

IDEALISM VERSUS MATERIALISM  
IN  
THE THREE-ACT PLAYS OF JACINTO BENAVENTE

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I hereby recommend that the thesis prepared  
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**IDEALISM VERSUS MATERIALISM**

**IN**

**THE THREE-ACT PLAYS OF JACINTO BENAVENTE**

JACINTO BENAVENTE

Spain - Madrid - Sept 28 -

Miss Virginia Butler.

Interpuncta Perpetua.

Gracias mucho a usted.

He sido muy idealista -

he he humanizado triunfos  
el espíritu -

Es particular de la  
emancipación de la mujer,  
de su intervención en la  
vida política y particular  
del divorcio -

Muy atento a u. s. s. -

Jacinto Benavente

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## PREFACE

The work of Jacinto Benavente, holding today the foremost place in the field of modern Spanish drama is a varied and interest-provoking record of contemporary society. A detailed comparison of Don Quijote and Benavente's drama, Los intereses creados, aroused my interest in the presence of both idealism and materialism in the works of this modern Spanish dramatist. An effort to ascertain his attitude toward the solution of some modern social problems leads to the conclusion that he combines these two philosophies in his solutions of human ills.

By way of limitation the work for this thesis has been confined to an analysis of only the three-act plays of Benavente.

Acknowledgment is hereby made of the sincere gratitude due Dr. Rebecca Switzer and Miss Maude Wallin for their kind help and guidance in directing this work. Sincere appreciation is also expressed to the members of the library staff for their kindness in granting privileges for the facilitation of research.

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## CHAPTER I

### JACINTO BENAVENTE THE MODERN

Jacinto Benavente, son of a physician for children in Madrid, was born in 1866. He studied law for a time in the University of Madrid, but gave it up in order to devote his time and interests to literature. He was interested in the theatre and was himself considered a good actor. At one time he was even manager of a circus. Perhaps his early interest in dramatic performances caused him to begin writing plays. His first drama of importance was El nido ajeno, produced in 1894. Since then he has written a variety of plays which range in length from one act to five, and in subject matter from the life of an humble person of the lowest class to that of kings and queens. His work is outstanding in Spain, and his literary merits are recognized universally. He was awarded the Nobel prize for dramatic composition in 1922.

Benavente is considered one of the members of the school of 1898 who introduced new literary tendencies and practices. The social and artistic programs of these "moderns", as they are called, differed greatly from those of the writers who preceded them.



Each writer of the group may have represented a different phase or movement, but the majority of them had the same underlying purpose or aim. They endeavored to bring into existence a better national life for Spain. They did not always agree in their ideas for improvement, but together they fought against political "caciquismo" <sup>and</sup> against ignorance and religious intolerance.

One outstanding artistic tendency of the generation of 1898 was the refusal to accept literary patterns. These writers were individualists who chose from all schools the literary principles which best suited their needs. Benavente's dramas show that he believes in simplicity and directness. In direct contrast to the dramatic school of José Echegaray which immediately precedes him, Benavente's writings lack the melodramatic situations characteristic of Echegaray and his school. They wrote of occurrences which seldom come about. On the other hand Benavente's dramas portray simple, possible, and probable incidents of an every-day world.

Benavente is a chief exponent of the movement to avoid literary "españolismo". He accepts inspiration for his work from abroad. He creates characters and settings which are cosmopolitan. Dramas such as La honra de los hombres and El dragón de fuego relate action occurring far from Spain.

Remaining true to the beliefs of his school, Benavente

is not too modern nor too radical to realize the literary merits of great writers of other lands who came before him. He has read extensively the works of Shakespeare, Molière, and Ibsen. His translations of King Lear and Molière's Don Juan show how well he had studied these important English and French dramatists. Some of his great women characters are said to be results of Ibsen's influence.

It is true that Molière probably had a direct influence on the social comedies of Benavente; however, it seems unjust to say that he has copied directly from some of the Frenchman's work. Benavente has long been a close observer of society, and his writing social drama is not unusual. His daily life in Madrid has made him well acquainted with people of various classes. He spends much time in cafés, clubs, theaters, squares, and market places. In each place he learns what is happening, analyzes the types of people he meets, and records his observations in his dramas. He was, and still is, a "man-about-town-of-Madrid", as he calls one of his characters, Luis Tomillares of La comida de las fieras.

Benavente is acquainted, not only with the life of his own Madrid, but also with that of other cities and provinces of Spain and of other countries. He has traveled extensively at home and abroad. However, foreign interest is not predominant in Benavente. Significant of the interest in the home and

womanhood which he shows in his plays is the fact that when his mother was ill he is said to have stayed with her almost constantly. The beautiful love which existed between these two may have been the inspiration for many of the artist's admirable feminine creations. Mother love is a dominant theme of his dramas, and, certainly, his women characters are far stronger than his men.

It is evident that his parents influenced Benavente in his dramatic innovations. His father, as has been stated, was a beloved physician for children. He was a man whom they loved, and whose influence caused his son to be interested in children. Jacinto Benavente created in Madrid a children's theater and has written many dramatic sketches especially for it. He is sincerely interested in children's education, entertainment, and general welfare.

In spite of the new tendencies which Benavente introduces into Spanish drama, he remains true to the traditions of his nation. He does not write social drama because Molière did. He is a Spaniard who sees life as it exists and portrays it just as Juan Ruiz de Alarcón did in La verdad sospechosa, one of the first social or thesis dramas, written in the seventeenth century. Molière, influenced by Alarcón's work, developed this type drama in France; and when Benavente revives it for Spain, he is not copying Molière, but is remaining true to tradition.



Great masterpieces of world literature show in their composition a blending of materialism and idealism. The writers saw that these two elements are combined in real life; and since literature is the portrayal of life, they are inevitably reflected in literary creations. In Spain, as in other countries, the blending of materialism and idealism was found as early as the fourteenth century in El libro de buen amor of Juan Ruiz. This combination was developed to a greater extent in La Celestina of Fernando de Rojas, and was treated with immortal success by Cervantes in Don Quijote. Benavente has remained true to this tradition by combining in his greatest works the material and the ideal. The play, Los intereses creados, which is usually conceded to be his masterpiece, may have had as its inspiration Cervantes' Don Quijote, and it proves conclusively that in a well-balanced society the material can not exist without the ideal nor the ideal without the material.

Benavente has frequently been called a bitter pessimist and a hopeless satirist; but a study shows that he reveals life as it is, and is kind and compassionate toward suffering humanity. He imbues his characters with idealistic qualities and shows more optimism than is often accorded him. His characters are life-like portraits of men and women who possess a variety of characteristics. Some are impractically idealistic, others despicably materialistic, and many possess an assimilation of

idealism and materialism. An analysis of these groups will justify the expressed belief in Benavente's optimism and compassion for humanity.



## CHAPTER II

### CHARACTERS

In an effort to ascertain the attitude of Benavente toward the solution of some modern social problems, it has been necessary to make an analysis of the characters about whom he writes in order to determine whether they are of an idealistic or materialistic nature, and whether, as such, the dramatist has any hopes for the happiness of these people as he presents them. Such an analysis shows that Benavente has made various types of characters live in his plays. Some are purely idealistic to the extent of being quixotic, others idealistically sacrificial or resigned types, others are materialistic in various manners, and some few may be called adaptable or "happy medium characters" who represent a combination of the idealistic traits of Don Quijote with the materialistic ones of Sancho Panza, characters who embody idealism and materialism in the immortal work, Don Quijote, by Cervantes.

What, shall we say, determines that a character be considered idealistic? Varied definitions might be given, but all are rather indefinite, so one will suffice.

An idealist is an imaginative person, an unpractical day dreamer; one who pursues or dwells upon the ideal; a seeker after the highest beauty or good; one who strives after ideal truth and justice.<sup>1</sup>

It seems also that a truly idealistic person should incorporate in his life and actions the highest and noblest traits of character; he should have faith in God and mankind, and he should seek to serve his fellow-man.

Examples of characters whose lives are generally idealistic are found in the three-act plays of Jacinto Benavente. These are characters who make no outstanding demonstration of their idealistic natures through dramatic sacrifice or other acts, but whose lives as a whole are characteristically idealistic.

Esteban in Más allá de la muerte is a kind man who takes Dick, a young thief, into his home and lavishes on him the love of a patient father. The Exile in La ciudad alegre y confiada is unselfishly idealistic. His love for his country is a good example of the purely ideal. Danf-Sar, the king of Nirvás, and his brother, Duranf, characters in the drama, El dragón de fuego, are kind, lovable men who find themselves in the clutches of ruthless foreigners whose treachery and intrigue lead to misunderstanding and unhappiness.

Danf-Sar, like Don Quijote has implicit faith in himself

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<sup>1</sup> The Century Dictionary and Cyclopaedia, Vol. V, p. 2974.

and in humanity, and many times he might have said as Don Quijote did, "Soy quien soy, y sé quien soy". Just such pitiful faith is found in the character of Daní-Sar, the Oriental king, who trusts Europeans too much and finds himself in their power. Before his death, when he is broken and disappointed, he says:

No basta amar como yo amé. Para ser fuerte es preciso defender nuestros amores con nuestros odios, y yo no supe odiar. Todo era amor en mi corazón, y así le hallaron indefenso la traición, el engaño, la ingratitud, toda la maldad de los hombres<sup>2</sup>.

