

MARIANO JOSÉ DE LARRA, A LITERARY LEADER

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PREFACE

Don Mariano José de Larra, one of the most versatile writers of the early part of the nineteenth century, was also one of the most influential writers of his time in Spain. His most important work is his artículos de costumbres or essays of customs, and it is with this phase of his writings that the intensive work for this thesis has been done. His drama and novel have been treated less intensively, and chiefly in connection with the Romantic tendencies in his own work, and also in regard to his influence on these two phases of Spanish literature during the Romantic period.

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CHAPTER I

LARRA, THE MAN

Don Mariano José de Larra lived his brief life during some of the most turbulent and agitated years of Spanish history. He was born March 26, 1809, in Madrid, the year following the invasion of the French in Spain. His mother was Doña Dolores Sánchez de Castro. His father, Don Mariano de Larra y Langelot, was a prominent physician in Madrid, whose sympathy for the invaders caused him to accept a position in the army of Joseph Napoleon. In the year 1813, Don Mariano de Larra, as a result of the victory of the Duke of Wellington at Vitoria, made a hasty departure from the country as did many others who were in sympathy with the French. Larra went with his wife and their four-year old son to Bordeaux. He remained in the hospital at Bordeaux for some months, and then left for a period of travel, visiting Berlin, Strasbourg, Vienna, and Leipzig. On his return to France he took up residence in Paris where he remained until 1818, when Ferdinand VII made it possible for the "afrancesados" to return to Spain.

Mariano José de Larra remained in school in Bordeaux during the entire period of his father's exile. He was a precocious child. Manuel Chaves says that, according to

some letters from his family, he is said to have been able to read perfectly at three years of age, and that on his return to Spain in 1818, he spoke and wrote French more¹ correctly than his native language. These years in France during an impressionable period in Larra's life influenced his nature very deeply.

On his return to Spain, he entered the Escuelas Pías de San Antonia Abad. While he was in school here, a youth in his early teens, he showed his first interest in literature by translating fragments from a French edition of the Iliad, and he attempted to write a Spanish Grammar.²

He also attended school in Corilla, and later went to the Jesuit Colegio Imperial in Madrid, where he continued his studies until about the middle of the year of 1824. He was particularly interested in mathematics and economics. In 1824, Doctor Larra y Langelot went to Valladolid, and his son entered the university. While there the latter studied logic, metaphysics, arithmetic, algebra, geometry,³ Greek, and botany.

We find Larra next in Valencia, but for a very few months. He then went back to Madrid, and entered the Reales Estudios de San Isidro. Even though he made a

¹ Chaves, Manuel, Don Mariano José de Larra, (Fígaro): su tiempo, su vida, sus obras, Imprenta de la Andalucía, Sevilla, 1898, p. 12.

² Ibid., pp. 13-14.

³ Ibid., p. 17.

great many changes, and moved frequently from one school to another, he obtained a good foundation not only in the literature and history of his own country, but in general culture as well. In the year 1826, his formal education came to an end, and early in 1827 some friends obtained a government position for him. This, however, was not the type of work for which he was suited, and he soon gave it up.

In 1827, he published his poem entitled "Oda a la exposición a la industria española del año 1827". The youthful writer was pleased with the reception of his first work, and at the age of eighteen decided definitely, against the will of his father, to follow a literary career. In the next few years he wrote other poems, none of which, however, is of any particular poetic value.

While yet a youth, at the age of nineteen, Larra began his first important literary work. In May 1829, he began to publish El Duende Satírico del Día, a satirical periodical which came out irregularly. In August 1829, even though the paper was well managed, it was suppressed⁴ by the government. Although the little paper did not live long, it gave its author a place among the rising young writers in Madrid and brought him considerable recognition.

Larra came to be known more and more among the groups

⁴ Chaves, Manuel, Don Mariano José de Larra, p. 25.

who discussed literature and the arts in the cafés and at social gatherings. In 1829, he was asked to read a poem, "Oda al terremoto de 1829", for the Duque de Frías, whose attention the young poet had attracted. The poem did not receive a great deal of applause, but this experience brought him in contact with many people of the aristocracy⁵ and gave him material for his essays.

It was also in the year 1829 that Larra was married to Doña Josefa Retoret y Velasco, with whom he was passionately in love. His father did not favor the marriage, since his son was so young, and Larra asked his friend, the Duque de Frías, to give his approval.⁶ Larra was at this time unemployed, and had no regular income.

In 1831, Larra took his place among a group of literary men who met in a corner of the Café del Príncipe and who constituted the celebrated Parnasillo. In the café there was generally a group of young men who had just published a pamphlet, a book, or some poetry, and it was their custom to discuss their own works as well as other current literature while they sat at the tables⁷ smoking. Among those who attended the Parnasillo were such well-known people as Bretón de los Herreros, Ventura de la Vega, Gil de Zárate, José Espronceda, Ferrer del

⁵ Chaves, Manuel, Don Mariano José de Larra, p. 28.

⁶ Ibid., p. 29.

⁷ Ibid., p. 37.

Río, Doncel, Roca de Togores, Miguel de los Santos,
Estébanez Calderón, Salas y Quiroga, and Mesonero Romanos.⁸

In spite of his youth, Larra was one of the outstanding personalities of the group. Pérez Galdós says of him:

"Tan rápidas eran las oscilaciones de su ánimo arrebatado en un vértigo de afecto vehemente, que no se podía distinguir en él la risa del llanto ni el dudoso equívoco de la expresión sincera. Había en su tono y en su lenguaje un doble sentido que aterraba y un epigramático gracejo que seducía, --- afectaba a veces desprecio de su nación, y la censuraba con acritud, quejándose de ella, como el prisionero que se queja de la estrechez incómoda de su jaula. Frecuentemente, después de alborotar en un grupo del café, con palabras impetuosas o mordaces, se retiraba a un rincón rehusando toda compañía, o despidiéndose a la francesa, huía. Después de largas ausencias, tornaba a la pandilla con humor hipocondríaco. Daba su opinión sobre poesía y literatura con un aplomo y una originalidad de juicio que pasmaba a todos. Ni Veguita (Ventura de la Vega) ni el tuerto autor de comedias (Bretón de los Herberos) tenían conocimiento por lo que sus maestros aquí le enseñaban, de aquel peregrino modo de juzgar, buscando el fondo más bien que la forma."⁹

Pérez Galdós was judging Larra merely as a successor who was interested in him as a literary man and not from an intimate knowledge of the man himself. Mesonero Romanos, a contemporary of Larra, knew him not only as a writer but as a close friend. He says that Larra was characterized "por su innata mordacidad".

After complying with the strict requisites which the government ordered, Larra, in August of 1832, published

⁸ Chaves, Manuel, Don Mariano José de Larra, p. 38.

⁹ Ibid., p. 39.

the first issue of his second periodical, El Pobrecito Hablador, using the pseudonym, Bachiller Juan Pérez de Munguía. This periodical, principally a review of customs, contained among many other essays "Vuelva usted mañana", "El castellano viejo", "El mundo todo es máscaras", "Empeños y desempeños", y "El casarse pronto y mal".

These are essays which show his keen power of observation.

The censorship became so rigid in 1833 that it was necessary for Larra to discontinue his periodical, and the last issue was published in March of that year. However, Larra was not so despondent and undecided as to what to do after the suppression of this periodical as he had been after that of El Duende Satírico del Día. In this same year, 1833, he began to write articles for the Revista Española,¹⁰ with which he was associated until 1835. For his articles in the Revista, Larra adopted the name Fígaro, which was destined to become celebrated. Mesonero Romanos did not favor this name, suggested by one of those present one day at a gathering of the Parnasillo, because it was of foreign origin. El Curioso Parlante, speaking of the choice of the pseudonym, says of it:

"Discutiéronse varios hasta que la autorizada voz de Grimalde pronunció el de Fígaro que adoptó Larra, con entusiasmo, a pesar de que yo expuse las razones, por las cuales no opinaba favorablemente hacia un nombre de invención extranjera, lo que era a mi entender, tan impropio,

¹⁰ Chaves, Manuel, Don Mariano José de Larra, p. 44.

como si a un periodista francés se le antojase firmar con el seudónimo de Sancho Panza." ¹¹

In September 1833, the long reign of the king, Ferdinand VII, came to an end, and in a short time "la guerra civil", which was to last for six years, began. Many transformations occurred during the next few turbulent years in Spain. Larra, energetic, observant, alert, and critical has pictured for us the political and social changes which took place within the nation. The death of Ferdinand VII was for Larra a redemption. During the oppressive reign of this despot, Larra was completely unable to express his clearly defined ideas of politics and society, and it was after his death that Figaro came to be well known. Larra was a profound liberal who was sincerely interested in the welfare of the people. He wanted political rights for them. He believed in them, in human ¹² progress, and in social perfectibility.

Late in 1833, or early in 1834, Larra met Doña Dolores Armijo, a married woman, with whom he fell passionately in love. Even though she went away some time after they met and ceased to return his affections, he continued to love her and was plunged into melancholy because of his

¹¹ Chaves, Manuel, Don Mariano José de Larra, p. 47.

¹² Piñeyro, Enrique, El romanticismo en España, Garnier Hermanos, Paris, 1904, p. 39.

¹³ Larra, Selected Essays, edited by Bourland, Ginn and Company, New York, 1932, p. xi.

love for her. Finally, overcome by his illegitimate love and yielding to his suffering, he decided to leave Spain for a long trip. He left in April of 1835 and first went to Lisboa, Portugal, where he embarked for London. In August, tired of the quietness of English life, he went to Paris. Although Larra did not cease his writings, he continued to be morbid and restless, and after about a year's¹⁴ absence, he returned to Spain.

After his return Figaro attempted to enter politics. He had always been interested in improving the government, and in his political essays criticized what he believed to be its defects. In 1836, after Istúrez became the prime minister, it was announced that the new government would assemble a parliament to reform the constitution. Larra, who was sincerely interested in such an undertaking, was elected as a representative from Ávila. The parliament, however, unfortunately for Larra, never met. Shortly after the election an uprising took place at La Granja. On August the fifteenth the government collapsed, and on the¹⁵ twenty-third the elections were annulled. As a result of the failure of his political venture his melancholy was deepened, and the sad state into which his love affair had thrown him was intensified. He became even more morbid

¹⁴ Chaves, Manuel, Don Mariano José de Larra, p. 86.

¹⁵ Larra, Selected Essays, p. XIV.

after the death of his very close friend, the Count of Campo-Alange, who was killed in December, 1836, at the siege of Bilbao.

Finally his emotional state became so intense that it completely overcame him. Not even his success as a journalist, his popularity throughout Madrid, or the fact that he was even sought by the queen were forceful enough to calm his impetuous spirit. Thus, on the evening of the thirteenth of February, 1837 at about eight-thirty, just after Doña Dolores Armijo had left his house, number three, Santa Clara¹⁶ street, Larra took his pistol and killed himself. His wife was at home at the time of the tragedy. Those who had been with Larra and talked with him during the day had not noticed any change in his attitude or manner. Mesonero Romanos, who had visited him during the afternoon, believed¹⁷ him to be more calm than usual.

Larra was a typical youth of the Romantic period. He was enthusiastic, independent, and individualistic. By nature, he was impetuous and rebellious, yet at the same time he was very nationalistic. He was in many ways a product of this turbulent epoch of Spanish history. Still a youth, even at the time of his death, he was unable to adjust his sensitive nature to all the forces of the period

¹⁶ Chaves, Manuel, Don Mariano José de Larra, p. 117.

¹⁷ Piñeyro, Enrique, El romanticismo en España, p. 49.

which were pulling at him. His ideas were too far in advance of those of his time for him to live harmoniously with the other people of the nation. He was very progressive and had aspirations of peace for Spain. The country, however, had not yet recovered sufficiently from her period of decadence to become a settled nation. Foreign influence was still a potent force. But even of more importance than this was the political struggle between the followers of Prince Charles, who were called the Carlists, and those of the Queen. Larra was disturbed by the struggles and was unable to adapt himself to society.

In his literary life Larra wavered between Classicism and Romanticism. He had been educated in the humanities, and he had also studied the classical literature of Spain and of foreign countries. He criticized the traits of the new school in various essays; yet, at times, in his own writings and particularly in his dramas he yielded to the Romantic tendencies and followed them in some of his works, particularly in Macías, his one original drama, and in his novel, El doncel de don Enrique el doliente.

The first works of the new school to come into Spain were from England. It would have been more natural, from the standpoint of past literary influence in Spain, had

¹⁸ Larra satirizes Romanticism in "El casarse pronto y mal", "La comedia moderna", "Review of Antony."

these first Romantic works come from France, but because of the rigid censorship maintained by Ferdinand VII it was almost impossible for any French literature to enter Spain during his reign. Consequently before the death of the king, when the cloud which had been extended over the country began to be raised, Larra had little opportunity to read the works of Victor Hugo and other leading French Romanticists. This door being closed, he naturally turned to English Romantic works for thought and inspiration. These works were the novels of Sir Walter Scott¹⁹ which were introduced about 1831. The success of Scott's historical novels after their introduction into Spain was rapid and decisive,²⁰ and it was only a short time until Spanish authors began to write historical novels also. So strong was the hold of the Romantic genre that few writers during the years of 1834 to 1840 failed to follow the new school even though their aptitudes may have been²¹ to the contrary.

Don Ramón López Soler was the first Spaniard to write in this manner. His novel, El primogénito de Alburquerque was the first of a series of a Colección de novelas históricas originales de España, and El doncel de don Enrique el doliente by Larra, published early in 1834, was the

¹⁹ Northup, George Tyler, Introduction to Spanish Literature, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1925, p. 359.

²⁰ Chaves, Manuel, Don Mariano José de Larra, p. 60.

²¹ Loc. cit.

second of such a series. El doncel has the same external appearance as a novel of Scott: it has long dialogues, the same slow and lengthy narration, and chapters without titles which are preceded by epigraphs in verse. A significant difference in the novel of Larra and those of Scott is that Larra does not use so much detailed historical material as Scott. There is, however, enough to prove that he was familiar with Spanish history.

