

AN APPRECIATION OF GUSTAVO ADOLFO BÉCQUER AND HIS
WORKS

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PREFACE.

Though the popular appeal and literary importance of Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer are recognized by authorities, very little has been written about him and his works. As elements of style are of interest to me, the quaint charm of Bécquer's legends first attracted me. I later became interested in the various literary trends that appear in his works. Hence, the purpose of this study is to give an appreciation of Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer and his works.

I wish to express my sincere appreciation to Dr. Rebecca Switzer and Dr. Jerome Moore for their inspiration, encouragement, and helpful criticism.

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CHAPTER I

BÉCQUER THE MAN AND HIS WORKS

Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer was born in Seville, Spain, February 17, 1836, one of eight sons of Don José Domínguez Bécquer, "a well-known Seville genre painter"¹ of noble lineage. Although his father died when Gustavo was five years of age, "too young to be taught the principles of his art, . . . he nevertheless bequeathed to him the artistic temperament that was so dominant a trait in the poet's genius."² The poet's education was begun at the College of San Antonio Abad, where he continued his studies until the death of his mother when he was only nine and a half years of age. Shortly thereafter, he entered the College of San Telmo, a school of navigation maintained by the government but suppressed soon after Bécquer's entrance. Then his godmother, Doña Manuela Monchay, "persona regularmente acomodada, sin hijos ni parientes,"³ took him into her home. She had a good library which contained the choicest classics, and "Bécquer fell upon them, devouring them with the impatience which was proverbial in

¹Everett Ward Olmsted (ed.), Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer, Legends, Tales and Poems (Boston: Ginn and Company, 1907), p. xv.

²Ibid.

³Ramón Rodríguez Correa (ed.), Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer, Obras completas (Madrid: Librería «Fernando Fé», 1898), T. I, p. 14.

him."⁴ Here it was that through the influence of such writers as Horace, Zorrilla, and Sir Walter Scott, his literary tastes were molded.⁵

Bécquer had a natural talent for drawing, and after two years of study with another painter, he entered, when about sixteen, the studio of his uncle, Don Joaquín Domínguez Bécquer, whose influence on his nephew's career was important. After a short time Don Joaquín realized that Gustavo's forte was literature rather than art and encouraged his following a literary career. The uncle arranged for the boy to take some Latin lessons, while Gustavo continued to enrich his literary background by much reading.

His godmother would probably have made Bécquer her heir, if he had consented to the mercantile career she desired for him.

The artist within rebelled, and at the age of seventeen and a half, feeling the attraction of the capital strong upon him, he bade farewell to the friends of his youth and set out to seek for fame and fortune.⁶

He arrived in Madrid in 1854 with the intention of following a literary career, but finding the city indifferent, he was forced for sixteen years to lead a precarious existence,

⁴Juan López Núñez, Vida anecdótica de Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer (Madrid: Editorial Mundo Latino, 1915), p. 15.

⁵Ibid. Olmsted also suggests the influence of Horace (op. cit., p. xvii).

⁶Olmsted, op. cit., p. xix.

holding for a while a government clerkship, editing a newspaper, doing magazine work, making translations, resorting, in fact, to earning whatever he could with brush and pen. An unfortunate marriage and ill health added to his misfortunes until at length in 1862, accompanied by his brother Valeriano, who had joined him that year, Bécquer was compelled to retire to the mountains in an effort to restore his health. Even there material demands necessitated his continuing his newspaper contributions, for it was while he was at the monastery of Veruela on the Moncayo that he wrote his famous "Cartas literarias" for El Contemporáneo. Though never able to regain his health, Bécquer's literary activity did not cease until finally death came on December 22, 1870.

Bécquer himself made no attempt to publish his works; and it was not until after his death, through the interest of Ramón Rodríguez Correa and other friends, that "most of the scattered tales, legends, and poems of Bécquer were gathered together and published by Fernando Fé, Madrid, in three small volumes."⁷ The Obras completas, on which this study is based, comprise twenty-two prose legends, seventy-six rimas, nine literary letters "con relato de excursiones y descripción de lugares,"⁸ one drama, and various artículos which include

⁷Ibid., p. xxviii. Bécquer also collaborated in writing the Historia de los templos de España, only one volume of which was published.

⁸M. Romera-Navarro, Historia de la literatura española (Nueva York: D. C. Heath y Compañía, 1928), p. 537.

"travel impressions and art notes jotted down at Toledo, Segovia, Soria . . . "9 In his Vida anecdótica de Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer, Juan López Núñez points out that many artículos and some poetry that appeared in various newspapers are not included in the Obras completas. Five of these artículos, taken from La ilustración de Madrid, Núñez inserts in his own book, and he suggests that the greatest tribute that might be paid to Bécquer would be a new edition of his works containing all the artículos and poetry omitted in the first compilation.¹⁰

A study of Bécquer the man would not be complete without considering his breadth of culture. His interests were many, and their reflection in his works reveal him as a man of great culture, one who has not merely skimmed the surface but one who has attempted to reach the depths.

First, Bécquer the artist must be considered, for though he preferred writing as a career, his talent and real interest in various forms of art are creditable. A genuine artistic sense is evident in all his works. That he enjoyed sketching is shown by his reference to many trips made for this purpose, like the one to the old convent of San Juan de

⁹Ernest Mérimée and S. Griswold Morley, A History of Spanish Literature (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1930), p. 510.

¹⁰Juan López Núñez, op. cit., pp. 82-91, 132-33. Olmsted also mentions these unpublished articles (op. cit., p. xxvii). It is possible, however, that some of the articles mentioned by both authors are included in Páginas desconocidas de Bécquer, ed. F. Iglesias Figueroa (Madrid, 1923), a book not available for this study.

los Reyes, mentioned in "Cartas literarias a una mujer."¹¹ He was picture conscious, and many scenes impressed him with their artistic possibilities, as when he speaks of a certain street in Toledo that "habla con tanta elocuencia a los ojos del artista."¹² Since part of Bécquer's early training was in the field of art, his references to Murillo,¹³ to Rembrandt,¹⁴ and to "cuadros que pertenecen a escuela holandesa"¹⁵ show a real knowledge of European painters and their works.

Bécquer's interest is not confined to painting, however, for his works also reveal the attraction of sculpture for him. He almost invariably makes special mention of the many statues that are usually to be found in abundance in the churches and cathedrals which he describes, and he pays definite tribute to the artistic execution of the statue of Doña Elvira in the abandoned church in Toledo which figures in "El beso":

Su rostro ovalado, en donde se veía impreso el sello de una leve y espiritual demacración, sus armoniosas facciones llenas de una suave y melancólica dulzura . . . , las purísimas líneas de su contorno esbelto, su

¹¹Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer, Obras completas, ed. Ramón Rodríguez Correa (Madrid: Librería de «Fernando Fé», 1898), T. III, p. 90. Sketching is a narrative device used in La venta de los gatos (T. III, pp. 33-48). All references hereafter to specific selections of Bécquer are to be understood as included in the Obras completas.

¹²"Tres fechas," I, p. 200.

¹³"Desde mi celda. Carta novena," II, p. 304.

¹⁴"Recuerdos de un viaje artístico," III, p. 65.

¹⁵"Roncesvalles," III, p. 185.

ademán reposado y noble, su traje blanco flotante, me traía a la memoria esas mujeres que yo soñaba cuando casi era niño.¹⁶

Likewise, in "La mujer de piedra," an art study, he seems intrigued by the beauty and excellence of the statue of a woman, and his discussion of its merits shows familiarity with the principles of that phase of art.¹⁷

Bécquer the artist was no less interested in architecture. As he grew up in Seville, his artistic nature was "desarrollado entre catedrales góticas, calados ajimeces y vidrios de colores,"¹⁸ and his works signify that this interest increased as time passed. Various buildings, particularly old cathedrals and monasteries, serve as background for many stories and artículos, and something of Bécquer's artistic appreciation is imparted to the reader. His particular interest in the Moorish influence on Spanish architecture is definitely expressed in "La arquitectura árabe en Toledo." This work also includes a brief general history of art, as related to architecture, which is suggestive of the extensiveness of Bécquer's artistic background.¹⁹

Characteristic also of the artist are Bécquer's point

¹⁶T. II, p. 49.

¹⁷T. II, pp. 158-165.

¹⁸Ramón Rodríguez Correa, op. cit., p. 17.

¹⁹Another discussion of Arabic architecture in Spain is found in "Recuerdos de un viaje artístico."

of view and approach in treatment. For example, he speaks of the difficulty of putting on canvas, much less into words, certain scenes, like the market square in Tarazona, that are "más para vistas que para trasladadas al lienzo, siquiera el que lo entente sea un artista consumado."²⁰ This attitude is further illustrated by his comparison of the first view of the obscure interior of the Basílica of Santa Leocadia to the contemplation of one of the pictures of Rembrandt, in the dark background of which, from a single point of light, heads and figures little by little become visible.²¹

Although not a musician, Bécquer, nevertheless, reveals a fondness for music. He admits this interest in the introduction of "El miserere" when he says:

Yo no sé la música; pero la tengo tanta afición, que aun sin entenderla, suelo coger a veces la partitura de una ópera, y me paso las horas muertas hojeando sus páginas . . . sin comprender una jota . . .²²

Too, there are constant references to music throughout his works, as in "La soledad," in which are mentioned such instruments as the harp and the guitar.²³ The theme of "El miserere" is based on the composition of a miserere, and musical terms such as maestoso, allegro, ritardando, piú vivo, and a piacere,

²⁰"Desde mi celda. Carta quinta," II, pp. 233-34.

²¹"Recuerdos de un viaje artístico," II, pp. 65-66.

²²"El miserere," II, p. 105.

²³"La soledad," III, p. 102.

are used.²⁴ He also refers to the opera, Tannhäuser,²⁵ and to a song of Ronsard.²⁶ The author's love of music, however, is best exemplified by the depth of feeling with which he describes the organ music and its effect on him in "Maese Pérez el organista."²⁷

Perhaps the most important phase of Bécquer's culture in relation to his own career is his rich literary background. The many literary references that appear in his selections indicate that his reading was extensive, with regard to varied genres and periods in the choice of material. References in many stories and artículos disclose Bécquer's knowledge of general history. He seems to be especially well informed concerning Spain, for besides incidental allusions to various kings²⁸ and events in certain articles, he gives a general outline of Spain's religious and political history in "Recuerdos de un viaje artístico."²⁹ The historical sources with which he is familiar are suggested by the mention of the

²⁴"El miserere," II, p. 106.

²⁵"Cartas literarias a una mujer," III, p. 87.

²⁶"El beso," II, p. 52.

²⁷T. I, pp. 69-71, 75-76.

²⁸Cf. Carlos III el Noble, "Castillo real de Olite," III, p. 211; Rodrigo, "Recuerdos de un viaje artístico," III, p. 70; el rey Don Pedro, "La arquitectura árabe en Toledo," II, p. 127.

²⁹T. III, pp. 67-71.

crónicas³⁰ and Mariana, one of Spain's best historians.³¹

It is interesting to note that the author's historical information is not limited to Spain, for in "Las perlas" he shows an intimate knowledge of Roman history. He refers to such figures as Julius Caesar, Pompey, Nero, Mark Antony, and Cleopatra in a manner that shows that his information is well grounded;³² furthermore, he gives detailed accounts of certain Roman customs.³³

Most significant, however, is Bécquer's apparent familiarity with the whole field of Spanish literature, as disclosed by the various literary references that are dispersed throughout his works. Allusions to the Cid and Bernardo del Carpio,³⁴ Roldán and Carlomagno³⁵ intimate his acquaintance with the old epic heroes, whereas mention of Trueba and Fernán Caballero suggests his knowledge of contemporary authors.³⁶ The variety and quality of his background are further denoted

³⁰"Roncesvalles," III, p. 181.

