SOCIAL CRITICISM IN THE PLAYS OF
JACINTO BENAVENTE

THESIS

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By

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The purpose of this investigation is to determine the extent and nature of criticism in the plays of Jacinto Benavente. Source material included the writings of such prominent critics of Spanish literature as Walter Starkie, Federico de Onís, Richard Chandler, Kessel Schwartz, Emiliano Diez-Echarri, José Franquesa, Federico Sainz de Robles, and Valbuena Prat. Twenty plays which best exemplify Benavente's criticism of society were selected from the dramatist's 172.

Benavente's criticism was aimed at the mores and customs of the society of Madrid of the turn of the century, the corruption of the political system of his nation, and the weak moral fibre of the rich and powerful in all societies.

The first chapter of this thesis is devoted to a brief study of the playwright's life with reference to those factors that determined or influenced Benavente's course as a social critic. The effects of his home life, travels, and study are discussed.

The second chapter is a study of Benavente's reaction to the customs and mores of society. In Gente conocida, La comida de las fieras, La gata de angora, Lo cursi, Por las nubes, and La noche del sábado, he ridicules people's misguided concern for fashion, appearance and etiquette. In
Las rosas de otoño, El hombrecito, La princesa Bebé, La escuela de las princesas, and La losa de los sueños, the playwright condemns the role that the women of his day occupied in society.

The third chapter of the thesis is devoted to Benavente's political criticism. Colonization, caciquismo, a system of political corruption and domination, and Spain's neutrality during World War I are discussed.

The fourth chapter of the thesis is a study of Benavente's views on the morality of contemporary society. In La fuerza bruta, Los cachorros, Los malhechores del bien, and Los intereses creados, he poses and tries to answer serious moral questions concerning love, marriage, religion, and money.

In conclusion, it can be said that Benavente felt that the decadence of his society was caused by the petty vices, the greed, and the corruption that make people lose sight of ideal human values. Yet, although he exposed the superficiality and corruption of society, he failed to offer solutions to the problems he presented other than to recommend self sacrifice for those who had not been corrupted by society.
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CHAPTER I

BENAVENTE'S LIFE

Jacinto Benavente was born to doña Venancia Martínez and don Mariano Benavente in Madrid on August 12, 1866. Don Mariano was a famous physician who treated the better classes of Madrid. His care for children was so highly regarded that he became known as Médico de los Niños, and after his death a statue was erected in his honor in the Parque del Retiro. His father's concern for the care of children deeply impressed Jacinto Benavente, and his own love for children is reflected in his activities and literary works.

Benavente was acquainted with the often dark and unclean conditions of schools, and protested vigorously in hope of stimulating interest and improvements in the situation. In addition to protesting, he aided a society that collected funds for milk and lunch at school for undernourished children and gave toys to poor children at Christmas (2, p. xii). He wrote for and actively sponsored a children's theater; his children's plays were El príncipe que todo lo aprendió en los libros, Ganarse la vida, Y va de cuento, La cenicienta, and El nietecito. "'Quizá sea tarde para mejorar a los hombres; por eso hemos de pensar más en los niños', escribe en una de sus Acotaciones, donde se duele de la escasa atención
que nuestros clásicos han prestado a la infancia" (10, p. 1467). His compassion for children is reflected in Por las nubes (6), where he actually reproduced on the stage incidents taken from real life (11). The same concern for the plight of childhood is shown in La princesa Bebé (3), Los malhechores del bien (5), and Lecciones de buen amor (4). The importance that the playwright placed on educating and caring for children is reminiscent of Azorín (1) and Ramón Sender (17), who made similar observations on this subject in their books Las confesiones de un pequeño filósofo and Crónica del alba, respectively.

The influence of Benavente's father did not end with the love for children that he instilled in his son. "La afición a los idiomas, la devoción a Shakespeare, son también herencia del padre" (16, p. 32). Between the ages of twelve and fifteen, Jacinto learned French, English, Italian, and some Latin; this enabled him to study the foreign theater without the aid of translations. Later in life he learned German. His father died while reading The Tempest, and later the son had Shakespeare's complete works in his two-thousand-volume personal library (9, p. 128). Completely familiar with Shakespeare's work, Benavente often quoted from it in articles and lectures (14, p. 34). He translated King Lear, and Cuento de Amor is an adaptation of Twelfth Night or What You Will. Although Walter Starkie contends that "there is a touch of the sublime coldness of Shakespeare in Benavente..."
which allows him to climb to the summit and to contemplate humanity" (18, p. 211), such critics as Marcelino Peñuelas and Gonzalo Torrente Ballester (14, p. 35), refuse to concede that there are any traces of Shakespeare in Benavente's works.

Benavente was raised in an atmosphere which developed his love for the theater and formed the basis for his plays dealing with society and politics. When Jacinto was a child, his father used to take him and his two brothers, Mariano and Avelino, to the theater. This inspired the child to construct teatritos de cartón and to present puppet shows, producing little comedies that were a "producto de su ingenio, donde intercalaba los versos que más le agradaban aprendidos de memoria" (16, p. 33). Before his audience of housemaids and youngsters, he presented the works of Shakespeare, Schiller, Molière, Lope de Vega, Calderón, Tirso de Molina, Rojas, Alarcón, Moreto, and the dramatists of the romantic theater (14, p. 16). The clientele of Jacinto Benavente's father included the aristocracy of Madrid: writers, José Echegaray and Juan Valera; politicians, Bravo Murillo, Práxedes Mateo Sagasta, Francisco Silvela, and Francisco Romero Robledo; and theatrical artists, Antonio Vico, Calvo, Emilio Mario, and María Tubau (14, p. 14). This direct contact with the wealthy helped Benavente to understand the class that he so bitterly attacks in Gente conocida, La comida de las fieras, Lo cursi, La gata de Angora, Los intereses creados, and Los malhechores del bien. His exposure
to conversations between his father and politicians of the day undoubtedly influenced his political plays on caciquismo--La farándula, El primo Román, and La gobernadora--and on colonization (El dragón de fuego).

Benavente's mother, doña Venancia, was born in a town near Madrid, and "era religiosa, católica, sin mojigatería" (13, p. 8). As a child, he frequently went with his mother when she visited her friends. "En la imaginación infantil se fijan para siempre aquellas charlas en que las mujeres hacen sus lamentaciones y confidencias" (13, p. 12). Memories of these visits and the impressions they made on him in his youth were invaluable in enabling Benavente to reproduce with authenticity conversations between women on stage. Beautiful examples of women's confidential conversations occur in Rosas de otoño. Benavente lived with his mother until her death in 1922, and there is no question of the influence she exerted upon his view of women. Although in certain plays he censured malice and false pride in women (2, p. xxvii), Benavente insisted on the equality of women in society and stressed man's moral obligations in matrimony (7, p. 560), in such plays as Rosas de otoño, El hombrecito, La losa de los sueños, La princesa Bebé, and La escuela de las princesas. Doña Venancia was the earliest and most influential inspiration for her son's feminist attitudes.

Benavente's education began at the Colegio de San José, and he received the bachillerato at the Instituto de San Isidro.
He was not a very disciplined student; however, he read extensively and independently. In 1882 he began to study law at the Universidad Central, but three years later his father died, and he immediately left school to pursue the life of a señorito madrileño and to cultivate his vocation as an author.

With no financial worries, he led the typical life of wealthy young men in Madrid: getting up late, traveling, playing chess, attending society parties and tertulias, and reading and writing. His first café was La Iberia, where a tertulía met that included such men as Núñez de Arce, Eusebio Blasco, Campoamor, Fernández Bremón, Luis Taboada, and other politicians, poets, and newsmen. In the years between 1885 and 1890, the playwright traveled to England, Germany, France, Italy, and Russia. These travels influenced him greatly. He saw the same foibles of the society of Madrid in these foreign societies, and these foreign environments inspired the imaginary international settings that he uses in El dragón de fuego, La noche del sábado, La princesa Bebé, and La escuela de las princesas. The first of these plays deals with an international issue, colonization; however, the other plays symbolically represent the society of Madrid. The time he spent in Madrid was divided "entre los salones aristocráticos, las recepciones diplomáticas, las cachupinadas de la pequeña burguesía, los cafetines de la bohemia y la biblioteca del Ateneo" (15, pp. 8-9). These activities
strengthened his understanding of the aristocracy and of its political thinking. They also gave him the opportunity of observing the middle and lower classes of Madrid. Such observations served him well in writing *Por las nubes* and *La losa de los sueños*.

In 1890, Benavente traveled with a circus performer, Geraldine, who was accompanied by a brother and sister, through various provinces of Spain. During these travels he dedicated some rather mediocre poetry to her, leading people to think that he held a romantic interest in their relationship. This circus atmosphere inspired settings for *La fuerza bruta*, *Los cachorros*, and *La noche del sábado*. His love for the circus never diminished, and he attended every Sunday afternoon when the season began in Madrid. His last attendance at a circus, according to Santiago Córdoa, was in May, 1954 (9, p. 130). Clowns were his favorite attraction, because, as Antonio Guardiola says, they act as men in ordinary life must: "siempre sonriendo..., aunque sangre en silencio nuestro corazón" (12, p. 108).

Before becoming known as a playwright, Benavente published three books: *Teatro fantástico* in 1892, *Versos* in 1893, and *Cartas de mujeres* in the same year. After receiving several plays over a period of years from Benavente, Emilio Mario, director of the Teatro de la Comedia, accepted *El nido ajeno*, which was presented on October 6, 1894. The public, accustomed to romanticism and *alta comedia*, rejected the play.
Federico Sainz de Robles says that Azorín, who wrote a flattering review of *El nido ajeno* in *Alma Española*, was the only favorable critic (15, p. 10).

By 1898 Benavente was an established writer, having presented *El nido ajeno, Gente conocida, El marido de la Téllez, De alivio, Don Juan*, a translation of Molière, *La farándula*, and *La comida de las fieras*. In addition to the three books mentioned previously, he had also published *Pigulinas* and *Vilanos*. He became identified with the "Generation of '98", which included the writers Unamuno, Maetzu, Baroja, Azorín, Valle-Inclán, Manuel Bueno, and Antonio Machado. At about this time, he attended a tertulia at the Café Madrid with Rubén Darío, Valle-Inclán, Luis Bello, Ricardo Baroja, Martínez Sierra, and other writers of the day.

Benavente had presented forty-four plays by 1905. On December 20th of that year, Galdós paid homage to him by reading a study of his theater after the presentation of one act each of *Rosas de otoño, Los malhechores del bien*, and *Sin Querer*. In the following year, he made his first lecture tour to South America, with great success. He received the Premio Piquer from the Real Academia Española in 1912; and in the same year he was elected to be a member of this academy, in order to fill the place left vacant by the death of Menéndez y Pelayo. At this time he purchased Villa Rosario, a country home. His vacations spent in the country inspired his rural plays: *Señora ama, La malquerida, La Infanzona,*
and De cerca. At the outbreak of World War I, Benavente expressed his sympathy for the Central Powers; and two years later, he presented La ciudad alegre y confiada, which is symbolic of Spain's reaction to this great conflict.

Upon his mother's death, Benavente embarked once again for South America, where he was touring when he received notice that he had been awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. From this time until his death, in 1954, Benavente continued writing prolifically and received many awards for his efforts. Some of his most notable awards were the Gran Cruz de Alfonso XII, an honorary presidency of the Montepío del Sindicato de Actores, another honorary presidency of the Confederación Nacional de Maestros, a monument sculptured by Palma and erected in Madrid, the presidency of the Comisión de Teatro, the Gran Cruz de Alfonso el Sabio, "Premio Mariano de Cavia" from the newspaper A B C, the medalla de oro from the Ministro de Trabajo, and a statue of St. Francis of Assisi, symbol of the "Premio de Literatura Teatral, 1952". In his lifetime, Benavente wrote 172 plays, several books, and numerous newspaper and magazine articles. His newspaper articles are found in a collection known as De Sobremesa, his sketches in Acotaciones, and his essays dealing with the stage in Teatro del Pueblo.

