ROMANTIC CHARACTERISTICS IN
GUTIERREZ NAJERA'S POETRY

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ROMANTIC CHARACTERISTICS IN
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CHAPTER I

LITERARY BACKGROUND IN MEXICO IN
\hspace{1em} THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

Mexican literary efforts during the first quarter of the nineteenth century were limited almost exclusively to poli-
tical writings in pamphlets and periodicals. Before 1836
most of the native authors were politicians, because economic
and political struggles had drawn their attention away from
pure literature.

After the Revolution in 1812 there was constant strife
between the liberals and conservatives to gain control of
the government; for nearly fifty years those leaders desiring
to preserve colonial rule battled those wishing to establish
a republic. Iturbide was the first caudillo to gain control
of the nation, and with the support of the army, he proclaimed
himself Emperor. In 1822 Santa Anna overthrew the empire
and established a republic. The struggle then became focused
on a single problem—the conservation or the abolition of
privileges. One uprising followed another, bringing innumer-
able rulers and political theories. The civil wars were
interrupted in 1847 by the American invasion, which meant a
loss of territory for Mexico. Ten years later a Federal
Constitution put the reform party into power, but the threat
of European intervention was greatly increased. At last, Mexico was invaded by the troops of Napoleon III, and an empire was established under Maximilian. The French were driven out in 1867, but the struggle was bloody. The Republic was restored, and Mexico had gained national unity after fifty-five years of conflict.

The literature of this period had been closely linked with politics, and few of the publications had any literary merit.

Tras de Fernández de Lizardi se hace un largo paréntesis de silencio en la producción novelesca. El teatro--aparte manifestaciones aisladas y de valer muy diverso--apenas si es cultivado activamente en las postrimerías de este período. En cuanto a la poesía, la situación que guardaba hacia 1830 distaba de ser floreciente.¹

The Academy of Letrán was established in 1836 in the cell of Don José María Lacunza at the old School of San Juan de Letrán. Writers of all opinions and backgrounds gathered to read their own works and to discuss those of other authors. They were influential in making Mexican literature significant to their contemporaries and in giving their native literature a distinctive character of its own.

José María de Heredia was perhaps the first modern poet to have a direct influence on this group of writers. He was a Cuban by birth, but had held several important posts

¹Carlos González Peña, Historia de la literatura mexicana, p. 276.
in the Mexican government under President Victoria. Although Heredia was far from successful in restoring Mexican poetry in his lifetime, he did influence later romantic trends and translated into Spanish works of Lamartine, Chateaubriand, Young, and Foscolo.

The beginnings of romanticism in Mexico became apparent in the early 1830's. The primary sources, except for Byron, were French writers. Later, Spanish lyric poets and dramatists, such as Espronceda, García Gutiérrez, and the Duke of Rivas, drew the attention of Mexican writers. Signs of conflicting opinions were becoming evident. In general, the romanticists were liberals who had fought for the republic, but they were a heterogeneous, unorganized group lacking polish and preparation as poets. The classicists were the conservatives who had upheld tradition and looked to the older Spanish forms and to Greek and Roman literature for models. They were members of the upper classes and possessed a solid literary background.

Cultivaban el romanticismo, de preferencia, los poetas salidos de la clase media, incultos; pero entusiastas y fogosos. Los poetas eruditos, los que pertenecían a las clases acomodadas no dejaban nunca escapar un grito vibrante de pasión, se mantenían siempre dentro de las formas establecidas por la retórica, eran fieles partidarios de la gramática. Los románticos se afiliaban a los partidos avanzados. Los románticos rompían con los sistemas establecidos. Los románticos mexicanos son, generalmente, poetas revolucionarios. ²

²Julio Jiménez Rueda, Historia de la literatura mexicana, p. 146.
Each romantic writer had his own interpretation of the movement, and the principles of the school were vague. Nevertheless, the romantic spirit spread quickly in Mexico, because neo-classicism had never been extremely popular. The nation was attracted to this liberalism in literature, a spirit which seemed particularly suited to the temperament of Spanish America.

Nuestro ambiente, el ambiente de esa parte de América, era, es incurablemente romántico. De modo es que poseíamos los elementos psíquicos; la expresión nos vino de fuera; la emoción la teníamos ya; era nuestra desde hacía muchos años.\(^3\)

In 1840, Fernando Calderón translated two of Lamartine's Meditations, which excited a new interest in French romantic poetry. Mexican romanticism was nearer in sentiment to the French movement than to that of any other European nation. Lyric poetry came from the pens of Rodríguez Galván, Guillermo Prieto, Juan Valle, and Isabel Prieto de Landazuri. These romantics, taking the French as models, enriched the language and introduced subject matter which the classicists had never dared use. They exalted the emotions and imagination, creating an insatiable taste for modern foreign literatures.

The works of these liberals reflected their mental unrest, their enthusiasm, and their spirit of rebellion against authority. The personality of each poet was expressed freely, and ideas were of secondary importance in the sentimental and

\(^3\) Luis G. Urbina, La vida literaria de México, p. 143.
descriptive lyrics. Some of the most talented writers had received little formal education, but in the new romantic freedom their genius found the perfect means of expression. They disliked the cold reserve of classicism and accepted passion rather than reason as their guide.

As typical romanticists, the Mexican writers felt that they were alone in the world, misunderstood by mankind. Many of them found the mysticism of the Roman Catholic Church appealing, while others attempted to satisfy their feelings of unrest and melancholy in nature.

Romantic poetry invariably deals with longing; not a definite formulated desire for some attainable object, but a dim mysterious aspiration, a trembling unrest, a vague sense of kinship with the infinite, a consequent dissatisfaction with every form of happiness which the world has to offer. The object of romantic longing, therefore, so far as it was any object, is the ideal.\(^4\)

Mexican romanticism did not exist as an open revolt against classicism. The two literary movements continued simultaneously for many years without visible struggle. In politics, however, the members of each school had bitterly opposed each other. In 1867 the conservatives, who were the classicists, were defeated, and the liberals had control of the government as well as literature.

After the restoration of the Republic, Mexican letters assumed a prominent role in the lives of thinkers of all ages and political factions. Writers expressed genuine interest in the organization of several literary societies and

academies. The most important of these groups was the Mexican Academy, founded in 1875. As a link with the Royal Spanish Academy, this organization was a symbol of the unity among the seventy-seven million Spanish-speaking persons of the two nations. The Mexican Academy began collecting material for the Dictionary of the Language, which contained most of the provincial expressions employed in Mexico. Of even greater significance was the interest of the Academy in modern foreign literature. The influence of Spanish writers continued, but French literature and language had become increasingly popular since the invasion of Napoleon's troops. The study of these forms was influential in the decay of classical poetry, because the French and Spanish poets of this period were, on the whole, romanticists. Both Ignacio Altamirano and Justo Sierra desired to introduce new foreign forms to their fellow countrymen and to combine the influences into a new national literature.

During the last forty years of the nineteenth century, all types of literature flourished, but poetry had become the outstanding means of expression. With the broadening of Mexican culture, romantic poetry was cleansed of its exaggerations and insincerity, and more thought was given to form and to the honest emotions of the writer. The post-romanticists of the 1870's continued to be increasingly cosmopolitan in their concept of culture and began to create new interest in the Spanish classics. Their style was more refined
than that of their predecessors, and greater attention was given to the sound of the individual word.

Just as romanticism had been a reaction against classicism, this new literary trend became a reaction against the outworn romantic tradition. This complex movement, called modernism first as a term of contempt, then of praise, found a large following among the young intellectuals who had tired of the stilted excesses in poetry. They found inspiration in the works of the Spanish poet Bécquer and in the new school of French Parnassians and symbolists.

In France, too, there had been a reaction against the extreme subjectivity of romanticism. Parnassianism emphasized an objective attitude toward life which sprang from the scientific spirit of the age. Seeking refuge in the "ivory tower," this group of poets was often pessimistic and sensual, but perfection of form was never neglected. Led by Baudelaire, Leconte de Lisle, and Sully-Prudhomme, the Parnassians often found inspiration in exotic pagan legends and remained indifferent to the world about them.

This naturalism in poetry began to decline in the early 1880's, and there was a revolt against the hardened forms of Parnassianism. French writers sought expression for their souls and demanded a change in both form and substance of verse. The symbolists, as they were called, were not slaves to any formula, but all had well-defined personalities. They expressed their love for men and life
as well as their respect for suffering. Uniting music and imagination, such poets as Paul Verlaine, Stéphane Mallarmé, and Rimbaud sought self-revelation by subtle and suggestive means. "Musical verse, delicate shades rather than definite color, absence of pompous verbiage, freedom of structure, independence in matters of rhyme... the communication of what has been called 'spiritual reality'—these are symptomatic of symbolist matter and manner."  