El doncel de don Enrique el doliente and also Larra's drama, Macías, are based on the old legend of an obstinate lover called "Macías el Enamorado." Macías was born in Galicia and served the Marquis of Villena. During his absence on one occasion the Marquis married the girl whom Macías loved to one of the knights. Macías sent amorous messages to the lady, knowing that she still loved him. When her husband discovered this he became so enraged that he followed Macías one day and killed him as he sang of the woman he loved. Macías' body was buried with pomp and ceremony in the church of Santa Catolina of Arjonilla.²² The story of this unfortunate youth was very popular throughout all of Spain, and there were many fabulous legends associated with him. We see the great attraction which this story had for Larra in that he chose to use it as the subject of his

²² McGuire, Elizabeth, "A Study of the Writings of Don Mariano José de Larra", University of California Publications in Modern Philology, September 14, 1918, vol. 7, p. 144.

two works which are representative of the Romantic school.

Macías, Larra's most important dramatic work, published in 1834, is said to be the first Romantic drama written in verse in Spain; and it is one of the most influential of the early works of this generation. Larra does not follow the rules of the Spanish comedia but rather the tendencies of the new school toward individuality. His play consists of four acts, and he disregards the unities of time and place. The theme of the play, the passionate love of two young people, is the theme which was to be dominant in other Romantic dramas. The fatalistic element is present in Macías, but it is not nearly so forceful as it is in the drama of the Duque de Rivas, Don Álvaro, o la fuerza del sino.²³ The treatment of the story of Macías is not objective as are the plays of the school of the Spanish Classical period, but the subject assumes a very personal nature, for the Romantic author wished to express the deep feelings of his characters.

The characters of Macías also are representative of those of the new school. Elvira, the heroine, is the typical woman of Romanticism who is weak and who has little initiative. Macías is the idealistic Spaniard who is unable to suppress his emotions and to continue living without Elvira for his wife. Death is the only answer

²³ Don Álvaro, published in 1835, is one of the most typical Spanish Romantic dramas.

that he can see to his problems, and the result is suicide for both himself and for Elvira. Chaves describes Larra's Macías:

" . . . lleno de vida, dotado de un cuerpo arrogante, de un corazón generoso y de un valor no desmentido que alienta sólo para la posición amorosa, que inflama su pecho, que derrite su alma. Ella se denuncia en sus altos, influye en todas sus ideas, le tiene por completo sometido a su imperio, y cuando habla, son sus frases espontáneas, sentidas, y expresión del fuego que le devora." ²⁴

In the "Dos palabras" which precedes the play, Macías, Larra explains very definitely his attitude toward the play. He admits that it was difficult to give it a name; and he does not classify it according to any particular type. He says that he who looks for the stamp of any school in the play, or who may try to find a name to classify it will be mistaken. And after all, what good is there in a name? The play is not a Spanish comedia like the works of Lope de Vega, Calderón de la Barca, Moreto, Tirso de Molina, or Ruiz de Alarcón. It is not a modern comedy which follows the rules of the classical genre; nor is it a comedy of customs or character. It is not a tragedy in the manner of Aristarcos, Esquilo, nor Sophocles. It is not a play to be compared with Antony, Lucrecia Borgia, and Enrique III. Then what is Macías? He answers:

²⁴ Chaves, Manuel, Don Mariano José de Larra, p. 62.

"Macías es un hombre que ama, y nada más. Su nombre y su lamentable vida pertenecen al historiador; sus pasiones al poeta. Pintar a Macías como imaginé que pudo o debió ser, desarrollar los sentimientos que experimentarí en el frenesí de su loca pasión, y retratar a un hombre, ese fué el objeto de mi drama." 25

Although Larra was not an outstanding poet, there are many beautiful passages in this play which show real merit. A particularly good passage is that in which Elvira defends the Doncel, Macías, whom Nuño, her father, has just called "mal trovador o simple aventurero".

Elvira replies:

"¡Eso no! Si no os place, nunca, nunca me llamará su esposa, ni cumplida veré jamás tan plácida esperanza. Pero al menos sed justo: sus virtudes, su ingenio, su valor, sus altos hechos no despreciéis, señor: ¿dónde están muchos que a Macías se igualen, o parezcan? De clima en clima, vos, de gente en gente buscadlos que le imiten solamente." 26

The enthusiasm and intensity of feeling are not seen less in the passage in which Macías talks with his lord, Don Enrique, after his return, and tells him of his great love for Elvira.

"Perdona si a la orden tuya
no di obediencia debida,
porque es quitarme la vida
mandar que de Andújar huya.

25 Larra, Obras completas, t. IV, Macías, Casa Editorial Sopena, Barcelona, p. 239.

26 Ibid., I, 2, p. 251.

Aquí está Elvira, señor,
 y aquí, como caballero,
 mi juramento primero
 me llamaba y el amor.
 No presumas que es nacido
 de alguna leve afición;
 no, que es veraz mi pasión
 y nadie igual la ha sentido." 27

Even though his verses may not be particularly outstanding for their form and technique, the force of the sentiment and passion expressed in them makes them beautiful.

In some respects it may be said that Larra's life is similar to the tragedy of his drama, Macías, although the details of his life do not coincide with the events of the play. There is, however, it seems a motivating power in his life, or rather there are two elements pulling and struggling to conquer Larra. These elements are what may be called "the old" and "the new" of Spanish literature. Larra may be said to be a transition figure between the neo-Classical school of which Moratín was outstanding and of Romanticism. He admired the Classicism of Moratín very much and praised him for trying to improve the drama of the eighteenth century, yet he could not accept the school which he followed, as it was. In the same manner he was not able to accept Romanticism in its entirety. He was far too realistic to follow strictly the

²⁷ Larra, Obras completas, II, 2, p. 269.

extravagant views of this school. Even though Larra follows the Romantic tendencies in his drama and his novel, two of the most significant works of the early Romantic period, the work which was to bring him fame and give him a place among the prose writers of first rank was his essays. These, which will be discussed later, are realistic and very distinct from the fanciful story of Macías.

Blanco García says of him: "Es cosa sabida que Larra se mantuvo algo indeciso en todas estas luchas"²⁸. He did not definitely associate himself with any particular group or school. The struggles which he had in his literary life, linked with his struggles concerning his political beliefs, added to his deeply philosophical and gloomy nature and led him to the desperate end of taking his life. Larra was a heroic figure, and he struggled against harsh circumstances. His son was right when he said:

"Era preciso mucho talento y mucha inteligencia para detener la carrera de las imaginaciones y hacerlas pasarse un solo instante en un hecho o una persona que no tuviera parte directa en la revolución que se estaba operando."²⁹

²⁸ McGuire, Elizabeth, "A Study of the Writings of Don Mariano José de Larra", p. 92.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 90.

CHAPTER II

LARRA, THE MODERN PROSE WRITER

Mariano José de Larra stood apart from the other writers of his period. He was individualistic. And he was a liberal not only in the position he took in regard to politics and society, and in matters concerning the press and business, but also in literature. Larra was truly a modern, and, according to Azorín, he was the only modern man of his time in Spain.³⁰

This modern spirit, this individualism, is manifested in Larra's manner of writing as well as in the subject matter of his works. He was always interested in matters of language and style, and expressed his own ideas of different types of writing in his essays.

We find that one of the outstanding qualities of his manner of writing, particularly in his "artículos" (essays), is his sincerity and simplicity. Larra was opposed to affectation, artificiality, and ostentation in writing, and in his essay entitled "Literatura" we find him expressing his position in a plea for purity of language:

³⁰ Azorín, Rivas y Larra, Rafael Caro Raggio, Madrid, 1916, p. 165.

"Hemos dicho que la literatura es la expresión del progreso de un pueblo; y la palabra, hablada o escrita, no es más que la representación de las ideas, es decir, de ese mismo progreso. --- Quisiéramos, sin ir más lejos en la cuestión, ver al mismo Cervantes en el día, forzado a dar al público un artículo de periódico acerca de la elección directa, de la responsabilidad ministerial, del crédito o del juego de bolsa, y en él (mismo) quisiéramos leer la lengua de Cervantes. Y no se nos diga que el sublime ingenio no hubiera nunca descendido a semejantes pequeñeces, porque esas pequeñeces forman nuestra existencia de ahora, como constituían la de entonces las comedias de capa y espada; y porque Cervantes que las escribía, para vivir, cuando no se escribían sino comedias de capa y espada, escribiría, para vivir también, artículos de periódico, hoy que no se escriben sino artículos de periódico. Lo más que pueden los puristas exigir es que al adoptar voces y giros y frases nuevas, se respete, se consulte, se obedezca en lo posible al tipo, a la índole, a las fuentes, a las analogías de la lengua."³¹

Larra did not believe as the "puristas" who held strictly to the language of the classical period, so rich in that time, but so poor for present needs.³²

Language, he says in an article entitled "Filología",³³ is for a speaker that which a gun is to a soldier. Just as a gun must be kept in good working order, so must a language be kept "up to date". A language should grow, and new words should be added from time to time in order that it should progress, since it is an expression of the

³¹ Larra, Artículos de crítica literaria y artística, t. II, edición por Lomba y Pedraja, Ediciones de "La Lectura", Madrid, "Literatura", 1923, pp. 191-192.

³² Ibid., p. 193.

³³ Larra, Obras completas, t. I, Casa Editorial Sopena, Barcelona, p. 50.

progress of the people. Larra says that while the language of Spain had remained more or less stationary since the period of the decadence, other countries, which Spain found it necessary to imitate, enriched their language with expressions from various parts of the world without asking "From where do they come?" but "For what will they serve?"³⁴

In "El album", Fígaro discusses the origin of the word "album", but he is not concerned with it. He says

"El que la voz album no sea castellana es para nosotros, que no somos ni queremos ser puristas, objeción de poquísima importancia; en ninguna parte hemos encontrado todavía el pacto que ha hecho el hombre con la divinidad ni con la naturaleza de usar de tal o cual combinación de sílabas para explicarse; desde el momento en que por mutuo acuerdo una palabra se entiende, ya es buena; desde el punto en que una lengua es buena para hacerse entender en ella, cumple con su objeto, y mejor será indudablemente aquella cuya elasticidad le permite dar entrada a mayor número de palabras exóticas, porque estará segura de no carecer jamás de las voces que necesite: cuando no las tenga por sí, las traerá de fuera." ³⁵

It was Larra's greatest desire to keep the language as pure and simple as possible. Yet he was liberal in his opinion that we should not hesitate to accept words from another language if they help us to express our ideas more clearly and concisely. Larra was an eclectic and believed that we should choose the best from all sources in language

³⁴ Larra, Artículos, t. II, "Literatura", p. 194.

³⁵ Larra, Obras completas, t. I, "El album", p. 442.

as well as in other things.

Larra expresses in his essay "Literatura" his idea of what literature should be. Literature should express ideas and truths, which must not be made obscure by an abundance of unnecessary words or phrases. We see his desire for simplicity of expression when he says:

" . . . no queremos esa literatura reducida a las galas del decir, al son de la rema, a entonar sonetos que concede todo a la expresión y nada a la idea, sino una literatura hija de la experiencia y de la historia y faro, por tanto, del porvenir, estudiosa, analizadora, filosófica profunda pensándolo todo, en prosa o en verso, al alcance de la multitud." ³⁶

In writing, words within themselves are of considerable importance. There are two types of words according to Larra. There are those which are strong and forceful, and which without any modification bring about a flood of ideas. He classifies such words as "palabras malas":

" . . . palabras que valen más que un discurso, y que dan que discurrir; cuando uno oye, por ejemplo, la palabra conspiración, cree estar viendo un drama entero, aunque no sea nada en realidad. Cuando uno oye la palabra libertad, sola ella solita, cree uno estar oyendo una larga comedia. --- Cada una de estas palabras son verdaderas linternas mágicas; el mundo todo pasa al través de ellas. Una vez encendidas todo se ve dentro." ³⁷

The other group of words consists of "palabras buenas".

³⁶ Larra, Artículos, t. II, "Literatura", p. 197.

³⁷ Larra, Obras completas, t. I, "Por ahora", p. 388.

They are words which do not say any thing for themselves. They are as "pliant as wax" and adapt themselves to all figures. They do not have a fixed and decisive meaning. These words, as prosperidad, ilustración, justicia, siglo, luces, progreso, reforma, marchar he calls the food of all
 38
 conversation.

Larra shows his interest in words in another essay in which he says that when one sees a man he does not see more than a word. It is true, however, at times that one may see many words in one man, and again he may see a hun-
 39
 dred men, and see only one word.

Our critic also gives us another interesting classification of words. There are "palabras del derecho, palabras del revés, palabras simples, palabras dobles, palabras contrahechas, palabras mudas, palabras elocuentes, pala-
 40
 bras monstruas."

Larra, always deploring any show or ostentation, discusses the use of classical or foreign quotations and epigraphs in "Manía de citas y epígrafes". It is true that Larra used a great many quotations from Spanish authors as well as from foreign writers, as we shall see later, but he disapproves of their excessive use when an

38 Larra, Obras completas, t. I, "Por ahora", p. 388.

39 Larra, Ideario español, edited by Andrés González-Blanco, Prologue and notes by Gabriel Alomar, Biblioteca nueva, Madrid, "El poder de las palabras", p. 182.

40 Loc. cit.

affected style is the result. Many writers use foreign expressions to show their readers that they know Latin, or that they have read French authors. It is not a rare thing, he says, for people to study Latin, or for them to know French, especially in a period when French words⁴¹ are used so extensively in Spain. Larra explains his position in regard to the use of quotations, when he says:

"Nosotros, que no somos hombres superiores, ni nos creemos vulgos, tomaremos de buena gana un medio igualmente apartado de ambos extremos, y deseáramos que, más celosos de nuestro orgullo nacional, no fuésemos por agua a los ríos extranjeros, teniéndolos caudalosos en nuestra casa." ⁴²

He realizes that readers tire of the work of pedantic authors who use ancient literary proverbs which have now lost their novelty and charm. Larra favored the choice of a "middle course" in stylistic details rather than to follow the extreme.

