

THE BASES OF HUMOR
IN THE CONTEMPORARY SPANISH THEATRE

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INTRODUCTION

"From the beginning, humor has been an essential ingredient of the dramatic literature of Spain, ever ready to appease what has been called 'la cólera del español sentado.'"¹ In the "Auto de los Reyes Magos," first extant work in the Spanish theatre, there is some humor in the portrayal of the Jewish counselors to King Herod. Although no other plays are available for study until the end of the fifteenth century, scholars know from references in Alfonso el Sabio's Siete Partidas that Spain developed a type of realistic, satirical play called juegos de escarnio. These secular works were condemned for their licentiousness, but even the serious religious drama was not devoid of the humorous, realistic element. Judging from the development of drama in other European countries and from the sixteenth century manuscripts that are available, critics of Spanish theatre know that the shepherd of the early nativity play soon developed into a comic character, a simple or bobó. From the juegos de escarnio and the use of the comic shepherd, Spanish playwrights developed and perfected a one-act farce whose humor was based on

the more or less realistic portrayal of certain popular types, usually drawn from the lower classes. This form of farce may be recognized in the paseo and entremés of the Renaissance and the Golden Age, in the sainete of the eighteenth century, in the género chico of the nineteenth.

It is significant to note that these humorous plays, which were essentially popular in nature, have often outlived the more ambitious works being written at the same time. Cervantes, as a playwright, is remembered generally, not so much for his longer, more serious works, as for his excellent entremeses. The eighteenth century in Spanish drama would be almost a void were it not for the sainetes of Ramón de la Cruz. At the end of the nineteenth century some of the best theatre produced in Spain was the género chico of such playwrights as Ricardo de la Vega.

Because few medieval plays have been preserved, the history of the Spanish drama really begins in the late fifteenth century with Juan del Encina. One of Encina's best known works is the "Auto del repelón," which deals with student pranks played on stupid peasants and doubtless stems from the lost medieval juegos de escarnio and juegos escolares.

The students throw the countrymen's vegetables into the mud, drive away their donkeys, and pull their hair. Much of the humor depends upon the peasant dialect, the naïve expressions of the rustics, their Negro-like misuse of long words.

We find here already two of the commonest farce types, the student and the bobo or simple, the rural simpleton.²

This is a popular play, with humor that often verges on slapstick. Encina, however, also wrote for the aristocracy. In his églogas he introduces shepherds who are held up to scorn because they try unsuccessfully to imitate the manners and courtly love of the upper class. In "Egloga representada en requesta de unos amores," for example, Encina presents a knight dressed as a shepherd who is a rival of Mingo, a married shepherd, for the love of a shepherdess. The knight wins his lady and Mingo becomes the object of the audience's laughter.³ In other plays, Encina uses the comic device of sleep to make his shepherds humorous. In "Egloga de tres pastores," a tragedy, there is the burlesque element of one shepherd's sleeping through another's account of his lamentable problems.⁴ Again, in "Egloga de Plácida y Vitoriano" some shepherds will not aid in a burial until they have had a nap.⁵

Among the other outstanding contributors to the early development of Spanish drama were Sánchez de Badajoz, Lucas Fernández, Gil Vicente, and Torres Naharro. G. T. Northup considers Sánchez de Badajoz to be the link between the religious drama and the later farce in Spain. Writing in the first quarter of the sixteenth century, Badajoz placed comic episodes in his religious allegories; he introduced many of the stock comic types

of the period, such as the sacristan, the Negro, the Moor, the boastful soldier.⁶ One such braggart soldier appears in the "Farsa teologal." The soldier has been badly frightened but wishes to conceal his fright. Lying to explain the loud exclamations he made in his fear, he says that he has a toothache. A dentist soon appears and begins pulling the soldier's teeth, promising to send a bill in the morning.⁷ Badajoz also introduces on stage the figure of the devil, a favorite comic type in medieval European drama. Along with many of his contemporaries, he satirizes the clergy and he is harsher with them than the other playwrights of his time.⁸ Lucas Fernández and Gil Vicente, along with many anonymous authors, satirized the friar and religious orders. The friar was satirized for such things as selling bulls and fathering illegitimate children. He was portrayed as a rather stupid person, with little dignity or moral character.⁹ Similarly public officials, such as the alguacil, were criticized for their dishonesty and for their injustices. "Social satire is to play a considerable part in the entremés as it develops. It is a form that in every way lends itself to such subjects."¹⁰

Essentially Lucas Fernández continued the pattern already set by Encina, writing farces and éclogas. His shepherds are more vulgar in their language than were Encina's.¹¹ He is credited with turning the conventional pastoral play into farce.¹² Rather than introduce

aristocrats disguised as shepherds, he introduces real shepherds and makes fun of courtly love. In his "Farsa o quasi comedia" he presents a burlesque courtship of a lady by a shepherd, and in his "Egloga nueva" he presents a hermit, a taffy-vender, and a friar who fight over a shepherdess.

Gil Vicente, who wrote in both Castilian and Portuguese, is noted for his ironic view of certain types from society, for his blend of social satire and poetry.¹³ Like Badajoz, he uses the devil as a character. In "Auto da barca do inferno" he uses the comic device of having someone call the devil names. In "Auto da barca do purgatorio" a character has semi-comic, semi-philosophical speeches with the devil and with an angel.¹⁴ The devil again appears in a "Farça chamada auto das fadas." In this case the devil has been called to appear by a witch. The play also contains an element of satire against the clergy, as do "Farça dos físicos," "Templo d'Apollo," and other of Vicente's works.¹⁵ Vicente also concerns himself with marital problems. In "Auto da India," for example, he shows how a wife plays one man against another while being unfaithful to her absent husband.¹⁶ In his longer work, Comedia del viudo, he achieves much comic effect when a friend of the widower complains about his unbearable wife.¹⁷ A common theme in later farces is that of literary parody; Vicente already introduces this idea in "Amadis de Gaula," which satirizes the language of the novels of chivalry.¹⁸

Among these early playwrights of the late fifteenth century and the early sixteenth century, Torres Naharro has been given credit for lending the greatest impetus to the development of humor in the Spanish drama.¹⁹

Torres Naharro es el padre del humorismo en la escena española. Las crudas bufonadas de los pastores de Encina se han tornado en fina crítica humorística en labios de los criados de Torres Naharro. En las églogas de aquél hay exageración cómica; en las comedias de éste, interpretación humorística. Es un humorismo de superior categoría, porque es más honda la observación y más universal. Detrás de las ironías y sátiras del autor de la Pronaladia hay una filosofía moral, un sentido ético, una personalidad.²⁰

Specifically, Torres Naharro is given credit for introducing to the Spanish stage true humor, the comic prologue, the type of the gracioso and graciosa so common to the Golden Age, and the first models of the comedies of intrigue and customs.²¹ His works have also been noted for their anti-clerical satire--a comic element that disappeared with the censorship of the Counterreformation when the sacristan became the substitute for the friar--their portrayal of character, and their "honor calderoniano."²² One device frequently found in his works is the use of several different languages. In his "Comedia soldadesca," for example, the recruits come from several different countries or regions, and each speaks his own dialect. In his "Serafina" a friar speaks in a humorous imitation Latin, while three other characters speak in Castilian, two in Valencian, and two others in Italian. For humorous effect Torres Naharro also uses parody and satire.

His "Comedia aquilana" is a parody of the novels of chivalry; the pair of young lovers are caricatures of the romantic hero and heroine, and the king swears like a farmhand and even tries to borrow his doctor's wife for the sake of a love-sick gardener.²³ In "Comedia himenea" the playwright parodies the love problems of his own main characters by introducing a parallel burlesque love among the servants--a technique later to be employed in the Golden Age with the love affairs of the gracioso. With this parody of the central action, Torres Naharro creates a "nota cómica que brota del contraste entre la poesía y la prosa de la vida."²⁴ Satire is seen in the "Comedia tinelaria." Here the scene is a cardinal's kitchen in Rome, and the author shows how the cardinal's servants abuse their position. "La servidumbre roba a su señor, llena la tripa y se embriaga hasta reventar, mientras que los pobres, que dependen de la caridad de aquél, se mueren de hambre."²⁵

Among the best of these earliest Spanish playwrights, however, is Lope de Rueda, who gave a crude sort of literary value to the paseo.²⁶ His short farces are realistic portrayals of the domestic relations of the lower classes, and his humor does not in every case rely upon the horse-play and coarseness often found in the works of his predecessors. "Their home life, with its banal situations, its crudities, and its commonplaces, all comic to the humorist, is full of the material most useful for popular comedy."²⁷

Lope de Rueda, in addition to his pasos, wrote five longer comedies. One of these, Los encañados, has its humor based on disguises and mistaken identity; a brother and sister so much resemble each other that they are taken for each other in spite of the differences of sex. But the real value of Lope de Rueda's theatre lies in his short realistic farces and their view of ordinary life:

A husband and wife quarrel over the price to be asked for a crop of olives, though the tree has just been planted. Two rogues get a free dinner by bamboozling a stupid servant out of the provisions he is carrying. A doctor's servant impersonates his master and prescribes to various patients.²⁸

In his pasos Lope de Rueda perfected the character of the hobo, but he also created realistic portraits of "el rufián cobarde, el lacayo maldiciente, la negra tonta y bonachona, el morisco con su jerga ininteligible, el doctorcillo pedante, el aldeano socarrón, la gitana de sutiles artes, el vejete malhumorado e impertinente."²⁹

Among the plays of these sixteenth century Spanish authors may be found a number of common comic devices, stock character types, and themes. Some of these comic characters and situations developed because of foreign influences, while others are native to Spain. The Spanish playwrights were influenced to some extent by the Italian comedy, the improvised commedia dell'arte, and by the Latin playwrights. Raymond Grismer, who has studied the influence of Plautus on the Spanish playwrights before Lope de Vega, finds that a number of the

common tendencies in the Spanish farce may be traced to the Latin comedy. The braggart soldier, for example, is found in Plautus' Miles Gloriosus. In Italian comedy the braggart soldier has become a boastful Spanish captain. In the Spanish farces where he frequently appears, he has, as Crawford points out, been adapted to Spanish life; now he is the Spanish soldier who has served abroad and returns to lie about his exploits and his valor.³⁰ Crawford also states that the soldier is related in type to the rufián or bawdy who appears in Spanish literature as early as La Celestina.³¹ The character of Celestina herself may be traced to the bawd in Latin comedy, and she is a character used frequently in the later Spanish farces.³² Grismer lists among Plautus' favorite comic devices a long or funny name, a funny disguise, an insatiable hunger, a craving for strong drink or actual drunkenness on the stage, threats, beatings, fear, the calling of names, madness, and dreams; he finds examples of each in sixteenth century Spanish drama.³³ In the theatre of Lucas Fernández he finds examples of name-calling, beatings, and fondness for drink.³⁴ Sánchez de Badajoz has used all of these devices as well as hunger; one of his characters is hungry even when asleep.³⁵ Torres Naharro is particularly noted for his use of name-calling; his servants are expert at heaping pullas.³⁶ Lope de Rueda borrowed many of his plots from Italian and Latin comedies and

made use of the stock Latin characters of the father, the father's old friend, the son, the girl, the bawd, the braggart, and the servant, as well as the Negress and gypsy from Italian comedy.³⁷ According to Grismer, "Rueda's contribution largely consists in the sparkling humor of the Spanish comedy."³⁸

Another critic, William Hendrix, has studied some of the native comic types in the Spanish drama of the period. He divides the stock characters into the stupid ones and the clever ones. The most common of the stupid characters was the shepherd, who carried over into the seventeenth century. He was scantily clad in sheepskins and was comic in his exaggerated interest in eating, drinking, and sleeping. Through the shepherd, the playwright was able to satirize the townsman, the squire, and the churchman. Often participating in moments of slapstick humor, the shepherd was beaten by the Negro and the Moor and slapped by the churchman and the squire. He differs from the later simple or hobo in that he has less to do with the plot.³⁹

At the opposite extreme from the stupid shepherd is found the clever servant--possibly a development of the clever servant or slave of Latin comedy. This servant is already found in Torres Naharro, where his love affairs serve as a burlesque of his master's. He frequently makes sarcastic remarks about his master and is sometimes noted for being a glutton or a coward.⁴⁰

Also common in the plays of the period are the foreign and dialectical types, each with his characteristic traits, usually exaggerated for comic effect. The use of dialect itself is humorous, perhaps because the spectator feels superior to the person speaking. Thus broken Spanish is funny in these early plays as a Brooklyn accent or broken English is in the television plays of today in the United States. Most common of the foreign or dialectical types in the early Spanish drama are the Negro, Moor, gypsy, and Portuguese; but examples of Italian, French, Valencian, Vizcayan, Jewish, and German characters are also found. The first two are notable for their ignorance and for their almost unintelligible Spanish. The gypsy likewise has a distinctive speech characteristic, the cecear; gypsies are associated with fortune telling, begging, stealing, and horse-trading. The Portuguese are poor and proud, love music, women, and Portugal, wear unusual costumes, and are treated as a burlesque of the hidalgo. The French are made to speak a language that is really a mixture of French, Italian, and Spanish, while the German is usually portrayed as a heretical Lutheran.⁴¹

In addition to these stock comic types, G. T. Northup finds several others in the Spanish farce. He mentions the vejete--a carry-over from the Latin father--who may be either the deceived husband of a giddy young wife or the outwitted father of a young daughter; he is

usually miserly, suspicious, and credulous and often receives beatings. The doctor, who is pedantic, unskilled, and completely without conscience, is also common in the farces. The doctor appears along with the lawyer, who is dishonest and ignorant. Another stock character is the student, an unscrupulous young rogue who is slovenly and suffers from chronic starvation.⁴²

These stock comic types are still being used in the farces of the Siglo de Oro. Cervantes, who is considered superior to Lope de Rueda in his humor and his universality,⁴³ makes use of them in his entremeses. In one of his best-known farces, "La cueva de Salamanca," for example, he introduces the vejete, who is being deceived by his young wife, and the young starving student, who cleverly fools the credulous old man. Also he frequently puts a picaresque element into his comedies, such as "El rufián viudo" and "Pedro de Urdemalas," and his humor can be as cruel as Quevedo's. Among his longer works are "comedias de cautivos" based on his experiences as a prisoner in North Africa. One of these, El gallardo español, contains a gracioso in the cast of characters, and another, Los baños de Argel, features a comic sacristan who makes fun of the Jews.⁴⁴ The best of Cervantes' theatre, however, is the entremés. In his short farces are found:

Veladas sátiaras sobre los prejuicios e intereses
y la credulidad excesiva, que dejan una inquietante

interrogación, junto a problemas más hondos, cuadros hampescos, ironías sobre las armas y la iglesia (el soldado y el sacristán), sobre los conflictos matrimoniales, sobre las supersticiones.⁴⁵

In "La elección de los alcaldes de Daganzo" Cervantes introduces a satire on the interference of the Church in civil issues. In "El juez de los divorcios" among other things, he portrays, with a coarse, burlesque humor, the problems resultant from marriages where there is a wide age difference between husband and wife. The same problem is treated in "El viejo celoso" and "El celoso extremeño." In "La guarda cuidadosa" the Church triumphs over the army when the sacristan wins his lady--a kitchen maid--from his rival, a braggart soldier. In "El retablo de las maravillas," a story similar to the Conde Lucanor's tale of the invisible cloth, Cervantes presents a satire of all types of hypocrisy.⁴⁶

Luis Quiñones de Benavente is the other major writer of entremeses in the Siglo de Oro. Beginning to write in 1609, Benavente gave to the entremés its definitive form. He is credited with "a genius for comic situation and dialogue."⁴⁷ He also helped develop a kind of "entremés cantado" which later became the zarzuela. Like his predecessors in the short farce, Quiñones de Benavente wrote for a popular audience. The sole purpose of his short plays is to entertain. One finds in his farces

... la sátira que muele las cosas y las costumbres sin apenas ofender a las personas, las frases hechas de fortuna, el regocijo y la hilaridad más

caprichosos, las situaciones escénicas más ricas en ritmos populares y en viveza musical, el verso fluido, los antecedentes caricaturescos de cada ser, lo grotesco dignificado por el humanismo.⁴⁸

In addition to these short farces, elements of humor are rarely lacking in other plays of the period. The most significant single comic element to be found in the Siglo de Oro drama is the character of the gracioso. While traits of the gracioso may be found in works before Lope de Vega on the Spanish stage and even in Latin comedy, Lope de Vega claimed to have created the gracioso or figura del donaire in his play La Francesilla.⁴⁹ The gracioso, generally a servant, gives the comic note to the plays of the Golden Age, for the nobleman usually cannot be the object of ridicule.⁵⁰ The gracioso may be a lacayo, or he may be of a higher intellectual order. He often is capable of writing poetry, and this comic character may create ingenious or burlesque sonnets.⁵¹ He dresses in his master's discarded clothes and serves as a caricature of him. He is usually, though not always, faithful to his master and is characterized by his interest in food and his ability to think about the practical aspects of life.⁵² While the comic figures in earlier plays of Spanish drama often appeared only in short episodes, the gracioso plays an important part throughout the play. In the comedies where love is an important factor in the plot, he serves as a go-between for his master; but, at the same time, he makes fun of the refined love of the nobleman.

There is often a parallel romance between servants, and here the gracioso burlesques the courtship of the master and his lady. It has been suggested that the gracioso and his master really represent two sides of the same personality.⁵³

Lope de Vega uses the figura de donaire in all types of drama, including his tragedies. In Fuenteovejuna the gracioso appears in the character of Mengo, who, like his fellow townsmen, does not tell who killed the Comendador. There is comic repetition in his assertion that "Fuenteovejuna" killed the man.⁵⁴ The gracioso also appears in the comedies of saints; here he serves as a humorous and sympathetic link between the saint and the audience, but he is less inclined to make fun of his master's theology than graciosos in other comedies do of refined love.⁵⁵

Although the gracioso soon became a stock character, there is some variation in his portrayal from the time of Lope to that of Calderón. In Guillén de Castro's plays the graciosos are "más movidos, más francamente cómicos que la mayor parte de los de Lope."⁵⁶ He lacks some of the idealism of Lope's comic figures. He collects for the same ticket or the same medicine several times; he arranges false marriages; and he courts every woman he sees.⁵⁷ In Juan Ruiz de Alarcón the gracioso has become the confidant or even adviser to the hero. In La verdad sospechosa, for example, he is an older man,

apparently a gentleman who has suffered financial misfortunes, who is to keep the protagonist out of trouble. Tristán, the gracioso, evidently feels a greater loyalty to the hero's father than he does to his young master, for he reports Don García's lies to his father. Ruiz de Alarcón's graciosos are satirical and are quick to criticize the customs of the society in which they live, even if their criticism breaks the unity of action of the comedy. They sometimes use the comic device of frequently changing clothes. In one play, La manganilla de Melilla, the gracioso is Jewish.⁵⁸

In the plays of Tirso de Molina the gracioso's humor tends to be more vulgar. The author also introduces more rustic characters than his contemporaries and, hence, his graciosos, who are not rustics, appear to belong to the upper classes. In El burlador de Sevilla the gracioso Catalinón is of a high enough class that he eats with his master. Most of Catalinón's humor, besides his fear of the status, comes in asides when he makes fun of his master. In Como han de ser los amigos a gracioso hides in a coffin, occasionally holding his head up and acting as an echo to what is being said on stage. Tirso makes use of a language device in another of his plays, El melancólico, where the comic figures pretend to be English and use supposedly English words.⁵⁹

Rojas Zorrilla has made his graciosos human. Like Lope, he uses the gracioso to express his own opinions.

He sometimes blends an element of the picaresque into his gracioso. Like Tirso he makes use of the language device; in one case he has two characters who speak a false Turkish, put on disguises, and mistakenly capture each other. In another play, Rojas Zorrilla uses the comic device of having the character pretend to be writing the play in which he appears.⁶⁰ Moreto increases the importance of the gracioso to the main plot of the play; in El desdén con el desdén, the gracioso becomes the center of the action. The play was copied by Molière, who often used a clever servant to manipulate the events of his comedies.⁶¹

Although the gracioso is the most important element of humor found in the comedias of the Golden Age, it is not the sole basis of humor in the plays. Often there is humor from the complicated plots themselves--disguises, mistaken identities, romantic entanglements. Moreover, characters besides the gracioso may be humorous as in the "comedias de figurón" of Rojas Zorrilla. In the theatre of Lope de Vega, for example, critic Valbuena Prat finds various comic elements; among these are the light comedy of customs in La moza de cántaro, the figure of the bully in El rufián Castrucho, scenes of realistic humor in La noche toledana, and subtle irony in Amar sin saber a quién.⁶² The latter play is a good example of a romantic comedy with the sole purpose of entertaining. The play is fast moving, consisting of many short scenes.

The main humor comes from the gracioso, comically named Limón; his master has fallen in love with a fifteen-year-old girl whom he does not know but whose picture he has. Limón repeatedly comments that the girl is probably forty years old--in spite of the evidence of the picture. Humor is also evident in the way the extraordinary young girl overcomes all obstacles to be able to marry the man she loves. In another of Lope's romantic comedies, La noche de San Juan, there is less humor than in Amar sin saber a quién, but the comedy is noteworthy for its complicated plot. There are two love triangles; in each situation a young girl loves one man but must marry another to follow the wishes of her brother, who has arranged the match for his sister in order to win the hand of the woman he loves. The unraveling of these complications forms the basis of its comedy.

In others of his comedies Lope adopts the figure of the bobo or pseudo-bobo. There is such a heroine in La dama boba, but she overcomes her stupidity when she falls in love. In La boba para los otros y discreta para sí, the main character uses stupidity as a sort of disguise in order to see through the hypocrisy of those around her.

Although Lope makes use of a wide variety of comic devices, Tirso de Molina is usually given credit for being the most humorous of the playwrights in the Lope

cycle. One of Tirso's common devices is to introduce the man-seeking woman, a female counterpart of Don Juan who, like some of Shakespeare's heroines, will even disguise herself as a man to aid her in arranging the marriage she wants. In La villana de Vallecas the heroine disguises herself as a girl from the lower classes to be able to pursue the man who has dishonored her. In this same comedy, the "villain" also steals the credentials of another man; the result is the comic situation of the stranger who cannot prove that he is himself because someone else is masquerading under his name. In El vergonzoso en palacio a young girl pursues her father's shy secretary. In Don Gil de las calzas verdes the heroine disguises herself as a man to be able to follow her lover, who has deserted her to marry another woman. The other woman does not realize that the "Don Gil" she meets is really her rival disguised as a man. Eventually two women fall in love with the feminine "Don Gil," several of the characters are using fictitious identities, and no less than four characters are claiming to be the real "Don Gil" at the same time. Before the final untangling of all these complications, the only one suspicious of the sex of the disguised "Don Gil de las calzas verdes" is the gracioso Caramanchel, who suggests that the handsome young "man" is a "capón."

Tirso is quite adept at handling such complicated plots. An extreme example of comic involvement is found

in Averiguéelo Vargas, where a series of love triangles is made even more confusing by a series of go-betweens. A brother and sister, Ramiro and Sancha, who do not know either their relationship or that they are the illegitimate children of the deceased king, arrive in the capital. The sister loves her brother, who loves Doña Felipa. In spite of her love, Sancha disguises herself as a male dwarf to act as a go-between for her brother. At the same time, the brother is acting as a go-between for Doña Felipa, whom he loves, and Don Dionís, and Doña Felipa is acting as a go-between for another woman and Ramiro. Eventually Ramiro masquerades as Don Dionís and Don Dionís mistakes Sancha for Doña Felipa. It is pure "situation comedy" and ends happily.

A much better comedy is Tirso's famous Marta la piadosa. Marta, in an attempt to avoid marrying a much older man chosen for her by her father, adopts the guise of being very devout. Her hypocrisy gains her enough freedom to be able to see the young man she loves without much difficulty. Eventually the young man pretends to be a sick student, and Marta suggests, as an act of Christian charity, that he be invited into their home while he convalesces. Later his pretense for staying is to tutor her in Latin. The device of pretending sickness to gain admittance to the girl's home is not a new one; it is also found in Quiñones de Benavente's entremés, "El doctor y el enfermo." In essence Marta

is the headstrong young girl of the earlier farces who is deceiving her credulous old father.

Juan Ruiz de Alarcón is best known for his comedies of character in which he satirizes man's shortcomings. In his theatre is found "un tesoro de observaciones psicológicas y de graciosísimos donaires."⁶³ In his famous play La verdad sospechosa, which was adapted by Pierre Corneille in Le menteur, he presents the portrait of an amazing liar who eventually is punished for his vice. The liar, Don García, is

El más perfecto y gracioso embustero del mundo, el maestro cumplidísimo de la mentira: la concibe con sorprendente rapidez, la dice con seguridad y osadía, la adorna con todo lujo de permenores; y, si es cogido, sabe escapar imperturbable y airosamente.⁶⁴

In El examen de marido a father leaves to his daughter this single message in his will: "Antes que te cases, mira lo que haces." The clever young woman sets up a husband contest and critically looks over her suitors. No hay mal que por bien no venga or Don Domingo de Don Blas is a slightly different kind of play, for here the hero is quite admirable. People laugh at him because he believes in putting comfort ahead of fashion, but he is a brave man who faithfully serves his king, and one finds in his attitude a clever satire of the exaggerated manners of the court.

