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I hereby recommend that the thesis prepared
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JACINTO BENAVENTE AS AN EXPONENT OF
MODERN SOCIAL DRAMA OF SPAIN

A DISSERTATION
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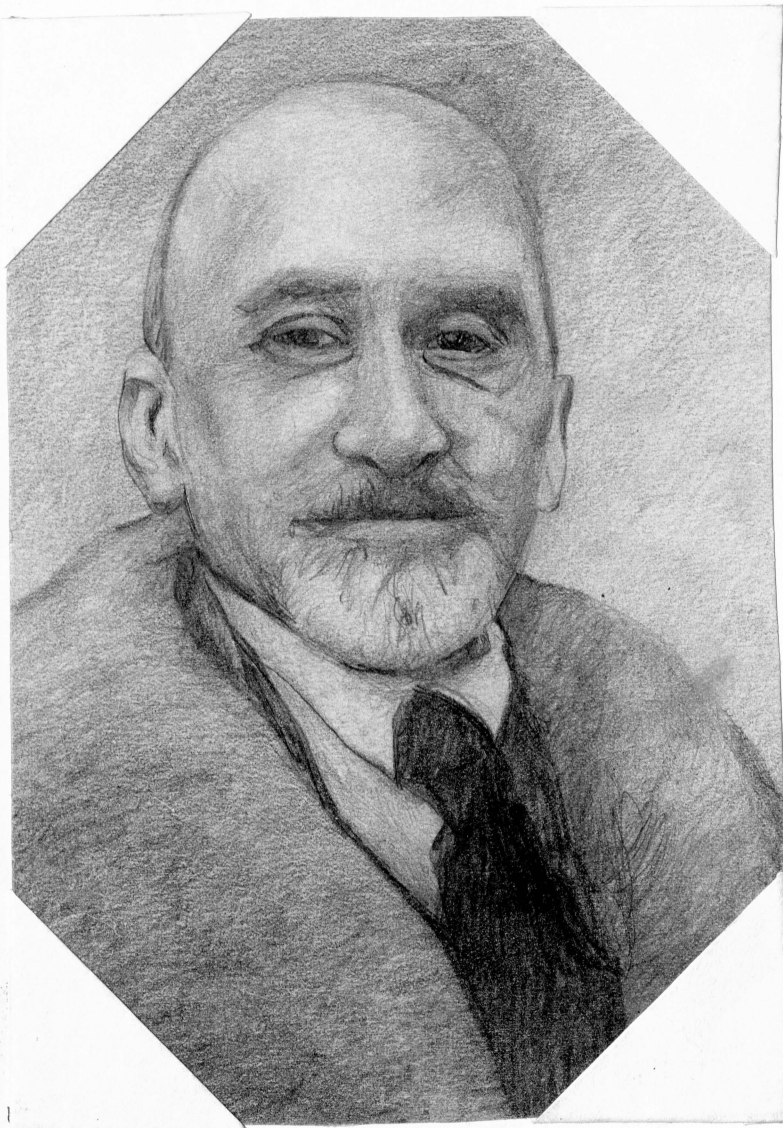
by

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☞ JACINTO BENAVENTE

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PREFACE

Social situations and the manner in which they are met by those about whom they center, have long held my attention. The choice, therefore, of social drama as the field for my research work may be regarded as a natural result.

In Benavente's dramas I found many problems realistically and idealistically treated. The accompanying study is based on those of his plays containing more than one act, there being an excess of sixty such. I have dealt with none of his translations.

The greater portion of my minor work was done in the field of social drama and covers a period paralleling that of Benavente. For this reason attention has been given to developments in the French drama contemporary with that of the Spanish. Mention only has been made of the English and Scandinavian influences found in Benavente's theatre, since my research has been confined to Spanish and French drama.

To Dr. Rebecca Switzer I owe deepest gratitude for the faith reposed in me as evidenced by her sanction of my desire to pursue, as I have, my study in this phase of Spanish literature. At all times she has been interested in my work, and continuously has offered the most clarifying suggestions.

Another instructor to whom I should like to express my appreciation is Miss Maude Wallin who generously rendered assistance during Dr. Switzer's illness, enabling me throughout that period to carry my work forward without delay.

I also want to thank the library staff for the many courtesies and privileges extended to me while I have been engaged in this work.

More than all, do I offer my greatest love to OBie and Dad whose sacrifices made possible this year of study.

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Chapter I

The Development of Social Drama in Spain

Modern drama in Spain, as in the majority of countries, shows decided social tendencies. Writers have everywhere become conscious of the existing conflict between the individual and the social mass. They are not satisfied with generalities, but desire to present concretely workings of those conflicts which are so general in their manifestations as to seem universal and which, however, to every individual seem his alone. Interest, therefore, centers about the most outstanding characteristic of this type of modern drama. The result is a realism such as that described by Storm Jameson when she says,

"By Realism, I understand a drama that treats of life as we today know it, and depends for its greatness on the success of the author in endowing it with qualities which lift it beyond today." (1)

This definition is one which might apply to the social drama of Spain today, for social drama is that type of drama in which existing conditions are presented to an audience in order that its members may become more fully aware of circumstances not always pleasant to face, yet at the same time, of vital importance to them.

The field of social drama as a separate category of Spanish literature has been recognized only within recent

1. Storm Jameson, Modern Drama in Europe, p. ix.

years, but social elements are to be found in the earliest manifestations of the theatre as well as in other literary genres since the beginning of Spanish literature.

An interest in social problems appears in the descriptions of manners to be used in the home(2), suggestions on the rearing of children (3), comments on friendship (4), and love(5), and regulations regarding the educational system(3) of the day, all of which appear in the thirteenth century in the writings of Alfonso el Sabio (1220-1284), Moral, social and political problems were presented in the didactic ejemplos of Don Juan Manuel (1282-1348), nephew of Alfonso el Sabio, who, to make his moral lesson more definite, often concluded his article with a bit of moral verse such as:

"Si al comienco non muestras qui eres,
nunca podras después cuand quisieres." (6)

A vast satirical picture of medieval society, presenting with notable exactitude the characters and customs of the fourteenth century, is preserved in El libro de buen amor by the Arcipreste de Hita. Realistic interpretation of dialogue, custom, and character evolution are present in

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2. Alfonso el Sabio, Siete partidas, "Partida segunda", Título vii, Ley v.
 3. Ibid, "Partida segunda", Título xxi, Leyes i-xi.
 4. Ibid, "Partida segunda", Título xxvii, Leyes i-vii.
 5. Ibid, "Partida segunda", Título v, Ley, xx, Tít.vi, Leyes i-ii
 6. Don Juan Manuel, "Ejemplo xxxv", cited in Menendes Pidal, Antología de prosistas españoles, p. 46.

El corbacho (7) from which a single chapter title indicates the didactic intention of the author.

"De los vicios e tachas e malas condiciones de las per-versas mugeres e primero digo de las avariciosas." (8)

Love (9), marriage (10), honor (11), pride of lineage (12), loyalty (13), religion (14), independence (15), are all treated in the old Spanish ballads, existing in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries but unprinted as a rule until the sixteenth.

Realism in early Spanish drama was carried on largely through the medium of the one-act play initiated by Juandel Encina (1468-1529). The productions of this writer were short pieces known as églogas which first dramatized the nativity, but later acquired a more secular note. They are of value for their realistic conservation of the dialogue of the fifteenth century, with the naïve expressions of the rustics, and their misuse of long words. The églogas also preserve many fifteenth century customs in the descriptions of peasant life and in allusions to events of the day.

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7. Alfonso Martínez de Toledo (1398-living in 1466) El corbacho.
 8. Alfonso Martínez de Toledo, "El corbacho", cited in Menéndez Pidal, Antología de prosistas españoles, P. 50.
 9. "Los infantes de Lara" cited in S. G. Morley, Spanish Ballads, pp. 6-12.
 10. "Romance del conde Alarcos y de la infanta Salisa", Ibid, pp. 64-72.
 11. "Bernaldo del Carpio", Ibid, pp. 1-2.
 12. "Romance del Conde Fernán González", Ibid, pp. 3-5.
 13. "Romance del Cid Ruy Diaz", Ibid, pp. 51-54.
 14. "Romance del Palmero", Ibid, pp. 34-36.
 15. "Romance del Conde Fernán González", Ibid, pp. 3-5.

An even greater contribution to the development of realism in the drama is found in the work of a successor, Lope de Rueda (1510?-1565). His interest in the Italian Commedia dell' arte led him to found one of the first dramatic companies in Spain. (1551). This author, actor, and producer travelled about the country, stopping at inns to pass the night and to present Italian comedies and tragedies. For diversion, he introduced between the acts of the classic dramas, realistic one-act plays which he called pasos. Social elements in the pasos are found in the use of idiomatic present dialogue, and of subject matter familiar to the audiences. The most famous of the pasos is that of the Aceitunas in which a husband and wife quarrel over the price to be asked for a crop of olives, though the tree has just been planted. In another, two rogues get a free meal by inveigling a servant out of the provisions he is carrying. Again, a doctor's servant impersonates his master and prescribes for various patients. Satire in the pasos is directed against the church, against representatives of the law, against poor country hidalgos who are pictured as the starving victims of a mistaken pride, and against students who improperly use Latin in talking with ignorant souls who know no Latin, as well as against other common phases of life.

Another form of the short dramatic piece similar in type to the églogas and the pasos was the entremés perfected by Miguel de Cervantes (1547-1616). Cervantes' constructive contributions to the social theatre are his convincing realism,

his minute study of customs, his choice of natural and characteristic situations, and the intensely human nature of his characters. He has written of divorce, the jealousy of both men and women, gossip, inadequate preparation of community officials, etc.

The government, people, dress, and customs of the seventeenth century were satirized by Quiñones de Benavente (1589-1651), who followed Cervantes and dedicated himself exclusively to the writing of the entremés. Taking the stock characters of the Spanish comic repertoire, he makes them move and speak with a grace previously unknown. His humor, however, depends too much upon allusions to events of the day and to customs peculiar to the passing moment. For this reason he is local and temporary in his appeal.

The eighteenth century was a period of degeneration for every form of Spanish literature. The entremés underwent decay. It continued to be written after the old patterns, and was dear to the populace, though despised by the critics under French influence. As time went on the entremés became so obscene as to create scandal. It was suppressed in 1780, but in dying gave way to a new form, the sainete.

The sainete which gives the best available picture of Spanish life of the eighteenth century was developed by Ramón de la Cruz (1731-1794). Characters in this new dramatic genre are no longer conventional types. All social

classes, all walks of life are depicted in the sainetes. The frivolous tertulias of the author's own aristocratic circle are revealed. One sees a futile society seeking vainly to conceal its ignorance beneath a veneer of French culture. Settings are some teeming street, the courtyard of an overcrowded tenement, a public promenade, etc. The author crowds his stage with merchants, artisans, charlatans, and peasants with their wives and sweethearts. All wrangle, make love, exchange repartee, converse in dialect, slang, and bad grammar. There is much bustle and animation.

In the longer drama Juan Ruiz de Alarcón (1581-1639) adherent of the school of Cervantes, Lope de Vega, Tirso de Molina, and Calderón is the foremost figure in the beginnings of a purely social drama which definitely indicates the conflict between the individual and society. In fact, his drama shows practically all the elements of modern social drama. Ruiz de Alarcón is the greatest moralist of the Spanish classical theatre. Besides this, he has no rival among his contemporaries in the comedy of character. His art is more normal and natural than that of his contemporaries and reflects more faithfully the society about him. He develops a single intrigue in which he seeks to contrast the poetry in the daily life of his characters with the more sordid outlook of the prevailing social mass. A certain psychological element appears in his drama. His theatre possesses an unusual dignity. His versatility is shown in the great variety of

themes he has treated, of which the most important are friendship(16), love, jealousy, loyalty(17), falsehood(18), vanity (18), self-control, slander(19), sexual morality(19), modesty (19), greed, ingratitude, sacrifice, the power of money(20), sound learning, bravery, kindness, honor, and social levels(21).