Larra, however, does not mean to depreciate the value of the study of the classics. On the other hand he is conscious that a careful study of them wisely directed is the only way to improve the literature of his period. According to him,

"Si los jóvenes que se dedican a la literatura estudiasen más nuestros poetas antiguos en vez de traducir tanto y

⁴¹ Larra, Obras completas, t. I, "Manía de citas y de epígrafes", p. 51.

⁴² Ibid., p. 53.

tan mal, sabrían mejor su lengua, se aficionarían más de ella, no le embutirían de expresiones exóticas, no necesarias, y serían más celosos del honor nacional." 43

Larra himself studied the classics extensively, and he realized that through this knowledge he gained a greater command over his language; hence, his belief that it would help other youthful writers as it had helped him.

Larra manifests his conservatism and his desire for the purity of the language of his country in suggesting the importance of an Academy to standardize the language and to determine the words which are best suited to the needs of the people before they are accepted.

"En primer lugar necesitarán una academia para que se atribuya el derecho de decirles que tal o cual vocablo no debe significar lo que ellos quieren, sino cualquiera otra cosa; necesitarán sabios por consiguiente que se ocupen toda una larga vida en hablar de cómo se ha de hablar; necesitarán escritores, que hagan macitos de papeles encuadernados que llamarán libros, para decir sus opiniones a los demás, a quienes creen que importan." 44

This suggestion for an Academy seems somewhat strange in that the Real Academia Española had been established in 1714. Larra's purpose, then, is evidently to emphasize the importance of an Academy in fixing a language.

There are certain elements or characteristics which go to make up Figaro's distinct manner of writing. When

43 Larra, Obras completas, t. I, "Filología", p. 51.

44 Ibid., "Las palabras", p. 295.

we read his artículos one of the first things that we observe is his pure, elegant Spanish. We have seen already that Larra studied classical literature, and that he encouraged others to do so. His knowledge of Latin, of classical Spanish, and French helped him to a very great degree to form a forceful, pure, and correct manner of writing.

One of the most interesting phases of Larra's style is his vocabulary. Because of his study of the classics, he became "language conscious", and was particularly interested in correct diction. He seeks always to use the most appropriate words possible so that he may express his ideas directly and simply. Words, he says, are the representation of ideas, and the significance of the ideas depends entirely upon the skill of the author in managing his vocabulary.

One of the very interesting phases of his vocabulary is his subtle use of suffixes. Through these he obtains varying shades of meanings which enable him to make his satire more pointed and more concise for having been able to say with one word what would have otherwise required, perhaps, several. The suffix which he, like many other Spanish writers, uses most extensively is the diminutive. This is perhaps the most expressive, the most pliable, and

⁴⁵ Larra, Artículos, t. II, "Literatura", p. 192.

the one most easily adapted to satirical writing.

We find numerous examples of the diminutive used to express smallness of size, one of its most common uses.

We find ⁴⁶un paquetillo; ⁴⁷una nubecilla de ligero polvo; ⁴⁸la ventanilla; ⁴⁹los cuernecillos.

We find many diminutives used satirically in his literary criticisms. In "Don Timoteo o el literato" he ⁵⁰uses versecillos when he wishes to satirize short, unimportant poems. He is satirizing other forms of literature when he uses ⁵¹folletito, ⁵²novelita, ⁵³traduciditas, and ⁵⁴piecitas.

A very subtle use of diminutives is to attach them to titles to express contempt of the aristocracy. For example, we find ⁵⁵la baronesita, ⁵⁶la marquesita, ⁵⁷la condesita, ⁵⁸el baroncito.

⁴⁶ Larra, Artículos, t. II, "Empeños y desempeños", p. 60.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 61.

⁴⁸ Larra, Selected Essays, "La diligencia", p. 105.

⁴⁹ Larra, Artículos, t. I, "El mundo todo es máscaras", p. 129.

⁵⁰ Larra, Selected Essays, p. 22.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 23.

⁵² Loc. cit.

⁵³ Larra, Artículos, t. II, "Carta a Andrés", p. 30.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 26.

⁵⁵ Ibid., t. I, "Empeños y desempeños", p. 57.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 56.

⁵⁷ Ibid., t. II, "Una primera representación", p. 244.

⁵⁸ Ibid., t. I, "La sociedad", p. 223.

He also uses this suffix naturally to express affection and intimate relationship as when he addresses his nephew in "Empeños y desempeños" as ⁵⁹señorito. It is with a feeling, more or less, of intimacy that he attaches a diminutive to proper names, as ⁶⁰Elenita, ⁶¹Don Periquito, and ⁶²Julianito.

Another suffix which Larra uses to express contempt is the augmentative. He uses, for example "ese gran ⁶³librote"; "esos ⁶⁴literatazos abrumados de años y de laureles;" "ese ⁶⁵grán muchachón, rubio alto, y extranjero!" This suffix is an excellent way to express depreciation of other persons or things, or as an expression of ridicule as Larra has used those given above in his satires.

We also find that Larra is careful in the choice of his adjectives. He is conscious of the value of adjectives in adding to the definiteness of a picture, especially in regard to his essays in which he is describing customs, as well as the people themselves. Well-chosen adjectives add completeness and force to the picture. In "El casarse pronto y mal" the description of Elena, the wife of the

⁵⁹ Larra, Artículos, t. II, "Carta a Andrés", p. 60.

⁶⁰ Ibid., t. I, "El casarse pronto y mal", p. 74.

⁶¹ Ibid., "En este país", p. 149.

⁶² Ibid., "El mundo todo es máscaras", p. 134.

⁶³ Larra, Selected Essays, "Don Timoteo o el literato", p. 19.

⁶⁴ Larra, Obras completas, t. I, "El album", p. 443.

⁶⁵ Ibid., "Varios caracteres", p. 217.

author's so-called nephew, is a good example of his ability to choose expressive adjectives:

"Aquella amabilidad de Elena es coquetería a los ojos de su esposo; su noble orgullo, insufrible altanería; su garrulidad divertida y graciosa, locuacidad insolente y cáustica; sus ojos brillantes se han marchitado, sus encantos están ajados, su talle perdió sus esbeltas formas."⁶⁶

In "La sociedad" we find a good example of his use of adjectives when he says of society that "primera, es imperecedora, --- y segundo, que es franca, sincera, y movida por sentimientos generosos."⁶⁷ These adjectives, as the majority of those which he uses, are simple and direct, and in keeping with a direct, concise, "llano" or "level" style of writing, instead of being extravagant and artificial. He thoroughly disapproves of flowery, "high-sounding effects gained from an excessive use of adjectives, as shown particularly in a review of his of the poetry of Don Juan Bautista Alonso. In a particular poem Figaro criticizes the use of certain unnecessary adjectives, and the obscurity resulting from the position of the words in a particular stanza. Otherwise, it would be an expression of first rank.⁶⁸ This desire for simplicity is one of the outstanding

⁶⁶ Larra, Artículos, t. I, p. 78.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 219.

⁶⁸ Larra, Obras completas, t. I, "Literatura-Poesías de Don Juan Bautista Alonso", p. 393.

features of Larra's entire work.

Figaro often uses foreign words, the majority of which are either French or Latin, though words from other languages also are found. It is probable that Larra's extensive use of French expressions was due to the very character of the period. At that time, when anything French was considered the vogue by most of the people, the use of French expressions in both conversation and in writing was a very general custom. Larra was not one of the "afrancesados" as those extreme enthusiasts for things French were called; on the other hand he severely criticized them.⁶⁹ But because of the universality of the custom of using French words it was very natural for Larra to do so. We find a number of illustrations which show that he uses French words naturally, as for example: "Escribe una esquila a borrell para que enviase cuanto antes un pantalón de panticour que me tiene hace meses por allá".⁷⁰

Perhaps an even more logical explanation of his use of French words is that he lived in France during five years of his childhood, and that on his return to Spain he spoke French more correctly and with more ease than Spanish. This knowledge of French would naturally cause

⁶⁹ In "Casarse pronto y mal" and "Empeños y desempeños".

⁷⁰ Larra, Artículos, t. I, "La vida de Madrid", p. 213.

him to use such expressions somewhat unconsciously.

One of the objects of Larra's use of French words is that of satirizing the "afrancesados" and ridiculing their use of foreign expressions. In his essay, "En este país", he does this when he is talking of his friend Don Periquito, who is a typical Spaniard in that he is very disdainful of every thing in his country. Larra remarks to himself during their discussion of breakfasting in Spain:

"Vive Dios! que cuando en este país se tiene un buen cocinero y un exquisito servicio y los criados necesarios, se puede almorzar un excelente beefsteak con todos los adherentes de un almuerzo a la fourchette; y que en París los que pagan ocho o diez reales por un appartement garni, o una mezquina habitación en una casa de huéspedes, como mi amigo don Periquito, no se desayunan con pavos trufados ni con champagne." ⁷¹

Besides French words we find Larra using Italian words, although much less extensively. Larra shows his desire of enriching the language by using such words as ⁷²un ⁷³bambino and altra prima donna. In "Ventajas de las cosas a medio hacer" we find this sentence:

"Suele decirse que nadie tiene más edad que la que representa, y esta es una de las muchas mentiras que corren acreditadas y recibidas en el mundo con cierto agradable barniz de verdad, y que entran en el círculo de todo aquello que sin ser "vero", es sin embargo, ben trovato!" ⁷⁴

⁷¹ Larra, Artículos, t. I, "En este país", p. 150.

⁷² Larra, Selected Essays, "La diligencia", p. 105.

⁷³ Larra, Artículos, t. I, "La fonda nueva", p. 161.

⁷⁴ Larra, Selected Essays, "La diligencia", p. 261.

Caroline Bourland explains in a note in her text, Selected Essays of Larra, that these words are taken from the old proverb, "Se non e vero e ben trovato"⁷⁵. In "La diligencia" we find a short quotation from Dante:"voi ch'intrate lasciate ogni speranza."⁷⁶

Larra was so well acquainted with classical literature that we are not surprised to find a large number of Latin words and expressions throughout his writings, even though he says in "Manía de citas" that we have heard utile dulci, lectorem delectando, obscurus fio, parturiens montes until we are tired of them, because they are used more or less commonly by everyone. Yet again, to satirize the affected use of them he uses such expressions as ad⁷⁷ hoc, sine qua non,⁷⁸ mutatis mutando,⁷⁹ in pectore,⁸⁰ and in statu quo.⁸¹

One of the most important reasons for his use of foreign words is his evident desire to enrich the Spanish language by adding new words, for the vocabulary of the classicists is inadequate to express modern ideas. Larra, while he was opposed to an extreme use of gallicisms,

⁷⁵ Larra, Selected Essays, "La diligencia", p. 133.

⁷⁶ Larra, Ibid., p. 105.

⁷⁷ Larra, Artículos, t. II, "Una primera representación", p. 234.

⁷⁸ Ibid., t. I, "Las calaveras", p. 264.

⁷⁹ Ibid., t. II, "Yo quiero ser cómico", p. 70.

⁸⁰ Ibid., t. I, "¿Quién es el público?", p. 45.

⁸¹ Ibid., t. II, "Carta de Fígaro", p. 398.

introduced some in his writings. ⁸²Echarpé, which he uses, has
 come down into Spanish today as ⁸³charpa; ⁸⁴ecarté, the name of a
 fashionable card game has not changed; suaré comes from the
 French soirée.

The strong hold which classical literature had on Larra
 is readily seen in his use of quotations from writers of the
 classical period, as ⁸⁵Phaedrus and ⁸⁶Terence. He makes fre-
 quent references to ⁸⁷Horace, to ⁸⁸Virgil, to Aristofanes, to
⁸⁹Socrates, and to ⁹⁰Juvenal.

Besides referring to classical writers, we find numer-
 ous allusions to such mythological characters as ⁹¹Phoebus,
⁹²Jupiter, Mercury, and Minerva.

He also quotes from the writers of the Spanish clas-
 sical period a great deal. Among those from whom he quotes
 most frequently are ⁹³Quevedo, ⁹⁴Lope de Vega, ⁹⁵Cervantes, and

⁸² Larra, Artículos, t. I, "La vida de Madrid", p. 213.

⁸³ Ibid., p. 216; also in "La sociedad", p. 371.

⁸⁴ Ibid., "El mundo todo es máscaras", pp. 139 and 159.

⁸⁵ Ibid., "El café", p. 5.

⁸⁶ Ibid., "Corridas de toros", p. 30, "El mundo todo es máscaras", p. 137.

⁸⁷ Ibid., "Una comedia moderna", p. 17; also t. II, "De la sátira de los satíricos", p. 212; "Literatura", p. 197.

⁸⁸ Loc. cit.

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 211.

⁹⁰ Ibid., "La satírico-manía", p. 72.

⁹¹ Ibid., t. I, "Empeños y desempeños", p. 68.

⁹² Larra, Obras completas, t. I, "Sátira contra los vicios de la corte", p. 68.

⁹³ Larra, Artículos, t. I, "Corridas de toros", p. 27, and "El día de difuntos de 1836", p. 209.

⁹⁴ Larra, Obras completas, t. I, "Teatros", p. 81.

⁹⁵ Ibid., "Don Timoteo", p. 186; Artículos, t. II, "Literatura"; Ibid., "Carta de Figaro", p. 114.

Mariano, the historian.

Larra's extensive use of these epigraphs and citations, besides lending a decided color to the artículos, gives us an insight into his early literary life. We see him as a serious-minded, rather pedantic youth with a classical as well as an eighteenth century background, which he also manifests through his quotations. Among eighteenth century writers from whom he quotes we find

97 98 99 100

Iriarte, Moratín, Jovellanos, Manuel José Quintana.