At the beginning of his career, Benavente's directness and simplicity were misunderstood and not accepted by the public. Influenced by the two preceding decades of social
criticism and by French writers such as Molière, he abolished intrigues, scenic display, dramatic play, monologues, and the aside. His plots are weak, and there is practically no action. His delineation of character and use of dialogue to express his theme have caused his dramas to be described as "'conversational' or 'drawing room' drama" (8, p. 130). In his plays dealing with society, his principal aim is to expose the fact that "all Spanish life is covered with conventions, filled with high phrases, low actions and affected thinking; and that therefore in this atmosphere human values shrink and perish" (2, p. xiv). His political criticism embodies attacks upon caciquismo, colonization, and Spain's neutrality during World War I. His satire in these plays is somewhat shallow in comparison to his ridicule of the society of Madrid. Benavente generally preferred to avoid serious political questions, and confined himself to subjects in which his feelings reflected those of a number of followers. His moral criticism deals with serious questions concerning human values. In these plays, biting satire emphasizes his strong moral opinions on love, marriage, religion, and money.
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CHAPTER II

BENAVENTE'S VIEW OF SOCIETY

Benavente's early plays are a fusion of costumbrismo and alta comedia. They develop a thesis portraying the vices of Madrid's society. Costumbrismo, a prose genre that first appeared in the eighteenth century, had as its aim the portrayal of the daily life customs of a particular society. It usually was satirical in tone. Some of its foremost cultivators were Larra, Estébanez Calderón, and Mesonero Romanos. Beginning with Leandro Fernández de Moratín and reaching its zenith in the comedies of Bretón de los Herreros, costumbrismo invades the theater of the first half of the nineteenth century. This realistic costumbrista comedy eventually develops into the alta comedia of Ventura de la Vega, Tamayo y Baus, López de Ayala, and Echegaray. Alta comedia was "a sophisticated type of thesis play based on direct observation of society" (24, p. 35). Benavente's Gente conocida, La comida de las fieras, La gata de Angora, Lo cursi, Por las nubes, El hombrecito, Rosas de otoño, La losa de los sueños, La escuela de las princesas, La princesa Bebé, and La noche del sábado contain elements of costumbrismo and alta comedia.
The Superficiality of Customs

Benavente's first plays contain an abundance of costumbrismo which allows him to censure the life and activities of the people in Madrid at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth. Born and raised in Madrid, he was familiar with the fashions and activities of its society and the lives of the madrileños because of his familiarity with the society. Angel Lázaro says that "nadie ha fustigado a la aristocracia española con sátira tan efectiva como Benavente. Doble virtud en quien nació en un medio casi aristocrático y frecuente y frecuenta el trato de la aristocracia" (20, p. 45). However Benavente's association with the aristocracy did not blind him to the existence of the lower classes. He was also able to observe their lives and present their situation on stage.

In his works the playwright accurately presents the life of the men of the better classes. Chapman says that these gentlemen arose late and went to their favorite café or club to read the newspaper. Their afternoons were spent at tertulias at their favorite club. Later they went for a drive along the paseo. They went to the same place everyday, and their principal object was to see, or be seen by, others who were doing the same. In the evening they returned to the club, and went to a play at nine-thirty or ten o'clock. This was followed by another visit to their favorite café. At last they returned home (17, pp. 522-523).
The women of the upper class, according to this historian, led a boring life. Since servants managed the housework, they had very little to do. They were fond of walks or rides in the afternoon and enjoyed social gatherings at night. At times they also attended the theater, but they usually did so in the company of female relatives and friends. On these occasions, it was not unusual for their husbands to occupy a different section of the same theater. This was a prevalent custom (17, p. 521).

In Gente conocida, Benavente ridicules the concept that married couples should not remain at each other's side. María Antonia scolds her husband, saying, "¡Toda la noche juntos! Ya habremos dado bastante que hablar" (4, p. 144). Showing that this was a new trend, María Antonia's mother, who is of the old-fashioned aristocracy, is pleased to see them together. In Lo cursi, Benavente again ridicules the custom; when Tomillares says that the new couple from America go everywhere together, Teles replies, "¡Pero eso es una cursilería" (12, p. 213)! Not only was sitting next to one's spouse considered unfashionable, but also dancing with one's wife or fiancée gave people reason to talk. At a party held in honor of the forthcoming marriage of the Duque de Garellano and Fernanda, in Gente conocida, Lilí comments, "¡Bah! Enrique es muy chic; eso de no bailar más que con la futura es una ridiculez" (4, p. 134).
In *Lo cursi*, part of the new spirit of freedom in the air concerns the *paseo* by women. Most women were accompanied by their children, maids, or female friends on their *paseo*. But Rosario tells of a modern change in this routine in the following passage:

Pregúntale a mi marido: las señoritas más distinguidas pasean en coche solas con amigos de su casa, y nadie debe asustarse; porque la mejor prueba de que nada tiene de particular, es que todo el mundo lo ve a la luz del día (12, p. 118).

Being a conservative and favoring traditional customs, he uses the previous passage to satirize the follies of people's modern behavior.

Benavente was disgusted with the superficial values of modern thinkers of this age. They placed fashion and social etiquette above virtuous behavior. They longed to be considered *chic* at all costs, and their fear of being *cursi* or unfashionable dictated their lives. Appearance, based on vanity, was more important than character, personality, or responsible attitudes towards life. Benavente exposed these superficial values mercilessly and continually.

Men's concern for their self-image was even carried to the appearance of their horses and carriages. Benavente satirizes this vanity in a conversation between the Duque de Garellano and his mother concerning the state of her carriage. Here is the conversation:

Duque: . . . ¡tú creerás que es muy divertido presentarse en paseo guiando ese par de Rocinantes!
Duquesa: ¡Un tronco magnífico, que costó en París treinta y dos mil francos!

Duque: Sí, cuando los cambios estaban bajos. ¡Bonita figura hacen ahora subiendo la cuesta de la calle de Alcalá! ¡La irrisión de la gente!


Duque: Eso sí. ¡Hay en Madrid cada tronco de caballos blancos, que fueron tordos, envejecidos al calor de la familia! Pero no es razón para que no tengamos un caballo presentable. Es una vergüenza, mamá (4, p. 128).

Obviously the duke was more concerned with the state of his horses than with that of his mother's purse, since she had finally reached the point of being forced to borrow money to satisfy his whims.

This concern with the outer image extended to clothing. In Gente conocida, one of the characters is against afternoon parties merely because he cannot wear clothes as luxurious as he can in the evening. He says, "¡No me divierten estas fiestas de día! Por la noche, con el frac, va uno tan rica-mente a todas partes! . . . ¡Pues digo, el charol de las botas! . . . ¡Y los guantes" (4, pp. 191-192)!: . . .

María Antonia, in the same play, complains of her pregnancy, saying, "He tenido que dar a ensanchar todos los vestidos; no puedo ir a ninguna parte" (4, p. 90). Her attitude towards her pregnancy reveals her superficial set of values. Concerned with her wardrobe, figure, and public image, she ignores the traditional concerns for the welfare of her child and her
future role as a mother. Women of this era often wore such
tight corsets that they eventually aborted the infant. If
the child were born, then the mother quickly placed it in
the care of a usually diseased wet nurse.

In *Lo cursi*, the characters are obsessed with fashions.
Rosario worries about her wardrobe constantly. The men also
pay inordinate attention to clothes. For example, Gasparito,
discussing clothes with Carlos, expresses in the following
statement a desire to be as well-dressed:

A propósito, Carlos, ¿sabes que no he podido
encontrar un chaleco escocés como el tuyo?
El dibujo, sí; pero el género, el género es
otra cosa. Tendré que encargarlo a Londres.
Me darás las señas del sastre (12, p. 87).

Even the women of the lower class were obsessed by fashion.
Although Josefina, in *La gata de Angora*, cannot afford to
dress fashionably, she wants to go to the Teatro Real to see
the beautiful clothes that the aristocracy wear. She con-
stantly asks her brother Aurelio such questions as "¿Y es
verdad que ahora no llevan guantes las señoritas y la moda es
llevar muchas, muchas sortijas" (7, p. 131)?

The aristocracy had expensive if not ostentatious tastes.
In *La comida de las fieras*, doña Concha describes an elaborate
dinner party such as was customary among the rich. Here is
her description:

Aquí todo se hace en grande, ya ve usted, esta
noche, para una reunión de confianza, una cena
servida en mesitas, que supone una barbaridad;
porque sirva usted a cada uno de lo que pida,
y empiece usted, de cada cosa para cada mesa.
¡Luego, como ellos no conocen a la gente de Madrid, reciben a todo el mundo, y es esto un pêle-mêle (5, p. 227):!

This type of party had as its primary purpose to impress the guests with the host's ability to afford such an elaborate gathering. The people invited were not invited for the pleasure of their company. The host merely wanted to impress a great number of people; therefore the guests were nothing more than an audience for the performance of the host. The more elaborate and expensive the party was, the more the host was admired and considered chic.

As a contrast, Benavente shows the simple tastes of the lower class and the old-fashioned Spaniards. Although the lower classes could not afford to go to the theater, they were united in simple tertulias by bonds of friendship and love. Benavente shows approval of this in the following cuadro de costumbres, from Por las nubes:

Carmen: . . . Cada noche nos reunimos en una casa; esta noche es aquí.

Pepe: ¿Juegan ustedes a algo?

Carmen: Ni eso; se charla, se lee el periódico. Hay quien se duerme (13, p. 95). . . .

In Lo cursi, although aunt Flora is rich, her gatherings also reflect the same spirit of friendship. Completely disregarding what is fashionable, she surrounds herself with people whose company she enjoys and engages in activities that please her and her friends. Her nephew, who represents the modern vain man, has this to say about her and her activities:
La quiero. Pero de eso a sorportar sus bailes, y sus comedas, y sus representaciones teatrales y sus minues y sus verbenas. . . . ¡Qué sé yo! ¡Porque humor como el de tu tía! ¡Qué señora! Sola, sin hijos, y no sabe qué inventar para divertirse y divertir a todo el mundo (12, p. 65).

To be fashionable also involved adopting foreign customs, some of which, such as the English garden party and the use of French cuisine, Benavente found objectionable. In Gente conocida Ansúrez and Torres comment:

Ansúrez: Me parece que los garden parties no se aclimatan en España: es diversión para países brumosos, donde un rayito de sol cernido entre brumas espesas se recibe con entusiasmo. Nuestro sol es mucho sol y mucha luz: no hay toilette ni cutis que lo resistan, y para las substancias químicas es un reactivo.

Torres: En Madrid, no hay que darle vueltas, somos nocharniegos por naturaleza (4, pp. 189-190).

In Lo cursi, in addition to garden parties, Benavente attacks French cuisine. Flora, representing the traditional view of life, does not approve of French cooks and explains why in this tirade:

. . . con el cocinero francés y el mozo de comedor. Pero el último día que almorcé con vosotros me hizo daño el almuerzo, y fué el lenguado; el sole, como decía el mend, que no estaba fresco. Esos cocineros saben mucho: lo sirven muy caliente, con una salsa picante, y luego es ella (12, p. 68).

In contrast to this ostentation, which the fashionable rich carried even to the table, Benavente shows the conditions under which the poor existed. The lower classes did not eat as well, because, as don Hilario says in Por las nubes, "el pan tanto, tanto las patatas, los garbanzos
tanto. . . . Y todo sube más cada día, todo está por las nubes" (13, p. 105). Furthermore, other family expenses could affect a family's food budget. In the same play, Pepe relates a poignant childhood experience that shows how medical expenses can affect a family of the lower class. Here is the story itself:

Eramos muy pequeños los cinco hermanos; el menor cayó enfermo, la enfermedad se prolongaba, mis padres no querían escasearle ningún cuidado. Un día echamos de menos el postre en la mesa. "¿No tenemos postre?", dijo uno de los pequeños. "No--contestó mi madre--, no podemos gastar tanto. Hay que comprar medicinas al hermanito." Murió poco después la pobre criatura, y pasado algún tiempo, normalizada ya la situación . . ., vimos reaparecer el postre en la mesa. Todos los pequeños palmoteamos. "¡Ya tenemos postre, ya tenemos postre!" Mi padre y mi madre se miraron tristemente; su mirada nos impuso silencio; un silencio angustioso. ¡Parecía que en vez de postre nos comíamos al hermanito (13, pp. 92-93)!

The Corruption of Society

In addition to giving an overall view of society and its faults, in Gente conocida, La comida de las fieras, La gata de Angora, Lo cursi, and Por las nubes, Benavente has particular theses to present. These theses uncover the problems that undermine the very structure of his society.

According to Charles E. Chapman, during the period of 1898-1917, Spain's society still had a strong aristocratic class "composed of the nobility, their relatives, rich merchants, the clergy, and the military" (17, p. 522). Since Gente conocida was written in 1896, one can understand why
Benavente was concerned with the entrance of rich merchants into the traditional aristocracy of Spain.

Benavente's initial lash at the aristocracy of Madrid is in *Gente conocida*, originally named *Todo Madrid*. This play is a "satire on the power of money among people whose nobility lies solely in their name, who hide behind their own misery, and who bow to the new aristocracy of money" (22, p. 76).

Here, the noble stoop to ignoble schemes in order to maintain and insure their threatened position in society. The threat is the rise of an aristocracy of wealthy, untitled businessmen. This class of people has gained control of the wealth of Spain, yet the possession of a title of nobility remains a concern. It is evident that the nobility will be forced to make certain concessions to the changing factors of the society. For example, the husband of the Condesa is gaining a livelihood with a wealthy businessman, Hilario Montes, and she explains the situation thus:

> en otros tiempos hubiera sido afrentoso para un aristócrata refinado azúcar o fabricar sidra, pero hoy . . . ¡si hasta es de buen tono! Ya ves a Montilla; dicen que está haciendo un dineral con las conservas de tomate (4, pp. 111-112).

Nevertheless, the nobility that Benavente presents is willing to prostitute itself in order to continue living as its position and title dictate.

The decadence of this society has not left the aristocracy unscarred. A marriage is planned between Fernanda de Fondelvalle, who is believed to be the heiress of Hilario Montes,
and the Duque de Garellano. This arrangement is satisfactory to all until it is learned that the wealthy Montes has acknowledged an illegitimate daughter, Angelita, who will undoubtedly inherit his fortune. The aristocrats then scheme to marry the Duque de Garellano to Angelita.