³¹"Castillo real de Olite," III, p. 214.

³²T. III, pp. 27-29.

³³Ibid., pp. 28-29. Because of the extensiveness of Bécquer's information, the authenticity of these customs is taken for granted.

³⁴"¡Es raro!," II, p. 131.

³⁵"Roncesvalles," III, p. 181.

³⁶"La soledad," T. III, p. 100.

by his reference to the fictional figure of Don Juan,³⁷ to the silvas of Rioja and the elegies of Herrera,³⁸ and to the outstanding figures of Quevedo³⁹ and Cervantes.⁴⁰ Interest in such authors as these betokens Bécquer's conscious interest in style, and it was probably through the study of the masterpieces of writers like Cervantes that he was able to attain the perfection that characterizes his own style.

Of inestimable influence also, in this respect, were the authors of the classical and Italian Renaissance periods which he mentions. Reference is made to Horace,⁴¹ whom certain biographers recognize as of influence on Bécquer; to Homer,⁴² to Anacreonte,⁴³ and to the legend of Galatea.⁴⁴ Then, that he knew Dante well is inferred by his alluding not only to the Italian himself,⁴⁵ but also to his Inferno⁴⁶ and to Beatrice.⁴⁷

³⁷Ibid., p. 99.

³⁸"Desde mi celda. Carta tercera," II, pp. 211-12.

³⁹"Los dos compadres," III, p. 200.

⁴⁰"Castillo real de Olite," III, p. 211.

⁴¹"Los dos compadres," III, p. 200.

⁴²"La soledad," III, p. 99; "Las perlas," III, p. 26; "Castillo real de Olite," III, p. 206.

⁴³"Los dos compadres," III, P. 199.

⁴⁴"El beso," II, p. 51.

⁴⁵"La soledad," III, p. 99; "Rima XXIX," III, p. 142.

⁴⁶"Pensamientos," III, p. 112; "Rima XXIX," p. 142.

⁴⁷"La mujer de piedra," II, p. 165.

The extensiveness of Bécquer's reading is likewise manifested by his reference to the Indian poets⁴⁸ and to the literature of other European countries. An acquaintance with Shakespeare's works is evident, for he not only cites The Tempest⁴⁹ and Macbeth,⁵⁰ but also refers to the characters, Ophelia⁵¹ and Hamlet.⁵² Because of the probable influence on Bécquer's own literary trends, especially significant is his familiarity with Balzac,⁵³ and Victor Hugo;⁵⁴ Goethe, Schiller, Uhland, and Heine;⁵⁵ and Byron, to whose Cain⁵⁶ and Manfred⁵⁷ he calls especial attention.

⁴⁸"Las perlas," III, p. 26. According to Valbuena Prat, although interest in Indian legends was common in Europe, it was not a popular tendency in Spain until Bécquer fostered it. (Ángel Valbuena Prat, Historia de la literatura española, ed. Gustavo Gili (Barcelona: S.A.D.A.G., 1937), T. II, P. 715)

⁴⁹"Desde mi celda. Carta primera," II, p. 171.

⁵⁰"Desde mi celda. Carta octava," II, p. 297.

⁵¹"¡Es raro!," II, p. 131; "Rima VI," III, p. 125.

⁵²"Cartas literarias a una mujer," III, p. 86.

⁵³Ibid., p. 77.

⁵⁴"La soledad," III, p. 107.

⁵⁵Ibid.

⁵⁶"Desde mi celda. Carta primera," II, p. 171.

⁵⁷"La soledad," III, p. 107.

Biblical references illustrate still another phase of Bécquer's literary culture. In relating the history of pearls in "Las perlas," the statement that "en el libro de Job y en el de los proverbios se menciona"⁵⁸ intimates that his knowledge of the material cited is not superficial. Also of interest are his allusions to Lazarus,⁵⁹ to the parable of the virgins,⁶⁰ and to Joseph's reporting that "durante el sitio de Jerusalén fué tal el hambre, que las madres se comieron a sus hijos."⁶¹ The nature of these references intimates a more than casual knowledge of the Bible.

A study of Bécquer is of value because of the literary tendencies that appear in his works. The relation of his background to his literary expression can only be conjectured; but the artistic perfection of his style points to the possible influence of some of the old masters. To what extent Bécquer was influenced by the romantic writers is uncertain; but similar reflections of literary currents lead one to make comparisons. Bécquer is said, for example, to show similarity to Zorrilla,⁶² to Heine,⁶³ and to Musset;⁶⁴ and although it is

⁵⁸T. III, p. 26.

⁵⁹"Castillo real de Olite," III, p. 213.

⁶⁰"Desde mi celda. Carta primera," II, p. 178.

⁶¹"¡Es raro!," II, p. 133.

⁶²Valbuena Prat, op. cit., p. 656; Olmsted, op. cit., p. xxix.

⁶³George Tyler Northup, An Introduction to Spanish Literature (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1925), p. 364; Valbuena Prat, op. cit., p. 713.

⁶⁴Mérimée and Morley, op. cit., p. 510.

impossible to form an opinion from a study of Bécquer's works concerning the influence of any American writers, he shows resemblance to Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849)⁶⁵ in his use of atmosphere and to Washington Irving (1783-1859)⁶⁶ in his flowing narrative style. Because of these similar romantic trends in Bécquer's works, he has been stamped as a romanticist; yet he anticipates the modern school in many respects, for several modernistic tendencies may also be found in both his prose and poetry. Consequently, the chief literary importance of Bécquer lies in the fact that he is a transitionalist.

⁶⁵Franklin R. Snyder and Edward D. Snyder (eds.), A Book of American Literature (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1935), p. 273.

⁶⁶Ibid., p. 224. Specific instances of similarity occur. In "Los dos compadres," the situation is much like Poe's "Cask of Amontillado," and the ending of "Creed in Dios" is reminiscent of Irving's "Rip Van Winkle."

CHAPTER II

BÉCQUER THE CONSCIOUS ARTIST

For a true appreciation of Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer as a literary figure, a study of certain elements of his style is necessary, for he is an outstanding stylist. Although style in itself is not easily defined, for it is an intangible element that may be identified but not detached, W. C. Brownell says that it is "the art of technic, that element of technical expression which makes an art of what otherwise is at best but skill."¹ This definition very aptly applies to Bécquer, for his manner of writing is truly that of an artist.

Although much that is said of Bécquer's prose is also true of his poetry, as a whole this study of Bécquer's style will be confined to his prose, for the amount of his prose far exceeds that of his poetry. Northup estimates Bécquer's prose as "perhaps the most artistic of any written during the century, down to the advent of the great contemporary stylists."² The fluency of his style is illustrative of the fact that style is easier when the writer has something to tell rather than something to say. Nevertheless, the smoothness and artistry of his prose indicate carefulness of technical workmanship. Hence, a study will be made not only of Bécquer's

¹W. C. Brownell, The Genius of Style (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1924), p. 19.

²Northup, op. cit., p. 364.

language, but also of certain mechanical features of his style.

An outstanding phase of Bécquer's style is his employment of different styles of composition to suit the subject matter. He uses interchangeably at least three distinct styles: simple, sublime, and impressionistic, the style used depending upon the nature and tone of the selection.

Directness, conciseness, and simplicity of expression are the main factors contributing to the author's simple style. In addition, it often assumes a conversational tone. The adaptability of this manner to description will be shown by the examples that will be cited later to illustrate Bécquer's descriptive patterns. Its application to narration is exemplified by the style of "La ajorca de oro," which, as a whole, is characterized by short sentences and direct expressions, like the following:

Ella se llamaba María Antúñez.
 Él, Pedro Alfonso de Orellana.
 Los dos eran toledanos, y los dos vivían en la
 misma ciudad que los vió nacer.³

The use of this simple style is the means by which Bécquer achieves the forceful beginning and conclusion of many of his stories. For example, in "La promesa" he launches at once into the story, omitting any explanatory passage and arousing interest in the first paragraph.

Margarita lloraba con el rostro oculto entre las
 manos; lloraba sin gemir, pero las lágrimas corrían silen-
 ciosas a lo largo de sus mejillas, deslizándose por entre

³I, p. 95.

sus dedos para caer en la tierra hacia la que había doblado su frente.⁴

A simple conclusion is generally characteristic of Bécquer. In "La promesa" a brief summing up of the final action prevents anticlimax, while in many instances a single short sentence suffices for a conclusion. "La ajorca de oro" leaves us with the brief statement, "El infeliz estaba loco."⁵ Leaving the details for the imagination of the reader, Bécquer ends "El caudillo de las manos rojas" with this expression of Siannah's deep grief over Pulo's death: "Siannah fué la primera viuda indiana que se arrojó al fuego con el cadáver de su esposo."⁶

Bécquer's mastery of this simple manner is shown by his skill in expressing his thoughts concisely. He exhibits his mastery of the art of condensation when he gives, for example, the life history of el tío Gregorio in one sentence:

De niño fué pastor, de joven soldado; después cultivó una pequeña heredad, patrimonio de sus padres, hasta que, por último, le faltaron las fuerzas y se sentó tranquilo a esperar la muerte, que ni temía ni deseaba.⁷

Similarly, Moorish history is presented in miniature, an unsurpassable example of conciseness:

⁴II, p. 25. "El gnomo" and "El Cristo de la calavera" are characterized by the same directness of beginning.

⁵T. I, p. 104. This simple style is also well illustrated in the conclusion of "El beso" and "La corza blanca."

⁶T. I, p. 156.

⁷"El gnomo," II, p. 83.

Primeramente pone su movable tienda, ya al pie de una palmera del Desierto, ya en la falda de una colina; después se hace conquistador, y derramándose por el mundo, hoy sesteá en el Cairo, a la tarde duerme en el África, y al amanecer levanta su campamento y le sorprende el sol con el nuevo día en Europa.⁸

Bécquer's sublime style, on the other hand, is marked by greater eloquence and copiousness than his simple style. Expressions of greater length and many subordinate elements are used. This style is often characterized by a loftiness of tone and depth of feeling not usually attained by the simpler manner. Bécquer's fluency adds a moving force. The use of this exalted manner is most apparent in the descriptive and historical accounts of old churches, cathedrals, and landmarks. It is in contemplation of these that Bécquer becomes most eloquent and reaches the height of sublimity in his expression. The style of the "Carta novena," which relates the history of the monastery of Veruela, well exemplifies this sublime mode. A quotation of a few lines is sufficient to disclose the general tone of this selection:

Al penetrar en aquel anchuroso recinto, ahora mudo y solitario, al ver las almenas de sus altas torres caídas por el suelo, la hiedra serpenteando por las hendiduras de sus muros, y las ortigas y los jaramagos que crecen en montón por todas partes, se apodera del alma una profunda sensación de involuntaria tristeza.⁹

This style is also effective when applied to narration. The fluency of "La rosa de pasión" is illustrative. Delicacy and

⁸"La arquitectura árabe en Toledo," II, p. 120.

⁹"Desde mi celda. Carta novena," II, p. 308. See also "Recuerdos de un viaje artístico."

lightness of touch are added features in "El caudillo de las manos rojas," perhaps the best example that may be cited because the sublime note is sustained throughout the story.