While considering Larra's use of epigraphs and citations it is interesting to note that in his novel El doncel de don Enrique el doliente, published early in 1834, he uses an epigraph at the beginning of each chapter instead of a title. In doing so he seems to be imitating the historical novels of Sir Walter Scott which evidently influenced him, particularly in this work. Almost all of the epigraphs which he chose to use as headings for his chapters are taken from old Spanish Romances, as:

"Y después de haber propuesto
Su intento y sus pretensiones
A los de guerra y estado
Que atento le escuchan y oyen,
En confuso conferir
Se oye un susurro discorde
Que sala y palacio asorda

96 Larra, Obras completas, t. I, "Teatros", p. 79.

97 Ibid., "El Album", p. 442.

98 Larra, Artículos, t. I, "El mundo todo es máscaras", p. 123.

99 Ibid., "Empeños y desempeños", p. 33.

100 Ibid., "Modos de vivir que no dan de vivir", p. 35.

La diversidad de voces." 101
Romance de Bernardo del Carpio.

"De un ardiente amor vencido,
Dice:-De cuatro elementos,
El fuego tengo en mi pecho,
El aire está en mis suspiros,
Toda el agua está en mis ojos,
Autores de mi castigo." 102
Romance del rey Rodrigo.

The influence of classical literature is again decidedly evident in the sentence structure of Figaro's essays. Throughout these there are examples of the various characteristic elements of a classical style, particularly in his satires when he is ridiculing something or some person. We find that he uses exclamatory sentences frequently in satire, as in "El café": "¡Este empeño de que todo el mundo se ha de dar a luz! ¡Maldita sea la luz! ¡Cuanto mejor viviríamos a obscuras que alumbradas por
I03
esos candiles de la literatura!"

In imitation of Cicero he also uses such rhetorical questions as: "¿Qué mejor careta ha menester don Braulio
I04
que su hipocresía?" and "¿Veis aquel hombre tan amable y
I05
tan cortés, tan comedido con las damas en sociedad?"

Another of Cicero's characteristics which we find in Larra's essays is his use of superlatives, particularly

I01 Larra, Obras completas, t. III, "El doncel", p. 149.

I02 Ibid., p. 50.

I03 Larra, Artículos, t. I, p. II.

I04 Ibid., "El mundo todo es máscaras", p. 134.

I05 Loc. cit.

in his satires when he is ridiculing something or someone, and wishes to make his subject exaggerated and impressive. In "La fonda nueva" Larra satirizes the lack of public entertainments in Madrid and refers to "este tristísimo cuadro de costumbres."¹⁰⁶

He is satirizing the fact that only a very few people have any knowledge at all of classical literature when he says in "Don Timoteo" that "las bellas letras es un oficio particular que sólo profesan algunos, cuando debiera constituir una pequeñísima parte de la educación de todos."¹⁰⁷

In "El mundo todo es máscaras" we find a good example of a superlative used to describe a person: "--decía a un ente rarísimo que se había vestido todo de cuernecitos."¹⁰⁸

He sometimes uses adverbs in the superlative degree for the purpose of emphasis in his satires. We find for example: "Perfectísimamente, y salíme riendo de los azares de la vida."¹⁰⁹

Another trait of a classical style is to use a series of nouns which have the same ending. Larra does this to gain an impressive sound when he writes "el favoritismo, el absolutismo, el obscurantismo, el fanatismo, el egoísmo--

¹⁰⁶ Larra, Selected Essays, p. 32.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 19.

¹⁰⁸ Larra, Artículos, t. I, p. 128.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 131.

ésas son nuestras virtudes--ése es el Carlos que pro-
clamáis."¹¹⁰

He frequently uses a series of exclamations for emphasis as: "¡Qué suavidad! ¡Qué atractivo! ¡Cuán
fácil trato debe de tener!"¹¹¹

Besides a series of exclamations, he also uses words in a series as "Leyó, hacinó, confundió, fué superficial, vano, presumido, orgulloso, terco, y no dejó de tomarse
más rienda de la que se le había dado."¹¹²

As an example of an abundant style with a long series we find that he often lists characteristics or qualities as in "El casarse pronto y mal":

"Religión verdadera, bien entendida, virtudes, energía, amor al orden, aplicación a lo útil y menos desprecio de muchas calidades buenas que nos distinguen aún de otros naciones, son en el día las cosas que más nos pueden aprovechar."¹¹³

Another example of an abundant style which we find rather frequently in Larra is the repetition of a word at the first of each clause in a long sentence. In "La vida de Madrid" a good example of this type of sentence is one in which the clauses are linked together:

¹¹⁰ Larra, Obras completas, t. I, "Los tres no son más que dos", p. 255.

¹¹¹ Larra, Artículos, t. I, "El mundo todo es máscaras", p. 134.

¹¹² Ibid., "El casarse pronto y mal", p. 72.

¹¹³ Larra, Artículos, t. I, p. 82.

"Cuando en un día de esos en que un insomnio prolongado o un contratiempo de la víspera preparan al hombre a la meditación, me paro a considerar el destino del mundo; cuando me veo rodando dentro de él con mis semejantes por los espacios --- cuando veo la verdad igualmente distante de todos puntos ---; cuando reflexiono que no se le ve el fin ---; cuando pregunto a todos ---; cuando contemplo que la vida ---." 114

An example of his use of the repetition of adjectives as a rhetorical figure is seen when he is describing an inn in Madrid: "Míre usted; nos darán, en primer lugar, mantel y servilletas puercas, vasos puercos, platos puercos y mozos puercos." 115

There are many well-balanced sentences in his essays. We find for example "Augusto no es a los ojos de su esposa aquel hombre amable y seductor, flexible y condescendiente; es un hombre sin ninguna habilidad, sin talento alguno, celoso y soberbio, déspota y no marido." 116

Another phase of Larra's sentence structure which is worthy of particular attention is the variety of the length of his sentences. In many of his dialogues the sentences are simple, short, and to the point. They are well worded and, because of their directness, make his articles brilliant and sparkling. In Spanish they may be well described by the adjective "chispeantes". He does not, however, bore his readers with short sentences, nor does he use them to

114 Larra, Artículos, t. I, p. 209.

115 Ibid., "La fonda nueva", p. 163.

116 Ibid., "El casarse pronto y mal", p. 79.

the extent that his essays appear "choppy". Many of his sentences are very long, and a smooth, flowing effect is produced. He is careful that these sentences do not become so involved that the thought is made obscure.¹¹⁷

The general structure of Figaro's essays is an interesting element of his style of writing. In almost all of his artículos we find that he observes a certain plan. As a general rule he begins an essay with an introduction in which he usually makes certain generalizing statements, and sometimes gives a reason for writing the article. Many times, he uses a very common literary device as the introduction. In several essays, he presents a journalist who is trying to think of something to write for his paper, but who can find nothing to say. While he is meditating, some one enters or some occasion arises which furnishes material for his article. He uses this device in "Empeños y desempeños", where his nephew, a French enthusiast, comes to his house early one morning.

In "El mundo todo es máscaras", the author feels that he has nothing at all to say. A friend enters and invites him to a masquerade. The journalist finally consents. The article is an account of his experience and a satire of the people who attend these entertainments.

¹¹⁷ A sentence of nineteen lines is found in "El café", p. 19; and one twenty lines long is found in "Corridas de toros", p. 35.

The situation of "El duende y el librero" is slightly different in that the bookseller is asking the author to write, and the author hesitates because so many people apply even general satire to themselves and become offended.

In "El castellano viejo" he again uses a device to present his satire rather than to declare it directly. In this article the author goes for a walk, and he satirizes the people whom he meets on the streets.

He varies the plan of presenting his subject at times by introducing foreign people. He does this in one of his best known essays, "Vuelva usted mañana". A Frenchman, who comes to Spain on business, visits the author, and tells him that he expects to be in the country for only a few days. However, he finds that it is almost impossible to see the men with whom he has business, and it is necessary for him to remain for a long period of time.

Another essay in which the author meets a foreigner is "La fonda nueva". The Frenchman in this article has come to Spain to study the customs of the country.

Some of his introductions, different from those in which he employs a literary device, are like the one we find in "La vida de Madrid" in which Larra is in a more philosophical mood than usual. He declares here that he belongs to a middle class of people who wonder or marvel at many things, rather than to a superior or stupid class where the people are satisfied not to think. He is

fatalistic in his declaration that we are only born to die and die for only having been born. When he looks at life, he finds that his neighbors appear to be happy, yet they always complain of their fate. These aspects of life cause him to wonder at the great power of the Supreme Being and at his great wisdom. He says that civilization may change man's actions and words, but not his fate. He was born a victim and his executioner pursues him always. From this he goes to a discussion of a typical youth of Madrid.

He does not, however, always begin his artículos with an introductory passage. One which is rather distinct is "Corridas de toros". He first quotes a short passage of poetry from Racine, and also from Quevedo, a plan which he follows in various essays. He then enters directly into the major part of the discussion, a rather long, detailed sketch of the history of bullfighting, in which he makes a greater display of erudition than usual. From this he leads to his ironic observations of the public's love for such a vulgar ill-smelling place as the "plaza de toros."

After the introduction of an essay, Larra usually

¹¹⁸ Larra, Artículos, t. I, "¿Quién es el público y dónde se encuentra?", p. 9.

Ibid., t. II, "Carta a Andrés", p. 22.

Ibid., "Una comedia moderna", p. 1.

Obras completas, t. I, "¿Quién es por acá el autor de una comedia?", p. 47.

Ibid., "Empeños y desempeños", p. 32.

presents a short story in which he pictures some phase of life in Madrid. This main portion of the article is in contrast to the generality of the introductions in that it is very concrete, and filled with details. "El mundo todo es máscaras", "El casarse pronto y mal", and "La vida de Madrid" are essays typical of the ones in which he tells a story.

Larra usually ends his articles with a conclusion in which he crystallizes the thought of his article, as in "La vida de Madrid" where, after a discussion of a typical youth, he returns to the theme of his introduction, and says that in spite of all the misfortunes, most people continue to want to live.

The personal quality of Larra's essays is one of the elements which make them so readable. The reader feels almost that he has had a visit with the author and that he has given him an account of the typical young men of Madrid, as in "La vida de Madrid"; that he related his strange adventures at the masquerade in "Todo el mundo es máscaras"; or that he told the story of his sister and nephew, who are fictitious characters, in the essay "El casarse pronto y mal". By putting himself into his essays, the satire was less apt to have been taken personally by the readers of his time; he was able to satirize more customs and to do it more pointedly and more effectively.

Larra was truly a stylist. He wrote first of all with care, because he trained himself to do so. He was conscious of the effect of his style. He must have studied his manner of writing to have been able to change from the regularity and simple directness of a modern style to an exaggerated, bombastic classical style when he wished to present a different tone and a different thought.

Someone has said that a language has a tune. Then certainly the language which Larra spoke had a very decided melody, with a wide range of notes as well as a variety of rhythm. The variety of his manner of writing makes his style individual, and gives it a freshness and charm which hold one's attention.

Larra was the inventor of modern Spanish prose. In the Romantic period when other writers were interested in medievalism and antiquity, Larra was breaking away from traditional forms of writing, from artificiality, affectation, and exaggeration in the language, and adopted a pure, clear, direct style which was not to be equalled until in the modern period years after his death.

CHAPTER III

LARRA, THE COSTUMBRISTA WRITER

Larra wrote poetry, dramas, a novel, and literary criticism, but it is his "artículos o cuadros de costumbres" for which he was best fitted and for which he is best known today. Larra had a keen intellect, he was a very close observer, and above all he had a critical mind. These qualities enabled him to present the customs of his country in a very individual and interesting manner.

Larra had well-defined ideas of what "artículos de costumbres" are, of what they should consist, and of the manner in which they should be written. In his review of Panorama matritensi, by Mesonero Romanos, he says that in his opinion this is a difficult branch of literature since it necessitates the combination of the most profound and philosophical observation with lightness and apparent superficiality of style, as well as the combination of accuracy and exactness with humor and charm. He says that it is necessary that the author know all classes of society, and that he know how to distinguish the natural sentiments common to all and the line which education establishes between some and others. He should have an instinct for observation in order to see clearly that

which at times appears obscure; he must have a delicacy of touch so as not to spoil his pictures with those domestic scenes the curtain of which should never be drawn by the hand of the indiscreet moralizer. Such an author must understand the spirit of the period; he must be piquant without being too caustic, since acrimony is
119
never a means of reform.

One of the first difficulties that is encountered by the costumbrista writer is the necessity of saying things clearly and without pretext. Another difficulty which confronted the author of this type of essay in the time in which Larra was writing was the fact that for some years Spain had been in a period of transition. The country had not, he says, ceased entirely from being the Spain of Moratín, yet it had not become the English and French Spain that it was tending to be. The foreign influence admitted many social changes in the entire organization, which affected the actions of the people of
120
whom he wrote.

The costumbrista writer must see below the surface; he must be selective and he must exercise the greatest care in the choice of his materials. Larra compares the costumbrista writer to an artist when he says of him:

119 Larra, Obras completas, t. II, p. 171.

120 Ibid., p. 173.

"El escritor de costumbres estaba, pues, en el caso de un pintor que tiene que retratar a un niño, cuyas facciones continúan variando después que el pincel ha dejado de seguirlas." ¹²¹

Just as the artist finds that a child's features are constantly changing, so the author of customs finds that his materials do not remain the same.

In the artículos we find a great variety of customs, for Larra does not limit his cuadros to any particular group or class of society. Of particular interest are those essays in which he pictures national characteristics of the Spaniards. One of the best known essays, "Vuelva usted mañana", is one in which we see a typical attitude of the Spaniard -- that of putting off until tomorrow everything that he possibly can. His laziness is one of his outstanding traits. In the essay we see a number of types of people, but all of them respond to the foreigner, Monsieur Sans-délai, in the same manner. Each one says "Vuelva usted mañana", but "tomorrow" never arrives. The tailor delays twenty days in making his suit; the shoemaker obliges him to wait for a pair of shoes; the laundress delays fifteen days with his laundry. Others whom he calls to see give petty excuses for not being able to talk with him at the appointed time.

¹²¹ Larra, Obras completas, t. II, p. 171.

