the vowels in his sonnet. Not until the last tercet is finished may the traffic proceed.

Don Ramon is the last member of that mythical family which came so near its termination with the death of Oscar Wilde and Paul Verlaine. His imagination is always at work. His beautiful lies come to us wrapped in a gorgeous, lyric garb. His very life is so bedecked with the festoons and astragals of his fancy that his biographer will probably expire before concluding his task. There are, for instance, about two hundred and thirty-seven theories about the loss of Don Ramon's left arm, and as many versions of how he induced the Rajah of Kapurthala to marry an unknown, timid, little dancer.

Valle-Inclan has been writing since the beginning of this century and he has been acknowledged as one of the masters of Spanish prose. He possesses the poetic quality, the fertile imagination, of his native province, Galicia. He is fond of the bizarre, the supernatural and the archaic. His works seem to have been exquisitely wrought by a gorgonzola-Bonvenuto Cellini inspired by a Barbey d'Aurevilly. In his "Sonatas" (translated into English by M. H. Brown as "The Pleasant Memoirs of the Marquis of Bradomin") the "Catholic, sentimental and ugly" Marquis carries on his Casanova existence in the polychrome and baroque setting of a D'Annunzio, whose "Figlia di Jorio" especially helped Don Ramon to create his comedias barbaras, and later a new genre, the esperpentos, a cross between the sublime and the ridiculous. The esperpentos are really literary abortions. In them grotesqueness mixes with charm, slang with symbolic language, chaos with distilled light. Since Alfred Jarry's "Ubu-Roi" literature had never seen such hybrid nightmares.

On nearing his sixtieth year, after all this training and experience in the manipulation of ambiguous elements, Don Ramon sat down and wrote one of the most significant novels of contemporary Spain—"Tirano Banderas" ("The Tyrant").

"The Tyrant" is an intense, lively, at times macabre, narrative of the glory, cruelties and downfall of one of those petty tyrants who, now and then, blossom like bloody castles in Latin-America. The novel takes place in Santa Fe de Tierra Firme, probably Mexico, though if we are to reckon it by the provincialisms used, it might be any place south of the Rio Grande. Don Ramon uses words from Argentina: Mucama, tilingo, ator-rante; from Venezuela: Fendejo, bochinche; from Mexico: Zoploti, Ipero, briago, chigado, gachupin, chamaco, guajolote, jarocho, guaco, tumbago; from Cuba: Choteo; from Peru: Concho; from Chile: Roto; and, not satisfied with that, he even mixes the currency, Peruvian soles with Venezuelan bolivares and Bolivian bolivianos. Most of this philological exuberance, so exciting to contemporaries of James Joyce, fades (through no fault of the translator) in Miss Pavitt's version. Yet Miss Pavitt's difficult task has been performed with utmost fidelity and at the same time with enough freedom and elegance to make of Valle-Inclan's novel an English classic.

The Don Ramon of the esperpentos discovered in these "warm lands" scores the sea a most appropriate stage for his inexhaustible fantasies and cynical travesties. His retablo holds brothels, pawnshops, mummings, casinos, jails, palaces, sandy wastes, agaves, prickly pears and mangrove swamps. Immersed in this contrapuntal atmosphere of sensuality, fatalism and superstition, live buffoons, ranchmen, prostitutes, diplomats, patriots,

a disciple of Memner "initiated in the Secret Science of the Brahmins of Bengal," and, as in Graça Aranha's powerful novel "Canaan," a baby eaten by boga.

In "The Tyrant" the torches of revolution flicker through the terrifying spectres of Valle-Inclan's own vivid imagination.

# Keeping Well

**MEDICAL INFORMATION IN SICKNESS AND HEALTH.**  
By Philip Skrainka, M. D. ... New York: Coward-McCann. \$7.50.

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The first four chapters deal with normal physiology and hygiene—the Human Machine, Keeping the Machine Fit, etc. Then communicable diseases are considered under the heads of the means by which they are spread: by discharge from the nose and mouth, by human excrement, by insects, by direct contact, wounds, infections, etc. After an account of the symptoms and objects of treatment of the diseases of all parts of the body, diseases of childhood and the preparation for childbirth are described in detail. "Emergencies and Accidents" makes a valuable chapter in a book on household-medicine. The book is sane and helpful.

# The Continuing Present

**THE MAN WITHIN.**  
By Graham Greene ... New York: Doubleday, Doran and Company ... \$2.50.

Reviewed by  
ENID BAIRD

An English critic writing of "The Man Within" has expressed fears for the literary future of the young author who has written a first novel of such distinction. After the spontaneous, almost extravagant, praise extended by the British press, one might well find American critics disposed to give the novel something of the more measured consideration that usually awaits a second novel of promise by young writers. But any predisposition to detect flaws in a piece of work so generally acclaimed is forestalled by the direct, unpretentious beauty of Mr. Greene's narrative. Even the advance publicity heralding the author's coming—twice removed—to Robert Louis Stevenson does not invite invidious comparisons.

Here is no plot concocted of whole cloth which one can point out dropped reads, and no elaborate tissue of emotional and mental analysis which can be proved shoddy. The book is subjective allism, but it is nevertheless the realism of action. It is the story of cowardice—rather the story of a man who knows he is a coward, and hates it. It is introspective and yet its verbs are those of being and saying rather than verbs of feeling or thinking.

Though not yet a dramatist in literary form, Mr. Greene has already learned that what cannot be portrayed on the stage is not essential to a theme. Con-

creteness and the strict economy of dramatic production characterize all phases of his writing. With them he has attained that vitality and feeling of the "continuing present" that creates dramatic tension even when the immediate actions are not dramatic.

Although the actual happenings of the book are exciting—including the betrayal of a smuggler crew by one of their number, a fight between the smugglers and revenue officers, a murder trial with the informer on the witness stand, the final meeting between the informer, Andrews, and his former comrades—they are only the background for the portrait of Andrews in his struggle with fear and failure and remorse.

The outward physical conflict never obscures that inner conflict, which is set forth with a completeness of sympathy and detail that precludes any denunciation but the one the author has given. Out of abject fear and sensitiveness and self-loathing, there develops momentary courage that seems the inevitable and wholly satisfactory victory of the real Andrews over his weaker cowardly self.

Restraint is a calculated quality of the novel that is particularly effective. Although the emotions portrayed are those of intense fear and shame and love, the characters neither think nor act extravagantly. Like real individuals they walk to a window, pick up a cup, go to sleep or do not go to sleep when their emotions are stirred. When they think, it is circuitous thoughts that have only a subterranean relevancy and forestall rather than convey meaning. When they talk, it is with the conversation of intimates, not the expansive completeness of explanation and description.

The finished skill with which Mr. Greene has integrated his materials into a complete and beautiful novel indicates a literary ability that has already been cultivated and disciplined. "The Man Within" is a first novel, but it is an accomplishment, not merely the promise of future accomplishment.

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