The modernist poets introduced new verse forms and revived old ones. In addition to stylistic innovations, greater attention was given to the symbolist doctrine of color and music and to the expression of emotions by means of unusual words. According to Professor John A. Crow, modernism did for the nineteenth century what Gongorism did for the Golden Age in Spain.  

Although most of the modernists turned to French and Spanish poets for models, they were not mere imitators. They took only the most desirable traits, combined and assimilated them until the harmonious whole was truly Mexican. From the Parnassians came their love for the new beauties of line and form; from the symbolists came the desire for new imagery and enrichment of the language.

Silabas y acentos son ya cosas secundarias. La idea misma es para el modernista cosa secundaria. Lo que

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6 Instituto Internacional de Literatura Iberoamericana, *Outline History of Spanish America*, p. 79.
The principal innovation in modernist poetry was in the matter of form. For many years Spanish poets had employed the accepted classical verse forms. The new Spanish American school succeeded in creating a freer and more flexible versification. Many of the writers turned to the old Spanish verse forms of the Middle Ages or to the masterpieces of the Siglo de Oro, while others invented their own forms and combined them with existing ones. Free verse, however, was not enthusiastically received by the modernists, because it seemed to lack the musical quality that was so important to these admirers of Verlaine. They found their music in many of the long-forgotten forms of medieval Europe.

This break with tradition brought new combinations in lines of various lengths and liberties in the fixed accents and rhythm. The old forms, such as the Alexandrine and the sonnet, regained popularity in the works of Rubén Darío and his followers. Eleven and twelve syllable lines became a common means of expression. One of the principal elements exciting this freedom of form was the spirit brought from France in the works of Hugo, Musset, Verlaine, and Banville.

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7 Arturo Torres-Rioseco, Percusores del Modernismo, p. 22.
With the modernist movement Mexico won recognition in the field of letters that had been unknown to her since the days of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz and Ruiz de Alarcón. The dynamic school of young authors gave an enthusiasm, a universality, and a more vigorous means of expression to a literature that Mexico could at last call her own.
CHAPTER II

GUTIÉRREZ NÁJERA AS A PRECURSOR OF MODERNISM

During the period of transition from romanticism to modernism certain Spanish American poets became important as links between the two schools of literature. In Mexico, the foremost precursor of modernism was Manuel Gutiérrez Nájera. His work is representative of French sentiment expressed in Spanish forms.

Gutiérrez Nájera was born in Mexico City on December 22, 1859, to a pious middle-class family. Although he spent most of his life in the capital, a large part of his formal education consisted of the reading of foreign literatures, notably Latin and French. During the early years of his study, he did not attend an organized school, but in his home, under the direction of a priest, he read the works of the Spanish mystics, such as Juan de Avila, San Juan de la Cruz, both Lujanes, Santa Teresa, and Malón de Chaide. Intensive study of Greek and Latin literature gave him a feeling for classical form which is reflected to some extent in all his works. The titles of several poems, such as "Non Omnis Moriar," reflect his knowledge of the Latin language and literature.
From his mother, Gutiérrez Nájera acquired his sensitivity and early piety, and from his father, who had written several dramas and a small quantity of poetry, his literary ambition. Vestiges of these influences always remained in his works.

At the age of thirteen he received repeated praise for his writings which were published in a Roman Catholic newspaper, La Iberia. From this first taste of success until the time of his death in 1895, he continued to write short stories, poems, and newspaper articles.

While Gutiérrez Nájera was attending a French school, he was introduced to the language and works of the foremost writers of the romantic and Parnassian schools, such as Victor Hugo, Alfred de Musset, Théophile Gautier, and Paul Verlaine. With this study of French literature he became Gallicized, but traces of his earlier Spanish readings may be found throughout his works, especially during the years 1876-1877.

El libro y el ambiente iban modelando a Gutiérrez Nájera; iban formando sus ideas, y su estilo, y realizando en él, como consecuencia de impulsos anteriores, un tipo perfecto de innovación y de selección. Poco a poco, en cuanto a la idea, afinó la sutiliza y la gracia; en cuanto al sentimiento, difanizó el manantial puro de su emoción y su ternura; y en cuanto a la forma, halló una elegancia suya, muy personal, en la que se mezclaban los elementos propios con los extraños.

In 1894 Gutiérrez Nájera and Carlos Díaz Dufío founded La Revista Azul. Although it was called a newspaper, its

\[1\text{Luis G. Urbina, op. cit., p. 221.}\]
chief purpose was to make known the prose and poetry of outstanding men of letters, such as Julián del Casal, Rubén Darío, and José Asunción Silva. To almost all his journalistic writings Gutiérrez Nájera signed the pseudonym "El Duque Job," which expressed two notable characteristics of his personality—the aristocracy of his sentiment and the patient sufferings of his soul.

Almost all his writings appeared in newspapers and magazines, such as El Federalista and El Partido Liberal. His poetry was not collected in a single volume until two years after his death, when Justo Sierra collected the verses and published them.

At an early age Gutiérrez Nájera had been filled with the mal du siècle so characteristic of the romantic school. He suffered without cause, and a vehement desire for death was expressed throughout his poetry. Believing himself misunderstood by the bourgeois, he lived in an invisible world with his doubts and longings.

Blanco Fombona has called him the outstanding elegist of any age, but not one who wrote Homeric songs of war. With metrical independence, he sang of various subjects, and above all, he possessed a manner of being spiritual. "Considerado así, Gutiérrez Nájera aparece como el mayor elegista del romanticismo en América."2

2Manuel Gutiérrez Nájera, Sus Mejores Poesías, "Introduction" by Rufino Blanco Fombona, p.XXI.
From the beginning of his interest in French literature there are noticeable differences in Gutiérrez Nájera's poetic expression and construction. He never slavishly imitated any other author, but his work reflected varied currents of thought mingled together to form a harmonious whole. With the combined influences of both Spanish and French romantic poets he was able to fashion for himself a richer means of expression to convey all the finer shades and subtle meanings of his complex personality.

Romántico y sentimental por naturaleza, fue discípulo de Musset y Bécquer, algo realista después y acaso un tanto modernista al fin; el más tierno, hondo y sincero cantor americano del amor, del penar y del morir, en tono melancólico y endecha. Es el Bécquer americano, ...castizamente español por la métrica, el realismo y la claridad; clásico en la naturalidad, en la sencillez y en el esmero de cincelar los versos; moderno en la fuerza lírica subjetiva y en la sentida amargura.3

Another manifestation of modernism was his voluptuous joy in nature, which served as a solace where he might hide himself from the sadness of life. His verse is extremely subjective, expressing his sadness with sincerity and spontaneity. Gutiérrez Nájera was fundamentally religious in spite of his innumerable doubts. His sentiment varied between a tender melancholy and devastating despair.

Un poeta atormentado por el deseo de la felicidad y la sed de la verdad, es una tragedia que pasa cantando por la mascarada humana; alma enferma de ideal, que...

estaba encerrada y cohibida por un cuerpo cualquiera, encontrado por casualidad.4

The poet found these sentiments expressed in French literature beginning with Chateaubriand. Nevertheless, the artistic development of Gutiérrez Nájera was not parallel to the development of French literary schools. He read the works of the romantics, the Parnassians, and the symbolists and assimilated them to create an independent personality. His various moods represent various aspects of his individuality and not mere stages in his development.

Puede afirmarse que los diez o doce primeros años de la vida literaria de Gutiérrez Nájera (1876-1888) fueron un viaje perpetuo por entre todas estas influencias, acercándose a todas, reflejándolas todas, nadando en las aguas de los autores nuevos, encantado, admirado, sugerido, y mostrando a veces en la superficie de las olas, como el escuajo de Heredia, su aleta relampagueante de esmeralda y oro.5

The poetry of Gutiérrez Nájera may be divided into three major groups. The first group, written between the years 1876-1886, consists almost exclusively of short love poems and a few religious pieces. These are the works of his youth, but they contain many of the same ideas and emotions found in his later poetry. His first lyrics were the highly romantic accounts of his grief—sometimes for his parents, at other times for a beautiful girl. All of them reflect his love for the beauties of nature, for his home, and for his family. Even in the earliest poems are found traces of religious

5Ibid., p. XIV.
doubt and pessimism. Often Gutiérrez Nájera seems to conquer his doubt and to return temporarily to his childhood piety, but he never ceases longing for his original steady faith.

