

## Characteristics of *modernista* Poetry

### Stylistic Characteristics:

- concern with formal innovation, formal perfection, new, more perfect ways to use language:
  - introduction of new rhyme schemes and meters into Spanish verse (example: borrowed rhyme schemes and meters from French poetry), as well as revitalization of traditional Spanish verse
  - use of enjambment and mid-line caesura (i.e. pauses); this differed from 19<sup>th</sup> verse from Spain, which employed a regular rhythm with each line containing a complete thought
  - attempt to bring out musicality of language ("harmony of sound" reflects "harmony of soul")
- other important characteristics include the use of a rich, varied, sophisticated vocabulary and extensive use of metaphor, symbol, analogy (as opposed to direct statements)

### Thematic Characteristics:

- focus on "universal" themes, avoidance of particulars, of local or regional politics and realities (though this changes in the later years of *modernismo*)
- preoccupation with finding, uncovering universal harmony:
  - nature as pristine, harmonious
  - celebration of sexual love, passion; reclaiming it in order to restore harmony between the sexes
  - poet as a seer, as a "superior soul" capable of revealing the cohesion and beauty of life hidden beneath the chaotic exterior
  - syncretism: reconciling variety of styles, images, religious beliefs, philosophical systems, modes of discourse
- references to classical figures, esp. of Greek mythology and to "exotic" locales, such as Middle East and Far East (both tend to be filtered through visions of these found in French literature)
- promotion of a world vision shaped by unorthodox belief systems, esp. occult sciences, including astrology, magnetism, hypnotism, Gnosticism, freemasonry, alchemy, and Eastern religions
- cosmopolitan vision of the world (opposed to regional)

Use of foreign models: many *modernista* innovations were inspired by European, especially French, models. The most important of these include:

-*Parnassianism*: a late 19th century French literary movement, named for the journal Parnasse Contemporain, which reacted against what were considered the excesses of Romanticism by striving for faultless workmanship, precise form and emotional detachment

-*Symbolism*: a late 19th century French school of poetry which opposed itself to Naturalism and Realism by avoiding direct statement and instead using symbolic language to convey meaning

→ Both of these movements are contemporaneous with Spanish American Modernism, which points to one of *modernismo's* goals: to be modern, to be contemporary with, not lagging behind, the great cosmopolitan centers of Europe.

Additional influences include: Golden Age Spanish poets (generally discredited in 19th century Spain as being excessive); Greek mythology and poetics, esp. as reinterpreted by French poets; modern reinterpretations of Nordic mythology; Western (French) interpretations of the East, etc.