



PROJECT MUSE®

---

The Latest Style. The Fashion Writing of Blanca Valmont and  
Economies of Domesticity (review)

Lisa Surwillo

Arizona Journal of Hispanic Cultural Studies, Volume 10, 2006, pp. 275-276  
(Review)

Published by University of Arizona  
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/hcs.2007.0044>



➔ *For additional information about this article*  
<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/214586>

Barrero Rodríguez, Amalia Bautista, Elena García de Paredes, and José Luis Gómez Toré. Although each poet is represented by only a few poems, the anthology's strength is the creativity with which each of the poets dialogues with the Classical models and thus presents a showcase of talent within narrowly defined parameters. In addition to an overall index, one final element that enhances the value of this anthology was the editors' thoughtful decision to include a carefully constructed appendix that lists the provenance of each of the anthologized poems. With the original publication date, there is also listed any existing edition of the *Obras completas*, that the editors very knowingly identify as "habitualmente más accesibles," in contrast with elusive first editions that so often go out of print and are almost impossible to locate.

This anthology, carefully constructed and reflective of contemporary Spanish poetry's debt to Classical literature, will be a welcome addition to scholars of contemporary poetry in Spanish as well as comparative literature. The editors have indicated that they are currently at work on "una gran antología de poesía española contemporánea de tradición clásica; el material recogido hasta este momento supera ya los seiscientos poemas" (8). If this current anthology is any indication of the careful scholarship and insightful choices yet to come, we, like the faithful Penelope, shall await with fortitude and great expectation Ulysses's return in that expanded text.

**Margaret Persin**  
Rutgers University

---

***The Latest Style: The Fashion Writing of Blanca Valmont and Economies of Domesticity***

Iberomericana/Vervuert, 2004  
By Kathleen E. Davis

The middle class, consumerism and fashion provided the structure for generations of men and women in urban Spain to forge

new identities and create social networks. In her recent book, Professor Kathleen Davis examines how and why women might have been influenced in their fashion choices and how they reconciled its expense with the dominant ideologies of domesticity during the final decades of the nineteenth century. Davis analyzes the "lifestyle" and fashion articles by columnist Blanca Valmont published between 1888 to 1899 in *La última moda*. The breadth of information covered is impressive and Davis offers keen insights into the ways that Spanish female readers were informed about a myriad of political, social and cultural events of the *fin de siglo* through the prism of fashion. Blanca Valmont addressed the Spanish-American War of 1898, the Panama Canal, stock market fluctuations, positivism, feminism and women's property rights, in addition to topics more immediately germane to domesticity, such as children's education.

The book's unique contributions to our understanding of nineteenth-century Spanish literature and culture stem from Davis's departure from previous studies that have focused on various anti-consumerist stances in contemporary novels; *The Latest Style* dismisses concerns over possible conflicts between domesticity and consumerism and builds upon a reading of Valmont's sustained pro-consumerist discourse in *La última moda* to analyze how "consumer values mediate social hierarchies, economic systems, family structures, and gender roles" (121). It is with this perspective that Davis undertakes a reading of Galdós's *Lo prohibido* (written the year that Valmont began her columns) and Oller's *La febre d'or* and analyzes how the two authors employ the idea of the creative power of fashion to, quite literally, self-fashion one's identity within and through social stratification. Davis does not propose any absolute conclusions as to these authors' stances on the slippery topic of consumerism, but her analyses of its complexities enrich our understanding of the novels. Finally, while Davis reads Galdós alongside Valmont as cultural text, she astutely reminds us of Galdós's use of the reliable narrator to "ensure that we read the text as art, not tract"—an admonition that is applicable to many of his works (139).

While biographical profiles of authors are usually unnecessary for literary analysis, in this book, crucial information about Blanca Valmont is wanting. The majority of *The Latest Style* focuses on the columns of this “important” and “longest-running voice” in the world of Spanish fashion and readers would benefit from knowing the basic contours of her identity. Given that Davis was unable to uncover any information about her, this reader wonders whether or not Blanca Valmont existed as a historical person or only as a periodical personality. Did her profile encompass several ghost writers and ideologies? Whatever her historical identity, it would be useful to know who paid for her promotion of the fashion industry and what bearing they might have had on the course of the commercial outlet for which she wrote. Was she backed by any specific French designers? Are there extant records from the magazine or notarial archives in Paris, where Valmont resided?

*The Latest Style* is well written and a pleasure to read. Ten pages of illustrations complement Davis’ text. However, there were a few surprising repetitions of quoted material; moreover, the very brief conclusion opens with a paragraph that reproduces exactly a passage from Chapter 2. Her conclusion would have been an excellent place to summarize the related topics that Davis uncovers in this book but leaves to future researchers. Her highly suggestive book invites scholars to ponder the role of fashion in economic and cultural imperialism, as readers outside of Madrid were guided by Valmont to use French fashion to remove all markers of their provincialism and pass for urban and consequently, international citizens. Similarly, Valmont’s lessons to her readers on the economics of imperialism that underwrote the development of *haute couture* anticipate current discussions of the authenticity of “national culture” and globalization (35-36).

**Lisa Surwillo**  
Stanford University

---

***Fearless Women in the Mexican Revolution and the Spanish Civil War***

University of Missouri Press, 2005

By Tabea Alexa Linhard

The intersection of war and gender makes for a series of interesting paradoxes. On the one hand, war has long been seen as a quintessentially male occupation, a pathology that affects men much more than women. “Obviously there is for you [men] some glory, some necessity, some satisfaction in fighting which we [women] have never felt or enjoyed,” Virginia Woolf famously wrote to a lawyer friend in reference to the Spanish Civil War. If it were up to women, she implies, pacifism would rule. On the other hand, as Tabea Linhard points out in this fascinating book, one can argue that enlisted soldiers take on a female-gendered role defined by service, blind obedience, and sacrifice; there is even an association of soldiers’ shed blood with fertility. Similarly, on the one hand war reduces women to helpless victims whose lives and bodies count for less than those of men; women are rarely accused of war crimes, to be sure, but conversely crimes against women are rarely coded as human rights abuses, as Catharine A. MacKinnon has recently shown. On the other hand, though, war and revolution—temporary suspensions of social normalcy and its structures of repression—can provide women with opportunities for emancipation. War can offer an escape from conventional roles and spaces; a more prominent public role; and even the doubtful privilege of bearing arms and helping to wipe out the enemy.

Even these kinds of changes, though, tend to be short-lived. As Linhard shows in relation to post-Civil War Spain and post-revolutionary Mexico, the return to postwar normalcy is all too often accompanied by a reinstatement of traditional gender roles. Linhard argues, moreover, that this re-domestication of women after war and revolution is not only social but *discursive* as well. Narratives of war are quick to cast women protagonists in a stereotypical female role—positively or negatively; as heroines or