Bécquer's third style of composition, the impressionistic, is dramatic in tone. It is used to create certain moods and effects; hence, most of the author's supernatural stories are written in this impressionistic manner. "Creed en Dios" is typical. At times, this style seems very artificial, for it obviously suggests a pose, as when Bécquer seems to try deliberately to strike a melancholy pose in "Pensamientos" by saying: "Tal vez, viejo y a la orilla del sepulcro, con turbios, cruzar a aquella mujer tan deseada, para morir como he vivido . . . ¡esperando y desesperado!"¹⁰ This impressionism is least forceful when colored by sentimentality, as in the introductory part of "La soledad," in which the desire for effect is so apparent that the colorful contrasts the author achieves lose much of their effectiveness.¹¹

This impressionistic manner is generally tempered in Bécquer's stories by being used in combination with either the simple or sublime manner, as in "Tres fechas" and "Creed en Dios." Likewise, the simple and the sublime are often

¹⁰T. III, p. 110.

¹¹"La soledad," pp. 95-97. This conscious impressionism is also found in "Roncesvalles," "La venta de los gatos," "Tres fechas," and "Cartas literarias a una mujer."

united to advantage, as in "La promesa," "El Cristo de la calavera," and the "Cartas literarias." It is significant, however, that regardless of the stylistic manner assumed, unity of mood is always sustained.

Bécquer's most obvious mechanical device is his use of patterns, which is a Ciceronian tendency. Though he perhaps does not deliberately imitate Cicero, he is conscious of the latter's forms, for many of them have become fixed in the Spanish language; and as a conscious stylist, Bécquer makes use of certain Ciceronian patterns. His treatment is Ciceronian enough to partake of finish and elegance but is not so fixed that it does not allow freedom and individuality of expression.

His use of descriptive patterns is one outstanding adaptation of this Ciceronian trait. One of these is a detailed pattern, usually employed in long descriptions which embody the enumeration of many details. Generally speaking, it is characterized by the use of long sentences or a combination of many fragments, made up of a series, each part of which is modified by words, phrases, or clauses. Several effective examples may be found in "La promesa," typical of which is the account of the contents of "las inmensas alforjas" of the "extraño personaje, mitad romero, mitad juglar":

. . . se hallaban revueltos y confundidos mil objetos diferentes: cintas tocadas en el sepulcro de Santiago; cédulas con palabras que él decía ser hebraicas, las mismas que dijo el rey Salomón cuando fundaba el templo, y las únicas para libertarse de toda clase de enfermedades contagiosas; bálsamos maravillosos para pegar a hombres

partidos por la mitad; Evangelios cosidos en bolsitas de brocatel; secretos para hacerse amar de todas las mujeres; reliquias de los santos patronos de todos los lugares de España: joyuelas, cadenillas, cinturones, medallas y otras muchas baratijas de alquimia de vidrio y de plomo.¹²

That this detailed manner is a pattern characteristic of Bécquer is indicated by its appearance again and again throughout his prose works. He follows this pattern, for example, in "Creed en Dios" in the description of the panorama which unfolds before Teobaldo as he is propelled through the air on the supernatural horse;¹³ in "El beso" in the description of the old church used as quarters for the French soldiers;¹⁴ in "El monte de las ánimas" in the depiction of the strange sounds Beatriz hears in the midnight silence;¹⁵ and in "Los ojos verdes" in Fernando's description of the site where he encountered the woman with the green eyes.¹⁶

On the other hand, Bécquer often uses a concise pattern for short, clear-cut descriptions. These, though brief, are effective in their completeness and often are made to stand out like the castle of Montagut in this passage: "En

¹²T. II, pp. 35-36.

¹³Ibid., p. 15.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 44.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 69.

¹⁶T. I, p. 88

lontananza, y sobre las rocas de Montagut, vió destacarse la negra silueta de su castillo sobre el fondo azulado y transparente del cielo de la noche."¹⁷ This concise pattern is especially striking in the graphic pictures of the individual, for with a few deft strokes, this literary artist succeeds in making a figure as prominent as one in a bas-relief. The description of el tío Gregorio serves as an example: "El tío Gregorio era el más viejeito del lugar; tenía cerca de noventa navidades, el pelo blanco, la boca de risa, los ojos alegres y las manos temblonas."¹⁸ The perception of the artist is evident in these brief descriptions in the choice and mastery of details, especially in the depiction of women. Note the details in the description of the woman in "Los ojos verdes":

Ella era hermosa, hermosa y pálida, como una estatua de alabastro. Uno de sus rizos caía sobre sus hombros, deslizándose entre los pliegues del velo, como un rayo de sol que atraviesa las nubes, y en el cerco de sus pestañas rubias brillaban sus pupilas, como dos esmeraldas sujetas en una joya de oro.¹⁹

Bécquer varies his approach in these short sketches. On one hand, he makes use of definite, concrete details, as in the impressive description of the pomp distinguishing a

¹⁷"Creed en Dios," II, p. 22.

¹⁸"El gnomo," II, p. 83.

¹⁹T. I, p. 91. Cf. the description of Sara in "La rosa de pasión," I, p. 270, and the woman addressed in "Cartas literarias a una mujer," III, pp. 73-74. It is interesting to note also Bécquer's preference for women of beauty in his stories. La tía Casca in "Carta Sexta" is one of the few women characters inexpressibly horrible in appearance.

hunting trip of "el regio morador de Kattuk":

. . . cien bocinas de marfil fatigan el eco de los bosques; cien ágiles esclavos le preceden arrancando las malezas de los senderos y alfombrando el lugar en que ha de poner sus plantas; ocho elefantes conducen su tienda de lino y oro, y veinte rajás siguen su paso, disputándose el honor de conducir su aljaba de ópalo.²⁰

On the other hand, he often conveys a vivid impression by means of suggestion. For illustration, he gives the reader a good conception of Beatriz in "El monte de las ánimas" when he says that she "hizo un gesto de fría indiferencia; todo un carácter de mujer se reveló en aquella desdeñosa contracción de sus delgados labios."²¹ Likewise the figure of the old innkeeper in "La venta de los gatos" is made more real by the author's remark that he "se enjugó una lágrima con el dorso de la mano."²²

A similar pattern in the use of series, though slightly different in form, occurs in Bécquer's employment of the Ciceronian figures of amplification, augmentation and accumulation. Augmentation is "the use of series of words, phrases, clauses, sentences and paragraphs" in ascending or descending order.²³ Using the mode frequently, Bécquer skillfully adapts

²⁰"El caudillo de las manos rojas," I, p. 114.

²¹T. II, p. 65.

²²T. III, p. 47.

²³Rebecca Switzer, The Ciceronian Style in Fray Luis de Granada (New York: Instituto de las Españas en los Estados Unidos, 1927), p. 42.

it to his own style. One of the best examples is found in "La ajorca de oro":

Ella era hermosa, hermosa con esa hermosura que inspira el vértigo; hermosa con esa hermosura que no se parece en nada a la que soñamos en los ángeles . . . , hermosura diabólica, que tal vez presta el demonio a algunos seres para hacerlos sus instrumentos en la tierra . . . ²⁴

Bécquer's mastery of the pattern is shown by the various ways in which he makes use of it. He sometimes amplifies by a series of paragraphs,²⁵ but he also applies the pattern to amplification in one sentence as in this passage: "Así pasó una hora, dos, la noche, un siglo, porque la noche aquella pareció eterna a Beatriz."²⁶

The same variety of treatment is characteristic of the many striking figures of accumulation, "which is a piling up of words and thoughts that often ends in generalities."²⁷ These forms fit well into Bécquer's stylistic scheme, for he enhances the general impressiveness of his style by using the mode of accumulation frequently. The excellent example which follows indicates his perfection of the mode:

Momentos que sus autores creyeron imposibles de destruir; razas poderosas que sujetaron el mundo a su

²⁴T. I, p. 95.

²⁵Cf. the account of sublime musical effects achieved by the organ in "Maese Pérez el organista," I. II, pp. 75-76.

²⁶"El monte de las ánimas," II, p. 70.

²⁷Switzer, op. cit., p. 43.

poder; imperios construídos por la espada sobre las ruinas de otros imperios; civilizaciones que los siglos contribuyeron a perfeccionar, todo se ha borrado . . . "28

Bécquer's employment of series of three is a pattern of interest. Although he uses series of four, five, or more words or groups, his series of three are so common that they seem to follow a definite pattern. It is a pattern that Bécquer employs repeatedly, and one that he adapts to almost every common grammatical construction. There are series of three consisting of single words, of phrases, of clauses, and even of sentences.

The following sentence, for example, has three subject substantives, each modified by a prepositional phrase introduced by de: "Los desiguales soplos de la brisa, el graznido de las aves nocturnas y el rumor de los reptiles . . . turbaban . . . el silencio de la muerte."29

Three adjectives and three predicate verbs occur in this sentence: "Los chiquillos fueron siempre chiquillos: bulliciosos, traviesos e incorregibles, comienzan por hacer gracia, una hora después aturden, y concluyen por fastidiar."30

Present participles in a series of three are found in this citation: " . . . se arrastró por la tierra besando los pies de los unos, abrazándose a las rodillas de los otros,

28"Recuerdos de un viaje artístico," III, p. 65. Other good illustrations are found in "La creación," I, p. 54; "Cartas literarias a una mujer," III, p. 87; and "Soledad," III, pp. 105-06.

29"La cruz del diablo," I, p. 182.

30"La creación," I, pp. 51-52.

implorando en su ayuda a la Virgen y a los santos . . . "31

The adaptation of this pattern to sentences is shown by the use of three exclamations: "¡Tengo sed! ¡Me muero! ¡Me abraso!"32

Despite the frequency with which the pattern recurs, Bécquer's treatment has enough variety to avoid becoming monotonous. This is shown by the various ways he used adjectives in series of three. In addition to examples having no modifiers, there are instances in which each adjective in the group is modified by más,³³ by qué,³⁴ by a clause introduced by porque,³⁵ by siempre,³⁶ and by tan.³⁷

Another dominant pattern that distinguishes Bécquer's style is found in the repetition of words. This varies in the way in which it occurs, but one of the most obvious devices is successive repetition, that is, repeating a word immediately following it, as in these quotations:

³¹"Desde mi celda. Carta sexta," II, p. 251.

³²"La cueva de la mora," II, p. 79.

³³"El aderezo de esmeraldas," III, p. 18.

³⁴"La pereza," III, p. 10.

³⁵"Cartas literarias a una mujer," III, p. 81.

³⁶"Desde mi celda. Carta quinta," II, p. 242.

³⁷Ibid., "Carta séptima," II, p. 276.

En aquel instante la nota que Maese Pérez sostenía trinando, se abrió, se abrió . . . ³⁸

Estaba en Toledo; en Toledo, la ciudad sombría y melancólica por excelencia. ³⁹

Too, there is the repetition of a word or phrase in parallel constructions, either within the same sentence or in different sentences. The following citations show how this type of repetition occurs within the same sentence:

Allí cada lugar recuerda una historia, cada piedra un siglo, cada monumento una civilización. ⁴⁰

. . . misteriosa, porque él es un arcano; inmenso, porque él es infinito; divina, porque su esencia es santa. ⁴¹

Note the duplication in different sentences within the paragraph in this illustration: "Yo no niego que suceda así. Yo no niego nada . . . " ⁴² A repeated phrase is often carried over from paragraph to paragraph. In one instance, three successive paragraphs begin with the clause, "La poesía eres tú," which is also repeated within the fourth one of the group. ⁴³

This repetition of phrase is more characteristic of Bécquer's impressionistic style than of the simple or sublime.

³⁸"Maese Pérez el organista," I, p. 70.

³⁹"Cartas literarias a una mujer," III, p. 89.