Social drama made almost no steps forward in Spain during the latter part of the seventeenth century. It is curious to note that Alarcón's comedy of character bore fruit in France rather than in Spain. In 1642, Corneille translated, in part, and, in part, imitated La verdad sospechosa under the title Le menteur and it is probably to this translation that one owes the social drama of Molière who was greatly influenced by this play. Molière (1622-1673) in his Comedy of Manners, has borrowed from the Spaniards a plot in whole or in part. It is not certain that he knew directly the works of Alarcón, but great similarity exists in treatment each has given to social situations. One finds in the dramas of Molière all types of seventeenth century French society. He is esteemed for his

"grasp of characters, for his delineation of foibles, and for his exposure of vices."(22)

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16. Ganar amigos, Examen de maridos, III-11.
 17. Los pechos privilegiados.
 18. La verdad sospechosa.
 19. Las paredes oyen.
 20. La industria y la suerte, II-3, Ganar amigos, III-1.
 21. Quien engaña más a quien, III-6, Los favores del mundo.
 22. S. Griswold Morley, "Notes on the Spanish Sources of Molière", Publications of Modern Language Association, p. 289f.

He reproduced with exactness the existing social conditions. He logically created and developed his characters. In the exaggeration of certain qualities to the point of caricature his plays were similar to the comedia de figurón introduced and popularized in the Spanish theatre of the seventeenth century by Rojas Zorrilla. Molière was an advocate of moderation and human tolerance, fighting always against the artificial and the unnatural.

In the latter part of the eighteenth century, social drama developed as it had been in France, returned to Spain. Leandro Fernández de Moratín (1760-1826), the only important dramatist of this period, shows in his decidedly social drama, with its realistic picturing of life, the influence of Molière. He made many translations and adaptations from the Frenchman's theatre. Moratín,

"Saw in the works of the French writer the model upon which the Spanish comedy ought to be based in the future, and the plays of Moratín recall at every step the work of the master." (23).

Besides the influence of Molière upon his subject matter, Moratín had enclosed his drama within the rigid bounds set down by the French critic Boileau, adhering strictly to the unities of time, place, and action, and carefully studying the language employed. The moralizing element in Moratín's theatre is, however, Spanish. His themes are of definite social interest, and he writes of love, jealousy, and marriage.

23. Leslie Bannister Walton, Intro. to El viejo y la niña, p. Lii.

He attacks parental authority and constraint in El sí de las niñas and La mojigata. Literary fashions of the day are satirized in El café. He criticizes the convent system in El sí de las niñas (11-5), advocates state patronage of literature in El café (1-3), and fulminates against the then existing prison system in El barón (11-16).

In spite of the literary movements which came and went in the nineteenth century, the Spanish held tenaciously to the realistic presentation of their own customs and social problems. Martínez de la Rosa (1787-1862) who ushered in the Romantic period with his Conjuración de Venecia (1834) also presented comedies which are social in character. He condemns hypocritical politicians (24), censures the bad example and neglect of a certain class of mothers (25), and treats of the problem of jealousy (26). Martínez de la Rosa's comedy of character is written in the same style as that of Moratín; yet it is greatly inferior to it in the observation of reality, psychological penetration and dialogue. Contemporary with Martínez de la Rosa was Bretón de los Herreros (1796-1873), the most popular poet and humorist of his time. His theatre is very popular and picturesque. His caricatures are exaggerations that delight, and their author was as great a portrayer of his own society as Ramón de la Cruz had been in the eighteenth century.

24. ¡ Lo que puede un empleo!

25. La niña en casa y la madre en la máscara.

26. Los celos infundados o el marido en las chimenea.

About 1850, romantic drama was replaced by comedy which might be called the comedy of transition. This comedy was not entirely modern, written as it was in many cases in verse, but there was a tendency to abandon the display of violent passion and to attempt pictures of contemporary society. Greater interest was evinced in the development of character and in direct observation and reflection of the workings of the mind. Of greatest importance in the theatre of transition are López de Ayala (1828-1879) and Manuel Tamayo y Baús (1829-1898). Tamayo y Baús tried, as did Ayala, to introduce plays with a decided moral element. In Lo positivo, one of the best comedies of manners of the former, the demoralizing greed for wealth is censured. In Lances de honor, he assails the practice of dueling and discloses the hardships and injustice brought upon others than the chief participants by this "debt of honor". Un drama nuevo is a strongly developed psychological study of love and marriage. Tamayo y Baús strove in a mechanical way to simplify the drama in setting, action, characters and expression. The method of López de Ayala is based on observation.

"His merits are inventive force, clean-cut plot, exact balance between reason and imagination, and a firm and vigorous touch which does not debar delicacy." (27)

In El tanto por ciento, he attacks the craze for quick riches, stock-gambling, pleasure seeking, and all the base emotions springing from such indulgence. El nuevo don Juan is a newer

version of the Don Juan type, and directs its criticism toward such men. In Consuelo, Ayala portrays once more the disastrous effect wrought upon a heart not wholly perverted from that longing for wealth and luxury which was coming upon the middle class at that date.

The monarch of the Spanish theatre during the last third of the nineteenth century was José Echegaray (1832-1916). Up until 1885, this writer's dramas offered various notes of Romanticism to such an extent that he was called neo-romantic. In 1885, however, Echegaray began a new phase in his literary production, influenced by his readings from the dramatists of the North: Stringberg, Sudermann, and Ibsen---Ibsen, the dramatist of whom Frank W. Chandler has written,

"He united literature with stagecraft; he combined ideas with story; he brought ethics and sociology out of the closet challenging playgoers to think as well as to feel."

In Echegaray's work he went beyond the superficial treatment of his characters to attempt a more psychological analysis of their thoughts and of the influence upon them of the group within which they moved.

This same psychological, analytical approach which Echegaray used in the latter period of his productivity was apparent throughout all of the French drama of the nineteenth century. It is not always true that individual French writers

28. Frank W. Chandler, "Ibsen", Modern Continental Playwrights, p. 1.

influenced the development of Spanish drama. More often, it is the movement they represented which has in some way affected modern drama in Spain; yet it is impossible to pass by or overlook the French influence. Nineteenth century French drama was almost wholly a social drama, a field definitely established and greatly developed by Alexandre Dumas fils (1824-1895), a creator and prolific initiator of new forms. Dumas opened up the field of the comédie de mœurs where human nature is studied in connection with and affected by its social environment. He created the piece à thèse or problem play and introduced the raisonneur or mouthpiece into the French drama. He wrote almost entirely of woman, and her social position with regard to love, marriage, divorce, and the illegitimate child.

After its beginning, social drama in France was promoted by André Antoine, founder of what is called the Free Theatre. Antoine sought to satisfy the affection of all who desired scope for the untrammelled development of the drama. During the existence of the Free Theatre (1887-1896) Antoine strove to present "slices of life" and to make the drama presented an exact reproduction of reality. Among the dramatists who first gained recognition in the Free Theatre are Eugène Brieux, François de Curel and Courteline. Characteristics of the Free or Naturalistic theatre which Antoine advocated are an emphasis upon observation rather than imagination, a

stress upon facts rather than truth, and life faced in its grimmest and most horrible aspects, for only so can it be improved. This shows that the Naturalistic theatre was not a happy theatre, and that the writers were inclined to be coldly analytical. Dramatists of this theatre are Henri Becque, Eugène Brieux, François de Curel, and Octave Mirbeau.

A narrower division of modern social drama in France, known as the Social Theatre, includes those dramatists whose preoccupation is purely social. This field, often divided into plays of ideas and the thesis play, is represented by François de Curel, Eugène Brieux and Paul Hervieu.

A major theme of French social drama is love, which is treated in a thoroughly psychological, analytical manner. The most important representatives of the social drama of love are Georges de Porto-Riche, Maurice Donnay, Henri Lavedan, and Paul Géraudy.

This phase or type of drama spread to Spain, where social themes were coming more and more to occupy the attention of the dramatists and of the audiences. Social problems of all sorts were being ruthlessly attacked. Writers were observing more carefully and were thinking more deeply and inclusively. The contemporary theatre was initiated by Pérez Galdós (1843-1920), a man of cosmopolitan knowledge, and certainly one of the most careful observers who have ever written for the Spanish stage. Much of his writing is propaganda, but he unhesitat-

ingly attacks his country's weaknesses. In Realidad, a faithful picture of society, he presents the husband who pardons the wife taken in adultery. Mariucha exalts the energy of the human will and praises the girl who works for her living in the face of aristocratic prejudices. He pictures the conflict between pagan and Christian conceptions of life (29), the sad state of the ruined aristocracy which is forced to work (30), and the moral regeneration of a husband who repents and is pardoned (31). In El abuelo he presents a Spanish King Lear who rejects Spanish traditions of family honor.

The writers who have succeeded Galdós have done little more than follow his realistic method, but each has given to his work the proper note of his own individual temperament. Among these, Jacinto Benavente, the greatest of the modern writers of social drama, is master in the field of social satire.

"Lo característico de Benavente ha sido la reacción contra las formas recibidas del arte nacional, movido, no por sentimientos descabidos, sino por el deseo y la necesidad de liberarse de los moldes tradicionales y crear su propia arte de acuerdo con los tiempos nuevos." (32).

The first of Benavente's comedies shows the influence of the Spanish social comedy which developed in distinct forms from Moratín to Galdós. Benavente used in these comedies the characteristics then dominating the French comedy, but

29. Barbara.

30. La de San Quintín.

31. Amor y ciencia.

32. Federico de Onís, Jacinto Benavente, p. 17

still made his dramas essentially Spanish. Thus he shows that the Spanish language was capable of the same subtleties and refinements which until this time were believed to be the exclusive property of the French language.

The French influence noted in his first works was discussed at length by critics who pretended to destroy the value of his work by accusing him of plagiarism. (33). Certain critics compared his works with those of many of the modern French theatre in an effort to prove that Benavente borrowed directly from specific writers. Professor de Onís writes,

"Lo que Benavente recogió de las comedia francesa fué la tendencia satírica y social que le llevó a pintar en muchas de sus primeras comedias, de carácter natural y realista que contrastaba con el carácter romántico de los dramas de Echegaray, la sociedad española, o mejor dicho, madrileña de su tiempo.

"El mundo que Benavente pinta no tiene nada que ver con el francés y su manera de pintarlo, el ingenio, agudeza y penetración de su mirada, son completamente suyos. Gente conocida se titula su segunda obra, y ese mismo nombre podría servir para la mayoría de su primera época y para muchos posteriores." (34).

The truth is that Benavente was capable of assimilating, without danger to his own originality, not only the influence of the French theatre in its diverse forms, but also that of other European literatures, particularly the English and the Scandinavian. (35). He has, in fact, shown himself to be the most cosmopolitan of all modern Spanish playwrights,

33. In his Comida de las fieras Benavente was accused of having used François de Curel's Le repas de Lion until it was proved that the accusation was false, since there is no similarity between the two beyond the titles.

34. de Onís, op. cit., p. 19f.

35. Ibid., p. 19. See also Preface to thesis.

and, despite the intensely personal note of his drama, has become almost universal in his appeal.

Chapter II

The Relation of Benavente's Life To His Work

Benavente's life is of particular interest to the student of his drama, because in it one finds the background for many of his theories and philosophies as well as much of the material which later offered itself for treatment in his theatre.

The dramatist was born in Madrid on August 12, 1866. He was the third child and son of Don Mariano Benavente and Doña Venancia Martínez. The parents belonged to that class known as the "alta clase media", a class that does not reach the heights of the aristocracy, but is above the social group which, according to Lázaro, "reforma en casa los sombreros y vuelve del revés los vestidos para que parezcan nuevos otra vez." (36) This "alta clase media" is of sufficient financial security to be relieved from the mean and sordid problems which so tear down an individual's existence. The fact that Benavente has been free from these worries may account for the definite absence of economic conflict in his theatre.

The dramatist's father, Don Mariano, was a physician who specialized in children's diseases. His lovable manner endeared him to all with whom he came in contact, particularly the children whom he treated. His intense interest in his

36. Ángel Lázaro, Jacinto Benavente, p. 7.

own children led him personally to supervise their education rather than submit them entirely to the care of a teacher. When not employed in the school room, young Benavente accompanied his father, at times, as the surgeon made his calls to the hospital and to the homes. In this manner the boy gained an unusual and intimate knowledge of children which later expressed itself in his work in the children's theatre.