Cristeta and Magín from *El primo Román* are quixotic idealists. The former knows very little of the practical, work-a-day world, and she has great fantastic dreams of being Isabel la Católica or Joan of Arc. Magín, the faithful servant of Cristeta's father, proves to be a servant, father, and mother for the orphan girl. Cristeta and Magín are idealistic because they try to do good even when forced into contact with the hard cruelty of society.

Two of the most beautifully idealistic characters found are the Queen and Friar Laurencio in *Para el cielo y los altares*. The friar through his deep faith and his saintly living is given the holy privilege of performing miracles. The Queen believes to such an extent that her son is revived af-

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<sup>2</sup> J. Benavente, *El dragón de fuego*, Epilogue, 3, p. 271.



ter the doctor has pronounced him dead. The trusting, beautiful faith of these characters is a living challenge, far more poignant than eloquent sermons, to the renewal of our own faith.

Victor of La otra honra is at heart an idealistic Quijote, but he becomes so desperate after all his business affairs fail that he becomes a modern Sancho Panza. His decision is expressed in this speech to Carmen:

Tengo fe, una fe ciega, en que esta vez saldré adelante, en que podré demostrar que mi ineptitud era sólo--honradez. Ahora no seré tan honrado. No, aun soy incapaz de indignidades. Me respeto demasiado a mí mismo. Pero sabré adaptarme, contemporizar, sobornaré cuando sea preciso, seré hábil, más que eso, pícaro también a mi modo.<sup>3</sup>

But these characters discussed are so impractical that they are unable to adapt themselves as Víctor hoped to do for himself, and it is too late when they "come to their senses" and can say with Don Quijote, "Yo fui loco, y ya soy cuerdo: fui don Quijote de la Mancha, y soy ahora, como he dicho, Alonso Quijano, el Bueno".<sup>4</sup>

Groups of idealistic characters mentioned in introductory manner included a number of characters who are willing to forget their own interests in an effort to help others, and who may be considered sacrificial idealists. They are peo-

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<sup>3</sup> La otra honra, I, 3, p. 16.

<sup>4</sup> M. de Cervantes, Don Quijote de la Mancha, Chapter LXXIV, p. 813

ple who make a very definite and, sometimes, dramatic sacrifice. Benavente presents characters of this sort in plays produced for the first time from 1894 to 1928.

The largest group of sacrificial characters is composed of wives and mothers who very unselfishly sacrifice their happiness to save the honor of their husbands, to make their children happy or to preserve their husband's pleasure in life and his faith in them. These women possess a recognition of human frailties and a forgiving spirit toward human weaknesses. Theirs is a spirit of self-abnegation that places the welfare of others, especially that of weaker human creatures, above their own. They also possess a tendency to see the good, the saving human qualities that exist in others in spite of their frailties.

Women whose maternal instinct causes them to make outstanding sacrifices are Isabel in Alma triunfante, Irene in Campo de armijo, Raimunda in La malquerida, Lea and Zoe in Los cachorros, Dominica in Señora ama, Paulina in La ley de los hijos, and Felisa in Pepa Doncel.

A type of tragic and resigned sacrifice caused from maternal instinct is exemplified in the character of Isabel in Alma triunfante. In the second act of the play we find Isabel a changed, different woman. At first she is so selfishly affected by the loss of her child that her mind has been un-



balanced. When she learns that her husband has sought satisfaction from another woman, she realizes that her absence has been the cause, that she has been a dead person to him, and begins to feel that she has no right to expect her husband's love. She claims that she is:

Ni esposa, ni madre, ni mujer siquiera. El espectro de una muerta querida que vuelve cuando su memoria es ya solo un recuerdo piadoso, sin color y sin vida?<sup>5</sup>

Isabel is not insane. By sacrificing all human emotions she forgives her husband and the woman who is the mother of his child. Her words very aptly explain this point:

No estoy loca; al contrario, todo lo que podía enloquecerme ha muerto en mí.....: pasiones de odio, de celos, de dolor....., todo lo humano....Sólo queda el alma....; mi alma triunfante!<sup>6</sup>

Mother love causes Isabel to be thus quixotic just as it causes Irene in Campo de armíño to adopt a child whom she believes to be her brother's, in spite of the fact that everyone calls her crazy. Her love, unselfish and beautiful, for the dead brother, and her unfulfilled maternal instincts cause her to lavish on Gerardo a mother's affection.

In La malquerida Raimunda loves her husband, Esteban, with an inexplicable profundity, and is also especially attached to

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<sup>5</sup> Alma triunfante, II, 5, p. 46.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., II, 7, p. 50.

her daughter, Acacia. She is willing in the end to die in order to save Acacia from the sinful love of Esteban.

Lea and Zoe of Los cachorros are sacrificial, idealistic characters even if it is a strange sort of idealism that comes to light through their actions. Lea, the first mistress of Adolfo, returns to the circus after the death of the man with whom she had gone away. Her own and Adolfo's son, Henry, is there, and Lea brings a daughter, Clotilde. Zoe is the new mistress of Adolfo during the time of the story, and she has a son, Billy, by a former "husband" and a daughter, Celina, of Adolfo.

Lea is quixotic in her idealism. She does not love Adolfo, and has nothing to do with him. She is not jealous of Zoe, and believes that they can all live together as one great family. Zoe becomes jealous and threatens to leave, but the love between Billy and Clotilde causes their mothers, Zoe and Lea, to decide to sacrifice their happiness and contentment for their children. Lea, the strong, modern Quijote, is the more forceful character and she tells Zoe:

Ya sólo importan ellos. Las dos somos madres. Hemos peleado como leonas, por defender a nuestros cachorros. Si ellos se quieren, si ellos se juntan, ¿ vamos a separarlos?

Paulina of La ley de los hijos is an admirable mother

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<sup>7</sup> Los cachorros III, 9, p. 57.

whose love for her children causes her to give up the security and happiness of her home in order that her children may not suffer because of their mother's sin. Paulina's husband forgives her for having gone away with another man, and she returns home to find that her daughter is about to marry the son of an aristocratic family who will not consent unless Luisa promises never to come in close contact with her own mother. Paulina sees that her place in the home will not add any to the happiness of her children, and so she leaves. She explains that it is the only way for her to be happy, and that by so doing her life may be an atonement for the wrong committed. Her attitude and the title of the play are shown in her words:

Las culpas de los padres caerán sobre los hijos.....  
No puede haber otro mayor castigo para las culpas de los  
padres que el dolor de los hijos.<sup>8</sup>

Another sacrificial mother is Felisa, or Pepa Doncel, who gives up the life of love and happiness that she might enjoy with the father of her child in order that this daughter may be respected and honored. Felisa secures a decent fortune and a certain amount of respectability in Moraleda through having been the wife of Cifuentes, brother of the *marqués* de San Silvestre. She makes the populace accept the fact that Genoveva

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<sup>8</sup> La ley de los hijos, III, 5, p. 74.



is the daughter of her husband, although she is in reality the child of Gonzalo. After gaining this respect for her child, Felisa tells Gonzalo that her pride lies in the fact that her daughter will profit through her mother's sacrifice. All the pride in her daughter and in what Felisa has gained for her is shown in these words:

.....es mi orgullo de madre! El orgullo de haber conseguido, bajo el falso respeto para mí....., el verdadero respeto para mi hija <sup>9</sup>.

Then again in a later speech Felisa explains how much consolation she derives through the sacrifice:

Esa verdad de mi sacrificio será la única verdad entre tanta mentira, hasta la de mi nombre, que ni yo misma sé cuánto ha sido verdad! <sup>10</sup>

Wives who make definite sacrifices or live resignedly and endure torment for the sake of their husbands seem best portrayed through the characters of Isabel in Rosas de otoño, María in El nido ajeno, and Valentina in El mal que nos hacen.

In Rosas de otoño, Benavente has made of Isabel the incarnation of a resigned spirit. She knows all the time of Gonzalo's perfidy, takes a bit of pride in the fact that her husband is a "lady's man", and suppressing all the human emotions of jealousy and outraged pride, she awaits Gonzalo's return to her.

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<sup>9</sup> Pepa Doncel, III, 12, p. 161.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., III, 13, p. 163.

Her great love for the unworthy husband helps her to endure all wrongs and suffering. She says:

Yo he sabido esperar, y ahora siento que no esperé en vano.<sup>11</sup>

María of El nido ajeno, wife of José Luis, is also a resigned person, who feels that her life has been a sacrifice, because she realizes after marriage that she does not love José Luis. She tells Manuel, her husband's brother, the man whom she really loves:

¡Qué perpetuo sacrificio el de mi vida! ¡Y no me quejé nunca! Con todo el cariño, con toda la abnegación de mi alma procuré hacerle dichoso.<sup>12</sup>

María's interest in and love for Manuel are not the sort that make her forget for any time the fact that she is an honored wife. She nobly refrains from accepting a love that might have made her happier.

Valentina of El mal que nos hacen is a quixotic sacrificial type. She sacrifices her reputation in a conventional sense to Germán by living with him when he can not obtain a divorce. She loves him so devotedly that it does not seem a sacrifice. Then she flaunts convention in order to do good and

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<sup>11</sup> Rosas de otoño, III, 13, p. 161.