Among the outstanding playwrights of the Golden Age, the one usually considered as being the least humorous

is Calderón de la Barca. In the full-length comedies of Calderón are found fewer variations on the gracioso than in any other author. Calderón has a "concepto de lo cómico menos complejo ... el humor, lo cómico, eran cosas en el fondo despreciable que se le concedía al vulgo!"⁶⁵ Contrary to Lope's gracioso, who sometimes is brave, Calderón's is always a coward and usually has ridiculous pretensions. The exception to this generalization about Calderón's longer comedies is La dama duende, in which the gracioso Cosme has received high praise as a comic character:

This character has humorous lines, is placed in many humorous situations, and is naturally a funny man in his own right. Cosme is really the best developed character in the play, and there is grave danger of his stealing the show. If one were to judge from La dama duende alone, one would say that Calderón was the greatest humorist in Golden Age drama.⁶⁶

In his autos sacramentales Calderón has also developed some comic graciosos. "In the humor of his autos Calderón is never quite as ineffective as he is in some of his comedies, and in two autos his performance ranks with his best efforts elsewhere."⁶⁷ The two graciosos particularly mentioned are Pensamiento in La cena del Rey Baltazar and the Labrador in El gran teatro del mundo.⁶⁸ In addition to these graciosos Calderón did introduce some other comic elements in his plays. In La dama duende the heroine, much like the female characters of Tirso, assumes a disguise to win the man she loves. In some

of his mythological comedies humor from anachronism has been noted in "la misma ironía de volver los temas paganos a las costumbres e ideas contemporáneas."⁶⁹ Besides these comedies Calderón also wrote some short farces.

The most humorous playwright, contemporary of Calderón, is probably Francisco de Rojas Zorrilla.

A Rojas cómico se le ocurren los más graciosos trucos y disparatos sin salirse de la raya humana. Sabe barajar como nadie para que hagan juego los mesones castellanos y las mansiones nobiliarias, los estudiantes y los casamenteros, los viejos celosos y los galanes audaces, las niñas bobas y las damas duendes, los espadachines y los soldados, los frailes y los pícaros rematados, las ingeniosas aventuras y las situaciones cómicas.⁷⁰

Rojas Zorrilla created the "comedia de figurón" which features a character with exaggerated, often ridiculous traits, but who is portrayed with a realistic psychology not found in the earlier burlesque comedies.⁷¹ Such a comic character appears in Entre bobos anda el juego where the hero is a ridiculous young man, easily deceived because of his vanity, who comes to the court from the provinces. In Lo que son las mujeres an angry match-maker sends prospective suitors, not to the beautiful, rich, but haughty young girl, but rather to a poor, ugly woman. Often dealing with matrimonial problems, Rojas Zorrilla defends in Cada cual lo que le toca woman's right to choose her own husband. In Abrir el ojo he reveals the deceptions of the cortesans. In Donde hay agravios no hay celos the master and servant exchange

roles so that the master may get to know his future wife-- a device not unlike that used by Oliver Goldsmith in She Stoops to Conquer. Much of the resultant comedy comes from the stupid things the servant, disguised as his master, does.⁷²

Rojas Zorrilla also incorporated a picaresque element in his humor. He occasionally uses two comic servants in his plays, one of them a gracioso and the other a pícaro. He presents picaresque caricatures in No hay amigo para amigo. Reminiscent of Quevedo, in El Caín de Cataluña he shows the bitter humor of the jail where the prisoners laugh at death and the gallows.⁷³

One of the last of the major playwrights of the Golden Age to display elements of humor is Agustín Moreto y Cabaña, who, like Rojas Zorrilla, wrote comedies of character. The protagonist of his El lindo Don Diego closely resembles Rojas Zorrilla's main character in Entre bobos anda el juego. Valbuena Prat considers Moreto's play to be a predecessor to the comic opera of the eighteenth century.⁷⁴ In Moreto's other major play, El desdén con el desdén, the gracioso takes on new significance by directing the action of the whole play. He might be compared to Beaumarchais's Figaro of a century later.⁷⁵ The theme of this play is similar to that of Lope's La hermosa fea. In the latter play a suitor wins a beautiful young lady who has become disdainful of compliments

by pretending to find her ugly. In Moreto's play a suitor arouses the girl's interest by being as indifferent to her as she has been to all her other suitors.

Following the Golden Age with its great flourishing of the Spanish drama came the decadence of the eighteenth century. The Spanish stage began, rather unsuccessfully, to imitate French theatre. The Spanish national drama itself degenerated. The entremés fell into such a stage of decay and obscenity that it was finally suppressed in 1780. The suppression of the entremés gave birth to a new form, the sainete:

A comic, one act theatrical piece, longer than the entremés, introducing more characters, and with a somewhat more ambitious plot, portraying realistically various social types, and satirizing human vices and foibles.⁷⁰

Ramón de la Cruz y Cano was the greatest proponent of the sainete. In it he displayed all classes of the society of his time and no longer used the conventionalized types of the earlier entremés.

In general it must be noted that Cruz does not deal with the two classes--the middle and the proletariat--in the same way. His manner toward the proletariat is one of sympathy tinged with mild amusement. He disapproves strongly of most of what the middle class does, thinks, and says, and he shows it.⁷¹

While Cruz may occasionally ridicule the lower classes, as he does in "Manolo," he usually is most severe in his criticism of the upper classes and their imitation of French manners:

The author reveals to us the frivolous tertulias of his aristocratic circle; snuff-taking gentlemen with rapier and wig, wearing the knee breeches of the period; young fops dancing attendance upon their beribboned and beflounced sweethearts, vying with the inevitable abate and the ever-present French perruquier for a moment of the fair one's time. We see a futile society seeking vainly to conceal its ignorance beneath a veneer of French culture.⁷⁸

In "Las tertulias de Madrid" Cruz satirizes high society in just this way. Don Juan pretends to be sick to show his wife Inés the falsity of her tertulia friends. They are noisy and rude while they believe that Don Juan is dying; they prove to be useless when Inés needs their help. The only true friend in the group is Don Luis, whom Inés previously disliked because she considered him too serious. This view of society and the very theme of the play remind one of Molière's seventeenth century play Le malade imaginaire in which the main character pretends to be dying to find out who among his family and friends really love him. In the nineteenth century we find a similar device in Bretón de los Herrero's Muñerete y verás. In the latter play the main character is assumed to be dead; he learns how quickly those nearest to him could forget him when they believed him dead.

When dealing with the lower classes, Ramón de la Cruz usually set his minetes in the street or a tenement courtyard. Showing the bustle and animation of crowds, he introduced many characters, all realistically portrayed: merchants, artisans, beggars, charlatans, peasants. Speaking

in dialect or slang, usually using bad grammar, his characters quarrel, make love, and exchange repartees.⁷⁹ This popular theatre of Ramón de la Cruz, the work of greatest value produced by the Spanish stage in the eighteenth century, is the continuation of the entremés and pase. "Este teatro no muere, tiene sus altibajos, pero siempre renace, porque es la manifestación satírica, cómica, dramática, propia del alma española."⁸⁰

At the end of the eighteenth century another important figure appears in the history of humor in the Spanish drama: Leandro Fernández de Moratín. Moratín is the forerunner of most of the high comedy⁸¹ to be written later in the nineteenth century in Spain. In addition to adaptations and translations of foreign works--for example plays of Molière and Shakespeare--Moratín wrote five original comedies. One of these, La comedia nueva, is a satire of literary trends of the time. Ramón de la Cruz also had previously satirized literary trends in some of his sainetes. In his four other original plays, Moratín is concerned with the education of Spanish girls and the arranging of their marriages. In his best play, El sí de las niñas, Moratín criticizes the tyranny of mothers over daughters and the convent-school education. The heroine is about to be married to a much older man, who is the uncle of the man she wishes to marry. There is a certain amount of comic confusion when the three of them and the girl's mother all meet in the same inn.

Much of the humor, however, grows out of the mother's character. Eventually the older man realizes the wisdom of letting the girl choose her own husband. In El viejo y la niña a young girl faced with a forced marriage to an older man chooses to enter the convent instead. The theme of El Barón again is an arranged marriage. An ambitious mother makes a match for her daughter on the basis of the suitor's title of nobility, which later proves to be false. In La mojigata Moratín repeats his criticism of convent educations. He contrasts two cousins, one strictly raised in the convent and the other given a liberal education. The liberally-educated cousin is falsely accused of a number of misdeeds which turn out to be the wrongdoings of the mojigata. These themes of marriage and the education of women will continue to appear in Spanish comedy even into the contemporary period.

Moratín's type of high comedy was continued by many of the playwrights of the nineteenth century, including several who are much better known for their tragedies than for their comedies: Mariano José de Larra,⁸² Francisco Martínez de la Rosa,⁸³ Juan Eugenio Hartzenbusch,⁸⁴ Antonio García Gutiérrez.⁸⁵ More important to the development of Spanish comedy, however, are the works of Manuel Bretón de los Herreros and Ventura de la Vega.

Bretón de los Herreros has been considered as a link in the popular Spanish comedy between the sainetes of Ramón de la Cruz and the género chico of Ricardo de la Vega.⁸⁶ He both adapted old Spanish comedies and continued the new trend of Moratín. In his works he satirizes middle-class customs; his plays could in this sense be considered a parallel to the costumbrista essays of Ramón de Mesonero Romanos.⁸⁷ In Muñete y verás the hero, because of his supposed death, is able to find out what his closest friends and his fiancée really feel for him. His fiancée quickly forgets him and begins a new romance with his best friend; naturally there is a sudden reversal in her attitude when she finds that he is not dead at all, but by this time he knows which girl really loves him. The humor is found mainly in the two esperpentos Favilán and Ellas. Another of Bretón's best known plays, Marcela, shows a young widow trying to choose among three suitors. The suitors, a timid poet, a gruff soldier, and a play-boy, are handled as caricatures, reminiscent of some of Molière's exaggerated comic figures. Finding that all three of the men are unacceptable, the widow decides to reject all of them and retain her widow's freedom. Bretón satirizes literary trends and writers in El poeta y la beneficiada, a criticism of melodrama, and Lo vivo y lo pintado, a burlesque of the old Spanish national drama. In Un

francés en Cartagena Bretón criticizes the French--a very common theme in the later género chico. In El pelo de la dehesa he shows the falsity of the city as seen through the eyes of someone from the provinces, and in A Madrid me vuelvo he has a man from the city discover that the country has as much vice as the capital but not so many conveniences.⁸⁸ Bretón's humor stems from the spontaneity and realism of his plays, his use of satire and caricature, and wide variety of exaggerated types and customs that he portrays.

Ventura de la Vega wrote a large range of plays, from historical drama and classic tragedy to high comedy. His original comedies lie halfway between the style of Moratín and the modern comedy of social criticism.⁸⁹ The best of his comedies is El hombre de mundo, which concerns the problems facing a reformed Don Juan when he gets married. He begins to suspect others of courting his wife as he, himself, used to pursue married women. Ironically his unfounded suspicions of his bride stem from his own previous sins.

Comparatively few humorous works of quality are found in the nineteenth century Spanish theatre from the time of Bretón de los Herreros until the rise of the género chico. One of the post-romanticists, Narciso Serra, evolved in his plays toward comedy.⁹⁰ His best known play, La calle de la montera resembles both El sí de las niñas and Marcela in some respects. Like the former,

the plot involves the rivalry of an older man and a young relative for the same girl's hand, and, like the latter, the object of the romantic interest is a widow who must choose from a number of suitors.

Among the realistic playwrights, both Adelardo López de Ayala and Manuel Tamayo y Baus wrote some high comedies, usually to illustrate a thesis. They both criticize the emphasis placed on money and the material aspects of life, Ayala in El tanto por ciento and Tamayo in Lo positivo. Tamayo's play contains some comic elements, particularly in the portrayal of the frivolous young girl whose father wants her to marry for money. Ayala introduces a similar topic in Consuelo.

Although the most famous of José Echegaray's plays are melodramas, he also wrote humorous works. One of these, Un crítico incipiente, follows the pattern of Moratín's La comedia nueva and Bretón's El poeta y la beneficiada and satirizes the current opinions on the theatre. Echegaray shows the sad financial plight of a good writer. Poverty, as one critic has pointed out, is a prime motive for laughter for a Spanish audience.⁹¹ Echegaray also satirizes the drama critics and the Spanish addiction to bull-fighting as well as the poor plays being written solely for box-office appeal.

Among the writers of the género chico is Echegaray's brother Miguel. Miguel Echegaray is so patriotic to Spain

in his works that he criticizes the introduction into his country of any foreign customs, fashions, or even food. He is particularly quick to satirize the use of foreign languages and, along with many of his contemporaries, he makes fun of people who show off their knowledge of Italian, French, or English.⁹² Another common linguistic device of the género chico is to make fun of faulty grammar.⁹³ In "La señá Francisca" Miguel Echegaray repeats the theme of Bretón's El pelo de la dehesa--the provincial finding fault with the city. The play includes a satire of lo cursi and of diplomats speaking French and introduces a stuttering baron, a hungry parasite, and a young man disguised as a servant to gain admittance to his sweetheart's home. "Viajeros de Ultramar" concerns the problems of some servants, who, after having turned the house in which they work into an inn during the absence of their masters, discover that the owners are unexpectedly returning.

Among the other well-known writers of the género chico are Miguel Ramos Carrión and Vital Aza. In collaboration they wrote "Zaragüeta," a play about a student's problems with a moneylender. The student, a libertine always in debt, is clever and dishonest enough to deceive his aged uncle and aunt in order to borrow money from them; such a student is the "tipo más usado y común de la comedia española" according to one critic.⁹⁴ This particular farce also introduces the comic element of

deafness: the moneylender cannot hear what is being said to him. He is presented to the uncle and aunt as a doctor, and the resultant conversations among the three are filled with comic misunderstandings. Another work due to this collaboration is "El señor gobernador" whose title character is one of the stock types of the period.

Ese personaje es--como el parásita, el sablista, el estudiante tronera, y la patrona de huéspedes--uno de los muñecos usuales que en todas partes figura, ya en la comedia, y en el sainete.⁹⁵

This farce also contains a starving artist who talks some poor people out of their food on the pretense that he is going to paint a picture of the things he takes. The comedies of these two writers are often based on mistaken identities, the quid pro quo which was very popular in the period.⁹⁶ There is also much similarity between their sainetes and French comedies of the time except that the illicit love affairs and loose women of the French works do not appear on the Spanish stage.⁹⁷ In "El oso muerto" Ramos Carrión and Vital Aza introduce a common French device of comic terror when someone thinks he has involuntarily committed a murder.⁹⁸

Often considered the best of the sainetistas in this group, Ricardo de la Vega wrote farces with little plot but much realistic portrayal of life in Madrid, particularly of the lower classes. "Todo en él me parece vivo y real; todo, fresco, agradable y sentido. El género, en aquella forma, es la única muestra, íntegra y aceptable,

del genio cómico castellano en la actualidad."⁹⁹ Among his works are "Pepa la frescachona" and "La verbena de la paloma." In the former are the usual young lovers who are trying to see each other in spite of parental objections. In the latter are found such comic types as the tavern keeper and his wife and the viejo verde. In this case a jealous young man is also involved and eventually a street fight takes place. Like his predecessors in the comic genre, Ricardo de la Vega satirized the theatre in his sainetes. "La abuela," for example, is a satire on the melodrama of Echegaray.

Outstanding in the following generation of sainetistas is Carlos Arniches, who is reputed to have replaced Javier de Burgos, Ricardo de la Vega, and Ramos Carrión in popularity.¹⁰⁰ The standard comic device found in his works is fear, "miedo a una tranca, a una pistola, a los puños de un jayán, a las uñas de una mujer irascible o a las apariciones del otro mundo; pero miedo siempre."¹⁰¹ It was his unfailing method of evoking laughter for forty-five years of writing for the stage.

Culminating the movement of género chico in the twentieth century were the works of the brothers Serafín and Joaquín Álvarez Quintero. They created a theatre of Andalusian customs, as well as a number of comical and satirical works not dealing with their own region. Their humor is based on the same type of realistic

portrayal of manners to be found throughout the development of the short farces in Spain. An important comic element in their plays of Andalusia is the dialect of that region:

Es además un hecho que esa manera de hablar de los andaluces, como en general su manera de ser, produce en el resto de los españoles una impresión agradable, tanto que bastan los gestos y la pronunciación andaluces para prestar a quien los tiene, tanto en la vida como en el teatro, una cierta gracia.¹⁰²

Among the more successful of the Quintero comedies are El genio alegre, revolving around a cheerful Andalusian girl who lives with her stern aunt; Las de Caín, dealing with the problems confronting a father who has to marry off five daughters without dowries; Doña Clarines, whose title character, a bit like Ruiz Alarcón's Don Domingo de Don Blas, is considered insane because she tells the truth and ignores social convention; and El amor que pasa, which tells of a lonely old maid always awaiting the sweetheart who never comes.

Contemporary with the Quintero brothers, several playwrights were producing high comedies. The most famous of these was Jacinto Benavente, who became internationally known and won the Nobel Prize in 1922. Benavente and his followers broke away from the melodrama of José Echegaray and gave new life to the Spanish stage.

La comedia benaventiana era lo más opuesto al gusto imperante que cabía concebir: sutil e irónica, sin acción, ni pasiones, ni tesis, llevaba a la escena las costumbres de la aristocracia y la clase media madrileñas mostrando sus prejuicios e hipocresía con intencionada mordacidad.

The theatre of Benavente is more cosmopolitan than Spanish in its origin.¹⁰⁴ He is said to have been influenced most by contemporary French writers, Shakespeare, Molière, Ibsen, and Maeterlinck.¹⁰⁵ In his earliest works he was particularly interested in satirizing the aristocracy and the middle class of Madrid. In El automóvil, for example, he makes fun of the latest fad of the day. In Lo cursi he satirizes the middle class's affectations. In Los intereses creados, one of his best plays, Benavente satirizes human nature. In the latter is found a servant-master combination which shows the good and the bad sides to man's character. The comedy itself has some relation in form to the old commedia dell'arte and Molière.

Among the followers of Benavente are Manuel Linares Rivas and Gregorio Martínez Sierra. Like Benavente, Linares Rivas is inclined toward social satire. His plays deal with marital conflicts, where he takes a stand for divorce; with the aristocracy, whom he severely criticizes; and with politics, which he satirizes. Linares Rivas also wrote short comic works and zarzuelas. Quite different from Linares Rivas and more of a modernist in his style is Martínez Sierra. His works are notable for their delicate, poetic humor and their handling of feminine psychology.

Although Benavente continued to write and produce plays until the 1950's, he, Linares Rivas, and Martínez Sierra properly belong in the development of the Spanish

theatre to the early decades of the twentieth century. In the following generation of playwrights, appearing before the Spanish Civil War, the most famous name is that of Federico García Lorca. Lorca's best theatre was his three rural tragedies, but he also wrote farces and comedies, introducing an element of poetry here as in all his work. Perhaps more influential on the post-war humorous playwrights are the works of Alejandro Casona. Casona first began writing plays when Lorca did, but while Lorca's career was cut short in 1936 with his assassination, Casona went into exile and continued to write. His theatre is marked by an element of fantasy, by a juxtaposition of realism and idealism. Further reference will be made to his writing in the body of this dissertation, although Casona's work is not specifically included in the present study as he was not in Spain in the period from 1945 to 1960.¹⁰⁶ The same is true of Jacinto Grau, who also went into exile and continued to write. Grau was not very successful in Spain before the Civil War, but his plays have more recently been recognized by critics. Grau wrote new adaptations of such legends as that of Don Juan and Pygmalion; like Casona, he introduces elements of fantasy into his work.

This dissertation is based on a study of a number of comedies produced on the Spanish stage between 1945 and 1960. The yearly anthology, Teatro español, edited by Sainz de Robles, has been used as an initial guide in

the selection of plays to be studied. These plays have been supplemented by many others that were well received at the time of their presentation or that have met with the favor of the critics. Doubtless additional plays worthy of attention have been inadvertently omitted, and some plays have been included which other students of contemporary Spanish theatre may not consider worthy of serious treatment. But, in general, the plays studied in this dissertation represent, in the opinion of the writer, the best comedies she has read of the period.

The better of the works recently produced in Spain may roughly be divided into two categories: the serious dramas of social protest dealing with the anguish of our times, and the lighter comedies that usually make no pretense at having any purpose other than entertainment. It is the latter group of plays which we shall consider in this dissertation.

Do these contemporary Spanish comedies bear a close relationship to the traditional Spanish comedy, whose development we have discussed in this introduction? One might say that there are two main branches to Spanish comedy leading up to the period under discussion. One of these is that of the farce, the popular comedy realistically portraying Spanish life, as seen in the paso, entremés, sainete, and género chico. The comedies from 1945-60 studied in this dissertation do not follow this farce tradition; they differ in form in that they are

full-length plays, and they differ in content in that they have plots and do not merely attempt to reflect customs. The other branch of Spanish comedy is that of high comedy, begun by Moratín and continued by Ventura de la Vega and, much later, Benavente and his followers. We have already mentioned the cosmopolitan influence on Benavente's work. Moratín and Ventura de la Vega, too, were influenced by foreign playwrights, particularly French.¹⁰⁷ Intermediate between Ventura de la Vega and Benavente, we find the works of López de Ayala and Tamayo y Baus, both of whom also underwent some foreign influence. These writers of high comedy differ among themselves. While one may trace an evolution from Moratín through Ventura de la Vega and then to Ayala and Tamayo, Benavente owes little to his predecessors. He was more directly influenced by the French, Ibsen, and Shakespeare, than by the Spanish.¹⁰⁸ In the same way, the writers who have come after him in the development of Spanish comedy have been more influenced by foreign writers than by Benavente. They likewise owe comparatively little to their other Spanish predecessors. In the twentieth century, with its rapid means of communication, cultural ideas can readily cross national boundaries and much of the literature of the Western world has become cosmopolitan in nature. It is easier to find traces of Pirandello, Priestley, or Giraudoux in contemporary Spanish comedy than it is to relate the latter to the entremés or the realistic thesis

comedies of the nineteenth century. This is not to say that there are no themes, comic devices, or comic characters common to both the contemporary Spanish stage and the Spanish comedies of centuries past. "No hay nada más mudable que la materia humorística de cada época aunque la técnica de provocar la risa varía poco."¹⁰⁹ Essentially, however, contemporary Spanish comedy is more the end result of the evolution of world drama than it is of the development of drama in Spain alone.

Among the contemporary Spanish playwrights to be discussed in this dissertation, the one who bears the closest resemblance to "traditional" Spanish comedy is probably Alfonso Paso. Paso frequently makes use of the comic device of fear, as did Carlos Arniches and generations of farce writers before him. His cowardly character is also usually stupid, a sort of modern version of the bobo. This cowardly, stupid character is usually paired with an extraordinarily clever or idealistic man. In some cases they remind one of Don Quixote and Sancho Panza, although they are also reminiscent of the master-gracioso combination. Paso also introduces the comic character of the talkative wife, a character used with great success in the entremés of the Golden Age, "Los dos habladores," attributed to Cervantes. Moreover, there is some connection between the macabre humor of Paso and that of certain writers of the Golden Age, such

as Quevedo and Rojas Zorrilla. The structure of Paso's mystery plays in particular is based on a complicated series of entanglements, much as the Siglo de Oro romantic comedies utilized an involved plot.

The examples of close relationship between the Spanish comedy of the past and the other contemporary playwrights are more scattered. In many cases the common themes are universal in nature: marital problems, literary parody, satire of lo cursi. The comic language device of the sixteenth century is still being used by contemporary writers, as is the satire of foreign and dialectical types. The devil is still a comic character as he was in the medieval and renaissance periods, although he has been modernized somewhat. Long or funny names continue to evoke laughter as they did even in Latin comedy. And clever young girls today, as yesterday, manage to outwit their elders in matters of love.

More specifically, one might mention the parallel between Bretón's Muérete y verás and López de Rubio's La otra orilla. In the former the hero finds out when he is reported dead that his fiancée did not really love him but that another young lady truly did. In the latter, where the author uses a juxtaposition of the real world and a fanciful interpretation of the after life, one of the characters makes a similar discovery, but, as he is dead, he cannot rectify his error in marrying

the wrong woman. Another parallel may be seen between La dama boba of Lope de Vega and Casi un cuento de hadas of Buero Vallejo. In both cases a young woman is cured of her stupidity when she falls in love. But it would be a mistake to say that Buero Vallejo was inspired by Lope's play; actually the contemporary work is based on a French story by Perrault. The similarity of theme is coincidence as are apparently most of the connections between the Spanish comedy of today and that of the past.

What the contemporary period definitely does have in common with the past is that many of the best plays being written for the Spanish stage are humorous. The bases of that humor, therefore, are worthy of study. Humor, however, is seldom treated in detail by critics of the Spanish theatre, and, to the knowledge of this writer, there is no monograph of the comic elements employed by contemporary playwrights.

Because of the large number of comedies produced in Spain since the end of the Civil War, it has been necessary to limit both the period studied in this dissertation-- 1945-60--and the number of playwrights. The appendix, found in each volume of Sainz de Robles' anthology, of plays staged in Spain clearly indicates the great activity of the contemporary Spanish theatre. ¹¹⁰

NOTES

¹Doris K. Arjona, "Beyond Humor: The Theater of Miguel Mihura," Kentucky Foreign Language Quarterly, VI (1959), 63.