In the end, all the base schemes of the nobility are destroyed by Angelita's uncorrupted conscience. Raised and educated without the influence of intrigues, malicious gossip, and deceitful conduct, which were becoming increasingly characteristic of Madrid's high society, she is free from its entanglements. A purity and honesty as to human values had permeated her conscience before her arrival in Madrid. Therefore, she has the strength to refuse to become an accomplice to the aristocrats' wicked schemes. She refuses to make a mockery of the sacred sacrament of matrimony. Alone she battles, saying that she is "una sola conciencia despierta entre tantas conciencias dormidas. Estoy sola, pero soy fuerte. Creo y confío en mí" (4, p. 224). Angelita is an individual surrounded by a corrupt society. Benavente seems to imply that many members of this society should follow her example. "The aristocracy of cleverness, of talent, of politics, of tricks, plays with the aristocracy of race and money, and exploits them to its advantage, but it is powerless before the aristocracy of the individual" (25, p. 46).

One can readily see that Benavente depicts "an aristocracy without morality, conscience, or any check except
selfishness" (2, p. xiii). Madrid's aristocracy behaves in a manner that is unbecoming of decent society. Needless to say, the aristocracy has always been placed above the other levels of society, but it fails to exemplify, in this case, the virtuous conduct that should be characteristic of the honorable position it occupies. In a conversation with her son-in-law, the Duquesa de Garellano laments this truth:

Duquesa: ¡Ay, Carlos! En estos tiempos la nobleza no puede ser respetada si no es respetable. Ten presente esta reflexión.

Carlos: Y en estos tiempos no se respeta más que al dinero. ¡Feliz quien lo reúne a la virtud! ¡Feliz quien como tú lo reúne todo (4, p. 102)!

It is lamentable that a once glorious nobility could exchange its virtue for monetary values.

La comida de las fieras opens with an auction of the house, furnishings, and personal belongings of a noble family that has been forced to abdicate its position. The people who have taken advantage of the hospitality of the former owners hypocritically sympathize with them as they carefully remain alert for possible bargains. They are "las fieras devorando al domador que no puede arrojarles más carne" (23, p. 56). The tragedy is repeated again in the play, with another family from America. Tomillares beautifully expresses the moral of the drama, which reveals the hypocritical society in its base nakedness:

La sociedad humana es democrática por naturaleza, tiende a la igualdad de continuo, y sólo a duras penas tolera que nadie sobresalga de la común
medianía; para conseguirlo es preciso una fuerza: poder, talento, hermosura, riqueza; alrededor de ella, aterrorizados más que respetuosos, se revuelven los hombres como fieras mal domadas; pero al fin, el domador cuida de alimentarlas bien, y el poder ofrece destinos, la riqueza convites, el talento sus obras, y las fieras parecen amansadas; hasta que un día falta la fuerza, decae el talento, envejece la hermosa, se derrumba el poder, desaparece el dinero . . . ., y aquel día, ¡Oh!... ¡ya se sabe, la comida más sabrosa de las fieras es el domador (5, p. 221)!

The corrupt society that Benavente so acridly satirizes is able to destroy the material wealth of the unfortunate couple from America, but it does not affect their love or self-respect. Hipólito dryly affirms the fact that "no contaban ellos con que habíamos salvado de la ruina nuestra conciencia" (5, p. 275). Like Angelita, in Gente conocida, this couple remains uncorrupted despite society.

Ismael Sánchez Estevan says that Benavente does not abandon his satirical formula in La gata de Angora, but "dió el comediógrafo preferencia a un proceso sentimental" (23, p. 62). The love of Aurelio for the beautiful noblewoman, Silvia, clad in white like a cat, serves to entangle the capable artist in a society of pseudo-intellectuals supported by the aristocracy. Their love, however, is false. It is a tool that the playwright employs to show how society affects the potential of a good artist. As soon as Aurelio enters the "painted salons of society," his muse declines (25, p. 52). A friend, Pepe, early in the play attempts to forewarn Aurelio of the pitfalls he may encounter by becoming entangled in society. He has
realized the consequences upon Aurelio's production of art, because he is watching Aurelio's art gradually disintegrate and lose its beauty. Talented artists become the pets of the rich and are subjected to their whims. He accuses Aurelio of becoming an "artista domesticado, . . . porque no es otro el papel que hacemos los artistas entre esa gente" (7, p. 133). He continues his advice, upon being asked if an artist should not live in society:

En sociedad sí; en una sociedad, no. Juzga por ti; cuando veías de lejos, entreveías apenas a esas mujeres elegantes, las pintabas mejor. Ahora te amaneras, adulas sin darte cuenta; has dejado de ver artísticamente. Es natural; buscas ante todo el aplauso más directo, el más cercano, el del círculo que te rodea: sacrificas tu sentimiento sincero del arte a ese resultado más inmediato, más fácil (7, p. 134).

This passage aptly describes the effect of a twisted society on a pure intelligence. Walter Starkie is more correct than Sánchez in saying, "It is a coldly intellectual play, written not to produce emotion but rather to observe satirically that white elegance of a perverted society" (25, p. 52). Here an elevated ideal of intellectualism is stained by its exposure to a society that regards it as a plaything. Aurelio discovers that the fabulous society which seduced him is a false and almost fatal inspiration.

Jacinto Benavente had at one time been the editor of La vida literaria, a Modernist review. Some critics felt that in Lo cursi he was attacking "the Modernists of Spain as having gone too far in attributing vulgarity to everything
which did not smack of the Bohemian . . . " and undermining what he considered to be the traditional values of society (16, p. 13). This idea is somewhat ironical, since he had supported La vida literaria. Benavente's criticism in Lo cursi is not directed towards this literary movement but against society's foolish reaction to this movement. Madrid's aristocracy reacted with a "temor a parecer poco distinguidos, que forzaba a muchas gentes a proceder contra sus gustos, hasta contra sus sentimientos y su propia conciencia" (12, p. 65).

Juan Valera says that the word cursi originated in Cádiz from a nickname given to the gaudily-dressed daughters of a poor tailor, Sicur. By exchanging the syllables of the tailor's name, the word was used to refer to anything that was poor and that attempted to assume a higher position. According to Walter Starkie, Benavente satirizes "the new Bohemians in literature who applied the word cursi to everything that was admired by the bourgeois" (25, pp. 54-55). But Benavente's criticism goes farther. He seems depressed by the influence of these superficial values upon society itself and the effect of society on the traditional values of his nation. In Lo cursi, the Marqués represents the traditional standard of virtue and proper behavior that the playwright admired. Acting as Benavente's spokesman, he says:

Sí, hijo mío, la invención de la palabra "cursi" complicó horriblemente la vida. Antes existía lo bueno y lo malo, lo divertido y lo
aburrido, y a ellos se ajustaba nuestra conducta. Ahora existe lo cursi, que no es lo bueno ni lo malo, ni lo que divierte ni lo que aburre; es una negación: lo contrario de lo distinguido; es decir, una cosa cada día; porque en cuanto hay seis personas que piensan o hacen lo mismo, ya es preciso pensar y hacer otra cosa para ser distinguido; y por huir de lo cursi se hacen tonterías, extravagancias . . ., hasta maldades (12, p. 81).

As seen in the previous speech, Benavente's intention in *Lo cursi* is to expose the dangers of this new mode of thought to the security of the foundation of society, the institution of the family. Rosario's fear of being *cursi* almost destroys her marriage. A tragic end to this happy marriage would have given a victory to the superficial values that were beginning to affect Madrid's society. In several instances in the play, Benavente "satirizes bitterly the new spirit of freedom which was undermining the cardinal virtues of Spain" (25, p. 56). For example, one particular wedded couple maintain separate households, a custom in accordance with what they consider to be *de buen tono*. The effect of this arrangement is observed in their daughters' twisted sense of values. Rosario, educated in a province, indicates in a conversation with her tía Flora that she realizes her precarious position, saying, "Gente así, gente como yo, gente que no ve con tranquilidad que se juge con el peligro. Y esa libertad de trato entre hombres y mujeres es siempre peligrosa" (12, p. 141). Aware of this danger, she conquers her fear of being *cursi* and is able to demonstrate her jealousy honorably. By pretending to accept the proposals of a lover, she forces her husband
to reject his modernistic attitudes, and thus saves the marriage. Agustín finally realizes that the basis of marriage is "respeto y consideración" (12, p. 160), and that "lo bueno nunca es cursi" (12, p. 176).

An extremely bleak picture of Madrid's lower class is presented in Por las nubes. This play is not a form of alta comedia, as are the four previous plays discussed; but it has the same purpose. A sadness prevails in the environment shown. The poverty in the play dominates the setting and adds to the depressing effect of society upon the protagonist, Julio. Although there is a slight element of satire concerning unimportant eccentricities of the poor class of people, the play cannot be considered a satire. Benavente's criticism of a society that stifles ambition and forces people to assume positions that they do not hold reveals a dismal situation. Julio feels smothered by his environment. The poverty that envelops the lives of his family seems to choke him. The family doctor blames the illness of Julio's sister on "pobreza, pobreza de sangre, pobreza de vida . . ., pobreza de todo" (13, p. 101). Julio plans to marry and go to America, where he hopes to find his fortune, even though he realizes that such an action will cause even greater hardship on his widowed mother and sister. Nevertheless, it is the only hope that he can see for his future. Deserted by his fiancée, he leaves for America, anyway. Benavente's intention here is to show the pathetic situation of Madrid's
lower class. These people cannot rise economically or socially in Madrid.

Benavente's "verdadero mundo, el que conoce a fondo y llena la mayor parte de sus obras, es el madrileño" (21, p. 12). However, La noche del sábado takes place in an imaginary country somewhere between France and Italy. Benavente traveled extensively in his youth to many European nations, and found in these other societies the same faults that he had encountered at home. La noche del sábado cannot be considered alta comedia, because it presents characters from all walks of life—royalty, aristocracy, and common people. One can even recognize novelistic tendencies here. The author called it a "novela escénica en cinco cuadros" (10, p. 173).

In the first act, Prince Miguel receives a telegram saying that the Emperor of Suavia has just had a son. The telegram is a relief to Prince Florencio, who had been the heir until then. At the end of Act I, Imperia, Prince Miguel's mistress, tells the story of her former life of poverty, and acknowledges a daughter, Donina, who is working in a circus. The second act is set in the circus, where Prince Florencio and his secretary, Harry Lucenti, are arranging an orgy. Donina is in love with Nunú, another circus performer, but the rogue accepts payment from Prince Florencio to bring her to the orgy. Learning this, Imperia decides to attend in order to protect her daughter. In the
third act, Imperia arrives at the party, but before she enters, shouts announce the fact that Donina has stabbed Florencio. The fourth act takes place at Imperia's home, where she has hidden the body. Florencio's death and that of the emperor's son have made Miguel the heir to the throne. Imperia convinces Miguel that the truth of Florencio's death must be hidden. In the fifth act, Donina dies upon learning that Nunú has been paid to pretend he loves her, and that she is a barrier to her mother's becoming the Empress of Suavia.

In *Gente conocida*, Benavente satirizes the debauchery of the aristocrats. Carlos shows the difference that money makes in people's opinion of debauchery when he says, "mientras tuvimos dinero éramos dos personas distinguidas, que hacen la vida correspondiente a su clase; hoy, haciendo lo mismo, somos unos perdidos, unos viciosos" (4, p. 196). Benavente satirizes this facet of society more extensively and bitterly in *La noche del sábado*. Imperia's vivid description of Prince Florencio reveals the absolute wickedness of his actions. She says:

A su lado sólo se respira el odio, la miseria, la vergüenza. Sus queridas han de vestir harapos y son maltratadas sin piedad; se rodea de miserables y, a fuerza de dinero, no hay infamia que no consiga: Entrega una niña a un viejo repugnante; un mozo fuerte y sano a una mujerzuela enferma, y compra las hijas a los padres, las hermanas a los hermanos (10, p. 241).

Prince Florencio is a wicked and perverted man, but since
he is a prince, society permits him, and the aristocracy of Madrid, to act as they please. Without their wealth, these men could not behave as they do.

The superficiality of the relationships between people in these societies is a fault that Benavente presents in *Gente conocida*, *La comida de las fieras*, and *La noche del sábado*. Friendship is the basis of society; without it, society must inevitably crumble, unless its members agree to be bound by hypocrisies and falsehoods.

José María Viqueira says:

En *La comida de las fieras* se nos presenta un cuadro moral de la sociedad elevada, en el cual contemplamos un despliegue de todas las hipocresías adulaciones y falsas amistades, derrumbadas estrepitosamente al menor soplo de contrariedad o de ausencia de utilitarismo. Es un desfile irónico y cruel, de esos mal llamados amigos de que la vida--y más la opulenta y lujosa--está empedrada. Tremendo cuadro de enorme vigor educativo este de la escena benaventina . . ., porque de verdad, esos falsos amigos son como fieras que sólo sirven para devorar, si pueden, al que llaman amigo (27, p. 64).

In *Gente conocida*, the same situation exists in some cases. The hypocrisy of the maintaining of civility by the Condesa de Fondelvalle and Petra is blatantly evident. The following is another example of this type of friendship:

Duque: . . . ¿Nada más hallaste en nuestra sociedad?

Petra: Sí. Algunos amigos fieles logrados a costa de sacrificar mucho a su amistad y de no exigir nada en pago (4, p. 124).