<sup>12</sup> El nido ajeno, II, 6, p. 28.



kind things. Federico needs her more than Germán, for he is weak, morally and mentally, and depends on her support. Their hearts have been united in sorrow and, whether conventionally right or wrong, she follows the dictates of her conscience in an effort to do the good that she can. She tells Germán:

La tristeza, las lágrimas compartidas, el dolor que puede comunicarse entre dos corazones los une para siempre más que todas las alegrías.<sup>13</sup>

The next group of sacrificial characters may be considered as those who give up their happiness, and sometimes their reputations, for the sake of a sister or brother. It is interesting to note that there are far more women characters of this type than men, and that some of the sacrifices are idealistically quixotic in nature.

Outstanding examples of such sacrificial sisters are found in Doll of Sacrificios, Isabel of Los ojos muertos, Gunna of La honra de los hombres, and Felicidad in La escuela de las princesas. One brother who is sacrificial is found in the character of Manuel in El nido ajeno; however, his sacrifice is not so hard nor unhappy as those of the women mentioned.

Doll, the sister of Alma, is a truly typical sacrificial character. It is she only in the play who knows how to sacrifice. Her life is a comparatively easy one which has been man-

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<sup>13</sup> El mal que nos hacen, III, 6, p. 65.

aged by her sister. She finally realizes that Ricardo, her husband, and Alma still love each other and she wants to do something to help them attain happiness. She purposely falls into a pond when attempting the rescue of a bird. Alma knows that Doll has committed suicide, for she says to Ricardo:

No lo sabremos nunca. Era un alma buena y las almas buenas se sacrifican en silencio.<sup>14</sup>

Doll's sacrifice is in vain for it brings no happiness to Alma or Ricardo.

Isabel in Los ojos de los muertos and Gunna of La honra de los hombres make just such futile sacrifices. Isabel, when she learns the truth of her husband's affair with her sister, Juana, and learns why he committed suicide, loves Juana enough and is kind enough to tell Gabriel, Juana's husband, that it was all Hipólitos' fault, that Juana was not implicated in the affair, and that he must not doubt about his son. Thus, Isabel is willing to accept dishonor for her husband's name and memory in order to attempt to save her sister's happiness.

Gunna, the sister of Paula, is one of the strongest sacrificial characters presented. She is to be admired for her strength of character and for the determination with which she clings to her ideals of honor and virtue. She sacrifices the most valued

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<sup>14</sup> Sacrificios, III, 6, p. 266.



possession that her sister may not be disgraced. She pretends that Paula's illegitimate child is hers, and to show the completeness of her sacrifice she says:

Yo he jurado callar siempre, aunque fuera en ello mi felicidad, aunque fuera mi vida!<sup>15</sup>

On learning that the child is Paula's, her husband, Magnus, says to his sister-in-law:

Sacrificaste por ella lo que más vale para una mujer ....tu honra; has soportado mis crueldades, sí..... todo por ella!<sup>16</sup>

Manuel, the brother of José Luis, in El nido ajeno, is a sacrificial idealist who renounces the idea of loving María in order that his brother may be happy. Manuel's own personal happiness has always been a matter of secondary importance to him. He is kind and generous in giving to the poor of the city. His sacrifice is tinged with fatalistic resignation, for these words show his belief in destiny:

Soy humilde, porque he luchado mucho con la suerte, sé que la suerte es superior a nosotros.<sup>17</sup>

Other sacrificial characters who do not belong to the more

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<sup>15</sup> La honra de los hombres, I, 1, p. 161.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., II, 6, p. 207.

<sup>17</sup> El nido ajeno, II, 1, p. 21.



outstanding types mentioned are here analyzed:

Fernanda of El demonio fué antes ángel sacrifices her life and thoughts to the needs of a blind father for years, and then feels it necessary to marry Hernán Marchena in order to serve as a "buffer" between him and Casilda, Fernanda's best friend who is married.

Asunción of La inmaculada de los Dolores gives youth and beauty as a sacrifice to the caprice of a fond and sad mother who wants her dead son's fiancée to remain true to his memory.

The Princess Constanza in La escuela de las princesas is forced to sacrifice herself to a man whom she does not love simply because it is her duty as a princess. Her compensation or consolation is given her by Prince Alberto, whom she really loves, when he tells her of an old fairy who changed into a beautiful girl and said:

No, no soy la felicidad; la felicidad no existe; yo soy el sacrificio, pero de cuantas apariencias encubren la felicidad, soy la más verdadera!<sup>18</sup>

Characters analyzed thus far show through their actions and thoughts that they may be considered among those whom we call idealistic. There are some characters found in the three-act plays of Benavente, who possess materialistic and idealistic characteristics in combination, but with the materialistic side

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<sup>18</sup> La escuela de las princesas, III, 15, p. 150.

predominating. A discussion of these types seems to serve very well as a transition from the idealistic to the materialistic. Examples of such characters are found in Aurelio of La propia estimación, and Manuel and Don Adrián of El hijo de Polichinela.

Aurelio seems to be a queer mixture of idealism and egotistical materialism. He falls in love with Ángeles, wife of Pepe, and finds that this love torments him very much. He helps Pepe in business by giving him work, and he comes in close contact with Ángeles, but always is honorable and decent. Such actions are unusual for him, because it is apparent that when younger he indulged in illicit love affairs. He is even selfish and egotistical in wanting to go away and give up his love for Ángeles, since in doing so his interest centers on the fact that he will preserve the good opinion he has of himself, and the adoring, worshipful feeling of Ángeles toward him.

Of course Aurelio is idealistic in renouncing this love, and in not giving vent to such savage desires as he has to kill Ángeles' husband. Yet one feels that all his goodness is tainted with the selfish egoism which his own words show:

No voy triste, porque no voy solo.....Llevo conmigo una alegría que llena mi alma; lo mejor que podía darme la vida, y si algo bueno puede darnos la vida es porque lo mejor de la vida hemos dado--, que renunciar es poseer.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> La propia estimación, III, 6, p.55.



Then in another scene he tells his brother-in-law of his ideas:

El mío es egoísmo también pero es otro egoísmo, es egoísmo ideal; es sacrificarlo todo, aunque el sacrificio destruya nuestra vida y su dolor entristezca el alma para siempre.<sup>20</sup>

Don Adrián and Manuel of El hijo de Polichinela are similar combinations of idealism and materialism. Don Adrián has a kind heart; he wants happiness for his children but does not possess the will power to accept the necessity for hard work in order to obtain money. Instead, he tries to get rich by rather unscrupulous methods.

Manuel tries very hard to make Don Adrián, his father, do right. He is ashamed of the father and of Eloy, the black-sheep brother. Manuel comes to love Julia, deserted wife of Eloy, and, in order to keep her unmolested, Manuel permits Eloy and Don Adrián to take some money from Don Bernardo, an avaricious money lender. Manuel knows that they will leave forever if they obtain the money. He is really surprised at what he has done, but his father says to him:

Nunca somos tan malos ni tan buenos como nos creen ni como nosotros nos creemos.<sup>21</sup>

Then he adds:

Ni para el bien ni para el mal nos consiente la vida

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., II, 7, p. 39.

<sup>21</sup> El hijo de Polichinela, III, 16, p. 50.



trazar nuestro camino en línea recta, inflexible. No podemos poner orgullo en nada. Bondad, honradez parecen lo mismo, pero la vida nos dice en sus lecciones, que alguna vez, por ser bueno, hay que dejar de ser honrado.<sup>22</sup>

And now let us consider what are the characteristics of a materialistic person. Someone has said that "ethical and practical materialism are terms used to denote the temper of mind which sees in the acquisition of wealth, material comfort, and sensuous pleasure the only reasonable objects of human endeavor".<sup>23</sup>

Some of the materialistic characters of Benavente's plays really worship money, social position and self instead of God. Sometimes they are successful, but most often these characters begin to pay for their sins.

It is interesting to note that the largest group of materialistic characters is composed of unscrupulous men and women who are very eager to obtain wealth by fair or foul means. Such characters are found in José Luis of El nido ajeno, Felisa and her husband, El conde de San Ricardo of Campo de armiño, Isidoro of Los nuevos yernos, Crispín, Leandro and Polichinela of La ciudad alegre y confiada, Don Fermín and Manuel of La comida de las fieras, Adolfo of Los cachorros, and El Rubio of La malquerida.

José Luis is really a man to be pitied. He has inherited

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., III, 20, p. 52.

<sup>23</sup> Dictionary of Philosophy and Psychology ed. by J.M. Baldwin, Vol II, p. 46.

from his father a grave and business-like disposition, and, therefore, spends most of his time thinking of business. His health is rather bad, but he is like many women. He seems to enjoy it. He loves María, his wife, but he is too busy to express that love until he begins to realize that he may lose her. He has no faith in humanity and makes his associates miserable because of his greedy, distrustful nature.

Felisa and El conde de San Ricardo are despicably materialistic. They pretend to Irene that the reason they do not want her to adopt Gerardo is that he may not be their brother's son, but it is certain that they only want Irene to have no heir. Their greed for money makes them forget honor, family ties, and self-respect.

Crispín, Leandro and Polichinela are degenerate types of materialism in La ciudad alegre y confiada. They have lost the vigor of their material characteristics, and have grown flabby and cowardly in their execution of vice.

In the play, La comida de las fieras, Don Fermín Antón and Manuel are excellent examples of money worshipers. Fermín is the supposed friend of Hipólito, but he manages to enjoy his friend's ruin. Manuel is Hipólito's agent who comes for money to evade bankruptcy. Hipólito saves the man and is himself ruined financially. Manuel, Isabel, his wife, and Anita,



his daughter, owe their security and happiness to Hipólito, but they forget very soon the kindness of the man whose ruin gives them safety.