Jacinto Benavente received his first education at the Instituto de San Isidro, where he displayed great precocity. He was studious and reflective, but not exempt from certain periods of insubordination and rebellion. He distinctly disliked to pray and to attend mass, and as often as possible contrived by some means or other to be absent from the daily services.

There must certainly have been hours of sadness and melancholy in the infancy of this impressionable child who found himself bored with the simplicity of a daily routine of school work which his companions found difficult. In his Bachiller Corchuelo he has written of himself,

"más reservado que expresivo y algo dado a meditaciones, me pasaba horas enteras solo, mirando a una luz o una pared bañado de sol, mientras mi imaginación echaba a volar." (37)

37. Ibid, p. 9f.

His greatest diversion was in constructing tiny theatres of cardboard and moving about their stages dolls for whom he spoke, using verses he had learned in the school room or at times introducing his own extemporaneous or hastily composed lines.

Frequently he accompanied his mother on her social visits. At such times the others talked while the child sat by silently. These conversations, in which the woman made their lamentations and exchanged their confidences, fixed themselves permanently in the boy's mind, without his being particularly conscious of the fact that he listened.

"Muchos años después, cuando Jacinto Benavente está escribiendo una de sus comedias, detiene la pluma, desvía la mirada del papel y permanece unos instantes pensativo. El dramaturgo busca la expresión familiar que ha de servir el matiz del personaje. Se trata de una anciana, o de una muchachita casadera, o de una sirvienta-----El poeta evoca su infancia, y otra vez vuelve a ser el niño que oye la conversación de las mujeres. Entonces, la frase familiar deseada, surge espontánea de los mayores, como si el artista la acabase de oír y la repitiera simultáneamente." (38)

Between the ages of twelve and fifteen he learned to read and speak French, English, and Italian, and there opened up for him three new fields, each rich in material and suggestion. Several years later he acquired a reading and speaking knowledge of German. His study of the attitudes and customs of foreign people developed in part his internationalism and

38. Ibid, p. 12.

his understanding of foreign settings and people. This interest has manifested itself in many of his plays in which settings, characters, or elements are of a foreign nature.

Upon leaving the Instituto de San Isidro, he enrolled in a law course in the Univeristy of Madrid where he was a student at the time of his father's death in 1885. Benavente was then nineteen years of age. The boy abandoned all thoughts of legal career and devoted himself entirely to literature. He had no fixed occupation, but travelled about rather generally. In Madrid he associated with all types and classes of people, always reading avidly from his own and other literatures. Conflicting opinions are advanced concerning the theory that during this period he travelled for a time with a circus. (39) Starkie has said,

"The clown's art, it is said, with its dependence on popular favour, afterwards taught him when writing for the stage to avoid effects which cannot be readily caught by the public." (40)

This statement appears plausible when one considers that Benavente is lauded for having done away with many of the artificialities of the theatre. In any case Benavente realized that any effect may be achieved in the theatre, no matter how subtle or elusive the idea may be, so long as it is susceptible to immediate perception. Perhaps it was as a re-

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39. Starkie, Jacinto Benavente, p. 23, and Lázaro, op. cit., p. 17 state that he was connected with a circus. Onís, op. cit., p. 12, most emphatically disagrees.
40. Starkie, op. cit., p. 23.

sult of this intimate knowledge of craftsmanship that he did away with the aside and the soliloquy, two devices which are most assuredly artificial and difficult to portray naturally and convincingly.

It is certain that no travelling done by the dramatist kept him long from Madrid. He spent the greater part of his life in the midst of the city. Occasionally, however, he wearied of the noise and bustle and fled to a house of his own in the village of Aldeancabo located in the province of Toledo. Of his life at Villa-Rosario, the name given to his home, Benavente writes,

"Me despierto temprano, y en la cama leo los periódicos, despacho la correspondencia. Leo o trabajo y a la caída del sol salgo a dar un paseo solo, huyendo de donde haya gente-----que además hay poca-----Cuando vuelvo, a las ocho, como, y después me pongo a trabajar hasta la madrugada.

"Yo no me he aburrído nunca estando solo. Muchas veces cuando me cansaron el tráfico y las insustancialidades y las perfidias de la ciudad, me escapé al pueblo. Y en el pueblo me pasé días enteras sin hablar con nadie(41)

Benavente's first period of writing reveals the fact that he has not yet found himself nor sounded out his scope and ability. His first work was a series of non-dramatic productions of varying type and value, the most important of which was his Teatro fantástico published in 1892. In 1893 he published a volume of poems written in imitation of Camoamor and Bécquer, but Benavente was not a lyric poet.

41. A. Lázaro, op. cit., p. 40.

There had been no great love in his life; neither had he known the suffering and privation which it is generally conceded are necessary in the make-up of a really great poet. In this same year (1893) there appeared his Cartas de mujeres, the first work that shows that the foundation of his work is in the field of feminism. This book is noted for its simplicity and for Benavente's fine knowledge of feminine society. Benavente has no illusions about his heroines, but analyses them with strict impartiality. The scope of the work is broad and through all of the letters one sees the illuminating spirit of renunciation which is so characteristic of the Spanish woman's soul. In the women of these "letters" there are the sketches of Benavente's future heroines. He was inspired by the true Spanish realism which is at all times poetic; yet however delicate Benavente may be in sentiment, he is always a realist. Following this, there came from his pen in 1894 the first of his dramas, El nido ajeno. Since that time he has written rather prolifically for the stage.

Always a careful observer, Benavente stored in his mind a wealth of material gleaned from observations of the people whom he met and with whom he talked. He spent a great deal of time in the cafes with his friends. Ángel Lázaro has printed an interesting description of him as he appeared in 1898.

"Su figura menuda, su rostro moreno y anguloso, su calva prematura, sus largos y retorcidos bigotes, su negra y puntiaguda barba y su enorme cigarro puro-----ese cigarro con el cual siempre vemos a Benavente en

fotografías y caricaturas y sin el cual no se concibe ya al dramaturgo-----son familiares en el Café de Madrid donde forman tertulia Valle Inclán, Rubén Darío, Luis Bello, Pío Baroja, Ricardo Baroja, Martínez Sierra y otros personajes, entre los cuales no faltaba algún cómico y tal cual estudiante aficionado a la literatura." (42)

Benavente would sit for hours and listen to the conversations and arguments which engaged the group, but seldom entered into the discussion. If his opinion were asked,

"el apartó el puro de las boca, se atusó ligeramente el bigote con sus dedos finos y dejó caer con cierta elegante indiferencia su comentario, breve, penetrante y frío como un estilete." (43)

This same brevity and penetration are noticeable in his plays which are neatly developed, and clean-cut in style. He concisely and clearly presents his ideas without being "wordy", until in the latter period of his writing he begins to moralize and philosophize.

His interest in children, which did not lessen after his father's death and his own entrance into the field of drama, led him to establish a Children's Theatre in Madrid in 1909, and to write several beautiful fairy tales for the new institution. Such tales are not lacking, in spite of their imaginative quality, in Benaventian theories.

The death of Menéndez y Pelayo in 1912 left vacant a chair in the Spanish Academy, and Benavente was elected to fill the vacancy. It is interesting to note that before

43. A. Lázaro, op. cit., p. 26.

43. Ibid, p. 26.

Menéndez y Pelayo the position was occupied by the scholar and critic Hartzenbusch.

There have been in Benavente's life since his entrance into manhood no significant events which have directly influenced his work. He has lived a very normal life. Although it is said that his first trip with a circus was the result of his love for one of the women of the troupe, it is not definitely known that this is true. Neither is it known that he ever loved any woman very deeply; at least he has never married. Perhaps it is the lack of some central passion in his life that has led certain critics to designate him as too coldly intellectual.

However that may be, in La malquerida, for which he was given the Nobel Prize for literature in 1922 with the comment,

"Awarded to Benavente for the happy way in which he has pursued the honored traditions of the Spanish theatre." (44)

Benavente displays a positive development of character and an understanding of human nature and emotions which place him among the world's celebrated writers, and show most decidedly his insight into human love and passion, a passion so great that it here manifests itself as hatred.

Benavente lives still in Madrid and continues to write.

44. Annie Russell Marble, The Nobel Prize Winners in Literature, p. 247.

Though his more recent dramas have not received such high praise as some of his earlier works, none is lacking in the vigor, spontaneity, and interest in social situations, all so characteristic of the first productions and of the writer himself.

Chapter III

Benavente's Approach to and Treatment of Social Problems

The year 1898 marked the beginning of a new movement in the literature of Spain. Historically, the year was that of the outbreak of the Cuban war, the ending of which was so disastrous for the Spaniards. The great loss of life and of the remaining Spanish colonies ends a chapter in Spanish history. Spaniards began to see that they must bring their country into line with modern Europe, and every year since has seen the introduction of new ideas into Spain. A more liberal spirit began to inspire the youth of the country. A feeling of internationalism slipped into the attitudes and theories of many of the people. Modern inventions and improvements then current north of the Pyrenees made their appearance on the peninsula. Many advancements were made; yet Spain could never be entirely European. She has always resisted with tenacity the attempts made by invaders to "Europeanize" her government and people, and, despite efforts made to assimilate her neighbors' ideals, the characteristic "españolismo" permeates her literature and art.

The movement of 1898 started brilliantly in literature under the leadership of young writers whose ideals were high and whose works were consistently steeped with a spirit of inquiry. The introduction of new ideals into literature must naturally react upon the drama, and compel it like other arts

to exchange its traditional conventions for modern stage technique. Among the many new writers there moved one who was later to be, not only the master builder of modern Spanish drama, but also the mirror of the society of his time, just as was Molière in France in the seventeenth century. It is truly evident that in the plays of Jacinto Benavente one may study the vices and virtues of twentieth century Spanish society, for in his work he followed closely the statement made by Lope de Vega,

"El drama ha de representar las acciones humanas y pintar las costumbres de su siglo." (45)

Benavente is not a typical Spaniard, but rather is he the most cosmopolitan of all modern Spanish writers. His use of material not entirely Spanish in nature has led various enemies of his to declare that his introduction of foreign elements and ideals into literature has caused the decline of true Spanish art. There are foreign elements in Benavente's theatre, it is true, yet at the same time he retains much that is Spanish. The underlying Spanish traditions cannot be entirely disregarded. This complexity in Benavente's theatre springs largely from the perpetual struggle within his own mind between the old and the new. There is no denying, however, that he was influenced by the French theatre of this period. That the same struggle was present in the minds of contemporary French dramatists is

45. Lope de Vega, "Arte nuevo de hacer comedias", Colección de obras no dramáticas de Lope de Vega, p. 230a.

evident in the productions of such men as François de Curel, Henri Lavedan, Georges de Porto-Riche, and Paul Géraudy, but it cannot be asserted with any degree of certainty that Benavente was directly influenced by any of these writers notwithstanding the similarity. As in Modern French drama there is a refreshing independence in Benavente's departure from confining traditions and in his steps forward into the field of freedom in expression. Chandler has named him,

"too comprehensive a genius to be confined to any one manner." (46)

and discusses him intimately in his chapter^{ex} titled The Versatile Benavente. (47)

"Benavente has tried his hand at almost every genre, and has been successful in them all. In all these different genres he has moved with consummate ease without the suggestion of effort." (48)

His plays are not long, nor are they encumbered with long speeches, until in the latter period of his production, when he begins to moralize. The majority of his dramas are very simple in outline and conversation takes the place of action. The slightly snobbish people of whom he writes so often are endowed, at times, with a scintillating wit which is sharp and subtle. Some plays are developed almost entirely by dialogue. This is true of Alma triunfante and Sacrificios in which,

46. F. W. Chandler, op. cit., p. 506.

47. Ibid, pp. 503-529.

48. J. G. Underhill, quoted in B. H. Clark, A Study of Modern Drama, p. 212.

"the dialogue becomes a medium for expressing various states of the mind, various interpretations of the central idea. Instead of the sharply defined moral standards which had always ruled Spanish drama, we find all the uncertainties, all the doubts of the modern mind." (49)

In both Alma triunfante and Sacrificios Benavente made excellent use of the theories introduced by the Belgian dramatist Maeterlinck in his static and symbolistic theatre. The Spaniard's theatre is of little interest and value to the person who is not highly imaginative. One must read between the lines and learn to divine from certain words and actions a meaning which is often independent of the situation being portrayed. Benavente himself has said,

"The best of the artist's genius is not in what is explained in his works, but in what escapes from them." (50)

Benavente's theatre might be called in many instances the true "slice of life" drama, defined and discussed in Chapter one. In his use of the "slice of life" drama lies much of the charm of the Spaniard's production. As is typical in this type of drama, Benavente does not attempt to solve the problems which he presents to his audiences. He merely reflects for the onlooker the weaknesses and vices of his own society, hoping that his contribution, as an author, will stimulate thought and action in the minds of the people, since it remains for them to correct the faults of their own group.

