THE PLAYS OF MIGUEL MIHURA

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THE PLAYS OF
MIGUEL MIHURA

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Miguel Mihura is a successful playwright of the contemporary Spanish theater. He has written twenty-two plays, three of them in collaboration. His plays have been translated into English, French, Flemish, German, Portuguese, Czech, and Dutch, and have been presented in the United States, Mexico, and most of the countries of Western Europe. Some have been made into motion pictures or given on television.

Mihura has also written articles and stories, a novel, and a number of film plays and dialog adaptations.

One of his plays is a serious drama; the rest are comedies of various types. Two or three are avant-garde, some are suspense comedy-dramas, some have social themes, and at least one is a murder mystery-comedy.

Mihura's wit, his sense of the ridiculous, his knowledge of human nature, and his amazing craftsmanship in creating compassion and suspense seem to indicate that his works will find a permanent place in world literature.

This thesis will give a brief biography of Mihura, summarize and discuss his more important plays, comment on the less important ones, and point out recurrent patterns and themes, with the hope that the general public as well as
the student of Spanish, may be better informed of the values to be found in the works of this writer. Unfortunately, his works are not available in book form in an English translation. However, almost all of his plays are available in the United States in Spanish, and since they all contain realistic, up-to-date, everyday speech, anyone who has had a year or two of Spanish study should have little difficulty in understanding the main points of the action, with occasional reference to a Spanish-English dictionary. Two of the plays, Carlota and Mi adorado Juan, are available in paperback student editions with difficult expressions translated into English in footnotes and a Spanish-English vocabulary in the back.
CHAPTER II

BIOGRAPHY OF MIGUEL MIHURA

Miguel Mihura Santos, the playwright, was born in Madrid in 1905. His father, Miguel Mihura Alvarez, had studied for the priesthood but had switched to the theater and at the age of twenty-eight, when the younger Miguel was born, he was already one of the most successful comedy actors in Spain. Ponce Muñoz states that the character of the father was passed on to the son.

Miguel Mihura, el padre de Miguel Mihura, era un hombre alegre y optimista, amigo de la vida y también, por su condición de cómico, con una gran compasión y comprensión hacia la vida. Estas características las ha heredado su hijo y afloran con mucha frecuencia en sus obras, en sus obras teatrales sobre todo. 1

Starting at the age of five, Mihura was taken back-stage by his father and was impressed by what he saw.

Ya a los cinco años mi padre me llevaba algunas tardes a su camerino del teatro y el olor a cosméticos, a polvos y pinturas, y el espejo rodeado de lámparas potentes, y las pelucas colgadas de la pared, y los trajes de grandes cuadros y las sortijas enormes de latón, eran para mí algo asombroso, que me fascinaba y me hacía feliz. 2

Mihura says very little of his mother, other than that his parents were happy, his mother was a non-professional,

and that she did not attempt in any way to interfere with his father's love of the theater. Ponce Muñoz believes that she was small and gay and that Mihura adored her. As proof of this statement he cites the profusion of kind old women that are found in Mihura's works.

As a child, instead of playing with toy soldiers or at bullfighting like other Spanish children, Mihura would dress up in old wigs and costumes of his father's and display himself on the balcony to the neighbors. If they did not notice him he would whistle for attention.

With his older brother Jerónimo, Miguel attended the Colegio de San Isidoro in Madrid. But the discipline and organization of the school did not agree with him and after graduating he turned to less academic fields. He studied music and learned to play the piano, but that was not what he wanted either. He began to study languages and sketching, and his father, who by this time had left acting and become manager of several theaters, placed him in the box office of El Teatro del Rey Alfonso, so that his first salary was earned in the theater.

Whenever he could leave his accounting tasks, Mihura would go into the theater and watch the reading of new plays, rehearsals, and performances. He met writers such as Carlos Arniches and Muñoz Seca. More important, he learned everything about the theater. In his own words,
Aprendí a calcular, con un rápido vistazo al patio de butacas, las pesetas que se habían hecho. Y aprendí la tremenda importancia que tiene en esta profesión un éxito o un fracaso.

Sentado en el patio de butacas de muchos teatros aprendí a montar una obra, a mover unos personajes, a saber cómo hay que tratar al actor—tan sensible, tan quisquilloso—para sacar de él lo que se quiere sin que sufra su orgullo demasiado. Aprendí a saber, en un estreno, lo que es un éxito y lo que—aunque lo parezca—no lo es.

Strangely enough, in the light of his later career, he then says,

Aprendí apasionadamente, por verdadera vocación, todo lo que se puede aprender en el teatro. Lo único que no aprendí, porque no me interesaba aprenderlo, fue a escribir comedias. Y sin embargo, ya había empezando a escribir artículos y cuentos en revistas de humor.4

The unexpected death of the older Mihura in a hotel room in San Sebastián was a shock to the brothers and they left the theater even though their father's employer wished them to continue. Later, Mihura regretted this, for he felt that the business end of the theater was his true vocation. He then wrote for newspapers and magazines and began to acquire some reputation as a humorist.

A friend named Alady asked Mihura to join a traveling musical comedy company as director and he accepted. There were six beautiful Viennese dancing girls, a French dancing master, a Negro dancer, a Negro musician, and a retired German lady snake charmer who accompanied the girls. This strange group will be seen again in one of Mihura's plays.

3Ibid., p. 27.

4Ibid.
Mihura and Alady worked out the lines and staging on the train enroute to Lérida, their first stop. After arriving, they rehearsed. The spectacle was quite successful. However, the show was to be changed every three weeks, and instead of preparing a new one, Mihura busied himself with a dancing girl, and Alady was occupied elsewhere. When Mihura was told by the manager the new show should go into rehearsal the following morning, he took the train back to Madrid and resumed periodical writing. In Madrid he also worked for movie studios, doing filmscripts and preparing Spanish dialogs for foreign motion pictures.

During this period he was very frequently advised to write a play. He took the theater seriously, did not appreciate this advice, and said, "... me ha parecido tan poco respetable esa gente que, sin saber lo que se dice, a cualquiera cretino que hace dos chistes en el café le aconsejan que escriba para el teatro."^5

Nevertheless, around 1929, Mihura became ill and had to have a serious operation which necessitated his staying in bed for three years. Faced with the choice of playing solitaire, learning Hungarian by correspondence, or writing a play, he chose the latter and wrote Tres sombreros de copa. Once out of the hospital, he again forgot the theater and resumed his newspaper and film work. From 1936 to 1939 he served as

^5Ibid., p. 20.
director of the comic magazine *La Ametralladora*. In his journalistic work, Mihura frequently collaborated with Tono (Antonio de Lara). In 1939 he again became interested in the theater and wrote *Ni pobre ni rico, sino todo lo contrario* jointly with Tono. At the same time he was writing *Viva lo imposible o el contable de estrellas* in collaboration with Joaquín Calvo Sotelo, a well known Spanish playwright.

In 1941 he founded another comic magazine, *La Codorniz*, and occupied himself largely with this until he sold his interest in it in the middle forties. Since another idea for a play had come to him, he joined Alvaro de Laiglesia in writing *El caso de la mujer asesinatita*. This play was quite successful and Mihura largely dropped his journalistic work and devoted himself to the stage and screen.

To date he has written twenty-two plays (including the three collaboration plays), hundreds of articles and stories, perhaps fifty film scripts and dialogs, and a book, *Mis Memorias*, which is not a book of memoirs, but a novel very loosely based on his life.

Today, Mihura at the age of sixty-four lives in Madrid, still a bachelor and active in the theater. Some critics believe that his recent plays are too repetitive of his earlier works.
CHAPTER III

MIHURA'S ABSURD PLAYS

Any attempt to classify the plays of Miguel Mihura immediately runs into the difficulty that all of his plays contain such a mixture of elements that any classification will be extremely subjective and will require that the reader accept the fact that some plays will contain strong elements of other classifications.

During the last half of the nineteenth century and the early part of the twentieth, realism and the well-made play predominated in the Western theater. Realism meant that scenery, costume and action would be true and objective representations of the real world. The well-made play was one which had a plot. The protagonist would struggle against some adversary which might be man, nature, or even himself. After a series of ups and downs, he would, through his own efforts, eventually triumph. The actions of everyone involved would be soundly motivated and the crises and the resolution would be logical.

About 1950 a movement of the Theater of the Absurd began and has been carried on by such dramatists as Beckett and Ionesco. Like present day radicals who wish to destroy existing society even though they have no replacement to offer, the Absurdists offer chaos in place of reality. They
claim that man lives in a universe devoid of purpose, that existence itself is absurd, that there is no truth other than one's point of view, and that it is impossible to be certain about anything. Essentially this is a pessimistic outlook. Perhaps this type of play can be best defined by telling what it is not. For example, Esslin, in speaking of Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, speaks of, "... so many established critics who condemned the play for its lack of plot, development, characterization, or plain common sense."¹

With few exceptions Absurd plays have not been popular with the general public, and since the well-made play has been with us since the days of the Greek drama, it seems likely that it is the type that will survive.

Mihura's plays are all realistic in setting and only a few of them can be said to be slightly Absurd in that the characters do not act in a manner in which we would expect rationally motivated people to act. These plays will be discussed in this chapter.

When Mihura, confined to bed in 1929, decided to write a play, he thought about his trip through the provinces with Alady, and basing his characters on his traveling companions, he wrote *Tres sombreros de copa* (Three High Hats).

In the play, Dionisio, a young man, comes to spend the night in a second-class provincial hotel. He is to be married the next morning and this is the city in which his fiancée lives. He is shown to his room by the elderly proprietor, Rosario. They are acquainted because Dionisio has stayed at this hotel before. Among his luggage he has three high hats from which he must chose one to wear for the wedding, though none of them fits him properly. He phones his sweetheart and then assures Rosario that he is very much in love and that his girl is a saint and an angel. Rosario leaves. The connecting door to the next room opens and Paula, a pretty blonde, enters. She tells Dionisio that she is fleeing from her Negro boy friend, Buby. They are members of a theatrical troupe. When she asks whether Dionisio is a performer also, he says that he is a juggler. Later, they are joined by Buby, other girls from the troupe, the bearded lady, the ancient soldier, the hateful man, the astute hunter with four dead rabbits hanging from his belt, and other strange characters. A party goes on until six in the morning. Paula has now become fond of Dionisio, and when Buby sees them kissing, he knocks Paula unconscious with a blow and flees. Dionisio hides Paula under the bed as Sacramento, his future father-in-law, drops in for a visit.