In the second group of poems written between 1886 and 1890, a stronger feeling of hopelessness is evident. The poet, in the midst of despair, longs for death to put an end to his wretchedness. Although he wrote several short lyrics for his friends' albums, most of the poems are bitter pictures of his struggle against existence. On a few occasions, his doubt approached blasphemy, but he never believed that he had the right to take his own life.

In 1890 Gutiérrez Nájera gradually found a sort of peace that vaguely resembled resignation. Even though he did not reconcile his doubts with traditional religious beliefs, he sought refuge in beauty. Some of his most artistic verse may be found during the last five years of his life. El dolor continues as his principal theme, but it is no longer the bitter questioning of his earlier years.

Gutiérrez Nájera produced a rare quality of verse, a harmony of music and words. His flexibility and good taste were an innovation in Mexican poetry. In all his works there was expressed a supreme anxiety, an undue suffering. The desire for an early death, characteristic of the modernists, was fulfilled, for he died at the age of thirty-six, before his internal conflicts could be resolved into a philosophical resignation.
CHAPTER III

GUTIÉRREZ NÁJERA'S POETRY OF
THE PERIOD 1876-1886

The early lyrics of Gutiérrez Nájera have often been
compared with Bécquer's *Rimas* and Musset's *Nuits*. The same
melancholy is found in the verses of the two continental
romanticists that is evident in the works of the Mexican poet.
Each one was lonely and pessimistic, and each sought con-
solation in beauty. The three poets reveal their intense
suffering in highly polished verse.

Although Gutiérrez Nájera carefully avoided grandilo-
quence, his images are often vague. His first poetic en-
deavors are excessively romantic and may seem insincere,
coming from the pen of a seventeen-year-old poet. Since his
experience was necessarily limited, his imagination was his
chief source of inspiration.

Compared with his later works, these early poems appear
to be somewhat superficial in their sentiment and do not
contain the depth of emotion found in the verses of the more
mature poet. The wide variety of tone and subject matter is
not found in early lyrics as it appears in a later period.

Even though Bécquer, Musset, and Gutiérrez Nájera wrote
of the pain and grief of love, their purpose was not identical.
The difference in approach may, in part, be due to the
distinct beliefs of romanticism and modernism. Bécquer and Musset were romantics, and when they wrote love poetry, they addressed a particular woman and often named her. Modernist poets, however, adopted a vaguely impersonal air, often writing of the ideal, the unobtainable. Gutiérrez Nájera, lacking the romantic fire, rarely speaks of a specific woman, but he seems to address a vague mental image totally unknown to the world. Perhaps this impersonal attitude of modernism accounts for his apparent insincerity in the poetry of his youth.

The love poetry now...often resembled the carpe diem of the Renaissance. The new poets bewailed their sorrows with a heartier sincerity than they showed in their loves; a deep sadness, a mournful loneliness, runs through the elegies of Gutiérrez Nájera, Casal, and Silva.¹

The author's first lyrics, Luz y sombra, Siempre a ti, and Hojas secas, sadly relate his love for a beautiful woman who has disdained him. She, who knows nothing of the deceitful world or the bitterness of doubt, has vanished. Now his life is a hymn of grief, because he cannot forget her.

_El eterno llorar! Tal es mi suerte;_  
_Nací para sufrir y para amarla;_  
_Sólo al hacha cortando de la muerte_  
_Podrá de mis recuerdos arrancarla._²

He sees a small white house hidden in the valley and surrounded by flowers that perfume the breeze. Amidst all the natural beauty, only one thing is lacking—Lola. In

¹Pedro Henríquez Ureña, Literary Currents in Hispanic America, p. 170.
"Mi casa blanca" he implores her to return to the colorless flowers and trees which are mourning for her.

En vano por verte la luna se asoma,
En vano te busca la fuente y la flor,
Solloza en tu ausencia la amante paloma,
Le falta la dicha, le falta tu amor.
No tardes ¡oh niña! que llega el invierno.
Y el árbol sus hojas comienza a perder,
Y acaso ese luto será, Lola, eterno,
Y acaso esas flores no vuelvas a ver.3

Without her, the little white house is enveloped in gloom; spring refuses to return; the birds refuse to sing. But still she does not come.

In two subsequent lyrics, "Del libro de Lola" and "Albores primaverales," the author compares himself to the faded flowers, to ominous clouds and to a psalter without a song. The illusions of his soul flee before him, leaving him alone and without hope.

¡Ya todo es ido!
Al perder la esperanza
Todo he perdido.4

There are instances when Gutiérrez Márquez seems to find it impossible to love. In spite of his youth, he has no reason to live. In "La noche de San Silvestre" he opens his heart to sadness and painfully watches a procession of phantoms that recall to him his past loves. He sees one maiden who resembles the picture of Magdalena in the chapel, but he can no longer love her.

3Ibid., p. 66.
4Ibid., p. 82.
¡Por qué se mueren las tempranas flores?
¡Por qué mi pobre espíritu no ama?
... 
¡Oh, ven! es tiempo aún; yo haré que guarde
Mi corazón tu amor y lo sujeté...
Yo quiero amar, vivir...es tarde, es tarde
¡Vete,--yo no te quiero --vete, vete!5

He reveals a similar attitude in "¡Anda!" He prepares
neither pardon nor punishment for the one who has left him.
Since she no longer wants his love, he forces her to suffer
alone when pain first appears to shatter her youthful dreams
of life. Although he never ceases loving her, he will watch
her struggle with destiny without aiding her.

Y yo, mi sueño, que te quiero tanto,
No podré defenderte de la vida,
Tal vez entonces busques mi cariño;
¿Qué madre puede revivir al niño
Que duerme bajo el musgo de la tierra?6

Gutiérrez Májera seems to put his own philosophy into
the mouth of Hamlet in the short poem "Hamlet a Ofelia." The
Shakespearean hero speaks of his intense sufferings, his
black thoughts, and his weariness. He warns Ofelia not to
love, because his love has already made her unhappy. Now,
however, he can no longer love; he believes in nothing. He
compares himself to the fallen eagle that has lost its nest.
Even though she was his only love and has made him happy,
he bids her go to a nunnery. Eternal grief has apprehended
him, and his sole means of escape is death.

5 Ibid., p. 117.
6 Ibid., p. 168.
In a succeeding poem, Gutiérrez Nájera may reveal himself again as deeply in love, but perhaps with another beautiful woman. He believes that his spirit follows her wherever she goes, taking the form of any tangible objects or spirits around her. He is the light that awakens her, the swallow at her window, the music that she hears, her sigh, her prayer book. In "El amor duende" he declares that his life is nothing more than the shadow of hers. Then, occasionally, he begins to doubt her love. Wishing to observe all her actions, he longs to take the form of the shadows surrounding her, or her stationery, in order to know what she writes. As doubts fill his mind, his love diminishes, because the more he loves her the more pain he must bear.

_Si te vuelvo a querer
   Te he de volver a olvidar._

Since Gutiérrez Nájera finds disappointment a more suitable subject for his early poetry, he often finds it difficult to forget his past loves. In fact, his most effective lyrics are those lamenting his loss rather than those expressing his love. He displays little faith in women, for their moods change with the wind. In "Carta abierta" he compares life to a train and love to the unobtainable vapor rising from the smoke stack. Man dreams of happiness but can never secure it, for women may adore him one day and disdain him the following day.

_Tbid., p. 101._
Soñamos con amar, y nos agita
La volcánica lava del deseo;
Matamos nuestro amor, y resucita
Con las múltiples formas de Proteo.
.
¡Amor es un laúd, es una lira,
Que vibra en el espacio y enmudece;
Amor es una Ofelia que suspira...
No la querrás tocar... ¡se desvanece!

When love has vanished and man finds it impossible to regain it, he must not throw "la gota del reproche en el sublime néctar del recuerdo." Just as the frozen rains of winter do not harm the trees, love lives eternally in spite of its many sorrows.

In this same poem Gutiérrez Márera reveals another love that is often found in later works, a love of home. He declares that he seeks only the simple pleasures of home, and he saves his deepest affection for the small child that may some day rest upon his knee. As early as 1877 he wrote poems to his parents and to his childhood home. "En el hogar" and "A mi padre" describe a serene and wise man who has guided a son who is unworthy of his love. In life's struggles, when the son's will weakens, there is always a hand to soothe him, to aid him in the fight, and console him if he fails.