There is not, however, a lack of true friendship, because the heroine, Angelita, forms such a friendship with Fernanda.
La comida de las fieras is an "análisis del cinismo y crueldad que hay en el fondo de la sociedad mundana, mostrados al desnudo con motivo de la ruina de uno de sus miembros" (21, p. 21). The members of this worldly society are willing to sell their "friendship" to the wealthy. At parties and dinners, they smile, flatter, and pretend to enjoy the company of the host. Nevertheless, they are hypocrites beneath the superficiality of their social conduct. "The idea is that a selfish interest attracts and holds a certain following to the possessors of wealth, beauty, and talent; but, if that bond be dissolved, desertion follows" (2, p. xiv). Although Benavente is chiefly concerned with the actions of the weakened aristocracy and the powerful nouveaux riches, he includes a servant girl in his agglomeration of selfish favor-seekers. Filomena desires a favor from the outcast couple; and, in order to obtain it, she deceitfully proclaims, "yo sé agradecer el pan que como" (5, p. 266). Thus the dramatist shows that all levels of society are subject to this fault.

In La noche del sábado, the superficiality of a certain type of relationship is shown in the following conversation between Prince Miguel and Lady Seymour:

Príncipe Miguel: . . . Milady, acaban de decirme que no os agrada la presencia de Harry Lucenti.

Lady Seymour: En efecto; nadie recibe a ese hombre en su casa.
Príncipe Miguel: Perdonad. Me pareció haberos visto hablando con él ayer mismo en el casino.

Lady Seymour: Y muchas veces; pero nunca delante de mi marido.

Príncipe Miguel: Es que a vuestro marido también le he visto conversando con él en la mayor intimidad.

Lady Seymour: De seguro; pero nunca delante de mí.

Príncipe Miguel: La corrección inglesa es más complicada de lo que yo creía.

Lady Seymour: Es respetabilidad (10, p. 185).

Benavente also uses this opportunity to demonstrate his dislike of the British and their society.

The greatest vice of society that is satirized is its regard for money and material objects. Benavente believes that such a regard is a disgusting excuse for the scheming ambitions of the aristocracy in Gente conocida. The Duque of Garellano's ambition is to obtain money by marrying the daughter of Hilario Montes. The weakness of the aristocracy begins to show at this point, when the Duque declares to his mother:

. . . pero yo no me caso sin dinero. No estoy dispuesto a soportar en el matrimonio la vida humillante del aristócrata tronado.

En tus tiempos la aristocracia deslumbraba con el brillo de sus títulos. Hoy un título lo tiene cualquiera; se dan y se venden por nada, y al que tiene dinero, y lo sabe gastar, nadie le pregunta de dónde ha venido (4, p. 127).

"El Duque de Garellano, cuando quiera vender su nombre, lo venderá en lo que vale, y todavía vale mucho" (4, p. 176).
The Duke is aware that he has something to offer the emerging class of the *nouveau riche*, and is correct in sensing the changes of his times. On the other hand, Hilario Montes is a shrewd man and realizes the power he possesses; he boasts, "Dadme un hombre que necesite dinero; dadme el dinero que ese hombre necesite, y haré de ese hombre . . . lo que yo quiera. . . . Aunque ese hombre sea el Duque de Garellano" (4, p. 164).

The aristocracy employs any means, regardless of the consequences, in its search for material wealth. The social climber, Petra, has no feelings of guilt or shame regarding her marriage to Hilario Montes, contrived in order to better her position in society and to increase her wealth. The Condesa de Fondelvalle is neither astounded nor tormented by rumors that accuse her of infidelity with Montes, and that identify her daughter as the fruit of this sin. Furthermore, it is strongly insinuated that she promotes these rumors for selfish interests.

Imperia, in *La noche del sábado*, has an equally strong and ambitious drive for material gain. In her striving for her goal, she sacrifices her virtue, respectability, and the life of her daughter. Benavente shows that people have no regard for virtue when it stands in the way of their goal. Rinaldi alludes to Imperia's goals by saying, "Pues ¿qué mejor imperio que el dinero para dominar al mundo? A esa realidad más práctica habrán quedado reducidos los
sueños imperiales de nuestra Imperia" (10, p. 246). Leonardo had made the crown of Imperia's statue of gold, "porque dorada es la luz, y era un trono de luz, de sueño, de ideal" (10, p. 264). He represents the author's opinion of the goal that ambitious people should seek. It is clear, however, that Imperia does not seek the ideal of goodness, but that her intention is "atesorar, atesorar; el dinero es la fuerza; con él todo se consigue: el bien o el mal, la justicia o la venganza" (10, p. 248).

Aurelio's ambition to become a famous artist is smothered by the society presented in La gata de Angora. His art cannot survive in the superficial atmosphere that society imposes upon it. His ideals are good, but only ambitious people without consciences can prosper in a decadent society.

Another fault that Benavente exposes in Spain's society is the fact that "Spaniards do not expect to rise from poverty to great wealth, as men do in America, for so few of them rarely can" (16, p. 523). He shows this aspect of Madrid's society in Por las nubes. The existing structure of society forbids the poor to rise. Julio attempts to explain this to his sister by saying:

¡Pero la vida aquí es imposible. ...
He buscado algún otro empleo, alguna solución, pero aquí es inútil. Esta situación penosa para todos, no puede prolongarse, como al fin ha de resolverse de modo violento, más vale que lo sea del todo. Separación completa, nueva vida, otra vida es lo mejor (13, p. 150).

He needs a fresh start in life, and the others in his social
class need it also. He realizes that he is trapped in a society that forces the individual to maintain a false appearance of material well-being. The deception is based on a false idea of social decorum. Manolo sadly acknowledges that "en nuestra clase no hay que pensar en revoluciones; ni somos bastante pobres para que se nos compadezca, ni bastantes fuertes para que se nos tema" (13, p. 162). Their poverty would not be so great if they did not sacrifice the necessities of life in order to maintain an illusion.

Benavente, in *La comida de las fieras*, also expresses his preference for America, where the possibilities for material and spiritual advancement are available equally to all. Pondering on his recent bankruptcy, Hipólito observes that

> En América el hombre significa algo; es una fuerza, una garantía . . .; se lucha, sí, pero con primitiva fiereza; cae uno y puede volver a levantarse; pero en esta sociedad vieja, la posición es todo, el hombre nada . . .; vencido una vez, es inútil volver a luchar (5, p. 272).

Seeking one's fortune in America could possibly be the solution that the playwright offers to the lower middle class of Madrid. Julio regards his future in America as an opportunity to establish himself as an individual. The money that he earns will be his own, and "no de las apariencias a que me obliga esta medianía social" (13, p. 162).
The Role of Women in Society

"No other single factor has contributed to so great a degree to Benavente's success . . . as his revelation of the heart of woman" (1, p. 204). He was concerned about woman's child-like role in society. Some critics compare his writing stylistically to Ibsen's (18, 19, 22, 26), but a comparison of their feminist views is more pertinent.

Charged that he borrowed the character of the strong woman in Gente conocida from Ibsen (15, p. xvii), Benavente replied in the following analysis of the play:

Ya ven ustedes que, ahondando algo, también aparecen sus puntas y ribetes de ibsenismo en mis escenas; pero confieso que no fué esa mi intención y que sólo en este momento me hago cargo de que pudiera tener mi obra esa significación (4, p. 87).

Referring to Gente conocida, Walter Starkie says that Benavente follows "Ibsen in making the climax of his play show the revolt of woman against the conventions and hypocrisies of society" (25, p. 42). Starkie also compares other female characters to those of Ibsen (25, pp. 61, 68), but implies that Benavente was too realistic to allow his women to be as rebellious as those of the Norwegian writer. Benavente, like Martínez Sierra, extolls the virtues of the Spanish wife and mother, and "continually expresses the belief that Spanish women are happy only in the home as wives and mothers" (25, p. 75). Thus, his works show that he is torn between his desire for a better role for women in society
and his conviction that Spanish women do not desire liberation.

*El hombrecito* presents an aspect of matrimony that Benavente found repellent. In the play the author decries the fact that women must choose between the nunnery and marriage, and that many of the unions are made out of convenience rather than love. In *El hombrecito*, the couple involved knows that they do not love each other, yet they consider such marriage a social obligation. Benavente disliked the fact that women in Spain had for centuries been held in low esteem. This attitude naturally limited the freedom of women in society. The playwright was a feminist because of his feelings towards the situation.

The attack that Benavente makes on marriages of convenience was "acaso excesivamente atrevida para su época" (23, p. 93). Nislo's attitude towards marriage, as expressed in *La moral del divorcio*, is reminiscent of Angelita's, in *Gente conocida*. Needless to say, the following speech of Nislo indicates precisely Benavente's attitude on the subject:

> Mire usted, querida amiga, el matrimonio, o no es nada o es algo muy serio, y si es algo serio, aunque pretendamos desentendernos de su seriedad, su seriedad, al fin, se impone, como en todo lo que de verdad es serio en la vida (9, p. 1036).

The protagonist of *El hombrecito*, Nené, is also appalled at the desecration of an institution she regards highly. Knowing that her brother's main interest regarding his forthcoming
marriage is the dowry involved, and that he plans to continue an illicit love affair, she confronts him, saying, "Y te casas sin cariño, engañando a una mujer sin experiencia de la vida, que no puede comprender que nada te obligue a la mentira, como yo no puedo comprenderlo" (3, p. 75). Perhaps it is Nené's love for Enrique that prevents her from understanding why "se casan por casarse, por disponer de una fortuna, por ser dueños de una casa bien puesta en que recibir a sus amigos y lucir en sociedad" (3, pp. 94-95).

In any case, she also expresses Benavente's attitude towards marriage. Affirming that she cannot marry with levity or inconstancy, she says that "la vida propia ya es algo muy serio, pero el lazo que une otra vida a la nuestra para siempre, que nos hace responsables de ella, es algo más serio todavía, que bien vale la pena de pensar seriamente" (3, p. 57). Benavente continually stresses the seriousness of marriage.

Benavente's play displeased Madrid's society. The playwright's exposure of the importance of money in the role of uniting life partners, and his obvious concern for the Spanish woman's role in her nation drew public disfavor. A noteworthy nineteenth-century critic, Manuel Bueno, explained the situation. "'La hipocresía del público y su cerrazón mental . . . han sido causa de que la obra haya sido rechazada con agresivas muestras de esquivez'" (23, p. 93).
The playwright begins El hombrecito by presenting a personality that resembles the heroines of Ibsen's plays. Nené is torn between attempting to free herself from this society and remaining as its accomplice. "Like the heroines of Ibsen she struggles to emancipate herself from the primitive feelings that weigh down the majority of women" (25, p. 68). Nené's dilemma is not resolved by a romantic abandonment of the traditional duty to her good name and family; Benavente recognized the need for corrections within the society, and for improvements in the status of women. Nevertheless, he also believed that

"La mujer es el mayor obstáculo a todo lo que pudiera emanciparla, mejorar su condición social; ella es la rémora de todas sus vindicaciones, de sus derechos; la que se opone a las leyes y a las costumbres que pudieran darle mayor libertad, mayor independencia" (20, p. 83).

Therefore, had Nené left with Enrique, an unhappily married man, the situation would have been absurdly unrealistic to the Madrid audience, and to the author.

In spite of the satire in El hombrecito, the play ends on a tragic note, because Nené's awareness of the faults of her society deforms her personality. She lacks the courage necessary to act as her conscience dictates. Forced to remain in the farce of her environment, Nené submits to a future involvement with Enrique in secrecy. She admits in her last speech that her personality has changed because of her lack of strength to maintain a strong character. She laments the
fact "que he aprendido a vivir . . ., como todos . . ., y ya lo ves . . ., acepto la vida" (3, p. 130).

Written two years after El hombrecito, Rosas de otoño appears to be a reversal of Benavente's conception of a woman's role in society. Nené is a rebel who fails in her attempt to defy conventions. The result of her weakness is a tragic submission that changes her personality. In Rosas de otoño, Isabel is the Spanish woman who is not rebellious, sees her duty as a wife, and considers herself victorious in the end. The long-standing Spanish idea of the double standard regarding sexual relations dictates her duty as a wife. The traditional Spanish woman should ignore her husband's transgressions and remain silent. Benavente did not agree with this idea of a wife's submissive role, and wrote Rosas de otoño as "a poignant satire on the position of women in matrimony that Isabel should have had to resign herself to be thus treated by her husband" (25, p. 71). Consequently, he is still expressing his borderline feminist attitude, but here he uses a different technique. By presenting Isabel as a traditional Spanish wife, he allows the tragic effects of her position to reveal themselves.

As mentioned earlier, the playwright considered marriage a serious and respectable institution. Nené and Isabel both struggle fruitlessly against society. At first, Isabel attacks that society for forcing women to present "esa falsa alegría con que tratamos, más que de engañar a los demás, de
engañarnos a nosotros mismos" (14, p. 81). Her daughter, María Antonia, expressing the same sentiment, is filled with indignation at the thought of absolute resignation, when she experiences the first disillusionments of marriage. María Antonia attempts to reject society's dictates by leaving her husband, but she is eventually reunited to him. Aside from several scathing remarks against the conventions of her society, Isabel meekly accepts her fate, renouncing any traces of animosity for her husband or for the system. Symbolizing the ideal Spanish wife and mother, she must fail in the role of a rebellious feminist. Benavente, "as a follower of Shakespeare .. . . cannot forget that he is depicting human life" (15, p. xxi). Once again he must choose the realistic course of action.