The foreigner cannot understand the Spaniards. He comes to do them a favor and they do not receive him. He says "Preciso es que la intriga más enredada se haya fraguada para oponerse a nuestras miras". Larra answers him:

"¿Intriga? No hay hombre capaz de seguir dos horas una intriga. La pereza es la verdadera intriga; os juro que no hay otra; ése es la gran causa oculta; es más fácil negar las cosas que enterarse de ellas." 122

Another trait of the Spaniards which we find pictured in a striking manner in the essay, "En este país", is that of depreciating their own country. They make everything they see appear of inferior quality in order to make others believe that they have, or that they have seen, better things. These people, according to Larra, are those who have only an average education, who have not traveled, and whose experiences with people have been confined to a few friends. Yet they continually speak with disgust of their country, as did Don Periquito whom Larra chooses as a representative. Don Periquito criticizes the periodicals; he sees only the misery of the poor and says, "No hay más que miseria en este país". He criticizes the police of Spain and compliments those of France and England, though he has never seen them; he

122 Larra, Artículos, t. I, p. 115.

123 Ibid., p. 118.

declares that all the inns and cafés of Madrid are terrible. When Don Periquito goes to the theatre he exclaims, "¡Oh qué horror! ¡Aquí no hay teatros!"¹²⁴ And he has never seen any others! In the conclusion Larra admonishes the people to cease speaking so degradingly of their country, and instead to try to improve it.

In the period in which Larra lived, there was a strong tendency to accept French manners and customs, to use French expressions, and to talk of French plays and literature. In the artículo "El casarse pronto y mal", Larra tells us of his sister who adopted French customs to such an extent that "ya no fué el pan pan,¹²⁵ ni el vino vino". After she married, she went to France to live and reared her son in that "affected" environment.

In "Empeños y desempeños" he tells us of a so-called nephew of his, a young man, who came to visit him one day. He was a youth typical of the young people of the time who studied French and Italian, not to enable them to read literature of real value in those languages, but because it was the vogue.¹²⁶ As was the custom of the "afrancesados" in Spain, this young man uses French expressions in his conversations. We find him speaking to his uncle

¹²⁴ Larra, Artículos, t. I, p. 115.

¹²⁵ Ibid., p. 70.

¹²⁶ Ibid., p. 57.

in French, "Quand il vous plaira, querido tío". Larra¹²⁷ says of him that he always speaks a little French and a little Italian when he is speaking Spanish, and that he never really speaks Spanish; he only mistreats it.¹²⁸

The youths of Larra's time were the product of their age. Many of the ways in which they were different from people of earlier periods were caused by the changes in education. In "El casarse pronto y mal" Larra contrasts the old education with the new. This old form was that in which children were taught to pray daily, to read the lives of the saints, and to go to hear mass. They were forbidden to read the prohibited books and certain novels. Then the French came to Spain, and the Spaniards, not being able to stop at a happy medium, went from Año¹²⁹ Cristiano to Pigault Lebrun, and left off mass and religious services entirely. People came to believe that religion was only a social convention in which only fools entered in good faith, and that children did not need it to make¹³⁰ them good boys and girls.

The new idea was that the child should be educated in the most convenient way; that he should learn to read, without any particular system, any book that should come

¹²⁷ Larra, Artículos, t. I, p. 58.

¹²⁸ Ibid., p. 55.

¹²⁹ Ibid., p. 71.

¹³⁰ Loc. cit.

into his hands. He was not taught to respect his parents, and always spoke to them in the familiar form, "tú". He was not taught to think and solve problems and this made him superficial. Larra sums up his ideas of this so-called "good education" when he says of his nephew: "Leyó, hacinó, confundió; fué superficial, vano, presumido, orgulloso, terco, y no dejó de tomarse más rienda de la que se le ¹³¹ había dado."

The nephew of whom we read in "Empeños y desempeños" was also brought up according to the new ideas. His education was of the best which his century could give him. He learned to read, although not in all books, and to write, though nothing that was worthy of being read; he knew how to dance; he sang sufficiently well to do so when asked and was never in tune; he could ride a horse like a centaur; and he knew little enough of the sciences and of art to be able to talk of all with mastery. He did not bother with classical literature and the theatre because these had been abandoned. He spoke of comedies to show that he had traveled in other countries. He spoke a little French and Italian, but he did not speak Spanish; he only abused it. Larra pictures these two young men as typical examples of the result of the superficial education of the period.

¹³¹ Larra, Artículos, t. I, p. 72.

Larra gives us a very good insight into city life in Spain, particularly in Madrid, the city from which most of the "costumbres" are taken. The pictures of the society of Madrid as a whole are interesting. The author shows us the routine of the daily life of a young man of ordinary means in Madrid. The latter has no ambition or individuality, nor does he desire to do anything new or different; he only follows the conventional course. We see that he rises late in the morning, drinks tea or chocolate, because everyone does so in that country; his servant brings him the newspaper, and after he has read the columns which are most popular with the people, the servant brings him a later edition. But the periodicals, Larra says, are like the youths of Madrid; they are different only in name. Our Madrilenian then dresses, and goes for a walk through the Carrera de San Jerónimo and other fashionable streets where he meets groups of friends with whom he stops to talk. Before he returns home, he buys some cigars at one of the fashionable cafés.

In the afternoon he again follows a routine of affairs. At two o'clock he goes to the house of the Marquesa; at three, to that of the Condesa; to some other at four. He carries on the same conversation at each place, and hears the place from which he has just come and the place to

¹³² Larra, "La vida de Madrid", p. 213.

which he is going severely criticized and ridiculed.

This aimless talk makes up the entire conversation of
 133
 Madrid.

In the evening it is customary to dine for two hours, then to go to the theatre; from there a group of the elite usually goes to someone's home for a party where the only diversion is the fashionable card game, "ecarté".

Thus it is that we see Larra again picturing the futility of life in Madrid in "La sociedad". In this artículo he talks with a cousin who has been "in society" for four years, and who declares that hypocrisy always
 134
 triumphs. He describes the women as being uninteresting; they talk only of love affairs or intrigues, and never of practical subjects. If a young man goes twice to a woman's house, others accuse him of being in love with her. If he talks to a pretty girl, he is said to love her; and if he talks to an unattractive girl, he is accused of desiring
 135
 to marry her for her money. Idle gossip is one of the outstanding faults of Madrid.

Again we find Larra saying that the youths of Madrid lack individuality. Their faces, even, are all the same.
 136
 In Madrid, the houses are the only things that are different.

133 Larra, Artículos, "La vida de Madrid", p. 214.

134 Ibid., "La sociedad", p. 224.

135 Ibid., p. 228.

136 Ibid., p. 223.

Society comes to rob a person of a part of his liberty, if not all, because of the many conventions which one must follow in order to be counted as a part of it. Larra expresses his attitude toward society by saying: "Ésa es la ¹³⁷ sociedad; una reunión de víctimas y de verdugos." He scorns the lack of individuality: "¡Dichoso aquél que no es verdugo y víctima a un tiempo! ¡Pícaros, necios, inocentes! ¡Más dichoso aún, si hay excepciones, el que puede ¹³⁸ ser excepción!"

One of the principal reasons for the regularity and daily routine in the life of the Spaniard is the lack of public entertainment. Spaniards, in contrast to the French, have no public games, nor public gardens, where every one may go for diversion. Instead, "No hay nada para el ¹³⁹ público; el público no juega". Spaniards either do not feel the need of recreation or else they entertain themselves as the sages of old with their own thoughts. In Spain there are no public dances nor evening parties. Everyone talks, or prays, and does whatever he may wish in his own home with a few intimate friends. These so-called ¹⁴⁰ tertulias are sufficient for him.

There is little wonder that foreigners, especially

¹³⁷ Larra, Artículos, "La vida de Madrid", p. 229.

¹³⁸ Loc. cit.

¹³⁹ Ibid., "La fonda nueva", p. 159.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 160.

French people, think the Spaniards are so queer. In "La fonda nueva" Larra tells us that the French are the people who are least able to understand the "monotonous and
¹⁴¹sepulchral silence" of the existence of the Spaniards. In "Vuelva usted mañana", Monsieur Sans-délai declares of the
¹⁴²Spaniards, "Me parece que son hombres singulares."

Only one day in the week do the Spaniards set aside for entertainment, and this not even during the entire
¹⁴³year. This day is Monday, when everyone, old and young, rich and poor, goes to the bull fights. Even the young girls and the young married women, who pale at the sight of a mouse or a spider, go to the arena, and leave disgusted if they do not see at least ten or twelve horses
¹⁴⁴gored to death, and if some cowardly fighter is not killed. The poor workman believes that he can show his affection for his wife in no greater degree than to take her to the bull fight, and they attend the gala occasion even though
¹⁴⁵they may not be financially able to do so.

Another entertainment which includes many of the people is the "máscaras". Larra relates a particular experience of his one night at a Carnival where there was a huge crowd. The people were carefree and noisy; many of

¹⁴¹ Larra, Artículos, "La fonda nueva", p. 158.

¹⁴² Ibid., p. 112.

¹⁴³ Ibid., p. 160.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., "Corridas de toros", pp. 33-34.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 35.

them rushed about as if they were seeking someone, yet never finding anyone. Mothers looked for their children; husbands for their wives; but no children sought their mothers nor any wives their husbands. The women flirted openly with men; many approached Larra and pretended that they recognized him.

He also satirizes the music to which the people at the Carnival were supposed to be dancing, but which could not possibly be heard for all the noise and laughter. A blind man, engaged for the entire evening, played a piano.

People of the aristocracy frequently entertained their friends with dances, which lasted throughout the night. In order to pay for the entertainment it was often necessary to pawn jewels and silver. One woman pawned a great number of precious stones to pay the musicians to play for her party on a particular evening. She owed them for playing on three other occasions, and they refused to play again unless they were given their money. The woman was enabled to continue with her party. The musicians played; the lights burned brilliantly; the party appeared spectacular because of the kindness of the money lender.

¹⁴⁶ Larra, Artículos, "El mundo todo el máscaras", p. 127.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 128.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 127.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., "Empeños y desempeños", p. 65.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 67.

People not only pawned their jewelry, but also their clothes. They promised to return for them, yet they never¹⁵¹ did. One man who needed money wished to pawn a dress suit. He had already pawned all his jewels, his watch, and chain. The money lender did not want to give him as much as he asked for the suit because the people never returned for¹⁵² the clothes, and it was difficult to dispose of them. Larra attended a party one night with his nephew. The money lender was present with his wife who was wearing a¹⁵³ shawl which had been in the pawn shop during three carnivals.

Another custom, particularly of the young men of that time who wanted to make a good impression and retain their place in the social world, but who were in reality very poor, was to frequent the cafés, where they found groups of their friends, and to have something to eat and drink with them. When they entered, they pretended to be looking for someone and feigned surprise at meeting their friends there. They accepted the invitation to join them at lunch,¹⁵⁴ and, as a result, did not have to pay for the meal.

It was also a very ordinary custom for men, who posed as counts, marquises, and gentlemen; never to pay their

¹⁵¹ Larra, Artículos, "Empeños y desempeños", p. 60

¹⁵² Ibid., p. 64.

¹⁵³ Ibid., p. 68.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., "La fonda nueva", p. 166.

accounts at the cafés, unless it was with beautiful words. Upon leaving the café, they never failed to speak very kindly to the proprietor and say, "Mañana le pediré a usted lo que le debo", or "Pasado mañana le daré lo que debo."¹⁵⁵ But this continued day after day, and their bills were never paid.

The cafés and inns were meeting places not only for the members of the leisurely aristocrats, but also for members of the middle class. Larra tells of one particular instance when an entire family, the father, mother, two daughters, two friends, a married daughter, her husband, their small child, and the grandfather rented a coach and went to spend the evening at an inn.¹⁵⁶

We get a very clear picture of the appearance of the inns of Larra's time from the essays as well as of the people who frequented them. Most of the inns as he pictures them are unattractive, unpleasant looking, and even dirty. Larra describes them thus:

"Las salas son bien feas, el adorno, ninguno: ni una fombra, ni un criado decente, ni un servicio de lujo, ni un espejo, ni una chimenea, ni una estufa en invierno, ni agua de nieve en verano --- ni Burdeos, ni champagne." ¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁵ Larra, Artículos, "La fonda nueva", p.17.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 162.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 163.

He goes still further to say of the service and the food:

"--- en cualquier fonda adonde vayamos, --- nos darán, en primer lugar, mantel y servilletas puercas, vasos puercos, platos puercos y mozos puercos; sacarán las cucharas del bolsillo, donde están con las puntas de los cigarros; nos darán luego una sopa que llaman de yerbas, y que no podría acertar a tener nombre más alusivo; estofado de vaca a la italiana, que es cosa nueva; ternera mechada, que es cosa de todos los días; vino de la fuente; aceitunas magulladas; frito de sesos y manos de carnero, hechos aquéllos y éstas a fuerza de pan; una polla que se dejaron otros ayer, y unos postres que nos dejaremos nosotros para mañana." 158

From these pictures, we are enabled to see the poor condition of the inns and cafés in the nineteenth century.

Larra's evident purpose was to ridicule them, hoping that his satire would result in their improvement.

As Larra always lived in the city, most of his pictures of customs deal with city life. We find, however, that his talents were not limited to this phase.

In "La caza" he gives us a graphic description of a hunting party on the estate of one of his friends. The description of the country is very beautiful and worthy of note, since he does not often lend himself to such descriptions.