²George Tyler Northup, ed., Ten Spanish Farces of the 16th, 17th and 18th Centuries (Boston, 1922), p. ix.

³J. P. Wickersham Crawford, The Spanish Pastoral Drama (Philadelphia, 1915), p. 27.

⁴Ibid., p. 33.

⁵Ibid., p. 48.

⁶Northup, op. cit., p. ix.

⁷William Shaffer Jack, The Early Entremés in Spain: The Rise of a Dramatic Form (Philadelphia, 1923), p. 57.

⁸William Samuel Hendrix, Some Native Comic Types in the Early Spanish Drama (Columbus, Ohio, 1925), p. 13.

⁹Ibid., p. 14.

¹⁰Jack, op. cit., p. 65.

¹¹M. Romera-Navarro, Historia de la literatura española (Boston, 1928), p. 112.

¹²Crawford, op. cit., p. 53.

¹³Angel Valbuena Prat, Literatura dramática española (Barcelona, 1930), p. 66.

¹⁴Hendrix, op. cit., p. 35.

¹⁵Valbuena Prat, op. cit., pp. 61-65.

¹⁶Hendrix, op. cit., p. 35.

¹⁷Romera-Navarro, op. cit., p. 114.

¹⁸Hendrix, op. cit., p. 36.

¹⁹The foremost critic on the works of Torres Naharro is Joseph E. Gillet. Gillet, however, did not appear to be specifically interested in the humorous element of

Naharro's theatre, and the student of humor must search elsewhere for a study of that aspect of Naharro's plays.

²⁰Romera-Navarro, op. cit., p. 117.

²¹Ibid., p. 118.

²²Federico Carlos Sainz de Robles, El teatro español, historia y antología, I (Madrid, 1942), 65.

²³Romera-Navarro, op. cit., p. 115.

²⁴Ibid., p. 117.

²⁵Ibid., p. 115.

²⁶Jack, op. cit., p. 85.

²⁷Ibid., p. 89.

²⁸Northup, op. cit., p. xv.

²⁹Romera-Navarro, op. cit., p. 199.

³⁰Crawford, "The Braggart Soldier and the Rufián in the Spanish Drama of the Sixteenth Century," Romanic Review, II (1911), 189.

³¹Ibid., p. 199.

³²Raymond Leonard Grismer, The Influence of Plautus in Spain before Lope de Vega (New York, 1944), p. 109.

³³Ibid., pp. 36, 51.

³⁴Ibid., p. 133.

³⁵Ibid., p. 136.

³⁶Ibid., pp. 153-54.

³⁷Ibid., pp. 167, 175.

³⁸Ibid., p. 173.

³⁹Hendrix, op. cit., pp. 4-5.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 6.

⁴¹Ibid., pp. 6-7.

⁴²Northup, op. cit., pp. xv-xvi.

⁴³Ibid., p. xix.

⁴⁴Valbuena Prat, op. cit., pp. 102-03.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 109.

⁴⁶Ibid., pp. 109-10.

⁴⁷Northup, op. cit., p. xxv.

⁴⁸Sainz de Robles, op. cit., II, 65.

⁴⁹Charles David Ley, El gracioso en el teatro de la península (Siglos XVI-XVII) (Madrid, 1954), p. 36.

- 50 Ibid., p. 12. 51 Ibid., p. 120.
- 52 Ibid., pp. 75, 83, 86, 112. 53 Ibid., p. 121.
- 54 Ibid., p. 128. 55 Ibid., pp. 152-53.
- 56 Ibid., p. 159. 57 Ibid. 58 Ibid., pp. 178-91.
- 59 Ibid., pp. 196-202. 60 Ibid., pp. 226-30.
- 61 Ibid., p. 235. 62 Valbuena Prat, op. cit., p. 153.
- 63 Romera-Navarro, op. cit., p. 352.
- 64 Ibid., p. 354. 65 Lex, op. cit., p. 206.
- 66 Sturgis E. Leavitt, "Did Calderón Have a Sense of Humor?" ("Romance Studies"; Chapel Hill, 1950), p. 5.
- 67 Leavitt, "Humor in the Autos of Calderón," Hispania, XXXIX (May, 1956), 138.
- 68 Ibid., pp. 140-43. 69 Valbuena Prat, op. cit., p. 231.
- 70 Sainz de Robles, op. cit., II, 39.
- 71 Romera-Navarro, op. cit., p. 373.
- 72 Ibid., pp. 370-71.
- 73 Valbuena Prat, op. cit., pp. 253-54.
- 74 Ibid., p. 260. 75 Ibid., p. 265.
- 76 Northup, op. cit., p. xxx.
- 77 Arthur Hamilton, A Study of Spanish Manners 1750-1800 from the Plays of Ramón de la Cruz ("University of Illinois Studies in Language and Literature," Vol. XI, No. 3; Urbana, 1926), p. 10.
- 78 Northup, op. cit., p. xxxii. 79 Ibid.
- 80 Sainz de Robles, op. cit., V (Madrid, 1943), 42.
- 81 High comedy is a term frequently used to distinguish serious comedy from slapstick or farce. William Flint Thrall and Addison Hibbard in their A Handbook to Literature (Garden City, N. Y., 1936), p. 197, define high comedy as:
- "Pure or serious comedy, as contrasted with 'low comedy.' High comedy rests upon an appeal to the intellect and arouses 'thoughtful' laughter by

exhibiting the inconsistencies and incongruities of human nature and by displaying the follies of social manners. The purpose is not consciously didactic or ethical, though serious purpose is often implicit in the satire which is not infrequently present in high comedy."

Bartholow V. Crawford in his article "High Comedy in Terms of Restoration Practice," Philological Quarterly, VIII (1929), 343, also distinguishes high comedy from popular comedy: "Indeed it will scarcely be disputed by anyone who uses the term that High Comedy scorns the devices of mere popular appeal, that it seeks instead the approval of a smaller, more discriminating, albeit less lucrative audience." Speaking more precisely in terms of Spanish drama, Richard E. Chandler and Kessel Schwartz in their A New History of Spanish Literature (Baton Rouge, 1961), p. 118, refer to alta comedia as a new type of social satire created by the realistic dramatists in the nineteenth century.

⁸²Sainz de Robles, op. cit., VI, 48.

⁸³Valbuena Prat, op. cit., p. 303.

⁸⁴Sainz de Robles, op. cit., VI, 56.

⁸⁵Valbuena Prat, op. cit., p. 309.

⁸⁶Federico de Onís, "Introduction" to Serafín and Joaquín Alvarez Quintero's La flor de la vida (Boston, 1926), p. ix.

⁸⁷Angel del Río, Historia de la literatura española, II (New York, 1948), 86.

⁸⁸José Yxart y Moragas, El arte escénico en España, II (Barcelona, 1896), 33.

⁸⁹Río, op. cit., p. 86. ⁹⁰Ibid., p. 113.

⁹¹Yxart, op. cit., p. 7. ⁹²Ibid., p. 125.

⁹³Ibid., p. 140. ⁹⁴Ibid., p. 63. ⁹⁵Ibid., p. 67.

⁹⁶Ibid., p. 76. ⁹⁷Ibid., p. 74. ⁹⁸Ibid., p. 75.

⁹⁹Ibid., p. 107.

¹⁰⁰José Deleito y Piñuela, Origen y apogeo del género chico (Madrid, 1949), p. 202.

¹⁰¹Ibid., p. 203.

¹⁰²Onís, op. cit., p. x.

¹⁰³Rfo, op. cit., p. 193.

¹⁰⁴Aubrey F. G. Bell, Literatura castellana (Barcelona, 1947), p. 217.

¹⁰⁵Rfo, op. cit., p. 194.

¹⁰⁶Casona went into voluntary exile at the beginning of the Civil War and lived in South America for many years. In the early months of 1963, however, he returned to Spain, and his works are once again produced in his native country, where they have been well received by critics and the public. The playwright died in Madrid in September, 1965.

¹⁰⁷Bell, op. cit., p. 217.

¹⁰⁸Rfo, op. cit., p. 194.

¹⁰⁹Ley, op. cit., p. 30.

¹¹⁰Sainz de Robles lists each year the plays staged both in Madrid and in the provinces. Although for the season 1949-50 he lists only about 150 plays, for each of the seasons 1950-51, 1951-52, and 1952-53 the number varies between 450 and 500. A small percentage of these plays are new productions of older Spanish works or translations of foreign plays, and some playwrights do produce more than one new work in a given year, but we may still safely say that in some theatrical seasons hundreds of contemporary writers see their plays presented on the Spanish stage.

CHAPTER ONE

MECHANICAL ASPECTS OF HUMOR

Comic authors over the centuries have built up a vast stockpile of sure-fire laugh-getting techniques to which both novice and experienced playwrights still resort with varying degrees of success. To be sure, comic devices differ from one country to another and one generation to another, and humor often does not translate, but many of the basic techniques remain the same. The stock characters and their favorite antics of Roman comedy are as much alive today as they were two thousand years ago.

As the French psychologist L. Dugas has pointed out, it is impossible to attribute all the causes of laughter to a single source:

Le rire se manifeste dans des conditions si hétérogènes et si multiples--sensations physiques, joie, contraste, surprise, bizarrerie, étrangeté, bassesse, etc.--que la réduction de toutes ces causes à une seule reste bien problématique.¹

Nevertheless, the theorists have managed to pinpoint the causes of laughter as far as the comic stage is concerned. Max Eastman feels that the causes of laughter may be reduced to two principal sources. Taking issue

with the elaborate theories of Freud² and Bergson, Eastman finds that these laugh-provoking techniques may be discovered by playing with a baby. What will make a baby laugh when he is being played with? Funny faces and objects that are pulled away from his grasping hand. The funny face is something ludicrous, or an example of Aristotle's concept of something ugly or distorted but not painful. The object pulled away from the baby's grasping hand or the more sophisticated adult's grasping mind is something witty, or an example of Kant's concept of an expectation that comes suddenly to nothing.³ Thus, according to Eastman, laughter may be aroused by two means: by the ugly, ludicrous, or distorted; or by the surprise or sudden reversal or disappointment.

Starting from entirely different perspectives, other thinkers have arrived at nearly the same conclusions as Eastman. The comic actor Ramón Rivero believes that audiences will laugh when the comedian takes them by surprise⁴ and that one always laughs at another's misfortune.⁵ While Rivero's second reason at first sounds far removed from Eastman's theories, there is actually a close connection. The baby laughs when his toy is pulled away from him in fun. The older child laughs, for the same reason, when a chair is pulled out from under a classmate. In the latter case, it is the classmate's expectation that has come to nothing, or

another's misfortune, which causes the child to laugh. If Charlie Chaplin receives a pie in the face, that is funny; if we do, we are less inclined to see the humor of the situation.

Expressing himself differently, Stephen Leacock touches upon these same sources of humor. He finds that laughter is provoked by incongruities, contrasts, and disharmony.⁶ The incongruous, of course, is not too far removed from the unexpected and the surprise, or from the ludicrous, and the funny or ugly thing that makes the baby laugh could be classified as an example of disharmony. Leacock suspects that primitive man laughed at injury--others' misfortunes--and that civilization has modified this source of laughter from injury to incongruity.⁷ He considers the clown a "symbol of our redeemed humanity" because he has raised our tendency to laugh at others' injuries from the realm of cruelty to that of make-believe.⁸ The clown slips on the banana peel and falls down; we laugh, but we know that he has not really hurt himself, that it is just done "in fun." In the same way, the baby laughs when his toy is taken from him because he knows that it is just a game and that the toy will be given back to him.

Leacock also describes a humor of "discomfiture."⁹ In this kind of humor, we laugh not at someone else's misfortunes or injuries, but at his blunders. We see

the comic character's mistakes, we know that his expectations will come to nothing, and we relish in the impending disaster, even though the character's stupidity may make us uncomfortable.

The concept of discomfiture also appears in the theories of Carolyn Wells. She summarizes the sources of laughter in the Derision Theory and the Disappointment Theory.¹⁰ The derision concept is just another wording for Leacock's humor of discomfiture, but the choice of vocabulary spotlights a frequent idea about why we laugh. According to some, we laugh because we are basically malicious and wish to make fun of others. Savages and small children supposedly find humor in someone else's broken leg, but the civilized adult must find substitutes, like the make-believe mishaps of the clown, for his rather grim desire to deride his fellow man and enjoy others' sufferings because, being removed from them, he can feel superior to them.

The humor of the child and the savage is cruel. That is why George Meredith can say, "An excellent test of the civilization of a country . . . I take to be the flourishing of the comic idea and of comedy." Perhaps it is not only a product, but one of the chief causes of that civilization.¹¹

What Carolyn Wells calls the Disappointment Theory is again the idea of incongruity or of the expectation that comes to nothing.

All of these variations on the source of comic laughter give us at least a limited view of the devices

the playwright may use to create the desired effect on his audience, but it is Henri Bergson who has worked out one of the most detailed systems to explain the various phases of comedy. Eastman may feel that Bergson missed the point of laughter entirely, but the French philosopher's theories do include explanations of the success of many stock comic techniques, and doubtless many twentieth century writers of comedy have familiarized themselves with his theories.

To evoke laughter, Bergson feels, comedy must appeal to the intelligence and must not be sentimental in that the emotions are the enemy of comedy.¹² However, humor in a broader sense does not have to arouse laughter and therefore may involve emotions and sentiments. To be comic, a character must be unconscious of his comical characteristics and must be a type rather than an individual; Othello is the title of a tragedy, while a comedy of similar theme might be called The Jealous Husband.¹³

Bergson does not believe that ugliness can be comic; a distortion is only comic if it is one that can easily be imitated. "Peut devenir comique toute difformité qu'une personne bien conformée arriverait à contrefaire."¹⁴ Neither can the comic be beautiful.

What is comic is not ugliness, but stiffness, not laideur, but raideur.¹⁵ And here Bergson arrives at the heart of his theory of comic laughter: human

characteristics become comic when they are stiffened in some way to appear mechanical. "Les attitudes, gestes et mouvements du corps humain sont risibles dans l'exacte mesure où ce corps nous fait penser à une simple mécanique."¹⁶ An imitation or repetition of gestures appears mechanical and is, therefore, comic. A multiplication of an action gives the effect, not of a man, but of a marionette, and is, therefore, funny. Any sort of disguise may also be funny because it is a mechanical way of concealing or deceiving nature. Hence clothing, except the style to which we are accustomed, is funny because it could be a disguise, and red noses or black skin, even if they are real, are funny because they, too, could be a way of masquerading.¹⁷ A character with an obsession may be comic for such an obsession suggests an automatic or mechanical quality.¹⁸

Bergson also develops an acceleration or snowball theory of comic laughter.¹⁹ As a child is amused by a snowball that rolls downhill, increasing both in speed and size as it goes, so an audience will be amused by an action that constantly accelerates or by anything that passes from hand to hand or increases somehow in size as it travels from one character to another or one scene to another. A situation that is repeated may be funny, as we have already mentioned, and so is a situation that suddenly reverses direction, for the sudden reversal is

also mechanical.²⁰ The latter theory calls to mind the stock movie device of reversing the reel and having the diver suddenly return to the board from the pool.

Comic characters may also be explained in part by the stiffening process, for often the comic types have stiffened themselves against society and are noted for their "insociabilité."²¹ The misanthrope and the miser have stiffened themselves in such a way and are funny because they are out of step with society.

Bergson's essay on comic laughter includes many other elements of humor and why he thinks they are funny to us, but his essential doctrine is that human action, human characteristics, human thought become comic when they become automatic or mechanical in some respect.

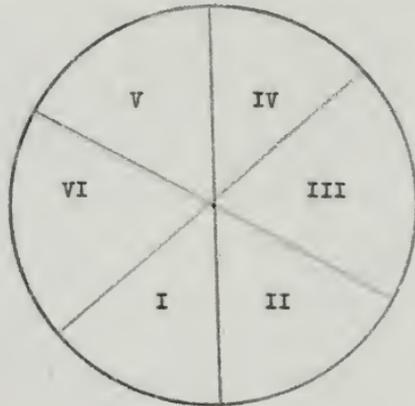
All of the theories cited here reduce the source of laughter to certain tools which the comic writer or comedian may employ, consciously or unconsciously, to entertain his audience. He may do so in the most obvious way: the clown puts on a large red nose and baggy pants and proceeds to slip on a banana peel. There is no attempt made at being subtle in his use of the age-old laugh techniques. Or the writer may choose to be more sophisticated in his approach, by appealing to the mind rather than the eye. He may give his character an exaggerated love of money, rather than an exaggerated nose, and let his slips be on an intellectual plane,

rather than on the floor in open view. The variations on the various laugh-getting devices are therefore infinite.

Are these tools for provoking comic laughter seen in the Spanish comedies produced between 1945 and 1960? They abound, and often the stock devices are used in new and rather interesting ways. Even the severest critics of contemporary Spanish theatre must admit that a number of today's playwrights are excellent craftsmen, writers who are thoroughly familiar with staging and stage effects and know how to construct a play even if they do fall short of literary masterpieces.

One of the first plays that comes to mind, not because of any great literary value, but rather because of its unusual staging, is La rueda by Juan Antonio de Laiglesia. First produced in 1955 and recipient of the Premio Nacional Calderón de la Barca of 1954, La rueda in its entire staging is an excellent example of Bergson's boule de neige or snowball theory of comic effect. According to Bergson, laughter can be aroused by an acceleration of action or by the passing of an object from one character to another. Laiglesia uses both of these techniques. The special stage for this production is constructed on a revolving platform, a circle divided into six sections. Each section represents the living quarters or office of each of the figures in a rather involved love circle; expanding upon the familiar

STAGE SETTINGS FOR LA RUEDA



The six settings are staged on a large, rotating platform. Right and left are those of the spectator.

Scene I. Doctor Benavides' office.

Scene II. The doctor's home. Without the curtain lowering, the platform revolves from right to left while the doctor exits through the door on the right in his office and enters his home.

Scene III. The platform rotates again, and Eulalia exits from the doctor's home and enters a café.

Scene IV. The platform rotates while Miguel leaves the café and enters the library of the College of Medicine.

Scene V. Gloria leaves the library and enters the next setting, José Luis's room in a boardinghouse.

Scene VI. As the platform rotates from right to left, José Luis exits from his room and enters the living room of Doña Matilde de Osorio.

love triangle in which A loves B who loves C, Laiglesia has created a situation in which the Doctor loves Eulalia, who loves Miguel, who loves Gloria, who loves José Luis, who loves Matilde, who loves the Doctor. Because of the revolving platform and the multiple stage setting, the action of the play can move readily from one scene to another, thus creating a sense of acceleration. In the first half of the play, each scene is fairly long as the action moves from one setting to another. In the second half of the play, the circle spins much more rapidly and in the opposite direction, as each of the characters has a change of heart. (Remember that a sudden reversal of this nature is also a stock comic device.) Also illustrating Bergson's theory, Laiglesia uses a ring that passes from one character to another as the stage spins around. The ring manages to make a complete circle as each character receives it as a gift from the one who loves him and then gives it to the one he loves. As Bergson has pointed out, the audience is amused by watching the passing of the ring "snowball" so to speak, and, of course, the spectators can also anticipate with pleasure the inevitable return of the ring to its original owner and the resultant series of recriminations as each donor accuses the recipient of having not cherished the ring with the proper feeling.

Human characteristics, says Bergson, become comic when they become mechanical. How have Spanish playwrights shown this comic technique?

A minor character who very clearly shows the results of making a human characteristic mechanical is Victoria in Joaquín Calvo-Sotelo's Una muchacha de Valladolid (1957). Victoria is the wife of the cultural attaché in a Latin American country. Before her marriage, however, she was a typist, and she has obviously suffered from typing too many mechanical business letters. Her conversation is never flexible; she always speaks in letters and in the stock expressions to be found in commercial correspondence. And, as her typewriter did not have an ñ, she consistently pronounces all ñ's as n's, just as she typed them. Certainly Calvo-Sotelo can count on Victoria's appearances, which wisely are not too frequent, to get a laugh from the audience.

The British butler is a traditional comic character who is funny because he seems more mechanical than human. His posture is stiff, his speech is stiff, and the expression on his face never changes. He is an old standby in Western comedy, and it is not surprising that he should appear in Spain. But the Spanish have given him a slightly new twist by creating Spanish servants who are trying to be British butlers. In Miguel Mihura's El caso del señor vestido de violeta (1954), the main character is an intellectual torero who cannot tolerate anything

Andalusian. Roberto, therefore, compels his servants to adopt the attitudes of British servants; his secretary is even called Miss Denis. The stiffness of these servants becomes most comic, perhaps, when the audience finally realizes that it is all an act. In Edgar Neville's Rapto one of the few successful comic devices of this rather unsatisfactory comedy is the servant who decides for himself, under the influence of too many British movies, that he wants to be a British butler. His name is Santiago, but he asks his master to call him "James." He even begins speaking in the plural because his prototypes use "we" instead of "I."

Among contemporary playwrights, Alfonso Paso turns out an amazing number of comedies, most of which have some entertainment value and few of which achieve any literary stature. He does, however, seem to know most of the tricks of the comic trade, so it is not surprising that there are examples of this "mechanical" humor in his works. In Cosas de Papá y Mamá (1960), to cite one play, he lets the character Dr. Bolt create a certain comic effect by his habit of mechanically wiping his glasses, and then he creates a more obvious piece of "business" with Leandro's cough. Leandro, the Papa of the play, stops coughing whenever his wife Elena raises her arm. We know from the first act, before Leandro and Elena begin their romance, that both of their

physical maladies stem from a lack of love, but the method of stopping Leandro's cough, like flicking a switch to turn off a light, is funny nevertheless.

A human being can become funny not just by stiffening one aspect of his nature, but by stiffening his whole being. In Diana está comunicando (1960), José López Rubio's spoof on telepathy, the characters intermittently become statues when the telepathist wishes to enforce his will. There is the added humor here of one person being able to control another, so that the medium may be talking quite naturally and then suddenly stiffen, change his attitude completely, and begin responding to the telepathist's will.²² In Como mejor están las rubias es con patatas (1947), one of Enrique Jardiel Poncela's last plays, three of the characters are so shocked to learn that a long-lost scientist is returning home in a cage as a cannibal that they sit quite frozen on the sofa throughout a good part of the play. To highlight the unusual immobility of the three, the portera of the house and her daughter sell admission tickets and offer guided tours of the room with the three living statues on the couch. One of the statues has the added attraction of thinking that he is a bird and of occasionally coming to life and chirping or attempting to fly. The fun is doubled when one set of visitors to this spectacle pays extra for seats and the

privilege of watching for developments, and then the next set of visitors enters and finds, not the three promised statues, but six!

One of the aspects of mechanical humor that Bergson stresses is that of repetition. A machine is constructed to do the same operation over and over again; the human being is more versatile. Thus when the human begins to repeat an operation, expression, or action, what he is doing becomes funny. The first time Paso's Dr. Bolt wipes his glasses, no one laughs. There is nothing comic in the action of wiping glasses. When he repeats the operation a few seconds later, however, there may be a slight laugh from the audience. By the third time he repeats the action, there is probably a noticeable laugh. If he wipes his glasses too often, however, the result is monotonous and no longer funny; the comic author must be sensitive enough to know when a repetition has created the maximum comic effect and stop using it at just that point.

In another Paso play, Una bomba llamada Abelardo (1953), the author uses a more complicated but not less obvious repetition device. Manuel, the voice of reason in this satire, has ordered a piano because of a sudden infatuation for Laura, a piano teacher. Two men deliver the piano and unload it, but Manuel is not there and the others tell them to take the piano away. Naturally

Manuel then appears and orders them to unload the piano again. In a series of contradictory orders, à la Laurel and Hardy brand of humor, the men load and reload the piano at intervals throughout the play.

An almost identical device is used by Tono (Antonio de Lara) in Un drama en "El Quinto Pino" (1950). Fernanda has packed the suitcases for a trip to Barcelona with her husband, Roberto. But some of Roberto's things do not fit in the bags. So Roberto repacks them and finds that it is Fernanda's things that do not fit. She unpacks, repacks, and proves that her things fit very well. The unpacking-repacking cycle is repeated several times, each time accompanied by appropriate clutter around the suitcases and increasing anxiety of Roberto, who worries about the time and the impending departure of the train.

Examples of such repetition devices in any group of comedies are almost unlimited. Repetition is a time-honored comic device and, in its more obvious manifestations, a very easy one to use. The repetition takes on a slightly different aspect in Neville's Adelita, however. Pedro, the same Pedro from El baile (1952) but now much older, has a great weakness for sweets, for marrons glacés and almendras garrapiñadas in particular, but the doctor and his granddaughter Adelita have forbidden him to eat them. Throughout the play he

repeatedly manages to sneak his favorite candies and talk others into smuggling them into the house. The action is comic in its repetition, but the play is written on a higher level of humor than those previously mentioned, and there is a certain amount of pathos intermingled with the comic. Pedro has diabetes and his death at the end of the play is doubtless hastened by his comic disobedience of Adelita's orders.

Repetition need not be limited to a particular action of an individual character; it may involve the recurrence of an entire situation. Such repetition can be handled on many different levels; instead of merely provoking laughter, it may arouse a feeling of pathos or even terror. In El baile the third act repeats the first in that Adelita is getting ready for a dance, wearing the same dress her grandmother wore, and Pedro and Julián are preparing to take her, as they took Adela. The repetition of the scene is humorous, but humorous in the sense that it evokes a tender smile, or perhaps a tear, but not a hearty laugh. Such a blend of humor and pathos is a highly prized combination.