Isabel is one of those women who "suffer many wrongs from their husbands, but protected by the Church, which is the pillar of constituted authority, they remain silent, firmly convinced in their hearts that resignation is a virtue" (25, p. 73). She considers her reward to be her husband's complete and faithful love in old age, which she calls "las Rosas de Otoño." The roses of autumn, she continues, "no son las flores del amor, son las flores del deber cultivadas con lágrimas de resignación, con aroma del alma, de algo eterno" (14, p. 163). Isabel may have believed that in fulfilling what she considers her obligation to her husband, she has redeemed him by her goodness. Although Isabel leaves the stage content, the
overall picture of her suffering through the years confirms the fact that Benavente was opposed to such blind behavior.

The women in *Rosas de otoño* and *El hombrecito* are victims of conventionalities regarding the matrimonial behavior of women in Madrid. Its society can forgive the illicit affairs of men, but if a woman is guilty of a sexual transgression, there can be no forgiveness. A woman is condemned by society and forced to enter a convent or forfeit all rights of decent society. Rosina is faced by this aspect of society in *La losa de los sueños*. In her plight, she rebels successfully against a society that deems it necessary to condemn her. Deserted by her lover, and insulted by her sisters, who represent society, Rosina determines to fulfill her maternal obligations. She will not leave home, deciding in a spirit of self-inflicted punishment, to make it symbolically her grave. She is capable of deciding her own future, unlike Nené and Isabel, who succumb to the dictates of society. They are not strong enough to take positive action regarding their situations. Rosina does so, justifying her action by saying, "Para abandonar a un hijo no hay razón nunca. Yo soy mujer y soy débil y estoy sola y cumplo con mi deber, que es aceptar las consecuencias de mi falta, que son bien penosas y bien pudieran acobardarme, y nunca me he sentido más fuerte" (8, p. 120).

As he does in *La noche del sábado* and *El dragón de fuego*, in *La princesa Bebé* and *La escuela de las princesas*, Benavente
"se escapa de los estrechos límites de la sociedad madrileña y de las exigencias de la naturalidad, para penetrar en un mundo cosmopolita e internacional" (21, p. 23). These international settings serve him to portray the role of women symbolically. Although princesses, these ladies still have no choice in deciding their fate, because their rebellious natures bring them only sorrow. Society will not allow them to escape the duties imposed on their lives.

In La princesa Bebé, Princesa Elena leaves her husband and elopes with his secretary, Alberto Rosmer, in search of love and true happiness. She wants to escape from "la sociedad entera con sus leyes, con su moral, con sus mentiras" (11, p. 151). Her cousin, Esteban, pities her because "ella amó en el caballero Rosmer una vida distinta de la suya; el caballero, en cambio, sólo amó en ella a la princesa de Suavia. Ni uno ni otro han hallado en su amor lo que soñaban" (11, p. 226). He knows that "la mujer que deja a su marido por un amante, desmerece menos que la que deja después al amante por otro, aunque sea por volver con su marido" (11, p. 227). When society refuses to allow her to forget her station in life, Princesa Elena bitterly learns that "la felicidad no existe en la vida. .. . Sólo existen momentos felices" (11, p. 238).

In La escuela de las princesas, Princesa Constanza refuses to marry Príncipe Alberto, as the king has arranged, because she loves Alejandro, a soldier. Her younger sister,
Felicidad, agrees to marry Príncipe Alberto, and Constanza gladly forfeits her right to inherit the throne. Like Rosmer, in *La princesa Bebé*, Alejandro is only interested in gaining the throne by a successful marriage. Therefore, "la que quiso vivir su vida, como una heroína de Ibsen" (6, p. 136), learns that her rebellion has failed. Her position in society does not permit her to make competent decisions.

Benavente feels that women should be allowed to live their own lives; but in these last two plays, he symbolically shows that "las mujeres, por muy altas que estén, no dejan nunca de ser mujeres, es decir víctimas, seres sacrificados al capricho o el amor del hombre" (19, p. 102).
1. Alarcón, Mariano, "Benavente as an Interpreter of Woman," *Poet Lore*, XXXIX (March, 1918), 201-205.


CHAPTER III

BENAVENTE'S VIEW OF POLITICS

It is impossible to categorize Benavente politically. He has been described as a monarchist, a liberal, a fascist, and a marxist. An example of his changing beliefs is that during the Spanish Civil War, he declared himself to be on the side of the Republic (12, p. 136). Yet after the dramatist's death, Santiago Córdoba interviewed his secretary, Luis Hurtado, whom he asked about "don Jacinto y la República." Luis Hurtado replied, "En ningún momento estuvo de acuerdo con ellos; ni en la guerra (8, p. 127)." This contradiction is also shown in Benavente's works. Supporting the Republic, he wrote Santa Rusia, in 1932, but in 1940 he praised Franco in his play Aves y pájaros (12, pp. 136-137). His political criticism appeared indirectly in such plays as La escuela de las princesas, La princesa Bebé, and La última carta. However, he specifically criticized particular political policies in the following plays: La farándula, El primo Román, La Gobernadora, El dragón de fuego, and La ciudad alegre y confiada. In these plays, the playwright directly approached the problems of caciquismo, colonization, and Spain's policy of neutrality during World War I, all of which he deplored and felt it necessary to expose.
Caciquismo

Benavente chose imaginary settings for the three plays that dealt with caciquismo. La farándula, written in 1897, was the first one to be set in his imaginary provincial town of Moraleda. Four years later, he used Moraleda as the setting in La gobernadora. A month later, El primo Román was presented, situated in "un pueblo de Castilla" (3, p. 184). He used these imaginary settings in order to demonstrate caciquismo as an evil that afflicted the typical Spanish provincial city, not to describe the situation in any specific town or region.

Caciquismo was a political-boss system whereby a cacique exerted considerable influence in the political or administrative affairs of a community. Benavente deplored this system, which flourished in the provinces of Spain. In La farándula and El primo Román, he skillfully portrays the role of the shrewd "city slicker" who swoops down upon a province, smothers the people with patriotic speeches, and eventually swindles the simple people out of their precious votes with the aid of a deceived and greedy cacique. In La gobernadora, the liberal attitudes of the common people of the town are pitted against the conservative control exercised by the aristocracy and the church over their government. The pressures brought to bear upon the provincial governor by his wife, secretary, and political factions eventually produce a man capable of holding strong convictions.
that enable him to govern justly. This play shows in essence a triumph over caciquismo.

In La farándula, Don Gonzalo Hinestrosa, with his secretary, Aurelio, has become a guest of the cacique, Juan Manuel. Don Gonzalo takes complete advantage of this household to further his political campaign. Eventually he is victorious, but his base and shallow intentions are skillfully exposed by Aurelio, who despises the role that he plays in the political farce. Aurelio reveals the senselessness and evils of his employer, as seen by Benavente's point of view. The farándula was a traveling theatrical company that gave performances in Spanish villages. One can clearly see the satirical comparison drawn between this type of theatrical company and the theatrics inherent in the campaigns of politicians. The title of the play is appropriate to Benavente's ridicule of these campaigns.

In this play, Aurelio is responsible for writing Gonzalo's political speeches and for sending newspaper editorials filled with false praise of Gonzalo to Madrid. Nevertheless, able to see the hypocrisy that permeates his job, he justifies his position by claiming to have put his intelligence "al servicio de su partido, como el obrero pone sus manos al servicio del maestro que le paga" (5, p. 129). He aptly describes Benavente's opinion of the typical politician, in the following speech:
¡Siempre la misma farsa! ¡El eterno discurso! Empieza con un saludo a la provincia; recuerdos históricos, monumentos ..., invocación al patrón o patrona de la localidad ..., frases hechas del país católico por excelencia, las veneradas tradiciones, etc., etc. Saludo al bello sexo, asegurando siempre que las mujeres más hermosas son las últimas. ... Después himno patriótico, marcha de Cádiz. ... Después un poco de Aritmética, párroco a la inglesa ..., mucha estadística, el 99 por 100, el 49 por 50, etc., y el final, ya se sabe ...: cuando se está en la oposición ..., ¡viva la Libertad!, primero; ¡viva la Monarquía! después. Esta precedencia siempre causa efecto amenazador. ... Cuando se está en el Poder ..., ¡viva la Monarquía!, y a la Libertad que la parta un rayo. ¡Qué farsa! Y así andamos de lugar en lugar, como la antigua farándula (5. p. 131).

There is not such a vociferous spokesman for Benavente in El primo Román as is Aurelio in La gobernadora, but the same shameful entanglements of Madrid politicians and caciques are revealed in this play by an old servant named Magín. Doña Salomé has allowed her nephew Román, from Madrid, to be her houseguest while he campaigns in the city. Román has been promised aid in this election by his aunt's servant, Romualdo, in exchange for helping financially the latter’s son, a student in Madrid. Romualdo solicits the help of Gatejo, an experienced electioneer. After diligent persuasive methods are employed, Román is elected as diputado of the small city.

Magín describes Román in terms similar to those Aurelio uses with reference to don Gonzalo, in La farándula. He says that Román deceives "con cuatro discursos a esa pobre gente que le vota" (3. p. 259), and that his ambition forces him to spend his life "engañando a los unos, implorando de los
otros, comprando y vendiéndose" (3, p. 201). In one of Magín's speeches, Benavente sarcastically speaks of the lack of responsibility with which these politicians regard their jobs:

Pues mira: diputados son unos señores que se reúnen todos los días en un salón, el Congreso, un palacio que hay en Madrid. Pues . . . . hablan de todo: de las cosas que pasan. . . . Cada pueblo tiene uno, ¿eh?, que lo eligen entre todos, para que los defienda y hable por ellos (3, p. 209).

The playwright must sympathize finally with the people who are deceived by these politicians, threatened by the caciques, and remain without any representation whatever. They cannot even turn to the Church for political help, as shown in La gobernadora.

La gobernadora deals with the complexity of a local government that has slight concern for the political situation in Madrid and is strongly influenced by a cacique. Don Santiago, the governor, is under the power of his wife, Josefina, who has complete control over him and the management of the home. His secretary, Manolo, like Aurelio in La farándula, becomes Benavente's spokesman in this play. The political issue around which the play revolves is the production of a liberal and subversive play, Obscurantismo. Influenced by the aristocracy and by church officials, Josefina convinces don Santiago that he should forbid the presentation of Obscurantismo. Since such a presentation is legal, the danger of an uprising of the people seems imminent. It is ironical that during her argument she should exclaim,
"¿Qué hablas de motines, ni de levantamientos? Los pueblos son como las mujeres: necesitamos un hombre de carácter que se nos imponga, por la fuerza si es preciso" (6, p. 87).

Immediately after the decision to forbid the play is made, Manolo has an argument with Baldomero, the rich cacique of the province, concerning his romantic involvement with the daughter of the cacique. Rather than yielding to Baldomero's threat of exposing letters that would compromise him with Josefina if he did not leave town, Manolo decides to ally the people of the town with himself and the governor against Baldomero. He wishes Josefina to persuade the governor that the subversive play should be presented. The task is difficult, but in the end the power of the cacique is defeated.

Don Baldomero has at one time been a liberal, but has changed. At a gossip session in a café, Guillermo says that "ese Baldomero es hoy el cacique de Moraleda: el que paga la contribución que le parece, y tiene hipotecas sobre media provincia, y pagarés firmados por la otra media . . ., y se congestiona si oye tocar el himno de Riego" (6, p. 41).

It is in Baldomero's best interests to side with the aristocracy and the Church in attempting to forbid the presentation of the highly controversial Obscurantismo. Speaking of the opinion of Su Ilustrísima as he voiced it from the pulpit the cacique says, "No ha sido sermón; ha sido un verdadero discurso de tonos muy levantados" (6, p. 60). Manolo knows that the only way to triumph over this cacique is to organize the
liberal forces behind the governor. This can only be accomplished by allowing the play to be presented.

Manolo's brother is the theatrical manager of the traveling company that wants to present Obscurantismo. Thus, Benavente is able to compare the careers of Manolo and his brother that were spent among actors. One set of actors occupied the stage, and the other was to be found in the arena of politics. Angry at the power of caciquismo, Manolo defends his brother's intentions to Josefina. In the heat of passion, he angrily exclaims:

Y ahora porque llevo esta librea burguesa, sería yo traidor y cobarde si no estuviera a su lado contra esa sociedad de tartufos, que quieren hacernos creer que defienden ideas, cuando defienden intereses. ¡Libertad, o religión, o patria! . . . Esas son las palabras grandes que les sirven de trinchera o de barricada para defender su interés egoísta, una posición social, un sueldo, hasta un negocio de timba, como don Baldomero (6, p. 120).

One can readily recognize the author's sentiments in the previous speech concerning the despicable role of caciques and political factions composed of selfish individuals.

In the other two plays, Benavente merely describes caciquismo and exposes the evils of the system with disgust; but in La gobernadora, he destroys the power of don Baldomero. His house is ransacked by the people, and he is denounced and humiliated publicly. Simultaneously, the liberal factions in Madrid have come into power. The governor of Moraleda receives the praise for this accomplishment, in the form of
a promotion, but he admits that the political astuteness of his secretary was responsible for the successful outcome. La gobernadora ends on an optimistic note which indicates the birth of a strong leader who had triumphed over caciquismo and freed himself from the corrupting influence of that distasteful political-boss system.