The monotony and hopelessness of the forthcoming marriage are symbolized here by Sacramento's statements that Dionisio must live with his in-laws, that he will not be able
to go out nights, or have the kind of meals that he wants, and his sole amusement will be twice weekly visits to chat with some centenarian friends of his in-laws. When Don Sacramento leaves, Paula comes out from under the bed, now knowing that Dionisio is not a performer and that he is to be married. She is sad, because she has had many male friends, but they are always married or about to be.

Dionisio decides that he does not want to go through with his marriage. Paula has told him that she and Buby are working a racket in which she bursts into a stranger's room, and, pretending to seek sympathy, gets money from him. When she refuses to supply any services and the victim demands his money back, Buby then appears to threaten him. She had planned to work this on Dionisio, but had fallen for him. Dionisio says that he loves her and they talk of going away together. Nevertheless, at seven o'clock, when Rosario appears, she helps him get the mildly protesting Dionisio ready for his wedding and they send him on his way as the curtain falls.

Mihura completed this play in November of 1932 and showed it to some theatrical producers. One said that it appeared to be the work of a madman, another said that he liked it personally but that if it were produced it would either be a success or the audience would set fire to the seats. He recommended that it be published as a book so that the readers would set fire to their own seats rather
than those of the theater. Still another said that the public was not ready for it, but that perhaps it could be given in better times, provided that it were first introduced to the critics, publicized in the press, and if Mihura would write a prologue advising the audience of what was coming.²

Thus Mihura was unable to have the play produced at that time, so he put the script away and went back to journalism. Actually, he was surprised to find that he had written an avant-garde play, since he considered himself a conservative in the theater. He said,

Y, de pronto, sin proponérmelo, sin la menor dificultad, había escrito una obra rarísima, casi de vanguardia, que no sólo desconcertaba a la gente sino que sembraba el terror en los que la leían. Yo era, por tanto, como ese huevo de pato que incuba la gallina y que, después, junto a los pollitos, se encuentra extraño y forastero y con una manera de hablar distinta.³

Only after Mihura had had three other plays produced, the last of which was a great success, was he able to get *Tres sombreros de copa* on the stage. It opened on November 24, 1952 in Madrid, where all but one of Mihura's plays have opened. It is interesting to note that this was almost exactly twenty years after the play was written. It was also shown in Paris and Brussels and an English version was given

at the University of Washington in Seattle in 1957, as well as a Spanish revival in 1959. In no case was it particularly a box office success, although it won the Spanish National Theater prize for 1952-53.

Critics, in general, received Tres sombreros de copa very favorably. For example, Prego says,

Todo el mundo sabe que Tres sombreros de copa fue la primera comedia de Miguel Mihura. Si hubo otras anteriores, no importa. A efectos biográficos y teatrales, la primera comedia de Miguel Mihura seguirá siendo Tres sombreros de copa, porque ella es la que reveló la presencia de un autor nuevo. No se podrá nunca intentar un estudio del teatro de Miguel Mihura al margen de Tres sombreros de copa...

Prego might have been more correct if he had said that this play reveals a new author stumbling through his apprenticeship, but this point will be covered later.

Luis Calvo, Eduardo Tegglen, and Gómez Figueras, all Madrid critics, praised the play highly. When it was given in France, a few of the minor critics liked it, but of the major ones, Jean-Jacques Gautier found it foolish and senseless, Robert Kemp found nothing in it to please, interest or amuse him, and François Mauriac was able to praise it only

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6 Ibid.

by saying that he did not find the castanets, dances, bullfights, or bloodshed that the French expect to find in Spanish plays.\(^8\)

The plot of *Tres sombreros de copa* is almost non-existent. What there is of it is based on the conflict between Dionisio's feelings for Paula and his duty to his fiancée. Chantraine sums it up this way,

Dionisio se enamora de una pequeña bailarina, Paula, ninfa de muslo ligero y corazón sensible. Después de una noche muy animada, en que las escenas de ternura entre los enamorados alternan con otras muy extravagantes entre los histriones y sus admiradores, Dionisio no tiene el valor de seguir a la pequeña comedianta que lo quiere. Renuncia a su anticonformismo para casarse con su prometida, una solterona, que el autor nos presenta como la quintaesencia del aburrimiento, de la fealdad y de la idiotez.\(^9\)

Compare this with Torrente Ballester's description of the same situation,

El argumento de *Tres sombreros de copa* es muy sencillo: Dionisio llega a una ciudad de provincias para casarse con su novia; en el hotel donde se hospeda entra en relaciones con una tropa de cómicos, bailarinas, malabaristas, y señores de la provincia, se divierte con ellos y se enamora de una de las chicas; pero estúpidamente, después de una deliciosa, ternísima y divertida escena de amor, renuncia a ella y sale para casarse con su novia que no aparece en escena, y que el autor ha concebido como el resumen de toda la espantosa cursilería provinciana.\(^10\)

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Both speak of tender love scenes, yet these so-called love scenes consist mainly of each one's complaints of his lot, interspersed with much senseless conversation. Dionisio, ironically named after Dionysus, the Greek god of fertility, is about as impotent and wishy-washy as a young man can be. Chantraine says that he lacks courage to act; Torrente Ballester says that he is stupid. Probably both are right. Since he is the only person the audience can identify with in the least, his failure to act is discouraging. In spite of all his declarations of love for Paula, one wonders whether he really loves her or does he just not love the life that faces him?

A further discouraging aspect of the play is pointed out by Ricardo Doménech,

La fuerza dramática de Tres sombreros de copa está en la colisión de dos mundos irreconciliables, pero necesitados entre sí, que parten de dos concepciones vitales opuestas. El mundo burgués, cursi, adinerado y limitado por una moral que a veces es tan estricta en sus formas como desgarrada en su fondo, de una provincia española y el mundo inverosímil, errante, libre y sin esperanzas que forman el negro Ruby Barton y las graciosas y estúpidas muchachas que integran su "ballet" en el "music-hall."

Notice that here it is the theater people who are stupid. But the essence is the conflict between the two irreconcilable worlds. There is nothing wrong with this concept in itself; it is the basis for much good drama. But what is

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11Review reprinted in Monleón, op. cit., p. 98.
wrong here is that neither world is acceptable. Paula makes it clear in her complaints about third-class hotel rooms, lack of sincere suitors, poor pay, nothing to look forward to in old age, etc., that the theater world is not a nice one. And Mihura makes it equally clear through his use of the hateful man and Don Sacramento, as well as his picture of Dionisio's future married life, that the bourgeois world is equally unacceptable. Then, where is one to go? But Mihura is telling us that there is no place to go and this is what makes this play so depressing and pessimistic.

Nor is the depression relieved by humor. Torrente Ballester points out that the play has no jokes or puns.12 Mihura attempts to achieve humor by the use of senseless characters and dialog, but he confuses absurdity with humor. Arjona says, "All but Paula are mad characters."13 Whether this statement includes Dionisio is for the reader to decide. Wofsy explains the problem of the humor,

La comodidad del diálogo resulta, a veces, tan sólo porque algún personaje dice cosas que a los demás se nos quedan en el pensamiento; otras veces, la contradicción de lo normal resulta de una ingenuidad como ocurre cuando el dueño del hotel le pondera a Dionisio el efecto de las luces del puerto que se ven desde la ventana, y luego sale con que él mismo no las ve pero que su padre, antes de morir, le había encomendado que llamara la atención de los huéspedes sobre esto.14

12 Torrente Ballester, op. cit., p. 259.
14 Wofsy, op. cit., p. 217.
As another example, in the scene in which Dionisio converses with Don Sacramento while Paula is unconscious under the bed, Sacramento smells a bad odor and asks whether there are dead bodies in the hotel rooms. Dionisio says that there are always dead bodies in the rooms in modest hotels. Then Sacramento discovers the dead rabbits that have been left there by the astute hunter. Dionisio denies that they are rabbits and claims that they are rats, that hotel rooms have different types of rats according to class, that he shot these with a shotgun supplied to guests by the management, and that the price tags on them are just numbers and that the guest who gets a lucky number wins a prize.

The play is full of incidents of this type, which are excellent journalistic humor, but since they are neither funny nor meaningful in this situation, they leave the reader or viewer puzzled and dissatisfied.

As has been pointed out above, Mihura himself said early in his career that he had learned everything about the theater except how to write plays. When he was bedridden, perhaps for his own amusement he took some material from his experiences and put it together. But like the tyro prose writer who puts a few incidents together and thinks that he has written a novel, Mihura put a few incidents together and thought that he had written a play.

As we follow Mihura through his later plays we will see how he matures in his values, how his ability develops, how he
learns to plot, to write stage humor, to create almost unbearable suspense, to create characters who are believable as well as amusing, and to write plays that please the public and the critics.

It might well be asked at this point why this play won a national prize as well as so much critical favor. A committee in charge of awarding such a prize would naturally be made up of people in the business: critics, writers, and producers. Where even an enthusiastic playgoer might not see more than one hundred plays in his lifetime, the professional probably sees, reads, and discusses that many every year. He becomes surfeited and anything unusual that comes along, particularly anything over which there can be a lot of discussion and controversy, is pounced upon with relish. As in the case of the woman who buys a new wardrobe just to keep in style, the new thing does not have to be good, it just has to be different.

It has been pointed out above that although Tres sombreros de copa was the first play that Mihura wrote, others were produced first. In the summer of 1939, Mihura collaborated with Joaquín Calvo Sotelo in the writing of Viva lo imposible o el contable de estrellas (Long Live the Impossible or the Counter of Stars). It opened on November 24th of that year in Madrid. Mihura claimed that the opening was a success and that the critics were favorable toward it, and blamed the bad weather for the fact that it ran for only thirty performances to almost empty houses. The text of this play is not
available, and little is known about it other than that it was a comedy-fantasy and was later made into a movie.

Also during the summer of 1939, Mihura collaborated with Tono (Antonio de Lara) in the writing of Ni pobre ni rico, sino todo lo contrario (Neither Poor nor Rich, but All to the Contrary). It was immediately sold as a motion picture and thus did not come to the stage until 1943, when it had a limited success.