Repetition of situation produces a more comic effect in Un drama en "El Quinto Pino." Roberto finally leaves for Barcelona alone, and Fernanda expresses a fear of being left behind because someday a thief may come walking down the stairs. Shortly thereafter Juan does

just that. But Juan is not a thief; he claims to love Fernanda although she has never seen him before. His presence in the house is rather compromising, and they wonder what Roberto would do were he to return and find them together. Roberto returns and kills them both. Then the audience learns that Juan and Fernanda are not dead, that they have just been imagining a scene that has not taken place. Again they try to imagine Roberto's return, and he appears on the scene; this time he accepts the idea that Juan is a cousin, but eventually the stage is littered with corpses again. The scene repeats itself with slight variations, each time only as a supposition, until Roberto returns in reality. The first time the situation occurs, the audience takes the melodramatic moment seriously. The second time, the situation is comic because it is only "supposition." By the time Roberto really comes, the audience, and supposedly Juan and Fernanda as well, are quite surprised to find out that this is the flesh and blood husband, not the imaginary one, and that this time the outcome of the triangle scene cannot be pretended away.

It is a frequent device in these comedies to have a scene take place first in the imagination or in the dream world and then repeat itself in reality. In Paso's Veneno para mi marido (1953) an actress plays the role of a jealous wife who poisons her husband. The play

within the play ends with the first act. Then, as the actress returns to the real world of her marriage, she discovers to her horror that the same situation is beginning to occur that led to the poisoning in the play. The actress thinks she knows what will happen next, but does not. There is comedy resultant from the contrast between her assumptions and reality and from the reactions of those who witness her series of misunderstandings.

In EL caso de la mujer asesinadita (1946) by Miguel Mihura and Alvaro de Laiglesia, Mercedes dreams that her husband Lorenzo has murdered her and married Raquel, accomplice in the murder and Lorenzo's former typist. Shortly after the dream, Raquel does become Lorenzo's typist, and the pieces of the dream begin to fall in place. In Neville's La vida en un hilo (1959) Doña Tomasita has the delightful gift of being able to look into someone's eyes and tell him what might have been. She tells the young widow Mercedes about the happy life she would have had with the sculptor Miguel Angel had she not married the deadly dull--and now dead--Ramón. Mercedes creates a beautiful dream around Miguel Angel in the world of fantasy, and then miraculously meets the sculptor in reality and has her fantasy come true. In Neville's play the repetition device is used for an obvious comic effect. After meeting Miguel Angel, Mercedes knows what will happen next, but the other

characters do not. She is always one step ahead of them, and their bewilderment is laughable. In Mihura's play the repetition produces fewer laughs than in the other two comedies. Here, as in El baile, there is pathos blended with the humor, for the repetition in reality of Mercedes' dream must inevitably lead to her death.

Mihura uses several different kinds of repetition to interesting effect in A media luz los tres (1953). The main character, Alfredo, is very much of a Don Juan and boasts of his accomplishments to his friend Sebastian, who is married, quiet, and apparently a bit stupid. Alfredo is not only successful with the ladies, but the ladies chase him. By the end of the play, Alfredo seems to have lost his touch, and when a situation of the ladies' chasing Don Juan repeats itself, it is Sebastian, not Alfredo, who is being chased. Repetition of situation also occurs in this play in that Alfredo tries to add to his conquests in a series of seduction scenes. Mihura heightens the sense of repetition by having each of the ladies played by the same actress. Alfredo uses the same approach--without much success--on each of his visitors. He points out a stuffed burro in the corner and calls the burro an "uneducated horse." If the lady seems eager to leave, he presses a button and turns on automatic rain outside

his window so that she will stay until the weather clears up. Only one guest, however, falls for Alfredo's tricks, a next-door neighbor who has been deserted by her lover. At the end of the play, when we learn that Alfredo has gotten married, we suspect that the neighbor is Alfredo's bride. But Mihura pulls a comic surprise on us, and we find that the wife is Alfredo's former maid--also played by the same actress--with whom he has been fighting during all three acts.

Having one actor play two or more roles is a sure way of making a repeated situation visible. Closely related to this kind of repetition is a duplication of character--two characters who look and act enough alike that one seems to be the mechanical reproduction of the other. Twins, of course, would be the classic example, and twins have been a stock comic device from the days of Plautus to the present. The bachelor brothers in Calvo-Sotelo's La visita que no tocó el timbre (1950), who suddenly find themselves in possession of an abandoned baby, are not twins; but they are comic both because of the similarities in their characters and lives and because of the contrasts between them. Fortunately, the nurse who comes to help them with the baby has an identical twin sister so that Santiago and Juan can duplicate their taste in women. In the same way, Pedro and Julián of El baile and Adelita, although

they fight quite constantly and are individuals, are comic because they have so much in common in spite of their differences.

In La guerra empieza en Cuba (1955) Victor Ruiz Iriarte consciously makes use of the classic theme of twins and introduces a double set. One set, María Teresa and María Rosa, are inseparable little girls who speak in unison and recite poetry; the comic aspects of their twinship are exploited mechanically. The other set of twins also provides good fun, but in a different way. One twin, Adelaida, is the stern, unsmiling, unloved wife of the governor; her sister, Juanita, is lovable, charming, and dishonored. Determined to take vengeance on Adelaida for the past, she takes her sister's place for a day, and no one believes that there are two governor's wives. The twins duplicate each other physically but have contrasting characters. When the happy-go-lucky twin puts herself in the stern sister's shoes, and later, at the end of the play, when the governor's wife decides to model her own character after that of her sister, we have an effective reversal of roles. Such a reversal has great comic potential.

Again in comedy the device of inversion in situations or roles is a formula sure to produce laughter. By turning the tables in the plot or reversing the usual order of nature, as when a man is disguised as a woman, a child lectures its parents, or the robber is robbed, we get examples of the world upside down. Since life is an irreversible process with its routines rarely infringed, such topsy-turvydom is funny.²⁵

Similar reversals appear in other contemporary Spanish comedies; the favorite relationships to turn topsy-turvy are the parent-child and the master-servant.

The parent-child reversal may be seen in Cosas de Papá y Mamá. Here it is not the young Luisa and Julio who fall in love, but rather their respective widowed parents, Leandro and Elena. The younger generation is much too tied up in business transactions and the hurry of modern life to have time for romance. They are serious and settled, but the parents are not. The children are also watchful, for fear that their elders will do something foolish, and the parents only receive filial permission for their marriage when they lie about Elena's being pregnant. The entire situation of young love and the problem of getting consent to marry is certainly familiar enough, but here the generations have exchanged places.

The younger of two generations also proves to be the more serious in Juan Ignacio Luca de Tena's Don José, Pepe y Pepito (1952). Actually three generations are involved here, but Pepito, the youngest, remains in his chronological place. It is Don José, the father, however, who is serious and settled and Pepe, the grandfather, who has the youthful outlook on life. Even the choice of names and nicknames here clearly highlights the reversed roles of the two generations.

Similarly, in Ruiz Iriarte's La soltera rebelde (1952) Guadalupe, the aunt in her thirties, is in many ways timid and afraid of life, while her young nieces, Mónica and Maty, although inexperienced themselves, are well-versed on many matters and can give their aunt advice on the facts of life and romance. Ruiz Iriarte uses the same device in Juego de niños (1952). Here Maité, a very modern young girl, proves to be much wiser in the ways of the world than her aunt Cándida and takes charge of a scheme to help Cándida win back the love of her unfaithful husband.

Much more complicated is Carlos Llopis' Nosotros, ellas ... y el duende (1948). At the beginning of the play, the two generations involved act as one would expect them to. The young Pilar and her fiancé Claudio are in love and plan to be married; Pilar's widowed father Eduardo and Claudio's widowed mother Antonina take charge of the parental arrangements for the wedding. Then Eduardo and Antonina fall in love, are married, and prove at times to be more romantic than their children. There are many moments when the son advises his mother about her marriage and the daughter, her father, rather than the more usual reversed situation. A standard comic conflict is the mother-in-law versus the new bride, but in the complicated family circle of this play, we often find mother-in-law and daughter-in-law in perfect harmony and an unusual mother-son conflict.

As we have already mentioned, the master-servant reversal is also a stock comic device of which there are many classic examples. In Molière, we find the master who deliberately changes places with his servant so that the servant may take a beating intended for the master. In many comedies the master assumes the servant's role so that he may examine more closely someone's true feelings about him. In twentieth century comedy, we have the example of James M. Barrie's The Admirable Crichton (1902) in which fate arranges for the butler to take over as master on a desert isle and prove his native superiority. The device appears again in a Spanish play of considerable merit that appeared shortly before the period under study: Mi pobre ni rico, sino todo lo contrario by Mihura and Tono, first written in 1939 but not produced until 1943. In this comedy the master, Abelardo, goes from extreme wealth to the life of a beggar. His valet, Julio, remains at the same economic level, so that he is in the first act Abelardo's hired servant, and in the second he charitably brings bread to his former master. The reversal of roles here is not complete, however, for Julio does not lose his respectful servant's attitude; he even continues to shave Abelardo, but now that Abelardo is poverty-stricken, he shaves him only once a week instead of every day.

Neville resorts to this time-honored technique in Alta fidelidad (1957), a satire of contemporary capitalism, tax collectors, and the cost of living. Fernando is a wealthy man who believes that money should be spent, not invested. His servant, Timoteo, who is much like the perfect British butler again in his conduct, has a sound business mind and rapidly is becoming wealthy from his investments while Fernando is losing all he possesses. Finally Fernando turns everything over to Timoteo and takes the latter's place as the servant of the house. Timoteo now finds that he cannot keep up with his financial obligations, but Fernando begins to learn something about investing. Eventually the two return to their original roles.

The comic effect achieved by such reversals of roles is somewhat related to what Leacock has called humor from contrasts. On a lower level, Mutt and Jeff are funny because one is so tall and the other so short; were the two to exchange suits, they would appear even funnier, for each would be obviously out of place. When the child begins to show parental concern for the parent, a modification of the same device is being employed. In a sense, two individuals who contrast vividly in some respect--physical appearance, age, social class, outlook on life--have been miscast. Ruiz Iriarte ^{high-}lights this aspect of miscasting in La guerra empieza

en Cuba at the beginning of the play when some of the characters are rehearsing for an amateur theatrical production. The Marqués, who is a rather elderly gentleman, has been given the role of the son of Pepito, who is a young man.

Contrasts between two or more characters may, of course, be used humorously without having the characters exchange places. In Ruiz Iriarte's La soltera rebelde there is a tender humor in the romance of Guadalupe, a spinster who has led a very proper life and is noted for her violent temper, and Esteban, the Bohemian organist who is as quiet and humble as Lupe is temperamental. In Paso's El canto de la cigarra (1960) the contrast between characters exists on a larger scale. Aristóbulo Terch, the grasshopper of the piece, is a lovable Bohemian who never works, whose house is falling apart, whose children, most of them illegitimate, bear impossible names. Aristóbulo takes life as it comes and refuses to hide behind any social hypocrisy. On the other hand, his wife Elisa, from whom he has been separated a number of years, is extremely concerned with wealth and social custom. The same contrast also appears to a lesser degree between Bisbisiana, Aristóbulo's daughter, and Alfredo, the man she eventually marries. Bisbi is much like her father, but, as the father points out, she is also half like her mother; Alfredo belongs to the

same society which Elisa considers so important, but he appreciates the value of the Bohemians and their lack of pretense.

Character contrast of a different nature is found in Mihura's Maribel y la extraña familia (1959). Maribel is a prostitute whom Marcelino brings home to meet his aunt and his mother. Marcelino's family seems totally unaware of Maribel's profession; they assume her to be a modern young girl and the perfect wife for the rather shy Marcelino. There is a vivid comic contrast between Maribel, her friends Rofi, Puli, and Nini, and Marcelino's family. The girls are quick to think the worst of people and be suspicious, while Marcelino, the aunt, and the mother are filled with human kindness and an idealistic tendency to find only the best in everyone. Their effect on Maribel is such that finally she, too, almost believes that she used to be a seamstress.

The contrast in Maribel y la extraña familia is not only one of character. The contrast here is also that between the idealistic illusions of the mother and aunt and the grim reality as seen by Maribel. Such a contrast between illusion and reality appears in many of the best comedies of the contemporary Spanish stage and will be treated at length in this study in Chapter Six. A humorous effect may also be created by a contrast between the past and the present; plays exemplifying this kind of contrast are discussed in Chapter Four.

One of the sources of comic laughter most frequently mentioned by the theorists is incongruity. This incongruity is closely related to disharmony; what is incongruous is somehow out of place, out of harmony with its surroundings. It is the exaggerated red nose on the clown or the monkey dressed in man's clothing. But an effect of incongruity may also be achieved on an intellectual plane by presenting the unexpected; the mind anticipates a certain logical conclusion following the given set of circumstances, but a different, incongruous conclusion is substituted instead. The incongruous and the unexpected appear frequently in contemporary theatre. They are the essence of the theatre of the absurd, which attempts to reflect the debasement of logic in the modern world. Doubtless the best-known exponents of the theatre of the absurd are those writing in France, headed by Ionesco,²⁴ but Spain is not without its own contribution to this kind of humor. Incongruity or absurdity is at the root of the so-called humor of La codorniz and of the playwrights connected with that now defunct magazine, notably Miguel Mihura. According to one critic, the whole purpose of the humor magazine was to replace the hackneyed by the unexpected; La codorniz had the "intention of annihilating the tópico (the shopworn situation, the tired cliché), mostly by a process of dislocation which replaced the shopworn situation by a mad counterpart and put the tired cliché to a

new and ridiculous use."²⁵ Or, as González Ruiz words it, the nueva comicidad of this school of playwrights "aborda de frente lo inverosímil como si no lo fuera."²⁶ This type of humor of incongruity or absurdity in Spain dates back farther than the magazine with which it has been associated. As Mihura himself has frequently pointed out, many of his plays written in this vein were completed long before the magazine was founded, and a similar humor can be found in the older playwright Jardiel Poncela, who has in many ways influenced the men writing comedies today. Pérez Minik, who includes Jardiel Poncela, Mihura, Alvaro de Laiglesia, Tono, and Carlos Llopis among the playwrights of this school of humor, has suggested that at some later date these comedies may be evaluated as a serious document, capable of interpreting our era and giving our contemporary life an unquestionable meaning.²⁷

Bien es verdad que toda esta representación humorística última, deshumanizada y abstracta, invertebrada y aséptica, arbitraria y escandalosamente original, merece un estudio a fondo que aun creemos no se ha hecho con toda dignidad.²⁸

Examples of the humor of incongruity may be found even in the titles of some of the comedies. Jardiel Poncela's Como mejor están las rubias es con patatas is an excellent sample. We are accustomed to steak tasting good with potatoes and blondes looking attractive in blue, but the juxtaposition of blondes and potatoes

is unexpected and amusing. Mihura and Tono had a similar effect with the title Ni pobre ni rico, sino todo lo contrario; we consider rich and poor to be opposite in meaning, and it catches us offguard to suddenly assume an opposite in meaning to both of them. Again, Mihura and Laiglesia's El caso de la mujer asesinadita causes us to smile; how can the woman be just a little bit murdered? Alfonso Paso, who also makes use of absurd or incongruous humor upon occasion, uses the same technique in the title Una bomba llamada Abelardo; we might expect Abelard to be the name of a scholar, but we ordinarily do not anticipate either that Abelard should be the name of a bomb or that a bomb should have a human name in the first place.

The authors of incongruous humor may use the technique, not only in the wording of the title, but in the comic dialogue of the play itself. Ni pobre ni rico, sino todo lo contrario is filled with such dialogue:

Abelardo: ¡Mercedes!
 Baronesa: ¿He tardado?
 Abelardo: Mucho.
 Baronesa: Menos mal. Creí que había tardado. Para venir antes he dejado mi auto en el garaje y he venido a pie.²⁹

Inventor 1^o: ¿A usted también le gusta inventar inventos?
 Inventor 3^o: Desde pequeño no he hecho otra cosa.
 Inventor 1^o: ¿Y su padre no inventaba nada?
 Inventor 3^o: Sí. Inventaba muchas cosas cuando volvía tarde de la oficina. Pero mi madre no se lo creía.³⁰

Abelardo: ¿Te casarás ahora conmigo?
 Margarita: (Mirando el reloj.) Ahora, no. Es ya muy tarde.³¹

Although this comedy was first produced somewhat before the period of Spanish theatre under study, it is so rich in examples of incongruity that it should not be overlooked. The play opens with three inventors on stage who are waiting to see Abelardo and sell him their patents. One inventor has created an auto horn and a harp that make no noise. Another has a machine that peels potatoes--but it only peels one potato and then never works again. The third has a saw that sounds a bell when the work is finished; he tests his invention by sawing the legs off a table in the room, but the bell does not work. Eventually Abelardo comes and buys the inventions. This scene is as fantastic as anything in Ionesco or as the opening act of Alejandro Casona's Los árboles mueren de pie (1949).

More incongruous situations develop when Abelardo becomes a beggar. At one point he comments that it was so warm that he had to sleep on his park bench with the window open. Margarita comes to visit him on the bench and decides to stay and set up housekeeping; in typical female style, she is discontent with the arrangement of the living quarters. She carefully plans how she will move the trees and flowers to suit her tastes in interior decorating. The baroness also comes, bringing

equally noble ladies with her; the three noble ladies have a picnic with Abelardo and his beggar friends.

Others of Mihura's plays display similar elements of the absurd. In Tres sombreros de copa, written in 1932 and first produced in 1952, Dionisio's hotel room is invaded by an unbelievable assortment of people: the troupe of dancing girls, their Negro manager, the bearded lady, the Astute Hunter, the Hateful Gentleman. The Astute Hunter is a good case in point; he fishes for rabbits, and from time to time throws a rabbit under the bed. Later Dionisio's prospective father-in-law, who represents the interests of "decent people," mistakes the dead rabbits for rats and takes them to his little nephew as a present. There is an obvious incongruity between the nature of the present and the supposedly acceptable standards of decency which Don Sacramento has been preaching.

In ¡Sublime decisión! (1955) Mihura creates another unbelievable atmosphere when Flora's family sets the stage with a cat, a piano, and assorted pastries to interview a prospective husband for their daughter. In El caso de la señora estupenda (1953) of the same author, the hotel room of the honeymooning couple at the beginning of the play seems quite normal until the bride asks her husband what his name is, and then it is learned that another man shares their honeymoon

suite with them. In El caso de la mujer asesinadita the authors introduce into an otherwise normal-looking Spanish home an American Indian, complete with feathers; the Indian proves, however, only to be part of Mercedes' dream.

Earlier in the century Jardiel Poncela made use of the same kind of devices. In Angelina o el honor de un brigadier (1934) he presents the situation of Germán, the villain, kidnapping Angelina with Angelina's poet-boy friend pursuing the fleeing couple on his bicycle. In Eloísa está debajo de un almendro (1940) he creates a fantastic family. The father has not gotten out of bed in years although he is not sick. He takes imaginary train trips and tests prospective servants by finding out if they can remain totally unsurprised by sudden gun shots. An aunt, who is inseparable from her massive dogs Cain and Abel, is equally strange. Examples of humor from incongruity appear also in Jardiel Poncela's last plays. In Los tigres escondidos en la alcoba (1949) Merche insists that she and her sister Celinda are both the wife of Darío. In the second half of El sexo débil ha hecho gimnasia (1946), the family of sisters, in contrast with their nineteenth century predecessors of the first half of the play, are so emancipated that their antics approach absurdity. For example they greet the first visit of a prospective

sultor with a "danza de las hogueras" in which they encircle the unsuspecting young man like a tribe of savage Indians. The young man then becomes initiated into the illustrious group of warriors including "Caballo Indómito," "Aguila Blanca," "Coyote Valeroso," and the "Poderoso Cacique y Hechicero." Some of the incongruities resultant from the cannibal's return to civilization in Como mejor están las rubias es con patatas have already been discussed. At the end of the play, however, before it is learned that the cannibal is a fake, there is a delightful scene in which the stage is cluttered with radio announcers, members of the family, assorted strangers, the man who still thinks he is a bird, and the cannibal in his cage. The cannibal is busily writing a book, a cookbook: one can imagine the gourmet specialties that he is recording!

Paso's use of incongruous techniques closely parallels that of Mihura and Jardiel Poncela. In No hay novedad, doña Adela (1960) Enrique rents an apartment where he has about as much privacy as Dionisio does in his hotel room in Tres sombreros de copa. The tenants in the adjoining apartments come and go as they please, particularly to use Enrique's phone. Moreover, nothing in the apartment is really what it appears to be. All of the pieces of furniture may be converted to a completely different use; the phonograph, for example, really makes

up into a bed. In Una bomba llamada Abelardo there is a father who is about as strange as the one in Jardiel Poncela's Eloísa está debajo de un almendro. This man cannot leave the house, so he hunts in the house; miraculously enough, he usually manages to shoot a bird or a small animal, but occasionally he misses and kills a maid instead. The play has a further element of the incongruous when it is learned that Abelardo, the great scientist and inventor of a magnificently destructive bomb, is really a gorilla; in spite of this knowledge, his fiancée plans to marry him as scheduled. In El canto de la cigarra, one of Paso's funniest plays, the incongruous appears at every turn: in the names of the children--Amaranta, Cornelio, Endimión--in Aristóbulo's fatal weakness for women with physical defects, in the way in which these women invariably abandon Aris with their resultant offspring, in Bisbi's habit either of not answering the telephone or of confusing the party at the other end of the line by carrying on an incomprehensible monologue. The house itself is filled with incongruities as well. There is a crocodile in the bathroom, and the lights are turned on and off by throwing a book at the wall. The scene becomes even more unbelievable after two kind ladies learn that Aris's children do not have milk, and well-intentioned people begin to send over so many bottles that the stage gradually becomes covered with them.

Humor of the incongruous or unexpected is somewhat akin to humor evoked by surprise, although the element of surprise need not involve any particular incongruity. We are surprised in Don José, Pepe y Pepito when the gentleman Don José is expecting from America turns out to be a lady, and we enjoy the resultant confusion, but the mistake was a natural one. We are likewise surprised at the end of Antonio Buero Vallejo's Irene o el tesoro (1954) when we learn that the doctor intends to commit to the insane asylum, not the charming and wistful

Irene, but the practical Dimas who accused Irene of insanity. What is often more closely related to incongruity than surprise is the lack of surprise on the part of characters in unusual situations. No one seems astonished that the Astute Hunter fishes for rabbits or throws dead bunnies under the bed. Abelardo's future in-laws accept the father's hunting in the house as perfectly natural and are not surprised by a dead maid. In Claudio de la Torre's La caña de pescar (1958) a whole series of inexplicable events takes place, but Rafaela, the family servant and cook, is never moved by them at all. If the lack of surprise about dead rabbits is incongruous and therefore comic, the comic element is even stronger when characters can take in their stride murders and corpses. Such is one of the major techniques in the comedies of so-called dark or macabre humor, the parodies of murder mysteries and detective stories to be discussed in the following chapter.

NOTES

¹L. Dugas, Psychologie du rire (Paris, 1902), dedication.

²We shall not consider Freud's theories on the motivation of laughter in this paper as they are more pertinent to students of psychology than to students of the theatre.

³Max Eastman, Enjoyment of Laughter (New York, 1936), p. 49.

⁴Ramón Rivero, Por qué se ríe la gente (San Juan, 1950), p. 34.

⁵Ibid., p. 29.

⁶Stephen Leacock, Humour: Its Theory and Technique (London, 1935), p. 12.

⁷Leacock, Humor and Humanity: An Introduction to the Study of Humor (New York, 1938), p. 17.

⁸Leacock, Humour: Its Theory and Technique, p. 12.

⁹Leacock, Humor and Humanity . . ., p. 91.

¹⁰Carolyn Wells, ed., An Outline of Humor: Being a True Chronicle from Prehistoric Ages to the Twentieth Century (New York, 1923), pp. 6-7.

¹¹Ernest Earnest, A Foreword to Literature (New York, 1945), p. 221.

¹²Henri Bergson, "Le rire" in Oeuvres (Paris, 1959), p. 388.

¹³Ibid., p. 394. ¹⁴Ibid., p. 398. ¹⁵Ibid., p. 400.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 401. ¹⁷Ibid., pp. 402-09.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 422. ¹⁹Ibid., p. 424. ²⁰Ibid., p. 426.

²¹Ibid., p. 456.

²²The humorous treatment of telepathy, extra-sensory perception, and psychiatry is considered in greater length in Chapter Five.

²³Marie Collins Swabey, Comic Laughter: A Philosophical Essay (New Haven, 1961), pp. 143-44.

²⁴See Martin Esslin, The Theatre of the Absurd (Garden City, N.Y., 1961).

²⁵Arjona, loc. cit., p. 65.

²⁶Nicolás Gonzalez Ruiz, La cultura española en los últimos veinte años: El teatro (Madrid, 1949), p. 40.

²⁷Domingo Pérez Minik, Debates sobre el teatro español contemporáneo (Santa Cruz de Tenerife, Canarias, 1953), p. 232.

²⁸Ibid., p. 25.