In La malquerida, El Rubio is an example of a character so materialistically unscrupulous that he commits murder for money. He is a tool in the hands of Esteban, and has only one virtue--loyalty to an unprincipled master.

In Los cachorros Adolfo is a materialistic, avaricious brute. He is a drunkard who even beats his mistress. He is interested in Lea's return only because she has some money; he is eager to turn Zoe out in order to placate Lea so that he may obtain her money. Of course he pretends to Lea that he loves her:

¿ Es que crees que ya no te quiero? Tú verás como te quiero. Más que a ella (Zoe). Se irá de aquí si tú quieres?<sup>24</sup>

Isidoro, husband of Paulina in Los nuevos yernos, is the personification of greed and determination to obtain money. He thinks of life as a big business deal, and believes money to be the most powerful agent existing. He tells Paulina:

Ya no sirve de nada lo que se tiene, sino lo que se puede tener..... digan lo que quieran, no hay explosivo más eficaz que el dinero?<sup>25</sup>

More proof of Isidoro's materialistic tendencies is shown

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<sup>24</sup> Los cachorros, II, 9, p. 38.

<sup>25</sup> Los nuevos yernos, I, 3, p. 12.



when he tells how he learned to obtain money by saying:

Pronto supe los medios para tener dinero; uno, robar; no muy fácil, peligroso y sucio; otro trabajar; limpio pero difícil y premioso; otro, el mejor, que es mitad y mitad : los negocios.<sup>26</sup>

The largest group of characters in La mariposa que voló sobre el mar are materialistic parasites. They have been invited by Samuel Simpson to make a yachting trip on the Mediterranean.

Raimundo and Cipriana are a good pair to represent the young author who writes dramas that might never be produced without the protection of a millionaire like Simpson, and the shallow quarrelsome wife who carries on a flirtation with anyone available.

Enrique is the son of a great publisher, who comes on the trip in order to get the business of publication from Simpson.

Próspero is an idler who entertains the group by palm reading.

The doctor courts the favor of rich people in order to enjoy good food, good drinks and nice trips.

Carolina, a silly old gossip, is the tutor of Gilberta, actress protégé of Simpson. She is very jealous of Gilberta and hopes to become Simpson's lady love.

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<sup>26</sup> Op. cit., I, 3, p. 12.

Another type of realistic character might be called the egoist. Esteban and Acacia of La malquerida are dominated by self-centered sexual attraction which at times takes the form of pure hatred on the part of Acacia. Esteban seems the culmination of selfishness and weakness. He knows that it is impossible to marry Acacia honorably, and instead of fighting against his desires, he stoops to base plotting and planning to keep her near.

A conflict of emotions has always raged in the heart of Acacia since her mother's marriage to Esteban. She is fond of and jealous of her mother, and does not like Esteban because he has taken an important place in the mother's heart. In spite of her antipathy for the man, she feels herself drawn toward him by a queer magnetism that, in her innocence, she does not understand. Still she is an egoist, for she spends too much time analyzing her own feelings and worrying about herself.

Another egotistical materialist is Gonzalo of Rosas de Otoño, whose only ideals are concerned with physical pleasure. There are no feelings of lofty morality in his make-up. He enjoys the flattery, attention and yielding that he receives from women. He is a Don Juan in that he loves and deserts and leaves wreckage in his wake, but he is even less idealistic than Don Juan in that he has no redeeming faith in a true love. Benavente characterizes him very well, and satirizes men in



general very harshly when he has Isabel, Gonzalo's wife, say:

Una vez más eres injusto, eres cruel, eres egoísta,  
eres ....., eres; hombre!<sup>27</sup>

Purely idealistic, purely materialistic, and combination characters have been analyzed thus far, and it seems plainly evident that such characters constitute a large percentage of the very unhappy people of the plays of Benavente. This fact might indicate that he writes only of unhappy folk, but it is pleasant to observe that there is a still larger group of characters who are also combination characters, as in a group previously considered, but who differ from this group in that their better natures predominate. These we may consider as adaptable or "happy medium" characters. They are people who have enough of the characteristics of Don Quijote and Sancho Panza combined in their natures to make them adaptable to circumstances that exist, and are able to adjust themselves enough to find some measure of happiness and peace. Characters of this type are found in at least twelve three-act plays, the most out-standing of which are to be analyzed.

(1908)

Dominica of Señora ama is one of the most idealistically adaptable characters. When she learns that she is to have a child of her own, her whole soul rises in revolt against the terrible treatment she has suffered from Feliciano. She is disgusted with the women who have trifled with her husband, and

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<sup>27</sup> Rosas de otoño, III, 13, p. 157.



who beg mercy for their children. She tells Jorja:

¡Se acabaron, pa mí los muchachos de nadie! ¡Y vosotras y toos! ¡Y ahora mismo os vais por esa puerta y no me volváis a entrar por ella!<sup>28</sup>

When Jorja and Pola have been frightened into leaving, Dominica tells her old servant, Gubesinda, that things are going to be different, and that she has ceased to be a fool. Thus she is transformed into a different type character. She is stronger and more capable instead of being resigned and sacrificial, and her adaptable sense and strength help her to meet the situation.

In La comida de las fieras (1889) Hipólito and Victoria represent a couple who are very capable of adapting themselves to circumstances. They are honest and kind in their dealings with humanity. Victoria gives to the poor and, while wealthy, feels that she must help others in order to balance the scale of happiness for all humanity.

After losing their fortune, their friends, position, home and everything, Victoria and Hipólito are happy in that they have not lost a clear conscience nor their love. They forgive the gossips who malign them, for Hipólito says:

Pero nosotros les perdonamos. No contaban ellos

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<sup>28</sup> Señora Ama, III, 5, p. 123.

con que habíamos salvado de la ruina nuestra conciencia,  
y añade Victoria, y nuestro cariño.<sup>29</sup>

There is an interesting group of adaptable characters in Los cachorros (1918) who are out standing in that they are able to cope with unusual circumstances in order that all may be happy. These characters are Madame Adelaida, manager of the Rigo-  
berto Circus, Zoe and Lea, mistresses of Adolfo Rigeberto, and the children, Billy, Henry, Clotilde and Celina.

Poverty, entanglements and jealousy almost wreck the lives of the group, but an effort to make the children happy, and to evade as much sorrow as possible, saves them from ruin. Madame Adelaida very aptly says that life is bad enough, so why do things to make it worse:

Si es la pena de pelear, si no es mejor estar a  
quererse todos? Es la muerte que es triste. ¿ Por  
qué hacer nosotros más triste la vida?<sup>30</sup>

Josefina of La gobernadora (1901) is one of the strong-  
est characters found. She is the "lady governor" of the pro-  
vince and manages her husband's affairs and the people of the  
province with an iron hand. One character says of her:

Aquí no se hace más que lo que ella dispone.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> La comida de las fieras, III, 1, p. 48.

<sup>30</sup> Los cachorros, III, 9, p. 55.

<sup>31</sup> La gobernadora, I, 6, p. 39.



Josefina's friendship toward Manolo, secretary of her husband, causes much criticism and comment, but it may not be more than an understanding and helpful relationship between two strong people who have to manage the affairs of the government. Manola says of it:

Créalo Vd., no cambiaría esta dulce amistad por todos los amores del mundo.<sup>32</sup>

In spite of the common notion that decent, honorable friendship cannot exist between man and woman, we like to believe in the honor of these two characters, for Trino, a faithful servant in the governor's house defends Josefina and Manuel:

..Y los tengo a todos por personas muy decentes, de lo más decente que ha pasado por el Gobierno en los veinte años que llevo en aquella casa.<sup>33</sup>

Outstanding adaptable characters in La otra honra (1924) are Victor and Julia. They are truly admirable people who flounder around for a long time in a society that is not understanding. Victor has great ideas for becoming rich, but he is too idealistic to cope with the financiers of his day, and therefore endures various failures. Julia has an idea that so long as she does nothing to dissatisfy her husband openly, she is not bothering anyone. She fails to realize how dependent each member of society is upon the social mass. There

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<sup>32</sup> Op. cit., II, 10, p. 113.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., III, 1, p. 141.



does come a day of reckoning which proves that these two characters are strong and idealistic enough to adapt themselves to existing circumstances. Purely ideal love saves the couple and helps them to be happy. Victor decides to give up flighty business and to live humbly and honorably as a common workman. Julia is going with him, and because of a greater love and deeper faith in her husband, she is certain that a new and better life will be theirs.

Other characters who are able to arrange their lives so that some happiness can exist, without making a dramatic sacrifice or causing melodramatic tragic action, are: Alberto and Elvira of ¡No quiero, no quiero! (1928); Don Isidor and The Marqués de Castro-Osorio of El demonio fué antes ángel; and Samuel Simpson and Felix of La mariposa que voló sobre el mar (1926).

These characters are adaptable because class distinction and prejudice are broken down. The new, energetic money-making person is given as many rights as the former aristocrat. Divorce, representing a new religious view, comes into existence and saves people from being miserably unhappy. Conventions are not the same. People are more individualistic and independent. The position of women changes even in Spain. The dates in parenthesis after each play mentioned in the discussion of adaptable characters indicate the first presentation of the drama, and it is surmised that they were written in at

least that decade. These dates show that this type of character came to exist in the latter part of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; therefore, we may conclude that their adaptability is a result of the changed social conditions mentioned.

