

PAINTING ON THE PAGE

*Interartistic Approaches
to Modern Hispanic Texts*

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PREFACE

Criticism in the poststructural and postmodern veins has been working toward a fuller integration of literature and other fields, especially the visual arts. Disciplinary boundaries are being crossed—and crossed out—as quickly as the cultural maps are redrawn. Those fields of representation grouped under “literature” and “the visual arts” are currently being studied in conjunction with major theoretical and methodological issues, and we are particularly invested in finding appropriate critical strategies that combine psychoanalysis, feminism, semiotics, and philosophy as they may be applied to late nineteenth- and twentieth-century Spanish and Spanish-American literature in relation to painting and to larger questions of art history. While some critics have made signal contributions in these directions, not very many relate interartistic theory to the specificity of Hispanic texts. (Incidentally, we say “Hispanic texts” as a kind of shorthand for “works written in Spanish from Spain and from Spanish-speaking countries in the Americas and the Caribbean.” We recognize that it may not be a neutrally descriptive term.) This book examines the relations between Hispanic literature and the visual arts by engaging in a series of interartistic explorations, which mediate new approaches with the more traditional concepts of *ut pictura poesis* and ekphrasis. Our project entails some obvious literary-artistic connections (literary works based on paintings, literary-artistic historical movements) but emphatically seeks to broaden the interartistic theoretical rubric in an effort to probe common literary and artistic representational codes.

We contend that this systematic interpretation and application of theories of visual representation to the selected Spanish and Spanish-American texts will contribute generally to the fields of literary criticism and art history by demonstrating specific possibilities of how theory can uncover new ways of analyzing works of art. Further, we wish to add to the criticism of major figures in contemporary Spanish and Spanish-American literature and plas-

tic arts while confirming the suitability of these creators' works for study in a comparative arts framework. It is well known to Hispanists that in the United States interdisciplinary studies of this kind typically focus on works from North America, France, or England, with the result that criticism of literature from Spain and Spanish America is often disseminated in relatively limited contexts. It is our hope that in placing Hispanic literature and art at the core of this theoretical project, the value and importance of these works will stand out more prominently on the North American critical scene from which we write. Since each chapter provides a fully articulated approach to an interartistic problem, the individual studies that make up the book will shed new light on the works of the artists under consideration from carefully constructed and integrated theoretical positions; demonstrate the deep affinities between writers of Hispanic texts and creators of visual works; raise crucial theoretical concerns that situate the art and texts beyond the historical, national, or aesthetic framework in which they have been traditionally placed, thus facilitating different "ways of seeing"; and, finally, chart new theoretical directions that may be utilized to study other artistic works, be they plastic or verbal.

"Reflections on the *Mirrored Room: From Work to Word*," the introductory chapter written in two parts (the first by Rosemary Geisdorfer Feal, and the second by both authors), gives an overview of the principal theories that approximate the literary and the visual arts. This exploration begins with a meditation on Lucas Samaras's *Mirrored Room* as metaphor for the interartistic approaches undertaken in the book. The mirror itself is a powerful vehicle that may assist in positioning the written text vis-à-vis the work of art, but to do so demands a treatment of metaphor and image along with a general consideration of the methodological potential and legitimacy of the interart comparisons. By putting into play the effects of mirrors in Samaras's work, we may see some possibilities for reflection—mental and optical—in the enterprise of comparative arts. This chapter presents a historiography with respect to the body of scholarly work that applies particular theories to literature and the visual arts. The conjunction of feminist and psychoanalytic theories is highlighted specifically for its import to the readings that comprise the core of our book, and the "new" art histories are reviewed with an eye toward map-

ping the critical trajectory that follows as we go from theory to application.

Chapters 2 through 6, written by Carlos Feal, address a range of modern Spanish texts, commencing with literary naturalism at the end of the nineteenth century and extending through the contemporary period. “The Temptation of Saint Julian in Emilia Pardo Bazán’s *The House of Ulloa*: Bosch, Goya, and Spain’s Fin de Siècle” begins with the premise that the story told in the third person is focalized through the protagonist, Julián. An analysis of Julián’s vision in *Los Pazos de Ulloa* reveals that his distorted images are rooted in the unconscious and processed through his rigid religious upbringing. Moreover, these images take shape in the implicit evocation of paintings by Bosch, Goya, and artists from the Victorian age. To the extent that Julián functions as a subject of desire, however, he is trapped in his own acts of contemplation, which take on the quality of a mirror or a dream. Finally, the novelist’s feminist viewpoint interferes with that of the protagonist, thereby creating fissures where the contradictions of “patriarchal” and “matriarchal” may be glimpsed.

“All the World’s a Museum: The Marquis of Bradomín’s Textual Exhibition” centers on Valle-Inclán’s *Sonata de primavera* [Spring sonata], in which Bradomín more overtly displays the decadent fin de siècle perspective initiated in *Los Pazos de Ulloa*. As the megalomaniac narrator, Bradomín aspires to take possession of the world of women around him through his aggressive vision, but this world onto which the protagonist projects his desires has the power to annihilate him. Bradomín thus resorts to freezing those women, whom he perceives as both desirable and threatening, into pictorial images. As the distanced spectator of his creations, Bradomín can exert his dominance much as a Renaissance painter does over his subjects.

The spirit of modernism that pervades Valle-Inclán’s *Sonata* is continued in the narrations that make up *Víspera del gozo*, the subject of chapter 4, “The Infinite Progression: Love and Art in *Prelude to Pleasure* by Pedro Salinas.” Salinas makes literary use of spatial forms by approximating temporal sequences to painting, thereby transporting the narrative flow outside of chronological time. Yet the opposite impulse is equally present in his work: there is a constant progression that seeks to surpass and replace current forms. A pictorial correlation to this impulse may be made with El Greco’s work, which is infused with an intense dynamism