The play begins with the same atmosphere of absurdity that we have seen before. Abelardo, a rich young man, is trying to ruin himself. He buys worthless inventions, paying whatever the inventor asks and more, he plays cards for money with the Baroness, whom he knows to be a cheater, and he invites thieves into his house to steal his property. When Margarita, his fiancée, comes to visit him, we learn that she is poor and will not marry a rich man. While Abelardo is telling her that he has chosen her instead of his money, the servant appears to say that the house is on fire. When the firemen come, Abelardo invites them to have a drink, and they all chat for a while before the firemen go to work. Then Abelardo's administrator arrives to tell him that he is now completely penniless and homeless and that even his friends will have no more to do with him.

We next see Abelardo living on a park bench. The Baroness, who is still fond of him, brings some friends and a picnic lunch to the park. Margarita also visits him, but now she
still will not marry him because he is too poor and the gulf between them is as wide as before. Then she changes her mind and decides that she will marry him and share his park bench. But when she begins to make plans to clean up the area, move the benches to better locations, etc., he becomes angry and orders her to leave.

Using money borrowed from the Baroness, Abelardo remakes his fortune as director of the "Poor Trust Company," managing the financial affairs of the poor of the city. However, because of his obligation to her, Abelardo is now going to have to marry the Baroness. At the last minute it turns out that the Baroness is already married and she then urges Abelardo to marry Margarita, who has conveniently appeared. But Margarita has again decided that she does not want to marry Abelardo, and he in turn decides that he prefers to go fishing with an old crony. Each goes his separate way as the play ends.

Connecting Abelardo with Dionisio, Arjona refers to him as "another naive young man." But this is not necessarily so. Mihura already begins to show some improvement in character development here. Abelardo knows what he wants, makes his decisions, and carries them out, even though his methods would not seem generally acceptable. The picnic in the park is far more believable than the insane scenes of Mihura's first play.

\[15\] Arjona, op. cit., p. 65.
The Baroness, who carries a portable phonograph with her so that she can play some music when the conversation gets boring, might make many of us wish that we could do the same. This is not really an important play, but it is a step on Mihura's path from the absurd to the realistic.

During the next ten years Mihura wrote several excellent plays which will be discussed in later chapters. Then in 1953 he returned to the absurd with the production of A media luz los tres (The Three in the Half Light).

Alfredo, a would-be Don Juan, is being visited in his apartment by his friend Sebastián, who is a married, older, rather ordinary fellow, interested mainly in loafing, reading, and fishing. Alfredo, as an expert in these matters, lectures Sebastián on women and describes his methods of seduction. He gets a phone call from a new girl friend, Mariví, and talks her into coming to the apartment. While she is coming, Alfredo puts the apartment into disorder, explaining to Sebastián that women like to come to places where they can straighten up. The bell rings, but it is only Paca, the housemaid, bringing cockroach powder. Alfredo is angry because this advertises to everyone that he has cockroaches. Paca leaves and Mariví arrives. She appears to be quite interested in Sebastián, who finally departs after strong hints from Alfredo. The attempted seduction does not go well at first, but then Mariví becomes more friendly and they speak of marriage as the first act ends.
Next we see Alfredo entertaining Elena, a married woman. She sees Mariví's picture and becomes jealous, but Alfredo explains that for some reason Mariví never came back. When the bell rings, they fear that it is Elena's husband, and Elena hides in the bedroom. But it is only Sebastián, who wants Mariví's picture which he says should belong to him since he is having an affair with her. Alfredo is angry at this double cross, but Sebastián explains that she pursued him and he couldn't help it. Sebastián then discovers Elena, who comes out angrily criticizing him, and the amazed Alfredo finds out that his friend has beaten him to Elena also. They quarrel and Sebastián leaves.

As it turns out, Alfredo has done such a good job of criticizing Sebastián and defending Elena's husband that she decides to cut her visit short and return home. And so it goes, with the indifferent Sebastián having success after success while Alfredo is constantly frustrated. Alfredo next meets Lulú, a showgirl who lives in the same apartment building. However, nothing comes of this campaign either, and the play ends. In an epilogue, Sebastián comes to visit Alfredo, who is now married to Paca, the servant girl.

This play has some good features and some bad ones. There is too little action and too much conversation. Torrente Ballester says, "Si tuviera que objetar algo a la nueva comedia de Mihura, sería su longitud. Dura veinte minutos más de
All four female parts are played by the same actress and it is not clear why this is so. If Mihura is trying to suggest that women are all the same, then the virtuous Paca does not belong in this group. The conversation between Elena and Alfredo is misleading, because one gets the impression that she is Sebastián's wife and the arrival of Sebastián seems to portend an entirely different situation than actually develops.

Monleón says, "A media luz los tres fue su primer gran éxito. Comedia sorprendente, pero clara, como lo eran, por ejemplo, las de Noel Coward." This praise is fairly well merited. Certainly it is the best play of those that have been covered to this point. This play is the first in the Absurd group in which we are treated to Mihura's priceless humor.

The reader should remember that in trying to explain humor out of context, much of its value is lost. However, the following is an example of a Mihura joke: When Alfredo scolds Paca and sends her away, Sebastián asks, "Why aren't you nicer to the maid?" Alfredo replies, "If I were nice to her, she would think I was in love with her and she would tell me not to smoke so much."

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16 Torrente Ballester, op. cit., p. 309.
17 Monleón, op. cit., p. 57.
An example of Mihura's situation humor is seen in Alfredo's large stuffed burro which he keeps as a conversation piece. To amuse his feminine visitors, at the first chance to bring it into the conversation, he says, "You know, a burro is just a horse that hasn't gone to school." Of course, no one ever laughs, and his continuing efforts throughout the play to get laughs build a more and more comic situation. At the end Paca laughs, and this meeting of the minds leads to their marriage.

In 1954 appeared El caso del señor vestido de violetra (The Case of the Man Dressed in Violet). Roberto, a caricatured figure, is a young bullfighter, so important, so involved in a world of big business, movie stars, ambassadors, etc., that even his sweetheart has to make an appointment to see him and journalists have to pay to talk to him. Everyone shows great curiosity about a mysterious door that opens from Roberto's office. He disappears through it whenever he is upset and returns later with his equilibrium restored. It turns out that he is suffering from a "complejo de viejecita," meaning that whenever he is under stress he thinks that he has turned into a little old lady and he goes into this room until he returns to normal.

After a number of more or less absurd scenes in a doctor's office and Roberto's hospital room, he is cured on the last page of the play with apparently no better remedy than the doctor's telling him that he is healthy.
Most critics feel that this is one of Mihura's lesser works. Torrente Ballester says that it represents a retrogression in it's author's career, that it contains nothing more than jokes, and that the characters belong to a technique thirty years out of date.\textsuperscript{18} Apparently Mihura tried to satirize intellectual and snobbish society, do a psychological study, and write a comedy, all at the same time, and the boat, being overloaded, sank. The attempted humor, in spite of Torrente Ballester's comment above, depends on the absurd rather than on the comic, and fails for this reason. In A media luz los tres we feel for Alfredo, who is a delightful if somewhat pathetic rascal, but Roberto remains a rather repulsive stranger.

Mihura's best play in this group is Mi adorado Juan (My Beloved John). Although there is some humor in the play, it is not really a comedy, but a combination of some elements of the Absurd with a social drama. It won the Spanish National Theater prize for 1956-57.

The play opens with Doctor Palacios, a man of seventy, and his assistant, Doctor Manriquez, at work in the former's laboratory. They are developing a new drug which will make it possible for man to go without sleep. Palacios is worried about his daughter, Irene, who has taken up with a ne'er-do-well named Juan, and he chides Manriquez for not courting her.

\textsuperscript{18}Torrente Ballester, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 310.
Manríquez would be happy to do so, but he complains that he can make no progress with Irene. Then she enters, and in a discussion with her father she points out that she is tired of the formal life that she has always had and is in love with Juan. She agrees to ask him to come to meet her father.

When Juan arrives, he brings with him Vidal, a carelessly dressed older man who immediately directs himself to Palacios' books while the others talk. At first Palacios is hostile to Juan, but the latter's friendliness and courtesy win him over. Juan explains that he does not work, but spends his life making friends and enjoying them. When Palacios finds out that Vidal is the great Professor Vidal, one of the world's most renowned biochemists, who has given up science in order to play dominoes with Juan, and that Juan himself is a doctor, he is completely won over. He then goes to the cafe with his new friends after Juan says that he does not want to marry Irene.

When Juan next sees Irene, she again brings up the subject of marriage. He points out the difference in their financial status and she insists that she is willing to share his poverty. He then tells her,

No te acostumbrarías, Irene. Además, cuando yo era joven, gané algún dinero y vivo de él, estirándolo mucho. Tal como vivo y según mis cálculos, ese dinero podrá durarme hasta que cumpla ochenta años. Repartiéndolo contigo, sólo me alcanzaría hasta los cincuenta. Perdería por ti casi treinta de vida. 19

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19 Miguel Mihura, Mi adorado Juan (Waltham, Mass., 1964) p. 33.
One would think that this calculating statement would discourage any romance, but it does not faze Irene, so Juan walks out. In the next scene, Palacios has become fond of Juan, and Juan agrees to marry Irene, provided that she will live in his slum apartment, that she will not interfere with his way of life, and that she will not ask him to work. She accepts his conditions and they marry.

In the second act, Irene is finding conditions in Juan's apartment somewhat unpleasant. He enters, bringing a picture of a child whom he proposes to adopt. When she points out that he will have to go to work to earn money to buy furniture, food, clothing, and books for the child, he decides to drop the matter. Manríquez appears and asks Irene to go to a reception for her father. Since Juan refuses to go, she goes with Manríquez. After they leave, Palacios appears. He had never had any intention of going to the party, and Manríquez had taken Irene there just to bolster his own position. Palacios, who has now become completely like Juan, has given up his career and wants to move into the apartment with the couple. While he is moving in, Irene returns and criticizes him severely for throwing away his lifework.

In the last scene, Palacios has decided not to go to America with Manríquez, where drug companies are waiting to buy the formula. Manríquez feels that as long as Palacios is no longer interested, the formula and credit should go to him. Irene has disappeared and Juan fears that she is going to
America with Manríquez, but she returns to Juan after going to the ship with a friend, stealing the formula, and throwing it overboard. Juan greets her with the news that he has decided to go to work, and the play ends.