⁴⁰Ibid.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 81. On this same page there is also a long sentence with four successive clauses introduced by the words, "si tú supieras."

⁴²Ibid., p. 79.

⁴³Ibid., pp. 76-77.

It is used much in his supernatural tales, for recurrence of words enhances such effects as weirdness and unreality. The frequent recurrence of corría heightens the tone of unreality in "Creed en Dios."⁴⁴ Repetition is also an obvious device employed in "El rayo de luna," as exemplified by these expressions:

¡El amor! . . . El amor es un rayo de luna!

.

¡La gloria! . . . La gloria es un rayo de luna!⁴⁵

Still another feature of Bécquer's recurrence of phrase is his frequent use of what seem to be more or less stock phrases. He is inclined, for example, to repeat certain adjectives or figures of speech in similar descriptions in various stories. In describing streets he shows a preference for the adjectives, narrow, dark, and winding. The streets of Toledo he always describes as "oscuras, estrechas y torcidas";⁴⁶ but like this he also pictures the streets of Tarragona,⁴⁷ Sevilla,⁴⁸ and Soria.⁴⁹ The stock use of oscura is

⁴⁴T. II, pp. 15-17.

⁴⁵T. I, pp. 170-71.

⁴⁶"El Cristo de la calavera," I, p. 233. Cf. "Tres fechas," I, pp. 200-2; "Cartas literarias a una mujer," III, p. 90; "El beso," II, pp. 41, 42, 53.

⁴⁷"Desde mi celda. Carta primera," II, p. 184.

⁴⁸"La soledad," III, p. 95.

⁴⁹"El rayo de luna," I, p. 164.

further exemplified by its repeated use in phrases like the following: "las oscuras y espesímas sombras,"⁵⁰ "una noche tan oscura,"⁵¹ and "la oscura alameda."⁵² Particularly noticeable, too, is the frequent appearance of "lanzando" and "chispas" in such phrases as "lanzando chispas de fuego,"⁵³ "lanzando chispas de luz de sus petos de hierro,"⁵⁴ and "lanzando unas chispas de colores."⁵⁵ One of the most frequently repeated expressions, however, is the figure, "gotas de rocío semejantes a lágrimas,"⁵⁶ which possibly attracted the author because of its unusual beauty.

In a broad sense, Bécquer's repeated treatment of nature falls in the category of patterns, for nature is an ever recurring theme. As situations differ, he embodies nature in his works in various ways, but his conscious weaving in

⁵⁰"El beso," II, p. 53.

⁵¹"El monte de las ánimas," II, p. 67.

⁵²"El gnomo," II, p. 103. His seeming preference for oscura and words similar is perhaps explained by his own admission that he always hunted the narrow and solitary streets in cities and the dark corners of buildings ("La mujer de piedra," II, p. 153).

⁵³"El aderezo de esmeraldas," III, p. 19; "Castillo real de Olite," III, p. 19.

⁵⁴"La promesa," II, p. 30.

⁵⁵"El gnomo," II, p. 39.

⁵⁶"Creed en Dios," II, p. 3; "Las hojas secas," II, p. 150; "Desde mi celda. Carta tercera," II, p. 214; "Penamientos," III, p. 112; "Rima XIII," III, p. 131.

of this element is one of the most obvious devices. He is so sensitive to nature that his literary expression is marked by constant references to natural surroundings. If a descriptive passage of nature is not appropriate to the subject at hand, Bécquer makes an occasion for bringing in some kind of reference to nature, as in "El aderezo de esmeraldas" in the comparison of the beauty of the aderezo to certain objects of nature:

En efecto, las esmeraldas eran bellísimas: aquel collar, rodeado a su garganta de nieve, hubiera parecido una guirnalda de tempranas hojas de almendro, salpicadas de rocío; aquel alfiler sobre su seno, una flor de loto cuando se mece sobre su movable onda, coronada de espuma.⁵⁷

This tendency is most noticeable, however, in the creation of setting and atmosphere. Many of Bécquer's stories, particularly those of a supernatural character, are directly dependent on the influence of natural setting for effectiveness, as the history of tía casca.⁵⁸ Others are made more impressive because of the creation of certain moods, which engender a more responsive attitude on the part of the reader. This last device is noted in "La creación," for in the opening paragraphs the author creates an atmosphere of Oriental fantasy which pervades the whole story.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ III, pp. 14-15.

⁵⁸ "Desde mi celda. Carta sexta," II, pp. 246-57.

⁵⁹ "La creación," T. I, p. 49. The tone of "El caudillo de las manos rojas" is also set in the nature sketch which opens the first canto. T. I, p. 105.

The descriptions of the coming of night and of night itself illustrate the way in which Bécquer has made a pattern of his treatment of nature. These descriptions recur again and again,⁶⁰ and the element of sameness in them is outstanding. Although varied slightly at times, Bécquer's favorite night scene is one that is dark and threatening, like that depicted in this passage: "La noche había cerrado sombría y amenazadora; el cielo estaba cubierto de nubes de color de plomo . . ."⁶¹ The portrayals of the coming of night, which seems to have intrigued the author, are often very beautiful, as this description:

Las sombras de los montes bajan a la carrera y se extienden por la llanura; la luna comienza a dibujarse en el Oriente como un círculo de cristal que transparenta el cielo y la alameda se envuelve en la indecisa luz del crepúsculo.⁶²

Henry David Thoreau says that "no man's thoughts are new, but the style of their expression is the never failing novelty which cheers and refreshes us."⁶³ As there is no great depth of thought in Bécquer, the reader goes to him not for mental food, but for repose and entertainment. He charms with the vigor, clarity, and beauty of his language, for he is a master of words. Despite his preference for stock phrases,

⁶⁰The element of night figures in practically all of Bécquer's prose selections.

⁶¹"El beso," II, p. 53.

⁶²"Desde mi celda. Carta segunda," II, p. 198.

⁶³Henry David Thoreau, Selections, (New York: American Book Company, 1934), p. 24.

he has at his command an abundant, rich stock of words, which he uses with ease.

Bécquer has the knack of choosing the appropriate word; and he indicates the consciousness of this choice when he says:

Pero no basta tener una idea; es necesario despojarla de su extraña manera de ser, vestirla un poco al uso para que esté presentable, aderezarla y condimentarla, en fin, a propósito, para el paladar de los lectores de un periódico, político por añadidura. Y aquí está lo espinoso del caso, aquí la gran dificultad.⁶⁴

It is this mastery that enables him to attain the unusual effects for which he is noted and to intensify the effectiveness of the thought. An excellent illustration of his forceful diction is found in the passage in which he reveals his conception of the development of Christianity:

La semilla de la fe germina y crece en el silencio de las catacumbas, en las tinieblas de los calabozos, en el horror de los suplicios, en la ensangrentada arena de los anfiteatros. La persecución a su vez toma gigantes proporciones, y, presa de un delirio febril, corre ardiendo en sed de exterminio tras un fantasma invisible, e hiere el aire con sus golpes inútiles, porque cuando logra alcanzar el objeto de su furor, la muerte deja entre sus manos sangrientas, con un cadáver, la envoltura material del espíritu que rompe sus ligaduras y sube al cielo desafiando su crueldad con una sonrisa.⁶⁵

Unusual turns of phrase often lend an original flavor to Bécquer's expression. Examples like the following are characteristic:

. . . las bandas de gentes del pueblo que hormiguean en el camino . . . ⁶⁶

⁶⁴"Desde mi celda. Carta segunda," II, p. 191.

⁶⁵"Recuerdos de un viaje artístico," III, p. 68.

⁶⁶"La venta de los gatos," III, p. 35.

. . . la poesía . . . es, una palabra, el verbo poético hecho carne.⁶⁷

. . . los arrojé con la misma tranquilidad . . . con que Buckingham, rompiendo el hilo que las sujetaba sembró de perlas la alfombra del palacio de su amante.⁶⁸

Beauty is also a quality of Bécquer's diction, for he consciously paints the beautiful with words of great beauty. Thus he gives his prose a poetic quality that is appealing, truly making "an art of what otherwise is at best but skill."⁶⁹ To illustrate, he speaks of a torrent that "ya salpica el rostro con el polvo de sus aguas,"⁷⁰ and he compares a field of white daisies to "esa lluvia de flores con que alfombran el suelo los árboles frutales en los templados días de abril."⁷¹ The following reference to Greece is marked by unusual charm of expression:

La Grecia coronó de flores sus divinidades, les prestó el ideal de la belleza humana y las colocó sobre altares risueños, levantados a la sombra de edificios que respiraban sencillez y majestad.⁷²

Bécquer also uses many synonyms. His vocabulary is so copious that he seems never to lack for words; and he is an adept at using synonymous terms because of his keen perception of shades of meaning. Note the synonyms in the following

⁶⁷"Cartas literarias a una mujer," III, p. 77.

⁶⁸"El aderezo de esmeraldas," III, p. 17.

⁶⁹Brownell, op. cit., p. 19.

⁷⁰"El caudillo de las manos rojas," I, p. 113.

⁷¹"Desde mi celda. Carta segunda," II, p. 194.

⁷²"La arquitectura árabe en Toledo," II, p. 122.

description of the Virgin:

. . . coronada de estrellas, vestida de luz, rodeada de todas las jerarquías celestes, y hermosa sobre toda ponderación, Nuestra Señora de Monserrat, la Madre de Dios, la reina de los arcángeles, el amparo de los pecadores, y el consuelo de los afligidos.⁷³

Much of the force and beauty of Bécquer's style depends on his extensive and skillful use of certain figures of speech. The simile is the type he most commonly employs, and generally his figures of this type are striking. The following examples are marked by great delicacy and lightness of touch:

. . . las hojas que se agitan como abanicos de esmeraldas
. . . ⁷⁴

. . . diáfanas como el ambar miríadas de pájaros y de insectos con ropajes de oro y azul de crespón y esmeraldas.⁷⁵

. . . las campanillas . . . semejando su repique una lluvia de notas de cristal . . . ⁷⁶

. . . unos ojos . . . transparentes como las gotas de la lluvia que se resbalan sobre las hojas de los árboles
. . . ⁷⁷

There are similes, too, of a grotesque nature. Many of these reveal Bécquer's interest in death by their reference to some aspect of death. To illustrate, he speaks of the crowd in the cathedral as becoming as silent "como los muertos

⁷³"Creed en Dios," T. II, p. 19. Cf. description of Siannah in "El caudillo de las manos rojas," I, p. 156.

⁷⁴"El caudillo de las manos rojas," I, p. 122.

⁷⁵Ibid.

⁷⁶"Maese Pérez el organista," I, p. 75.

⁷⁷"Los ojos verdes," I, p. 83.

cuando pone Maese Pérez las manos en el órgano . . . ";⁷⁸ and in "El miserere" he says the miraculous illumination of the ruined church "parecía, como un esqueleto, de cuyos huesos amarillos se desprende ese gas fosfórico que brilla y humea en la oscuridad . . . "79

Though not so abundant as the similes, there are many metaphorical expressions in Bécquer's works that further indicate his word mastery. Very unusual is his definition of the imagination, for he says that "una vez aguijoneada, la imaginación es un caballo que se desboca y al que no sirve tirarle de la rienda."⁸⁰ A metaphor of exquisite touch is used to portray Pulo's feeling of desperation on Siannah's disappearance: "¡Oh! vuelve, vuelve, hermosa mía; sin ti, mi vida será una noche sin aurora, un llanto sin lágrimas."⁸¹

The figures of personification are characterized by the same variety of approach. There are some of very beautiful conception, like the figure, "la aurora abre las puertas al día";⁸² but there are also examples of horrible figures, like the one which says that "Siannah . . . siente helarse la sangre en sus venas y queda inmóvil, como si la mano de la Muerte la

⁷⁸"Maese Pérez el organista," I, p. 66.