The following is an apt description of El nido ajeno,

49. Starkie, op. cit., p. 16.

50. B. H. Clark, op. cit., p. 218.

the first of Benavente's plays to gain recognition---- a description which might apply equally well to other "slice of life" dramas.

"no había ningún conde vengativo, ninguna condesa adúltera, ningún escudero traidor. Nada. Salía allí una habitación de casa modesta, y en el segundo acto lo mismo, y en el tercero igual. Un oscuro incidente de la vida familiar, desarrollado entre muy pocos personajes, y un final un poco amargo, con sus gotos de filosofía y de enseñanza de la vida. Habiendo escrito después Benavente tantas obras magníficas, que parecía debían borrar el recuerdo de El nido ajeno éste sigue siendo para muchos como un símbolo, y lo será más aún cuando se trace en frío la historia de últimos del siglo XIX. En El nido ajeno parece indudable que Benavente se propone que el contraste sea absoluto entre su teatro y la técnica que privaba entonces. El nido ajeno puede servir como un modelo excelente de una manera moderna, segura y artística de entender el teatro. De El nido ajeno ha salido la lección y la norma para todo nuestra teatro actual." (51)

González Ruiz, author of the above comment on El nido ajeno, writes concerning Gente conocida, Benavente's second drama which appeared in 1896,

"En ella existe una condición desconcertante todavía para mucha parte del público. No hay 'argumento'. El que esto excribe ha visto a algunos expectadores de Gente conocida preguntar por el argumento con indignación, con el tono del hombre estafado, y que va a pedir que le devuelvan su dinero o arma un escándalo. En 1896 la cosa era más extraordinaria que hoy. Allí había una serie de escenas magistrales, finísimas, donde se veía retratado una parte de la sociedad de entonces, y cuando iba por lo mejor, ¡paf! se bajaba el telón y se acababa la comedia." (52)

And so it is in many cases the absence of definite argument and traditional characters along with the unexpected final curtain which constitutes a part of the interest and popularity of Benavente's theatre. That Benavente carefully

51. González Ruiz, En esta hora, p. 25f.

52. Ibid, p. 26.

calculates, however, the effect which he wishes to produce is indicated by the following caustic remark,

"Every thing that is of importance to the proper understanding of a play must be repeated at least three times during the course of the action. The first time one half of the audience will understand it; the second time the other half will understand it, only at the third repetition may we be sure that everybody understands it, except, of course deaf persons and some critics." (53)

Benavente is indeed versatile, and his ability is to be seen, not in one field alone, but in each phase of his drama, where he has shown himself capable of developing equally well, through his careful use of dialogue and exposition, classes of people and types of characters in widely differing settings.

He has treated some five different social classes in his dramas: the royalty in its pretentious setting of court life and its characters torn between duty and desire; the aristocracy both real and false with its snobbish ideals and standards; the "alta clase media" artificial and narrow, conscious always of its own pure state and the baseness of the next and middle class which it barely escapes; the middle class, a class where struggle and disillusion are at all times uppermost; and finally the lower class, laborers working their farms, speaking their characteristic dialect, finding their souls ruled by almost pagan passions of love and hatred.

53. J. G. Underhill, Plays by Jacinto Benavente Vol. II, p.xv.

Benavente's treatment of the royalty usually follows an outburst of romanticism in his own spirit and feelings. Like his French predecessor Edmond Rostand who surprised the public with the elaborate and romantic Cyrano de Bergerac, Benavente uses a vast canvas and paints with broad strokes an overabundance of color and detail. Representative of this type are La noche del sábado, El dragón de fuego, La princesa Bebé, and La escuela de las princesas. In each of these plays there is a lack of restraint stimulating the imagination to a restless perception of the awe and majesty of life.

"Instead of reinforcing his character satire, the sweep and apparatus of these great spectacles dissipated and bewildered it." (54)

Campo de armiño furnishes an excellent survey of the aristocracy, with its standards false in many cases, offering at the same time a glimpse into the underworld and the life of the "demi-monde" made so celebrated in French drama by Dumas fils. Benavente shows the aristocracy in decadence in Gente conocida, and in La comida de las fieras presents the tragic spectacle of a ruined noble family forced to sell its heirlooms.

Caste and class in Benavente's theatre are of importance only as they prevent attainment of desire. He is more concerned in each case with the often artificial obstacles

54. Ibid, p. ix.

which membership in a certain group imposes upon the people within that group. Class barriers prove to be one of his most interesting themes.

There is not a great deal of difference between the "alta clase media" and the middle class proper. Critics often fail to distinguish between the two. These and the aristocracy rather merge one into the other. Of the three, Professor de Onís states,

"Benavente no analiza y critica una sociedad abstracta y cosmopolita. Ha fijado en estas obras a la burguesía y aristocracia madrileñas tal como eran en un momento de su evolución en que estaban transformándose conforme a moldes europeos, perdiendo muchas de sus tradicionales virtudes sin adquirir las nuevas, y conservando en cambio muchos de los antiguos vicios acrecentados con los nuevos, producto de la modernización. La pintura no contiene todo lo que es sociedad madrileña: pero sin duda, Benavente expresó el carácter dominante del momento que por su propia naturaleza se prestaba a una honda interpretación satírica." (55).

Plays of the "alta clase media" constitute the major part of Benavente's literary production. He himself has given his reason for choosing the aristocracy as a butt of ridicule, and his statement shows that he is not a mere reviler of rich and prominent people.

"If at times I have lashed our aristocracy, it was not on account of prejudice against it, but because, called upon to satirize, and considering the natural and roguish desire of the public to laugh at somebody's cost, it seemed to me more charitable to excite laughter at the expense of those who enjoy many advantages in life, rather than at the expense of the humble who toil and who suffer privations of all kinds. It has never seemed to me that hunger is a fit subject for laughter, and we know that in half of our comic plays hunger is the principal cause of

merriment." (56).

In the few plays of Benavente which treat of the middle class he does present a drab and sordid picture of the hunger of these people whose poverty is not a poverty of body alone, but of mind and soul as well.

In plays of the lower class Benavente, as has been before mentioned, deals with deep innate passion, and in La malquerida and Señora ama, the two outstanding dramas of this type, he has done some of his best work.

Settings for Benavente's plays are of practically every type. For plays dealing with the royalty and for plays of the children's theatre he has chosen fictitious and foreign backgrounds, constructing within his own mind imaginary kingdoms and establishing upon their thrones imaginary kings. For the aristocracy and the two divisions of the middle class, in the majority of cases he uses Madrid for his setting. In La gobernadora, La farándula, Pepa Doncel, and various others, he has placed the action in Moraleda, a fictitious provincial capital in New Castile. Moraleda is Benavente's own creation, and is supposed to typify all that is old fashioned and smug, though none the less politically and socially corrupt.

In his dialect plays of the lower class Benavente has chosen the province of Castile, and uses the rustic background of the country for his setting.

56. Jacinto Benavente, quoted from Introduction to Los intereses creados, p. xviii.

Much of the strength of Benavente's theatre lies in his character creation.

"His drama is a drama of character, not because it is occupied with character, but because it takes place within it, and the conflict is joined in the play and interplay of thought and emotion, of volition and inhibition, of impulse and desire, as they are colored and predetermined by tradition, by heredity, by convention, by education, and all the confused network of motive and prejudice of which conscious assertion of personality is but a part." (57)

And,

"Although all classes of men and women are reproduced in his works, there are no types. Through all his scenes one will search in vain for one hero, and one will search in vain for one villain." (58)

Benavente's strongest characters are his women. In the majority of plays he strives to show their revolt against the conventions and hypocrisies of society; yet he has not written his plays as an expression of feminism. His primary intention is to satirize the corrupt society of Madrid, Moraleda or some foreign city or country. Though he does expose many of the vices and weaknesses of the social group, in every study some particular feminine character is stressed. He sympathizes with the aspirations and disappointments of his women characters. He extols their sacrifices. (59). Wives in his theatre must be indulgent to light-of-love husbands. (60). Should a wife herself sin, the husband may pardon, but where children are involved the law is inexorable. (60). Benavente

57. Underhill, op. cit., p. x.

58. Ibid., p. xiv.

59. Alma triunfante, Sacrificios.

60. Rosas de otoño, Señora ama, La malquerida.

61. La ley de los hijos, La honra de los hombres.

seems to feel that women accomplish most when they forgive, and throughout his feminist plays he exalts love as being wholly unselfish.

The Beneventian hero is weak. With the exception of the "mouthpiece" character who is usually a man, there are few strongly drawn men in Benavente's theatre. Hipólito, of Gente conocida is an interesting person, but he is completely overshadowed by the splendidly drawn Victoria, his wife. Aurelio of La gata de angora would have developed into a significant character, had he not been dominated by his love for Silvia. Toggi of La honra de los hombres is a fragile framework which might have been sturdily completed had he not crumpled before the thrust at his own honor following which Gunna triumphs with her supreme sacrifice. Dani-Sar (62) fights a losing battle against circumstances, because,

"he does not see the egotistical machinations of the European powers which are trying to obtain control over his kingdom." (63).

The youth Julio of Por las nubes is one of the stonger masculine creations of Benavente's theatre. He is a symbol of human individuality.

"Julio must achieve independence for himself and character. He must subdue reality, pushing aside the phantoms which confuse and hem him round, and follow the only reality, the flight of his spirit towards its ideal." (64)

Julio must fight alone, but the exhilarating knowledge that he has strength to do it makes him one of the most admirable

62. El dragón de fuego.

63. Starkie, op. cit., p. 144.

64. Ibid, p. 83.

of Benavente's characters.

Stronger even than Julio and of much greater popularity is Crispín the picaresque servant of Los intereses creados. An astute and sagacious person who understands perfectly the workings of the human mind, Crispín is the center of the play. He it is who moves all the threads of action and sets to work the passions of the characters. He is really master of his master Leandro, because while he is capable of elevated thoughts, of supreme idealisms, and of the generosity of love, he is also a practical man who does not despise material values. González Blanco is of the opinion that,

"Las creaciones de Leandro y Crispín bastarían para inmortalizar a un autor." (65)

It is in Gente conocida that one meets for the first time in Benavente's works the peculiar type of which so many examples follow later. He is the "mouthpiece" who utters all the author's theories and explains the workings of the play.

"He is always a man of the world, a bachelor, ironical but suave, always keeping his ear agog for the gossip of Madrid life. He is equally at home in the study of the master of the house or in the boudoir of the lady; the secrets of his patron's bank balance are known to him no less than the secrets of the 'alcove' ". (66)

In the above mentioned play the mouthpiece is Tomillares, and from him we learn what lies beneath the striking outer appearance of the society of Madrid. In Por las nubes it is Don

65. González Ruiz, op. cit., p. 132.

66. Starkie, op. cit., p. 47.

Hilario, the doctor with modern views, who is eager to demolish the thin covering of hypocrisy that veils the life of the middle classes. Don Pablo, in El collar de estrellas, the mouth-piece and hero of the play, is a symbolistic character. His desire is to live on a mountain, so that he may be far removed from men while the stars breathe a message to him.

In Benavente's earliest works he gives indications of his passionate interest in the welfare of children. In El príncipe que todo lo aprendió en los libros, Ganarse la vida and Cienecita, he has given charming images of fairylike people combined with educational principles. One finds, however, that he too often sacrifices beauty to moral purpose. His little princes and princesses lack the spontaneity, the divine gaiety, and the human naturalness found in Barrie's Peter Pan and Maeterlinck's Blue Bird. His most realistic interpretation of child life is found in the character of Titín who appears in Lecciones de buen amor. Titín is a small boy whose parents are undergoing marital difficulties, and his rôle is subordinated to the love theme. Titín is real, perhaps because he is not symbolistic. He is a normal, pampered child, responding quickly to a bit of tenderness and attention. Exclusive of those plays written expressly for the children's theatre, children are almost nonexistent in Benavente's production.