Arjona says of this play, "Mi adorado Juan, sentimental and relatively lacking in humor, depicts the selfless young man who interests himself in others, a type that appears with some frequency in the twentieth-century theater."\textsuperscript{20} On the other hand, Torrente Ballester speaks of Juan as "un personaje absurdo."\textsuperscript{21} Arjona's characterization would seem more realistic. There is nothing absurd about Juan himself. He is a well adjusted, intelligent, outgoing young man who knows just what he wants and has obtained it.

To some extent we see here the same contrast between Bohemian and bourgeois that we saw in Tres sombreros de copa. The difference is that here Mihura does not particularly demean either side except in his rather shabby treatment of Manríquez who is really guilty of nothing more than honest ambition. Aside from this, the two worlds seem to exist side by side rather than in conflict, with the protagonist having freedom of choice. It is interesting to note that while Manríquez remains steadfastly bourgeois and Irene retains her tolerance of the Bohemian life, Palacios and Juan seem to almost change

\textsuperscript{20}Arjona, op. cit., p. 67.

\textsuperscript{21}Torrente Ballester, op. cit., p. 313.
places. The final curtain leaves many questions unanswered. Will Juan continue his trend towards becoming what is called a useful member of society? Will the marriage succeed? Will Palacios revert? In any event, the possibilities of Juan and Irene's happiness seem to be far greater than those of Dionisio and his bride. Mihura apparently developed a more optimistic point of view in the more than twenty-five years since the writing of his first play.

Monleón says that Juan is the mouthpiece of Mihura.22 Others have suggested that Juan is patterned after Mihura himself.23 This seems very likely and perhaps gives us a clue to the development of the author's character, because it is possible that all the plays in this chapter contain Mihura. These five are virtually his only plays that have a male protagonist. From the weak and useless Dionisio we go to the more decisive Abelardo, pass on to the amusing Alfredo, regress to the absurd Roberto, and end with the interesting, confident, competent Juan. The plays improve in quality in the same order, and so perhaps does Mihura's self image.

22Monleón, op. cit., p. 62.
23Mihura, op. cit., p. xii.
CHAPTER IV

MIHURA'S CRIME PLAYS

Mihura wrote five plays dealing with crime, although in all but one of them the comedy effect outweighs the serious. The first of them came to being around 1945, when Mihura had an idea for a new play and discussed it with Alfredo de Laiglesia. The latter suggested that they collaborate. The two set to work and in twenty days they turned out El caso de la mujer asesinadita (The Case of the Murdered Woman). It was produced in 1946 and was an immediate success. It was given on television in Paris and broke all records in Mexico by running there for two years.

The play begins with Mercedes, a bored married woman who is waiting up for her husband. She decides to go to bed, and after she leaves the scene, Lorenzo, a middle-aged man, Raquel, his young wife, and Norton, an American Indian, enter. It appears to be their home, and in the ensuing conversation Lorenzo tells Norton that he had been married before, but when he brought Raquel into the house as a typist, he fell in love with her and poisoned his wife. Norton is very interested and not the least bit shocked. Mercedes appears and asks what they are doing in her house. Lorenzo and Raquel reply that it is their house and that Mercedes is the intruder. Mercedes
calls the servants, who identify her as the owner, and the other three leave. A few minutes later, in discussing the matter with the maid, Mercedes learns that the latter knows nothing about the affair. She then realizes that since she heard everything that went on even though she was not there, it was all a dream. At this moment, a slightly older looking Lorenzo, who is really her husband, returns home. He tells her that he has been promoted on the job, that he will have a lot more work to do, and that he has hired a young woman typist to come and work in the house. Mercedes runs from him in horror.

In the second act, Lorenzo and Raquel are now working together in the house. Mercedes has calmed down somewhat, but she still keeps a close eye on them. Lorenzo has a business visitor who turns out to be Norton, now a European. When Mercedes and Norton are left alone, she tells him about her dream and she learns that he dreamed about her at the same time. They are interrupted by an old couple dressed in mourning who have come to look at the house under the impression that it is for rent. After sending them away, Mercedes calls a phone number that they have left because she wants to find out if it is all a joke. She learns that the old couple died five years before. The terrified Mercedes begs Norton to help her. Lorenzo and Raquel enter and tea is served. The latter two put aspirin in their tea for their headaches, and Mercedes suspects that it is poison. There is a great deal of tumult and switching of teacups, after which Mercedes takes Norton
out to show him the garden. Lorenzo, left alone with Raquel, finds that he is in love with her.

In the third act, Mercedes is entertaining Norton on Christmas Eve as they wait for Lorenzo. Mercedes has an impulse to invite Raquel to supper and Norton sends his chauffeur to pick her up. Raquel arrives and Lorenzo returns home, but the party is not a success. Lorenzo tells Raquel how much he would like to marry her, if only he could get rid of Mercedes, who bores him. When Norton leaves to take Raquel home, Mercedes asks Lorenzo to get her pills but to be sure not to get the wrong ones, since there are some poisonous ones in the same drawer. When he gives her the pills, she takes them and dies. At the same time, sirens are heard outside and Norton is killed in a crash with a fire truck. Norton's and Mercedes' voices are then heard in the background, united in the other world and happy to be together. The lights dim for an instant and when they come up we see Lorenzo and Raquel, now married and already bored with each other.

The play contains much situation comedy which cannot be brought out in this summary. Mihura builds a great deal of suspense through the play. The ending is very sentimental, at least as far as Mercedes and Norton are concerned. We are left to decide for ourselves whether Lorenzo poisoned Mercedes deliberately, accidentally, or, as has been suggested by Chantraine, "un poco por casualidad y un mucho por un deseo
inconsciente."¹ In any event, we see that Lorenzo has gotten his just deserts.

This is the first play in which Mihura showed himself a master of plot and suspense. Whether he learned through experience or from Laiglesia is unimportant. He is a master of plot and suspense from this point on in his career. El caso de la mujer asesinadita is Mihura's only excursion into the supernatural. The conversation of the two lovers from the other world may have been the basis for José López Rubio's La otra orilla, which appeared almost ten years later. The play contains only one flaw. Even though in the third act some time has elapsed since Mercedes' dream, it is hard to believe that she would so casually accept pills from her husband after the terror inspired by her dream.

After the production of El caso de la mujer asesinadita, Mihura was inactive in the theater for six years, after which came the production of Tres sombreros de copa in 1952. In February of 1953 a new Mihura production appeared, El caso de la señora estupenda (The Case of the Marvelous Woman).

The play takes place in a hotel room in the mythical country of Koridibra. Victoria and Alejandro, newlyweds, are shown to their room by the manager, who apologizes for not being able to give them a better room. The hotel is filled with refugees from a war in the neighboring country. They are

unhappy to learn that they have to share the room with Carlos, a stranger, because of the room shortage. Next, Susana appears, and there is a great deal of comic confusion while Carlos tries to understand how Susana can be Alejandro's betrothed, while Victoria is his wife. We learn that the marriage was a business arrangement. Victoria married Alejandro, a native of Koridibra, in order to escape from her country. The next day she will take the boat to America and get a divorce. She is paying Alejandro for this, and with the money he will be able to marry Susana. Victoria's problem is that she was born in Argentina, to an Austrian mother and Polish father, and she married a Swede in Germany. Her parents are dead, and now no country will accept her.

A very suspicious police agent then comes in and says that he suspects Victoria of being a spy. He orders them not to leave the hotel. Susana is jealous and does not want Alejandro and Victoria to spend the night together, even though Carlos is there to chaperone them. Finally she leaves, reassured by Carlos, who by this time is very much attracted to Victoria.

In the second act, María and Gisela, Susana's mother and aunt, have been sent by her to watch Alejandro. Then the Police Commissioner arrives to question Victoria. Naturally, the room full of people causes a great deal of confusion. The Commissioner also suspects Victoria and will not allow her to leave the next morning. After they plead with him, he agrees
to take up the matter with the Chief, and he leaves. In the meantime, Carlos gets rid of the two old ladies. When the Chief arrives, he accuses Victoria of being Olga Tamarieff, an international spy, and arrests her. He also plans to take in Alejandro and Carlos. The latter then becomes angry and phones the Minister of War, who, we learn later, is his cousin. The Minister promises to come over. Susana returns and complicates the situation further. Victoria becomes irritated with her and goes off to the bedroom. Then Violeta arrives. She is the Minister's wife and has come in his place. She embraces Carlos and chides him for staying away so long. Then Victoria appears and she and Violeta embrace happily. They are old friends.

Alejandro and Susana then leave, while Victoria, Violeta, and Carlos talk over old times. With Victoria's identity established, the police also leave, and a romance appears to be developing between Carlos and Victoria as the play ends.

Strangely enough, critics were very dissatisfied with El caso de la señora estupenda. Torrente Ballester said, "Existe una evidente contradicción entre el estilo del tema y el de los diálogos."\(^2\) Chantraine said, "Desgraciadamente, el autor introduce escenas incongruentes, demasiado serias y largas que dañan la unidad del conjunto."\(^3\)


\(^3\)Chantraine, op. cit., p. 687.
These comments do not seem to be well merited. Apparently the critics are taking the plot too seriously. The work is not meant to be anything more than a farce, a bit of nonsense, and it is loaded from beginning to end with gags, situation humor, and a constant round of confusion and mistaken identity. What little plot there is is meant to serve merely to hold the jokes together, but Torrente Ballester and Chantraine seem determined to classify El caso de la Señora estupenda as a drama, or worse yet, as a melodrama.

Wofsy says, "Indudablemente, el autor habría alcanzado mayor mérito de haber dotado a su protagonista con sentimiento más humano y de haber desarrollado relaciones de amor más convincentes entre ésta y Carlos." This statement also seems utterly uncalled for. Victoria is presented as an interesting and sympathetic, if somewhat mysterious figure, right from the opening, while Carlos, again almost from the beginning, starts to compliment and help her and as the action progresses she shows an increasing gratitude towards and dependence on him.

If this play has any fault at all, it is in the contrived ending. In the ancient Greek Theater, whenever a playwright would get his characters into a situation from which he could not extricate them, a god would be lowered in a basket from the skies and would set everything to rights. Today, the

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4 Wofsy, "La calidad literaria del teatro de Miguel Mihura," Hispania, XLIII (May, 1960), 215.
name of this operation, *deus ex machina*, is used to describe any forced or contrived solution resorted to by an author.