⁷⁹"El miserere," II, p. 113.

⁸⁰"El monte de las ánimas," II, p. 61.

⁸¹"El caudillo de las manos rojas," I, p. 140.

⁸²Ibid., p. 112.

tuviera asida por el cabello."⁸³

Also worthy of mention are Bécquer's forceful figures of contrast. The author's comment on the arrangement of the contents of the daily newspaper is a good example of his use of antithesis; he says it is "todo revuelto: una obra de caridad con un crimen, un suicidio con una boda, un entierro con una función de toros extraordinaria."⁸⁴ Other emphatic figures, like the following, further denote his skill in the figurative use of words:

Aquello no era pelear para vivir; era vivir para pelear.⁸⁵

. . . el hierro domina, pero la razón convence.⁸⁶

Another significant feature of Bécquer's language is his use of a great variety of suffixes, both diminutive and augmentative. His works abound in these. They tend to enhance the general interest and effectiveness, for through suffixes many subtle shades of meaning can be implied. Most numerous are diminutives, like the following: "riachuelo,"⁸⁷ "esquilillas,"⁸⁸ "palabritas,"⁸⁹ "joyuelas,"⁹⁰ and "pajeci-

⁸³Ibid., p. 109. This legend abounds in rich figures of various kinds.

⁸⁴"Desde mi celda. Carta segunda," II, p. 202.

⁸⁵"La cruz del diablo," I, p. 180.

⁸⁶"Recuerdos de un viaje artístico," III, p. 68.

⁸⁷"El miserere," II, p. 109.

⁸⁸"El gnomo," II, p. 96.

⁸⁹"Desde mi celda. Carta primera," II, p. 184.

⁹⁰"La promesa," II, p. 36.

llos."⁹¹ There are many effective augmentatives, as "capotón de guerra,"⁹² "amigotes muertos,"⁹³ "escabón,"⁹⁴ and "almohadones";⁹⁵ but of particular interest are the words to which depreciative suffixes are added, examples of which are "lugarajo,"⁹⁶ "migajas de pan,"⁹⁷ "casuca,"⁹⁸ and "poblachón."⁹⁹

No less interesting are the choice colloquial expressions that Bécquer uses occasionally, for they add a realistic touch. In "El miserere," for example, in speaking of a group of bandits and their leader, he states that "se marcharon . . . , adonde no se sabe, a los profundos tal vez."¹⁰⁰ In "El beso" there are the expressions, "en el alcázar no cabe ya un grano de trigo, cuanto más un hombre"¹⁰¹ and "eso es lo que se llama llegar y besar el santo";¹⁰² and he begins one

⁹¹Ibid., p. 35.

⁹²"El beso," II, p. 47.

⁹³Ibid.

⁹⁴"Desde mi celda. Carta sexta," II, p. 261.

⁹⁵Ibid., "Carta primera," II, p. 174.

⁹⁶"La promesa," II, p. 39.

⁹⁷"Desde mi celda. Carta séptima," II, p. 269.

⁹⁸Ibid., "Carta cuarta," II, p. 222.

⁹⁹"El beso," II, p. 45.

¹⁰⁰T. II, p. 109.

¹⁰¹Ibid., p. 42.

¹⁰²Ibid., p. 48.

of his artículos by saying, "Hay gentes que tiene en la uña el almanaque."¹⁰³ In addition he uses many colloquial phrases, as "magicazo de tomo y lomo,"¹⁰⁴ "una muchacha . . . amiga de parecer bien,"¹⁰⁵ and "dicharacheo."¹⁰⁶

Though concreteness of expression often tends toward apothegm, pithiness is the exception rather than the rule with Bécquer. It is only in a few selections that he resorts to the use of epigram to any appreciable extent, namely, in "Cartas literarias a una mujer," "El caudillo de las manos rojas," and "La creación." Although some of his conceptions are very effective, the expressions themselves are too wordy to be considered good epigrams. It can easily be deduced from the following typical illustrations that Bécquer's forte is not an epigrammatic style:

El mundo es un absurdo animado que rueda en el vacío para asombro de sus habitantes.¹⁰⁷

El amor es un caos de luz y de tinieblas; la mujer, una amalgama de perjurias y ternura; el hombre un abismo de grandeza y pequeñez; la vida, en fin, puede compararse a una larga cadena con eslabones de hierro y de oro.¹⁰⁸

There are other elements of Bécquer's style besides

¹⁰³"El carnaval," III, p. 215.

¹⁰⁴"Desde mi celda. Carta séptima," II, p. 270.

¹⁰⁵Ibid., "Carta octava," II, p. 285.

¹⁰⁶Ibid., "Carta quinta," II, p. 235.

¹⁰⁷"La creación," I, p. 50.

¹⁰⁸Ibid., p. 49.

the mechanical features and the language that are of interest, but a study of this scope will not permit a consideration of them all. It is fitting, however, to take into account his dramatic power and the quality of unity.

Bécquer has a keen dramatic sense and he handles expertly the dramatic situations in his stories. His plot set forth, he proceeds with directness, motivating each step, until the highest point of interest is reached. The development of the plot of "El beso" is an excellent example of Bécquer's art in building up to a single climax; but "El Cristo de la calavera" offers proof of his consummate skill as a narrator, for in this story there are three distinct climaxes, each of which holds the interest of the reader. There is no tendency towards anti-climax in Bécquer's stories. If a story does not end with the highest peak of interest, the action moves swiftly from this point to the desenlace, which is usually novel in Bécquer.

The quality of unity in Bécquer is important, for one of his chief claims to clarity lies in his artistic conception of the whole. His selections indicate a definite plan, which not only encompasses the whole, but also provides for continuity within, achieving unity between sentences, paragraphs, and parts. This perfection of organization is well exemplified in the artículo, "Las perlas." In this, Bécquer passes with ease from a discussion of the value of the pearl to an account of its history; the concluding remarks on this part

motivate an anecdote concerning a pearl of great beauty; and this story in turn paves the way for the conclusion which is skillfully related to the various points made.¹⁰⁹ This same quality of unity characterizes Bécquer's stories and cartas, though in a manner somewhat more subtle.

As a stylist, Bécquer is a master of the whole as well as of the part. He is first a master of words. Skilled in both choice of word and usage, he excels in beauty and force of expression. He achieves clarity of expression by his meticulousness and orderliness of details, and he unifies the whole by making a definite plan and by paying careful attention to harmony of details. Hence, it may well be said that Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer is a conscious artist.

¹⁰⁹ This same type of organization is found in "El carnaval," III, pp. 215-24.

CHAPTER III

BÉCQUER THE NEO-ROMANTICIST

Romanticism in Spain, fully developed when introduced by the emigrados after the death of Fernando VII in 1833,¹ was short-lived. Reaching the height of its development before 1840, it was virtually over before Bécquer began to write, for by 1850 a definite reaction to the movement had set in. As he went to Madrid in 1854 to begin his career as a writer, his period of literary activity coincided with the return to realism which came as the reaction against romantic fervor (1850-1870). Nevertheless, his works reflect a romantic undercurrent that was expressed chiefly in his nationalism and medievalism.

As "Romanticism was regarded by some of its adepts . . . as first a cosa de España, a form of patriotism,"² this nationalism manifested itself in Spain in an interest in and conservation of folklore, which resulted in the costumbrista movement, established by Mesonero Romanos (1803-1882), Mariano José de Larra (1809-1837), Serafín Estébanez Calderón (1799-1867), Fernán Caballero (1796-1877), and Pedro Antonio de Alarcón (1833-1891).³ Though Bécquer is not one of the costumbrista group, romanticism fostered in him a similar patriotism, revealed by his interest in Spain and that which

¹Northup, op. cit., p. 348.

²Mérimée and Morley, op. cit., p. 462.

³Ibid., pp. 338-40, 369-71.

is Spanish.

One evidence of this is in the cuadros de costumbres found in Bécquer's works. The best of Bécquer's cuadros are in the "Cartas literarias" of the "Desde mi celda" group, the outstanding one of which is perhaps the account of Bécquer's experiences on his journey from Madrid to Veruela, a village in the mountains.⁴ This sketch is doubly interesting, because it is reminiscent of the genial manner of Mesonero Romanos. The artículo, "El carnaval," also preserves many customs related to the yearly carnaval; and there are examples of contemporary manners in many stories.⁵

Likewise, Bécquer shows an interest in contemporary Spanish types. This, too, is manifested principally in the "Cartas literarias," particularly in his observations of peasant types in the mountains, like the añoneras.⁶ Of interest also as types are those that are represented as the source of many of his legends, as the guide in "La cruz del diablo"⁷ and the pastor in "Carta sexta"⁸ and "La corza blanca."⁹

⁴"Desde mi celda. Carta primera," II, pp. 172-84.

⁵See "Los dos compadres," "La venta de los gatos," "Maese Pérez el organista," and others.

⁶"Desde mi celda. Carta quinta," II, pp. 237-43.

⁷T. I, pp. 175-77.

⁸T. II, pp. 246-57.

⁹T. I, pp. 243-45.

His tendency to base many stories on Spanish legends and to introduce legendary material wherever possible is indicative of Bécquer's interest in Spanish folklore. All the tales included in the "Cartas" are of this nature; and it is in one of these that he professes an interest in legends of his people as well as in their customs and types when he says,

Al volver al monasterio, después de haberme detenido aquí para recoger una tradición oscura de boca de una aldeana, allí para apuntar los fabulosos datos sobre el origen de un lugar o la fundación de una casuca . . . , un recuerdo de las costumbres o un tipo perfecto de los habitantes . . . ¹⁰

The use of a romance in "La promesa"¹¹ suggests the wide variety of legendary material at his command, as do the references to the Cid and Bernardo del Carpio¹² and Roncesvalles.¹³

He voices his attitude toward the national past by saying:

. . . en el fondo de mi alma consagro como una especie de culto, una veneración profunda a todo lo que pertenece al pasado, y las poéticas tradiciones, las derruidas fortalezas, los antiguos usos de nuestra vieja España, tienen para mí todo ese indefinible encanto, esa vaguedad misteriosa de la puesta del sol de un día espléndido . . . ¹⁴

¹⁰"Desde mi celda. Carta cuarta," II, p. 222.

¹¹A fragment of a romance is also found in "Roncesvalles," III, pp. 187-90.

¹²"¡Es raro!," III, p. 131.

¹³"Roncesvalles," III, p. 181.

¹⁴"Desde mi celda. Carta cuarta," II, p. 223. Cf. "Tres fechas," p. 200.

He echoes Mesonero Romanos in this deep respect for antiquity; and one is reminded of the latter's article, "La casa de Cervantes," when Bécquer says that we ought to preserve "la imagen de todo eso que va a desaparecer."¹⁵ This veneration is further exemplified in the same selection by his contradiction of his previous progressive attitude when he laments that with the spread of modern inventions and modern living, the old is being erased, the new being substituted for the old.¹⁶

This looking to the past is also manifested in Bécquer's many articles on, and references to, old Spanish art, landmarks, and ruins. Anything breathing the air of tradition appealed to him; and, according to Romera-Navarro, "Bécquer ha descubierto el oculto símbolo de las piedras y ruinas, el alma de las cosas muertas."¹⁷ The selection, "Recuerdos de un viaje artístico," is significant, as it includes a reference to fragments of Roman construction in Toledo.¹⁸ Bécquer's account of the old monastery of Veruela also shows his deep veneration for the past.¹⁹ "His love for old ruins and monuments, his archaeological instinct, is evident in every line."²⁰

¹⁵Ibid., pp. 227-28.