And so one finds that Benavente's theatre is a theatre of character, characters from all stations of life and from varying geographical settings. Yet despite even this fact,

these characters are more or less uniform in that each is presented in a situation demanding, not only thought and consideration, but in many cases sacrifices of a most tragic type.

Benavente is,

"a keen observer commenting upon life agreeably and wisely, and imbued with faith in the possibility of making it finer." (67).

In his approach to and treatment of social problems he is cheerful, sound and sensible. The problems which he has presented are not of unusual type, but are situations which might arise in the life of any normal individual, and the philosophy which he exemplifies is a sound philosophy of life, irrespective of geographical setting. His sanity of view-point constitutes one of his chief claims for universality.

67. F. W. Chandler, op. cit., p. 528.

Chapter IV

Problems Treated in Benavente's Plays

In the earliest of Benavente's plays the people satirized were themselves the audience. Only the people of the upper class attended the theatre, and it was at these that the dramatist directed his subtle irony. This same Madrilenian society whose defects were so openly satirized by Benavente was the first to become interested in him and to recognize his value, enjoying even the fineness and perfection of the satire of its own portrait, in spite of the similarity of the likeness. But with these satires Benavente would never have been able to awaken the sympathy of the public. His art was too refined and too subtle to ever make itself popular. For this reason he, was, at first, successful only among a select group of people sufficiently cultivated to understand him. It was not long until his dramas became broader and more profound and acquired a more moral and human sentiment. There is in these later plays not only a burlesque of the society surrounding us, but the ideal of a greater humanity. It was then that his theatre began to be more diversified, to acquire richness and variety and to display the profundity of Benavente's dramatic talent. The most diverse tendencies of the modern theatre, all types of emotions, social types and conflicts of the soul have encountered expression in his work. This diversification has not manifested

itself in successive steps, but in a progressive enrichment of varieties which go hand in hand with the plays which precede, maintaining always the comedy of contemporary customs as the dominant background. (68)

The problems of his plays may be rather broadly divided into two groups, one being domestic problems, the other community problems, the first named having most often occupied the dramatist's attention.

In domestic situations one finds that love is the quality considered most frequently in Benavente's theatre. Its pre-eminent position may be due as much to its traditional importance (69) as to its normal importance in human relations, which make logical the attention given the subject by Benavente. About the theme of love have been constructed the most significant of the dramatist's plays and through it there have unfolded some of his most interesting characters. The traditional idea of love is excellently developed in Los intereses creados, one of the most popular of Benavente's works. Leandro has previously thought nothing of living so luxuriously in the hotel when he well knows that he is penniless. Upon meeting the lovely Silvia and being attracted to her immediately, his great love

68. de Onís, op. cit., p. 21ff.

69. The importance of love was shown in El libro de buen amor, its effect upon Finea in La dama boba, its importance in the sentimental novel, Cárcel de amor, and in the pastoral novel Diana.

changes his attitude. He is ashamed of his life. He wishes to flee or to turn himself over to the officials. He himself says,

" ¡Nunca pensé que pudiera amarse de este modo! / Nunca pensé que yo pudiera amar! En mi vida errante por todos los caminos, no fui siquiera el que siempre pasa, sino el que siempre huye, enemiga la tierra, enemigos los hombres, enemiga la luz del sol.----- /He soñado! Pero mañana será otra vez la huida azarosa, será la Justicia que nos persigue-----y no quiero que me halle aquí, donde está ella, donde ella pueda avergonzarse de haberme visto." (70)

In Gente conocida the artificial love of Duke Henry offers distinct contrast to the sincere ideal love of Angelita who refuses the young nobleman's declaration.

"Angelita is a girl without the vanity of Fernanda; love for her is an ideal and she refuses to throw away this pearl even to please her father who has all the old notions with regard to the obedience of daughters." (70)

The immensity of love such as that dreamed of by Angelita finds expression in the devotion of Duraní (72), who believes love to be stronger than all else. Such ideal loves seldom exist, for the two involved often discover, as did Octavio in Amor de amar,

"No era a esa mujer a quien yo amaba; era el amor que nació en mí y que yo animé con mi alma." (73)

70. Los intereses creados, I, C (cuadro) II, 9.

71. Starkie, op. cit., p. 45.

72. El dragón de fuego, I, C II, 3.

73. Amor de amar, II, 2.

Rosario, the young country girl married to a man of the city who completely dominates her, expresses this same idea,

"Y el cariño único es tan difícil de encontrar en una sola persona!" (74)

That there are those who believe in an enveloping sort of love is exemplified in the character of Elisa, the woman who spends her fortune in establishing a successful political career for an ingrate who, once secure, repudiates her. Even then, the remembrance of her lover never fails to stimulate her.

"En todo cariño hay siempre uno que quiere, otro que se deja querer; un incendio y un resplandor, que en nuestra ilusión queremos creer es fuego también," (75)

Elisa admits that she has loved too deeply,

"Pero, ¿es que cuando se quiere puede quererse de otra manera?" (76)

At her death from poverty she receives a letter containing money from the man she loves, but all that matters is the envelope addressed in his handwriting. (77) Of equal depth is the passion which Natalie professes to have felt for the vagabond Paco.

"Le he querido, como no se puede querer a ningún hombre. Por eso le odio como le odio." (78)

Love is so great that it expresses itself as hatred finds superb treatment in La malquerida. Raimunda, mother of Acacia

74. Lo cursi, II, 6.

75. Una señora, II, 2.

76. Ibid, III, 1.

77. Ibid, III, 4.

78. Campo de armiño, I, 6.

and wife of Esteban, is disturbed by the girl's extreme dislike for her stepfather. In an attempt to establish more friendly relations between the two, the mother herself discovers and discloses to the daughter that her hatred is merely a screen behind which hovers her ardent love. (79). Por las nubes.

"is a drama developed out of conflict rising from two kinds of love"---that toward a boy's family and that toward his fiancée---" two ways of looking at life. It is all in accordance with Julio's questioning mind that recedes at one moment to conservative and at another advances to liberal notions. He weighs carefully the evidence for both sides, and only gives his decision, his casting vote, after mature deliberation." (80)

Despite the fact that Julio, following his decision, must go away alone leaving both family and sweetheart,

"the dominant note at the end of the play is one of optimism and faith in the future." (81)

Quite opposite is his attitude to that of Elisa. Julio loved deeply, but he realized the necessity of breaking away from the rut of middle class life. The tragedy of the play lies in the shallow love of his fiancée, who would not suffer with him the hardships of a new life in America. Few of the women in Benevente's plays are this weak, and the woman who loves deeply does not often yield to obstacles or unkindness. Victoria of La comida de las fieras is the first of the true Beneventian heroines.

"she stands in glorious contrast against the gloomy background of male characters, and it is only by her noble example that she gives hope to her husband Hipólito. (82)

79. La malquerida, III, 11.

80. Starkie, op. cit., p. 80.

81. Ibid, p. 84.

82. Ibid, p. 50.

Finding himself ruined financially, the young husband speaks ironically of his wife's duty in remaining with him during this crisis. Victoria reveals her strength when she answers,

"¿Deberes? ¿Deberes conmigo? Deja esa palabra. Eso quiere decir obligación penosa; algo que se cumple por eso, por deber. Yo no llamo deber a nada de lo que hago por ti---lo llamo---- ¡Que sé yo! Algo alegre, fácil, gustoso. Yo daría la vida por ti; y no diría que cumplía una deber, diría----que completaba mi felicidad!" (83)

Donina's love for Nunu is so great that she is willing to be mistreated by him in order to be near him. (84) In spite of the thoughtlessness and the infidelity of many husbands their wives accept their desertion and suffer untold neglect before they finally rise up and demand respect and attention.

"En la protagonista de Rosas de otoño aparece ya el tipo de mujer que ha de alcanzar su máxima definición en Señora ama y que ya se insinuaba en aquella Donina, de La noche del sábado que al hablar de su amante dice. 'Me quería mucho. Me engañaba con todos, es verdad, pero yo era siempre su Donina, la primera, la única después de todo. Y yo, en el fondo, hasta me sentía orgullosa de que todos le quisieron y que él, después de ellos, volvieron a mi, siempre sin haberme olvidado.

"Isabel (Rosas de otoño) pertenece a ese frecuente carácter de mujer amorosa y resignada que perdona las infidelidades del esposo, porque es para él un poco madre y sabe que ella está en el corazón del infiel por encima de los frívolos y fugaces pasa-tiempos con mujeres livianas." (85)

The young and disillusioned María Antonia accuses men of being incapable of loving. Following her outburst,

83. La comida de las fieras, II, 8.

84. La noche del sábado, II, 2.

85. A. Lázaro, op. cit., p. 43.

come the exalted words of Isabel who, in spite of having been so humiliated by her husband's various love adventures, loves him still.

"Los amores alegres, los amores fáciles que sólo conocen la ilusión y el deseo, ven deshojarse todas sus flores en una breve primavera; para el amor de la esposa, para los amores santos y fieles que saben esperar, son nuestras flores, flores tardías, las Rosas de Otoño; no son las flores, del amor, son las flores del deber cultivadas con lágrimas de resignación, con aroma del alma, de algo eterno." (86)

Gonzalo as he is here drawn is very like Feliciano of Señora ama. Dominica, wife of Feliciano, sees herself surrounded by children who are the offspring of her husband and other women of the village. Dominica herself has no child. Upon discovering that she is to be a mother, Dominica turns upon Feliciano, and in her wrath brings him to her feet in tears while she exults in her new security.

"Me tengo desesperá miles de veces, cuando creía que él podía querer a cualquiera otra-----; pero ya me he convencío y que no es así, que son, ellas las que le quieren a él, y en medio de todo pa mí es una satisfacción. Toas por él y él por mí! ¿No es pa estar orgullosa? (87)

Dominica justifies her own worship of Feliciano as she says,

"Yo tenía que querete más que toás juntos pa ser más que toas ellas." (88)

Dominica's role of mother is slight, but in it one may see a thread of the theme of mother love, and love for children. In view of Benavente's interest in children, it is

86. Rosas de otoño, III, 16.

87. Señora ama, I, 6.

88. Ibid, III, 11.

rather unusual that they play so small a part in his theatre. As they appear, their rôle is slight and they are generally rude and impudent. He attacks the lack of affection for children, or he builds a character such as Imperia or Dominica about the theme of mother love. Perhaps it is the dramatist who speaks through the mouth of Federico in the delightful comedy Lecciones de buen amor as he says,

"No comprendo cómo hay gentes para quienes un niño es sólo algo así como un animalito, que divierte cuando está mono, o algo insignificante que no merece más atención que una caricia." (89)

Second only to the problem of love in Benavente's theatre is that of sacrifice. The most evident sketch of sacrifice occurs in the drama of the same name. In this delineation there are two sisters. The older one, an actor, is deeply in love with a young man, who returns her affection. She permits her guardian to convince her that marriage means sacrifice of her art. Feeling, however, that she cannot send Ricardo away, she offers him the hand of her young sister Doll. Doll, to whom Alma is more mother than sister, accepts the situation and marries Ricardo. Alma discovers later that she cannot so easily tear Ricardo from her heart. At his further declaration of love, she decides that she must go away or risk ruining Doll's happiness. As Alma tells this to Ricardo, Doll rushes in, but goes out immediately, saying that the gardener's children are mistreating the birds. Shortly.

after, cries from the children take Alma and Ricardo to the garden where Doll lies upon the grass dead. The children say that, in trying to get a bird from the water, she fell and drowned before help came to them. Both Alma and Ricardo ask themselves if Doll heard their conversation and hearing, consciously threw herself into the water. Lacking a solution, the two must forever separate. The dramatist has here followed the method of Maeterlinck (90) and Currel (91) in suggesting an idea and leaving the question with the audience. Starkie's comment is similar as he says,

"Benavente behind the realist plot exploits the drama of the sub-conscious, and as it were gives the characters a shadow which interprets them." (92)