However, the greatest play in which Benavente has presented characters which are adaptable is Los intereses creados (1907). In this play there is an assimilation of idealism and materialism through character fusion. One character possesses the idealistic and another the materialistic characteristics, but these two work as one, and are therefore adaptable. The inspiration for this drama may have been the immortal work of Cervantes, Don Quijote; for Leandro represents the idealistic Don Quijote and Crispín, the materialistic Sancho. Crispín makes the following observation concerning the character fusion:

A habilidad es mostrar separado en dos sujetos lo que suele andar junto en uno. Mi señor y yo, con ser uno mismo, somos cada uno una parte del otro.<sup>34</sup>

In Don Quijote there are many references made to the idea that Sancho is a part of his master. He is the fellow who remembers to fill the saddle bags with provisions, the one who insists on such practical things as sleeping and eating, and the one who is observant of ways to acquire sustenance. This

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<sup>34</sup> Los intereses creados, Quadro, II, 2, pp. 60-61.



character fusion for adaptation is reproduced in Los intereses creados. It is Crispín who notes the existence of two parts to a creature that usually walks as one. He is the more astute, practical side of Leandro's dreamy, idealistic nature. Crispín says that in each of us there are two such men. In these two characters one finds together a human being whose very nature is an incarnation of materialism, and one whose being is idealism personified. Thus one is justified in thinking of these two, Crispín and Leandro, as Benavente's Don Quijote and Sancho Panza.

Crispín says of Leandro and of himself:

Ya sabéis quien es mi señor: el de los altivos pensamientos, el de los bellos sueños. Ya sabéis quien soy yo: el de los ruines empleos, el que siempre, muy baja, rastrea y socava entre toda mentira y toda indignidad y toda miseria. Sólo hay algo en mí que me redime y me eleva a mis propios ojos: esta lealtad de mi servidumbre, que se humilla y se arrastra para que otro pueda volar y pueda ser siempre el señor de los altivos pensamientos.<sup>35</sup>

Starkie points out also that this idea of Benavente seems to be derived from Don Quijote where we find a conflict between the ideal and the real. Don Quijote is the symbol of the pathetic struggle to reach winged ideals; Cervantes ridicules his hero's fantastic imageries, but glorifies and admires his pu-

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<sup>35</sup> Op. cit., II, 2, p. 61.



rity of purpose. Sancho symbolizes the sound common sense and the primitive or more selfish desires of the folk. Through loyal service to his master and association with so gentle-minded a knight, he gradually loses his gross, muddy vesture and reaches a noble refinement of soul. Leandro is a modern knight to whom the romances of chivalry are faint echoes of the past, not living realities as they were to Don Quijote. Crispin is a modern Sancho Panza who has lost many of his blithe and debonair qualities in the rough and tumble of civilization. He has a more overmastering ambition than Sancho. <sup>36</sup>

Like Cervantes, Benavente seems to show that he believes it necessary in life to have a balance between the lofty ideals and beautiful dreams of a quixotic nature and the lowly realities of practical life.

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<sup>36</sup> W. Starkie, Jacinto Benavente, P. 163.

## CHAPTER III

### THEMES

Following the practice of creating characters who possess an assimilation of idealism and materialism, Benavente uses idealistic and materialistic themes in his dramas. Two distinct types of motivating forces are found in his work. There is one group which may be considered idealistic and another that is definitely materialistic.

Among idealistic themes one sees faith, love of various types, resignation, and sacrifice. On the other hand there is a large group of plays wherein phases of society are the objects of attack. Gossip, parental neglect, conventionality, hypocrisy, and greed are treated.

Faith in God is developed with beautiful simplicity, as the theme of only one <sup>37</sup> play which is of importance. The sincere belief in Divine power is portrayed through the characters of a friar and a queen whose faith in God allows the former to perform, and the latter to witness the performances of, miracles. This seems to be one of the most idealistic themes treated by Benavente.

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<sup>37</sup> Para el cielo y los altares



Faith in humanity and in himself is the motivating force guiding Daní-Sar of El dragón de fuego. In him Benavente presents a character whose idealistic faith in his fellow man is similar to that which Don Quijote possessed.

One of the most popular themes, according to the author himself, seems to be mother love or the maternal instinct. Benavente was very devoted to his own mother, and he was, and still is, a staunch defendant of mothers. Lázaro quotes Benavente as having said:

Si hay algo que esté sobre todo, si hay algo que sublima y santifica a la mujer más pecadora, es la maternidad. Pueblo en que no se defiende, se ampara y se respeta a la mujer madre, nunca podrá ser civilizado y mucho menos cristiano.<sup>38</sup>

In view of this assertion, it does not seem strange that this most idealistic of human emotions should be particularly the theme of Señora ama, the play which he considers his best, and of other important plays.<sup>39</sup> The mother love, forgiving nature, and strength of character embodied in Dominica of Señora ama represent a compilation of the ideal characteristics of womanhood and especially of mothers. Benavente does not expect any one woman to possess all Dominica's virtues, but has her to represent idealistic motherhood as a type. Sometimes maternal instinct is the emotion which helps to save an erring

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<sup>38</sup> Quoted by A. Lázaro in Jacinto Benavente, Chap. XVII, p. 84.

<sup>39</sup> Campo de armijo, Pepa Doncel, La malquerida, Alma triunfante and La ley de los hijos



husband from sin or to reclaim him for his wife and family.<sup>40</sup>  
 Again it is the force which brings into existence respect and<sup>41</sup>  
 happiness for the children of sacrificial mothers. Often a<sup>42</sup>  
 mother's love saves a child from ruin, or transforms a cold,<sup>43</sup>  
 friendless world into one of beauty and comfort for an orphan.<sup>45</sup>  
 However varied the treatment of maternal love which Benavente  
 may make, it is always sublimely idealistic.

Ideal love between man and woman does not seem to receive  
 extensive development by Benavente, although it serves as the<sup>44</sup>  
 motivating force in a few plays. This would seem to indicate  
 that he does not believe in the frequent existence of such i-  
 dealistic love. The love which most often runs as the central<sup>45</sup>  
 theme through the plays mentioned is usually platonic and often  
 the sort that is unrealized. Sometimes it serves as the guid-<sup>46</sup>  
 ing light in the lives of the characters even though they may  
 be forced to subjugate their emotions.

Another idealistic theme which Benavente uses is friend-  
 ship. It seems to be more outstanding and to be found in a<sup>47</sup>  
 greater number of plays than the type of love above mentioned.

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40 Señora ama

41 Pepa Doncel, La ley de los hijos, and Los cachorros

42 La malquerida

43 Campo de armijo

44 El nido ajeno and La melodía del jazz-band

45 Manuel and María of El nido ajeno

46 Pepe and Lucila of La melodía del jazz-band

47 El demonio fué antes ángel, Los buhos, Las cigarras  
hormigas, La otra honra, La gobernadora and El primo Roman

In many dramas friendship exists between men; in other plays a beautiful portrayal of idealistic friendship between girls is made, and occasionally an example of an idealistic, friendly love between man and woman is found.

Parallel with the development of friendship as a theme is that of love between sisters. In each of three outstanding  
48 plays which have such themes, the idealistically sacrificial love of one sister strives for the happiness and contentment of the other.

Resignation and sacrifice in combination are often used  
49 by Benavente to make the theme of a play. The idealistic sacrifice and resignation of his women characters contrast strikingly with the weak and usually egotistical characteristics of his men.

In sharp contrast with the idealistic themes of faith, love, friendship, resignation, and sacrifice are the themes of his satirical social drama. Here it seems that Benavente looks on society with a bitter and hopeless pessimism and paints what he sees with vivid reality. According to Onís the Spanish dramatist acquired from French comedy this tendency to portray satirically the social world, and concerning it we find the critic making this observation:

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48 La escuela de las princesas, La honra de los hombres,  
and Los ojos de los muertos

49 Rosas de otoño and Sacrificios



La pintura no contiene todo lo que es esa sociedad madrileña; seguramente hay en ella mucho más de bueno y de malo; pero sin duda, Benavente expresó el carácter dominante del momento, que por su propia naturaleza se prestaba a una honda interpretación satírica.<sup>50</sup>

51

In the plays considered it is found that a large number have as their central purpose or motivating force this presentation and development of the vices of society.

In a few plays one great social vice, gossip, which has served as the theme for Echegaray's well-known El gran galeoto, is used by Benavente. As in the play by Echegaray, the later dramatist develops the idea that the cruelty of society in indulging in "la murmuración" causes even the virtuous to sin.

52

In four outstanding plays Benavente uses change in social customs and conventions as the central theme. The old order of society wherein fathers arranged marriages and practically managed the lives of the children has to give place to a new and different social regime in which they may follow their own inclinations. Nobility and aristocracy give place to individualism and democracy. However, lack of conformity to conven-

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<sup>50</sup> Onís, op. cit., p. 21.

<sup>51</sup> La virtud sospechosa, De muy buena familia, La otra honra, El mal que nos hacen, No quiero, no quiero, Los nuevos yernos, El homrecito, La comida de las fieras, El primo Román, and Alfilerazos.

<sup>52</sup> La otra honra, El mal que nos hacen, No quiero, no quiero, and Los nuevos yernos.



tional rules in marriage still brings bitter disappointment to characters.