¹⁶Ibid., pp. 225-27.

¹⁷Romera-Navarro, op. cit., p. 537.

¹⁸T. III, p. 61.

¹⁹"Desde mi celda. Carta segunda" and "Carta novena."

²⁰Olmsted, op. cit., p. xxix.

Though the typical romanticists did not limit themselves to any one period, the Middle Ages and the Siglo de Oro are periods especially interesting to romanticists in Spain because of their wealth of literary material. In returning to the past, the Spanish romantic writers took advantage of this storehouse of popular ballads, drama, picturesque legends, and traditions. This is also true of Bécquer, for his works reveal a thorough knowledge of the Middle Ages. Many of his stories are of medieval setting, and there are references to feudal customs. "La promesa" is typical, for in this story Bécquer graphically presents certain phases of the life of the Middle Ages, such as the gathering of the "campesinos" to witness the departure "a la guerra" of the "soldados" or vassals of the "conde de Gómara, célebre en toda la comarca por su esplendidez y sus riquezas."²¹ The details of the order of departure suggest his understanding of the feudal order.

Medievalism in Bécquer, however, partakes of more than background and customs, for he has caught the spirit of the period, as well. The prominence of the supernatural element, a medieval characteristic, is outstanding in Bécquer's legends, for it not only appears incidentally in many stories, but also is often the motivating force. One way in which it is manifested is in the appearance of supernatural beings. These are of two types: those purely fantastic, like the

²¹T. II, pp. 28-30.

gnomes in "El gnomo,"²² and those representing the dead returned to life. Those of the first type lend an Oriental touch and are suggestive of Bécquer's interest in Oriental fantasy. In fact, the tale of the origin of the castle of Trasmoz is reminiscent of the Arabian Nights.²³ The supernatural beings are made impressively realistic. Endowed with earthly power, they often play a major part in plot development. Such is the case of Maese Pérez²⁴ and "el señor de Segre."²⁵

The supernatural also enters into many unusual occurrences. A statue's striking down the arrogant French captain serves as the denouement of "El beso."²⁶ The supernatural extinguishing of the street lamp is a motivating force in "El Cristo de la calavera,"²⁷ and the dominant factor of "La promesa" is the "casamiento de la mano."²⁸

Then, too, there is a mixture of deep religious feeling and medieval paganism reflected in Bécquer. The return to Catholicism, which was a romantic tendency that came as a re-

²²T. II, pp. 102-03.

²³"Desde mi celda. Carta séptima," II, pp. 263-79.

²⁴"Maese Pérez el organista," I, pp. 61-81.

²⁵"La cruz del diablo," II, pp. 173-97.

²⁶T. II, p. 60.

²⁷T. I, pp. 236-37.

²⁸T. II, p. 39.

action to eighteenth century rationalism in other countries, tended only to strengthen religious feeling in Spain, already a Catholic nation;²⁹ and it is this religious spirit, dominant in his attitude toward all connected with the Church, that pervades Bécquer's works. Various aspects of this piety may be noted in "Maese Pérez el organista": his veneration for the bishop, various religious customs, and the awe inspired in him by the impressive transfiguration service in the cathedral on Christmas Eve.³⁰ Significant also is the reverence which characterizes the reference to any figure of the Virgin; and his treatment of the miracle of La Aparecida³¹ typifies his respectful attitude toward the religious marvels that were so much a part of medieval religion. In "Recuerdos de un viaje artístico," which develops into a brief treatise on religious history, Bécquer reveals the deep feeling inspired in him by contemplating the solemn grandeur of the interior of the Basílica de Santa Leocadia. Statements like the following suggest the romantic spirit: "De lejos se interroga; se analiza; se duda; allí la fe, como una revelación secreta, ilumina el espíritu, y se cree."³²

A truly medieval note is added to Bécquer's religiosidad in the element of fear which figures in many stories.

²⁹Northup, op. cit., p. 346.

³⁰T. I, pp. 64-80.

³¹"Desde mi celda. Carta novena," II, pp. 304-07.

³²T. III, p. 67.

The castigo de Dios is a theme used by Fernán Caballero, regional novelist, in La familia de Alvareda and La gaviota. It is also used to advantage by Bécquer in "Creed en Dios," "El miserere," and "La promesa."

Paradoxically, this religious spirit in Bécquer appears in combination with elements that tend toward medieval paganism. In fact, by some of his "calumniators," he has been called an atheist.³³ This may be due to his romantic attitude toward nature, the deep love of which becomes almost a cult with him. The wildness of nature³⁴ appeals to him and fascinates him with its mystery and beauty. This pagan worship of nature is a dominant note in "El gnomo" and in "Los ojos verdes." It is revealed in the latter when Fernando says to the woman who symbolizes nature in the story, ". . . te amaría . . . te amaría, como te amo ahora, como es mi destino amarte, hasta más allá de esta vida, si hay algo más allá de ella."³⁵

Moreover, superstition colors the element of religion in Bécquer's stories, many of which, like the account of tía Casca³⁶ and "El monte de las ánimas," are based on superstitions. There are also various superstitious beliefs appear-

³³Olmsted, op. cit., p. xxxiii.

³⁴Cf. "Desde mi celda. Carta séptima," II, pp. 273-74; "El miserere," II, pp. 106-11.

³⁵T. I, p. 92.

³⁶"Desde mi celda. Carta sexta," II.

ing incidentally that indicate the influence of this element, which was so characteristic of medieval thought. For example, there is the belief that kneeling before the black cross entailed disaster³⁷ and that on stormy nights Roldán's army returns to the site of defeat near Roncesvalles.³⁸ A reference to man's being governed by the stars is found³⁹ and el tío Gregorio tells of the espíritus diabólicos that frequent the mountain at night.⁴⁰

Interest in fantasy, typified by these espíritus diabólicos and other such creatures, is another phase of Bécquer's paganism. It resolves itself into what Arturo Torres Riosco terms ninfomanía. Torres Riosco says that this ninfomanía, coming to us through romanticism,

. . . demuestra en alto grado la falta de orientación del ideal romántico y sus anhelos indefinidos. La falta de amor definido, las novias imposibles, los ojos verdes que aparecen en el fondo de los lagos . . . han pasado a ser lugar común en la literatura mundial del siglo XIX.⁴¹

As applied to Bécquer, this tendency is appropriately called a mania, for at times the unreal seems almost an obsession with him. In fact, in the introduction to "Los ojos verdes," he reveals the attraction of the fantastic for him, for, in

³⁷"La cruz del diablo," I, p. 176.

³⁸"Roncesvalles," III, p. 190.

³⁹"Creed en Dios," II, p. 18.

⁴⁰"El gnomo," II, p. 86.

⁴¹Arturo Torres Riosco, Precursores del modernismo (Madrid: Talleres Calpe, Rios Rosas, 24, 1925), p. 109.

regard to the subject of the story, he says:

Hace mucho tiempo que tenía ganas de escribir
cualquier cosa con este título . . .

.

Yo creo que he visto unos ojos como los que he
pintado en esta leyenda. No sé si en sueños, pero yo
los he visto . . . ⁴²

"La corza blanca," one of his most incredible stories, offers an excellent example of these imaginative creatures in the diaphanous "bellísimas mujeres"⁴³ into which the does were transformed. This quality is manifested further in the fantastic trend his thoughts often take whenever he gives them free rein. He refers to this tendency on the occasion of one of his trips to the convent of San Juan de los Reyes, when he says his thoughts "comenzaron a hervir y levantarse en vapor de fantasías" and there appeared to him "entre las sombras una figura ideal," the ethereal form of one of the statues of the ruined cloister.⁴⁴

Bécquer's mingling of the fantastic and the real is one phase of his love of the picturesque, another romantic trait dominant in his works. Violent contrasts abound, like the description of the gnomos against a beautiful natural

⁴²T. I, p. 83.

⁴³T. I, pp. 261-65.

⁴⁴"Cartas literarias a una mujer," III, p. 91. For other examples of this tendency see "Desde mi celda. Carta segunda," II, p. 195 and "El Caudillo de las manos rojas," I, p. 123.

setting, horrible creatures that are pictured thus:

. . . unos seres extraños, en parte hombres, en parte reptiles, o ambas cosas a la vez, pues transformándose continuamente, ora parecían criaturas humanas, deformes y pequeñuelas, ora salamandras luminosas o llamas fugaces que danzaban en círculos sobre la cúspide del surtidor . . . agitándose en todas direcciones, corriendo por el suelo en forma de enanos repugnantes . . . ⁴⁵

In addition to giving a picturesque trend to the products of his imagination, Bécquer shows an acute consciousness of the striking contrasts in the world around him. For example, he points out the contrast offered by the elaborately fantastic figures decorating the convent of San Juan de los Reyes and the "tristes ruinas y las calladas naves, y, por último, el cielo, un pedazo de cielo azul que se ve más a través de los calados de un rosetón."⁴⁶

The prominence of the horrible element in many stories indicates Bécquer's romantic interest in the grotesque element. La tía Casca is unforgettable as she appears on the highest peak of the mountain, "alta, seca y haraposa, y semejante a un esqueleto que se escapa de su fosa, envuelto aún en los jirones del sudario."⁴⁷ Moreover, the description of her fall down the mountain side is one of the most gruesome accounts in Bécquer's selections:

⁴⁵"El gnomo," II, p. 88.

⁴⁶"Cartas literarias a una mujer," III, p. 90. Innumerable examples of contrast may be found in "El caudillo de las manos rojas."

⁴⁷"Desde mi celda. Carta sexta," II, p. 250.

. . . la vi caer por lo alto de ese derrumbadero, dejando en cada uno de los peñascos y de las zarzas un jirón de vestido o de carne, hasta que llegó al fondo, donde se quedó aplastado como un sapo que se coge debajo del pie?⁴⁸

"El monte de las ánimas" is also predominantly grotesque. In this story there is reference to "las ánimas de los muertos" that "envueltas en jirones de sus sudarios, corren como en una cacería fantástica por entre las breñas y los zarzales."⁴⁹ This element is also outstanding in "El miserere," particularly in the expressions used instead of the customary musical terms to indicate the interpretation of the miserere about which the story is written: "Crujen . . . crujen los huesos, y de sus médulas han de parecer que salen los alaridos . . . Las notas son huesos cubiertos de carne . . ." ⁵⁰

Another romantic characteristic that is dominant in Bécquer is his use of the tragic. As a whole, his stories are characterized by a melancholy note, the majority of them terminating in disaster for the protagonists.⁵¹ "La rosa de pasión," which ends with Daniel's crucifixion of his own daughter, is typical. Bécquer's one drama, called "Un drama," is wholly romantic in this respect, reminding one, in its extravagance of tragic emotion, of the dramas of Zorrilla, the Duque de Rivas, and the other romantic dramatists. One

⁴⁸Ibid., pp. 248-49.

⁴⁹T. II, p. 63.

⁵⁰T. II, p. 106.

⁵¹"El Cristo de la calavera" is unique among Bécquer's stories in its happy ending.

wonders if this trend in Bécquer's literary expression were not influenced by his own personal misfortunes as much as by the imagination.

Though a certain literary trend may be dominant in any given period, it does not exclude all other trends, for various tendencies may run concurrently, some as undercurrents. Such is the case of romanticism in Spain in the period following its brief flowering. The romantic movement was no longer in vogue, but its characteristics did not disappear entirely, for certain writers chose to write in the romantic vein, although realism was dominant in the period. Thus it is that Bécquer, appearing as a transitional figure, kept alive certain romantic tendencies that were to blossom again in the modern poets.