²⁹Miguel Mihura and Tono, Ni pobre ni rico, sino todo lo contrario, in Tres sombreros de copa: Teatro (Madrid, 1947), p. 175.

³⁰Ibid., pp. 162-63. ³¹Ibid., p. 201.

CHAPTER TWO

MACABRE HUMOR

A type of comedy that appears frequently in the 1945-60 period is that of "dark" or macabre humor, the take-offs on detective stories and horror movies. While dark humor itself is nothing new in Spain, being well exemplified by the works of Quevedo,¹ this particular kind of literary parody can be traced in the contemporary period to certain plays of Jardiel Poncela.² A number of playwrights have made use of the technique, but the most notable ones in Spain are Alfonso Paso and Miguel Mihura. Paso, in particular, has expressed a great fondness for macabre humor:

Si alguna forma de humor me gusta mucho es precisamente el macabro y delirante a dos pasos de la monstruosidad. Aborrezco eso que se llama humor con acaramelada dulzura.³

The writers of the dark comedies show that one can joke about death, that the topic is not so serious as to be beyond the realm of humor.⁴ In their comedies they succeed in building up suspense, littering the stage with corpses, and yet provoke laughter throughout the calamities.

These parodies of detective stories, murder mysteries, and horror movies are certainly not limited to Spain. If anything, the influx of such comedies in the Spanish theatre is influenced greatly by foreign plays and movies. The same type of comedy appears frequently in the American movies, and many playwrights of Europe and the United States have tried their hand at the genre. Prominent among the playwrights of mysteries who are translated and frequently produced in Spain are J. B. Priestley and Agatha Christie. In general, contemporary Spanish playwrights are familiar with these foreign writers and are at least somewhat influenced by their work. In the theatre seasons 1949-50 and 1950-51, two of Priestley's plays, Dangerous Corner and An Inspector Calls, respectively, were produced in Spain.⁵ The latter of these two plays was published in translation as the sixth in Alfil's inexpensive collection of theatre. The influence of Priestley and Christie on individual Spanish playwrights, notably Alfonso Paso and Miguel Mihura, has been cited by a number of critics of the contemporary Spanish stage.⁶ As Spain produces comparatively few movies, a majority of the films shown in Spanish theatres are foreign films with a dubbed-in soundtrack in Spanish. In recent years there has been a large number of American and British detective-story movies, many of which are as humorous as they are suspenseful. Alfred Hitchcock, for example, often produces films that are parodies of

mystery stories. One recent American film clearly shows in its title, The Comedy of Terrors, that it is intended to parody horror movies. A good percentage of these British and American parody movies reach the moving picture screens of Spain. There is, perhaps, some evidence of foreign influence in the Spanish macabre comedies in the fact that they are often set in foreign countries. Paso's Usted puede ser un asesino (1958) takes place in France, and Mihura's Carlota (1957) not only takes place in foggy London but also satirizes many aspects of "typical" British life. Mihura's comedy suggests that the British love crimes and murders, and Carlota is convinced that she can keep her husband's interest by making him believe that she poisons people. The detective in the case naturally comes from Scotland Yard, and the policeman on the beat is so entrenched in the British custom of drinking tea that he apparently carries a teapot under his coat.

One element often found in mystery stories is surprise. The author keeps the reader's attention by building up suspense; then, when all the clues have been presented and the reader--or spectator--is convinced he knows the solution, the author gives his plot a sudden twist and presents a surprise solution. The author of the detective-story parodies does the same thing, of course, but he seeks a humorous effect in his surprises,

and he also makes use of a lack of surprise on the part of his characters to evoke laughter from his spectators; that is to say, the characters may manage to take murders and corpses in their stride, and the incongruity of their reaction to death and violence becomes comic.

For example, in the final act of Tono's Un drama en "El Quinto Pino" Roberto thinks that his wife Fernanda is dead. The maid enters to receive her instructions for dinner as there is company:

María: Entonces, habrá que freir dos huevos más.
 Roberto: No es necesario, María. La señora no tomará huevos fritos.
 María: Entonces, tortilla.
 Juan: No, es que la señora se ha muerto.
 María: (muy natural) Eso es peor. Bueno, pues cuando quieran los señores me avisan.

The maid, obviously, is not at all disturbed by the news of Fernanda's death. Likewise, in Carlota Charlie Barrington has brought a detective home for dinner only to discover that his wife, Carlota, has been murdered. He wonders nonchalantly what he is going to feed his guest now that his wife cannot prepare the meal, but Detective Douglas adjusts nicely to the situation and finds sandwiches in the kitchen. In Usted puede ser un asesino Simón and Enrique have a difficult time disposing of the body of Dupont; everytime they try to hide him, someone interrupts at the wrong moment. Finally Simón puts Dupont in a chair on the terrace, and to hide the fact that Dupont is a corpse, Simón and Enrique join him on the terrace and conduct a lively

conversation with their friend "Don Segismundo" who is so quiet that it is impossible to get him to say a word. In the same play the policeman André is so unconcerned by this murder and the subsequent murders and attempted murders that he nonchalantly reads a newspaper throughout the action. The policemen in López Rubio's La otra orilla (1954) also are unperturbed by the four dead bodies in the play; when they find a bottle of chilled champagne in the refrigerator belonging to one of the murdered men, they are perfectly happy to share it with the maid of another of the murdered men. Out of "deference" to the dead, however, they drink the champagne in the kitchen instead of in the living room where two of the corpses were.

Even the dead are capable of making macabre comments. La otra orilla differs from the other plays mentioned in that it is not just a detective comedy; the play consists of two planes of reality--the reality of the living and the reality of the recently dead. The four dead people cannot be seen and heard by the living, but they continue to view life and make comments on it. Jaime, the deceived husband, has murdered his wife Ana and her lover Leonardo at the house where the lovers met; he has also accidentally killed Martín, a passerby. Jaime himself in turn is killed by the police when he tries to escape. Ana and Leonardo quickly realize that they are dead because they can see their own bodies lying

on the floor. Martín, however, was killed on the sidewalk and does not realize that he is dead. Trying to break the news to him gently, Ana suggests that he go back outside because he has left something on the sidewalk. Later Jaime is indignant that Martín, a stranger, should offer opinions on the love triangle and killings; their conversation is filled with grotesque humor:

- Jaime: (A Martín, irritado.) ¿Se puede saber quién le da a usted vela en este entierro?
 Martín: Perdón pero me parece que ha sido usted. Este entierro es, también, el mío.
 Jaime: Eso no le da derecho a
 Martín: Mire, me da derecho a todo. ¡Si, encima, me voy a tener que estar todo el tiempo callado como un muerto!⁸

At the end of the play, although he is now close to divine judgment, Martín even manages to joke about hell. Not yet dead, only mortally wounded, he has fallen in love with Ana and wishes to follow her wherever she goes:

- Martín: No me resignaría a vivir sin usted. No me resigno a pensar que podría resignarme. ¡Sería capaz de ... !
 Ana: ¿De bajar a los infiernos por mí, como Orfeo?
 Martín: (Lamentándolo.) ¡Tengo tan mala voz!⁹

The characters in these comedies have little or no respect for the dead--or for the living; if they did, of course, the audience would take the matter seriously and there would be no humorous effect possible. In Usted puede ser un asesino Simón is such a mystery story fan that Enrique does not take him seriously when he tells him that there is a body in the closet. Enrique

just laughs until Simón temporarily locks him in the closet with the corpse; then Enrique's laughter subsides. In Un drama en "El Quinto Pino" the characters want to know if Fernanda is really dead, and someone suggests holding a mirror in front of her; if she is still alive, her breath will steam up the mirror. Roberto, the husband, however, comments that the mirror is an excellent idea because, if Fernanda is alive, she is so vain that she will naturally straighten her hair as soon as she gets near a mirror. The mirror is handed from the neighbor Carlota to Roberto to Fernanda to Juan, who holds it in front of Fernanda; but no one realizes that the "dead" woman has passed the mirror along.

Another common source of amusement in these plays is the Sherlock Holmes figure--the detective or character who reconstructs a complicated crime from insignificant scraps of information. The character may be of two types: he may be a detective who amuses us with his deep deductions because his deductions are invariably wrong, or he may amuse us because his deductions are so clever and so accurate that they pass the bounds of plausibility. The police inspector in Usted puede ser un asesino is an example of the former. Named Hilario Cerveille, he proves not to be so "brainy" as his name might indicate. Not only is he incapable of unscrambling what has happened, but when Simón finally turns Julio,

the real murderer, over to him, he quite frankly admits that Simón will have to come down to the station to explain to him why he is arresting Julio. Douglas in Carlota is even more obviously a caricature of a detective. He has a reputation as a sleuth from Scotland Yard. At the beginning of the play, he amazes the others by readily deducing that Sergeant Harris, the policeman on the beat, is a widower; then he admits that he researched the record of the local patrolman before coming to Barrington's house. His first deduction without research is that Carlota does not answer the door because she is afraid of Douglas and has run away; actually Carlota does not answer the door because she is dead. Douglas' other deductions throughout the play are about on a par with the first one. It is quite doubtful that he would ever have solved the case had Carlota not conveniently left behind a diary containing all necessary background information and had her friend Miss Margaret not confessed.

More fun than the bungling detective's efforts are the exaggerated methods of deduction of the amateur. One of the best examples of this is Carlos in Paso's Receta para un crimen (1959). A man of intelligence and courage, Carlos does not believe in work and therefore lives by his wits. At the moment he is the traveling companion of Emilio, a wealthy man who is neither very bright nor very brave. They are spending

the night in an old inn, and, with almost no facts, Carlos manages to solve the mystery behind a fifteenth century legend and eventually arrives at the correct conclusion concerning a murder that took place two years before. The action of the play, in good detective-story tradition, takes place on the second anniversary of the crime and on the same sort of rainy, stormy night. Carlos is amazing and amusing because of his unshakable logic and his lightning-fast deductions. His method of investigation consists of turning over a fact, "dándole la vuelta," in order to see the correct possibility. The old legend is child's play for him. He is told that the inn once belonged to a wealthy Jew with a beautiful daughter. According to tradition Count Nieva, the great lord of the region, came one night to steal the Jew's "treasure," i. e. his daughter, Alor. Carlos quickly deduces that Count Nieva, who had feudal rights over the young maidens living much nearer to his castle, would not have troubled himself for Alor. The Jew's treasure, therefore, was not his daughter, but gold and jewels. And, as all three died in the house on that evening, the treasure is still hidden in the inn.

Carlos also turns his attention to the more recent murder. Supposedly Enrique, who is still at large, killed his wife Herminia because she was in love with

Enrique's nephew Daniel; Enrique often still comes near the inn and attempts to kill Daniel. Carlos soon deduces that Enrique did not kill his wife and was, in fact, murdered himself two years before and is buried by some rose bushes in the backyard. To prove his point, he calmly disinters the skeleton. By this time Carlos has trained Laura, another guest of the inn, to play his game of mystery-solving. She, too, learns to start with one small bit of information and quickly deduce that if A is true, than B, C, D, and E must logically follow. An apt pupil, she soon arrives at the identity of the real murderer, just as that murderer puts in his appearance. It is a common device in these comedies to have the murderer arrive at just this point in the deductions, join in the conversation unnoticed for several exchanges of speech, and then suddenly terrorize the amateur detectives; the same situation occurs in Usted puede ser un asesino when Simón realizes that Julio is responsible for Dupont's death.

Proving his intelligence once again, Carlos outwits the murderer, Lorenzo, a disappointed scholar who is an old schoolmate of Carlos and who has been searching for the treasure in the inn. Carlos convinces Lorenzo to escape, rather than murder all the inn guests, and Carlos promises not to contact the police. Lorenzo flees, Carlos keeps his word, and Emilio calls the

police. The comedy ends on a good humorous note, for Emilio, who has shown nothing but comic stupidity and cowardice throughout the play, has now caught on to Carlos' game of logic. He not only tells the police who Lorenzo is and why he is fleeing, but "dándole la vuelta" to what he knows, tells the police what route Lorenzo will take, how he will attempt to leave the country, and what his ultimate destination is. This sudden reversal in Emilio's thinking processes both surprises and delights the audience.

Paso uses the same character type as Carlos and the same means of logical deduction in others of his plays. In Juicio contra un sinvergüenza (1958), which takes place in London and is actually a criticism of social hypocrisy rather than a mystery story, the main character conducts a parlor game that is similar to Carlos' mystery game. Juan Esquín, who is really an honorable man but is condemned by society for being shameless, suggests that his respectable acquaintances play a game of judgment. In the course of the game, Juan logically deduces and proves that the minister of imports has undermined the British economy for his personal gain by allowing French cars to enter the country, that the men Juan used to work with before being falsely accused of a robbery were all in on the graft, that the minister himself has been carrying on an adulterous love affair

with the wife of one of his employees who had been mysteriously promoted to a position for which he was not qualified. The situation here is entirely different from that of the detective comedies, but the method of rapid and almost unbelievable deduction is the same.

Simón in Usted puede ser un asesino is also closely related to Carlos in character and intelligence, although his ability to solve crimes rapidly is not so exaggerated. It takes him a while to realize that Julio, the fiancé of young Noemi who lives next door with her aged, sick, and wealthy aunt--who has recently turned up dead in Simón's closet--is the murderer of Dupont. Dupont died from drinking poisoned milk. After searching his memory many minutes, Simón realizes that the bottle of milk from which Dupont drank must have been destined for next door, because Simón's wife was leaving on vacation and had cancelled their milk delivery. Julio must have been trying to poison the old aunt, and it must have been he who entered Simón's apartment earlier and removed the bottle. Julio enters at this point and threatens to kill Simón and Enrique. The only chance the two have of being saved is if Simón's wife also remembers that she cancelled the milk delivery and returns with the police. Just in time to save her husband, Margarita does return with Inspector Cervelle, but not because she has arrived at Simón's conclusion because of the milk delivery: she had witnessed Julio's stealing

of the bottle and finally decided to mention it! Margarita is the typical talkative wife of comedies, but her thinking powers do not match her speaking ability.

Although it takes Simón much time to solve the mystery in which he is personally involved, he does much better with a case from the past. Trying to convince Cerveille that anyone can be a murderer, he suggests that Cerveille himself was involved in an unsolved crime from several years before. He suggests that Cerveille murdered two little girls who disappeared shortly after witnessing a crime; he tells Cerveille where and how he buried the little bodies. Cerveille is not impressed by Simón's comments on the unsolved case until the end of the play when André, who is reading the newspaper as usual, discovers an article telling that the skeletons of the little girls have been found exactly where Simón said they would be. André asks Cerveille to guess what was buried with the bodies and Cerveille, remembering Simón's deductions, amazes his assistant by correctly guessing a shovel and pail. The humor of the incident comes both from the surprise that Simón's wild conjectures are true and from the reversal in the attitude of Cerveille, who now takes credit for an idea at which he had previously scoffed.

In Melocotón en almíbar (1953) Mihura has created a character with similar powers of deduction. His character,

however, is not the usual amateur detective, but rather a very comic nun, Sor María. A gang of thieves, posing as a family of tourists from Venezuela, has recently robbed a jewelry store in Burgos and hidden the loot in a flower pot. They are now planning a theft of a jewelry store in Calle de Ferraz in Madrid, but one of their number is sick, and the doctor has sent Sor María to nurse him. The nun is extremely observant and has an uncanny ability for arriving at the correct solution. She makes the thieves so nervous that they finally flee from their apartment to escape her, unsure whether she is extremely stupid and lucky in her guesses or extremely intelligent and aware of their crimes. Actually she is much too innocent to realize that they are jewel thieves, although her knowledge that they are disbelievers and her imagination lead her to create a number of explanations for their actions. When she first enters the door of the apartment, she suggests that the sick man should not be allowed to read the newspaper. Don Cosme is in the other room; how does she know what he is doing? Well, she met the paper boy downstairs, she does not see the paper in the living room, so the sick man must be reading it. It is amazing that Don Cosme caught cold in Seville, where they say they have been; but Burgos just had a sudden cold snap, and you might expect people to get sick there. Obviously Don

Carlos took the car to get Don Cosme's medicine; the prescription came from the Calle de Ferraz, and that is too far to walk, and it would be unreasonable to take a bus to pick up some medicine. Perhaps Don Carlos has a friend who lives on the street? Indeed Don Carlos does; the head of the gang lives in the hotel across from the jewelry store so that he can observe the place. By now the thieves are so nervous that they all go out for a walk, leaving the sick man behind with the nun.

Sor María never stops in her deductions. She quickly decides that Fernando and Nuria, who are posing as man and wife, are not married because they use separate tubes of toothpaste. She also decides that Don Cosme is not really Nuria's father and that Nuria is extremely unhappy, which she is. The good nun stumbles upon gloves that smell of chloroform and a pistol. She also takes it upon herself to nurse a sick plant back to health, and, of course, that plant is in the flower pot where the jewels are hidden. Before making their final escape, the thieves substitute another plant and flower pot for the valuable one, but Sor María switches them back. The thieves leave, not knowing that they have given a fortune in jewels to the nun. And the nun does not realize it either; she simply plans to give the flower pot to some poor person who will be gladdened by owning the beauty of a plant.

The humor of the comedy comes from the contrast between the thieves' efforts at secrecy and the nun's ability to stumble upon the truth, between the thieves' suspicions and knowledge of guilt and the nun's innocence as far as their crime is concerned. Mihura introduces other comic elements as well. Ever aware of the poverty and needs of her order, the nun repeatedly talks the landlady into giving her things for the convent; each time Doña Pilar resigns herself and gives in gracefully. The thieves, who are not so creative as one might expect, plan each of their robberies according to a movie they have seen; according to what Doña Pilar reads in the newspaper, the police are now aware of the thieves' method of operation and will soon capture them.

A band of thieves also forms the nucleus of the action in Jardiel Poncela's Los tigres escondidos en la alcoba. Jewelry thieves also, but thieves who steal from individuals rather than from jewelry stores, this gang is much more sophisticated and clever than the one in Mihura's play. Posing as a wealthy brother and sister and their servants, the thieves move into an expensive suite in a luxury hotel; after they have prepared the suite carefully for a future robbery, the sister finds fault with their rooms and demands different accommodations from the manager. The gang then waits for the new tenants to move into the old suite so that they can rob

them. When the new tenants do come, however, they quickly and almost automatically uncover all the clever devices for facilitating the robbery: the hidden microphone, the tampered lock, the special device on the telephone. Then, when the thieves finally do steal the case containing a fortune in jewels, they discover that there were two identical cases and that they have the wrong one, much as Mihura's thieves walk off with the wrong flower pot. Eventually a clever detective unravels an unsolved murder case from several years before and hands the jewels over to the rightful owner, who, because of a number of strange twists in the story, happens to be the leader of the thieves, and all ends happily for most of the characters.

The plots of these comedies are sometimes highly complicated, and part of their comic effect comes from this very intricacy of detail. Jardiel Poncela's play is a good example. Each of the thieves has two names: his gang name, and his name in his assumed role. Moreover, there is a rivalry between the head of the group and the man who poses as the valet. The valet, in the meantime, does not trust the girl who poses as the maid and has taken the hotel manicurist into his confidence to train her to take the maid's place. The manicurist, however, is really the secret agent for the policeman, who is currently posing as a blackmailer. One of the

victims of the robbery plot is, in reality, the gang leader's former assistant and girl friend who deserted him some years before. Add an unsolved murder mystery, a sister who claims to be her brother-in-law's wife, and identical jewel cases to this confusion, and the result is comic chaos.

The plots of Paso's plays, which his amateur detectives unravel with great brilliance, are also quite complicated, although perhaps not so much so as Los tigres escondidos en la alcoba. Mihura's Carlota also qualifies as having an extremely complicated story line. Carlota has pretended to poison people to keep her husband interested, and the number of murders which he suspects her of is monumental. The relationships among the living are no less complex. Miss Margaret, for example, is the former fiancée of Fred Sullivan, who works in Carlota's drugstore. She has deserted Fred, however, supposedly for Sergeant Harris, who thinks he is her secret fiancé, but, in truth, her romantic attachment is with Carlota's husband. A glance at the cast of characters of the play will indicate even more convincingly how entangled Mihura has made his plot:

CARLOTA, viuda de míster Smith y de profesión
farmacéutica.

CHARLIE BARRINGTON, empleado de un banco y viudo de
Carlota.

JOHN MANNING, criado de Carlota, casado con Velda
Manning.

VELDA MANNING, viuda de John Manning y ama de llaves
de Carlota.

DOCTOR WATS, médico de los Barrington y viudo de
 mistress Williams.
 MISS MARGARET WATS, huérfana del doctor Wats,
 aquejada de fuertes jaquecas.

Because of the flashback technique, some of the characters who are dead appear on stage, although their relatives are properly identified as widows and orphans. A total of six deaths are mentioned in the play, and Charlie considers his wife responsible for all of them except her own. Almost all of the deaths are from heart trouble, but the cause of death might just as easily have been from Carlota's administration of her special cures mixed with a bit of hot tea. It is no wonder that Charlie never takes tea at home in two years of marriage.

Poison is a favorite means of eliminating unwanted people in these plays, and characters who are aware of this often comically refuse to accept drinks. In Veneno para mi marido of Alfonso Paso, the actress on vacation with her husband refuses to accept a glass of benedictine at the inn where they are staying because the inn reminds her of the one in the play in which she recently appeared, all of the characters seem to duplicate roles in the play, and the benedictine was poisoned in the play. Later, confused by all the coincidences between the reality she is now living and the fiction she recently portrayed, the actress tries to poison her own husband with a glass of milk; he wisely does not drink it. Poison and repetition of situation also appear in Mihura's El caso

de la mujer asesinadita. Mercedes has dreamed that her husband has poisoned her; then, in reality, she finds that the only way she can be united with the man for whom she was destined is in death, so she virtually tricks her husband into poisoning her as he did in the dream. Mercedes not only does not refuse drinks as do so many of the characters in these plays, but is eager to accept the poison.

We have already mentioned the amateur or professional detective of great deductive powers who often appears in these comedies. Another character frequently used, often in comic contrast with the detective, is the cowardly friend who does not take murders, mysteries, and danger for granted. The coward, of course, is a stock comic character, and the combination of the fearless master and the frightened servant dates far back in the annals of comedy. The combination of the clever amateur detective and his scared companion is just a new version of an old theme.

Of the two friends in Usted puede ser un asesino, Enrique plays the role of the coward in contrast with Simón's detective role. At first Enrique does not believe that there is a corpse in the closet. When he does accept the truth, his first reaction is to flee. He only remains with Simón and attempts to help him dispose of the body because Simón points out that Enrique could easily be the murderer and, if Simón were to accuse him,

he could not prove his innocence. Enrique remains a reluctant accomplice throughout the play. At the end when Julio, now identified as the murderer, returns, Enrique sees him first and becomes visibly terrified. Simón may be able to discuss the murder quite calmly with Julio, but Enrique cannot. At one point he softly and timidly calls for help. At another, when Julio says that the old aunt died from fear, Enrique admits that he could write a volume on that subject. Simón is the calm and clever one, while Enrique brings the comic effects through his contrast with Simón.

The same character contrast also exists in Receta para un crimen. Paso is a talented craftsman of comedies; recognizing the comic value of this combination of characters, he utilizes the same combination in more than one play. Although Carlos seems to be a bit more astute than Simón, the two are really the same character, and Emilio and Enrique are also merely two representations of the same cowardly, bungling companion. Emilio has the added humor of being a wealthy and vain man who thinks that he is successful at seduction and the leader in his friendship with Carlos; the truth of the matter is that Carlos does all the thinking and that the conquests Emilio boasts of do not exist. Even with all his money, he cannot accomplish a fraction of what Carlos can do on wits alone.

Paso repeats the same character combination again in a slightly different play which, nevertheless, bears many resemblances to Receta para un crimen in particular: Una tal Dulcinea (1961). Again the action takes place in an old building, and again there is a centuries-old legend of a crime. The Carlos figure of this play is Juan, a clever and brave man, but this time an idealist and dreamer, a Don Quixote figure who has fallen in love with a portrait, a man who wants to return to the sixteenth century. His friend Enrique is a Sancho Panza figure, a man very similar in character and actions to the other Enrique and Emilio. He is the coward, while Juan, who believes that the ghosts of the legendary figures return periodically to relive their tragedy, wants to see the old crime reenacted. Juan's wife arranges for the legend to come to life, and the audience only realizes that it is a play within a play when a corpse frightens poor Enrique by suddenly coming to life and asking for a cigarette.

The comedies that we have mentioned have all met with a certain amount of success and have been recognized for their entertainment value, but do they have any literary value as well? Carlota has been successfully produced in Paris, Brussels, Italy, and the Netherlands, as well as in Spain; Melocotón en almíbar has been staged in German, English, and Italian and filmed in both Spain and Germany.¹¹ Sainz de Robles, who is usually sparing

in his praise, has found in Usted puede ser un asesino an irresistible humor and has categorized it as a masterpiece of the contemporary Spanish theatre.¹² But we have already seen that much of the plot and the humor of these comedies comes from the mechanical manipulation of the element of surprise, the use of macabre jokes, and stock character types who may be transplanted from one play to another without significant change. Doubtless these parodies of detective stories are entertaining; they are well constructed, funny, clever, and often original in their use of certain techniques. But we suspect that posterity will find that only two of the plays discussed in this chapter have any lasting literary value: La otra orilla and El caso de la mujer asesinadita. Both of these, while they have something in common with the parodies, go beyond a mere take-off on mystery stories and enter the realm of fantasy and illusion.