En mi conciencia tu palabra escucho,
Conmigo siempre por doquier caminas;
Gozas al gozo; cuando sufro mucho,
Sin que yo te lo diga, lo adivinas.

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8 Ibid., p. 221.
9 Ibid., p. 221.
10 Ibid., p. 84.
When Gutiérrez Nájera's modernist spirit longed for death, his mother's affection always prevented his contemplating suicide. In its simple, expressive style, "A mi madre" reveals the devout love that he has for his mother in spite of the many griefs that he has brought her. It was from her that he acquired his early faith, and he longs for her virtue to strengthen him while he awaits death.

Si me muero--ya presiento
Que este mundo no muy tarde
Dejaré,--
En la lucha dame aliento,
Y a mi espíritu cobardes
Dale fe. 11

Throughout his entire works, Gutiérrez Nájera is constantly making allusions to his parents, his home, and, later, to his own children. In "Cuadro de hogar" the poet depicts his ideal home. The house is filled with flowers, and the light breezes blow the curtains into forms resembling archangels. Near the garden window a woman sits at the piano. In her long black hair she wears two white roses. A small candle is burning before the shrine of Nuestra Señora de los Dolores, and its soft light casts weird shadows on the walls. In a cradle two children who resemble Titian's cherubs are sleeping. The only sounds to be heard are the peaceful breathing of the children and the sobs of Schubert coming from the piano.

11Ibid., p. 89.
To Gutiérrez Májera, children are angels from Heaven who have had the misfortune of descending to earth to suffer the pains of all mortals. They know nothing of evil and grief, but only death can prevent their learning of unhappiness. The poet compares them to small birds that have not yet learned to fly. "Pobre niña" expresses his grief for a small child, Eugenia, who had longed for death but did not realize the sorrow that she would leave for her family. When she died the red of her lips returned to the poppy, the fairness of her skin to the jasmine, her glance to a star. Nothing is left as a consolation for those who had known her during her short life except the mournful waters blown against the shore by a gentle breeze. Everywhere the cypress, the flowers, the doves ask when she will return, but perhaps they do not know that she is dead.

To those children who are poor, ill, and lonely, only death can offer escape from their misery. In "Pobre y enferma" the author depicts a small girl seated some distance from a group of other children who are laughing and playing together. Life seems to have fled from her thin, motionless body, for silently she sits listening to the rustle of silk skirts. Her spirit is dying like that of a fallen martyr, without fear or hope. Why does she live? God has wanted her to suffer the pains of existence in order to make her one of His angels. Gutiérrez Májera, nevertheless, believes that the sooner death comes the happier she will be.
Yet man is usually more tranquil in his childhood than at any other time in his entire life. Gutiérrez Nájera would like to protect happy children from the future. "Crisálida," as the name implies, is the account of a nine-year-old child who has already passed infancy but has not yet reached maturity. The poet wonders what grief the future holds for her and wishes that he could preserve her childhood.

¡Si nunca despertara de ese sueño!
¡Si pudiera vivir,
Sin que su frente de querub tocase
Con su mano de hierro el porvenir!\(^\text{13}\)

In the case of his own two daughters, however, Gutiérrez Nájera does not pray that death keep them from the future. In fact, he is inclined to become excessively sentimental when writing of them. "De Margarita" describes a lock of one of his children's hair which takes him into a world of dreams and makes the Rothschild and Vanderbilt fortunes seem small in comparison.

In writing of his wife, Cecilia Maillifert, Gutiérrez Nájera succeeds in creating two masterpieces, "La Duquesa Job" and "A Cecilia." The first is written in a light,
whimsical style, but its many foreign allusions have hampered its popularity. It is in this poem that Gutiérrez Nájera reveals a comparatively unknown side of his personality. The metrical crispness has often been interpreted as an attempt on the part of the poet to imitate the rhythm of Musset's _Chanson_. Gutiérrez Nájera occasionally approaches realism, and it is "La Duquesa Job," written _d'après nature_ that he departs from his traditional romanticism. With grace, elegance, and humor, he compares his wife to the _griseta_ of the French novelist, to Musset's Mimi Pinsón, and to the French singer Louise Théo.

Desde las Puertas de la Sorpresa  
Hasta la esquina del Jockey Club,  
No hay española, yankee o francesa,  
Ni más bonita, ni más traviesa  
Que la duquesa del duque Job.\(^{14}\)

In "A Cecilia" the poet searches vainly for his muse in order to write new verses worthy of his wife's beauty. He can no longer write without the aid of a muse, for fresh, harmonious verses refuse to come to his mind. In the lament itself, however, he creates a highly artistic and original poem.

As another means of expressing his love for beauty, Gutiérrez Nájera frequently wrote of nature in a sensitive and almost mystic way. One of his most objective poems is "Tristissima Nox," which describes the gloom and fear that the night brings. Supernatural beings come to life, and God

\(^{14}\text{Ibid., vol. II, p. 24.}\)
sends forth evil. Grieving spirits fill the air, while wild beasts roam the woods. Then the timid animals hide in stables or nests when the black night begins to rise from the abysses and smother the light. The weird sounds and forms bring grief to man, who eagerly awaits the dawn. The entire earth joyously greets the sunrise, which returns gladness and life. In contrast, in "Crepúsculo" the poet expresses a different attitude toward night. In this instance, night arrives slowly and scatters her radiant jewels across the sky. Forms seem to melt together, but there is nothing to fear.

Ya la tranquila noche comienza
Y entre las sombras se puede amar. 15

Gutiérrez Nájera loved beauty in any form, whether it was natural or man-made. Unlike many of his literary predecessors in México, he had seen prosperous cities grow in Spanish America which were comparable to those of Europe. He had seen wealth and luxury, and Versailles became a symbolic name for the recent American prosperity and progress. For its culture and splendor he praised France.

Su cuerpo era de México y su alma de París. Impregnóse su espíritu de "parisina" a punto de que su producción se confundiera con la de un escritor francés si no fuese el tema local. 16

A large majority of Gutiérrez Nájera's poems deal with French thought, and one entire poem, "Francia y México,"

15Ibid., p. 157
is devoted to praise of France, who is represented as the hand that raises those who have fallen, and a warm balm that consoles those in despair. Mexico is no longer trying to dispel Napoleon's armies; rather she wants to recognize France as the mistress of all nations.

To such a poet as Gutiérrez Nájera, however, history and economics were too cold and academic for his subjective writings. He invariably returned to philosophy and to the subject of death for his more serious works. As early as 1877 he was finding religion a suitable theme, but he never wrote of theology or dogma. His religious beliefs were as erratic as his loves. His first poems disclose the pious influence of his mother. One of his most famous works, written during the first years of his career, is "La Cruz," dedicated to this "holy symbol of the faith, the emblem of Christianity."

¡Quién eres tú, que como hermosa palma
Sobre el viento y el mar te balances,
Prestando al corazón ventura y calma?
¡Eres la Cruz--La salvación del alma!
¡Signo de redención, bendito seas!17

Several poems in the same vein followed in rapid succession. "Dios" is a short poem which reveals God's power. The tempests serve as God's vengeance and as a reminder of His omnipotence. The skies reflect His greatness, which is almost incomprehensible to man. Nature is a song of His love, and thought is a song of His knowledge.

"Maria," which appeared in 1877, praises the love and pity of the Virgin, the star of the seas and the lighthouse of hope. Mary, a name the early centuries never heard, was unknown to the early Greek scholars, and profane muses did not sing it. Like a hidden rose, the humble mother of Jesus accepted her pain with resignation and her greatness without pride. Still, angels adore her, and impious man invokes her as a messenger of peace and pardon. With this poem, Gutiérrez Nájera caused his readers to believe that the young poet was destined to become one of the great religious writers of the age, but similar poems did not follow "Maria."