The satiric inclination of the writer is also shown in his using as themes hypocrisy, politics, and greed. Society often is cruel, selfish, and hypocritical, and people act like wild animals who devour the weak, sick members of their group.<sup>53</sup> In order to secure wealth, members of the social group are so greedy that they constantly engage in the effort to kill others by "pin-pricks".<sup>54</sup>

From an analysis of themes we see that they are idealistic and realistic. However, the very society which Benavente satirizes so thoroughly was the first to become interested in his work and to recognize his value. He is more than a satirist, for his writings acquire a more moral and human element. His irony becomes softer and more tolerant, and although we are invited to laugh at the ridiculous and depreciate the evil and bad, there is in these works a certain spirit of human sympathy that inclines us toward tolerance and compassion.<sup>55</sup> Therefore we feel privileged to say that the themes of Benavente's dramas are not irreparably destructive or materialistic in their portrayal of social conditions. There is an evi-

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<sup>53</sup> La comida de las fieras

<sup>54</sup> Alfilerazos

<sup>55</sup> Onís, op. cit., pp. 21-22.

dence of enough blending of idealism and materialism in the themes to lead to the fortunate solution of some social problems and to justify the belief that our dramatist is not wholly the confirmed pessimist that he is so often pictured to be.



## CHAPTER IV

### SOLUTIONS

Preceding chapters dealing with Benaventian characters and themes have shown that there are two types of each, the idealistic and the materialistic. An analysis of some forty-five plays <sup>56</sup> reveals the fact that Benavente continues, in the solutions of his dramas, the practice of combining the elements of idealism and materialism, and, incidentally, reveals that there is more optimism in his attitude toward modern social problems than critics usually concede to him.

There are, in reality, four divisions which might be made in an analysis of the solutions. There are some plays in which Benavente presents a problem but offers no solution. In another group may be considered plays which, because of their pessimistic solution, offer no hope for the members of the society portrayed. The third division includes plays which have a solution that is very impractical in that it is too idealistic to bring happiness or contentment to the characters. In definite justification of the belief that Benavente is predominant-

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<sup>56</sup> Two additional plays, Los intereses creados and La honra de los hombres, have been included because of their outstanding importance to this type of study. These are two-act plays.



ly optimistic in his attitude toward social problems, one needs only to analyze the fourth and largest group of plays. These have a solution which is an assimilation of idealism and materialism leading to an optimistic and practical end.

Here, it is interesting to note that critics vary greatly in their opinions of Benavente's drama solutions. Some disagree completely with the opinion expressed above, Starkie says:

Often in his plays Benavente is purely destructive without any idea of proposing a solution.<sup>57</sup>

Onís is more liberal in his opinion:

En Benavente, como en Cervantes, hay un realista y un idealista, un satírico y un poeta, un pesimista y un optimista.<sup>58</sup>

59

Let us consider first a group of five plays which, as has been stated, seem to offer no solution of the problem presented.

In the play, La gobernadora the central theme is the hypocrisy and shallowness of society. Its vices are made evident in the play through satire of the governor, his wife and all the people of the town, who may be considered as representing types of members of society and not individuals. Satire in this play is so forceful that Onís says of the efforts of the dramatist:

<sup>57</sup> Starkie, op. cit., p. 146.

<sup>58</sup> Onís, op cit., p. 63

<sup>59</sup> La gobernadora (1901), Los ojos de los muertos (1907), El mal que nos hacen (1917), La Inmaculada de los Dolores (1918), and La mariposa que voló sobre el mar (1926).

En La gobernadora se desenmascara la hipocresía  
de una sociedad pacata y convencional, pero inmoral en  
el fondo.<sup>60</sup>

Throughout the entire play Benavente makes clear the fact that political factions change opinions and loyalties very readily. At one time a leader is cheered; the next minute he may hear scathing denunciation from the same people who have very recently applauded his remarks. Society is cruel and shallow. People follow the crowd in their beliefs, and are as easily led to believe in falsehood as in truth. Gossip seems ever evident in society as a necessary evil.

Pure unadulterated friendship cannot exist between man and woman without inciting criticism and distrust. Stronger personalities are destined to rule, even when they belong to the so-called weaker sex. Santiago and Josefina triumph in what they consider to be right, but they are influenced by Manolo's purely materialistic desires to ruin Don Baldomero's position as the leader of a political faction; hence, there is no solution here offered for existing social problems. Manolo is to remain in Moraleda as friend to Josefina and secretary to Santiago. Political disturbances will continue; Josefina and Manolo will be the targets of severe criticism, and no

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<sup>60</sup> Onís, op. cit., p. 21.



one in the play will be made happier.

The idea of sin and its costs is presented in a very pessimistic manner in Los ojos de los muertos. This thought, revealed through the contrast of the materialistic characters of Juana and Hipólito with the idealistic ones of Isabel and Gabriel, creates such a pessimistic situation that no solution is offered.

Juana commits suicide and, in some measure, pays for her sin; but that does not assure her husband and son of any happiness. Carlos and Isabel are to be married, but theirs will be a life of unhappy memories.

Justice, not mercy, seems to be the keynote to the ending of the play. As a result of having sinned, people must ultimately pay a burdensome price. One cannot sin and affect only himself; many innocent people suffer.

The necessity of conforming to the conventionalities of marriage is the predominant idea expressed in El mal que nos hacen. This idea is presented through the portrayal of three couples who represent different social attitudes toward marriage. Doña Tomasa and Don Rosendo receive social approval for their conventional marriage in spite of the fact that they are unhappy because of constant quarreling. Pepe and Luisa are a younger couple who long defy convention and do not marry because of the fear that conformity to staid conven-



tionalities will rob their love of its romantic glamour. They are, however, finally forced to marry in order to secure social and economic advancement. Germán and Valentina are a couple who are forced to defy convention because divorce for Germán is impossible. Then Valentina and Federico present still another attitude, because we have no definite proof that they will marry in spite of the fact that they will live together. The whole story brings out the thought that convention inevitably forces people to conform to its rigid rules. Again Benavente has presented modern life as it exists, and again he offers no solution.

Starkie makes this comment about the play:

Benavente shows the falsity of the conventions of society, the egoism of men, the cruel logic of modern life, but he offers no real solution.<sup>61</sup>

In La mariposa que voló sobre el mar, society in all its materialism and cruelty is portrayed through satire of individuals who represent groups or types of characters. Contrast of the idealistic types with the materialistic is made <sup>here</sup> also. No solution is given which could leave the slightest vestige of hope.

Gilberta, a tragic heroine, finds herself distrusted be-

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<sup>61</sup> Starkie, op. cit., p. 67

cause she has been so flippant; and in order to prove that, for once, her love is sincere, she commits suicide. Hers is a hard, pessimistic outlook on life that shows no happiness, no peace, and no contentment. This pessimistic attitude is really what drives her to suicide, and is the obvious result of a complete lack of idealism in the philosophy of life on the part of an individual.

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Then Benavente has presented a group of plays wherein situations are solved in a way; but there is seen such a predominance of materialism in certain characters or groups that the solution is very pessimistic. Situations are even presented in these plays whereby some happiness might come to the characters; but the methods or means by which those conditions are brought about are such that the characters cannot possibly be happy if they possess any Christian ideals. A man and woman who love each other may be left free to marry through the suicide of a beloved one, but conscience will not allow them to be happy in such a marriage.

El hombrecito portrays the hypocrisy and power of society. These vices are mirrored in the characters of Nené's friends. The justice and decency seen in Nené are the offsetting or re-

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<sup>62</sup> Sacrificios (1901), El primo Román (1901), El hombrecito (1903), La ciudad alegre y confiada (1916), Para ser con todos leal, ser para todos traidor (1919), Una pobre mujer (1920), Más allá de la muerte (1922), Alfilerazos (1924), and De muy buena familia (1924).



deeming factors, here outweighed by the adverse forces. Development is made through bitter satire, and the solution is the very essence of tragic pessimism. Nené fights for a time against the intrigue, the hypocrisy, the veritable farce of society; but the tragedy appears when she realizes that she cannot give up her love nor act with courage and accept it in revolt against convention. She tells Enrique:

Ahora me falta valor, no para quererte.....Pero mi padre....., mi casa. No puedo, no puedo. No soy el hombrecito....., mi corazón no es fuerte para luchar....., luchar contra todos.

No sé.....Que no te vean. Es nuestro primer engaño--no será el último. La mentira para todos. la verdad sólo nuestra. Todo la vida para querernos<sup>63</sup>

Starkie says:

It would be difficult in all Benavente's work to discover a play that ends on a tone of deeper pessimism than this one. The satire that has seemed so brisk becomes tragic. After pulling to pieces Nené's soul, Benavente forces her to creep back maimed and cowed to join in the farce of society<sup>64</sup>

In Una pobre mujer there is no trace of the serene, philosophic Benavente. Even his doctrine of sacrifice and resignation serve to no purpose<sup>65</sup>

Dire want and bitter poverty cause Fermina's daughter to voice the keynote of the drama in the often repeated despair-

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<sup>63</sup> El hombrecito, III, 7, p. 129

<sup>64</sup> Starkie, op. cit., p. 70

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., p. 191



ing cry, "Why was I brought into this world?"

The daughter dies from lack of proper food and care, as she cries out the above quoted words to her mother. Poor Permina with that heart-breaking sound ringing in her ears is forced to accept life and take care of the little motherless grandchild, whose life will probably be so miserable that she, too, may some day say:

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¿Pa qué me habrán traído a este mundo?