NOTES

¹Alfredo Marquerie, Alfonso Paso y su teatro (Madrid, 1960), p. 139, and Ramón Gómez de la Serna in Gonzalo Torrente Ballester, Panorama de la literatura española contemporánea, II (2nd ed.; Madrid, 1961), 576.

²Marquerie, op. cit., pp. 139, 219. Valbuena Prat, Historia del teatro español (Barcelona, 1956), p. 631.

³Marquerie, op. cit., p. 46. The macabre humor to which Paso refers might be related to that of the Grand Guignol, the now defunct horror theatre in Paris. In speaking of the humor of Pío Baroja and of Quevedo, R. Romeu in his article "Les divers aspects de l'humour dans le roman espagnol moderne," Bulletin Hispanique, XLVIII (1946), 358, refers to "le goût du macabre, l'humour guignolesque au moment de la mort." The Grand Guignol, however, apparently did not intend to be funny. The management did alternate horror plays with light comedies, but the horror plays themselves were intended to be gruesome. See P. E. Schneider, "Fading horrors of the Grand Guignol," New York Times Magazine, March 17, 1957, pp. 13ff.

⁴The humorist Stephen Leacock has suggested that death cannot be treated humorously. See Humor and Humanity . . ., p. 184.

⁵See the appendix of works staged in Spain in the yearly volumes of Teatro español, ed. Sainz de Robles (Madrid, 1951--).

⁶Sainz de Robles, ed., Teatro español, 1954-55 (Madrid, 1956), p. 21. Sainz de Robles, ed., Teatro español, 1952-53 (Madrid, 1954), p. 19. Marquerie, op. cit., pp. 155, 182. Marquerie, Veinte años de teatro en España (Madrid, 1959), p. 153. Torrente Ballester, op. cit., p. 439. John G. Dowling, "The Theater of Alfonso Paso," Modern Language Journal, XLV (1961), 196.

⁷Tono y Manzanos, Un drama en "El Quinto Pino" (Madrid, 1953), p. 36.

⁸ José López Rubio, La otra orilla in Teatro español, 1954-55, p. 288.

⁹ Ibid., p. 335.

¹⁰ Mihura, Carlota in Teatro español, 1956-57, ed. Sainz de Robles (Madrid, 1958), p. 333.

¹¹ Juan Guerrero Zamora, Historia del teatro contemporáneo, III (Barcelona, 1961), p. 170.

¹² Sainz de Robles, ed., Teatro español, 1957-58 (Madrid, 1959), p. xv.

CHAPTER THREE

COMEDY OF CARICATURE AND CHARACTER

As we have seen, one of the sources of humor in the parodies of detective stories is the portrayal of the detective himself or of his cowardly companion. The detective and his companion are well-known types and are treated by the author as caricatures; that is, the character is not meant to be a realistic, well-rounded individual, but rather is humorous because he incorporates one or more exaggerated traits of the person after whom he is modeled. Douglas in Carlota, for example, is a caricature of the Sherlock Holmes type of sleuth.

Similar caricature of other types is found throughout the history of comedy. Stock comic figures of today and yesterday may be traced as far back as the Greek and Roman stages: the miser, the parasite, the jealous wife, the young lover. The old stand-bys may change somewhat in form, but they do not disappear entirely.

A long life was reserved, moreover, for the character types of Roman drama--for its lovers and obdurate fathers, clever or rascally servants, fatuous elders, cowardly braggarts, and hangers-on or parasites. Together, they constituted a Human Comedy. Italian improvisatory theatre of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (commedia dell'arte) displayed their descendants--doddering Pantalones, pedantic Dottores, rascally Arlecchinos,

and various contemporary types of fool--at the crossroads and in the market places of Western Europe. Ben Jonson and other Elizabethans used these stereotypes for theatre of "humours," or idiosyncracies, as well as for social satire. Molière domesticated and individualized them in the seventeenth-century theatre, and his successors have been translating them into recognizable personalities of European and American society ever since.¹

In the following chapter, we shall examine some of the more recurrent comic types appearing on the Spanish stage today.

A favorite object for comic treatment has always been the foreigner. Because he is not exactly like us, he is thought to be funny; his speech is not fluent, his pronunciation is faulty, and he can readily be stereotyped as the capitalistic American, the immoral Frenchman, or the stuffy Britisher. Few invite caricature more easily than a foreigner.

The first indication of the comic aspects of the foreigner is his accent, and writers of comedy are very quick to exploit the natural reaction of natives to hearing their language butchered. The use of accent or dialect for humorous purposes "helps to give the audience a sense of superiority" to the character who cannot speak the language well.² A number of the authors of contemporary comedies have carefully written the Spanish spoken by foreigners in something more or less resembling a phonetic transcription of the way they feel the accent should be handled. In Luca de Tena's ¿Dónde vas, Alfonso

XII?, for example, the French Montpensier is made to say:

Me págese mejog. Nunca se sabe el séquito que traegan, ya conoses a tu hegmana. Aunque llevo el coche ggande, a la "Grand Daumont," podemos no cabeg todos Si ella fue jeina de España, mi padge Luis Felipe fue jey de Fgansia.⁵

Sometimes the "phonetics" are so thorough that the written Spanish becomes almost incomprehensible.

This device of using foreign accents for humorous effect is certainly not new in the Spanish theatre. Lope de Rueda made use of it four hundred years ago. In his comedy Eufemia the Negro slave Bulalla speaks with an accent:

Siñor, presentame la siñora doñaldoça, un prima mía una hojetas de lexías para rubiarme na cabeyos, y como yo sa tan delicara, despojame na cabeça como⁴ nas ponjas; peinso que tenemos la mala ganas.

In another of his comedies, Armelina, the Moor Mullen Bucar is made to speak butchered Spanish:

¿Qu'n llamar, quin llamar? ¡Ola! ¿Pinxastex quinxordamox porque traquilitraque? No hay aquí perdonanax, amego; extá la perxona lo que complimox, y voxotrox, voxtra merxe agora en extorballe un palabra no max, baxer que perdemox cuanto ex trabaxado.⁵

Accents do not have to be foreign to be funny; they may also be simply regional. The most commonly introduced accent for comic effect in the contemporary Spanish plays still seems to be Andalusian. In ¿Dónde vas, Alfonso XII?, two gypsy dancers from Seville, El Tato and Trinidá, come to visit Mercedes; as they play no part in the development of the action of the play,

they seem to be introduced only for the humorous effect of their accents and personalities. In Mihura's El caso del señor vestido de violeta, the intellectual bullfighter has such aversion to everything Andalusian that he forces his secretary to pretend to be British and his private detective to be Scotch. But his bullfighting assistants, Patas Largas and Carnicero, cannot be cured of their accents and their regional culture, and the others eventually revert to the Andalusian speech as well.

At other times, the author may choose to authenticate the national identity of his foreign character by having him interject a few words or expressions of his own language. The expressions are usually common ones, familiar even to people who do not speak the language, such as, "Hello, how are you?" or "Thank you." Perhaps the playwright uses occasional foreign words, assuming that his audience will be secretly pleased at recognizing the French or English lines that lend authenticity to the character portrayal. However, the playwright himself is not always a skilled linguist, and sometimes the English-speaking reader finds amusing passages of inadvertent humor in the grammatical structure and the given pronunciation of English expressions. The American businesswoman in Luca de Tena's Don José, Pepe y Pepito introduces her secretary to Pepito, "Aem goin tu introdus yu Mste La Riva . . . Jier is Mste Persy Brouw,"⁶

and what Mihura describes as a "diálogo en inglés correctísimo" in Carlota contains such expressions as "What a foggen night (Wout e fogin nait)" and "You are very kindly. Is this the Hardy-Street? (Yiú ar very caintli. Is dis di Hardy-Strit?)"⁷ The epitome of the use of foreign expressions is reached in Jardiel Poncela's Como mejor están las rubias es con patatas with two or three characters who constantly speak in a incomprehensible jumble of Spanish, French, English, and assorted other languages. Their speech is so extreme, so absurd, that one is led to believe that the author is laughing a bit at the whole comic device of introducing foreign expressions.

The foreign characters who might not necessarily win a popularity contest in Spain, or anywhere else, but who do appear quite frequently in these comedies are the Americans. There are several varieties of Americans available, but ordinarily they are wealthy, good-looking, and very businesslike. It is not surprising that Norton in Mihura's El caso de la mujer asesinadita is a banker or that Francis⁸ in Don José, Pepe y Pepito is such an able businesswoman that she is known as "el presidente" instead of "la presidenta." If Francis softens into femininity and falls in love, it is probably because she is half Spanish and not because of her Yankee heritage. Similar in character to Francis, but

unredeemed by Spanish blood, is Alicia in Las gafas de don Telesforo, o un loco de buen capricho (1949) by the exiled playwright Jacinto Grau. Alicia is an American girl with beauty, intelligence, and money; she has, however, no sensitivity whatsoever and is capable of dealing with Don Telesforo in a cold, capitalistic manner for the right to produce a newly-invented bomb. The American, we are quick to realize, is always able to spot a profit-making scheme, even when the American in question is of the fair sex.

Another American in pursuit of the exclusive rights to a bomb appears in Paso's Una bomba llamada Abelardo. Less attractive than the beautiful Alicia, Tonzigan is the stereotype of the American diplomatic representative who is trying to get his hands on something. While chasing the inventor persistently to keep the Russians from getting the new bomb, Tonzigan is ingratiating to cement relations between the United States and Spain. Unfortunately, when he wishes to extol the virtues of Spain, we find that he really knows very little about the country or the language and can only repeat the same rehearsed line whenever he is interviewed: "Soy contento de estar aquí. Toreros, capotes, manzanilla, mujeres, ¡Olé!"⁹

Related to Alicia in appearance and wealth, if not in interests, is a character in Dos mujeres a las nueve, winner of the Premio Nacional de Teatro for 1949, by

Luca de Tena and Miguel de la Cuesta. Here the American girl, Magda, is a student who has fallen in love with her professor, Don Lito. Like Alicia, she is self-confident and is willing to use her assets to best advantage to get what she wants. Alicia wants a bomb; Magda wants Don Lito. The American girl, who speaks Spanish with a Latin-American accent and uses occasional expressions of unidiomatic English, conducts herself with such independence that she shocks the Spanish women in the play. She pursues the professor openly, coming to his home unannounced. Although there is no real indication that she is an immoral young lady, nevertheless her conduct is not straight-laced a la española and is hence open to criticism. The humor in Magda's portrayal comes both from her somewhat exaggerated characteristics and from the contrast between her forwardness and Don Lito's shyness.

Also given a good deal of freedom is the American teen-age Cristy in López Rubio's Un trono para Cristy (1956). Cristy leads a life of leisure and enjoys the same sort of active social life in Mallorca that she might have were she living in the United States. She is off on a constant whirl of parties and dating, while her mother remains in the background dreaming of a great marriage for her. The mother differs from the other Americans mentioned so far in that she is not wealthy.

Pamela, in fact, does not have a cent. She lies to bill collectors that her money is tied up in cattle in an effort to have enough time to find a noble husband for her daughter. While the wealthy capitalist is one stereotype of the American, the treasure-hunting, title-hunting one is another. Pamela, indeed, feels that her daughter is fit for a king and eventually manages to convince both a certain Society for the Restauration of European Thrones and a duchess that Cristy is a long-lost princess.

There are certain aspects of life in the United States that tend to arouse the curiosity of the European, and some of these understandably appear in the contemporary theatre. The Wild West and the American Indian are a part of our history that, because of movies and television, has not yet been relegated to the past; so the feathered redskin remains a part of the American image. Norton in El caso de la mujer asesinadita first appears to Mercedes in her dream as a savage who constantly says that he is thinking of his meadows and forests and not of other things. In Claudio de la Torre's La caña de pescar Adriana is told that her great uncle in America married a squaw and has half-breed sons.

When Norton ceases to be the feathered redskin of Mercedes' dream and becomes the banker he is in reality, he introduces her to another "typical" American custom--the séance. He assures her that it is a common practice

to communicate with the spirits back in the United States. Yet another interesting bit of American culture is mentioned in Neville's Rapto. Alfredo is going to the United States, and his father, who is a scholar working on a serious study of the Mormons, asks Alfredo to stop in Salt Lake City and get a firsthand account of polygamy. The Spanish scholar, in spite of his research, is totally unaware that the Mormons no longer practice polygamy and have not for a number of years.

In Ruiz Iriarte's El pobrecito embustero (1953) there appear several references to preparations that the Spanish must make for the impending visit of a New-World relative. The americano this time is not from the United States, but from Mexico;¹⁰ however, the situation would be the same were he from the other side of the Rio Grande. It is winter and the servants are upset that they will have to ready the unused bathroom for Pedrín's arrival, since Americans have the strange custom of taking baths even in winter! Considering how surprised the North American is to learn that most Europeans do not consider daily baths a necessity--and vice versa--it is difficult to say whether Ruiz Iriarte is making fun of the Spanish or of the Mexican boy.

In previous chapters we have already mentioned the caricatures of British traits: the ultra-dignified servants who are copied by Spanish butlers and valets, the Scotland Yard detectives, the tea drinkers in Carlota.

Another nationality that is satirized in these comedies is the Russian. In Una bomba llamada Abelardo Paso supplies a most amusing Russian counterpart to the American diplomat who is bargaining for Abelardo's bomb. Chatowsky makes all of the stereotyped comments the Western World attributes to the Russians. Whenever some invention is mentioned, he quickly proclaims that the Russians created it first. He even says this of the bomb he is trying so hard to buy. An ardent Communist, Chatowsky never misses an opportunity to preach to the working men of the world. He attempts, unsuccessfully, to cause the men delivering a piano to rebel against capitalistic management; the piano movers are completely unmoved by Chatowsky's economic philosophy. Paso has fun at his Russian's expense even when Chatowsky wishes to swear; as he has renounced religion in his political doctrine, he must vent his anger with expressions such as: "Y yo qué Volga sé de donde puede Vd. . . ." ¹¹ and "¡Y qué Lenin os maldiga!" ¹²

If one Russian is funny, two Russians should be doubly so. In La cena de los tres reyes (1954) Ruiz Iriarte creates a pair of Soviet spies on an unusual mission. The Party has adopted a new "soft" line; Russia will take over the world by favoring the extreme right instead of the left, by putting deposed monarchs back on their thrones. The spies have come to a small inn to

arrange an elaborate reception for three deposed kings who are secretly planning to spend Christmas Eve together there. The spies are comic in their way of mysteriously coming and going, but they cannot keep a secret. They have soon told everyone in the inn that they are spies and why they have come. Koproff is a formal man who knows well the protocol for a Soviet spy. He is, at first, horrified by the younger Molinsky, who is enchanted by all he sees in this capitalistic country.

Me gusta todo lo que veo. Todo. Me gusta esa ciudad con sus callecitas, y sus palacios, y sus jardines. Me gusta este paisaje. ¡Me gusta hasta la Catedral!¹³

When the monarchs cannot be bought by caviar, candle-light, and Communist promises, Molinsky decides to defect. He gives several reasons for remaining in this enchanting country, which appears to be Spain:

Porque aquí no hay disciplinas, ni sabotajes, ni Partido. Porque me encanta esta gente, que son alegres porque hacen lo que quieren. Porque me gustan las muchachas que sólo quieren a un hombre para toda la vida ... y porque el Servicio Secreto me parece una tontería.¹⁴

To an American, Franco Spain might not be a paradise of freedoms, but to this Soviet spy it is liberty personified in comparison with home. Knowing what awaits him at home because of his diplomatic failure, Koproff has no choice but to choose political asylum and remain too.

The deposed monarchs themselves in La cena de los tres reyes are caricatures of royalty to a certain extent.

The most exaggerated portrayal of the three is that of the deposed Arab king, former owner of a large harem, Alf-Harem el Magnífico. Alf-Harem is quick to let people know who he is; he travels in attention-getting "incognito" and expects to be surrounded by photographers at all times. He lets it be known that his royalty has accustomed him to wealth and luxury, and he mentions missing his many wives as often as he can fit them into the conversation. But, when the Soviet spies give him the opportunity to return to his country, his throne, and his harem, he has to admit that he does not want to go. He enjoys traveling to the great capitals of Europe much more than staying at home in his own backward country.

Far removed from the traditional picture of a king is Prince Federico, pretender to the throne of his country. Shy and scholarly, while he awaits the time to become king, he studies. Finally, to win the love of the romantic Paloma, he rents a princely uniform and cape from a costume shop, overcomes his timidity, and decides to fit himself into the stereotype of an exotic prince that his people have been waiting for. Federico, too, turns down the Soviet offer, for he prefers being a free prince to an imprisoned king. And he assures the spies that his decision is not prompted by an American offer; Americans are not interested in real monarchs: "Los americanos sólo necesitan reyes para Hollywood, y los inventan porque resultan mejor."¹⁵

Less comic than the other two is Alberto, who was deposed in large part because his own idealistic, liberal policy encouraged his people to overthrow the monarchy. Now getting old and no longer wealthy, he has a much more realistic outlook on life. He turns down the Communist offer because he knows that the good old days they are trying to revive were not so good after all; besides, Alberto does not like the Party and he does like Americans.

None of these kings fits the traditional pattern of the all-powerful monarch. In fact, none of them really wants to rule. It is in another comedy that Ruiz Iriarte has shown a caricature of an absolute monarch on the throne. The eighteenth century king in El gran minué (1950) is so pathetically weak that his ministers rule him entirely, and his pages make fun of him.

The politician is no more exempt from teasing than the monarch. In Dos mujeres a las nueve appears the ridiculous figure of Don Gaspar, who has held every possible position in the government at some time in the past and talks about it incessantly. The other characters make fun of him by calling him "Don Extodo." In Una muchacha de Valladolid Calvo-Sotelo presents the head of state of an unidentified Latin-American country as a lecherous man who prefers to deal with the ambassador's wife rather than the ambassador. If he is not more interested in romance than in the government, he is at

least equally interested in both. When he is deposed at the end of the play, the new regime has reason to refer to him as "el concupiscente, venal y libidinoso ex canciller."¹⁶ The man is comic in his "subtle" remarks about why he prefers to deal with the wives and in his creation of an imaginary but influential friend who would enjoy having Mercedes come to tea.

More often the target of humor than the politician is the capitalist, the man who makes or desires to make money. The capitalist is often an unscrupulous man, the villain of the piece. At best, he is so interested in his job and the all-mighty peseta that he has become somewhat inhuman. He appears, of course, as a stereotype in the more serious plays as well as in the comedies. In Carlos Muffiz Higuera's serious drama El grillo (1957) the successful brother is willing to help his poor relations only because he intends to seduce his niece. In El drama de la familia invisible (1953) by Alvaro de Laiglesia and Juan Vaszary, a play similar in setting and plot to El grillo and not much lighter in tone although termed a comedia de humor, the industrialist in question has a habit of befriending families of the lower middle class with pretty daughters, dishonoring the daughters, and then standing back waiting for the girl's ex-fiancé to murder her. In the lighter comedies the capitalist usually does not have such ulterior motives, but he will resort to stealing whenever necessary. Don Leocadio in

Vicente Soriano de Andia's Ayer ... será mañana (1951) has adjusted to the modern business world while his wealthy brother-in-law Paco still lives in the world of 1909. Leocadio manages to swindle all of Paco's fortune but is generous enough to continue supporting Paco as Paco has supported him all these years. In La otra orilla Martín's death is opportune for his nephew Diego, who has just finished swindling all of his uncle's fortune, by legal means, of course. In Mihura's Mi adorado Juan (1956) the ambitious, money-hungry figure is Manríquez, assistant to the great scientist Doctor Palacios, inventor of a drug that will allow mankind to survive without sleep. Eager for fame and fortune, Manríquez first usurps the credit for the discovery and then hopes to reap all the financial profits as well.

With the exception of Don Leocadio, none of these characters is particularly comic although they do fall into the pattern. More amusing than most of them is Ambrosio in Dos mujeres a las nueve. Here there is a comic contrast between Don Lito, the young professor who is buried in his books, and his cousin Ambrosio, who frequently comes to the house and always with some secret financial deal to work out with Don Lito's mother. Ambrosio is as much an active part of the world as Don Lito is detached from it. In Neville's Adelita we see a humorous change in Tonito, Adelita's

husband, from the romantic suitor to the stodgy husband who is more interested in his bank than in his wife. The reversal in character works in the opposite direction with a businessman in Alvaro de Laiglesia's Amor sin pasaporte (1953). Don Anselmo is an extremely wealthy man but miserly. He allows the charming refugee Lili into his home because Lili knows of Anselmo's extra-curricular activities. Finally Lili teaches the hard-hearted old capitalist generosity.

Doubtless the best caricature of a capitalist in the plays under discussion, however, is that of Don Carmelo in Calvo-Sotelo's Milagro en la Plaza del Progreso (1953). Don Carmelo is the employer of Don Claudio, who suddenly disappears while on his way to bank some of his employer's money. Later we learn that Don Claudio has given the money away, but Don Carmelo early shows where his concern lies by being more worried about the money than about the man. As he explains to Don Claudio's wife, "ni del dinero ni de su marido, por orden de importancia, se sabe una palabra."¹⁷ He comforts the weeping wife with touching words of consolation:

Yo tengo motivos para ser pesimista, pero usted, no. Que su marido aparezca, entra en lo posible; pero que mi dinero se lo ha llevado la trampa, eso es tan seguro como que ahora es de noche.¹⁸

Don Carmelo remains consistent; his only interest throughout the play is getting his money back.

The one thing all these businessmen have in common, whether they obtain their capital by honest or dishonest means, is that they must work and worry constantly either to make or keep the money. Don Carmelo may be the boss, but he spends as many hours on the job as his employees; as soon as he gets to Don Claudio's apartment, he sets up telephone lines of communication so that he may be contacted at all possible moments. Neville shows just how hard a capitalist works in his play Alta fidelidad when several of the characters set up an office and become successful investors. They no longer have time free to do anything except handle their money. Fernando, who does not understand this activity as he believes money to represent pleasure, not work, observes:

A mí me da la impresión de que se han convertido en esclavos de su dinero, en empleados de sí mismos. ¿De qué les sirve la fortuna si están obligados a estar diez horas al día colgados al teléfono para administrarla? Esto está bien para los que quieren hacerse ricos, pero nunca para los que ya lo son. (Grave.) Luego un día, al mismo tiempo que el teléfono, os empieza a sonar un timbre en la cabeza y es el final, y os habéis ido del mundo sin gozar de él.¹⁹

Were he not a wealthy man, Fernando's unconventional attitude could label him as a Bohemian. Certainly he believes in getting a great deal of enjoyment out of life and in spending his money freely; when his fortune diminishes, he ignores reality and continues to spend money as freely as before.

A number of characters in contemporary Spanish comedies are men either with no visible means of support or with some sort of employment that taxes their abilities as little as possible and yields just enough to keep off starvation. Like Fernando, they see no point in becoming slaves to money or to anything else: they rebel against society and often against the particular fields in which they are trained.

In Chapter One we have already discussed Paso's amusing comedy El canto de la cigarra with its unorthodox and lovable hero Aristóbulo Terch. Aris is the Bohemian par excellence. Shunning society and all its hypocrisy, Aris happily lives in a house that disintegrates around him with his growing family of illegitimate children. He is the grasshopper who sings rather than worries about what winter will bring. Whenever money disappears completely from the household, he is confident that some miracle will bring the next meal to his family, and the miracles always come: he wins the lottery, or the crocodile he has found and keeps in the bathtub brings a substantial reward. In contrast to Aris' easy-going nature is that of his wife Elisa. Elisa is a de-feminized capitalist; she is willing to work furiously to save for the future, and she succeeds in amassing a fortune. She worries about social appearances and what people will say. Does her money bring her happiness? No, and

finally her loneliness forces her to return to Aris. Do the grasshoppers who fail to prepare for the winter survive the cold? No, says Aris, but it does not matter. "Cuando llega el invierno se mueren, pero después de haber cantado."²⁰ Somewhere between the two extremes we find characterized here must be the ideal, Paso suggests, mentioning in his self-criticism of the play that what pleases him most about his fable is that the grasshopper and the ant reach an agreement at the end and learn to love each other.

While not going to the same comic extremes as Paso, Mihura has created a character quite similar to Aris in his philosophy of life. In Mi adorado Juan the main character is a doctor who has long since renounced his profession to lead a Bohemian life. Juan does what he pleases. He spends his time fishing, drinking coffee in the cafés, talking. He knows everyone and is everyone's friend. Although Aris can be considered a caricature, Juan is a realistically-drawn human being. He is a man of great personal charm who gave up his former staid way of life when he became disillusioned rather than let his profession sour him on life. His friends are often Bohemians of the same stamp. One, who now makes his living stealing dogs for scientific experiments, is actually a painter of considerable talent. Another was a great scientist but withdrew from research to take

refuge in books and a Bohemian way of life. Juan's influence and the harsh realities of life are such that finally even his father-in-law, Dr. Palacios, decides to give up his life of diligent scientific research to join this pleasant world of leisure where one can forget assistants who steal formulae and companies which exploit science for profit. Although the characters are realistic and human, they are off-beat and there is much humor in their lines and their unusual personalities. However, behind the humor Mihura has a serious point to make. The Bohemians in the play are men who have lost faith and therefore have given up their work; but, are they justified in giving up careers that might bring satisfaction to themselves and to others merely to escape ambition and envy? Apparently Mihura believes that they are not, that his Bohemians, no matter how charming, are selfish; in the end, Juan decides to practice medicine again.