Un himno a la Virgen hizo creer en el advenimiento de un poeta místico; pero ese cántico no era sino una de tantas bizarrías de quien iba a pasar por las evoluciones más raras y caprichosas, yendo de la fe ciego en la Divinidad hasta la completa negación del Todo; de San Francisco de Asís a Kant; siendo alternativamente creyente y ateo... para volver en sus últimos días a cantar a Dios.18

More than once the poet longed for the simple faith of his childhood, a time when he enjoyed peace and security. Suddenly his enchanting illusions were shattered by reality, human misery, and human passions. His mother prayed for her weak son whose heart had been darkened by doubt and even blasphemy. He compared his life to a strong ship that lost its course and was tossed by the sea. Then the ship found its way again and was led to shelter. In "La fe de mi infancia"

18Beltrán, op. cit., p. 349.
the poet says that his blasphemous heart has been purified and
he has found a light to guide the world to eternal love and
joy:

Yo fui, Señor, en medio a mi camino
Semejante a la nave, débil pluma
Arrastrada del recio tornillo
Rota y sin rumbo entre la hirviente espuma
Pobre mortal, cuitado peregrino,
Volví la vista a tu grandeza suma,
Mi voz a ti elevé por vez postrera
Y hallé mi fe de niño toda eterna. 19

Then in "La duda" the poet's feelings of doubt return to
torture him. In this struggle to liberate himself from them,
he compares his life to a ship again. The ship breaks its
cables and begins to cut through the waters of the ocean.
Doubt seems to whisper that happiness is only a dream and
that the sole certainty is tears and pain. His soul has been
filled with shadows, and his brain has been left in chaos.
He bids the black phantom flee before all his hopes are destroyed;

¿Acaso ignoras, dime,
Que el santo amor que siento
Es alma de mi alma
Y vida de mi ser?
¿No sabes que sin ella
La vida es un tormento,
La fe palabra vana,
Quimérico el placer? 20

Once more Gutiérrez Nájera decides that the only eternal
happiness is death. In "Sobre el sepulcro de Rafael Martínez
de la Torre," he declares that his good friend has made a
conquest and now lives eternally. The poet envies Rafael,
who has already left the wretched world and has acquired true peace.

*Morir es quebrantar con dura mano
De esta cripta horrorosa las cadenas,
Sacudir las mortales ligaduras,
Traspasar de este mundo las barreras
Y desposarse con la eterna dicha
En el azúreo tálamo del cielo.*

One of the strongest and most depressing of all Gutiérrez Nájera’s poems is "De las neuróticas." He wonders who will make his coffin when life leaves his tired, pale body. Who will kneel by his bed, and what kind souls will cry on his tomb? The tower of the church seems to be looking at him and calling him. He enters the church and kneels to receive the sacrament, as he once joyfully did in his childhood. The priest takes the chalice, but as he approaches, the Host leaves the priest’s hand and flies away through the white air.

In "Para qué?" life is compared to a hazardous journey on the sea. It is useless for man to struggle with destiny, for he cannot be freed from his ship. While others search greedily for happiness, Gutiérrez Nájera is resigned to his fate:

*Vivir es ser cautivo...
Echado en la sentina mi vida pasaré!
No quiero entrar en lucha con hombres ni deidades;
Ya soplen los alisios o rujan tempestades,
Aquí, sin agitarme, la muerte esperaré.*

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21Ibid., p. 46.

22Ibid., p. 165.
When he was quite young, the poet was in love with a girl who died before she reached maturity. "Lied" is a short lyric composed in her memory. Again he longs to cease living, for fate has opened only one road to him and has given only one star to light his way. It is the road that guides him to death, and the star is the cross.

"Fiat voluntas" is one of Gutiérrez Nájera's most pessimistic poems. His soul is engulfed in sadness as he cowardly awaits death. His last hope is the Christian faith. He goes from door to door begging happiness, but everywhere he is refused. Praying to be cleansed of such bitterness, he feels that some day he will be able to overcome his weakness.

¡Señor! a cada paso la dicha más se aleja
¿Por qué, por qué, Señor?
¡Todo en profundas sombras y obscuridad me deja,
Sí, todo, hasta el dolor!23

In "Entumbido" Gutiérrez Nájera describes a cold, hungry child who has no warm clothing and shelter. The boy has no mother to hear his complaint, and he will never again see the rays of the sun. The poet, however, knows how much the dying child is suffering.

¡Débil niño que pereces sin abrigo ni jergón,
Cuánto, cuánto te parece a mi pobre corazón!24

In a succeeding poem, he returns to a more whimsical and playful mood to express the poetic denial of his gifts. In "Nada es mio" Gutiérrez Nájera tells the inquisitive

23Ibid., p. 268.
24Ibid., p. 230.
Rosa that he does not know how verses are made. He does not write his poetry; it lives within him and without him. Sometimes he writes a poem and plagiarizes, without knowing it, some greater poet, a thrush, a chattering sparrow, a bee, or perhaps a butterfly. The verses he loves most express his anxieties and deep affections. Often the stars help him, and the ruby dawn inspires him. Poetry sent by God enters his mind without asking permission.

No soy poeta, ¡ya lo ves! en vano
Halagas con tal título mi oído,
¡Que no es senzontle o ruiseñor el nido
Ni tenor o baritono el piano!²⁵

During these first ten years of his poetic creation, Gutiérrez Márrea revealed his versatility in subject and mood. From the short love lyrics, such as "Después del teatro," to the longer, more profound poems, such as "Sicut nubes, quasi navis, velut umbra," there is the same questioning and sadness, and on rare occasions one may find a bit of humor. He brought innovations to Mexican literature during one of its most arid epochs.

²⁵Ibid., p. 256.
CHAPTER IV

POEMS OF THE PERIOD 1886-1890

In the four years between 1886 and 1890 Gutiérrez Nájera produced some of his most famous poems. As a more mature poet, he was able to write more artistic and subtle elegies. They possess the same extreme subjectivity of his earlier works, but the melancholy and bitterness are much deeper. He has discovered that grief and pain are universal, and in the disillusioned spirit of Leopardi he questions the meaning of life and death.

His inner conflict is characteristic of the age. Similar to scores of others who had not found themselves, he was influenced by scientific questioning. "He begins to wonder whether there is a sole truth and has begun to sense the futility of dogma whether clothed in religion or in science."¹

The poet reveals a curiosity concerning the metaphysical, asking where he goes and from whence he comes. His sincere emotion and expression have had a lasting influence on later Spanish American modernistas, such as Amado Nervo and Luis G. Urbina. Most of the poems of this period were published separately in journals, with the exception of a group called Versos viejos.

¹Isaac Goldberg, _op. cit._, p. 35.
One of the outstanding poems that Gutiérrez Májera wrote during the latter part of 1886 is "Musa blanca." It bears a striking resemblance to Alfred de Musset's "La nuit de mai" in both subject and tone. In "Musa blanca" the poet is seated at a table filled with books, but his sadness and loneliness prevent his writing.

¡A solas y callados!...¡A solas dolor mío!
¡Entre los cuatro muros del camarín sombrío,
A solas y callados quedémonos tú y yo!
Mas ¿qué pisadas oigo? ¿qué sombra ven mis ojos?
Cerrada está la puerta...corridos los carrojos...
Ni el perro vigilante en el jardín ladró.2

Musset's poem has similar feelings of despair when the Muse enters:

Dieu puissant! tant mon corps frissonne.
Que vient? qui m'appelle?--Personne.
Je suis seul; c'est l'heure qui sonne;
O solitude! o pauvreté!3

Gutiérrez Májera's muse, like Musset's, bids the poet arise and write, even though the poems are laments. The most beautiful songs are often written about tragic subjects. His muse brings him life and warmth, enabling him to see the beauty of sadness.

"Calicots" is the account of a boy's receiving the news of his mother's death. The boy has been sent to America, and after many years of loneliness, he hears that his beloved

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mother has died, alone and forgotten by her son. This poem cannot be taken as autobiographical, since Gutiérrez Nájera and his parents resided in or near Mexico City during their entire lifetime, and his own mother was never far away from him. It does, however, show the poet's ability to express grief, whether it is his own or that of someone else.

*El dolor* continues to be his theme in "To be." Gutiérrez Nájera was an ardent admirer of William Shakespeare, and he frequently employed Shakespearean quotations and characters in his own works. "To be" expresses the hopelessness of Hamlet's soliloquy. Life is only pain and suffering, but suicide is useless. Death does not free souls from grief, for sleep without dreams is impossible. There is no death, no hope, for those who suffer. Life may cease, but pain continues forever.

*Y el espacio,
El vivir de soles, lo infinito,
Son la cárcel inmensa, sin salida,
De almas que sufren y morir no pueden*[^1]

Gutiérrez Nájera takes a more optimistic view of life in a succeeding poem. In "Consejos" he advises man not to deny his beliefs or curse his existence. There is hope for the future, and although life is a perpetual struggle, happiness is not unobtainable. If man suffers, he must remember that some day pain will cease.

Busca, si lloras, el crucifijo,
Siempre tu madre contigo esté,
Sabe ser hombre, sabe ser hijo,
Espera, lucha, combate, cree!5

Then, once again, the poet seems to lose his faith in humanity as he composes the bitter "Tres amantes." In this poem the young girl represents mankind in its quest for contentment. She rejects the first two amantes who come to seek her love. The first one, the warrior, has won a hundred towns with his sword and bows to her beauty. He is noble and valiant, but she rejects him. The second is a poet who wishes to make a statue of her beauty and a hymn of her words, so that future ages may serve her. She scorns both his love and his words. The third lover appears, and he offers to convert her golden tresses into money. It is he who steals honor and decorum and gives only gold. She willingly accepts his offering and bids him enter.