In Alma triunfante Benavente again pictures a supreme sacrifice. Nervous exhaustion following the death of her only baby and knowledge that she can never have another child led to the insanity of a young married woman. The husband, during the five years which his wife has spent in the hospital, has turned to another woman Emilia. Andrés loves Emilia, and by her has a child whom he adores. This second happiness is destroyed by Isabel's cure and return home. When his wife's sanity is as-

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90. Maeterlinck and the static drama with his use of the sub-conscious in Péleas and Mélisande, Les Aveugles, and L'interieur.
 91. Currel, Sacrifice in La nouvelle idole.
 92. Starkie, op. cit., p. 117.

sured, Andres severs his relations with Emilia and his little daughter. In the meantime, Isabel has learned of the association with Emilia and of the child. In an attempt to make Andrés happy and to gain escape for herself, Isabel most logically pretends a return of insanity. With the exception of the priest all are convinced that the cure has been only temporary. Padre Victoria persuades Isabel that it is her duty to remain in her home to prevent further sin on the part of her husband and Emilia. Isabel consents to remain and her plans are revealed to Andrés. Somewhat inspired by the priest's idea that the soul can at all times triumph over pain and sin, Isabel, Andrés, and Emilia strive to adjust themselves to their new circumstances. (93)

In the play, Más fuerte que el amor, Carmen rejects Guillermo, whom she loves, to marry Carlos, a sickly young man made eligible by his fortune. Her husband's illness prevents his entrance into any very strenuous activity, and his extreme jealousy keeps Carmen from enjoying herself with her friends. Soon the girl's position becomes unbearable and she decides to leave with Guillermo. She is stopped on the verge of her departure when Carlos has a stroke of paralysis, and without revealing her plans, she abandons them to attend her invalid husband. (94) Here, again, there is evidence of French

93. Alma triunfante, III, 2.

94. Más fuerte que el amor, IV, 11.

influence in the similarity of the conclusion of Más fuerte que el amor to that of the French drama Le Marquis de Priola by Henri Lavedan.

More pathetic than Carmen is Paulina (95), who in her early married life left her husband and children. The years prove lonely, however, and after the children are grown, the mother feels the desire to slip back into her old place. A reconciliation occurs between the parents, but this cannot be so easily done with the children. The aches and humiliations which they suffered during the years of her absence cannot now be made up. In order to avoid greater distress the mother goes away because the law of the children is stronger than her own love and her husband's willingness to forgive.

In La inmaculada de los Dolores the theme of sacrifice is treated in a most unique manner. The marriage of Asunción, the daughter of a middle-class man, to a young aristocrat is prevented by the boy's sudden death. At the request of his parents, she goes to live with them. From that time forward her life is one of quiet and extended mourning. The family delights in its suffering and loves Asunción for her continued grief. The girl's position enables her to send money to her own family. When marriage is later proposed to her by the cousin of her deceased fiancé, she gently rejects the second suitor. Marriage, even within the family might destroy any opportunity to further aid her own parents. Asunción is not,

however, so entirely bound by money as this might lead one to believe. In her years of grief she has come to reverence the memory of this man whom she knew so slightly and any other life would now be sacrilege. (96)

Sacrifice of honor is involved in La honra de los hombres in which Gunna relinquishes her honor in an effort to save her sister from disgrace. Magnus, her brother-in-law, is aware of what she has done to shield his wife, and as he goes sorrowfully away, says to her,

"Adiós, Gunna----Sacrificaste por ella lo que más vale para una mujer----tu honra.---- ¿Perdonar? Es que cuando se ve morir a una persona querida----" (97)

Aurelio of La propia estimación will not sacrifice his own self-respect and honor in order to take the woman he loves when the opportunity offers itself. To him, his self-respect is of greater worth than the satisfaction of his desires. (98)

Benavente in his treatment of love and sacrifice is not so satirical as he is in his treatment of marriage. Marriage is a significant topic in his plays, but study of it involves many other minor problems, such as tradition in marriage, the position of the unmarried woman, the education of women for marriage, and the subjection of woman following marriage. Marriage in Spain has long been governed by tradition. Girls, especially those of the higher class, are ordinarily reared

96. La Inmaculada de los Dolores, CIII, 2.

97. La honra de los hombres, II6.

98. La propia estimación, III, 6.

in a convent until they reach a marriageable age, at which time arrangements are made by the parents. The question of the parents' part in marriages is becoming one of foremost discussion and consideration, and Benavente's attitude toward it is extremely liberal. Eugène Brieux of the modern French theatre pictures the disaster resulting, in one case, from the intrusion of the parents in their daughter's marriages. The French drama is Les trois filles de Monsieur Dupont. In the Spanish drama, Gente conocida, Hilario Montes and his wife Petra are greatly disturbed when their daughter refuses to marry the man they have chosen for her, despite the fact that the girl does not know the proposed man. (99) The most liberal attitude displayed is that of Gonzalo, father of Genoveva in Benavente's Pepa Doncel. Gonzalo says,

"Esos hijos no deben la vida más que a Dios. Sobre esos hijos no tenemos ningún derecho a disponer de su vida. Su vida es suya, y ellos son los que deben disponer de ella."
(100)

In Los malhechores del bien the women of the village attempt to arrange the marriage of Jesús and Natividad to their own liking, while before them is the unhappy Teresa whom they have joined to a man old enough to be her father. (101) Nené deftly analyzes the basis of marriage when she says a man's fitness for marriage is based on his social position, his

99. Gente conocida, IV, 14, 17.

100. Pepa Doncel, II, CII, 4.

101. Los malhechores del bien, I, 15.

physical appearance and his clothes. (102)

Because of traditions there are few occupations open to women. The difficult position of the unmarried woman is well portrayed in the French drama Les trois filles de M. Dupont. But, as the professor says, in Los buhos,

"¿Pero, quiere usted decirme a qué gana una mujer honradamente lo bastante para vivir?" (103)

The tragedy of poverty is strikingly drawn in La losa de los sueños. A young couple love each other, but the boy has difficulty in supporting his own family, and marriage would mean additional expense which he could not meet. The girl is willing to work, but there is nothing open to her. The mother laments her poverty, and the boy's pride.

"¡Ay de los señoritos pobres! Que son demasiado para casarse con otro pobre, y muy poco para casarse con un rico." (104)

It would seem then that marriage is the only career open to women; yet these women are not educated for marriage. The French dramatist Dumas fills realistically pictures woman's lack of preparation for marriage in L'Ami des femmes. He well shows that women have no conception of the vast difference in their life before and after marriage. In many cases women are like those pictured by Fray Luis de León in La perfecta casada,

"se engañan muchas mujeres porque piensan que el casarse no es más que dejando la casa del padre, y pasándose a la del marido, salir de servidumbre y venir a libertad y regalo!" (105)

102. El hombrecito, II, 1.

103. Los buhos, II, 5.

104. La losa de los sueños, II, 5.

105. Fray Luis de León, La perfecta casada, p. 4.

In Benavente's drama Por ser con todos leal, ser para todos traidor, woman's helpless state is pictured by Leonor when she says the only thing women can do is sew and make shirts. (106) That women are not educated for marriage is everywhere evident. Isabel and Carmen in discussing their own problems are careful that Luisa, Carmen's daughter, does not overhear them, saying that she must not know such things until after she herself is married. (107)

Perhaps it is as a result of her lack of education and preparation for marriage that the average woman finds herself dominated by her husband and subjected to his will. The ideal union is one such as that described by Román, in which,

"confianza mútua, independendencia absoluta, y buena educacion, aseguran mejor la felicidad más que el cariño más apasionado." (108)

But this is merely an ideal, and more often the situation is quite the opposite. María of El nido ajeno, a young woman who like other young girls was reared in a convent, is now married to José Luis, a man much older than she. The husband, who is not well, seldom leaves home other than to go to his office. According to tradition, a good wife never leaves her home without her husband's permission. María then, must stay at home to administer to her ailing husband. In El Mal que nos hacen, Benavente boldly draws the picture of a woman

106. Por ser con todos leal, ser para todos traidor, I, 6.

107. Rosas de otoño, II, 6.

108. El primo Román, II, 5.

of the "demi-monde" who is completely subjected to the jealousy of the man who loves her. This study is similar to that pictured by the French dramatist Georges de Porto-Riche in Amoureuse. The theme of the Spanish drama is found in the lines,

"Para aceptar el mal que nos hacen necesitamos comprender que es nuestro castigo el castigo de un mal que hemos hecho; no sabemos comprender que el mal que nos hacen sin haberlo merecido, el mal que nosotros hacemos a quien no lo merece, es casi siempre la venganza del mal que otros hicieron." (109)

Rosario, another young girl from the country who finds herself linked to a rather prominent man of the city,

"does her best to follow the nimble spirit of her husband. He, however, wants her to be the modern wife who keeps to herself as much as possible and does not trouble her husband." (110)

She realizes though that in acquiescence to Agustín she is losing her own individuality and soon, as she says,

"sería una mujer sin corazón, incapaz de sentir con verdad." (111)

In spite of the many unhappy domestic situations, divorce is, in the majority of cases, beyond the question. Divorce has been treated only slightly in Benavente's theatre, but in no case is it sanctioned. Isabel, miserable herself and aware of María Antonia's unhappiness, still begs the girl not to attempt a divorce.

"No por mí, ¡por tu madre te lo suplico, reflexiona! no puede ser." (112)

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109. El mal que nos hacen, I, 7.
 110. Starkie, op. cit., p, 56.
 111. Lo cursi, I, 1.
 112. Rosas de otoño, II, 9.

The Emperor in La princesa Bebé refuses absolutely to consider divorce in the royal family. (113) Even in a position where dissolution of marriage seems advisable, to do so is sacrilege. In an effort to help his friend Andrés, the husband in the play Sacrificios, the doctor suggests nullification of his marriage, to which Andrés replies,

"¿Nulidad dice usted? Eso no. La muerte sólo destruye el Sacramento; las leyes humanas nada pueden." (114)

Two other problems which Benavente treats in his drama are class barriers and liberty. Each might be considered more individual than domestic, but since, in the majority of cases, they are involved in domestic situations, consideration is given them here.

The theme of class barriers appears first in Benavente's theatre in Gente conocida, his second drama. Ordinarily social groups are careful that no person of a lower class should enter their association. In this play, however, Hilario Montes who has amassed a fortune by unscrupulous methods, has no difficulty in gaining recognition for himself and for his illegitimate daughter as well. He does this because he has money, and various members of this aristocratic group are in a state of financial decadence. The poor artist Aurelio of La gata de Angora falls in love with Silvia, who is an aristocrat. His

113. La princesa Bebé, I, 8.

114. Alma triunfante, I, 1.

failure to observe certain conventions of her social group results in a quarrel in which she reminds him that he was a middle class nonentity who has risen only by her influence. (115) Doll, who is sent to school with the children of wealthy parents, is looked down upon because her sister works. (116) The many difficulties which Julio encounters arise mainly from his desire to marry outside the bounds of his own social group. In El dragón de fuego, Sita is declared incapable of feeling or of loving, since she is a slave and her blood is that of captives. (117) Nenés believes her love is strong enough to overcome the barriers between her class and that of her lover, but upon discovering that he is not only of another class but has been married, she lacks the courage to defy convention and sends him away. (118) The problem of class enters often into marriage and love in Benavente's theatre. The dramatist, it seems, advocates freedom of choice in such matters, and liberty becomes one of his minor themes.