CHAPTER IV

BÉCQUER AS A PRECURSOR OF MODERNISM

"Modernism, as a tendency in Spanish and Spanish-American literatures, derives from the French Parnassians and the poets of the decadent-symbolist group."¹ Smacking of Gongorism in its richness of language,² it combines the Parnassian love of color, visual appeal, and classic form with the individualism, musical qualities, metrical innovations, and symbolism of the other group.

The modernistic movement came into being "como reacción frente al realismo de un lado, y como estilización a la vez de las corrientes románticas, que no habían desaparecido."³ It originated during the latter part of the nineteenth century in the Spanish-American countries,⁴ whose writers have not been subject to the prejudice felt by the Spanish against the French influence. "First of the modernistas were the Mexican, Manuel Gutiérrez Nájera; the Cubans, José Martí and Julián del Casal; and the Colombian, José Asunción

¹Northup, op. cit., pp. 409-10.

²Ibid., p. 417; Cf. also Lula Giralda Adams and Ruth Lansing (eds.), Rimas y versos (New York: The Century Co., 1929), p. vii.

³Valbuena Prat, op. cit., p. 784.

⁴Arturo Torres Rioseco, Antología de la literatura hispanoamericana (New York: F. S. Crofts and Company, 1939), p. 165: "El modernismo es la primera escuela literaria que se funda en América."

Silva."⁵ Though modernism was brought to Spain by the Nicaraguan, Rubén Darío, Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer, who precedes him, may be said to be a precursor of the movement, as Bécquer stands "between Romanticism and the contemporary period, with some traits of each school."⁶ In reality he belongs to neither period. Nevertheless, he preserves the seeds of fantasy, imagination, and other romantic characteristics which also form a part of the modernistic creed, while he anticipates, at the same time, many aspects of the movement that are characteristically modern. Bécquer looks forward to modernism in his interest in precision of form and his concreteness of impression, which are Parnassian traits, and in his symbolism, typified by "Los ojos verdes" and "El rayo de luna," his individualism, and his aural appeal, which are traits suggestive of the Symbolists.

Foremost in Bécquer as a precursor of modernism is his appeal to the senses in both prose and poetry. His love of color is a dominant note, and his visual effects are made more vivid by his artistic perception of color values. The description of the golden bracelet worn by the Virgin of the Sagrario in "La ajorca de oro" is typical of his use of color:

Las luces del altar, reflejándose en las mil facetas de sus diamantes, se reproducían de una manera prodigiosa. Millones de chispas de luz rojas y azules, verdes

⁵Northup, op. cit., p. 411.

⁶Mérimée and Morley, op. cit., p. 509.

y amarillas, volteaban alrededor de las piedras como un torbellino de átomos de fuego . . . ⁷

Bécquer also vivifies his representations of nature with much use of color. He refers repeatedly to the whiteness of the snow, the blackness of night, the blueness of the sky, the silvery moon, the fiery rays of the sun, the rosiness of the dawn, and the crystal transparency of water.

Bécquer's fondness for brilliancy and richness of effects is likewise a characteristic of his impressionism. He seems to revel in the sensuous luxuriousness of scenes of splendor, like the spacious salons of the king's palace in "El Cristo de la calavera" that are described thus:

. . . vestidos de tapices, donde la seda y el oro habían representado, con mil colores diversas, . . . sobre los cuales vestían un mar de chispeante luz un sin número de lámparas y candelabros de bronce, plata y oro, por todas partes . . . se veía oscilar y agitarse en distintas direcciones una nube de damas hermosas con ricas vestiduras chapadas en oro, redes de perlas apresionando sus rizos, joyas de rubíes . . . ⁸

The use of precious stones, noted in the above quotation, is a common device employed by Bécquer in his appeal to the imagination,⁹ as is his play upon effects of light and shadow, exemplified by the third stanza of "Rima LXXIV":

⁷T. I, p. 97.

⁸T. I, p. 227.

⁹Other good examples are found in "El aderezo de esmeraldas," T. III and in the description of the subterranean palace of the gnomes, "El gnomo," T. II, p. 37.

La vi como la imagen
 que en leve sueño pasa,
 como rayo de luz tenue y difuso,
 que entre tinieblas nada.¹⁰

Though visual effects in his works are perhaps more common than other sense impressions, Bécquer, nevertheless, has the power of making a strong appeal to the other senses. He refers many times to the scent of delicate perfumes; and the odor of incense is made very realistic in some of the descriptions of churches and cathedrals. The appeal to both smell and sound is outstanding in the cathedral scene in "Maese Pérez el organista," for the reader can sense the "nube de incienso que se desenvolvía en ondas azuladas" and can hear the "campanillas" that "repicaron con un sonido vibrante," followed by the "cien voces" of the órgano as they resound "en un acorde majestuoso y prolongado . . . hasta convertirse en un torrente de atronadora armonía."¹¹ Bécquer refers to the power of odor to call to mind past sensations and experiences in this passage relative to the arrival of the daily newspaper:

Hasta el olor particular del papel húmedo y la tinta de la imprenta, olor especialísimo que por un momento viene a sustituir el perfume de las flores que aquí se respira por todas partes, parece que hiere la memoria del olfato, memoria extraña y viva que . . . me trae un pedazo de mi antigua vida; de aquella inquietud, de aquella fiebre fecunda del periodismo.¹²

¹⁰T. III, p. 175. "El rayo de luna" illustrates the same treatment in prose.

¹¹T. I, pp. 69-70.

¹²"Desde mi celda. Carta segunda," II, p. 196.

Another element of Bécquer's appeal to the senses that is a dominant trait of the modernists is the musical quality of his expression. The ease and flow of his language give a musical lilt to his prose; and recurrence of phrase effects an emphasis that resolves itself into a rhythmic movement and cadence, varying in pattern because not fixed by metrical standards as in poetry. Consider the rhythmic effect of the recurring phrases in the following typical passage: "Había visto flotar un instante y desaparecer el extremo del traje blanco, del traje blanco de la mujer de sus sueños, de la mujer que ya amaba como un loco."¹³ Another manner of achieving this rhythmical quality, which is better sensed than defined,¹⁴ is by the use of long sentences that tend to fall into parts nearly equal in length. Also, the use of many elements of parallel structure, of which the following sentences are illustrative, approach metrical structure:

Era alta, delgada, levemente morena, con unos ojos adormidos, grandes, y negros.¹⁵

Entonces no siento ya con los nervios que se agitan, con el pecho que se oprime, con la parte orgánica y material . . .¹⁶

This musical trait is also one of the distinguishing characteristics of Bécquer's poetry. Here, too, repetition

¹³"El rayo de luna," I, p. 169.

¹⁴The musical prose of "El caudillo de las manos rojas" is illustrative of this quality.

¹⁵"La venta de los gatos," III, p. 36.

¹⁶"Cartas literarias a una mujer," III, p. 79.

of phrase is a contributing factor; also significant are his metrical patterns, the use of assonance and other tone-combinations, and interior rhythm. The melodiousness of the following stanzas from "Rima XV" is illustrative:

Cendal flotante de leve bruma,
rizada cinta de blanca espuma,
rumor sonoro
de arpa de oro,
beso del aura, onda de luz,
eso eres tú.

Tú, sombra aérea, que cuantas veces
voy a tocarte, te desvaneces
como la llama, como el sonido,
como la niebla, como el gemido
del largo azul.

.

Largo lamento
del ronco viento,
ansia perpetua de algo mejor
eso soy yo.¹⁷

Bécquer is also a forerunner of the modernists in his individuality. According to Onís, he is "el único autor español del siglo XIX que se salva en su apreciación precisamente por ser excepcional y distinto."¹⁸ One expression of this individuality is in his innovation of poetic forms. According to Bécquer, poetry falls into two classes, the poetry of everybody and that of poets. The latter he defines as

. . . natural, breve, seca, que brota del alma como una chispa eléctrica, que hiere el sentimiento con una palabra y huye, y desnuda de artificio, desembarazada dentro

¹⁷T. III, pp. 132-33.

¹⁸Federico de Onís (ed.), Antología de la poesía española e hispano-americana (Madrid: Publicaciones de la Revista de Filología Española, 1934), p. xiv.

de una forma libre, despierta, con una que las toca, las mil ideas que duermen en el océano sin fondo de la fantasía.¹⁹

This type corresponds to Bécquer's own poetry, for his poems are terse expressions of vivid emotions. Romera-Navarro makes the following statement concerning Bécquer as a poet:

En un rasgo apasionado, en una nota melancólica, da la sensación de un mundo de afectos: «para una esperanza, le basta una sonrisa, para un dolor, una lágrima; para un recuerdo, un suspiro».²⁰

Bécquer does not confine his poetry to any set rules but lets the thought or impression govern the form. Consequently, his originality of treatment results in many innovations of form and meter. This liberty of form, which was but a natural manner of expression in Bécquer, presages the demand of the modernists for complete metrical freedom, a freedom abused by many lacking the poetic genius of this precursor.

Because of this individual manner of expression, Bécquer's poetry is marked by conciseness, natural simplicity, and precision. Olmsted says that "he strikes but one chord at a time on his lyre, but he leaves you thrilled,"²¹ and to illustrate he calls attention to the "extreme simplicity and naturalness of expression" of the refrain of "Rima LXXIII":

¡Dios mío, qué solos
se quedan los muertos!

¹⁹"La soledad," III, p. 98.

²⁰Romera-Navarro, op. cit., p. 541.

²¹Olmsted, op. cit., p. xxxvi-xxxvii.

Valbuena Prat says that Bécquer's poetry is "a la vez intensa y sencilla."²² Romera-Navarro also refers to the conciseness of his style; he says that the poet "declara una idea, un sentimiento, con rapidez; es corta centella, que vibra e impresiona, sin embargo, largamente."²³ The copiousness that characterizes much of Bécquer's prose is not found in his poetry.

"One of the principal characteristics of the poets of the Modernistic school is the subjective tendency,"²⁴ another trait in Bécquer that suggests modernism. Although there is a personal note in the "Cartas literarias" and some of the artículos, this characteristic is found mainly in his "Rimas," which form, it has been said, "un poema en el cual está contenida la vida espiritual de Bécquer,"²⁵ a kind of autobiographical "drama of love."²⁶ As Bécquer is such a conscious stylist, this element in his poetry may possibly be a literary pose; however, it is convincing enough to merit the consideration of many critics. Romera-Navarro has called him "el más subjetivo de nuestros poetas."²⁷ Moreover, Mérimée

²²Valbuena Prat, op. cit., T. II, p. 714.

²³Romera-Navarro, op. cit., p. 541.

²⁴Arturo Torres Rioseco, Precursores del modernismo, p. 35.

²⁵Romera-Navarro, op. cit., p. 538.

²⁶Mérimée and Morley, op. cit., p. 510.

²⁷Romera-Navarro, op. cit., p. 540.

and Morley state that subjectivity is not only the "most obvious quality of the Rimas," but is also a new note, "the intimate accent of personal sorrow . . . not at all in the Spanish manner . . . "28

This element of personal sadness is exemplified in "Rima LXIV," which follows:

Como guarda el avaro su tesoro,
guardaba mi dolor;
yo quería probar que hay algo eterno
a la que eterno me juró su amor.