"No tardamos en llegar al desierto que íbamos a habitar por algunos días: una dehesa inmensa, impotrada en medio de otras inmensas dehesas; el suelo alfombrado de cuantas flores y yerbas de diversos y vivísimos matices se pueden imaginar, cubierto de altísimos jarales, salpicado de

158 Larra, Artículos, "La fonda nueva", p. 163-164.

robustas encinas y hormigueando por todas partes la caza; jabalíes, venados, ciervos, gamos, lobos, y otros animales, aves de todas especies y colores, todo esto junto, revuelto, y casi mezclado, volando, saltando, corriendo, aullando, bramando, cantando, una figura humana alguna vez; un sol de justicia dando de día color y calor al cuadro, y una argentada luna rodeada de lucientes estrellas, dándole de noche sombras y misterio: figúrese usted todo esto, añádale usted algún rebaño de ovejas y cabras trepando por la colina, tal cual vaca al parecer sin dueño, alguna yegua de un pastor seguida de sus potros, alguna mula, algún otro cuadrúpedo que no nombraré, diversas castas de perros, mastines, caseros y de caza, un gallinero en la cabaña de los guardas y un arroyo de cuando en cuando poblado de ruidosas ranas, y tendrá usted la representación perfecta de la creación." 159

The description of the hunter who lives in the country is very different from that of the huntsman of Madrid who, on Sunday, dons a beautiful suit and equips himself from head to foot with all kinds of beautiful and expensive hunting instruments. The hunter in the country wears -

"un mal sombrerillo, gacho amarillento, curtido del polvo y del sol, una zamorra de piel; -- calzón de paño burdo; polaina o botín de cuero; por calzado un pedazo de piel sin curtir, sujeto a la pierna con cordiles; una cañana alrededor del cuerpo; un morral de piel; -- escopeta sencilla vieja, antiquísima pero que ninguno de ellos cambiaría por otra de dos cañones." 160

In his essay "Impresiones de un viaje", Larra also gives us some pictures of country life. In his description of Extremadura he says that, with the exception of Vera de Plasencia and other parts as Villafranca where

159 Larra, Artículos, Obras completas, t. II, p. 42.

160 Ibid., p. 43.

grapes and olives are grown, the people engage in almost no other type of agriculture. He says that "la riqueza agrícola de la provincia consiste en sus inmensos yermos, en sus praderos y encinares, destinados a pastos de toda clase de ganados."¹⁶¹ He says also that industry is no further advanced than agriculture in this part of Spain.

There is "alguna fábrica de cordelería, de cinta, de paño burdo, de bayeta, de sombreros y de curtidos para el consumo del país. Estas son las únicas excepciones a la regla general."¹⁶²

Of the people in this part of the country, he says,

"El hombre del pueblo de Extremadura es indolente, perezoso, hijo de su clima, y en extremo sobrio. Pero franco y veraz, a la par que obsequioso y desinteresado. Se ocupa poco de intereses políticos y encerrado en su vida obscura no se presta a las turbulencias."¹⁶³

Although the people in the country and small towns are simple folk, concerned only with their own affairs, they are a friendly and amiable people. Larra observes of the people in Badajoz that -

"la amabilidad y el trato fino de las personas y familias principales de Badajoz compensan con usura las desventajas del pueblo, y si bien carece de atractivos para detener mucho tiempo en su seno al viajero, al mismo tiempo le es

¹⁶¹ Larra, Obras completas, t. II, p. 43.

¹⁶² Ibid., "Impresiones de un viaje", p. 48.

¹⁶³ Loc. cit.

difícil a éste separarse de él sin un profundo sentimiento de gratitud." 164.

Larra noted particularly the cleanliness of the people in all the rural towns which he visited, especially in regard to their homes. It was a custom to whitewash the fronts of the houses daily; none of the houses appeared to be old or worn. As he says: "--en una palabra, en Extremadura la casa es un ser animado que se lava la cara
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todos los días." Larra seems to have been impressed by the rural sections of Spain; and he is less satirical in the essays in which he writes of the country than in those of life in the city.

In his essays, Larra pictures many political customs. He was always keenly interested in the affairs of the government, and in his satires of different phases of the government we are enabled to see many of the events which took place in this period of unrest in Spain. One of the wittiest and cleverest of these political satires is "Nadie pase sin hablar al portero", in which he particularly holds up to ridicule the clerical element in the Carlist party. In this article two men, a Frenchman and a Spaniard, traveling from Paris to Madrid, are stopped at Alava, one

164 Larra, Obras completas, t. II, "Impresiones de un viaje", p. 52.

165 Loc. cit.

of the first towns they enter in Spain. They are met by a number of "facciosos", or Carlists, standing near by, each of whom has on his hat band "Carlos V"¹⁶⁶. The priests are indignant, and are very rude to the Frenchman. When he tells them that he received his passport from Louis Phillipe, the French King, they declare that they have never heard of him and that the passport is worth nothing. They tell him that he should have obtained one from some clergyman in Paris.¹⁶⁷

The Frenchman has a number of books with him, for his purpose in coming to Spain is to study this beautiful country. The priest destroys these. The traveler also has several watches in his traveling bag which he is taking to a friend, a watchmaker, in Madrid. The clergyman who is inspecting his baggage distributes these among his friends;¹⁶⁸ then they take the money which he is carrying in his purse.

When the priest has completed the inspection of the Frenchman, he turns to the Spaniard, and when he asserts that he favors Her Majesty, the Queen, there are cries from those standing near by that he be sent to prison. They mock the date on his passport, 1833. "How rapidly these people live!" they say, For they, like the other

¹⁶⁶ Larra, Selected Essays, "Nadie pase sin hablar al portero", p. 62.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 64.

¹⁶⁸ Loc. cit.

Carlists, disregarded the old calendar and originated a new one after the victory at Vitoria. The year of the victory of Vitoria was designated as the first year of the calendar. Finally, the "facciosos" come together, whisper among themselves for a time, and finally announce that the travelers may continue their journey, because they fear the wrath of Louis Phillipe if they treat these men too severely. They do not, however, allow the travelers to keep their passports because they consider them worthless.

"La planta nueva, o el faccioso" is another very clever political satire, in which Larra ridicules the Carlists. The entire essay is symbolical. In the beginning he says that just as every climate has a direct influence on the actions of the people, just so has every country its particular productions. For example, we find fine peaches in Aragón, strawberries in Aranjuez, peppers in Valencia, and "facciosos" in Roa and Vizcaya. It is said that Roa, a small town in the province of Burgos, was one of the localities which furnished most recruits to the bands of Royalists, in support of Don Carlos.

¹⁶⁹ Larra, Selected Essays, "Nadie pase sin hablar al portero", p. 65.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 66.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., "La planta nueva o el faccioso", p. 68.

¹⁷² Caroline Bourland makes this explanation in a note in her text on page 132.

Larra writes of the "facciosos" as though they were plants. There are many parts of Spain, he says, which produce rich "facciosos" with marvelous fecundity; there are some parts in which in a single year there are two or three crops. The "faccioso" grows without cultivation, and even grows¹⁷³ in thickets; it is found in houses and cafés. Only order, system, and care damage the growth of the "faccioso". Thus it is that Larra satirizes the manner in which the rebels or Carlists sprang up throughout the entire country, and the ease with which they spread.

Larra makes an interesting comparison of the "faccioso" and the bat. The "faccioso", he says, has characteristics of both plants and animals. It is similar to the monkey, that animal which is most like man. In a word, it is to man and to plants that which the bat is to a bird and to an animal. Larra says that the "faccioso" is distinguished from other beings in that he is gifted with a lack of¹⁷⁴ reason.

The "facciosos" go about together in bands, like wolves, trying to conserve themselves. They attach themselves with all their power to lost travelers, or to stray¹⁷⁵ horses, in the manner of parasites.

¹⁷³ Larra, Selected Essays, "La planta nueva o el faccioso", p. 68.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 70.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 71.

"La junta de Castel-o-Branco" is another essay in which Larra satirizes the Carlists, their custom of forming numerous assemblies, and the great importance which some people attach to them. Our author believes that it is not possible to accomplish anything in an assembly, yet nothing is more important to the traditional Spaniard.

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The assembly is the precursor of a party. He then goes into the details of the manner in which the Carlists practically forced people to become members of their party.

In the essay, "Los tres no son más que dos, y el que no es nada vale por tres", we find that Larra again makes his satire more or less symbolical. In this article he describes a masquerade, to which a double meaning is attached. There are three groups of people in the masquerade. The first group, which is the smallest in number, consists entirely of old men who are fat and robust, but who seem to lose weight and strength when they must spend their money, their only interest. These men seem to be retreating rather than advancing in the parade; they are not well organized because their leader is interested only in his own affairs. Occasionally one of the magnates gives a signal and they respond with "¡Viva!" but without enthusiasm; these men talk little, and then without

¹⁷⁶ Larra, Obras completas, t. I, "La junta de Castel-o-Branco", p. 227.

enthusiasm. They represent the traditionalists, who con-
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 tinue in their old ways.

The second group has a strong leader. The members of this group are young; they run instead of walk; they are enthusiastic. These are not interested in money but in periodicals, and with each periodical which they produce, they gain weight and reason. Their faces appear as his-
 178
 torical discourses. They talk much, and their conversa-
 tion sparkles. These youths represent the new and the modern; they are the liberals in every respect.

The third group is made up of the majority of the people. They do not have a distinct color; they seem to be moving, but they only mark time. They are of medium stature, with no extremes; the expressions on their faces show them to be content with what they have. In other words they are passive and stationary. They do not talk,
 179
 they neither applaud nor criticize. These people are those of the bourgeoisie or great middle class.

In this same essay Larra satirizes those who criticize his work and his political satires, saying that he does more damage than a cannon with such essays as "Nadie pase
 180
 sin hablar al portero", and "La planta nueva". The

177 Larra, Obras completas, t. I, "Los tres no son más que dos", p. 252.

178 Ibid., p. 253.

179 Loc. cit.

180 Ibid., p. 254.

followers of Carlos V, he says, wish to deceive the people, to cover their eyes, tape their mouths, and then to consume their blood.

"El día de difuntos de 1836" is one of Figaro's most famous political satires, and it is one of his essays in which he is most bitter and pessimistic. All of Madrid is a cemetery; and each house in the city is a niche for the family that lives there. Larra makes observations concerning different public buildings and reads the inscriptions which he finds on them. When he reaches the prison, he finds the inscription to be "Aquí reposa la libertad¹⁸¹ del pensamiento". In Spain, a country where people have been educated for liberty and freedom, there is none. The people are dominated by the government, and punished for the expression of their personal opinions if they are contrary to those of the authorities of the nation. This article also represents Larra's complete disillusionment of life. He wishes to flee from this huge cemetery, but he can find no place of refuge. Even his own heart appears¹⁸² to be another sepulchre.

Because of the manner in which Larra satirizes Spain, many people form the opinion that he was not patriotic. It was, however, his love for his country that prompted

¹⁸¹ Larra, Obras completas, t. II, "El día de difuntos", p. 211.

¹⁸² Ibid., p. 212.

his criticisms of her weaknesses. No more eloquent proof of his love need be sought than the passage from his "Impresiones de un viaje", in which he describes his departure from Spain in the spring of 1835.

"Era el 27 de mayo: el sol empezaba a dorar la campiña y las altas fortificaciones de Badajoz: al salir saludé el pabellón español, que en celebridad del día ondeaba en la torre de Palmas. Media hora después volví la cabeza: el pabellón ondeaba todavía: el Caya, arroyo que divide la España del Portugal, corría mansamente a mis pies: tendí por la última vez la vista sobre la Extremadura española: mil recuerdos personales me asaltaron: una sonrisa de indignación y de desprecio quiso desplegar mis labios, pero sentí oprimirse mi corazón, y una lágrima se asomó a mis ojos.

Un minuto después la patria quedaba atrás, y arrebatado con la velocidad del viento, como si hubiera temido que un resto de antiguo afecto mal pagado le detuviera, o le hiciera vacilar en su determinación, expatriado corría los campos de Portugal. Entonces el escritor de costumbres no observaba: el hombre era sólo el que sentía." 183

These words from a man who was little given to an expression of his emotions and one who engaged only very infrequently in descriptions of nature may be taken as a sincere representation of his love for Spain.

It was also Larra's love for Spain, that prompted him, in his costumbrista essays, to point out the country's faults, and make them appear ridiculous to her. He is not destructive at heart; he has faith in people, and believes in the progress of society.

183 Larra, Obras completas, t. II, "Impresiones de un viaje", p. 52.

The outstanding note of the essays of customs is their universality. Larra, because of his keen power of observation, was able to write of all phases of life. He has given us, to a certain extent at least, a picture of Spain in the early nineteenth century. But Larra's critical ability was not limited to costumbrista essays. He was equally as successful in the field of literary criticism.

CHAPTER IV

LARRA, THE LITERARY CRITIC

The field of literary criticism held almost as much interest for Larra as satires of customs and politics, and he was more prolific in this type of writing than in the latter. Doubtless one of the reasons for his extensive work in literary criticism was that the government maintained such strict censorship of all publications that, when his political satires were suppressed by the board of censors, he naturally devoted himself more to literary criticism. Larra's judgments and opinions of many contemporary productions are considered among the best and most authoritative which we have concerning them.

Larra believed that literature is the expression of the progress of the people; and that, whether it is written or spoken, it is not more than the representation of their ideas. Literature, he says, must express this prodigious revolution and this great progress. In politics one does not see more than interests and rights, that is to say,
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truths. It is said that the tendency of the century and

184 Larra, Articulos, t. II, "Literatura", p. 195.

the very spirit of it, analytical and positive, carried in it the death of literature. But this is not true, according to Larra, because the imagination itself is only¹⁸⁵ a more beautiful truth.

Even though it was politics that absorbed the public and filled the columns of the newspapers, Larra desired to point out the place which literature rightfully has. Even though the people were so completely concerned with politics and other interests, he believed that they had not forgotten that literature is the expression, the true thermometer of the state of civilization, nor did he believe, as do many foreigners, that the love for classical literature in Spain expired at the conclusion of the¹⁸⁶ Golden Age. Larra may have been pessimistic in many respects, yet he believed in Spain, in spite of her many faults, even to the extent that although the majority of the people acknowledged that she had lost all her literary fervor and interest during the years of the decadence of the seventeenth century, he gave her credit for not having forgotten the glories that were hers during the prolific Siglo de oro.

In his purely literary criticisms we find considerable interest in poetry. Larra says in one essay that

¹⁸⁵ Larra, Artículos, t. II, "Literatura", p. 195.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 184.

we shall not find great didactic writers among the early poets; their work had to do largely with inspiration.