Love of liberty is one of the foremost questions in La princesa Bebé a comedy in which the princess Elena wishes to escape the bonds which membership in a royal family imposes upon her. She declares the life of the royalty to be hypocritical. (119) Stephen, joined to a commoner, agrees that he has married out of his class, but insists that he is human

115. La gata de Angora, II, 6.

116. Sacrificios, I, 3.

117. El dragón de fuego, I, C II, 8.

118. El hombrecito, III, 7.

119. La princesa Bebé, I, 9.

and has every right to enjoy his life as others do. (120)

The question of freedom is again propounded in La escuela de las princesas when the princess Costanza demands liberty in loving and marrying as she wishes. (121) Her sister Felicidad, being less positive, accepts the conventions caused by her membership in the Royalty, though not without expressing herself,

"Las altezas no opinamos nunca. Ni siquiera vestimos a gusto nuestro." (122)

From this discussion of the problems treated in Benavente's theatre, it would appear that his characters are not happy and that they are too often torn by conflicting ideas and prejudices. This is not always true, however, and in spite of the difficulties surrounding them their attitudes toward life are, in the majority of cases, optimistic. Many of them like Isabel suffer a great deal to gather in the end their "Autumn Roses". (123) Even Alma, one of those who sacrifices most, speaks rationally of reality,

"La realidad es no pedir a la vida lo que no puede dar
-----La realidad es no creernos más grandes, ni más generosos, ni mejores de lo que somos; es conocernos, aceptarnos como somos, buenos o malos, vivir nuestra vida, seguir nuestra camino, que es el único modo de no ser obstáculo en la vida de los demás." (124)

Leonardo, the artist, is cynical in his question,

"¿Que es la vida eternamente renovada, sino la risa triunfadora con que el amor vence a la muerte?" (125)

120. Ibid, I, 9.

121. La escuela de las princesas, I, 5.

122. Ibid, I, 1.

123. Rosas de otoño, III, 15.

124. Sacrificios, II, 3.

125. La noche del sábado, I, 2.

Equally pessimistic is Doña Carmen's comment that not for anything would she begin life anew, (126) as well as the doctor's observation that only the strongest will survive because life is full of hypocritical pretensions that mean little. (127) The tragedy of Los ojos de los muertos lies in Isabel's words,

"Las palabras saben engañar como la vida, pero el silencio de la muerte es verdad."

and in Gabriel's retort,

"Una verdad que no sabes. ¿Qué verdad es esa? Dudar de todo." (128)

Perhaps these things are true, but it may be better to think,

"La vida no es lo que ha sido, es lo que ha de ser."
(129)

One should feel like the little prince who, even in his days of disillusionment still felt the need of dreaming beautiful dreams in order to accomplish beautiful things. (130) Of similar character is Cojita's idea that,

"Nada valdría un hermoso sueño si no sirviera para embellecer nuestra vida. Triunfe siempre en la vida el encanto de nuestros sueños." (131)

It is true that this is a child's attitude, but is not Alberto's very like it?

126. Por las nubes, I, 5.

127. Ibid, I, 7.

128. Los ojos de la muerte, II, 1.

129. Alfilerazos, III, 3.

130. El príncipe que todo lo aprendió en los libros, II, 5.

131. Y va de cuento, I C. IV.

"Es muy sencilla mi filosofía. Aceptar mi condición social con todos sus deberes. Comprender que sólo cumpliéndolos libremente, esto es por su propia voluntad, podría ser dichoso." (132)

In his plays dealing with community problems Benavente satirizes the vices, petty trivialities, and absurdities of the social group, striking most often at the artificialities of social life.

"Gente conocida is the first product of reaction against the old Spanish romantic drama. Benavente follows Ibsen in making the climax of his play show the revolt of woman against the conventions and hypocrisies of society. His primary intention was to satirize the corrupt society of Madrid." (133)

In La comida de las fieras a middle-aged man in need of funds for a business enterprise threatens to kill himself if the young millionaire Hipólito fails to make the loan he asks.

(134) This man and other members of the social group, who pretended to be so interested and fond of Hipólito and his wife, quickly turn from them when their great losses are known. Professor de Onís writes,

"Es análisis del cinicismo y crueldad que hay en el fondo de la sociedad mundana, mostrados al desnudo con motivo de la ruina de una de sus miembros." (135)

Great similarity exists between this play and the French drama Les Corbeaux by Henri Becque.

132. La escuela de las princesas, II, 9.

133. Starkie, op. cit., p. 43.

134. La comida de las fieras, II, 6.

135. de Onís, op. cit., p. 21.

Political life and affairs are corrupted by a group of women who want first one thing then another. The governor's officials have no time to attend to his needs, because they are entirely occupied with running errands for his wife. (136) Mothers encounter nameless difficulties in rearing their daughters,

" ¡Ay qué hija! Luego no la ve usted nunca contenta."
 ---"Es la edad---; las muchachas no saben lo que quieren, o, como dice usted muy bien, sólo quieren lo que no tienen." (137)

"En La gobernadora se desenmascara la hipocresía de una sociedad pacata y convencional, pero inmoral en el fondo."
 (138)

There are, however, those who recognize the stupidity of all these petty conventions. Rodrigo, cousin to the city bred Rosalinda, is believed to be crude because he does not indulge in every insipid nicety of society. To him, these many complexities mean nothing,

" ¿De qué me sirve todo eso? Nadie me quiere. Ni mi familia ni mis compañeros----- ¡Y por qué? Porque no sé fingir, porque soy muy franco," (139)

Benavente has coined the word cursi to mean anything particularly absurd which is a fad. It was originally a local word of Cádiz applied as a nickname to the daughters of a poor tailor called Sicur, because they went about so grotesquely dressed. The syllables of the word were changed around, and it came to mean all that is poor and aspires to

136. La gobernadora, II, 1-6.

137. Ibid, I, 4.

138. de Unís, op. cit., p. 21.

139. Amor de amar, I, 6.

be distinguished. (140)

"Lo 'cursi' la palabra como la cosa, fué un producto genuino del tiempo y rasgo característico de aquella sociedad que descubre mejor quizá que ningún otro lo mas endeble y ficticio de su naturaleza moral." (141)

In the society of the "cursi" one is condemned for loving sincerely, (142) or for being moved emotionally by a theatrical performance (143), and such minor distinctions are made as criticizing a woman for failure to change her "morning dress" before lunch. (144) The extent of what is "cursi" and what is not is well expressed in the words of Aunt Flora,

"Todo eso es verdad; murmuran, exageran; por eso las mujeres verdaderamente honradas deben exagerar su honradez tanto que por mucho que exagere la murmuración, no pueda llegar hasta ellas." (145)

Of like nature is the irony directed at customs and foibles in Al natural, in which Benavente attempts to prove that people are best understood, and appear to best advantage in their natural environment.

Of different type, but of equal absurdity, is the picture presented in La noche del sábado. Lady Seymour will not recognize the notorious gambler, Harry Lucenti when she is accompanied by her husband, for fear of being

140. Starkie, op. cit., p. 54.

141. de Onís, op. cit., p. 21.

142. Lo cursi, III, 6.

143. Ibid, I, 4.

144. Ibid, I, 3.

145. Ibid, III, 5.

rude. Yet she always speaks to Lucenti if she is alone. Her husband and Harry Lucenti are very good friends, but never recognize each other in the presence of Lady Seymour.

(146) Gossip and scandal of every sort are at all times present. Difficulties arising in the group are as quickly and quietly covered over as is possible. In La noche del sábado the world is expected to accept the mysterious death of the prince as suicide. The year before Lady Seymour went about for days with her arm in a sling as the result of a fall from an automobile, and at another time suffered a badly bruised eye "in a fall from a horse". (147) These things happen and pass by unquestioned because.

"La mayor parte de la gente conoce de la vida, como del teatro, la escena, nada más; y la verdadera comedia está entre bastidores." (148)

Don Heliodoro, one of Benavente's most delightful characters, makes fun of the exaggerated courtesies exchanged by the Marchioness and Doña Esperanza in Los malhechores del bien. One of the traditional rules of society requires that an object praised must at once be offered to the admirer. The latter will then assure the owner that the article could not be put to a better use than its present one. In the play, Heliodoro pretends that the Marchioness, on hearing Teresa praised, offers her services

146. La noche del sábado, I, 1.

147. La noche del sábado, V, 3.

148. Ibid, I, 5.

to Doña Esperanza. The latter in her turn, insists that Teresa could not be better employed. (149)

Extremely unconventional is Nené who is not interested in the men who pay court to her, because they are all so alike in every detail. They dress the same, think the same, talk the same, and one of them boasts of having spent more than three thousand "pesetas" during one year for his underwear. (150) Nené struggles to emancipate herself from the primitive feelings of the majority of Spanish women. Her ideas of love and her advanced interpretation of marriage as a social organization make her an outstanding character. She does not hesitate to tell her brother Carlos that he is not marrying for love, but puppet fashion has allowed Isabel, the social match-maker, to arrange his marriage to her own liking. (151)

"The tragedy of El hombrecito appears when Nené realizes that she must act, in future, the farce of society. She cannot renounce her love and yet she is unable to act with courage. Openly she will follow her love. She had been ready to act sincerely and openly in defiance of society, but then her weakness came and she realized that the sacrifice of her good name was too great." (152)

Like Nené's accusation against Carlos is that of Tomillares against María Luisa in El automóvil, when he insists that she is marrying Federico only because of his title and distinguished name. (153)

149. Los malhechores del bien, I, 6.

150. El hombrecito, I, 1-2.

151. Ibid, I, 8.

152. Starkie, op. cit., p. 70.

153. El automóvil, II, 6.

An attempt to live as do his old friends well illustrates ^{the} tragic note in Una señora when Don Manolo, having lost everything he possesses, still goes on pretending to be rich, prodded forward always by his false pride and fear that if his poverty is known, his friends will cease to recognize him. (154) Yet in these shallow groups a recommendation and introduction from a respectable member suffices for the acceptance of a man of shady character. (155) Education consists of a few lessons in manners and little else. Men are not reared to work; yet they find themselves unhappy in their wealth and idleness. One of them says of his own state,

" Me pesaba esta vida insubstancial mía de señorito bien! Pero no me habían educado para otra cosa. No es mía toda la culpa." (156)

It is not surprising that the young woman who lives in the country and finds her hands full, is, in reality, happier than her city friends. Casilda laughs at city life,

"Yo en Madrid, si me divierto, es por lo que me río al ver como se aburre la gente haciendo todo lo posible para divertirse, no paran en todo el día; visitas, bailes, teatros, excursiones, y a cada paso, a jóvenes y viejos no les oye decir otra cosa:
' ¡Qué aburrido está esto! ' ' ¡Me aburro de muerte! '
' ¡No se aburren ustedes! ' " (157)

Closely related to the artificialities of social life are the many customs and traditions of Spanish life which Benavente has included in his drama. These points offer

154. Una señora, I, 3.

155. La virtud sospechosa, II, 6.

156. Nadie sabe lo que quiere, I, 5.

157. El demonio fue antes angel, I, 2.

bits of local color which, in many cases, may be considered as artificialities. The popularity of foreign languages in the circles of the élite resulted in the interpolation of many French and English words in conversation (158). The lottery is certainly the most popular means the women have of making money, and many revealing scenes are involved in discussion of this form of entertainment. (159). Gifts made to women of one's fancy are such articles as flowers, candy, fans, tambourines, etc. (160) Women are not supposed to ride alone with a man, go to his home unaccompanied, (161) or dance with any other than the husband or the fiancé, if engaged. (162) Even a girl who is engaged must not telegraph her fiancé. Gracia wishes to telegraph her fiancé, who has been in an accident, in order to inquire as to his injuries. She is rebuked by her aunt,

" ¡Niña! ¡Telegrafiar a un hombre que no es tu marido!"
(164)

In his presentation of these customs and traditions Benavente makes more evident the almost backward state of Spanish society and the need of conservative, organized

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158. Lo cursi, I, 8.
 159. El automóvil, I, 2. El hombrecito, I, 1.
 160. Rosas de otoño, III, 1.
 161. Por las nubes, II, 2.
 162. Gente conocida, II, 2.
 163. La propia estimación, I, 2.
 164. El tren de los maridos, II, 7.

changes. It is true that certain advancements have been made, but too many of these are trivial changes which do not better the social and economic conditions. Conflict between the old and the new is present on all sides and appears, in some form, in practically all of Benavente's plays. The few people like Nené and Angelita, who would break away from the old, find themselves so completely dominated by the group, that protest or revolt would result in estrangement. The slightest move not in accord with accepted standards leads to unlimited gossip. Inability to control this gossip may end in disaster, for as Duke Henry says,

"la murmuración es como el agua; mientras va encauzada, no hace daño; lo peligroso es que la corriente se desvíe." (165)

The littleness of gossip is one of the minor problems satirized in La noche del sábado. Prince Florencio, upon learning that Imperia has dared to enter a night club, says he must go at once to tell his uncle. Harry Lucenti, who is with him, remarks sarcastically,

"¡Oh, sí! Debe decirse todo lo que puede molestar." (166)

These same people who gossip so constantly are those whose ideas serve as background for so many prejudices and biased attitudes. Particularly in a small town or within a group