With the same motivation as Juan, the hero of Paso's Juicio contra un sinvergüenza adopts a Bohemian existence. Having been falsely accused of a robbery and ousted from his job, in reality because his integrity was incompatible with the fraudulent schemes of his superiors, Juan Esquín fights the hypocrisy of the men he worked with by rebelling against society as a whole. Like the other Juan, he is disillusioned, but instead of making friends with his easy-going ways, he soon

alienates almost everyone with his wild exploits in the local night spots. Esquín becomes the personification of the ne'er-do-well, whose actions are as unpredictable as they are socially unacceptable. He does not lose his sense of humor, however, and eventually he puts it to work to prove that he may, in spite of everything, be the only honorable man left in London. At last, as was the case with Aris, even his wife wants him back. In this play Paso has created Esquín not as a caricature of the Bohemian so much as a tool with which to satirize society. The other characters are the one-dimensional ones, the caricatures: the adulterous wife, the young lovers, the pompous government official, the cynical playwright, the clumsy maid, the misunderstood wife who haunts the psychiatrists' offices.

In Paso's play Esquín is condemned as a sinvergüenza by society but defended by the author, as the other Bohemian and ne'er-do-well figures mentioned also had the sympathy of the playwrights. In Ruiz Iriarte's La guerra empieza en Cuba there appears a good-for-nothing who even has the approval of at least part of society. This ne'er-do-well, Javier, is a soldier who is always in trouble and constantly being transferred from one location to another. His exploits are about on a par with Esquín's, and his arrival in the comedy is the answer to the prayers of the townspeople in the provincial

capital who have grown weary of the gobernadora's strict views of morality. The sinvergüenza, not concerned with what people will think or what effect his actions may have on his career, will surely do something to liven things up. He does. He runs off with the gobernadora's twin sister.

If the Bohemian and the good-for-nothing are portrayed as sympathetic, admirable, and almost heroic figures, the same cannot be said of that perennially pathetic character, the lowly professor. One can gain respect by rebelling against society, but not by being a scholar. In La cena de los tres reyes Prince Federico soon learned that his studious nature was incompatible with the romantic image of a prince. When he was a shy scholar, Paloma never noticed him and refused to believe that he was a prince. Once he rented a cape and uniform and donned the superficial indications of royalty, Paloma's love was his. Don Lito in Dos mujeres a las nueve does not lack for feminine admirers in spite of his being a professor, but he receives no money for his work and does not have enough backbone to make a decision. When he must choose between his two sweethearts, he makes appointments with both of them for nine o'clock in the morning and is saved the problem of deciding which appointment to keep by his mother, who decides not to wake him till ten. Although not a very forceful person,

Don Lito at least is not ridiculous. The same cannot be said for Jardiel Poncela's caricature of a professor in Como mejor están las rubias es con patatas. Don Ascelpigio Pallarés is absent-minded, repetitive, and completely unaware of what is happening around him. Whenever someone manages to distract him from his thoughts, his only comment each time is that class is over and the students may leave. Don Ascelpigio's contact with reality is virtually non-existent.

In the same play an interesting comment is made on the opinion the world has of scholars. After Ulises Marabú disappeared in Africa, he began to receive great recognition at home. Statues were built in his honor; a street bears his name. When the rumor reaches Spain that Ulises has been found and will be returning home, one of the characters wonders if the statue will be torn down and the street renamed now that Ulises is alive. Can a man of letters receive recognition only in death?

If we judge by Ruiz Iriarte's farce El pobrecito embustero, we have to answer yes to the question. The main character of this comedy is a professor and scholar of history who is appreciated by almost no one until he starts the rumor that he has an incurable disease. Lorenzo has been an object of ridicule. His students follow him home in the afternoon, throwing things at him. His wife is unhappy with such a modest, unassuming husband. Not

only had she dreamed of a different kind of mate, but she has created the image of another man entirely in letters she has written to her sister in Mexico. Lorenzo is, indeed, a pobrecito, a pathetic, unloved human being without any apparent strength of character. His only happiness comes from his studies. However, everything changes when the people of the town think that he will die within a month. His pupils come to respect him, his wife and the servants spoil him, the ladies of the town prepare going-away parties for him. And how disappointed they all are when he does not die on schedule as promised! A healthy scholar is an object of ridicule. A dying scholar is a man worthy of respect and honor. But a dying scholar who lingers on and on is a fraud and a cheat. Fortunately Lorenzo is saved from the fury of the townspeople at his continued good health by being fatally injured in an automobile accident. None of the scholars and professors in these comedies seems to fare very well until he either changes his public image or dies.

Another character who appears frequently in these comedies and invariably is shown in a favorable light is the man of the world who has reached a certain age without losing any of his charm. These men, whether middle-aged or older, know a great deal about life and people and are therefore able to give excellent advice to the younger generation. That the creators of these

particular characters are themselves the older playwrights, not the younger ones, is probably not surprising.

One of the best examples of these delightful older men is Pepe in Luca de Tena's Don José, Pepe y Pepito. The character of Pepe is, in fact, undoubtedly the most successful aspect of the play. The plot line is slim and the other characters are not particularly interesting. The grandson Pepito is just another confused adolescent; the son Don José is, at first, a rather uninteresting and cold scientist who later becomes humanized because of his love for the American businesswoman Francis; Francis herself inspires love in all three men without really being an unforgettable character. Pepe, however, is a delightfully charming old man, and his personality gives the comedy its warmth. In spite of his years, he has remained young in spirit and in sense of humor. He understands both his son and his grandson and can communicate with both of them on their levels. It is he, with his wisdom acquired over the years, who keeps Don José and Pepito from becoming permanently estranged when Pepito loses control of his youthful emotions with Francis; and it is he who prevents Don José from losing the woman he loves. But beyond his ability to bring harmony to his family, Pepe is a comic character. In one scene, for example, he tries to sneak into the house in the middle of the afternoon without anyone's noticing

that he is wearing evening clothes. He has spent the whole night out of the house and is rather embarrassed. Were he younger, people would assume that he had been up to some mischief, and that would be an acceptable explanation for his night's absence. As it is, at his age, he is ashamed to admit that he fell asleep in his club's library and was locked in for the night. Pepito idolizes his grandfather, and the audience, too, no doubt feels a great sympathy and affection for Pepe.

Younger than Pepe and less interesting as a comic character, but equally worldly-wise, is Marcelo in López Rubio's Una madeja de lana azul celeste (1951). Marcelo is old enough to have a grown son, but young enough that he still has an active social life. Like Pepe, he knows how to dress and where to go, but he is not yet old enough that his evenings out include falling asleep in the library. When his daughter-in-law Clara needs advice, she naturally turns to Marcelo. Clara is worried because her friend Lucrecia is trying to break up Clara's marriage and take Daniel away from her. Clara feels defenseless but is sure that Marcelo's knowledge of people will come to her aid. Marcelo solves the problem for his daughter-in-law by replacing his son as Lucrecia's romantic interest and taking her off on a trip with him.

The situation of the older man who not only successfully competes with younger romantic rivals but often

marries the twenty-year-old girl is quite frequent in the Spanish comedies of the contemporary period, particularly in the works of Neville, and will be discussed in Chapter Five. Usually these men are similar in character and personality to Pepe and Marcelo in their charm and knowledge of the world. One of them, Don Antonio Hinojar de Alba in Felipe Sassone's Yo tengo veinte años (1950), is almost Marcelo's twin. He is rich, an elegant dresser, and very familiar with the social graces. He also is a judge of human character and, when he realizes that his niece's fiancé is a scoundrel, he proceeds to buy the young man off and arrange to have the bride left at the altar rather than have her marry the wrong man. Up to this point he shows himself to be an extraordinary but wise grandfather of the Pepe variety, but then he proceeds to marry his niece himself.

Neville, of course, has created some delightful older men who are not obsessed by a desire to marry young girls. Pedro and Julián in the last act of El baile and the sequel play Adelita are two charming old men. They are romantically interested in Adelita only in the sense that she so closely resembles her grandmother, whom both men loved, and through her they can relive some of the happiness of the past. In another play, Veinte años (1954) Neville has created an older man

who has maintained his youthful interests and has not resigned himself to old age. Pepe, like Luca de Tena's Pepe, can still communicate with the younger generation. Unfortunately, the young people he most enjoys communicating with are pretty young girls, preferably rather scantily clad in the summertime. Pepe's wife Faustina is unsympathetic with her husband's antics; she feels that Pepe is making a fool of himself. Actually Pepe does have the same sort of charm as the other older men discussed here, and the young girls honestly enjoy his conversation, his flirting, and his tales from the past. When Pepe arranges with the devil to become young again, he is much less successful with the young ladies on a closer age level than he was when he was old enough to be their grandfather.

A good percentage of the older men in the contemporary Spanish comedies are portrayed in this sympathetic light. They are charming old men who have increased rather than decreased in their appeal to the opposite sex over the years. The old ladies in general do not fare so well. The playwrights seem to tend to make their most farcical older characters female rather than male. The uncles and grandfathers in these plays may be comic, but they are seldom ridiculous. The aunts and grandmothers more often than not have habits and mannerisms that are exaggerated beyond belief for comic

effect; while the old ladies may be quite lovable, they are seldom realistically-drawn characters.

The little old ladies in Mihura's plays are excellent cases in point. While Mihura writes surrealistic comedies that cannot be compared in style and purpose with the works previously discussed of Neville or Luca de Tena, it is interesting to note that he seems to specialize in eccentric old ladies and not eccentric old men. In El caso de la señora estupenda (1953) Mihura endows the pretty but stupid Susana with a mother and an aunt who accompany her when she comes to spy on her fiancé. The fiancé, with Susana's previous knowledge, married a woman he did not really know so that she might get a passport and he, a good sum of money. Susana and family come to the hotel where the newly-weds are staying and camp out in the room. What do the mother and aunt do in such a situation? They take baths. In fact, they are enchanted by this hotel room where they can take advantage of the facilities, and that is what they proceed to do until talked into leaving. In Mihura's earlier play, Ni pobre ni rico, sino todo lo contrario, again the young girl has an unusual aunt. This aunt is capable of discussing nothing but the weather. When she is with her niece in an office, she becomes fascinated by a typewriter which she calls a small piano. Completely unfamiliar with the machine at the beginning,

by the end of the act she is a speed typist. Like the aunt and mother in El caso de la señora estúpida, this old lady is completely oblivious to her surroundings and can amuse herself with whatever facilities she finds available. In Maribel y la extraña familia (1959), Mihura also chooses to introduce an unorthodox aunt-and-mother team. These two, Doña Paula and Matilde, are not so detached from reality as the old ladies already mentioned, but they are unusual in their interests. They have adopted an enthusiasm, completely out of keeping with their age, for everything modern. They play Elvis Presley records, are authorities on jazz, and serve gin fizz instead of tea. They are looking for a modern girl for Marcelino, their nephew and son respectively, to marry, and they do not realize that Maribel is a prostitute. They are sheltered from the truth by their own simplicity.

As the atmosphere of Mihura's comedies is usually far removed from reality, it is not surprising that his little old ladies should be very unreal. However, one can cite comedies by other authors as well in which the old ladies are quite unconventional in their behavior while the older men are perfectly normal. In López Rubio's Veinte y cuarenta (1951), for example, the author presents two older men. One of them, Lorenzo, is middle-aged but marries the twenty-year-old Marga. The

other, Marga's father, has also remained youthful enough that he secretly marries his mistress after his daughter is safely married. Marga's aunts Lola and Clotilde, however, can only be described as zany. While the middle-aged men are youthful in their interests, the old ladies are well beyond the age of romance. Both claim to be the widows of Justo Avial. Actually neither of them was ever married to Justo Avial, who has been dead for many years, but each is convinced that he would have married her had he lived. They are faithful to Justo's memory and continue to vie for his affection. Eventually they surprise everyone, including themselves, when they become modernized, buy a car, and learn to drive. They even patch up Marga's rapidly-disintegrating marriage.

In Ruiz Iriarte's La cena de los tres reyes the contrast between what the years have done to a man and to a woman is much more vivid, because the man and woman in question are very close in age. The deposed king, Alberto, as we have already seen, is still a man in his prime. He is not portrayed as a particularly comic character, nor does he seem particularly old in his attitudes. Also at the inn is an old duchess, a lonely old woman who lives in the past. She makes friends with the inn guests to tell them stories of her days as a spy in World War I and her great romances in order to fill the void of her loneliness. In reality she never

was a duchess, but her stories are at least partially true. As she is now a pathetic figure as well as a comic character, it is a bit surprising to learn that she was once Alberto's mistress. The two, who are portrayed in such different lights, are really more or less the same age. It seems that the male playwrights are more sympathetic toward aging members of their own sex than toward older women.

Women naturally offer comic possibilities to the male playwright, and none more quickly than the overly-talkative or domineering wife. There are several good examples of this perennial favorite in contemporary Spanish comedies. In Usted puede ser un asesino Paso describes Margarita as "un auténtico gramófono. No para, no detiene la lengua ni para que le saquen una muela."²¹ Certainly Margarita dominates the conversation whenever she is present, and the intellectual quality of her comments does not match the quantity. Her husband Simón marvels that Enrique's wife Brigette is so quiet, but Enrique assures him that his wife, too, is loquacious; it is just that Margarita talks so much that Brigette cannot show her true capabilities. Paso lets us know that a talkative woman could drive anyone, even a parrot, crazy:

Simón: Bueno, pues se compró un loro y lo echó a discutir con Margarita.
 Enrique: Se murió, claro.
 Simón: No. Pero se puso muy triste y se pasaba

todo el tiempo diciendo: "Esto no se hace con un pájaro ... esto no se hace con un pájaro."²²

Felipe Sassone creates another talkative woman in the character of Doña Mariana in Yo tengo veinte años. Doña Mariana bullies her husband Don Manuel, gossips incessantly, and delights in finding all the possibilities for evil in any given situation. Her portrayal is exaggerated enough to make her a caricature. In the play she hopes to be able to dominate Don Antonio's niece Carmen by serving as the young girl's chaperone until her marriage, but uncle and niece unite to save Carmen from Doña Mariana's overly-possessive friendship.

There is an even more exaggerated dominating wife in Tono and Manzanos' Un drama en "El Quinto Pino." Carlota invariably encourages her husband Puli to relate certain incidents from their life, but she never gives him the opportunity to tell the story once he has started. She interrupts him and contradicts him. Poor Puli never says four or five words before Carlota tells the story for him. If he says they arrived in Barcelona in the morning, she says that they arrived at night. If he says that they went to one hotel, she contradicts and says that they went to another. As long as Puli accepts her correction, she is not disturbed by how ridiculous the story may become. Puli had said that the sun was shining when they arrived in Barcelona in the morning. At

Carlota's insistence, he amends the tale to say that the sun was shining when they arrived in Barcelona at night. Carlota always gets her way.

Probably the wife who would be the most difficult to get along with, however, is Aurora in Tono's ¡Qué "Bollo" es vivir! (1950). Aurora has psychological problems and is convinced that she has a second self who sometimes gets the upper hand. She is disappointed in her husband because he gave up no great passion to marry her and has been uninterestingly faithful to her. To get even with him, she hides his things, threatens to poison him, and attempts to dominate him. She opposes whatever he does. When he is reading the newspaper, she tells him to stop. If he obeys and stops reading, she tells him to read the newspaper. If he starts to go out, she complains; if he agrees to stay, she orders him to go out. Aurora is never satisfied with what he does until she thinks that he has arranged a clever little play to convince her that he has a mistress. She would perhaps be less content if she learned, as the audience does, that the woman in question really is his mistress. With a wife like Aurora, one is not surprised that Ramírez is unfaithful.

The domineering wife is not and never has been a sympathetic character. She can be comic, but she is not likable. The playwrights give these virtuous but unbearable wives less favorable treatment than they do the

prostitutes and "fallen women." In fact, some of the most sympathetically portrayed women characters in the contemporary comedies are those who have strayed farthest from the straight and narrow. Such romanticized prostitutes are by no means new to literature. One could cite innumerable examples: Manon Lescaut and La dame aux camélias in French literature, or the heroines of Irma la douce and Never on Sunday in contemporary motion pictures.

Maribel in Mihura's Maribel y la extraña familia has become somewhat hardened by her life as a prostitute and is bewildered by the attitude of Marcelino, his mother, and his aunt, who do not realize what her profession is. She has learned to look for the worst in people and is suspicious of everything and everyone. But she is not an unsympathetic character, and all she needs to be redeemed is a push or two in the right direction. Under the influence of "the strange family," she soon finds herself becoming what Marcelino and the old ladies want and believe her to be: a respectable modern girl who has been working as a seamstress and who would be an excellent wife for Marcelino. Maribel is a delightful character both in her initial skepticism and in her transformation; Mihura has painted her with tenderness and has made no attempt to criticize or condemn her for her past.

A prostitute with a "heart of gold" appears in Calvo-Sotelo's Milagro en la Plaza del Progreso. One of the people to whom Don Claudio gives his employer's money, this woman is much too honest to keep the money. She returns it to Don Claudio's wife. There is a comic scene between the prostitute and Eulalia, for she, like Marcelino's family, does not recognize the streetwalker for what she is.

An unusual comic creation is the character of the prostitute in Pemán's Los tres etcéteras de don Simón (1958), a comedy about the Napoleonic invasion of Spain. Charming and intelligent, Marifácil is honest about her profession, has an excellent sense of humor, and actually dominates the action of the whole comedy. The only professional of her kind in the small town of La Fernandina, she is the object of considerable attention. All the women consider her presence a disgrace to the community, the young girls are not allowed to look at her, and the men all recognize her perfume. When the French official, Don Simón, is going to visit the town, and the alcalde ignorantly interprets "etcétera, etcétera, etcétera" of his instructions to mean that he must provide three women for the Frenchman, Marifácil is the only woman in the community who would not be dishonored by fulfilling the request. With great skill Marifácil convinces Don Simón to pardon a condemned Spanish rebel, gets a father to

consent to a marriage he had previously forbidden for his daughter, plays Cupid in arranging another match, and prevents disgrace from coming to La Fernandina. Marifácil's wisdom seems almost unlimited. She knows instinctively that Don Simón is neither the Romeo nor the cruel conqueror that he is reputed to be. She gives excellent advice to the other two "etcéteras" on how to win their men. She knows the art of pleasing a man and of creating the illusion of love without any of the unpleasant responsibilities and parting scenes. Does Marifácil outwit herself in that she and Don Simón really do fall in love? Perhaps so, but both are too wise to try to turn the illusion of love into reality when the time comes for their inevitable parting. Pemán's farce is notable because of the two excellent comic creations of Marifácil and Don Simón.

The woman who has lost her reputation but has not resorted to prostitution is also treated with sympathy. There is a vivid contrast between the twin sisters in Ruiz Iriarte's La guerra empieza en Cuba with the advantage going, not to the sternly moral Adelaida, but rather to her fun-loving but dishonored sister Juanita. Eventually Adelaida realizes that she must follow the example of Juanita, whom she had previously considered a disgrace to the family. When Adelaida alters her attitudes and becomes friendly and smiling, there is an effective comic

reversal in her character. The playwright does not condemn Juanita either for her past or for her running off with Javier. Equally as interesting as Juanita is her vivacious friend, Pepa, who has also led less than a moral life. She effervesces with personality and soon wins the affection of those she meets.

A different type of personality entirely, but also sympathetic, is Elvira in Neville's Alta fidelidad. Elvira is a "kept woman" with a great love for luxury. She represents high fidelity, but she is faithful, not to her protector Fernando, but to his wealth. When he loses his money, she leaves him. With such obvious gold-digging traits, Elvira could be a despicable woman, but actually she is quite charming. She is particularly at her best when trying to convince the income tax collector that she needs and deserves Fernando's money more than the government does. Elvira, who considers fur coats and expensive clothes as necessary to life as oxygen, is thoroughly feminine and thoroughly delightful. In portraying Elvira Neville is apparently unconcerned with questions of morality.

The playwrights show little sympathy for the talkative or domineering wife and seldom give a favorable portrayal of the very proper Spanish girl who has been raised in the traditional, sheltered way. Most of the young women characters in the comedies are emancipated;

they have become modernized and even "Americanized." The occasional girl who has remained conservative usually does not stand up in a comparison with her more "liberal" counterpart. Florita, the doctor's fiancée in López Rubio's Diana está comunicando, is so conservative in her viewpoints and conduct that she is a caricature of the "proper" Spanish girl. Gradually she is pushed into the background by Diana, who, if she is more unorthodox, is also more charming. In Dos mujeres a las nueve Don Lito's Spanish fiancée, Fernanda, is very reserved and proper in contrast with the wild and exotic American, Magda. Fernanda recites romantic doctrine about marriage being the union of the souls while Magda turns her vivacious personality loose in her efforts to get her man. Magda is perhaps too high-spirited for the scholarly Don Lito, but Fernanda is so colorless that one is almost relieved when the professor's two romances both come to an end. The contrast between the modern and the traditional Spanish women is even more vivid in Ruiz Iriarte's Cuando ella es la otra (1952), for here the playwright has reversed the expected roles in a love triangle. It is the wife who is a modern woman and her husband's mistress who falls into the stereotype of the reserved Spanish woman with a strict sense of morality. Eventually the confused husband returns to his wife. The play, with its effective comic inversion of roles,

has been praised by critic Joaquín de Entrambasaguas as "una originalísima comedia en que la ficción dramática, tan ágilmente manejada por el autor, alcanza magníficas calidades."²³

One of the most proper of the proper Spanish novias is one who never appears on stage--Dionisio's fiancée in Mihura's Tres sombreros de copa. As the author himself has said, she is such a disagreeable person that she is better kept at a safe distance. From her phone calls to the hotel room and what we see of her father, we know enough about her to understand why Dionisio approaches his marriage with something less than enthusiasm and why he is tempted to run off with Paula, a show girl with a questionable past. Certainly Paula would be easier to love, but as she sadly realizes, her world and Dionisio's are too far apart.

The number of "modernized" young girls in the contemporary Spanish comedies is almost unlimited. They are young ladies who attend the university, work, or simply play; they dress in fashionable, often provocative clothes; they choose their own boy friends and, in a comic reversal of roles, tend to advise their elders rather than take advice from them. They are far removed from the unhappy young ladies of the first half of Jardiel Poncela's El sexo débil ha hecho gimnasia, which takes place in 1846, or the revolutionary Florita in Mihura's ¡Sublime decisión!, who decides to go to work in 1895.

In spite of their new-found freedoms, most of these girls are very respectable, like the young heroines in Paso's Juego de niños, Ruiz Iriarte's La soltera rebelde, Neville's El baile, Adelita, and Venite afitos, or Soriano de Andia's Ayer ... será mañana.

Less respectable and even more obviously emancipated from any conservative restraints on clothing or behavior are the movie starlets. They are provocatively-dressed, exotic beauties in the Hollywood tradition, and they are publicity conscious wherever they go; they are usually caricatures rather than well-developed characters, for the playwrights exaggerate their clothing and mannerisms for comic effect. Paloma in La cena de los tres reyes has taken refuge in the inn in order to spend a quiet Christmas, but she expects phone calls and knows that her admirers will be able to find her. Like Alf-Harom el Magnífico, she expects to be recognized in incognito. When she learns that a prince is at the inn, she proves to have romantic notions that match the plots of the movies in which she has appeared. She is looking for Prince Charming, and once Federico acquires the appearance she expects, she is happy to run off with her prince. There is a comic reversal in her attitude toward Federico when he ceases to be himself and fulfills the Hollywood image of royalty.

The starlet in El pobrecito embustero is more practical than Paloma. Linda is primarily interested in her

career; she would probably consider a romance with Prince Charming only from the point of view of its publicity value. In Ruiz Iriarte's comedy about the unfortunate professor, Linda comes to see Lorenzo when it is rumored that he is dying and he has begun to receive recognition at long last. She intends to have the noted scholar die in her arms with photographers at hand to catch the historic moment. Linda's interest in Lorenzo is obviously limited to how his death can enhance her career. She is a caricature of the publicity-conscious starlet, and there is humor here from the incongruity of a movie starlet rushing to the deathbed of a scholar.

Ruiz Iriarte gives us two examples of young starlets, but López Rubio in Veinte y cuarenta introduces us to a whole world of movie personnel. Lorenzo is a movie director. His apartment is filled with movie stars who comically vie with each other for Lorenzo's affection and for coveted roles in films. These are more established actresses than the starlets in the other two comedies, but their chief concern is still getting ahead in their profession.

In another comedy the same author shows us an actress who has become so engrossed in her career that she can no longer be herself. Gloria Velarde in El remedio en la memoria (1952) is so accustomed to acting that her life itself is just another "role." When she deals

with her daughter, her daughter's romance, or her own lost loves, she resorts to the familiar scenes and the memorized lines. Her reactions are therefore mechanical and are humorous for that reason. Life has become for her merely a series of stage plays, and her interests are involved in retaining her beauty and her prominent position in the theatre.