Gutiérrez Nájera's cynicism deepens and approaches blasphemy in his well-known "Monólogo del incrédulo." He bitterly declares that man has not asked for existence, so why must he endure it? Perhaps man has committed some sin without knowing it, and life is his punishment. If God gave man an existence that he does not want, is it possible for him to return it? The poet longs to die in order to see if the god who punished him should be named Evil or Love.

\[5\text{Ibid., p. 62.}\]
Gallous life ties man with strong ropes, and in vain death stretches out her arms to him. Gutiérrez Nájera does not contemplate suicide, because he does not wish to bring grief to his parents. He could kill himself serenely, but he does not want to condemn his mother to eternal suffering:

Tengo derecho a morir,
Mas no derecho a matar. 6

He knows well, however, that all is transient, and after suffering infinite pain, he will find an escape from life. He too will engender another being as unfortunate, and although he will deeply love it, he will feel regret at having forced it to suffer life. Thinking of his family, the poet feels that all creatures do not know life as constant grief and wickedness. He recalls the faith in the future that his novia had when she first whispered, "Te adoro." She is in love with a man who is as smoke. Perhaps her sincere love can restore eternal faith to his life. Then he wonders if he loves her, if he will love her in the future. Finding one’s love gone is similar to finding one’s small child dead;

Amar y no ser amado
No es la pena mayor;
Ver el cariño apagado,
No amar ya lo antes amado
Es el supremo dolor. 7

He is chained to life by others’ love, and if their love for him would die, he would be set free. In vain his saddened

6Ibid., p. 75.
7Ibid., p. 78.
heart seeks liberty. He abhors life and pleads with God for death.

Gutiérrez Nájera’s famous poem "Para entonces" was written in the same year as "Monólogo del incrédulo," and in it he expresses the same vehement desire for death. The poet, who is twenty-eight years old, wishes to die when the sun is sinking in the west:

Morir, y joven; antes que destruya el tiempo a leve la gentil corona; cuando la vida dice aún; soy tuya, aunque sepamos bien que nos traiciona. 8

He regains his faith temporarily in "La cena de Noche Buena." On Christmas Eve his illusions return, and phantoms of his departed friends pass before him. While all the believers are attending midnight mass, he sits alone with ghosts that seem to return to life. He looks at the crèche, and the figure of Jesus lying in the manger seems to have become alive. The poet dreams of happiness and vows that he will dispel doubt and wickedness from his life.

Despair again seizes Gutiérrez Nájera as he writes "Ondas muertas." In an attitude of tender melancholy, he attempts to sound depths of the soul that never come to light. This poem is a masterpiece of self-revelation and sadness. He describes the silent currents of water that glide in darkness beneath the earth. If iron pierces the rocks above, they

8Ibid., vol. I, p. 29.
leap up in a vast gush of foam. But other currents never find an exit and glide in the dense darkness, perpetually condemned to their course. Rivers flow toward the sea, cheerfully reflecting the stars above them and the flowers on their banks; fountains spray water into the air, and it playfully scatters sparkling drops on leaves; the waves of the sea assault the rocky shore and rise toward the skies; yet the black currents that live below the earth have never felt the light or heard a song. The poet compares this water to the currents of his soul, which are captive waves, unseen and forgotten. If they could find an open passage, they would burst forth.

Pero nunca jamás, prisionera, santiréis de la luz la mirada; seguid siempre rodando en la sombra, silenciosas corrientes del alma.9

The poet realizes the creative power of grief and incorporates all the disillusionment and unrest of his age in one short poem, "Mariposas." The lost illusions of his soul are compared to butterflies. They frolic in the air and on the flower petals. A spark of light gives them life, and a falling drop of water drowns them. When darkness comes, the butterflies flee, leaving no trace of their abode.

Nacen, aman, y brillan y mueren, En el aire, al morir se transforman, Y se van, sin dejarnos su huella, Cual de tenue llovizna las gotas.10

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10Ibid., p. 106.
Perhaps some of the butterflies are called to the sky to form the rainbow, while others become flowers. They disappear, but who knows in what grave they sleep? In the same way, the fantasies of love and glory are born and die. The white butterflies, the pure orange blossoms of his novia, have fled. The red butterflies symbolize passion, the blue ones, poetry, the gold ones, glory. Evening has come to the poet's soul, and there are no butterflies. Then a swarm of black ones, which represent death, slowly approach. The disillusioned poet welcomes them and bids them come soon.

Several of the poems written between 1886 and 1890 are dedicated to friends who have recently died. In "En la muerte de Manuel Alvarez del Castillo" and "Blanco--Pálido--Negro" Gutiérrez Nájera praises the benevolent God who rescued two of his friends from life. He offers consolation to a father who has lost his young son in "A Benjamín Bolaños en la muerte de su hijo," and he reminds the father that he is more fortunate than some parents.

Si no vuelve el amor de tus amores,  
en tu amor paternal halla consuelo;  
¡no conoció del mundo los dolores,  
y vivió sin vivir, y se fué al cielo!\[1\]

But death is not always so kind. In "La serenata de Schubert" Gutiérrez Nájera recalls his past happiness as the strains of Schubert's "Serenade" seem to say "Hasta mañana."

\[1\]Ibid., p. 150.
The poet, however, knows that happiness is of yesterday, and tomorrow holds only pain, darkness, and death. The sobs of Schubert and Musset’s Lucia recall to him his past joy, the many times when he stood at a reja in the moonlight, speaking to a girl who whispered, "Hasta mañana." She did not realize that tomorrow meant death. He no longer sees the blue lake, the orchard in bloom, the silvery moonlight. All is gone except tomorrow. Schubert and Musset weave their sad harmony into a painful serenade in his heart.

Gutiérrez Májera reaches his deepest note of despair in "Después," which was written shortly after the death of his father. As he sinks to the bottom of the abyss, complete hopelessness seizes him. He sees that the large nave in the immense temple is mute and somber. The candles do not burn, and the alter flowers are black. He longs for death not only for himself but also for his mother, who mourns for his father. He seeks a "sombra sin orillas" for his soul.

Señor, ¿en dónde estás? ¿En dónde estás, oh Cristo?
¡Te llamo con pavor porque estoy solo,
Como llama a su padre el pobre niño,
¡Y nadie en el altar! ¡Nadie en la nave!
¡Todo en tiniebla sepulcral hundido!
¡Habla! ¡Que suene el órgano! ¡Que vea
En el desnudo altar arder los círios!
¡Ya me ahogo en la sombra, ya me ahogo!
¡Resucita, Dios mío!12

The joyous illusions of his childhood have fled, but he bids them return to his soul as happy children return home

12Ibid., p. 154.
from school. The illusions return slowly, although they are clad in mourning veils. His thoughts are no longer clothed in brilliant colors. His illusions have been punished by a cruel world that does not know their value.

Ilusiones, ¿por qué os castigaron? ¡Pobrecitas!...yo sé que sois buenas. Sólo amor y ternura pedían, sólo os dieron engaño y tristeza.13

A more optimistic note is sounded in "Espera." The poet's imprisoned heart tries to release itself from its dungeon. His ideals are dead, but his soul retains its desire to prevail, perhaps to conquer a bleak, sandy desert. Through all his misery goodness is visible. Farther away hope sadly smiles. Gutiérrez Málara knows that he is a coward when death approaches, even though he can fight valiantly with pain. When his heart pleads to be free, his body does not wish to release it, but finally the soul is liberated.

"Hubo un ángel en medio de mi sombra;"
Ya, prófugo, a partir me preparaba,
Y la que sólo mi silencio nombra,
Me dijo sonriendo;--¡Te esperaba!14

In spite of the melancholy tone of his preceding poems, Gutiérrez Málara wrote some of his most whimsical lyrics during this period. Short poems such as "El hada verde," "Para el corpúsculo," and "En el campo" describe the celestial beauty of nature. "Para un menú" compares past loves to

14Ibid., p. 146.
empty wine glasses.