"Son rara vez preceptistas. Homero, Virgilio, Anacreonte, Pindaro, Tasso, Milton, etc., se contentaron con la parte que les tocó; verdad es que les tocó lo más, porque nunca harán los preceptos a un poeta. Recorramos, por otra parte, las obras de los grandes maestros del arte. Aristóteles hubiera probado a entonar la trompa épica; en balde hubiera ensayado a observar sus mismas reglas. Longino, que tan bien entendió lo sublime, no hubiera dado nunca con él. El severo Boileau quiso pulsar la lira, y Apolo la rompió en sus débiles manos; toda su oda a la toma de Namor puede darse por el peor concepto de su arte poética. La Harpe dió modelos, pero modelos de escuela." 187

In another essay our author says that even yet, when, from time to time, some genius illuminates the field of Spanish literature, he is like a great extinguished brasier, among whose coals some remaining spark remains shining dimly and flickeringly. The Golden Age has passed, and the new nineteenth century has not yet arrived. The form of poetry, like that of other literary genres, was not definitely determined. But even this being true, Larra believed that poetry still attained to the height of little murmuring streams; of the pleasures of pastoral life, of milk and honey, sad turtle-doves and other phantasmagoria of this manner. In Spanish poetry there is, at least, he says, no malice; all is pure innocence. There is no other course

187 Larra, Ideario español, "La poesía y la critica", p. 149.

for the poet. Let us agree, he says, that the poet of the year 1835, in this aged society, an amalgamation of artificialities and traditions, he himself the prey of little, weak passions is a being ridiculously hypocritical and old fashioned.¹⁸⁸ What then is the significance of such absurdities as the poetry of these men is being written when neither the one who writes them nor the one who reads them believes them.¹⁸⁹

In another essay, Larra satirizes poets and their insincere verses, when he says it is of much more worth to be a man of honor than to make good verses, if it should not be possible to unite both qualities.¹⁹⁰

"Por ejemplo, ahí está un Aronet. ¿De qué le sirvió hacer su "Zaira" y su "Mahoma", con otras frioleras de gusto, si a la hora de ésta debe de estar probablemente hecho un torrado en los profundos? Esto es lo que me da rabia cuando leo un hermoso trozo de Homero y aun de Virgilio; siempre arrojo el libro diciendo: ¡Qué lástima que esos hombres no fuesen buenos cristianos y hombres de bien, como don Clemente Díaz!"¹⁹¹

In another essay, Larra says that, since in Spain it is not possible to unite both honor and advancement in poetry, it is necessary to be content with either one or the other. In regard to learning, a poet, who knows

¹⁸⁸ Larra, Obras completas, t. I, "Literatura, poesías de don Juan Bautista Alonso", p. 392.

¹⁸⁹ Loc. cit.

¹⁹⁰ Larra, Ideario español, "Sátira de un poeta", p. 142.

¹⁹¹ Loc. cit.

only one language, has only one means of expression and, because of this limitation, can go only half the way. Larra tells us of a youth who wrote some careless poetry, very sonorous and full of poetic expressions. His favorite subject was women, and those poems which brought him recognition were of that theme. He used words for which he searched in the dictionary, and then transposed them so that no one was able to understand what he was saying. Because of this, people exclaimed: "How he manages the language! He is a man who truly knows Castillian!"¹⁹²

As a result of the applause which he received, the promising youth travelled for a number of years. When he returned, he published a small volume containing a few odes, a "romancito", and a comedy. He stated in the prologue that he wrote these pieces in brief moments when his misfortunes left him free; that he published them because he knew that they were well received in America, or in some other place; and that he wished to dedicate them¹⁹³ to his own "dear country". Larra's satire and disapproval of the Romantic poets is very evident in this essay.

Larra is, to a certain extent, classical in his views of poetry. As is so distinctly seen in the above essay, he is bitterly opposed to the superficiality of Romantic

¹⁹² Larra, Ideario español, "Sátira de un poeta", p.147.

¹⁹³ Loc. cit.

poets whose poetry is affected and insincere. Insincerity in literature even in the matter of a dedication is an¹⁹⁴ abominable thing to him. He much prefers the poetry of true inspiration of Homer, Virgil, Pindar, Milton, and Aristotle, poetry that is genuine and which holds much thought as well as beauty of expression, and he upholds¹⁹⁵ the rules which these classicists followed.

Larra's classical tendencies in poetry are also seen in the fact that of the few poems that he attempted, the majority is written in classical forms, as odes, epigrams, and sonnets.

Larra says in his essay "Literatura" that the imagination lends itself more readily to poetry than to prose. Even in the Golden Age, there was not a great production in the field of prose. Aside from the mystic and theological writings, of which Spain is able to present a more complete library than any other nation, if we wish to encounter prose writers, it must be in the field of history. Solís, Mariano, and a few others truly represent the muse of Tacitus and of Suetonius. In his discussion of historical writings, our critic points out the weaknesses of the early historians. These, he says, offer

¹⁹⁴ Larra, Ideario español, "Las dedicatorias", p. 140.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., "La poesía y la crítica", p. 149.

their work more as an example of the language than as an interpretation of the events of their epoch. Influenced by popular beliefs, they did not take any forward steps; they adapted stories and fabulous traditions as true political causes. They tried to present their material in a florid style instead of trying to reveal the motives of the deeds which they related. Their writings appear more as a compilation of materials and disconnected fragments, as an abundance of probable harangue than as rational history. Not knowing how to define the chronicles, they did not differentiate history from fiction, and filled many volumes without succeeding in making a single book.¹⁹⁶

In his essay "Literatura", Larra also discusses the novel in Spain. The novel, completely an offspring of the imagination, was seen represented in Spain in a period when the genre had hardly been thought of in any other country of Europe, since even the books of chivalry had their origin in the Spanish peninsula. There are many outstanding examples, however. El ingenioso hidalgo, the immortal accomplishment of Cervantes, which Larra calls the last endeavor of human genius, would be sufficient to justify the triumph even if there were no other representations of any importance. This period of prose production, however, was of short duration, and, after the time of

¹⁹⁶ Larra, Artículos, t. II, "Literatura", p. 188.

Quevedo, prose work was largely forgotten except by a
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 very few authors.

In another essay, it is interesting to note Larra's attitude toward the influence of the novel in the lives of people. He believes that it is erroneous to say that novels should bear the blame for all the foolish relationships which occur or are made in the world. The fault is not completely in novels; the greater part is in the human heart itself. There have always been disastrous love affairs, from the time of Pyramus and Thisbe, of Leander
 198
 and Hero, and they certainly had not read novels. In Spain, he says, there were not men of the same temperament as Sir Walter Scott, Casimir Delavigne, Lamartine, Scribe, and Victor Hugo, and for that reason the Romantic
 199
 novel did not develop as it would have otherwise. The writers of this period in Spain were interested primarily in the theatre, or in realistic fiction as were Mesonero Romanos and Larra himself. Mesonero Romanos, like Larra, was interested in satire, yet his was much less bitter, and less pointed than that of Figaro.

Larra, who was one of the cleverest and most brilliant satirists of his time, was well aware of the fact that

197 Larra, Artículos, t. II, "Literatura", p. 189.

198 Larra, Ideario español, "Las mujeres y las novelas", p. 148.

199 Ibid., "La gloria en España", p. 146.

satire to be effective and to serve its purpose should be well handled. He knew that it was a delicate form to use. In his review of "La satírico-manía", by Don Clemente Díaz, he says that the inconvenience of satire is not its uselessness, but the difficulty of directing it and not making it a treacherous weapon.

Don Clemente Díaz, in his pamphlet, points out that satire puts a check on vice, on ridiculous situations and on eccentricities. By going through the literary annals of satire, from Lucian to the present day, there has been scarcely a single epoch in which satire has not been profitable. It seems, he says, that satire has always been destined to emit the first light of a happier period for literature: it has always been, when not the motive, the precursor of good taste.

In the article entitled "De la sátira de los satíricos", Larra suggests certain eminent qualities which a satirist should have. He should possess the greatest penetration and sagacity in order that he portray men and events truly; he should be of a profound character, and in his study of human nature he should not be superficial, but delve into the very depths of the human heart. He should be a discreet

²⁰⁰ Larra, Artículos, t. II, "La satírico-manía", p. 75.

²⁰¹ Ibid., p. 75.

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and impartial judge. It is also necessary for the satirist to understand perfectly the century in which

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he lives. This was true, he believed, particularly of his own century, not that one is any more important than another, but that in that time, when society had aged, more than in the periods of Aristophanes, Catullus, or Juvenal who lived in the infancy of society, customs varied more and it was necessary to treat them with more

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thought and consideration.

Due to the fact that in Larra's own time, the drama was the most popular genre, most of his criticisms concern the theatre. In these essays, as in his other literary discussions, we find expressions of his own personal beliefs and ideas. Because of the large number of dramatic criticisms, and also, since he wrote them almost throughout the entire period of his literary life, we are able to determine very clearly certain changes in his ideas of the drama.

In his early dramatic criticisms we see the influence of his classical background. He had studied Aristotle and Horace; he knew the writers of both the French and Spanish classical periods, as well as the neo-Classic writers of

202 Larra, Artículos, t. II, "De la sátira de los satíricos", p. 210.

203 Ibid., p. 211.

204 Loc. cit.

both countries, and because of this it is only natural that his ideas of the drama are those of the Classicist. In "Una comedia moderna", an essay published in 1828, in El Duende Satírico del Día, he discusses his views of the drama in connection with his criticism of a current drama, "Treinta años o la vida de un jugador". He says that this melodramatic piece pertains to a new genre which was not known in the time of Terence and Plautus, and all those Classicists who only knew how to write in a well-ordered manner by observing all rules as if it were
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a necessity to do so to write a play.

In his review of Don Agustín Durán's, "Discurso sobre el influjo que ha tenido la crítica moderna en la decadencia del teatro antiguo español", Larra gives us a very interesting picture of the status of Spanish drama. Literary supremacy declined with political supremacy, and poets disappeared with captains. By the middle of the eighteenth century Spaniards had lost their power of invention and their artistic ability, and as they had not adopted the imitation of the French Classicists, the Spaniards were like a people who had forgotten their language before they learned another, and, who for a time found themselves
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not able to speak any. There were some dramatic compositions

²⁰⁵ Larra, Artículos, t. II, "Una comedia moderna", p. 3.

²⁰⁶ Ibid., "Discurso", p. 77.

he says, which did not pertain to any particular school, but to a fastidious genre, in which largely the defects²⁰⁷ of such writers as Lope and Calderón were conserved. An artificial, extravagant style was cultivated. Finally, Luzán, Montiano, and Iriarte opened the way for a new drama; the old drama collapsed with the approach of a new genre, which, however, at that time was not yet called²⁰⁸ "Romantic".

The new literary school, Romanticism, was not well established in Larra's time. He said that the Romantic productions were the object of a great dispute in that day, inasmuch as it was not known whether they should be allowed to enter Parnassus, or whether they should remain²⁰⁹ at the door. Larra tells us that the Spanish declare that Romanticism originated in France. He believes however, that this school belongs just as much to the²¹⁰ Spaniards as to the French. But he says that to invent such things it is necessary to have many others, which are found only in France; but to know them it is necessary to be in Paris. He who has not been in Paris is excused from having common sense, and even though certain

²⁰⁷ Larra, Artículos, t. II, "Discurso", p. 77.

²⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 78.

²⁰⁹ Ibid., "Una comedia moderna", p. 3.

²¹⁰ Ibid., p. 4.

things should be invented in Spain, they would be bad
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 because they were Spanish.

During the period of Lope de Vega and his contemporaries, when they were writing so many dramas, Romanticism was not discovered, because it was not time that it should be. The power to write this type of foolishness, he says,
 212
 was reserved for Ducange. In one of his plays, La vida de un jugador, Ducange accumulates entire years. The hero of this barbarous spectacle appears as a child in
 213
 the first act and as an old man in the last act. This play and other Romantic productions were well received by the public, the theatres were filled, and they produced money. What other rules, he asks, could one wish for a drama?

Rules for dramas were an old thing everywhere, except in Spain, until a comparatively short time previous to the beginning, when the Romantic tendencies began definitely to assert themselves. Moratín began to predict a stricter adherence to rules precisely when others were
 214
 beginning to disregard them.

In this criticism Larra is thoroughly opposed to the new school. In discussing the melodramatic situations

211 Larra, Artículos, t. II, "Una comedia moderna, p. 5.

212 Ibid., p. 6.

213 Ibid., p. 6.

214 Ibid., p. 8.

he manifests his disapproval for the brutality and coarseness of the play. At the end, he says, the player enters, covered with blood, in spite of the fact that Horace holds that this type of scene should not be presented.²¹⁵

In conclusion he says:

"¡Paciencia! El drama es malo pero no se silbó. Pues no faltaba otra cosa sino que se metieran los españoles a silbar lo que los franceses han aplaudido la primavera pasada en París! Se guardarán muy bien de silbar sino cuando se les mandé, o cuando venga silbando algún figurín, en cuyo caso buen cuidado tendrán de no comer, beber, dormir ni andar sino silbando y más que un mozo de mulas." 216

"Nosotros (los españoles) sabemos, lo que es más, hacer llorar en nuestra comedia melodramática; reír en nuestra tragedia monótona y sin acción, y bostezar en la cansada y tosca música de las óperas, con que, a pesar de Euterpe, nos empeñamos en ensordecer los timpanos mejor enseñados." 217

In this passage he makes fun openly of the Romantic dramas and of the audiences which approve of them. But as time passed, Larra could not but be affected by the new tendencies, and, as a result of their influence, he modified his views somewhat in that he became more liberal in his ideas of the art.

In his essay, "Discurso", written in 1833, he says that the question of the Classical or Romantic genre

²¹⁵ Larra, Artículos, t. II, "Una comedia moderna", p. 19.

²¹⁶ Ibid., p. 20.