The whole atmosphere of the play is fatalistic. The dominant force, life in its terrible realities, is here inescapable. There is such little hope, and living seems so futile that one is left with an inclination to wonder if the struggle to live is of much value, after all. Certainly the play seems to end with a pessimism comparable to that of El hambrecito, but with a harsher and more bitter hopelessness, and with no suggestion of a possible solution through any gleam of idealism.

Alfilerazos is another play which has, in its end, such gloomy, satiric pessimism that one recalls these words of Star-  
kie:

Benavente is mainly an intellectual writer who lets his cold irony play with the follies of the world: his

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<sup>66</sup> Una pobre mujer, III, 3, p. 215

satire does not kill at one blow, but little by little by dint of pinpricks<sup>67</sup>

Don Remigio, the central character, has spent a lifetime struggling for wealth and position, and when he has attained these, his efforts to do good are rewarded by the cruel pinpricks of society. He is helpless in the hands of political leaders and of pious, church ladies, willing enough to accept his donations, but too proud and haughty to be kind to Don Remigio's poor wife because she comes of a lowly social class. Don Remigio's last tragic cry is:

.....por el dinero son las guerras del mundo. ; Y toda mi vida trabajé por ganarlo! ; Mal negocio fué éste, mal negocio, y en él eché toda mi vida! ; He perdido mi vida! ; He perdido mi vida!<sup>68</sup>

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Three other plays have similar themes and solutions. In each the shallow falseness of politics is developed through satire of political "caciquismo" and men who obtain positions by unfair means. In each play materialism predominates to such an extent that the solution is entirely pessimistic. It seems safe to say that not a character portrayed is happy when the action of the play ceases; but then, not a character

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<sup>67</sup> Starkie, op. cit., p. 119

<sup>68</sup> Alfilerazos, III, 6, p. 97

<sup>69</sup> El primo Román, La ciudad alegre y confiada and Para ser con todas leal, ser para todos traidor

shows a gleam of idealism in his life.

These plays of the two groups discussed very clearly evidence Benavente's satiric pessimism. From their hopeless solutions of social problems one might surmise that the dramatist is a hopeless pessimist. However, these plays reveal only one aspect of his view of life. He is not always a pessimist; other plays show that, at times, he is decidedly an optimist.

Indeed, these pessimistic solutions of plays discussed contrast very vividly with the next group, wherein one finds idealism uppermost in the characters who bring about situations which may not be perfectly happy for all concerned, but which, at least, bring peace and contentment into the lives of people who have done right or atoned for their sins.

Idealistic mother love, portrayed through the character of Isabel, predominates in the solution of Alma triunfante. The idealism is a very impractical sort, to be sure; and we can explain it only by surmising that Benavente follows the dictates of his Roman Catholic conscience and secures Church approval by offering this conclusion. Isabel resigns herself to a life with Andrés, notwithstanding the fact that she realizes that his most frequent thoughts will surely be

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<sup>70</sup> Alma triunfante (1902), La malquerida (1913), La propia estimación (1915), Campo de armíño (1916), La otra honra (1924), and El demonio fue antes Ángel (1928).



with Emilia and his daughter. Isabel's feelings have been suppressed to such an extent that only her soul exists; and it is triumphant. She forgives Emilia, because they are sisters in suffering, and Andrés because she feels that her stay in the asylum has caused him to feel that she was dead. Padre Victor, a spokesman for the Church and, probably, for Benavente's conscience, is the powerful figure of the play. It is he who manipulates the strings of the puppet characters in order to have an idealistic solution.

In a similar manner, mother love on the part of Raimunda and Irene brings about idealistic solutions in La malquerida and Campo de armijo respectively. In the first play dramatic justice is dealt to each character. The sinful must and do suffer, but a clear conscience brings peace to dissatisfied hearts.

In Campo de armijo mother love again idealistically solves the problem. Irene's strength of character triumphs over the materialistic schemes of her relatives. Benavente forcefully points the conclusion that there is hope for down-trodden humanity, as represented by Gerardo, so long as there are such people as "Mamá Irene".

Self-esteem, as the keynote of La propia estimación, is embodied in the character of Aurelio, whose idealism causes an idealistic solution of the problem offered.

Doing the honorable, idealistic deeds of life may not always bring pure satisfaction and contentment, but it brings a peace and calm that may be far better. This is the idealistic note evident in the solution offered in La propia estimación. Ángeles has, through her efforts, made a man of Pepe; and because of his love for her, this former derelict will continue to improve. Aurelio is able to conquer his physical desires and the feelings of his heart, thus preserving his self-esteem; so he tells Ángeles and Pepe:

Hoy he podido vencer al corazón, y como dijo un poeta: cuando la cordura pasa por nuestras almas, la fatalidad retrocede y no hay tragedia posible!<sup>1</sup>

In La otra honra the whole purpose seems to be to show what Benavente thinks of lack of conformity to rigid rules of convention. Manuel, the brother-in-law of Julia, is the philosopher of the play and perhaps the mouthpiece of the author. He says:

Somos de todos. Desdichado el que pretende romper esa cadena social que a todos nos une y ante todos nos hace responsables. Irrumpe nuestra voluntad de rebeldes, de emancipados, contra algo que juzgamos una preocupación social, y un día vemos que esa preocupación social, es en nosotros algo más que una convención, más que un sentimiento, es un instinto humano!<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> La propia estimación, III, 5, p. 54

<sup>72</sup> La otra honra, III, 3, p. 51



However, in contrast to El mal que nos hacen, we have here a solution. Julia and her husband are idealistic enough to be able to solve their problems of conventionality and still be happy. Julia tells Manuel that people are destined for discontent if they believe that life is a pathway strewn with roses. People become terribly entangled when they stumble along not expecting the prosaic in life.

Manuel, speaking for Benavente, says that it is much better to carry flowers in our hearts to scatter along the dry, difficult places in the road of life. He also remarks:

Que las rosas tengan espinas es la desilusión de los que sólo saben soñar mal; que las espinas tienen rosas es la verdad de los que saben hacer bien.<sup>72</sup>

In other words Benavente expresses a definite belief in the necessity of a blending of materialism and idealism. Life, in its complexity, has both elements, and the over-predominance of either element in a character will cause unhappiness for him.

El demonio fué antes ángel has no sordid, dishonorable characters or action. Idealism of the people portrayed keeps them from yielding to unconventional impulses. The people are consequently admirable and are able to find contentment for themselves. True, a seemingly unhappy, though idealistic, si-

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., III, 3, p. 49



tuation is presented in the end; but one has hopes that it will unravel itself. Indeed, already satisfaction comes to Hernán and Casilda through knowing that they have committed no grave errors and are fulfilling faithfully the duties of their marriage vows. And Fernanda is happy with even a part of Hernán's love; for she has saved him and Casilda, her best friend, from sin.

A conclusive consideration of this group of plays leads one to agree fully with Starkie that "in spite of his perpetual pessimism Benavente always looks ahead to the ideal of <sup>74</sup>Christianity".

There is no sordid materialism nor pessimistic tragedy in their solutions. They represent purely idealistic optimism tinged with fatality.

<sup>75</sup>The fourth and last group of plays to be considered reveal in their solutions an assimilation of the pessimism of the second group, discussed in this chapter, and the idealistic optimism of the third.

Pertaining to this assimilation of the elements of ideal-

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<sup>74</sup> Starkie, *op. cit.*, p. 161

<sup>75</sup> El nido ajeno (1894), La comida de las fieras (1898), El dragón de fuego (1903), Rosas de otoño (1905), Los intereses creados (1907), Los buhos (1907), Señora ama (1908), Los cachorros (1918), La ley de los hijos (1918), La honra de los hombres (1919), La virtud sospechosa (1924), Nadie sabe lo que quiere (1925), Los nuevos yernos (1925), El hijo de Polichinela (1927), Pepa Doncel (1928), No quiero, no quiero! (1928), Para el cielo y los altares (1928) and La melódica del jazz-band (1931).

ism and materialism in Benavente's work, Onís says:

There is a dreamy, poetic idealism in Benavente's work which runs side by side with his satire and his realism.

A veces se juntan las dos y surgen entonces sus obras maestras.<sup>76</sup>

Critics will agree that some of the greatest Benaventian dramas are included in the group which have this combination of idealism and materialism. One has to admit, however, that he is not always certain whether the idealistic optimism supercedes extensively enough to insure happiness for the characters. Benavente has some of his materialists acquire idealistic traits but he leaves us to wonder whether these characters will lapse again into materialistic practices.

Pure, idealistic, unrealized love between man and woman serves as the motivating force of El nido ajeno. It is developed through contrast with the selfish, craving love which José Luis has for María.

An assimilation of idealism and materialism seems predominant in the solution of the play, for Manuel and María do the right and honorable thing about their love by rejecting it. They will be happy in knowing that they have done right; and though we have little assurance that José Luis will be very

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<sup>76</sup> Onís, op. cit., p. 64



different, in spite of his being forced to admit that he loves María, we feel that it is this predominance of the one quality only in his nature which is the secret of his inability to adjust and the argument for assimilation is made all the stronger.