Mas hoy le llamo en vano y oigo
al tiempo
que le agotó, decir:
- ¡Ah, barro miserable, eternamente
no podrás ni aun sufrir!²⁹

The same note of loneliness is sounded in the last two lines of "Rima LXV":

Yo era huérfano y pobre . . . El mundo estaba
desierto . . . para mí!³⁰

In many rimas, there is a tinge of bitterness and pessimism, as noted in the following excerpts from "Rima LVI":

Hoy como ayer, mañana como hoy,
y ¡siempre igual!
un cielo gris, un horizonte eterno,
y ¡andar . . . , andar!

Moviéndose a compás, como una estúpida
máquina, el corazón;
la torpe inteligencia, del cerebro
dormida en un rincón.

²⁸Mérimée and Morley, op. cit., p. 510.

²⁹T. III, p. 163.

³⁰Ibid.

El alma, que ambiciona un paraíso,
 buscándolo sin fe;
 fatiga sin objeto, ola que rueda
 ignorando por qué.

.

¡Ay!, a veces me acuerdo suspirando
 del antiguo sufrir . . .
 amargo es el dolor; pero si quiera
 ¡padecer es vivir!³¹

Even though Bécquer is spoken of as a precursor of modernism, he founded no school of poetry. In fact, during the period of transition between the romantic and modernistic periods, no definite school of poets existed in Spain.³² Nevertheless, there were many poets in both Spain and Spanish America who imitated him, writing "rimas al modo de Bécquer."³³ Of these imitators only a few major poets have imbued their verse with the deep sentiment and feeling characteristic of Bécquer's "Rimas," for the imitators with less poetic talent "have only succeeded in caricaturing his defects."³⁴ Of these minor imitators Romera-Navarro says:

. . . en la composición y sencillez, en las formas estróficas, lo habían logrado, pero no en el espíritu tan íntimo y vibrante, tan humano e intenso de los poemas de Bécquer.³⁵

There are, however, many similarities to be noted in the poetry of Bécquer and several of the major modernistas.

³¹T. III, pp. 157-58.

³²Northup, op. cit., p. 403.

³³Arturo Torres Rioseco, Precursores del modernismo, p. 59.

³⁴Lawrence C. Woodman "Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer: Spanish Romanticist," Poet Lore, July, 1915, p. 512.

³⁵Romera-Navarro, op. cit., p. 541.

As these points of resemblance reflect the same trends, many authorities recognize the definite influence of Bécquer on the modernists.

In the first place, there are tendencies in the work of the precursors of modernism that suggest the influence of the Sevillian poet. According to Federico de Onís, the poetry of Gutiérrez Nájera, who "mejor representa a través de su originalidad, la transición del romanticismo al modernismo," is characterized by a subjective and sentimental romanticismo "depurado y selecto, que sigue las huellas de Bécquer o Musset."³⁶ Similarity of many features of the work of Gutiérrez Nájera and Bécquer may be noted. Like Bécquer's prose, that of the Mexican author is said to be "ágil, . . . llena de color y movimiento";³⁷ and he is also like Bécquer in that he "ensayó nuevas formas de expresión."³⁸

José Martí, too, according to Torres Rioseco, resembles the Spanish poet, because "supo expresar las más íntimas emociones en la forma de su verso."³⁹

Evidence of possible influence of Bécquer on José Asunción Silva is even more pronounced. Onís says that in

³⁶Federico de Onís, op. cit., p. 6.

³⁷Arturo Torres Rioseco, Antología de la literatura hispanoamericana, p. 169.

³⁸Ibid.

³⁹Ibid., p. 167.

Silva's works there is "un fondo de influencia clásica y de Bécquer y Campoamor . . . su parentesco mayor se encuentra en los post-románticos Heine, Poe, Baudelaire, Bécquer, Campoamor."⁴⁰ Moreover, Torres Rioseco definitely credits Bécquer with contributing to the formation of Silva's poetry. He says that in both may be found "una vaguedad apacible y melancólica, el hechizo dulce de la Luna en los paisajes otoñales, el matiz, la frase."⁴¹ For illustration, this critic points out how similar to Bécquer's "Rayo de Luna" is Silva's "Nocturno," showing that when a certain part of Bécquer's prose selection is put in stanza form in Silva's manner, it closely approaches the poem in expression as well as thought. It is apparent to even the casual reader that the same repetition of phrase characterizes the selections of both authors. Torres Rioseco also adds:

Además, en toda la obra del colombiano existe la misma levedad de alas, la misma melancolía indefinible, los mismos recursos técnicos del asonante, del diminutivo y de la diéresis, la misma atracción mórbida de la muerte, la misma pregunta terrible acerca del futuro, que hicieron tan profunda la poesía del cantor sevillano.⁴²

Authorities indicate that, in addition to the precursors, Bécquer influenced certain major writers of the modernist group, among whom are Rubén Darío, Unamuno, Pardo Bazán and

⁴⁰Federico de Onís, op. cit., p. 79.

⁴¹Arturo Torres Rioseco, Precursores del modernismo, p. 104.

⁴²Ibid., p. 105.

Juan Ramón Jiménez. Onís states that Bécquer is one among the Spanish poets of the period imitated by Rubén Darío.⁴³ The latter's Rimas, published in 1888, suggest the influence of Bécquer's poetry. Valbuena Prat calls attention to the similarity of Unamuno's Teresa and one of Bécquer's "Rimas." He says that Unamuno's book is "una deliberada becqueriana"⁴⁴ and that the modernist "ha dado un perfil menos musical pero más varonil a esa poesía al inspirarse en ella para «Teresa»."⁴⁵ Then, Hurtado y Palencia find a trace of Becquerian influence in some of Pardo Bazán's lyric poetry, which is "de gusto delicado, a imitación de Bécquer."⁴⁶

Bécquer's importance as a precursor of modernism in Spain, however, is perhaps best illustrated by his relation to Juan Ramón Jiménez. Bécquer is one among those who have been cited "en relación con Juan Ramón Jiménez, por haber influido en fases o aspectos de su poesía o por tener con él parentesco espiritual."⁴⁷ Mérimée and Morley refer to him figuratively as "a son of Bécquer."⁴⁸ Juan Ramón Jiménez too,

⁴³Federico de Onís, op. cit., p. 144.

⁴⁴Valbuena Prat, op. cit., p. 845.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 715.

⁴⁶Juan Hurtado y J. de la Serna y Ángel González Palencia, Historia de la literatura española (Madrid: Tip. de Archivos, 1932), p. 961.

⁴⁷Federico de Onís, op. cit., p. 575.

⁴⁸Mérimée and Morley, op. cit., p. 624.

wrote rimas, which, according to Romera-Navarro, are characterized by "la sencillez, el matiz delicado y la tristeza íntima de las Rimas becquerianas."⁴⁹ Romera-Navarro also says that Juan Ramón Jiménez's Arias tristes strike a note "no menos becqueriano."⁵⁰ Valbuena Prat points out many similarities to Bécquer in the work of this modernist, particularly in his first poems which are distinguished by a musical tone, a melancholy sentiment, color, y "la estilización de elementos visuales de sentido impresionista y de las esencias del modernismo precedente . . . "⁵¹

Bécquer's position in relation to the modernistic school is important, for he looks forward to modernism in many of its phases. One of his greatest contributions is his appeal to the imagination, which embodies the use of color and brilliant effects and the vividness of sense impressions. The musical quality of both his prose and poetry is a significant note, and his individuality, Parnassian interest in perfection of form, and subjectivity anticipate some of the most popular modernistic trends. The significance of these tendencies in Bécquer is shown by the fact that he has had many imitators, some of whom are outstanding among the exponents of the modern mode. Hence, Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer may rightly be called a precursor of modernism.

⁴⁹Romera-Navarro, op. cit., p. 624.

⁵⁰Ibid.

⁵¹Valbuena Prat, op. cit., p. 887.

CHAPTER V

BÉCQUER'S POPULAR APPEAL

Though Bécquer has not been accorded the literary distinction that he probably deserves, his works, nevertheless, are of great popular appeal, particularly among Spanish-speaking people. His works are well known not only in Spain, but also in Spanish America, where it is conjectured he has enjoyed perhaps greater popularity than in his own country. An indication of this is the fact that, although he did not establish a school of poets, he did influence the precursors of modernism in the Spanish American countries. It is significant, too, that it was due "especially to the inspiration of a young Argentine poet, Ramón García Pereira," that a few of Bécquer's admirers had a "modest but tasteful tablet" placed on the façade of the house in which Bécquer was born.¹

Generally speaking, Bécquer is best remembered for his "Rimas," some of which "andan todavía en boca de las gentes."² According to Mérimée and Morley, "many of these moving verses have remained fixed in the hearts and on the lips of Spanish youth,"³ for there are probably few who have not

¹Olmsted, op. cit., p. xv. Olmsted also says that this South American poet paid a fitting tribute to Bécquer in a poem, "Canto a Bécquer," which was published in La Ilustración Artística in Barcelona, 1886.

²Romera-Navarro, Historia de España (New York: D. C. Heath and Co., 1932), p. 189.

³Mérimée and Morley, op. cit., p. 510.

at some time recited some of Bécquer's best known poems, such as the one which begins with these famous lines:

Volverán las oscuras golondrinas
en tu balcón sus nidos a colgar,
y otra vez con el ala a sus cristales
jugando llamarán;

Pero aquellas que el vuelo refrenaban
tu hermosura y mi dicha al contemplar,
aquellas que aprendieron nuestros nombres.
esas . . . ¡no volverán!⁴

The universal appeal of Bécquer's "Rimas" possibly lies in their lyrical subjectivity. In this respect Olmsted says that Bécquer is without an equal, for subjectivity of this quality "cannot be found in any other of the Spanish poets except mystic writers as San Juan de la Cruz or Fray Luis de León."⁵ Bécquer strikes a responsive chord in the emotions of the reader. His poetry is "a song to the masses"⁶ because he has expressed simply and naturally what the average reader feels but cannot express. He is reminiscent of "Byron in unrestrained passion, Keats in the genuineness of his poetic gift, Horace in lighter moods, and Heine in his music."⁷

It is not to be deduced from the stress placed upon the popularity of Bécquer's poetry that he is remembered for his verse alone, because his legends and "Cartas literarias" are also widely read. According to Hurtado y Palencia, "lo

⁴"Rima LIII," III, pp. 155-56.

⁵Olmsted, op. cit., p. xxxvi.

⁶Woodman, op. cit., p. 522.

⁷Ibid., p. 520.

que vale más son las Leyendas."⁸ These are very popular among Spanish-speaking people, and the fact that English and French translations⁹ have been made suggests that Bécquer is perhaps read to some extent by people who do not know Spanish.

The legends are of popular interest for various reasons. The traditionalism probably appeals greatly to the Spaniard, for Bécquer has succeeded in catching the true Spanish spirit. The narrative phase is doubtless of more general interest, for Bécquer is a good storyteller. "He may be compared with Poe and De Maupassant for clear and vigorous narrative power."¹⁰ The predominance of the nature element should attract the lover of nature, for Bécquer's love of nature resembles that of Thoreau, while the symbolism in the legends may be compared to that of Maeterlinck.¹¹ To some readers, however, the outstanding point of interest is the quaint charm of Bécquer's prose style, for "su prosa, más que por el vigor, cautiva por esa magia alada y poética del estilo."¹²

Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer's sources of appeal are so many and so varied that he should continue to grow in favor as a

⁸Hurtado y Palencia, op. cit., p. 946. It must be remembered that some of the "Cartas literarias" contain legends.

⁹Olmsted, op. cit., p. xi.

¹⁰Woodman, op. cit., p. 520.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Romera-Navarro, op. cit., p. 538.

literary figure, for he is outstanding as a man of culture, a conscious artist, a neo-romanticist, and a precursor of modernism.

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