One of the poet's most artistic pieces is his symphony in white major, "De blanco," which is often compared with Théophile Gautier's "Symphonie en blanc majeur." He enumerates the rarest white objects in nature—the orange blossom, the cloud, white doves, the village tower, the swans on the lake, the snowy iris. Inside the temple the holiest objects are white. The Host shines; the priest's hair resembles snow. The marble statues listen to prayers of a hundred little girls dressed in white. In the field the foam of the singing brook resembles a tumult of white feathers. Nature finds white its perfect means for expressing beauty.

¡Qué blancas son, reinas, los mantos de armiño!
¡Qué blanca es, ¡oh madres! la cuna del niño!
¡Qué blanca, mi amada, qué blanca eres tú!\(^{15}\)

The years between 1886 and 1890 display a new literary elegance in poetic sentiment and expression. Gutiérrez Najera has acquired a devotion to form, a more turbulent inner conflict, a symbolic beauty, and a variety of moods.

\(^{15}\)Ibid., p. 123.
CHAPTER V

POEMS OF THE PERIOD 1890-1895

The last five years of Manuel Gutiérrez Nájera's life are less prolific than the previous ones, but the quality of the poems overshadows the number. His dissatisfaction with this life increases, but it is not the blasphemous bitterness of "Monólogo del incrédulo" or "Después." His eternal questioning seems to be soothed by resignation, although it is never completely satisfied. His serenity, however, is frequently interrupted by a sob of grief.

Gutiérrez Nájera's later poems are more carefully composed, and he never published one until it was revised and polished. Many of the shorter lyrics did not appear in print until 1937, when E. K. Mapes's collection "Poemas inéditas de Gutiérrez Nájera" was published in six volumes of the Revista Hispánica Moderna. Even though his early poems were written hastily, the works of the more mature poet display a technical perfection which is the result of the poet's study and discipline. He believed that poetic gift is not enough; artists must not depend on their innate talent to produce innumerable carelessly-written volumes.

The emotions expressed in these later works are less violent

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displays of passion and despair. As Henríquez Ureña wrote, Gutiérrez Nájera "spoke of his sorrows in a soft murmur."¹ In this period, as in the two preceding ones, he wrote numerous short love lyrics for albums, but compared with the profound pieces such as "Pax animae," they are of little consequence.

As a true romantic, Gutiérrez Nájera denounced strength and surrendered to weakness. He held the belief that free will is a myth. Thus, he ceased fighting and placed himself in the hands of fate. For this reason, some of the poems written from 1890 until his death seem to contain a quality of resignation.

In these years Gutiérrez Nájera most successfully combined the French spirit and Spanish form. According to Justo Sierra, he reached the goal in his quest for the ideal.

En los últimos seis ó ocho años, dueño ya por completo de sí mismo, no con el estilo de sus maestros, pero sí con uno que sus maestros no habían repudiado y que era único en nuestra literatura, el poeta, el Duque Job, había logrado realizar en sus escritos lo que había soñado...²

One of the most beautiful and popular of Gutiérrez Nájera's poems is "Pax animae." This poem is widely read in Latin America because of its beauty of language and sentiment. It lacks the cynicism and pessimism so prevalent in most of

¹Pedro Henríquez Ureña, Literary Currents in Hispanic America, p. 167.
his earlier works, and it reveals that he almost finds the peace that he has sought for so long. Instead of loathing life, he is now only tired of existence and longs to sink into complete oblivion. Life has been unjust, love has been inconstant, and fame, the last sad vanity of man, is transient. Although his heart cries out for compassion, no one responds. In this life the only consolation is raising one's eyes toward the stars in the heavens and recalling the beautiful hours that are past. Alfred de Musset expressed the same sentiment in "Souvenir," in which he stated that perhaps the joyful memory of things past is man's most priceless possession. This belief is quite different from that expressed in the Inferno by Dante, who thought that no pain was so great as a pleasant memory recalled during hours of misery.

Gutiérrez Nájera, however, has begun to rely on dreams to alleviate some of his grief. He no longer fears them as he did in "To be." Instead, sleep and dreams serve as a sedative for a sad heart. In "Pax anmae" the poet contemplates vengeance for his recent wound, but then he asks for forgiveness.

Pero... ¡perdona el mal que te hayan hecho!
¡Todos están enfermos de la vida!

· · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · ·
Si los que tú más amas te traicionan
¡Perdónalos, no saben lo que hacen!³

He asks who can be sure that he is without guilt, who

³Ibid., vol. II, p. 166.
can be sure that he has not killed. The poet seeks pity and pardon for those who still live, for they will be filled with love and compassion and perhaps sometimes goodness. Slowly the day departs, and the dark forest offers rest and peace at last. The tired light closes its eyes, and the descending night bids the day, "Now sleep and do not cry."

Then follow four of the most famous lines penned by Gutiérrez Nájera:

Recordar...Perdonar...Haber amado...
Ser dichoso un instante, haber creído...
Y luego...reclínarse fatigado
En el hombro de nieve del olvido.4

The poet's advice is to gather flowers while flowers still exist and forgive the roses' thorns. Grief and pain will soon return like a swarm of black butterflies. Love and pardon, and with valor resist injustice, villainy, and cowardice. The silent evening is falling, beautifully pensive and sad.

Cuando el dolor mi espíritu sombera
Busco en las cimas claridad y calma,
¡Y una infinita compasión albera
En las heladas cumbres de mi alma!5

All the sadness and loneliness that Gutiérrez Nájera feels are expressed in the mournful verses of "Mis enlutadas." He loves his griefs, because they alone have not deserted him. They are always constant and punctual. At times he may forget them, but soon they return to bury themselves in his soul and drive away his hopes and smiles. They cause

4Ibid., p. 167.
5Ibid., p. 168.
memories to seem to be dim candles of pale wax. Like hungry wolves, they find his guilt and all his shortcomings, which are quickly exposed to view. Sometimes the poet feels like a martyr or a mistreated child; often, however, in an outburst of rage, he curses his tristezas. Then, after he finds himself without them, he realizes that they are the only creatures that have not deserted him. When his griefs have departed, he feels alone and bids them return.

Venid y habladme de las cosas idas
De las tumbas que callan,
De muertos buenos y de ingratos vivos...
Voy con vosotras,
Vamos a casa.  

In "Las almas huérfanas" Gutiérrez Nájera describes the misfortunes of his errant soul. On still, dark nights it wanders sadly through the infinite shadows of the city. Strange people surround the alma, but it is unable to understand what they say. The poet begins to wonder if his family and home were only dreams. He searches in vain for his wise father and his pious mother, who symbolize happiness and virtue for him. The familiar feeling of loneliness sweeps over his soul. He compares himself to a cold, hungry beggar, who sings and asks alms, but his songs and pleas are never heard. The God that others worship does not understand his language; He is the false god of foreign peoples. The poet recalls his sisters, who share his sadness; but he still

\[6\text{Ibid.}, \ p. \ 182.\]
longs for peace. He does not ask for fame, wealth, or even happiness; all that he requests is hope.

Gutiérrez Nájera remembers the loss of his faith, which fled when Truth called it to battle. He wishes to return to the temple to seek Christ and to kiss the altar.

Labró en mármol la hermosa capilla
Donde yace el Jesús de su infancia,
Y quisiera decirle: ¡En ti creo,
Sé mi Dios y levántate y anda!
Pero el Cristo ¡qué exangüe! Sus ojos
¡Qué apagados! Su frente ¡qué pálida!
Ya no tiene más sangre su cuerpo
Para dar fuerza nueva a esa alma.7

As a poet, he cries out for death and vengeance, for he abhors life. Still, he is conscious of a feeling of nostalgia, a desire to retrieve his youthful joys and his faith. In despair his soul joins other almas huérfanas in asking, "Whence do we come? Where is our home?"

In 1893 Gutiérrez Nájera seems to have acquired a faint hope for the future. In the exquisite "Salmo de vida," he offers a mixture of imagination, reality, and symbolism. His ideas are covered with a thin veil of symbols, but his concepts of the spirit remain clear. This poem describes the blossoming of spring, the renovation of life heralded by Psyche, the long-suffering spirit which lives on in spite of pain. Spring brings health to the sick woman, the soul, and she rises from her bed to live again.

7Ibid., p. 173.
¡Qué gozo! ¡Ya está sana! ¡Ya está buena!
¡Ya estás, oh Primavera, en nuestras almas!

In "La misa de flores" the poet displays his eternal love for nature. He describes a mass said in the forest by flowers and birds. Each lily contains sacramental wine; each dove carries a branch of orange blossoms. The jasmine and forget-me-nots are up to greet the daybreak. The grasshopper is the tenor in the choir, and the tulip delivers the sermon. The prim dahlia, a prioress, gently kneels before the brilliant altar. After mass the pious flowers slowly close and await the following day.