The solution of Victoria's problem by having Carlos turn out to be a cousin of the Minister of War and by having Victoria and Violeta turn out to be old school chums is too artificial. Since Carlos gradually takes the male lead away from Alejandro and becomes the hero, it would have been better if he had saved Victoria by some bit of strategy. Aside from this, little can be found to complain of in this play. Of course, it has no particular message or significance, but it provides excellent entertainment. Other than *Tres sombreros de copa*, this is the first play that Mihura wrote on his own, and it shows him already a master humorist.

Mihura must have had a busy year in 1953, because less than two months later in another Madrid theater his production of *Una mujer cualquiera* (*A Common Woman*) appeared. This work, although referred to by Mihura as a comedy, is really his only attempt at a serious drama.

Antonio, a rather unsavory young man, picks up a prostitute named Nieves and brings her to an isolated house in the suburbs. He is ill at ease, appears to be waiting for something, and although he claims that the house is his, he does not seem to know his way around. Someone is heard approaching, and Antonio pushes Nieves into an anteroom and locks her in. The man who enters is the real Antonio, resident of the house. The false Antonio (who continues to be known by that name
throughout the play) kills him with a gun. He then removes the keys, compact, and an initialed handkerchief from Nieves' purse and puts them in his pocket. He then lets her out, gives her the purse, tells her that he has killed a man, and that she had better go so as not to be involved. Frightened, she does so. Antonio cleans up his own fingerprints, leaves Nieves' things scattered about, and leaves.

In the next scene, Commissioner Ruiz is investigating. He realizes immediately that there is something improper about all the clues that have been left. An interview with the taxi driver who brought Nieves and Antonio to the house increases his suspicion that all is not as it seems.

Meanwhile, Nieves has read the papers and is hiding out. She goes to the home of a friend, Rosa, and seeks shelter there. Rosa suggests that she go to the police, but Nieves knows that the police will not believe her. Rosa is hostile because she is to be married soon and her sweetheart does not know of her past. She wants to get rid of Nieves. While they are talking, Rosa's fiancé enters, and it is Antonio. Nieves does not denounce him and when they get a chance to talk alone, he tells her to keep quiet and he will help her. If she goes to the police it will be her word as a prostitute against his as a respectable business man. He takes her to an apartment which he has been preparing for himself and Rosa after their marriage. Nieves, completely frightened and friendless, has no one to turn to and begins to become attached to Antonio.
While he is away, Rosa enters, finds Nieves there, and assumes that they are lovers. She is about to scream for the police when Antonio returns. He defends Nieves and in the resulting quarrel breaks off with Rosa. She leaves, silenced by Antonio's threats.

Antonio takes Nieves to a restaurant and tells her his plans. He says that he is going to take her to his father's house, near the French border, and then will get her across to France. As they leave the restaurant, they are followed by Commissioner Ruiz, who now knows that Antonio is the guilty one.

The pair are welcomed by Juan, Antonio's father, who does not know that his son is a criminal, and by Julio, a rascally servant in league with Antonio. Julio was to provide Antonio with a false alibi for the night of the murder, but he reports that he has been questioned closely and he fears that the police will find out the facts. Antonio decides that he and Julio will flee across the border and leave Nieves behind for the police.

He takes the gun with which he committed the murder and slips it into the pocket of her coat which is hanging nearby, but Nieves sees him do this. He tells her that he is going to take her across the border now, but that he and Julio are going out to scout the way first. Seeing that he is about to betray her again, she takes out the gun and kills him.

*Una mujer cualquiera* was made into a movie in Spain, another in Argentina, and was shown on television in London. It
is a highly emotional story, arousing a great deal of sympathy and compassion for Nieves in the minds of the audience. But some critics did not see it that way. Chantraine writes,

Una mujer cualquiera expone la aventura de una prostituta que se da a un asesino, más por miedo de la soledad que por amor verdadero. . . . El autor parece profesar una simpatía sin falla por la prostituta de corazón sensible, víctima de las contingencias sociales. Este tema demasiado gastado por el naturalismo francés del último siglo y repovado con talento por F. Carco, no nos conmueve mucho hoy.

Chantraine seems to miss the point entirely. We are not supposed to be moved by the melodramatic concept that Nieves is a poor unfortunate who has been forced into a life of prostitution. Her entry into this field was probably by choice. The theme is rather that of a terrified woman, alone in the world, rejected by her friends, and utterly helpless to deal with the circumstances that have enmeshed her. The fact that she is a prostitute and that the police, therefore, will not believe anything she says is just one more facet of her dilemma.

Wofsy writes, "Pero el inexplicable cariño de la protagonista por un bribón vulgar y odioso, que la ha expuesto con sus trampas a que se sospeche de ella por el asesinato que él mismo había cometido, carece de motivación adecuada . . ."

This comment seems to be very well answered by the statement of Chantraine above. Nieves is so fearful that she does

\[5\] Chantraine, op. cit., p. 687.

not even want to be left alone. She has no one to turn to but Antonio, and just as a man dying of hunger is not very fastidious about his food, Nieves has no other choice. Only when she finds that he is not really going to help her does her dependence turn to hate. At the end, when Ruiz asks her why she went with Antonio, she speaks for all lonely women when she says, "Por miedo a estar sola. Lo hacemos todo por miedo a estar solas. Y porque me besó." 7

As has been pointed out, this is Mihura's only drama, and the Spanish stage is the poorer for his not having written others.

Mihura did not do another crime play until the production of Carlota (Carlotta) in 1957. In this play he pokes fun at the London fog, British customs, and Scotland Yard. It is an excellent comedy and a top quality murder mystery. Carlota is at least his second best play.

The action takes place in London around 1900. Harris, a policeman, is seen leaning against a lamp post in front of a residence. Shots are heard, but Harris pays no attention. Barrington, who lives in the house, comes along and chats with Harris. He mentions that his guest for dinner is to be Douglas Hilton, a famous detective, the most talented of Scotland Yard. While they talk, Hilton comes along and joins them. They hear a piano playing through an open window and

Barrington says that it is his wife, Carlota, at the piano. When the playing stops they try to enter the house, but no one answers the door. Hilton opens the door with his skeleton key and they enter. Carlota is found on the floor of the bedroom, having been strangled with a silk cord. The service door at the back of the house is found open, and in the attached drug store, which Carlota operated, the money box has been robbed. Harris stated that he saw Fred Sullivan, Carlota's assistant in the drug store, leave an hour before. A search is started for Sullivan and for Velda Manning, the housekeeper, who was the only one who had a key to the rear door.

Hilton then questions Barrington and finds that Carlota had been a widow when Barrington met her, that Velda Manning had been her housekeeper even then, that Mr. Manning has since died, and that there seems to be something mysterious about Carlota. A flashback then takes us back to the time when the newly married Barrington and Carlota arrive at her house. Barrington does not like the house because Carlota has so many memories of her parents and grandparents who died there. Also he finds the servants insolent. As they are preparing to go to bed, Margaret, a friend of Carlota's, drops in to get some pills for her headache. She is the daughter of Dr. Wats, the neighborhood physician.

After Margaret leaves, Carlota tells Barrington that her godfather was opposed to the marriage and had threatened to cut off her inheritance, so she poisoned him in order to be
able to marry Barrington. It was easy for her to obtain poison since she was a pharmacist. Barrington is appalled by this revelation, but Carlota thinks he should be flattered since she did it for love of him. She fears that the servants suspect something and that this is the reason for their insolence.

Later, Barrington talks to John Manning and Dr. Wats about the deaths of Carlota's godfather and first husband. Carlota offers the doctor a drink during his visit and mentions that she has to get some medicine for Manning. The next day both men are dead.

Going back to the present again, Douglas now suspects that Velda Manning may have killed Carlota to avenge the death of her husband. Douglas also learns that Harris, the policeman, was fond of Carlota and had visited her in her home. A mysterious hunchback who has been hanging around turns out to be Douglas' assistant. To further complicate things, Douglas learns that Fred Sullivan had been in love with Margaret, but that she had rejected him to become sweethearts with Harris.

In another flashback we see Carlota entertaining two friends, Cristi and Lilián. She serves them tea and they become very ill. Barrington's superior at the office is giving him a lot of trouble and he mentions to Carlota that the man has a liver ailment. Carlota gives her husband some pills of her own secret formula to give to the boss and within a few days the boss is dead.
Going back to the present again, Sullivan is found to have committed suicide with Carlota's missing revolver and it is now suspected that he is Carlota's murderer. But then Bill, Douglas' assistant, accuses Barrington of being the guilty one.

Barrington, of course, points out that he had been standing in front of the house with Harris and Douglas while Carlota was still alive and playing the piano. Bill claims that Barrington could have had a phonograph playing piano music. But they are unable to find any such instrument. Douglas next accuses Margaret of sneaking away from a dance she was attending, murdering Carlota, and returning to the dance. In her own defense, Margaret tells Douglas that Barrington had told her of his plans to murder Carlota. Carlota had poisoned so many people that he was afraid for his own life and wanted to be rid of her. Barrington had come home while Margaret was visiting Carlota, killed Carlota, and ordered Margaret to play the piano while he joined Harris and Douglas in the street.

The irony of it all is that Carlota was perfectly innocent. Those who had died had all died of natural causes, but Carlota had told Barrington that she was a murderess to make his life interesting and to keep him from being bored with her.

Carlota was an instant success. It was also produced in France and Belgium and made into a motion picture. Critical opinion was almost entirely favorable. Pirulero wrote,

De eso que unos llaman construcción; otros carpintería teatral; algunos, oficio, y muchos, técnica, esta...
comedia constituye el punto de referencia. Su arquitectura, dentro del teatro contemporáneo, es el monumento de El Escorial. A nuestro juicio, claro.

Pero no es sólo la técnica lo que cautiva en esta comedia tan admirablemente contada. Es el ingenio, la gracia, la agilidad mental, y el enorme interés.

Torrente Ballester writes,

La construcción de la comedia es impecable. Todo está en su lugar, nada sobra y nada falta. El sistema de efectos típicamente policíacos se mezcla con los efectos teatrales. Nadie sospecha, ni puede sospechar, hasta el momento justo quién es el asesino. La escena final es estupenda.