The most direct methods of caciquismo are shown in El primo Román. Upon receiving funds for the campaign from Román, Gatejo says, "¡Ajá! Con esto y una pipa de aguardiente que me ha mandado un cuñado de la parienta, que está en Chinchón, sale usted por encima del pueblo y por el sufragio universal, como quien dice" (3, p. 222). These men resort to paying for votes, physically dragging people to the polls, and getting the undecided voters drunk. In La farándula, Juan Manuel's methods are more subtle and refined. He is a gracious host at high-society gatherings, invites newsmen to dinner, and caters to the whims of his guests from Madrid. The only allusion to his relationship with the common people of the town is his support in gathering an audience for Gonzalo's political rallies. It is assumed, however, that the wealthy farmer employs a considerable part of the labor force and indirectly influences these people. Although no specific manifestations of don Baldomero's power are shown in La gobernadora, Manolo calls him a "señor de horca y cuchillo . . . en estos dominios de Moraleda" (6, p. 106). Baldomero insinuates the extent of his power when he threatens
Manolo, saying, "Pero cuando directamente, cara a cara le digo a usted: 'quiero que usted se marche', es porque puedo decirlo . . . como consejo. . . . Como mandato, si usted lo prefiere, se lo dirá el mismo don Santiago" (6, p. 106).

All three caciques share one vice. Greed dominates their actions. Juan Manuel wants to exercise his influence in Madrid. He is blindly deceived into believing that he supports a worthy man and will eventually reap his desired reward. He does not stop to think that Gonzalo has probably made the same promises to the other caciques in the neighboring provinces which he has visited. He is a willing victim for the sharp politician from Madrid, who has no concern for any of the aspirations that this backward cacique holds. Greed appears in the form of paternal egoism in El primo Román. Romualdo mistakenly thinks that his son, Luciano, has the capabilities and desire to pursue higher education, and wishes to see the son a worthy husband for Cristeta, the adopted daughter of doña Salomé, so that the boy may inherit the widow's fortune. The third cacique, don Baldomero, is greedily concerned with protecting his financial interests from unfavorable government action. Benavente is repelled by the vices of these men and their questionable legal operations.

The simple people of these provincial cities do not escape Benavente's satirical attack, either. It is true that they are being deceived, but they are not completely naïve. Some willingly sell their votes. In El primo Román, however,
some wives make their husbands stay at home, away from the drunken brawls that accompany the persuasive methods practiced by caciques on election days. In the other two plays, the aristocracy are more concerned with social etiquette than with any political considerations. The common people in La gobernadora are the only ones who have definitely liberal political ideas. They are not concerned with the price they could place on their votes or the threats they receive.

A comparison of the two politicians in La farándula and El primo Román reveals the same underlying selfish desire for personal gain at any cost. These men are willing to stoop to any base methods of deception or bribery in order to achieve their goals. Benavente mercilessly exposes the wickedness of Gonzalo through a continual satiric assault on his life style. Román, on the other hand, is treated in a more favorable light. Politically, however, his only concern for the people of the province is, like Gonzalo's, to scheme successfully in order to gain their votes. Following the tradition of their unscrupulous predecessors, both men hold out glorious expectations to the provinces, knowing that their speeches will be well-received but are not legally binding. This aspect of their deceptive campaigns reenforces Benavente's belief that "'el sacerdote predica en el templo a los católicos; el socialista, a los socialistas en su círculo; el anarquista, a los compañeros en su centro. Así no hay disgustos ni controversias'" (10, p. 80). The blatant unconcern for
these provinces and the lack of adherence to any political ideals represent the worst characteristics of any man who assumes the title of politician in order to better himself in a material sense.

Colonization

In 1903 Benavente's political criticism turned to the international level. He let the problem of caciquismo rest and wrote *El dragón de fuego* which deals with the vices and hypocrisies of European colonization. It shows his attitude towards the forceful imposition of "civilization" upon relatively backward countries. Greed and desire for wealth are carefully masked behind idealistic plans for development, aid, and benefits to be conferred on the colonized society. Naturally, the idealistic aims of the invaders are never realized, and the question that Pío Baroja poses in his book, *Paradox, Rey*, remains: Is colonization truly beneficial?

*El dragón de fuego* involves the colonization of Nirván by Silandia, with Franconia and Suavia as its rivals in the endeavor. Mr. Morris, director of the Royal Company of Commerce and Navigation, General Ford, and the Evangelical Pastor are the chief emissaries from Silandia. They support the king, Dani-Sar, upon the throne. Although the king is a puppet and seems to appreciate their culture, they become distrustful of him. Dani-Sar's brother, Duraní has been educated in the court of Silandia, and these men treacherously
dethrone Dani-Sar to put Durani in his place. Durani serves the needs of the invaders well, until he is mutilated by rebels of Nirvan, and dies. The epilogue of the play describes Dani-Sar's imprisonment in a luxury hotel in Silandia. That country wants him to sign a treaty relinquishing any claim to his country. Outwardly he is treated well, because if he were treated otherwise the rival nations will go to war with Silandia. Dani-Sar is extremely homesick, and the climate of Silandia begins to affect his health. After signing the treaty, he is carefully carried home, but death seems imminent at the end of the play.

As Silandia cannot afford to take Nirvan by force, its representatives hypocritically form an alliance with the primitive country. Mr. Cotton, another merchant, says:

Sí, la fuerza. Es verdad. En último caso hubiera sido nuestra razón contra el mundo entero. Pero en otra ocasión, reconozcamos que mucho se nos debe a nosotros; a los que, antes que con las armas, supimos hacer nuestra, mejor dicho, de nuestra Silandia, esta hermosa región, digna de ser civilizada por nosotros. Nuestro comercio, nuestras factorías, las mil empresas en que hemos logrado interesar a los grandes capitales de Europa, han pesado más en esta ocasión que los acorazados y los ejércitos de todas las potencias aliadas.

Ante todo, es preciso fomentar los intereses materiales, civilizar. Una vez civilizados, aceptarán nuestras creencias sin esfuerzo, como un producto más que se les ofrece en buenas condiciones (2, pp. 157-158).

The merchants' main concern is selfish, and they do not sincerely care about improving Nirvan. They want to exploit the resources of this primitive nation for their own profit. One can also
clearly see in the words of Mr. Cotton, the definite rivalry between the powers of money and arms. The merchants feel that colonization should be effected through the establishment of commercial ties. This system includes bribery, with such enticing items from the superior civilization as "la luz eléctrica, el teléfono, el fonógrafo," and "hasta la música de Wagner" (2, p. 160). This method of deluding aborigines by trading relatively impressive objects for valuable natural resources was widely used with American Indians by the French, English, and Spanish during their colonization of North America. When the merchants fail to force the absolute submission of Nirván, General Ford decides to employ force of arms.

Benavente sympathizes with the natives of Nirván. He abhors their subjection by and exposure to a society whose true religion is the worship of money. The hypocrisy of the actions that mask their intentions is atrocious. For example, General Ford says that he wants to come into the country with friendship and an exchange of love. Yet he considers the people of Nirván an inferior race, and finally resorts to a forceful conquest of their country. The presence of the Pastor in the group of invaders should establish a religious intention in the colonization, but such an outward expression of religious concern for the souls of the natives is also hypocritical. Mr. Morris does not fear any intervention from the clergy in the sordid plans to exploit Nirván, because "todos ellos son accionistas de nuestra compañía" (2, p. 159).
He knows that "están en su papel, y hay que aceptarlo sin alarmarse" (2, p. 159).

The virtual lack of religious conviction by the people of Silandia is sharply contrasted with the fanatical degree to which the people of Nirván carry out their convictions. Dhulip, the priest of the outcasts, sees "el Dragón de fuego" shine and encourages the other outcasts by shouting, "¡Los dioses están con nosotros! Es la señal; podemos atrevernos a todo; a exterminar al extranjero" (2, p. 153). Dhulip is an extremely capable orator, and by employing basic mob psychology, he is easily able to inflame the passions of his followers. These people are extremely superstitious, seemingly indicating Benavente's doubt as to whether they are capable of self-government or not.

Benavente and Pío Baroja treat the question of coloniza-
tion differently. Benavente does not favor the idea of
divilization's imposing its materially-oriented influence on
this primitive culture, and he does not believe that these
people should exist in a state of ignorance and poverty,
shrouded by superstition. Pío Baroja parallels the introduc-
tion of "civilization" with the introduction of crime, alcohol-
ism, venereal disease, and other by-products of the vices of
society (1). Benavente's Nirván does not exist in total
primitive bliss, as does Baroja's Uganga. Dani-Sar is
surrounded by treacherous subjects in his own court, and his
wife, Mamni has an even fiercer nature than does General Ford.
The horrible mutilation of Duraní shows that crime is not unknown to the culture. Nevertheless, both authors question the right of a corrupted society that, considering itself superior, imposes its will on a defenseless nation.

It is obvious that Benavente sympathizes with the Indian poet, Rabindranath Tagore, who according to Starkie, "condemned the attitude of the Western people towards the Indian; according to him they were losing their souls for material wealth" (13, p. 143). Benavente may be directly attacking England's colonization of India, but he is probably expressing his disgust for any type of forced colonization. The names Cotton and Morris suggest a British country. Furthermore, Benavente's sharp criticism of their social behavior is reminiscent of the manner in which he attacks the British in La princesa Bebé and La noche del sábado.

Benavente concentrates so much on exposing the selfish desires of European nations that Dani-Sar is neglected as a dramatic character. Dani-Sar is the only character who expresses true concern for his people. He desires improvements for his country, but in the end he realizes the truth: he has been used. He bitterly acknowledges his folly, in the following speech:

¡Todo lo que ambicionaban, todo es suyo! Pero no es robo, no es despojo; es tributo que paga el Nirván como aliado y amigo de Silandia. Es el precio de mi vida y de la paz de mi reino asegurada. Y todos aceptan lo convenido. Unos por interés, otros por cobardía. Cuanto hizo Silandia con el Nirván y conmigo, nada significa si la
Throughout the play, Benavente contrasts the selfishness and vices of the European powers with the almost mystic purity of Dani-Sar. No solution to the problem is offered at the end of the play because the playwright realizes that humans as a whole are incapable of being truly as self-sacrificing as Dani-Sar.

Neutrality

Once again, in La ciudad alegre y confiada (1916), Benavente turns his critical eye to the politics of his own nation. Spain maintained a vacillating neutrality during World War I. Most Spaniards could not see any advantage in entering the war, whereas there was a "distinct benefit for certain elements in the population, in the shape of abnormal war profits, through remaining neutral" (7, p. 514). Many conservative elements of Spain were not as pro-German as they were anti-French (7, p. 513). Starkie said that the Spanish army, the clergy, and the aristocracy favored the Germans because it was strongly believed that they would win.
The army admired the superiority of the German troops; the clergy hated anti-clerical France and Protestant England; the aristocracy hated democracy and republicanism. Unamuno was a splendid speaker for the pro-ally elements of Spain, which consisted of many businessmen and some literary men. In the same year that Benavente presented La ciudad alegre y confiada, he wrote a prologue for a volume called El año germanófilo in which he publicly declared himself pro-German. Many of the foremost intellectuals of Spain did the same in this book (13, p. 40-41).

La ciudad alegre y confiada is a continuation of Los intereses creados. Crispín is now "El Magnífico" and the ruler of the city. Crispín's actions reflect the sentiments of the powerful and rich, who delegated power to him in order to cleanse their hands of the sordid control they exercised over the masses. Leandro no longer represents the idealistic goals of mankind. He shuns Silvia's pure love in order to chase after a dancer, Girasol. Money has completely corrupted these people. "El Magnífico" has asked Desterrado to return to his home. The son that Desterrado has left behind, Lauro, is in love with Julia, the daughter of "El Magnífico". Crispín is tired of the farce in which he plays a part, and realizes that the city no longer has a soul. This is the reason he seeks the help of Desterrado. He also knows that the awakening of the people means his own destruction.
The capitalists of the city enjoy the profits of commercial trading with both warring nations. Finally, the Venetians demand the city, wishing to be in a better strategic position to attack the Genoese. Concerned with the security of their money, the wealthy are willing to accept the Venetians' proposal. Meanwhile, Desterrado has successfully aroused the conscience of the people, and war is declared. In the heat of patriotic fervor, Leandro has rushed forth and met death. However, the soldiers of the city are forced to surrender because of the dire shortage of arms and munitions. Crispín, acknowledging the fact that he must pay for the sins of all, refuses protection from the Venetians, approaches unprotected the enraged people, and thus meets his death. At the end of the play, Lauro is killed trying to defend Crispín, amidst the chaotic shouts of the crowd. Pantalón, who has gone insane, is screaming for his money, and Desterrado emotionally compares his country with the patriotic soul of his dead son.

Ample evidence of the vileness of the wealthy is presented. An example of their perverted sense of values is the accident Mr. and Mrs. Polichinela have en route to a party. In recounting the incident, Mrs. Polichinela says that the driver died, and Mr. Polichinela gives his opinion of the matter, saying, "Eso importa poco" (4, p. 168). Needless to say, the starving people of the city resent and protest the lavish gathering of the wealthy that the couple attends. Throughout
the play, Benavente incessantly assaults the high regard for wealth foolishly held by such characters as Hostelero, Pantalón, and Polichinela. The significance of their money, according to Desterrado is "la ruina de la Ciudad, su humillación . . ., su vergüenza . . ., la sangre de sus hijos" (4, p. 257). One can readily see that the playwright is satirizing that species of businessman who preys on the miseries of war for his own profit. He disliked the advantage that neutrality gave these men, enabling them to trade with other nations while their own countrymen starved.