165. Gente conocida, I, 4.

166. La noche del sábado, II, 2.

in a city, are, people often governed by public opinion. An attempt to do anything not indulged in by all others is met with disapproval. Amalia and Román, most innocently caught out alone in a storm, find that their reputations are greatly endangered. (167) In La ley de los hijos, Paulina is eager and willing to come back and try to slip penitently into her place in the home. Public comment makes the situation so difficult for her children that she goes away again. (168) Public sentiment is so strong against two girls who cut their hair that caricatures and articles criticizing them are printed in all the newspapers. (169) The shrewd and astute Crispín uses publicity to his advantage when he assures the people who have so heartily denounced him that only through the marriage of Leandro and Silvia can they obtain their money. (170)

In this situation there unfolds another of the leading themes of Benavente's theatre, that of materialism. In the play mentioned, the creditors, to get their money, quickly shift their support to the cause of Crispín and Leandro. Polichinela realizes that his failure to agree to the marriage will cause his name and that of his daughter to be dragged through the mire. He, therefore, gives his consent to the mar-

167. El primo Román, III, 2.

168. La ley de los hijos, III, 1.

169. El demonio fue antes ángel, II, 1.

170. Los intereses creados, II, C.III, 8, 9.

riage and arranges to pay all of Leandro's debts. (171)
 Crispín is the epitome of materialism. Picaresque in character, he well knows the power of money and what one may accomplish with it. As he and Leandro enter the city, he remarks that there are really two cities, one for those people who have money, another for those who have none. (172). He reveals his realistic understanding of the world when he says,

"Nada importa tanto como parecer, según va el mundo."
 (173)

Knowing that Polichinela values his possessions and his money above all else, with the exception of his daughter Silvia, Crispín outlines a campaign which involves the girl. When his trick is discovered, the creditors rush about crying for their money. (174) It is then that Crispín, by drawing Silvia into the affair, successfully gathers in the spoils of his struggle. It is rather unfortunate that Crispín who is so delightfully pictured here, should become, in La ciudad alegre y confiada, so miserably overbearing and avaricious. Materialistic concepts have narrowed and warped the lives of these once happy and interesting people. Polichinela is smarting under

171. Ibid, II, C.III, 9.

172. Ibid, I, C.I, 1.

173. Ibid, I, C.I, 1.

174. Ibid, II, C.III, 18.

the fact that he is being asked to pay his son-in-law's debts. (175) With the approach of war money becomes more and more important (176), and at its outbreak Leandro's death appears almost trivial compared to the loss of Polichinela's home and fortune. (177) Materialism dominates La farándula, where it is shown in the corrupt political policies. The importance placed upon money, possessions, and correct appearances is certainly one of the most degrading vices which Benavente attacks. One may overcome practically all differences and difficulties if he has money. Yet it is neither class nor financial stability that makes a man or a woman. The marqués de Montiel strikes at falseness, artificiality and materialism, the greatest defects of community life, when he says,

"La diferencia de clases no está en ser capitalista o proletario, está en ser noble o plebeyo, y entiéndase que puede ser nobilísimo el más pobre labrador, el más humilde obrero, y puede ser plebeyísimo un Grande de España. La nobleza es de orden espiritual, de derecho divino. La mayor grandeza, la de Dios, nació en un establo." (178)

This discussion shows the problems of Benavente's plays to be of universal type. In handling these problems he has treated practically every class of society. His attitude toward people and social conflict is both broad and tolerant. His comprehension of individual problems is clear and despite

175. La ciudad alegre y confiada, C.II, 2.

176. Ibid, II, 5.

177. Ibid, III, 1.

178. Los nuevos yernos, I, 2.

a certain idealism in his work, he is never over sentimental. He is, at all times, interesting and natural. It has been said that he does not attempt to solve the problems of humanity; he merely exposes them. If this be true, and if it is intended that one should derive particular benefit from Benavente's plays, the social mass may accept to its advantage the lesson taught by Don Pablo in El collar de estrellas,

"La lámpara de allá arriba, ya no lucirá en alto como una estrella más. Lucirá aquí, familiar, y a su alrededor, abierta esa ventana, veremos a un tiempo, en el cielo engarzado por el amor, que es voluntad divina, el Collar de Estrellas. En la tierra engarzada por la voluntad de los hombres, que será amor divino, el collar de las almas." (179)

Chapter V

A Critical Estimate of Benavente as an Exponent of Social Drama

With Benavente living still, it is difficult to attempt any very conclusive estimate of his contribution to the social drama of Spain. Modern critics, with the exception of Ramón Pérez de Ayala who appears more prejudiced than understanding, seem to feel, however, that Benavente's position as one of the foremost of modern dramatists is assured. As one of the leaders in the field of social drama his merit is unquestioned. Walter Starkie writes,

"It has often been said that dramatic art, fully developed in the form of the acted play, is not only the self-realization of the individual, but of society itself. For this reason we might even call Benavente in his works an expression of modern Spain. In the countless visions of his stage we see the pictured struggle of countless aspirations in the modern Spanish mind. His plays are before anything else a series of attempts to reconcile the outer and social life of the modern Spaniard with his interior life, the life of his own soul." (180)

This but illustrates the growing recognition by critics of Benavente's ability to portray the social mass as well as the individual soul.

In his treatment of the social group, as Mr. Underhill says, the tendency of Benavente's art is away from the plastic toward the insubstantial, the transparent. (181). He tries carelessly to suggest sub-conscious life where

180. Starkie, op. cit., p. 194.

181. J. G. Underhill, op. cit., vol. II, p. ix.

thought is in the process of formation. It is the unfinished action in Benavente's theatre that adds much to his effect. The individual is often left to add the "finis". It was this subtlety, perhaps, which militated against Benavente's favorable reception in the early days of his career. His theatre, therefore, may be said to be one which stimulates the imagination.

In spite of his many merits and the acclaim which he later received,

"Benavente no gustó al público en un principio; sus obras fueron escuchados con indiferencia, cuando no con desagrado. Tardó mucho en entrar el público por su nueva modalidad." (182)

It was following the presentation of Los malhechores del bien that the general public recognized the value of Benavente's work, but

"Aun en los momentos en que aplaudió el público, quisiera no aplaudir; se vió que estuvo rendido y aún no quiso confesarlo, tardó mucho en entrar dentro de la obra como se dice en el argot de bastidores." (183)

No doubt the slowness of the public in receiving Benavente as a playwright was due in large measure to the fact that there still prevailed in the Spanish theatre the romantic tradition followed by Echegaray, the reigning playwright of the Spanish stage immediately preceding the epoch of Benavente. It is evident from Pérez de Ayala's defini-

182. González-Blanco, Los dramaturgos españoles contemporáneos, p. 87.

183. Ibid, p. 114.

tion of the essential elements of the theatre that his ideal is still the romantic one. Pérez de Ayala does ^{not} appreciate Benavente, but seems to be alone in his lack of appreciation, in these days when the prevailing vogue is the social drama. Ayala says,

"Los elementos esenciales de toda obra dramática son; realidad, caracteres, acción, y pasión." (183)

He then proceeds in great detail to prove that Benavente has neither.

In 1919 Pérez de Ayala wrote,

"Creemos que los únicos valores positivos en la literatura dramática española de nuestros días-----son Benito Pérez Galdós, y en un grado más bajo de la jerarquía los señores Álvarez Quintero y don Carlos Arniches." (184)

Upon reading this comment, Don Luis de Oteyza wrote Ayala asking why he failed to mention Benavente. Ayala responded with,

"Al no mentar entre los 'valores positivos' al señor Benavente, después de haber estudiado sus obras con tanta prolijidad, claro está que no quiero dar a entender que no existe, sino algo peor, que existe como un valor negativo." (185)

There have been many to contradict Ayala's attitude and statement. Both slip into oblivion upon consideration of the esteem in which Marcelino Meléndez y Pelayo held Benavente. Since the master critic seldom went to the

183. Pérez de Ayala, Las máscaras, p. 129.

184. Ibid, p. 151.

185. Ibid, p. 152.

theatre it is interesting to know that one of the last occasions upon which he did attend was to witness the first presentation of Los intereses creados. He valued Benavente's work highly, recommending the dramatist to all who questioned him concerning contemporary literature. (186)

The knowledge of stage technique which Benavente gained as actor aided him greatly in the mechanical work of the theatre. The understanding of human nature gleaned from observation of others and analyzation of his own thoughts and attitudes made it possible for him to know the exterior as well as the interior life of his characters. That he himself was engrossed in his characters is exemplified by this statement,

"Yo escribo siempre atento al ritmo interior del pensamiento y del corazón. Y ¿sabes lo que eso significa? Significa lo que decía una famosa actriz francesa cuando la aplaudían; 'Ya pueden aplaudir; les doy mi vida.' Porque escribir así, con nervios, con toda el alma de muchas almas, es eso; dar la vida. El autor dramático es el contemplador desinteresado, algo así como un dios artista, para quien no hay secretos en la vida de los personajes. Y no hay secretos porque el autor, por su simpatía, vive la vida de todos ellos." (187)

Benavente, in living the lives of his characters, has penetrated deeply into human nature to study its problems in the sanest and most normal manner. Underhill writes,

186. Cienfuegos, Benavente y la crítica, p. 94.

187. Ibid, p. 106.

"The human terms of problems engage him, the postulates which inhere in their solution, the working out of these in feeling and ways of thought, and in acts afterward of human and irremediable import. He is free from nostrums and posed problems; he neither courts nor wins the unimaginative, the dull mind, nor is his drama more portentous than life, but from page to page, and scene to scene it lives with a strange vivifying power, which infuses even the slightest detail with the significance of the greatest documents that literature has known." (188)

Of the Spanish audience and its interest Storm Jameson writes,

"The interest of the Spaniard is in humanity and humanity a little braver, a little nobler than it is. This tradition of a fuller realism, the modern Spanish theatre has never quite lost, and now in Benavente is reaching." (189)

Miss Jameson later adds,

"The work of Jacinto Benavente is in the highest tradition of the Spanish drama, and a symbol of its promise. The creative genius of Lope de Vega informed his vision of reality with the fullest active and emotional life. To his country's drama he left a tradition of suppleness; skilful construction, splendour of movement and music; living distinctive characters. Only a new creative activity could give fresh life to his pageant of emotion and colour, filling it with the more complex life of modernity, taking the highest from the past and present and making it afresh for the new age. For the one dramatic form, Benavente has gone near accomplishing the task." (190)

In accomplishing the task of perfecting a new dramatic form,

"Benavente parece desinteresarse cada vez más del 'arte' en sus comedias. El filósofo, el ideólogo, el moralista, predominan casi absolutamente en ellas." (191)

188. Underhill, op. cit., vol.II, p. xivf.

189. S. Jameson, Op. cit., p. 231.

190. Ibid, p. 239.

191. Manuel Machado, quoted in Lázaro, op. cit., p. 64.

There is, particularly in Benavente's later work, much philosophizing and moralizing. Despite this, however,

"Hay en él algo que le distingue del resto de los dramaturgos españoles: Una finura de percepción, una acuidad crítica, un penetrante conocimiento de la realidad, que le hacen no rebasar jamás la línea de la sensibilidad para caer de la sensiblería empalagosa ni la línea de la gravedad mediatibunda para caer de la énfasis ridícula." (192)

It is this quality of sensibility and the care exercised in not being too severe in his ridicule which have endeared Benavente to the public.

Of some writers who have gained recognition during their lives, the public remembers their work. There are others whose names alone remain. Jacinto Benavente will live both as a dramatist and as a distinct personality. González-Blanco justifies his permanence both as writer and as man in his statement,

"Ha sido el más feliz de los innovadores en el teatro español contemporáneo. Descubrió con ingeniosidad extraña, acciones artificiales, que hacían, al parecer, de múltiples prejuicios, hasta tal punto, que todo su teatro----no es sino una serie de ensayos encaminados a inquirir cómo y en que medida podemos conformar nuestra vida social con nuestra vida interior, o como la vida social podría reformarse para que fuese más justa, más sincera, más humana." (193)

192. González-Blanco, op. cit., p. 156.

193. Ibid, p. 168.

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1. When two dates are given with a play, the first signifies the date of first presentation, the second that of publication.

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