Only one strange comment seems to mar the almost universal praise. Chantraine says, "Si el autor evoca, con más o menos acierto, la atmósfera de Londres en 1880, en cambio fracasa en sus tentativas de remediar el humor británico."10

But to confront this comes an Italian comment (name of critic not given), "Carlota, del español Miguel Mihura, es una comedia macabra desarrollada con sonriente ironía a la manera británica."11

Again it would appear that both critics have really missed the point, since Carlota is not supposed to be a British detective story, but a parody of one. Mihura is lampooning British writers, not trying to imitate them. Indeed,

9Torrente Ballester, op. cit., p. 315.
10Chantraine, op. cit., p. 687.
any attempts at imitation could very well be the other way around, for few writers of any nationality can equal Mihura’s craftsmanship.

The last of Mihura’s crime plays was Melocotón en almíbar (Peach in Syrup), presented in Madrid in 1958. It lacks the serious overtones of Carlota, being a simple comedy, almost a farce, but an excellent one.

Federico, a young waiter, Cosme, an elderly taxi driver, and Nuria, a dance hall girl, have joined up with Carlos and Suárez to form a rather pathetic gang of jewel thieves. They get their ideas for their operations by watching movies, one of which, Melocotón en almíbar, gives the play its name. Unfortunately, Cosme comes down with a bad cold on each of their escapades.

They have just robbed a jeweler in Burgos and all except Suárez are now hiding out in a furnished apartment in Madrid, pretending to be a family, with Federico and Nuria posing as husband and wife, Carlos as her uncle, and Cosme as her father. They hide the jewels in the soil of a flowerpot on the balcony of the apartment. The whole gang is very frightened and every ring of a bell or knock on the door sends them into a panic. Nuria in particular wants to go back to an honest life.

To complicate the problem further, Cosme’s cold turns into fever and he has to have a doctor. The doctor decides that Cosme will have to have a nurse in attendance and
promises to send one. But there is a shortage of nurses, and instead they send a nun, Sor María. She is a wonderful, kind-hearted person of the type that can never see any bad in anyone. But her presence makes the gang very uncomfortable, particularly when it turns out that she is an amateur Sherlock Holmes, telling people where they have been, what they have done, etc., by the clues that she sees. She begins to take an interest in the flower pot with the jewels, carrying it around and watering it, while they try to distract her from it.

Sor María finds a pistol that the gang hid in a chair, and when Suárez comes to call, she gets the idea that he has been making love to Nuria and that Federico had the pistol to kill Suárez. She announces to the surprised gang that she knows everything, and they assume that she is talking about the jewels. She tells Suárez that Federico plans to kill him. Suárez believes that Federico plans to kill him for his share of the loot and is furious with the others.

This all blows over, but the members of the gang decide that they will have to leave, particularly when they hear that the Chief of Police is interested in renting the apartment next and will soon come to look at it. Federico buys a duplicate plant in a flower pot and exchanges it for the one with the jewels, which he places in a paper bag so that they can carry it with them. While she is alone in the room, Sor María notices that they have switched plants and she changes them back again. In the meantime, the point has been made
that the jeweler was insured and thus has lost nothing if he does not get his jewels back. The gang leaves, taking the wrong flower pot, and the play ends as Sor María, talking to the landlady, tells her that she has become fond of that potted plant and is going to take it with her and give it to some poor person in her parish.

It has been mentioned that this play is just a light comedy, but it also must be pointed out again that no summary can do justice to the wealth of jokes and situation comedy in this work. The thieves are a rascally lot, but we are so busy laughing at them and feeling sorry for them that we cannot dislike them. The contrast of the characters of the nun and the jewel thieves is a device that will be seen again in Mihura's work.

One difficulty that arises in reading this play is that, while the text of a recent paperback edition contains stage directions following the summary that has been given here, the text in Mihura's Obras Completas omits the directions for Sor María to exchange the flowerpots. This of course destroys the entire point of the ending.

It will be remembered that in the plays of the Absurd group, all the protagonists were male. In the crime group all the protagonists are women. And to some extent we find a repetition of the process of the gradually strengthening control

12Miguel Mihura, Melocotón en almíbar (Madrid, 1958), p. 70.
of the protagonist over the situation. Mercedes of El caso de la mujer asesinadita and Victoria of El caso de la señora estupenda do little but let things happen to them, but Nieves of Una mujer cualquiera takes definite action; Carlota brings her death upon herself, and there can be no doubt that Sor María is the one who makes things happen in Melocotón en almíbar. This chronological strengthening of character would seem to bear out the suggestion made in the previous chapter that perhaps the development of Mihura's own personality is reflected in the changes in his people.
In classifying certain of Mihura's works as social plays it should be pointed out that Mihura is not in any sense a reformer. He is not following in the footsteps of Shaw or Ibsen in trying to correct social evils. Rather, this classification is made up merely of those plays in which Mihura has made use of a social situation to furnish a plot for a comedy.

The first work to be examined in this group is *Sublime Decision* (Sublime Decision), presented in Madrid in 1955. The problem is that of Florita, a young woman in her late twenties, apparently destined to be an old maid. Her father is poor and in ill health and in 1895, the time of the action of the play, a woman has no respectable way to make a living. Florita sits out on her balcony every day, even in cold weather, hoping to attract a suitor. Discouraged, she finally gives this up. A couple of catty neighbors discuss the fact that they have seen Florita going out at night when everyone else is asleep.

Florita tells her father that she needs to see her uncle, Don Claudio, and also wishes to see the priest. In the meantime, Manolo, suitor of Florita's younger sister, Cecilia, comes to call and brings a friend, Pablo, for Florita. Pablo
claims to come from a well-to-do family and says condescendingly that he is willing to see if Florita suits him. She is offended at this and sends him away, to the horror of her father and aunt.

When Florita sees the priest and Claudio, she tells them that she has secretly been taking lessons from the inventor of the typewriter and that she wants a job so that she can earn her living. She threatens that if Claudio does not give her a job in his office, she will become a prostitute.

The scene shifts to Claudio's office, The Ministry of Public Works. The other employees are Hernández, Ramón, and Pablo, who is not from a rich family, but is just an office boy. They are all shocked to hear that a woman is coming to work in the office. Soon Florita arrives, accompanied by her father and aunt as chaperones. Eventually she settles down into the office routine, does her work efficiently, and handles the public well, but there is a great deal of friction and jealousy over her on the part of the male employees. Claudio, therefore, discharges her.

At home again, Florita confines herself to her room, while the catty neighbors visit her aunt and father to gloat over the fact that Florita has been fired and the family has had to sell the piano for living expenses. Their only hope now is that Manolo and Pablo will marry the girls. Manolo appears to say that there has been a change of government and he has gotten a raise. But it turns out that Hernández,
Pablo, and Claudio have all been discharged. Then they learn that Manolo's raise has been canceled. The situation is now completely black. Florita speaks of becoming a nun, but she is not fitted for it, so she settles down to wait until Pablo gets a job.

The new government then appoints Claudio Director General. He decides that he will have a department completely staffed by women, so that there will be no sex problems, and invites Florita to bring some friends to work in the office. Florita recruits her sister, her aunt, the family servant, and even the catty neighbors. Now economically self-sufficient, they give up all thought of marriage and the play ends.

Monleón says, "Sublime decisión es, sin duda, una de las mejores comedias de Miguel Mihura." Yet the reasons he gives to support this view are somewhat superficial. Mihura uses in this play several devices which are unusual to him, and although these please Monleón, it is not at all certain that they help the play. In several instances Florita or her maid make expository asides to the audience. These are not needed because the information is given in the dialogs. In two instances Mihura has three pairs of women all gossiping on the stage at once. Of course, the conversations are not meant to be understood and they do not add to the humor or atmosphere of the play. What humor there is is stretched out very thin, mostly

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based on the family's poverty, the coldness of the hallway out-
side the apartment, and the family's efforts to attract suitors.
Most of the humor is in Act I. In the second act, when Florita
has gone to work, and in the third, after she has been dis-
charged, the humor disappears. There is not really enough drama
or enough plot to hold the interest and the play sags after the
first act.

Torrente Ballester says, "Un cambio de Gobierno resuelve
el problema de Florita. Con lo cual se demuestra que el drama-
turgo puede echar mano de las más diversas colaboraciones."\(^2\)
Of course, he refers to the \textit{deus ex machina} ending which
Mihura uses for the second time here. This is not to suggest
that plays must be written in accordance with rigid rules.
We know from his other plays that Mihura is capable of a far
better ending, so it might appear that the play had to be fin-
ished in a hurry and Mihura did not take the time to do better.

The next play in this group is \textit{Maribel y la extraña fam-
ilia} (\textit{Maribel and the Strange Family}), presented in Madrid in
1959. This play broke all box office records in the history
of the Spanish Theater, won the National Theater Prize for
1959-60, was made into a movie, and was produced in several
foreign countries. It vies with \textit{Carlota} for the honor of be-
ing Mihura's best play.

The action of the play begins in a fine home in present
day Madrid. Paula, an elderly lady, has as guests a couple,

\(^2\)Gonzalo Torrente Ballester, \textit{Teatro español contemporáneo}
Vicenta and Fernando. She hires them by the hour to visit her so that she can tell them all her troubles without having to be bored by listening to theirs, as she would if friends visited.

Visiting Paula are her sister Matilde and Matilde’s son Marcelino. The latter two live in a small town and own and operate a chocolate factory. Marcelino is in his late thirties and they feel that it is time for him to marry. All the girls in their town, however, are stupid, ugly, petty, and old fashioned, so they have come to Madrid to visit Paula and to find a modern, sophisticated wife for Marcelino, who is rather shy and not experienced with girls.

Marcelino announces to the two old ladies that he has met a girl and is bringing her to meet them. She is Maribel, a prostitute that he has picked up in a bar. The ladies are completely taken by Maribel’s fancy hairdo, flashy clothes, and breezy manner. This is just the type of sophisticated young woman that they have been looking for. Maribel, on the other hand, expecting to be taken to a bachelor apartment for an assignation, is completely amazed on being presented to the two old ladies. When they talk of marriage, she thinks that they are all crazy. The situation, as they politely inquire about her work and her family, while she attempts to give innocuous answers, is a typical Mihura comedy situation. At this time the family doctor comes to call. When Maribel gets a chance to speak to him alone, she asks him whether the family is
crazy. He also accepts Maribel as a sophisticated young woman and points out that Marcelino is young and rich. If he wants to marry, the doctor asks, what is wrong with that? Maribel decides to go along with it for the moment.