²¹⁷ Ibid., p. 21.

cannot ever be absolute, but only relative to the demands
 218
 of each group of people.

In a review in 1836 of Alexander Dumas's drama Antony, we find an expression of the change which had come over Larra, and of his desire to be classed with neither the old nor the new school. In this article he says,

"Sin aceptar la ridícula responsabilidad de un mote partido, sin declararnos clásicos ni románticos, abrimos la puerta a las reformas, y por lo mismo que de nadie queremos ser parciales, ni mucho menos idólotras, nos decidimos a amparar el nuevo género con la esperanza de que la literatura, adquiriendo la independencia, sin la cual no puede existir completa, tomaría de cada escuela lo que cada escuela poseyese mejor, lo que más en armonía estuviese en todas con la naturaleza, tipo de donde únicamente puede partir lo bueno y lo bello". 219

From this declaration we may say that Larra was an eclectic; that he did not wish to be confined to any one particular school, but that he wished to choose the best from each. It was because of this attitude, as we shall see later, that he was able to appreciate both the classical comedies of Moratín, and the Romantic tragedies of García Gutiérrez and Hartzenbusch.

Even though Larra is not opposed so strongly to Romantic dramas, he does not entirely favor them. Antony,

218 Larra, Artículos, t. II, "Discurso", p. 80.

219 Ibid., "Review of Antony", p. 267.

he says, like the greater part of the works of modern French literature, is the cry of humanity which carries us on, a cry of desperation, on encountering the chaos²²⁰ at the end of life.

We see from Larra's review of García Gutiérrez's El trovador that he did appreciate a well-written Romantic drama. He praises this play very highly throughout the entire review. El trovador is of the greatest school, that of genius, which does not have a greater teacher²²¹ than inspiration, nor more rules than sentiment and truth.

In regard to the plan of the play, he does not hesitate to say that it is rich, elegantly conceived and carefully developed. This play may be classified among those heroic comedies, models of which were left us by Shakespeare and Calderón. It is comparable to those of Shakespeare in dramatic resources, in natural passions, well revealed. The author, according to Larra, is comparable to Calderón in the ostentation, richness, and²²² nobility of his characters, and of the acting of the parts.

Another characteristic of the play which Larra praises particularly is the fact that the author very ably used both prose and verse. This variety in form is a trait dis-

²²⁰ Larra, Artículos, t. II, Review of "Antony", p. 271.

²²¹ Ibid., "Review of "El trovador", p. 224.

²²² Ibid., p. 232.

tinctly characteristic of the new Romantic school.

Larra notes, especially, the difficulty of this, because it is not so easy for a poet to write so well in prose as he does in verse, for, in his opinion, prose has a²²³ peculiar harmony of its own.

Larra is still the Classicist in that he favors the unity of time, especially in the drama. He believed that a year is longer than is necessary to pass between the first and second acts of El trovador.²²⁴ He also mentions the frequent changes of scene, but he does not wish to dispute this with any poet, as, in El trovador, certain changes are always indispensable, and are used for the sake of effect.²²⁵ As a whole, the representation of El trovador was one of those which was among the least disgusting of the Romantic productions.²²⁶

In one essay entitled "Teatros", Larra says that it is not sufficient that there are theatres, nor that there are poets, nor actors. One of these three cannot exist without the cooperation of the others, yet it is more difficult for the three united to exist without a fourth, even more important, he believes. This one is the public. A public which is indifferent to the heir of a general

²²³ Larra, Artículos, t. II, Review of "El trovador",

²²⁴ Ibid., p. 240.

²²⁵ Ibid., p. 239.

²²⁶ Ibid., p. 241.

education, badly understood and taught superficially, is the first link of this miserable chain. When the poets see the public applaud wretched dramas, scarcely suspecting the existence of real classical productions which have cost so much work and effort, they yield and say with Lope de Vega:

"Puesto que el vulgo es quien las paga, es justo
Hablarle en necio para darle gusto." 227

Men, he says, are not more than men, and it is not reasonable to believe that they would sacrifice their applause, whether just or unjust, to the desire to please half a dozen "literatos". When the poets see that the public lacks that national pride, applauds mechanical translations, and even prefers them to the original works, they ask why they should tire themselves in trying to gain perfection. How much more easy it is to make a translation in a week than to work for a half a year on
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an original play!

The public is the first cause of the degeneration of the Spanish stage. Larra offers good constructive criticism when he declares that only instruction and education for the public will help the situation. When

227 Larra, Obras completas, t. II, "Teatros", p. 81.

228 Loc. cit.

the people are truly educated and are able to recognize works of merit and value, when their national pride, awakened anew, makes them demand original works, worthy of consideration, then will the authors write with pleasure, the actors present the plays with more perfection and the returns from the productions be sufficient.

In the review of the play Antony, also, Larra speaks of the public and its influence on the drama. He says in this essay that there are three distinct groups. The first group is an indifferent multitude, irrational and for a long time dead to their country because they do not have the necessities of life; they lack stimuli. The middle group is being slowly enlightened. These people have a few of the necessities of life. Because of this, they are conscious that reforms are needed and that they are able to profit through changes and improvements. This group is able to see the light, and enjoys it, but, like a child, cannot calculate the distance at which he sees it; he believes the things which he desires to be nearer at hand than they really are. The third group is the privileged class, of a smaller number than the first two groups. These people are brought up in a foreign atmosphere, if not in a foreign country, victims of the movement of the "afrancesados" to make Spanish society

²²⁹ Larra, Obras completas, t. II, "Teatros", p. 83.

as much like the French as possible.

Larra did not limit his dramatic criticisms to the plays themselves, but included the presentation of the play and discussed particularly Spanish actors. In the essay entitled "Yo quiero ser cómico", Larra gives us a picture of a typical actor. A young man comes to him, asking for his assistance in receiving a position as a comic actor. Larra asks him questions in regard to his preparation and qualifications for such a position, and learns that the young man has not studied grammar, that he does not know anything at all of Latin or classical literature, nor has he memorized any lines from the classical poets because he does not enjoy studying. He does not know, even, what history is. When Larra asks him if he has studied human nature, and how he would portray different characters, he answers that he would present them in the traditional way that they are portrayed on the stage. A king, for example, is always very domineering; he talks in a loud, bold voice, and appears to be superior to his subjects. A judge is also a commanding figure; he is very stern and sincere, and always wears his hat, regardless of the presence of women. The young actor also knows how to talk in an affected manner: to say "actitud" for "aptitud" and vice versa;

230 Larra, Artículos, t. II, Review of "Antony", p.268.

"diferiencia" for "diferencia"; "dracmático" for "dramá-²³¹
tico"; and puns on other similar expressions. He is also
able to burlesque and depreciate poets even though he
does not understand what they have written; he knows how
to praise the language of the plays, though he may praise²³²
the verse without knowing but that it may be prose.

The actor who is able to win his entire audience is
he who knows best how to portray the human passions; for
if there is anything in the world which makes all people
equal, it is the emotions. The heart, then, and senti-
ment are the fountains from which the actor should take²³³
his inspiration.

There are certain habits of actors of which Larra
disapproves. Some actors are accustomed to having their
eyes bloodshot, their eyebrows arched and plucked. They
give a tone of solemnity to their voices, and wave their
hands unnecessarily. Larra asks: "Do they believe that
the characters they portray are not men who feel as do²³⁴
the rest?"

Larra also disapproves of artificiality in the pro-
duction of plays. He expresses his distaste particularly
for the use of masks. In his review of Ventura de la

²³¹ Larra, Artículos, t. II, "Yo quiero ser cómico",
p. 64.

²³² Loc. cit.

²³³ Ibid., "La extranjera", p. 59.

²³⁴ Loc. cit.

Vega's Don Quijote de la Mancha en Sierra Morena, he says that Cervantes shows us that the use of masks is repugnant. It is a species of true ugliness which should not be presented in the theatre. Actors use different types of masks and cosmetics on their faces where the emotions are to be expressed, and the result of all this make-up makes their faces as expressionless as marble, gives them the immobility of a statue, and all the ugliness of a lie. The artificiality of the use of masks²³⁵ makes a play unreal.

Larra's literary criticisms as well as his satirical essays of customs and politics show his ability to observe, to think, to form judgments and then to present them in a concise, brilliant manner. He follows, perhaps unconsciously, his theory that literature is a reflection²³⁶ of the period in which it is written, in that his literary criticisms reflect the changes that were taking place during the period in which he was writing from 1828 to 1837. Spain was becoming more and more Romantic. His literary criticisms also show his versatility. As in his essays of customs, he portrays all phases of life, so, in his literary criticisms, he manifests his interest in all types of literature.

²³⁵ Larra, Artículos, t. II, "Review of "Don Quijote"", p. 45.

²³⁶ Ibid., "Literatura", p. 198.

CHAPTER V

LARRA'S INFLUENCE ON THE LITERATURE OF SPAIN

Mariano José de Larra, though his literary life, extended over a period of less than ten years, was a man who exerted considerable influence on the literature of Spain. In many ways he came to be a leader in his country.

He was a leader first of all through his personality. He was a charming young man in spite of his periods of melancholy and pessimism; he possessed a keen wit and a sense of originality which were almost unique. His individuality and independence were important factors in his being admitted to the famous club Parnasillo, where he soon became an outstanding figure for his literary judgments. He frequented other cafés besides the one where this particular group of men was accustomed to meet, and at all these places he joined in the conversations, expressing his ideas and opinions on all subjects and particularly on literary subjects. This was one of the ways which Larra had of letting the public know his ideas.

Larra's intellectuality was one of the chief elements

which gave him a place in the literary world. He was a brilliant youth with a broad-minded attitude. He was traditional in many respects, but he also looked for new ideas that would help the people of Spain to progress. He was more than an ordinary scholar; he was a thinker. He might almost be called a philosopher for the depth of his thought and the treatment of his observations. This aspect of his mind was developed to a certain degree, at least, by his education. His knowledge was characterized by its cosmopolitanism and its universality. The first five years of his education were spent in France, where he received many ideas and impressions which were to remain with him throughout his life, particularly because he was an unusually precocious and alert child. His study of classical Greek and Roman literature broadened his viewpoint and his outlook on life in general. He was also familiar with the literature of his own country from the earliest periods of legends and romances; through the Siglo de oro, Spain's classical period; through the changes which occurred in the eighteenth century and which were taking place so rapidly in his own time. The universality of his training enabled him to be sure of himself and to form conclusions concerning the numerous literary problems which confronted him. It also gave him the power to select the best from both schools and thereby form a manner of writing completely individual and different to that of the

other authors of Romantic Spain.

It was his close association with classical literature linked with his ability to comprehend the good of Romanticism that enabled him to know what the people of Spain should adopt from both schools. Larra was very nationalistic in all respects and desired to help his countrymen in solving their problems. He was especially interested in the development of the people's literary ideas which he felt to be very vital to the development of Spanish literature from the state of decadence out of which it was emerging.

Larra had an excellent opportunity to express his ideas through the periodicals for which he wrote, for in this manner he was able to reach the people of the entire nation. He exerted a great influence through his articles in El Duende Satírico del Día and El Pobrecito Hablador, the periodicals which he himself founded and published as well as for such other leading publications of the country as El Mundo, El Redactor General, La Revista Española, and El Español. There appeared in these periodicals his costumbrista articles in which he criticized the society of Spain; there were his political satires with his own opinions of the government; and there were also his literary discussions with his criticisms and reviews of current publications. He took the utmost

advantage of this opportunity to express himself and gave us some excellently formed opinions of the various literary genres.

Besides being a leader through the expression of his ideas, Larra was influential in the genres which he attempted. He was an innovator in the fields of Romantic drama and novel. The novel at this time in Spain was not a popular form of writing as is evidenced by the almost complete lack of novels in the period. Larra wrote an historical novel after the manner of Sir Walter Scott, and proved his ability to succeed in this type of work. This novel, El doncel de don Enrique el doliente, which followed the Romantic tendencies, was not of particular importance in the development of the prose of the period because of the fact that this was to follow a more realistic trend after the manner of the picaresque novel. Even though El doncel was well received by the public, Larra's leadership in this field was not followed and the Romantic novel was not developed in Spain.

In the drama, however, Larra's influence was more powerful. His Macías, the first Romantic drama in verse, set the pace for others which were to follow. The play is divided into four acts instead of the conventional three of the Spanish comedia. El conde Fernán González, one of his more original adaptations and written in verse,

has five acts. No más mostrador, a very clever adaptation of two French plays, written in prose, consists of five acts.

Other romantic tendencies in Macías which are found in later Romantic dramas are its subjectivity, the fatalistic element, deep emotional expression, and the adaptation of a legend in the plot of the play. This interest in medievalism appealed to the imagination of the people and to their love for antiquity. Even though Macías is the only original drama of Larra's, it is of great significance in the development of the theatre, and placed him at the head of this genre, somewhat in the position of a founder, for his work was the first of this type to appear.

Larra was outstanding and exerted most influence in the field of his costumbrista essays. These are important for the light which they reflect on the customs of Spanish people in their social life as well as in their political life; yet it may be largely the influence of style and of the author's language which give him a place as a literary leader in Spain. Larra's language is a striking example of simplicity and directness. He may be said to have had somewhat the same significance as Cervantes who, in the Siglo de oro, more or less established the language of his period. Larra, in the first part of the nineteenth century, helped to further establish the purity of the language by

making the artificial and affected speech of the "afrancesados" appear ridiculous. Figaro's influence on modern prose writing is a real contribution to literature. He was the precursor of the so-called generation of 1898 of which Unamuno and Pío Baroja with their simple and direct style are outstanding examples.

It is Larra's versatility which gives him a place among the leaders in Spanish literature. He tried all literary genres; drama, poetry, novel, essay, and literary, social, and political criticism. He was an editor; and he was also interested in the dramatic arts, for his numerous translations of French plays were presented in the theatres of Madrid. It is of the utmost significance that he did this unusual amount of work, that he gained a position of first rank before he was twenty-eight years of age, and that he is so often said to have been more influential on modern Spanish prose than any other writer of the nineteenth century.

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