Desterrado is Benavente's spokesman in this play. He thinks that the city should end the farce of neutrality, and realize that "si el extranjero cayera sobre nosotros, su cultura, sus libertades, sus sabias leyes, las guardaría para él; a nosotros nos trataría como se trata a los traidores, que, vencidos, sólo son dignos de ser esclavos" (4, p. 138). The city has the choice of humiliation by the Venetians, or war. They choose war because "la ciudad ideal ha de purificarse por la sangre y el fuego; por su dolor ha de redimirse" (4, p. 210). Upon losing the war, Desterrado laments the fact that the city still has no soul:

No es lo triste la humillación de esta derrota; lo triste es dejarse vencer por ella. Siempre podemos vencer a quien nos vence si sabemos resurgir del dolor fortalecidos. Pero, ya lo ves . . ., después de la derrota es la misma inconsciencia de siempre . . ., tan inconscientes en la tristeza y el desengaño como lo fuimos en la alegría y confianza, que todos sabían sin fundamento y parecían tan
fundados como si todos hubieran estado seguros de haberlos cimentado en el deber cumplido, en el amor a la patria . . . . Y era el patriotismo cosa fácil, era creerse cada uno mejor que los demás, sólo porque veía las culpas de todos y con eso las suyas ya tenían disculpa. Y con desconfiar unos de otros, todos vivían confiados . . . ., cada uno se sentía superior a los otros y cada uno pensaba que él sólo era el justo por quien la Ciudad había de salvarse, como en las bíblicas ciudades (4, p. 247).

La ciudad alegre y confiada es an extremely pessimistic play, but in the words of Antonio Guardiola, "es todo un símbolo de la caída y la ruindad del Estado, a la vez que un canto a la eterna bondad, al eterno ideal, a la eterna fe del pueblo en la justicia y razón, en el trabajo, el orden y el bien" (9, p. 196). Many critics related the incidents of La ciudad alegre y confiada to Spain's historical role in World War I. They even tried to correlate the characters of the play to public figures; for example, many thought that Desterrado really represented Antonio Maura. ""El Desterrado"--dice Benavente a Alejandro Pérez Lugín--no tiene vida real. En él he propuesto representar únicamente el sentido común y el amor patrio, desterrados de España, digo de la ciudad alegre y confiada'" (11, pp. 241-242).

Walter Starkie feels that this situation "could refer to any country in Europe" (13, p. 17); and it is possible that Benavente is proposing a political philosophy and employs the circumstances of the war merely as a setting for this philosophy. Speaking with Alfonso XIII about his solution for the play, Benavente said:
"El remedio está en hacer todo lo contrario de lo que hacen los muñecos de mi farsa. En renunciar a todos los egoísmos personales en aras de un santo egoísmo patrio. En no consentir que de los negocios públicos y de la gobernación del Estado se apoderen Crispines cínicos y desvergonzados" (11, p. 242).

Benavente was definitely opposed to Spain's policy of neutrality in World War I. Although he was pro-German, he did not suggest forming an alliance with Germany in *La ciudad alegre y confiada*, which was satirical of Spain's neutrality and called for an awakening of the citizens of Spain to their precarious position. The Spanish people had found themselves unprepared for a conflict of the magnitude of World War I, and he warns them of the tragedy that could result from their lack of foresight. The underlying theme is the power that materialism exerted upon Spain's government.
CHAPTER BIBLIOGRAPHY


A rather severe critic of Benavente was Pérez de Ayala, who felt that Benavente's plays were superficial. "He believed him to be acute in a satire that delighted in pointing out the weaknesses of others and incapable of a true moral satire" (14, p. 41). This touched upon Benavente's weakness: "the dramatist's lack of depth" (14, p. 41). His plays, however, do not lack depth in characterization, since often through his characters he reveals the necessity to solve serious moral questions. If his plots are weak, one must bear in mind that this is the author's style of writing. His plays show that he is concerned not with the plot but with the characters, dialogue and theme. Benavente treats moral questions involving love, marriage, religion, and money, in La fuerza bruta, Los cachorros, Los intereses creados, and Los malhechores del bien. The playwright is a straightforward writer who makes his points clearly, without cumbersome plots filled with entanglements. The questions that he raises have considerable depth.

The Importance of Love

Benavente always held a high regard for love, as shown, for example, in La comida de las fieras. However, it is in
La fuerza bruta and Los cachorros that he proposes love as a moral solution to many of the problems of society. He once said, "'Nunca hay fracaso en la vida cuando el amor se salva'" (9, p. 83). Los intereses creados also demonstrates the importance of the role of love in the lives of people. In Los malhechores del bien, true love manages to survive the harassment of those who believe they can dictate the morality of others.

One background in which Benavente shows the nature of love is the world of circus people; he uses this background as the setting for La fuerza bruta and Los cachorros. This is an "ambiente muy amado por el autor, porque es ambiente de aventura, de peligro, de pasiones ocultas, de fingimientos dolorosos . . . como la vida misma" (8, p. 108). His love for the circus environment probably stemmed from a romance in his youth with the circus performer, Géraldine. Although he denied any amorous connection with anyone, several critics (9, 12, 13) maintain that his excursions through the provinces of Spain with her circus were not strictly "'en calidad de empresario únicamente'" (9, p. 17) as the playwright claimed. The circus is also used as a background for Donina's love in La noche del sábado. Although Benavente exposes the ruthlessness of some circus people, he inevitably contrasts their ruthlessness with purity and nobility of the characters who fight the forces of evil with love and a sense of moral duty.
La fuerza bruta begins as the circus people prepare to rehearse. Mr. Richard, the owner, is an unscrupulous businessman whose concern for money dominates his existence. He is lamenting his financial losses with Mr. Henri, who with his wife employs a troupe of acrobats. Fred has been their star trapeze artist, but his broken leg forces them to abandon him in a hospital and terminate their contract with Mr. Richard until they can train another young man to replace him. A member of their act, Nell, cannot abandon Fred, because she loves him. Nell arranges an act with Bob so that they can take Fred with them as soon as he can leave the hospital. Since he has no other skills, her love rescues Fred from a life of begging for charity. Nell's love is the self-sacrificing love that Benavente also portrays in *Rosas de otoño*. She could have continued as a performer with Mr. Henri, and she would have had a relatively secure future. However, her true love forces all thoughts of such a betrayal out of her mind, and she remains faithful to Fred. Fred, fearing that Nell's love is pity, wants to flee from it. Sor Simplicia, a nun in the hospital, counsels him thus:

*Si es por amor . . . no será sacrificio; si es por bondad, considere usted que al aceptarlo es cuando damos valor al bien que nos hacen. ¡oh, señor Fred!; es que toda su vida y todo su arte y tal vez todos sus amores . . . no tenían más alma que su cuerpo fuerte de acróbata. Hay algo más que la fuerza bruta. Sus fuerzas no bastan ya para sostenerle. Las mujeres somos humildes ante los débiles, y a nuestra fuerza le damos nombres de dulzura, de amor, compasión, caridad (2, p. 274).*
Love is also the source of salvation in *Los cachorros*, which deals with the entanglements of adult circus performers faced with clashing interests. Lea has left Adolfo and their son, Henry, to go to South America with a man. In the beginning of the play, people begin to speculate about her actions upon her return with her daughter, Clotilde. While she was gone, Zoe and her son, Billy, had begun to live with Adolfo. Adolfo and Zoe subsequently had a daughter named Celina. Zoe's jealousy, aggravated by the misery of poverty, was the catalyst for a horrible scene that exposed the selfishness of Zoe, Adolfo, and Lea. Their children arrange a reconciliation because Clotilde and Billy wish to marry. Madame Adelaida sums up the happy ending, saying:

¿Tú ves, Lea? Todos éramos a pelear, a poner guerra los unos a los otros: pero ellos, los pequeños, los cachorros, han estado a quererse, y ya no es más guerra. ¡Mira cómo es alegre todo, cómo es bueno! ¡Todo familia, todos hermanos! ¡Ah, si estuviera así siempre, cómo la vida sería bonita! ¡Cómo sería bonita (3, p. 292)!

The pure, innocent love that the *cachorros* demonstrate for each other and their parents is unspoiled by immoral concerns for money or by a blatant disregard for religion. Fraternal exchanges of love manage to resolve devastating conflicts.

*Los intereses creados* begins with Leandro and Crispín arriving at a city, or "two" as Crispín says, "una para el que llega con dinero, y otra para el que llega como nosotros" (4, p. 144). They proceed to take a room at the inn, with Leandro playing the part of a wealthy gentleman and
Crispín posing as his servant. Later at doña Sirena's home, it is learned that she intends to give a party, but finds herself in dire need of funds. Crispín volunteers to have his master supply everything, and she will be paid further if Leandro should, presumably with her help, marry Silvia. At the party, Crispín intentionally tells Mr. Polichinela that he should prevent his daughter from associating with Leandro; but the warning comes too late, and by the end of the first act, the couple have fallen in love.

Crispín hires some men to attack Leandro, and then spreads the rumor that this has been the handiwork of Mr. Polichinela. Appalled by this situation, Silvia leaves her father's home and swears that she will not return until she is Leandro's wife. Later she goes to the inn to see her loved one, and she and Leandro are forced to hide while Crispín is left to deal with the police, creditors, and her father. He explains to the creditors that it would have been to their interest to wait until after the marriage. Mr. Polichinela is asked by the crowd to consent to the marriage without disowning Silvia, but he does so only on condition that Crispín leave. Crispín leaves town gladly.

Benavente "resorts to the stock characters of the Italian commedia dell'arte to allegorize the universal mingling of good and evil" (15, p. 44). This theme of "good versus evil" is characteristic of Benavente. Crispín's evil plot is summed up in his following words: "Piensa que hemos creado
mucha intereses y es interes de todos el salvarnos" (4, p. 216).
The force that fights this evil is of course pure love. Silvia's
love for Leandro is in a sense his salvation. In the final scene,
Crispín triumphantly says to Leandro, "Para salir adelante con
todo, mejor que crear afectos es crear intereses" (4, p. 250).
When Leandro responds that it is Silvia's love that saves him,
Crispín exclaims, "¿Y es poco interes ese amor" (4, p. 251)?
This speech indicates that perhaps "the central idea in the
play is not the question of the bonds of interest" (16, p. 165),
but the ability of love to reveal the senselessness of conven-
tional afectos.

The Marquesa de Casa-Molina, doña Esperanza, and Asunció
are the ladies who impose their will upon the people they give
charity to in Los malhechores del bien. Natividad and Jesús
had been shipwrecked as children and brought under the care
of these charitable ladies. As a young man, Jesús had once
wandered through the streets drunk with Cabrera and Repelona.
For this reason the ladies feel that Jesús is not a suitable
husband for Natividad, even though the couple are deeply in
love. They arrange a marriage between Natividad and Martín,
but before this marriage takes place, Natividad and Jesús
leave for America to get married. Their happiness is made
possible by don Heliodoro, the brother of the Marquesa.
Throughout the play he openly accuses his sister and her
friends of doing wrong, and maintains that his own act is
good because it is a gift of love and liberty. Thus, Benavente
shows that love can survive and triumph over evil; Silvia expresses this idea in Los intereses creados in the following quote:

Y en ella visteis, como en las farsas de la vida, que a estos muñecos como a los humanos, mueven los cordelillos groseros, que son los intereses, las pasioncillas, los engaños y todas las miserias de su condición: tiran unos de sus pies y los llevan a tristes andanzas; tiran otros de sus manos, que trabajan con pena, luchan con rabia, hurtan con astucia, matan con violencia. Pero entre todos ellos, desciende a veces del cielo al corazón un hilo sutil, como tejido con luz de sol y con luz de luna, el hilo del amor, que a los humanos, como a estos muñecos que semejan humanos, les hace parecer divinos, y traé a nuestra frente resplandores de aurora, y pone alas en nuestro corazón y nos dice que no todo es farsa en la farsa, que hay algo divino en nuestra vida que es verdad y es eterno y no puede acabar cuando la farsa acaba (4, p. 251).

The Concept of Marriage

In his plays, Benavente presents marriage as a serious sacrament and considers its abuse an immoral act. The forthcoming marriage of Fred and Nell in La fuerza bruta is an example of the strength of true love based on the ideals of sacrifice and mutual respect. Although Silvia and Leandro share a similar love in Los intereses creados, the people of the city make a mockery of their marriage, regarding it merely as a solution to their financial interests. The immoral entanglements of Lea, Zoe, and Adolfo are leading to tragedy until the children rescue the situation with their love. In Los cachorros, Benavente shows his disapproval of the disregard for matrimonial union. Madame Adelaida scolds Zoe and expresses his feelings in the following speech:

Benavente treats the union of a man and a woman from three points of view, in Los malhechores del bien. The first type is the marriage arranged by the Marquesa, doña Esperanza, and Asunción. Don Heliodoro describes their techniques in the following attack of doña Esperanza:

". . . la que todo lo inspecciona, gobierna y censura, la que dispone, desde cómo ha de ser el traje de baño y a que hora ha de bañarse la gente, hasta la hora en que hemos de acostarnos y con quién. . . . . . . . . . . . . . .

Digo con quién, porque todas las bodas que aquí se hacen son cosa suya: la de los ricos y la de los pobres (5, p. 136)."