In the second act she is already on intimate terms with the family, but they want to meet her friends, so she invites three other prostitutes, Nini, Pili, and Rufi, to Paula's home. These three are suspicious that there is some plot going on against Maribel, since they cannot believe that all is as it seems. The meeting of the three girls, pretending to be Maribel's college chums, with the old ladies is another excellent comedy situation.

However, the girls still feel that Maribel might never be heard of again if she goes with Marcelino, and when they learn that Marcelino had been married before and that his wife was drowned in a lake near the factory, they become even more frightened. Maribel, however, is sure that everything is all right. She tries to tell Marcelino of her background, but he will not listen.

In the third act, Maribel and her friends have gone to visit in Marcelino's home. The girls are still afraid that Marcelino is a sadist and that he will kill Maribel. While Marcelino is trying to be alone with Maribel, one or another of the girls continually interrupts them so that they can keep an eye on Maribel's safety. When Maribel finds that the death
of Marcelino's first wife was an accident, she is reassured. She constantly tries to tell him of her background, but he always changes the subject. She never finds out whether he knows about her past and does not want to discuss it, or whether he is completely unaware.

When it is learned that Paula and Matilde are on their way in a taxi from Madrid, Maribel and the girls are afraid that the ladies have learned about Maribel's past and are on their way to throw her out. They pack and leave just as the ladies arrive. But Maribel returns, deciding to face the responsibility. However, the reason for the ladies' hurried trip from Madrid was just that they did not know that Maribel's friends were there, and it had occurred to them that there would be small town gossip if Maribel and Marcelino were alone.

Maribel, overcome by the love and acceptance of this family, reasons that she has always tried to be honest and has never harmed anyone. Therefore, her conscience is clear, and she accepts her new role as the play ends.

This is one of Mihura's best comedies, but it also has an absorbing character study. Maribel is treated very sympathetically by the author, and although we know that she is accepted and loved by her new family, we are never sure as to whether the old ladies are just naive, or whether they are so good, like Sor María in Melocotón en almíbar, that they cannot see anything bad in anyone, and to them who or what
Maribel has been makes no difference. It has already been mentioned that we are left to decide for ourselves just what Marcelino knows.

Chantraine likens this play to Shaw's Pygmalion, and there is a hint that perhaps Marcelino is knowingly playing this role. In the third act, he tells Maribel and her friends about a very ugly woman who had lived in his village. A man loved her and married her. He believed that she was beautiful and constantly told her that she was, and eventually she came to be so. Likewise, Maribel, accepted and treated as a virtuous woman, comes to believe that she really is a dress-maker and was in that bar for the first time when she met Marcelino there.

However, Chantraine makes one comment that needs to be questioned. She refers to Marcelino as, "Este panoli provincial, hermano del Dionisio de Los tres sombreros de copa. . ."

This comparison seems unbelievable. Marcelino, although he is presented as being shy with girls, is an intelligent and otherwise forceful young man. He is a successful industrialist and in connection with Maribel he knows just what he wants and gets it. There seems to be no basis of comparison at all between him and the weak, useless Dionisio.

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3Jacqueline Chantraine, "Tendencias del teatro español de hoy," Thesaurus, XVII (1962), 690.

4Ibid., p. 689.
Next in this group came *La Bella Dorotea* (The Beautiful Dorothy), presented in Madrid in 1963. The action takes place in a seacoast town in Northern Spain just prior to World War I.

Three gossipy neighbors, Inés, Remedios, and Benita, come to visit Dorotea, her father, Manuel, and her aunt Rita. They criticize Dorotea because she has slept late on her wedding day, because the man she is going to marry is a nobody who is only after her money, and because she is a rebel who does as she pleases. Dorotea, in turn, complains about the narrow-mindedness and stupidity of the people of the town. After the girls leave, Manuel tells Dorotea that he also has heard around the town that her sweetheart is marrying her only for her money. She denies it and says that they are truly in love.

Rita is angry because Manuel intends to take the management of his business enterprises away from her and turn it over to Dorotea's husband. Then a note is received from Dorotea's fiancé, saying that he has left town for good. He cannot stand the gossip about the marriage. Dorotea vows that she will never take off her wedding dress until she finds someone to marry her.

Months later she is still wearing her wedding dress. No one will marry her, some because they think she is crazy, and some because they do not want the stigma of marrying for money. Others she rejects because they are only after her money. Her
father has now died and her aunt encourages her to continue wearing the wedding dress. In a park, Dorotea meets Juan, owner of a merry-go-round at the fair. Juan is secretly in love with Rosa, Dorotea's maid. He has sent to Madrid for his friend José, and he suggests that José marry Dorotea, get control of her property, sell it, and abscond with the money. José is only lukewarm about this idea.

Next, in the railroad station restaurant which is one of Dorotea's properties, Inés, Benita, and Remedios plead with Rita to keep Dorotea off the streets, since the civil authorities are considering locking her up as a lunatic. Rita refuses to do so. Actually, she wants Dorotea to be put away so that she can get control of the properties.

Later, when Dorotea is alone in the restaurant, José enters, dressed in a well worn wedding suit. He tells her that he wears this suit because his fiancée stood him up at the church. Since she is in the same position, he suggests that they marry. She tells him that she has seen him around town before, wearing ordinary clothes and working out his scheme with Juan. Nevertheless, she is attracted to him and asks him to stay.

Later, Dorotea and José have married, as have Rosa and Juan. Dorotea knows that José has been selling some of her enterprises and accumulating the cash. Also, she has found a railroad ticket to Madrid in his pocket. She believes that he is going to run out on her, but does not want to stop him.
When Juan and José go to meet the train, the women think they are leaving. But when the train pulls out, Juan and José are still there. They were looking for a friend who did not come. Dorotea learns that José has only sold off her unprofitable businesses and that the friend is a contractor who is going to build a new roadhouse for them on some land that José has acquired. The railroad ticket in José's pocket was for this friend to return to Madrid. The play ends with the implication that the business as well as the marriage will be successful.

González Ruiz, Alfredo Marquerié, and Torrente Ballester all relate La Bella Dorotea to Tres sombreros de copa. Marquerié also compares Dorotea to Don Quijote, seeing a similarity between Dorotea's search for a husband and the old gentleman's search for wrongs to right. And in a sense, Dorotea is trying to right the wrong of having been deserted at the altar. The comparison even includes Dorotea's faithful servant, Rosa, as the counterpart of Sancho Panza.

Torrente Ballester says,

La Bella Dorotea de Mihura está en la buena línea de Tres sombreros de copa, aunque, naturalmente, los procedimientos de 1963 no sean ya los procedimientos de 1936. Han variado bastante, sobre todo, los elementos de la comicidad verbal, mucho más sustanciosos y accesibles y muy alejados ya del surrealismo.

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6Ibid., p. 136.
7Ibid., p. 139.
It might seem easy at first glance to find elements of the Absurd in *La Bella Dorotea*, but it is not that at all. There is never any question about Dorotea's sanity; if anyone needs a psychiatrist it is the mean, gossiping, vile townspeople. Dorotea blames them for the failure of her marriage plans. It was their talk that drove her sweetheart away. It is their fault that she is still single and therefore she is going to continue to wear her wedding gown as a protest and a reminder to them of their crime against her until the crime is expiated by society's furnishing another groom.

None of the critics have suggested it, but it would seem more reasonable to compare this play with *Sublime decisión*. Florita cannot marry because she is too poor; Dorotea cannot because she is too rich. In each case we have an attractive, intelligent young woman, unable to carry out her destiny because of narrow-mindedness and intolerance.

In 1964 Mihura came out with another great success, *Ninette y un señor de Murcia* (*Ninette and a Man from Murcia*), which won the "Calderón de la Barca" literature prize for that year.

It is the story of Andrés, a young man of Murcia. He has just inherited some money and a bookstore specializing in religious books from a deceased aunt, and before settling down to work, he decides to go to Paris to have a fling. He writes to a friend, Armando, who lives in Paris, asking that Armando find him a place to stay. Since Andrés does not speak French,
Armando gets him a room in the home of Bernarda and Pedro, a middle-aged Spanish couple living in Paris. Andrés is dissatisfied, since he was planning on a luxury hotel, but he decides to stay on temporarily.

Armando then plans to take Andrés out, but his idea of a night out is a sandwich in a snack bar and then a movie, while Andrés wants to go to fancy restaurants and cabarets and have a boat ride on the Seine. He particularly wants to meet some easy girls, as he has heard of the reputation of the French. Armando goes out to see if he can round up some girls and in the meantime, Ninette, the daughter of the family, comes home and meets Andrés. They are attracted to each other and she suggests that he stay at home with her rather than go out. He does so and they begin an affair. Ninette is on her vacation and both of her parents work, so they are able to be together in the apartment a great deal of the time. Andrés makes the excuse of being ill and later of having a sore foot so that the parents will understand why he never goes out. The result is that he never gets to see any of the sights of Paris that he came to see, but spends all his time in the apartment with Ninette.

Then Andrés finds that René, Ninette's French boyfriend, is very jealous and is hanging around outside the apartment waiting to beat him up if he should come out. Ninette gets rid of René by telling him that she is pregnant with Andrés' child. To Andrés' dismay, this turns out to be the truth.
Andrés, who thought that he was having a pleasant adventure with a French girl, now finds that Ninette's parents have old-fashioned Spanish ideas of morality and he is forced to agree to marry her. It turns out that they really love one another. Pedro and Bernarda decide to return to Spain with the couple, so all return to Spain with poor Andrés still having seen no more of Paris than the inside of the apartment.

Critical opinion of Ninette y un señor de Murcia was unanimously favorable, particularly in regard to the humor and the characterization. There are only five parts in the play and each person develops his individuality.

The social interest lies in Mihura's portrayal of the differing national approaches to morality. Perhaps it might be better to say that the Spanish view of morality is compared with the Spanish concept of the French view. Perhaps the French might feel that the situation is the other way around. Nevertheless, Andrés, having heard about French promiscuity, and considering Ninette French, has a different view of the affair than do her parents, who consider her Spanish, and this difference of opinion forms the theme of the play.