During the last five years of Gutiérrez MÁjera's life, the writer continues writing short pieces for albums and hymns of praise dedicated to his friends. The most outstanding poems of this type include "A Altamirano," "A Justo Sierra," "A Vincente Riva Palacio," and "Para la corona fúnebre de la señora Juana Diez Gutiérrez de Diez Gutiérrez." The first two express his admiration for the two contemporary poets, both of whom had a tremendous influence on him.

Unlike most Mexican men of letters, he took little interest in politics. He makes infrequent allusions to political figures, but he never expresses his own opinions. Absorbed in his artistic creations, Gutiérrez MÁjera seems to have little interest in such mundane affairs as government. Had he been anxious to spread political propaganda, he had excellent opportunities in the poems "A Hidalgo"
and "A la Corregidora." Instead, he preferred to write musical lyrics in the interest of pure art. "A Hidalgo" is a short poem which appeared in his famous volume Odas breves.

When asked to sing praises of Hidalgo, the priest liberator of Mexico, he wrote a reverent ode in which he declared himself incapable of brandishing the high sword of song.9

"A la Corregidora" was Gutiérrez Nájera's final literary creation. It was written for the dedication of a statue of the Corregidora, the heroine of the Revolution. He describes the flowers that pay their tribute to her statue. This poem is the foremost example of the poet's ability to compose musical verse. He attempts to follow Verlaine's suggestion of conveying ideas by means of sounds instead of images. The seventh stanza, especially, recalls to the reader the poetic works of Rubén Darío.

    El chorro del agua con impetu rudo,
    En alto su acero, brillante y desnudo,
    Bruñido su casco, rizado el alirón,
    Y el iris por banda, buscándote salta
    Cual joven amante que brinca a la alta
    Velada cornisa de abierto balcón.10

Gutiérrez Nájera bids farewell to life when he is but thirty-four years old. Yet in "Non Omnis Moriar," written in 1894, he declared that he would not wholly die; his poetry would live long after life had passed from him. His thoughts,

9Pedro Henríquez Ureña, Literary Currents in Hispanic America, p. 173.

prosaic as they may seem to others, will be eternal, although his body must soon perish.

Porque existe la Santa Poesía
Y en ella irradiás tú, mientras disperso
Atomo de mi ser esconda el verso,
¡No moriré del todo, amiga mía! 11

11 Ibid., p. 214.
CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

Although Manuel Gutiérrez Nájera is usually labeled a precursor of modernism, his romantic characteristics cannot be overlooked. He was a pure lyrist who attempted to reveal the world within his own soul. His style is simple, almost classical in its naturalness, yet romantic in its subjectiveness and plaintive melancholy. His modernism is not so evident in his poetry as in his prose, but Gutiérrez Nájera "never ceased being romantic."¹

He sought inspiration in foreign fields, because Spanish literature in both hemispheres had been unproductive. His aim was to develop individuality without forgetting literary tradition, to interpret without slavishly imitating. "Se ha sumergido en sus pensamientos, se ha asimilado su manera de decir, y ha vuelto, como buzo, con las manos llenas de perlas."²

Gutiérrez Nájera's first lyrics reveal the romantic soul of a poet who gave Mexican literature new life in a barren epoch. During the years between 1876 and 1886 he

²Manuel Puga y Acal, Los poetas mexicanos contemporáneos, p. 59.
describes his disappointments in life and his search for consolation in nature. His ability to write melodious, pessimistic verse is evident, although these early poems lack the emotional depth and polished style of his later works. His grief is often short-lived, but his youthful heart cannot find happiness. He gives evidence, however, of his versatility and vivid imagination.

During the four years from 1886 to 1890 his poems indicate definite progress in thought and style. His soul is seized by doubt and bitterness, and he laments the loss of his belief in humanity; he becomes cynical and longs for an escape from life. His moods are constantly changing, but a note of pessimism remains.

The years from 1890 to 1895 are the mature years of a great artist. Gutiérrez Májera has acquired an ability to express his emotions in a subdued and technically perfect manner. He is still seeking an exit from life, but he is content to await death, which will rescue him from his grief. The poet has become less bitter and is able to find some slight consolation in recalling his happier hours.

Even though his poetry written in a lighter vein has charm, Gutiérrez Májera excelled in melancholy verse. Perhaps these poems have more appeal because they seem to be more genuine, more nearly the expression of the poet's own soul. As a typical romantic he writes of the disillusionments
of love, the fleeting aspect of all things, the meaning of life and death, and a constant internal conflict. This conflict is the result of a loss of faith in religious dogmas which were too deeply rooted in childhood to allow him to renounce them completely. One of the poet's outstanding characteristics is pessimism. "This pessimism arises from aspirations of an unobtainable ideal, leaving the romantic without a spiritual anchor or goal."3

Gutiérrez Nájera proves himself a master of style, metrical perfection, and musical grace during the last ten years of his life. He endeavors to make his readers feel that they have just seen a brilliant painting rather than having read about it. By the frequent use of similes and clever epigrams he succeeds in creating vivid word pictures. His metrical perfection is evident in "De blanco," which is written in perfect waltz tempo, and in "A la corregidora," which is the poet's most musical and onomatopoetic composition. Although Gutiérrez Nájera's poetry contains fewer figures of speech than his prose, "Pecar en sueños" is noted for its epigrams which have become familiar to the average Mexican. There is comparatively little symbolism in his poetry, and for this reason, his works are more easily read and understood than those of many of the later Spanish American poets.

The poetry of Gutiérrez Nájera shows an influence of

French philosophy. He grew up in the age of liberalism. In 1859 Benito Juárez issued his Reform Laws, and three years later religious orders were suppressed. The poet was a thinker as well as an artist; so these reactions against religion contributed to his doubt and loss of faith in dogmas. Perhaps Gutiérrez Nájera would have suffered less if he had been less of a thinker. His poetry, however, would lack much of its beauty and grace had its author not suffered endless pain. "Y si el poeta sufre, su dolor no es blasfemia...y no por obra de sabiduría, sino por dulce atenuación de su gracia; por su don interior." 4

Gutiérrez Nájera devotes few lines to the expression of the joys of youth and the gladness of nature. Since he spent almost all his life in the vicinity of the Mexican capital, he was not very familiar with nature's beauty. To his family and friends he was too absorbed in reading to display an interest in anything except literature. In his youth he found little but scorn in love. It is natural, however, that a man of Gutiérrez Nájera's physical appearance might be scorned by women. He was a short, malformed person with a large Cyranoesque nose, a crooked mouth, and slightly slanting eyes. But his physical unattractiveness was overlooked by his intimate friends, who admired the beauty of his emotions.

Gutiérrez Nájera's most popular lyrics in Spanish America

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4Santiago Argüello, Modernismo y modernistas, p. 190.
are the lighter and less melancholy poems, such as "Para un menú." If the poet had prepared a collection of his better works, he probably would have omitted such compositions. Some of his love poems contain brilliant passages, but they do not seem to come from the heart of the poet. During the last ten years of his career, Gutiérrez Márquez's heart, lacerated by despair and doubt, cries out, "¿Por qué vivimos? ¿De dónde venimos? ¿Quién nos trajo?" He longs for the peace that he knew as a child.

Although he excelled in melancholy verses, some of his poems written in a lighter vein, such as "La misa de flores," and "La Duquesa Job," have charm. The poet was fond of music in all its forms and succeeded in composing musical verse unlike that of any of his Mexican predecessors.

Romantic poets of Mexico before Gutiérrez Márquez had employed trite expressions and images. Their verse lacked music and smoothness. Gutiérrez Márquez broadened and enriched his native literature with subtleties of expression, new verse forms, and fresh images. It is difficult to evaluate the contributions of a writer who lived only thirty-five years. He was obviously a poet and essayist of great genius, but he might have become one of Spanish America's most famous men of letters if he could have reached greater maturity.

Just as Gutiérrez Márquez was influenced by French romanticism, Parnassianism, and symbolism, he in turn exercised a wide-spread influence on Mexican and South American
modernism. Even though his extreme cynicism and sentimentality may seem exaggerated to many of his readers, his artistic abilities cannot be denied. His poetry transcends literary boundaries, but his romantic characteristics are always evident, and he will be remembered for his ability to incorporate music, color, and emotions into a harmonious whole. "Gutiérrez Nájera es incorrecto a veces, gongórico otras, extravagante algunas...pero siempre es poeta.5

5Antonio de la Peña y Reyes, Algunos Poetas, p. 77.
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