Idealistic resignation serves as the theme of Rosas de otoño, and Benavente develops the triumph of idealism. He portrays the position of women in marriage through the character of Isabel in representation of resigned woman as a type. She and María Antonia rail against conventions which force a woman to wait resignedly for the return of her husband's affections and interests. Starkie says that in Rosas de otoño"it is a poignant satire on the position of women in matrimony that Isabel should have had to resign herself to be thus treated by her husband".<sup>77</sup>

But there is a triumphant reward for the patient and enduring Isabel. Her great love for Gonzalo, her fidelity, and lack of complaints are noted by him. Her attitude toward María Antonia, daughter of Gonzalo, whom Pepe has accused of being unfaithful, has brought Gonzalo to his senses. He returns to the comforts of home. When Isabel feels sure of her husband again, she tells María Antonia that she has gained her "autumn

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<sup>77</sup> Starkie, op. cit., p. 72



roses".

Isabel is old when she gains her reward for ideal love and resignation. Many of the best years of her married life have been spent in waiting for her husband's love. Thus it is natural for a skeptical critic to say that idealism does not triumph, because Gonzalo is so old and worn that he represents nothing but ashes wafted back to the hearth by the stronger winds of youth. Too, one cannot be certain that María Antonia and Pepe are sure of happiness. But Isabel, herself is happy, and it is she who has been the self-sacrificing idealist and merited happiness.

A more hopeful solution, which is an assimilation of idealism and materialism, is presented in Señora ama. Maternal instinct and idealistic love represented in the character of Dominica contrast with the sensuous materialism of Feliciano to develop the assimilation.

The hero and heroine are young when Feliciano decides to be faithful. Dominica feels that she can insist for the sake of their son that her husband be a decent fellow. Benavente has her say that she is sure life will be very different and far happier. Since <sup>the</sup> love and common sense of Dominica have won her husband in early life, there is a brighter outlook for humanity here presented than in Rosas de otoño, which was written three years earlier.

Sacrificial mother love also serves as the motivating force in the play La ley de los hijos. This love is portrayed through the great sacrifice which Paulina makes. She has repented, has suffered and is willing to sacrifice in order to secure forgiveness.

Aurelio is a kindly, religious man who forgives his wife for the sake of love and for their children.

The story proves, in its solution, that "the wages of sin is death", and surely shows that he who sins must pay twice--once in his remorse for the unhappiness brought directly to him, and then for the sorrow caused in the life of others. However, idealism is evident in Paulina's sacrifice.

In El hijo de Polichinela love, pure idealistic, unrealized love is embodied in Manuel and Julia. In direct contrast to this idealistic element, we find the sordid, materialistic love and greed of Don Adrián and Eloy. This contrast serves as the force which causes idealism to triumph and result in a possibility for happiness.

Don Adrián is becoming old, and the fact that he does have some idealistic ideas causes us to believe that his life will be better. Isabel forgives him for his neglect and goes away with him.

Manuel and Julia cannot marry, for she is the deserted wife of his brother, Eloy; yet she leaves her son with Manuel



for she knows that he will be a good father. Manuel's words to his father show the extent and depth of Julia's love and of his own:

Sí, es verdad, nos queremos; pero nos queremos como debemos querernos. Ya ves: ella saldrá de esta casa y me deja su hijo, que ya no tendrá más padre que yo; no puede darme mayor prueba de seguridad en mi cariño. Ella sabe muy bien que al llamar hijo mío a su hijo, nunca podrá ese hijo saber que por mi culpa pudo su madre dejar de ser honrada.<sup>78</sup>

And Don Adrián's reply gives proof of his idealism:

¡Cómo entender que, avergonzándome de ser tu padre, me sienta orgulloso de que seas mi hijo!<sup>79</sup>

La melodía del jazz-band is one of the latest plays by the dramatist considered, and it is especially interesting in this study to note that in its solution there is also an assimilation of idealism and materialism.

The love between Lucila and Pepe, which is surely the theme of the drama, is as hauntingly beautiful as the "melody of a band". Pepe describes their love thus:

Es como nuestras almas, donde, entre los mil ruidosos estrépitos discordantes de nuestra vida, se oculta y aparece y vuelve a perderse la melodía de nuestras al-

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<sup>78</sup> El hijo de Polichinela, III, 6, p. 39

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., III, 6 p. 40

mas, que es lo que hay de divino en ellas, y que en todos existe y en todos se percibe, si con amor nos acercamos a ellas.<sup>80</sup>

This love tinged with idealism brings about a solution which is idealistically optimistic.

Lucila finds, after several years of separation, that Pepe, her lover, has married, and has a little girl. Lucila, who lives as the mistress of Sabino Montero, becomes very fond of Pepe's wife and child. She helps them financially and even secures a good position for Pepe. She sacrifices her love for him to the happiness of Carmen and Carmelina. She has as her compensation the memory of her love for Pepe and the satisfaction of having done some good.

However, it is not only in recent dramas that Benavente uses an assimilation of idealism and materialism. As has been illustrated, the plays discussed in this group date in first presentation from 1894 to 1931. Surely critics will concede that the greatest play of this type is Los intereses creados produced for the first time in 1907.

Starkie says:

In 1907 Benavente reached the pinnacle of his fame by the production of Los intereses creados--a play characteristic of his art of combining satire and humor with a higher idealistic philosophy.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> La melodía del jazz-band, Prologue, I, p. 154

<sup>81</sup> Starkie, op. cit., p. 36



This Benaventian masterpiece has in its solution an assimilation of idealism and materialism similar to the other plays of this group, but developed in a different manner. In other plays the characters have within themselves a blending of the two elements which causes a hopeful solution. In Los intereses creados two characters represent separately these elements, but these two men are so closely associated and so much a part of each other that there is, in the solution, what may be called an assimilation through character fusion.

The very essence of the play is idealism and materialism. Leandro and Silvia, on the one hand, and Crispín and Polichinela on the other, present this idea emphatically. It is the idealistic love of Silvia and Leandro which serves as a redeeming factor in society as revealed in this play.

Two extremes of idealism and materialism are given in the characters of Leandro and Crispín. There is a hopeful optimism on the part of the dramatist. Each character would be helpless alone; but the author gives a bit of hope to an impractically idealistic society or nation by making that society accept the aid and instructions of the practical, worldly groups. Benavente and Cervantes have given us in Don Quijote and Los intereses creados a constructive criticism or treatment of society. Don Quijote and Leandro represent a Spain of Spanish castles, nobility, and decadent aristocracy whose feet, as well

as minds, are in the clouds. Such a Spain cannot endure. Sancho and Crispín, on the other hand, represent the extremes of practicality, but at the same time a necessary element in any progressive society. In Cervantes' masterpiece, through contact with the great idealist, Sancho is imbued with many of Don Quijote's ideals, and each is made more adaptable through absorption of some qualities of the other. In the same way Benavente's Crispín has one redeeming characteristic-- faithful loyalty to his master, with realization of the fact that he is a necessary part of Leandro.

The philosophy underlying the solution of Los intereses creados and La otra honra seems to be the one especially belonging to Benavente. To him life is, as has been said, a combination of materialism and idealism. People must be willing to accept the prosaic, practical side of life. They must also be able to allow high Christian ideals to guide them in their associations with mankind. Rules of convention should be adhered to in order to be happy, for conventionality is not only a set of rules of society; it is human instinct. An individual cannot be independent. He is entirely dependent upon the social mass.

In every human being who is happy and satisfied with life there will be a Leandro, representing lofty ideals, and a Crispín, representing practical details.

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This study of the solutions of Benavente's plays reveals the fact that he is especially interested in certain social problems. For some of the existing situations he offers a solution, but for others there seems to be no remedy.

The position of women in marriage appears of intense interest to our dramatist. He believes that resignation, sacrifice, and ideal love will make a success of marriage for most women. Conventional rules of marriage should be followed. We are led to believe that the practice of divorce is an abominable one to him; no case has been found in any of the plays considered. Benavente gives us situations which are positively tragic that might be solved through divorce, but he seems to prefer free love.

Following the beliefs of his modern school, Benavente bitterly denounces the falseness of politics. Three plays wherein political problems are set before us have no solutions. Benavente is interested in such terrible political conditions, but he seems to see no means whereby they may be improved as long as the majority in society do not attempt change.

Benavente's interest in the blending of the aristocratic members of society with those of the progressive, working class is similar to Galdós' problem of La loca de la casa. Benavente offers a solution in this case. He creates modern aristocrats who are broad enough to judge a man in view of his individual

worth instead of according to his lineage and title. In Benavente's plays the daughter of a "Marquesa" marries an humble professor, or the daughter of a titled family, a professional dancer.

Likewise, the problems of a superficially conventional society receive treatment by this modern dramatist. Trivial conventionalities are satirized bitterly. A public opinion founded upon these artificial conventions rules the society of Madrid. People must follow the vogue regardless of its absurdity or triviality. At times it is not even considered good taste to be in love with one's husband or wife. A married couple discovered in the act of embracing each other excite much comment. To marry for love is considered very "cursi". A lady must indulge in an "affair" with some other woman's husband in order to be acclaimed charming and popular. Serious governmental decisions depend at times on a new gown from Paris, which must be displayed before envious eyes.

For these foibles of society Benavente offers no definite remedy, except that, sometimes, a sincere, frank, simple character of his drama may show his associates that the way to happiness does not necessarily depend on these conventionalities.

In fact, Benavente seems to be concerned with the whole of modern society. He portrays it as it exists, and develops the idea that in order to be happy or content, people must be



combinations of the ideal and material. He may be considered a realist in that he thus sees in life a balance of the idealistic and the materialistic. Perhaps he is an idealist, however, because he seems to have faith in the existence of such a balance of idealism and materialism in society.

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