Perhaps because he enjoyed his characters so much, perhaps because the public wanted to hear what happened to Andrés and Ninette, perhaps for reasons given by a critic who will be quoted later, Mihura, for the first time, wrote a sequel. The new play, Ninette; modas de París (Ninette; Modes of Paris), was presented in Madrid in 1966.
As the play begins we find that Ninette has lost her baby in an auto accident on the way back to Spain, but that the couple, as well as Ninette's parents, are now comfortably installed in Andrés' home. Armando, Andrés' friend from Paris, is also on the scene, visiting his grandmother. Ninette and her parents are somewhat messy and this conflicts with Andrés' passion for orderliness. Pedro, now known as Pierre, claims that he cannot find an apartment.

Ninette is bored with inactivity, but Andrés has old-fashioned ideas about a woman's place being in the home, and he will not let her help in the bookstore which is attached to the house or give French lessons. She decides that she and her mother will open a dress shop selling French fashions. Andrés refuses to hear of it. Ninette then threatens to sleep in a separate room if Andrés does not permit them to have the shop. It then occurs to Andrés that Ninette and her mother would be out of the house all day and that this would give him an opportunity to play around with Maruja, his clerk in the bookstore. He then agrees to Ninette's plan, although Bernarda is suspicious of his easy assent.

The affair with Maruja does not go well, because she is jealous of Ninette and Armando is in love with Maruja. In a quarrel, Maruja scratches Andrés and he has to tell everyone that a cat did it. He now wants to get rid of Maruja but cannot because of the labor laws. Then there is a rumor that Ninette is carrying on with Patricio, the interior decorator.
Andrés angrily accuses Ninette, who admits that Patricio is in love with her and has asked her to go away with him. She says, however, that she gave him such a slap that he had to go to a hospital. When everyone is happy again, Ninette announces that her father has been offered a local automobile agency and proposes to go into partnership with Andrés since the bookstore is antiquated and unprofitable. Thus the play ends with the assurance that the marriage as well as the new business enterprises will be successful.

The social conflict here of course is between Andrés' idea of the place of a wife in the home and the desire of Ninette, a modern, educated young woman, to have a stimulating and productive place in the world. Just as Andrés did not have a chance in the first play of the series, neither does he have a chance in this one. Of course, as has been pointed out before, these are comedies, excellent ones indeed, but nothing more, and the themes are not to be taken too seriously.

Again, critical sentiment was very favorable. Actually, Sainz de Robles sums up the almost universal opinion of both plays with his comment:

Como es impecable, como dicen los clásicos de hoy que la vida sigue, es lógico que siguiera la vida de tan felices criaturas como aquellas que protagonizaron la deliciosa comedia de Miguel Mihura Ninette y un senor de Murcia. Y ya casado el senor de Murcia, Andrés, con la seductora Ninette, ¿qué han de hacer sino regresar desde París a Murcia, donde, para no aburrirse y ganar unas pesetitas, Ninette abrirá una casa de modas parisienses?
Cierto que casi siempre se cumple la categórica sentencia de que "nunca segundas partes fueron buenas". Pero una de las escasas excepciones de la regla es esta segunda parte de Ninette, obra compuesta acaso con más arte, con más reflexión, aun cuando con la indiscutible desventaja de que el autor tenga que excederse en ingenio y en gracia para no desilusionar a sus miles de admiradores que acuden a la segunda parte... con la mosca en la oreja.

It would be hard to find better deserved praise, except that perhaps the word *miles* above should be changed to *millones*. Yet there is a sour note. Fernández Santos had this to say:

La costumbre es decir que nunca segundas partes fueron buenas. Lo exacto, en el caso de esta nueva historia de Ninette Sánchez, es decir que las segundas partes son exactamente iguales que las primeras. Esta nueva Ninette de Mihura no es ni mejor ni peor que la anterior, es igual de mala.

After this amazing statement, he goes on to say that Mihura wrote the play only to earn money, that he plagiarized himself, and that any person who needs to know what happened to Ninette after the first play is a person of bad taste. These statements seem so bitter that they can be explained only as malice rather than as objective criticism. The quality of the plays as well as the comments of other critics answer well all these charges, and as to the statement that Mihura wrote only to earn money, so did Shakespeare, and no doubt so does Fernández Santos.

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CHAPTER VI

MIHURA'S LESSER PLAYS

Mihura has written a number of plays of lesser importance. The earliest of these, La canasta (The Basket), came out in 1955. The script of this play is not available and no further information could be obtained.

El chalet de madame Renard (The Villa of Madame Renard), produced in 1961, tells of a middle-aged lady, impoverished, with four mortgages on her villa, who claims to be rich and advertises for a rich husband. Her ad is answered by two confidence men, each seeking to marry a rich widow. Eventually all the deceptions are unmasked, but by this time the trio have grown fond of each other, and they decide to pool their efforts and live by their wits.

Las entretenidas (The Kept Women), is a bedroom-drawing room comedy about a doctor and his mistress and her eventually successful efforts to get him to marry her. It came to the stage in 1962.

Milagro en casa de los López (Miracle at the López Home), which opened in Barcelona in 1964, is the only one of Mihura's plays not to have had its première in Madrid. It is about a couple who have not had any guests or been out of their house for ten years. To break up the monotony they decide to take
in roomers, and at that instant, a mysterious taxi deposits some would-be roomers at their door. One of them is a hypnotist who produces some of the miracles that happen, while others are explained as the result of a romantic intrigue between the maid and the taxi driver.

La tetera (The Teapot) opened in Madrid in 1965. A man-about-town goes to a small village and marries there. Friends visiting him are amazed to find that he has married a fat, plain woman. Then they think that he is going to murder her in order to have her beautiful sister. But it turns out to be true love after all.

These last plays are all routine Mihura comedies, amusing to read, and no doubt they would provide an evening's light entertainment at the theater, but apparently they are not considered to be of great significance. Critical literature available is limited to little more than a mention of their titles.
CHAPTER VII

RECURRENT PATTERNS

An examination of Mihura's important plays reveals a number of recurrent patterns. One of these remains essentially unchanged throughout his works, while the others show a shifting point of view as the playwright matures.

Torrente Ballester points out that, "La prostituta, llamése Maribel, Paula, Nieves, Lulú, o como ustedes y Mihura prefieran, es una de las muchas claves del teatro de Mihura."¹ But it goes further than that. Mihura's plays abound with women who are either wicked or seem to be so during a large part of the play. In addition to those listed by Torrente, we have Racquel, who is enjoying an affair with Lorenzo; Victoria, who is accused of being a spy; Elvira, the adulteress; Florita, who threatens to become a prostitute; Carlota, who was thought to be a murderess; Nuria, a thief; Fany (Las entretenidas), a kept woman; Madame Renard, a swindler; Dorotea, reputed to be insane; and finally Ninette, who suffers under a double suggestion: first that she is a promiscuous French girl, and later that she is carrying on with her interior decorator. Of the important women characters, only

¹José Monleón, editor, Teatro de Miguel Mihura (Madrid, 1965), p. 77.
Mercedes and Irene escape even a suggestion of crime or immorality. But Mihura likes his women characters. All are treated sympathetically; none are condemned.

Mihura's interest in unusual women is probably based on his associations with them in the theater and in road shows, as well as in his bachelor life. Edgar Neville, famous playwright and long time friend of Mihura, says,

Miguel no es lo que se puede decir un buen mozo, pero las mujeres también le adoran y ha hecho grandes conquistas de chicas excelentes en todos los sentidos, pero de las que se ha cansado después de los primeros encuentros.

Connected with this is Mihura's attitude toward marriage. In his first play we see Dionisio's forthcoming marriage presented as the beginning of a lifetime of unhappiness and boredom. Abelardo finds a return to hobo ways preferable to marriage; Racquel and Lorenzo are shown already bored with one another shortly after Mercedes' death; Florita rejects her suitor in favor of a job; and Carlota, sure that her first husband died of boredom, pretends to be a murderess to make things interesting for the second.

Mihura was twenty-four years old when he started Tres sombreros de copa. Obviously a handsome bachelor of that age, successful in theatrical and literary circles and admired by women, does not have much interest in the married state.

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2Edgar Neville, Prologue to Miguel Mihura, Obras Completas (Barcelona, 1962), p. 15.
However, although there is an overlap, a change begins to show in some of the middle plays. Mihura adopts a rather neutral attitude toward the implied marriage of Carlos and Victoria and perhaps even a very faint suggestion of approval toward Juan and Irene. He does not tell us that these matings will turn out happily, but he lets us know that they might. In the later plays, in the marriages of Maribel, Dorotea, and Ninette, we see that these are definitely happy marriages accompanied by the feeling that this is what is good and right. Mihura is probably writing what he feels, and a bachelor of sixty-four, Mihura's age at this writing, probably finds his bachelorhood much less satisfactory than he did at twenty-four.

Chantraine speaks of Mihura as "antiburgués y anticonformista." Note that this comment was written in 1962. It is true that in the early plays, Mihura ridiculed the bourgeois life. But by the time we reach Mi adorado Juan, in 1956, we begin to see a shift in economic values also. True, the ambitious Manríquez is presented in a very unsympathetic light. But Juan, though he is a bohemian, is not by any means a beatnik or a bum. He has retired on the wealth he earned previously. What could be more bourgeois than that?

Still later, we find Marcelino, a rich factory owner, and we find the husbands of Dorotea and Ninette, who operate

3Jacqueline Chantraine, "Tendencias del teatro español de hoy," Thesaurus, XVII (1962), 690.
and expand their businesses. It is quite obvious that their financial as well as their personal lives will be happy. Again of course, the mature Mihura sees more value in financial security than did the twenty-four year old one.

As for being a nonconformist, a person raised in the world of the theater could hardly be anything else. But Mihura is a nonconformist in another and more important way. In today's world of watchers, he achieves this status just by being a doer. He has put himself into many fields of the entertainment world, traveled widely, made friends in all circles, and made a considerable impact on the Spanish theater.

With the exception perhaps of Dionisio and Mercedes, Mihura's leading characters are like their creator: they get out and make things happen. This attitude is probably summed up best by his own statement:

Creo que en la vida hay dos clases de personas: los espectadores y los actores. Los que pagan por ver y los que cobran por dejarse ver. El león y los que detrás de la reja forman corro mirando al león. Y yo siempre, del grupo, el que me ha parecido más listo ha sido el león.

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4Mihura, op. cit., p. 20.
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