These ladies assume that they are capable of regulating the activities of such marriages. The poor people who succumb to such marriages of convenience are indebted financially to these ladies, and the rich people's activities are likewise regulated because of their mortal fear of public opinion. The playwright once said, "'Esto del "qué dirán" y el "qué dirían" son los verdaderos dictadores de España'" (9, p. 83).

The second type of union is represented by that of Repelona and Cabrera. They cannot marry because her husband had left her ten years earlier, and she does not know if he is alive or dead. Doña Esperanza tells her that she should live with decency as God commands, but Repelona replies, "Yo
con decencia vivo, y nadie dirá que ando con unos y con otros, como muchas" (5, p. 174). One would think that the dramatist would have deplored such a relationship, but he is concerned with a higher moral "cuya base es la caridad y cuyo fin es la libertad individual" (10, p. 28). Neither he nor the Spanish public could condemn these characters.

Naturally, the marriage of Natividad and Jesús represents the ideal marriage that is founded on freedom, love, and respect. It is thus similar to those marriages presented in \textit{La comida de las fieras}, \textit{Los intereses creados}, \textit{La fuerza bruta}, and \textit{Los cachorros}. The playwright felt obligated to present the moral question of matrimony to Madrid's society.

The Meaning of Religion

In \textit{La fuerza bruta}, the faith that Sor Simplicia holds in her religion is able to sustain Fred during his trying moments. She instills the will to live in the circus performer because her religious convictions give her strength, and she knows that they can do the same for him. Her adherence to Christian morality is remarkably different from the disregard for such a morality in \textit{Los cachorros} and \textit{Los intereses creados}. The only true religion in the latter is the worship of money, also presented by Benavente in \textit{El dragón de fuego}. Madame Adelaida makes a mockery of religion because she considers church attendance as an act that is good for business. Upon returning from mass she says:
Es bueno vean a la misa. Todos digan: ¡Ah!, la directora del circo Rigoberto es a la iglesia, como una señora buena. No crean que se somos los titiriteros, se seamos judíos, como los gitanos, como bohemianos, Deba ir a la misa. Es bueno para el público esto (3, p. 211).

The true meaning of religion is misunderstood and misused in Los malhechores del bien. The ladies are guilty of abusing two of God's commands. The concept of charity presented in the Bible is that of giving freely, anonymously, and without any expectations of repayment of any type. Furthermore, the Bible says that God shall be the judge of man and that man should not judge his fellow man, because he is not capable of divine judgement. Don Heliodoro attacks the immorality of their charitable acts in the following speech:

. . . porque no hacen ustedes caridad ni limosna desinteresadas, sino a cambio de una profesión de fe absoluta, no sólo religiosa, política, social, hasta sentimental. Y aunque a ustedes les sorprenda, no todo el mundo . . ., y menos entre esa pobre gente que en esferas más elevadas, está dispuesta a vender su conciencia y sus sentimientos por una limosna que sólo a ese precio se les oferece. Creen ustedes que fomentan la virtud, y lo que fomentan es la hipocresía; . . . . Caridad de toma y daca no me convence; el bien no es semilla que debe sembrarse con esperanza de cosecha; se arroja al suelo; que alguna cae en tierra y fructifica, bien está; que el viento se la lleva, no se pierde . . .; la alegría de hacer bien está en sembrar, no está en recoger (5, pp. 146-147).

In aiding Natividad and Jesús, don Heliodoro practices true charity. The three ladies judge people's activities, and withhold their charity from those not deemed worthy of receiving it.
According to Federico de Onís, "el tema de la comedia, además, tocaba a uno de los sentimientos más arraigados y permanentes del espíritu español: el sentimiento de la libertad moral" (10, p. 27). The Marquesa, doña Esperanza, and Asunción have no moral tolerance of others. As don Heliodoro says,

"a cambio del bien que hacen exigen una abdicación completa de la voluntad, una especie de esclavitud; las personas no son personas para ellas, son abstracciones, almas que salvar, y las personas, ¡qué demonio!, tenemos un alma; pero envuelta en muchas fibras de carne y hueso, sangre que hiere, nervios que saltan, vida, en fin, vida que es fuerza y rebeldía (5, pp. 159-160).

It is an obvious fact that slavery in any form is immoral and will eventually reap tragedy. The price of slavery that these people must pay for charity is unreasonable.

The Christian ladies in Los malhechores del bien have no concept of true Christian morality. The dramatist shows no mercy for these people, who are involved in false charity "prompted by vanity, not love" (1, p. xix). His criticism in this play was considered so severe by certain elements of Madrid's society that many people left the theater during its presentation, as a form of protest (6, 7, 11). Although many people considered him to be anticlerical because of this play (9, 10), he denied it by saying:

Lo que quise pintar es el tipo del protector que quiere disponer del hombre a quien protegió. Si hubiera pensado en desarrollar la acción entre rusos, hubiese sacado a escena en vez de señoritas católicas una asociación secreta de nihilistas (9, p. 44).
The Importance of Money

Money is the means that enables the women in Los malhe-chores del bien to carry forth their immoral judgements of other people and to dictate the lives of the people they control. However, in Los cachorros, La fuerza bruta, and Los intereses creados, it is the characters' attitude toward money that is immoral. In the majority of his plays Benavente reveals the evils caused by people's excessive love for money.

The circus in Los cachorros is very poor, and the people are hopeful that Lea's return with money will improve the situation. Lea, however, does not want to give all her money to the circus, because she wants her children to have it. Naturally, in addition to her jealous fear of Lea, Zoe is angry at Lea's selfishness. She threatens to leave because she feels mistreated. She has worked in the circus at Adolfo's side for years while Lea was living in luxury in South America. She thinks that Lea intends to use her money to regain Adolfo's favors. The characters' anxiety and greed concerning money is the cause of a great deal of unhappiness.

It is morally unjust to abandon a helpless man, but the Henris do this to Fred in La fuerza bruta. The Henris are eager, for financial reasons, to begin working with a new man to replace Fred. They are not interested in Fred's fate and are not concerned about his future, but their own purse. Madame Henri tries to justify their actions by saying to Fred, "Tú sabes que has sido un hijo para nosotros. . . . Yo os miro
People should help the weak, not desert them. Mr. Richard also shows a disregard for people. He is completely obsessed with money. He continually complains that he is being robbed because he has to pay exhorbitant fees for worthless acts. He regards his employees as machines and not as people. He feels that they can be discarded at once if their usefulness no longer meets his standards.

Benavente introduces the stereotyped shrewd businessman without conscience in the character of Hilario Montes, in his second play, Gente conocida. Mr. Richard is another example of this type of man, but the best example is Mr. Polichinela, in Los intereses creados and La ciudad alegre y confiada. According to his wife, Polichinela "piensa que sólo el dinero vale y se estima en el mundo" (4, p. 187). He himself says,

Yo pienso que sin dinero no hay cosa que valga ni se estime en el mundo; que es el precio de todo.

Todo tiene su precio, ¿quién lo duda? Nadie mejor que yo lo sabe, que compré mucho de todo eso, y no muy caro (4, p. 187).

At the party Mr. Polichinela repeatedly alludes to the fact that he is a wealthy man, in such comments as the following:

No fue culpa mía la tardanza. Fue de mi mujer que entre cuarenta vestidos no supo nunca cuál ponerse.
Pues aún no trae la mitad de sus joyas. No podría con tanto peso (4, pp. 185-186).

His obsession with money makes him ignorant of the meaning of morality; he feels that money can replace "la virtud, y el saber, y la nobleza" (4, p. 187).

Referring to the corrupting influence of money on society, Crispín says, "La riqueza del señor Polichinela es un insulto a la humanidad y a la justicia. Sólo entre gente sin honor puede triunfar impune un hombre como el señor Polichinela" (4, p. 206).

The entire society allows men of this nature to triumph. Evil often spreads because people allow it to grow by remaining silent. The dramatist contrasts this evil with the pure, idealistic natures of Leandro and Silvia. Silvia symbolizes purity. Angel Lázaro says that Silvia "es el candor, la pureza, la ingenua y noble pasión que redime a Leandro de sus miserias morales y ennoblece el cinismo del pícaro Crispín" (9, p. 50). Leandro allows Crispín to provide for him, but he seems to stay above the sordid methods his companion utilizes. This is, partly at least, due to his naiveté. It is not clear whether Leandro would have gone through with the entire scheme or not. Crispín considers Leandro's true love for Silvia as foolish. In Crispín's following description of Leandro's character, the dramatist sharply contrasts a good man with ambitious men whose love for money qualifies them only as crooked politicians or businessmen without consciences:

Tú no eres como el señor Polichinela, que con todo su dinero, que tantos lujos le permite, aún no se ha
permitido el lujo de ser honrado. . . . En él es naturaleza la truhanería; pero en ti, en ti fue sólo necesidad. Y aun si no me hubieras tenido a tu lado, ya te hubieras dejado morir de hambre de puro escrupuloso. ¡Ah! ¿Crees que si yo hubiera hallado en ti otro hombre me hubiera contentado con dedicarte a enamorar? No; te hubiera dedicado a la política, y no al dinero del señor Polichinela, el mundo hubiera sido nuestro. Pero no eres ambicioso, te contentas con ser feliz (4, p. 213).

Benavente at no time insinuates that money is wicked or corrupting. For example, don Heliodoro invests his money in a worthy cause. In these plays, the playwright criticizes the immoral use of money and immoral acts caused by people's attitude towards money.
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CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Benavente's social criticism embodies attacks upon society, political practices, and moral behavior. In Gente conocida, La comida de las fieras, Lo cursi, La gata de Angora, Por las nubes, La noche del sábado, Las rosas de otoño, El hombrecito, La princesa Bebé, La escuela de las princesas, and La losa de los sueños, the superficiality of customs, the corruption of society, and the stifling role of women in society are analyzed. He attacks the greed and hypocrisy of a society that cause and allow to flourish such practices as caciquismo—in La farándula, El primo Román, and La gobernadora; colonization, in El dragón de fuego; and neutrality based on commercial interests, in La ciudad alegre y confiada. The moral behavior of society is censured in La fuerza bruta, Los cachorros, Los malhechores del bien, and Los intereses creados.

In his social plays, the playwright does not offer any tangible solutions to the problems inherent in the structure and faults of society. In Por las nubes and La comida de las fieras, he offers a new life in America as an escape from the decadent society of Madrid, for those who are willing to sacrifice and work hard. Escape, however, is never a solution to existing problems. He expresses a cynical and fatalistic
attitude towards the situation, and shows no hope for the future. This attitude is expressed by the Conde de Fondel-valle in *Gente conocida*. The Conde says, "Las razas degeneran. La nueva generación promete poco. Caras bonitas, bellezas delicadas, talles flexibles, ojillos picarescos . . .. pero nada sólido ni permanente" (1, p. 141). The petty vices, greed, and corruption that make people lose sight of ideal human values are the cause of the decadence of society. Benavente exposes the superficiality and corruption of society, but he fails to offer solutions to improve or erradicate this decadence.

The political criticism in his plays deals basically with social greed, which permits the growth of corruption. The obsession with material objects that plagues society is the germ of *caciquismo*, colonization, and neutrality during an international crisis. All three of these political policies are denounced by Benavente, because they are based on greed and are masked by hypocritical expressions of idealistic desires.

The *caciques* of the provinces of Spain and the politicians that thrive on the support of the *caciques* are motivated by selfish desires for material advancement. They lack any beneficial spiritual motives that could incite them to fulfill their obligation to be responsible representatives of the people in a governmental capacity. Greed also motivates countries that seek to colonize underdeveloped cultures.
Their low actions and their schemes to steal the natural resources of a helpless culture are clothed in idealistic promises to improve the colonized society. Actually, they are not concerned with aiding the colony, but with deceiving its people in order to exploit it for their own benefit. The people who were increasing their wealth during Spain's neutrality in World War I are bitterly satirized. Their greed, which was their foremost motivation, undermined the true values of a patriotism that should be inherent in spiritually healthy nations. The power that these wealthy men possessed in determining the policies of their government was abhorred by the playwright, and his only solution to these problems is for society to assess its values and base its political policies on actions that are beneficial to the people.

Benavente's moral censures are based upon a clear delineation between good and evil. He makes his points clearly and obviously, and his cry for good and moral behavior is loud and strong. Although he was not formally religious, he strongly believed in the basic tenets of Christianity. The favorable presentation of Sor Simplicia in La fuerza bruta supports such a view. His attack on false charity in Los malhechores del bien is also based on Christian principles of true charity. The importance of love and marriage has a moral foundation, and immoral abuses of these principles are attacked vigorously. Greed and an excessive regard for
money are often causes of immoral behavior, and he sharply condemns these evils. He believed that man's freedom centered upon his ability to make moral decisions in life. Society needed to condemn immoral behavior in order to free itself from its decadence.

In conclusion, Benavente's social criticism was directed at the corruption of society, politics, and moral behavior. He was a keen observer of life, able to reproduce the failings of society that he observed on stage. He alternated between harsh satire and tragedy in order to expose these failings. Like other members of the "Generation of '98", he was aware of the decadence of his society and longed for its improvement; however, his only solution was a self-sacrificing reach for the ideal by individuals whose moral conception of values was uncorrupted. Consequently, this solution was too idealistic to be of any pragmatic use for a society filled with conventions based on materialism, and accustomed to base actions.
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