The character types found in these contemporary Spanish comedies are varied both in personality and in treatment. We have examined only some of the more common types, and even in that sampling the stock figures have ranged from Russian spies to capitalists, from emancipated teen-age girls to romantic old men, from reserved professors to vivacious prostitutes. Depending upon the author and the style of comedy, these figures may be handled as mere caricatures--personified traits used strictly for comic effect, like the talkative wife in Usted puede ser un asesino or the publicity-mad movie starlet in El pobrecito embustero--or they may be well-delineated characters who have a reality of their own and a human warmth in spite of, or perhaps because of, their comic characteristics--Pepe in Don José, Pepe y Pepito or Lorenzo in El pobrecito embustero. In some cases such a warm and human comic character may be the most important facet of the play. Rather than create characters merely to fulfill the necessities of the plot (comedy of intrigue

or situation), the playwright makes the action of the comedy revolve around a central figure (comedy of character).

NOTES

¹John Gassner, ed., A Treasury of the Theatre (From Aeschylus to Turgenev) (rev. ed. for colleges; New York, 1960), p. 4.

²Ernest Earnest, op. cit., p. 221.

³Luca de Tena, ¿Dónde vas, Alfonso XII? in Teatro español, 1956-57, p. 133.

⁴Lope de Rueda, Teatro, ed. J. Moreno Villa ("Clásicos castellanos," Madrid, 1924), p. 103. For other references to the use of dialect and foreign languages in early Spanish drama, see above pp. 6 and 11. For a discussion of the Quintero brothers' use of Andalusian dialect, see above p. 35.

⁵Ibid., pp. 153-54.

⁶Luca de Tena, Don José, Pepe y Pepito (Madrid, 1952), p. 40.

⁷Mihura, Carlota, p. 335.

⁸Luca de Tena apparently does not realize that Francis is a masculine name and Frances, a feminine one. His female character spells her name with an i, and hence Don José is inadvertently justified in assuming her to be a man on the basis of their correspondence.

⁹Paso, Una bomba llamada Abelardo (Madrid, 1953), p. 19.

¹⁰Pedrin is referred to as coming from América and being americano. In Spanish americano often refers to Latin American; although Mexico is in North America, Pedrin is not called a norteamericano as that term is usually applied to residents of the United States. See Real Academia Española, Diccionario de la lengua española (18th ed.; Madrid, 1956), pp. 80, 924.

¹¹Paso, Una bomba . . ., p. 33. ¹²Ibid., p. 35.

¹³Ruiz Iriarte, La cena de los tres reyes (Madrid, 1955), p. 24.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 97.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 93.

¹⁶Calvo-Sotelo, Una muchacha de Valladolid in Teatro español, 1956-57, p. 322.

¹⁷Calvo-Sotelo, Un milagro en la Plaza del Progreso in Teatro español, 1953-54, ed. Sainz de Robles (Madrid, 1955), p. 24.

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹Neville, Alta fidelidad in Teatro español, 1957-58, p. 127.

²⁰Paso, El canto de la cigarra (Madrid, 1960), p. 76.

²¹Paso, Usted puede ser un asesino in Teatro español, 1957-58, p. 269.

²²Ibid., p. 271.

²³Joaquín de Entrambasaguas, El año literario (1952) (Madrid, 1953), p. 13.

CHAPTER FOUR

HUMOR SET IN THE PAST

Many contemporary playwrights of comedy, in Spain as well as in other countries, have chosen to set some of their works in the past, sometimes trying to recapture the spirit of the turn of the century, sometimes going back as far as legends of antiquity. Why do the writers choose to avoid our own times? Doubtless there are many reasons. Critics of the contemporary theatre say that it is just another means of escaping from the realities of our day, but that is not enough of an explanation. Specifically concerning himself with this trend in the Spanish theatre, critic González López finds the reason in the strict censorship imposed on the contemporary stage: "The Spanish stage, forced to avoid any current social or human issue, looks to the past or to a kind of comedy more witty than deep."¹ This same tendency to set plays in the past may be seen in serious drama, as well as in comedies. Critic Allardyce Nicoll sees in the contemporary theatre a "vogue of historical drama."² By having the plot already supplied, as in the case of historical drama, the author may turn his imagination loose on other aspects of his play. By choosing a

historical setting, he can place enough distance between his spectators and the theatrical action to approach tragedy.³ The writer of comedies derives similar benefits from choosing a historical episode. He, too, has more freedom to work on characterization, witty dialogue, and other phases of the play if the plot is already supplied. Moreover, he may be more successful at making his audience laugh, for we find humor in the foibles of the past more readily than in our own. As Bergson has explained, there is a great comic effect to be achieved from costumes of other periods; whatever style is not the current one is funny to us, and the comic writers use the dress from the gay nineties, for example, as a laugh-producing device. The author may choose to set his play in the past so that he may take advantage of the comic potential of anachronisms, or he may simply choose a period which he wants to evoke with a certain nostalgia. The humor resultant from a setting in the past may well be a sentimental humor, far removed from out-and-out laughter. Leacock has pointed out that the juxtaposition of the past and present produces a "saddened smile that arises from the reflection of what the lapse of time has done."⁴ Again, the scenes from the past may contain an obvious or subtle commentary on the present.

Several of the plays from the period under study present a deliberate contrast between the past and the

present, usually to the detriment of the present. While some of these plays achieve the contrast by having the action begin fifty or sixty years in the past and continue through the lifetime of one or more of the characters, others achieve the same goal by having the past re-created in the present. The latter plays overlap with those to be discussed in the chapter on fantasy because the past exists, not in reality, but only by some illusion.

One of the plays in which the contrast between the illusion of the past and the reality of the present is vividly presented is Ayer ... será mañana by Vicente Soriano de Andia. In this play the stage itself is divided between 1909 and the present. Paco, the main character, is a wealthy man who cannot adjust to contemporary life and modern business transactions. Because of his wealth, he is able to keep up the pretense of the past, complete with façades from the neighborhood where he met his deceased wife, Pepa la Planchadora. To add to his illusion of the past, he hires men to dress and act like the policeman, the coachman, and the lamp-lighter he remembers from the good old days. The restoration of Williamsburg, Virginia, with its numerous people employed to "live" and dress à la eighteenth century, follows in reality Paco's "staged" nostalgia.

While Paco cannot adjust to the mid-twentieth century, the rest of the world nevertheless goes on.

Paco's daughter Isla is as modern a young lady as can be imagined, and her sweetheart, Ti, is completely incomprehensible to Paco, beginning with his name and continuing through all aspects of his character. Paco's brother-in-law Leocadio has adjusted so well to the changing world that he manages to swindle all of Paco's fortune, and Sebastiana, Paco's sister-in-law, who has also become modernized, succeeds in becoming Paco's second wife. Paco is outnumbered by modernized people and overwhelmed by the present. Aside from his 1909 façades, his only contact with the past is Pepa's ghost, who appears to him and only to him. In the other world, Pepa is in charge of souls, and, at Paco's request, she puts new souls in the bodies of Leocadio, Sebastiana, and Isla. At first there is a remarkable change in the characters of those three, a comic reversal of character, but eventually the new souls become corrupted by the realities of the present. The changes in the times would affect even the most virtuous souls from the past. Paco had hoped to make yesterday live again, but yesterday cannot become tomorrow. Unable to adjust to the 1950's, Paco is content to die and rejoin his Pepa.

Soriano de Andia's comedy appears to have a serious comment to make. When he contrasts the past with the present, the present loses in the comparison. Paco is a much more likable character than any of the modernized

members of his family. Leocadio's supposedly acceptable "modern" ways of doing business are dishonest and immoral. Sebastiana is a disagreeable person, and Isla does not gain our sympathy. Yet Paco is wrong in trying to keep the past alive; the past cannot live again, and we must adjust to the present, make the best of it, or die. A restoration on a large scale, like Williamsburg, has a historical value, but the same concept cannot successfully be applied to an individual life.

In spite of the serious commentary in this play, there are many moments of high humor. Paco's world of 1909 is indeed comic, and his hired characters from another era are extremely funny. Moreover, Pepa's ghostly appearances add many moments of high humor, for only Paco can see and hear her, and the others never understand why he says the things he says when he does. He seems to be carrying on an incomprehensible one-sided conversation, or worse yet, he seems to be insulting the other characters who do not realize that he is really talking to Pepa, not to them. The same device of one character having contact with a ghost appears in Noel Coward's Blithe Spirit (1941) and Jardiel Poncela's Un marido de ida y vuelta (1939).

The contrast between past and present is presented in a different way in a comedy by Tono and Jorge Llopis. Winner of the Premio Nacional de Teatro of 1952, La viuda

es sueño is built around a Rip Van Winkle theme. Socorro, a nineteenth century lady, has been asleep for ninety-two years; unlike her legendary American counterpart, she has not aged during this time. When she appears to be ready to wake up, her descendents are worried about what will happen to her when she comes in contact with the modern world, so they put on nineteenth century clothes and prepare to play the roles of the family that surrounded Socorro at the beginning of her nap. Socorro accepts the illusion of the past until she goes for a walk and comes in sudden contact with the modern world. She is horrified by contemporary Madrid, by the amount of English spoken in the streets, by the scantily-clad French tourists, by the brazen overtures of hotel representatives. Socorro returns home and decides to go back to sleep to await a better century. The only vestige of the nineteenth century that she has found remaining in the contemporary hustle and bustle is the romantic love of two of the characters, Yole and Tony. Nothing else in the new world that she has seen seems to be worthwhile. Likewise, in Calderón's La vida es sueño the only "reality" remembered by Segismundo in Act II is his memory of a girl.

Again the present has lost the contest with the "good old days," but the writers of this play seem much less interested than Soriano de Andia in presenting a serious message under the humor. Tono and Llopis appear to have no other intention than to entertain. The title

of the play is a clever twist on Calderón's play, the nineteenth century dress produces the desired comic effect, and there is the added fun of the characters portraying unaccustomed roles for Socorro's benefit. Yole and Tony, for example, are posing as man and wife but are not really married; they must present an illusion of intimacy for Socorro with all the resultant confusion, and, like Isabel and Mauricio in Casona's Los árboles mueren de pie, they enjoy the illusion so much themselves that they fall in love in reality.

A similar rejection of the present occurs in Paso's Una tal Dulcinea. Juan is fascinated by a sixteenth century legend and falls in love with a portrait of Dulcinea, the heroine of the legend. His wife arranges for the legend to be relived for him. She plays the role of Dulcinea, and Juan finds himself portraying Dulcinea's legendary lover. He much prefers the atmosphere of the legend and the past to the world of the 1960's. He would like to continue living in the world of pretense, rather than return to the reality of the modern world. His wife decides to forsake the present, too, and join her husband in the illusion of the past.

In some comedies the illusion of the past exists in the present without any judgment of the two necessarily being made. The past exists contemporaneously with the present, but one is not chosen as superior to the other. Such a condition exists in Ruiz Iriarte's delightful

El landó de seis caballos (1950). Four of the characters, Chapete, Doña Adelita, Simón, and Pedro, are very old and have not adjusted to the changes that time has brought during their lives. Alone of the four, Doña Adelita is aware that the days of their youth exist no more, but she helps the others to maintain the illusion of the past, of the turn of the century. Thus the four continue to live as they lived in their youth; they continue to take rides in their imaginary horse-drawn carriage. Then, when Adelita knows that she is going to die, she invites several modern young people to her strange house of illusion to see if one of them will be willing to join the old men in the past and keep their dreams alive. The woman who does so chooses to join the past, not because it is really "better" than the present, but because she appreciates the beauty of the fantasy and the poetry of bringing happiness to others. In his self-criticism of the play, the author established this purpose for the comedy:

Intenté que en la farsa se cruzasen los aires de hoy--traídos por Isabel, Margarita, Rosita, Florencio y el Músico--con los ecos de un ayer reciente, pero lejano, ya pura lámina, hechos superviviente realidad en la fantástica aventura de los cuatro viejecitos, entre las paredes de la vieja casona perdida en un bosque inexistente. Si de todo ello resulta un revuelo de poesía y un poco de humor, éstos son, seguramente, los tantos que el autor hubiera querido anotarse.⁵

Ruiz Iriarte has achieved his goal. There is in El landó de seis caballos a great deal of both poetry and humor.

There is much that is comic in the contrast between the old people and their fantasy and the modern young people; in the confusion of the young people themselves when they are confronted by this strange world of illusion; in the attitudes of the old men and their squabbles that they have been carrying on for years; in the quarrels of the young women, each of whom thinks she is the personal guest of a mythical duke. But the comedy rises above the merely funny to reach a higher plane of tender humor. As José Antonio Bayona has said, it is "un bello y dulce poema, en donde se mezclan la gracia y la sonrisa y en donde la nostalgia queda envuelta por el velo de la fantasía."⁶

The situation of one character causing the past to live again in order to help someone else occurs also in Calvo-Sotelo's María Antonieta (1952). A young woman, dressed in eighteenth century clothes and claiming to be Marie Antoinette, suddenly appears in the heart of modern Paris at the Place de la Concorde. Jaime Serrat and his friend Pierre meet the young lady, and Jaime first decides to help her and then falls in love with her. María Antonieta realizes that she comes from the past but is not at all sure in what century she is now living. She is amazed by automobiles, electric lights, and the lack of a monarchy in France. Jaime assumes María Antonieta to be insane; he believes her to be a

certain Susana Wiedemann, and he proposes, because of his love for her, to bring her back to reality. In order to do so, he re-creates some of the past for her, surrounding her with loyal eighteenth century servants and portraying himself the count Hans Axel de Fersen, the man María Antonieta loved. Jaime gives to María Antonieta the opportunity to be an eighteenth century French queen in the midst of twentieth century France.

Yo regalo a Susana Wiedemann, su vida de María Antonieta. Yo hago posible su locura. ¿Se acuerda usted de aquel viaje de Catalina de Rusia, a través de un país empobrecido, que el amor de Potemkin, convirtió en un paraíso, con decorados de teatro y falsos jardines y comparsas a sueldo? Pues, Susana, vive, así, por vez primera desde hace unos días, sin que nadie le contradiga, no la vida real, si no la vida que sueña Y, gracias a mí, todo, en torno suyo, se produce igual que si fuera, de verdad, la Reina de Francia.

Jaime had hoped that María Antonieta, in recognizing the pretense of those creating this eighteenth century illusion around her, would come to admit her own pretense and return to her normal role as Susana Wiedemann. But María Antonieta does not recognize the difference between the illusion of the past and the reality of the present. Jaime then hopes that a threatened trip to the guillotine will cause María Antonieta to claim her real identity. He arranges a mock execution and lets María Antonieta believe that the twentieth century republicans want to behead the queen. But María Antonieta goes bravely to her execution, dying, apparently of a heart attack, on

the steps of the scaffold. Her hair turns white before the execution, as did the original Marie Antoinette's. Was this woman the insane Susana, or did the past really come to life again and the unfortunate queen exist briefly two centuries beyond her own time? The question remains unanswered.

Like El landó de seis caballos, María Antonieta achieves a high level of humor intermingled with fantasy and poetry. There are, however, moments of lighter comedy: the humor arising from María's bewilderment with the modern contraptions we take for granted, the sudden switch of twentieth century people to eighteenth century roles, the need to bribe the guard at Versailles so that the farce from the past may be enacted. In the play a comic contrast does exist between past and present, and there is the fun of seeing people masquerade in costumes from another era, but the real emphasis is on the characters themselves and their illusions, rather than on any humor to be derived from a setting taken from the past.

Thus far we have discussed plays in which there is a juxtaposition of past and present because some illusion of the past has been created contemporaneously with the present. A comedy may, however, present a contrast between two eras by having the different periods of time appear sequentially rather than contemporaneously.

Such is the case with Jardiel Poncela's El sexo débil ha hecho gimnasia. Winner of the Premio Jacinto Benavente for 1946, the play is written in two parts. The first, written in poetry, takes place in 1846, while the second, written in prose, takes place a hundred years later. Unlike the other plays discussed which judge between past and present, this work of Jardiel Poncela gives a clear preference to the contemporary period and the emancipation of women it has brought. The choice of poetry for the nineteenth century section and prose for the twentieth century is a significant one. The author wanted to create the atmosphere of drama from the past century, and poetry was still the vehicle of expression for most nineteenth century theatre. Jardiel Poncela used the same technique earlier in Angelina, o el honor de una brigadier (1934), his parody of nineteenth century melodrama set in the year 1880. Tono and Jorge Llopis doubtless had this idea of the older playwright in mind when they wrote their parody of Siglo de Oro melodrama Federica de Bramante, o las florecillas del fango (1953), for they, too, have tried to imitate the poetic style of the period they are satirizing.

In El sexo débil ha hecho gimnasia Jardiel Poncela presents a group of sisters of assorted ages who live with their aunt Adelaida. Adelaida is an amazing and admirable woman, in spite of a rather irritable disposition,

who has taken to heart the sad plight of woman in a man's world. Woman is, she feels, the victim of injustice and oppression. Even the Queen is not exempt, for she has been forced to marry a worthless man for the sake of diplomatic relations. As the play opens, the sisters and the aunt are expecting company for a festive dinner; the several novios of the young ladies have been invited, and spirits are fairly high. By the end of the first half of the play, tragedy has touched almost all of the female characters of the play. One girl receives a letter from her sweetheart telling her that he is married already and therefore cannot marry her. Another is the sweetheart of an unsuccessful poet whose first play was laughed at in its opening performance the night before; the poet, shattered by his failure, commits suicide. Another sister is pregnant and has been deserted by her lover; she has no choice but to have the baby, give the infant to some charitable group, and enter a convent. The one girl who is married is forcefully separated from her family because her husband, a middle-aged man, considers himself a "decent" person and refuses to ever again enter this house which is no longer respectable. A fifth sister has a shy admirer who has never declared himself; now he is leaving for the Philippines and is frightened away from the house without ever declaring his love. Even the littlest sister,

a young girl with a lisp, is not exempt from the general calamities, for her dog--a female, to be sure--dies. Adelaida can only hope that someday things will change for downtrodden femininity, that the weaker sex will take up gymnastics and become strong.

Jardiel Poncela calls this play a tragi-comedy, and indeed there is more tragedy--or melodrama--in this first part than humor. There are a few comic elements: the little girl's lisp, a lazy sister's tendency to move from one couch to another and one nap to another, the aunt's ill humor, the brother-in-law's exaggerated indignation. There is even some grim comic effect from the extreme number of calamities that beset this family of females in a short space of time. But all in all, the atmosphere of the act is somber and life in the nineteenth century looks very harsh for womankind.

The real comedy of the play comes in the second part when the changes that a hundred years have brought are shown in vivid contrast with the unhappy nineteenth century. The weaker sex has certainly done something, for now the poor male of the species is dominated by the women. The names and dispositions of the characters have changed, but the same actors play the corresponding roles. The downtrodden sisters of 1846--Rosalía, Juana, Lucía, Julia--have now taken on rare and exotic names to go with their new freedom--Mitó, Tilendi, Machuga,

Churra. Aunt Adelaida is now Aunt Lila; she is still an amazing and admirable woman, but her ill temper has been replaced by a sense of humor, and she has acquired a liberal outlook on life. Like all of the characters, she has changed from a melodramatic heroine to a comic character. One of her idiosyncrasies is an inability to remember the names of the servants, so she rechristens each one with some version of "So and So," such as Fulana and Mengana. The sisters are each confronted by the same calamities as their nineteenth century counterparts, but they are much too high-spirited to succumb to tragedy. The littlest sister no longer lisps; she eavesdrops, blackmails, sells confidential information, and generally makes a nuisance of herself. The sister whose fiancé admits to being married takes the news calmly and prepares a legal contract compelling him to separate from his wife and promise to marry his novia in the event that he should become a widower. The girl with the shy suitor proposes to him rather than let him get away. The poet has his first play laughed at, but his girl friend does not let him commit suicide; taking over the management of his career, she suggests that he continue to write tragedies but label them comedies in the future. The married sister is no longer dominated by a brutish husband. On the contrary, she is a well-known singer, and he docilely follows her around, taking care of her luggage. Even the unwed mother no longer hides ashamed in her room

nor does she plan to enter a convent. Comically her pregnancy causes her to develop an aversion to a portrait in the living room, and she goes into a tantrum whenever she sees it. Sisters and aunt alike are delighted to know that soon there will be a baby in the family without the mother's being saddled down by a husband or bothered by in-laws. The modern young ladies have complete control of their destiny, and woe betide the man who should attempt to go against their strong wills. The female servants now dominate the men in their lives as do their mistresses, and romance comes to the aunt as well as to her nieces. Aunt Adelaida met a man who admired her and sympathized with her problems but did not express his feelings; Aunt Lila gets her man.

This second part of Jardiel Poncela's play is extremely comic. Each situation as it arises is doubly funny because of its contrast with the tragic developments of the first part. The characters themselves are the exaggerated types of comedy. The prose dialogue is livelier, and new situations have been introduced for comic effect. For example, there is a confusion between the phone number of this house and that of the railroad station; there are so many telephone calls asking for train schedules that every member of the household has memorized all possible schedules and can readily say when the next train leaves for Barcelona or Seville and whether

or not it has sleeper accommodations. Finally the station master himself calls for information. While the nineteenth century household seems realistic, the twentieth century one has taken on a number of unbelievable aspects, all of them intended to move the audience to laughter.

Jardiel Poncela views the past in contrast with the present and certainly shows no nostalgic attachment for the past. The same is not true of some other comedies of the period; many playwrights revive memories of times gone by with sentimental fondness. Such is true of Calvo-Sotelo and his work Plaza de Oriente. (1947). Writing of the neighborhood where he lived as a child, Calvo-Sotelo evokes great tenderness in this play, which has been considered his best work by one critic⁸ and termed a "pequeña joya de técnica y emotividad" by another.⁹ The play is episodic in its structure, presenting certain moments from the life of an old man, and, according to the author, the main character is really the tick tock of the clock, or the passage of time.

The action begins in 1931 with Don Gabriel looking at a diary he started many years before in 1886 when he fell in love with María Luisa. As he remembers the high points of a long life, many moments are re-created, and the audience is transported from one epoch to another. The first such scene is 1886. Here again is the humor

of old-fashioned clothes and bygone days. Don Gabriel wants to tell his father of his love for María Luisa, but he is comically timid and hesitates. Finally he blurts out the truth, and his father and María Luisa's guardian, both of whom are very pleased with the proposed marriage, tease the young people and discuss the matter seriously before giving their consent with comic gravity.

Another humorous element is Gabriel's little sister. Fourteen years younger than he, Encarnita is only eleven in 1836. On the day that Gabriel finally declares his love for María Luisa, the Queen is about to have a baby. All Spain hopes for a prince--all Spain except Encarnita. She wants the baby to be a girl and is disappointed when the number of cannon shots indicates that a future king has been born.

The years pass and life goes on, a life filled with its comic moments and its sorrows. In one scene a photographer comes to take the family portrait. Old photographs with everyone posing quite stiffly invariably strike the modern viewer as funny; doubtless Bergson could explain the comic element in the photograph as the human made rigid and mechanical. Seeing the photograph being posed and taken is, therefore, funny to the audience. Don Gabriel is amused by the posing and the photographer's methods, too; when the photographer is not looking, he sneaks up to the camera and takes a candid shot. It is the candid shot, not the carefully

posed one, that turns out and takes its place in the family album.

All the memories of a lifetime cannot be funny, however. Encarna's husband proves to be a gambler and thief who deserts his family. Gabriel's son likewise rejects his family in order to marry a woman of questionable reputation from the lower classes. The son is killed, and his wife takes their little boy to America without letting the grandparents see him. María Luisa becomes sick and dies. Don Gabriel grows old; he lives with Encarna and his memories. At last the grandson comes home to Spain, and the old man feels that now he can die because there is someone to carry on the family tradition. María Luisa is waiting for him, and he goes to join her in eternity.

Plaza de Oriente is a touching and sentimental play. There are moments that are purely comic and many more that belong to the humor that is close to tears. Calvo-Sotelo is viewing a lifetime with a smile, but the smile reflects varied emotions throughout the course of the play.

There are a number of similarities between this play and one of a few years later that has come to be recognized as one of the best works of the contemporary Spanish theatre: Neville's El baile, winner of the Premio Nacional for 1952. Neville's play, too, evokes

the past with nostalgia and treats the passage of time with tender and poetic humor. Not so successful as El baile but again showing the author's deep sympathy and affection for his characters is a sequel, Adelita.

El baile es el exponente brillantísimo de un teatro, sentimental y humorístico al mismo tiempo, que nos liga instantáneamente con el trío interpretativo por un fenómeno de contagiosa simpatía. Neville se encariñó con él de tal modo que volvió a sacar los personajes en Adelita, sin preocuparse ni poco ni mucho por el argumento, sólo por un irresistible afán de hacerlos reaparecer.¹⁰

Like Plaza de Oriente, the action of both El baile and Adelita is episodic. The first act of El baile takes place in 1900; at this time, Pedro and Adela are a young married couple. The third and only other character in the play is Julián, a former suitor of Adela who eventually joins the household and guards Adela's honor more jealously than her husband. This is a fantastic ménage à trois, for the relationship of Julián and Adela is truly platonic. As the play progresses, it becomes clear that, although they quarrel incessantly, Pedro and Julián are really very close friends; they are linked by their common love for Adela and their common passion for insects.

Years pass between the first and second acts. Pedro's and Adela's daughter is grown and married and now lives in America. Adela herself is sick and dying. By the third act, Adela is gone and the two men, now quite old, would be alone were Adelita, Pedro's granddaughter, who

is played by the same actress as Adela, not visiting them. Now the old men are given a chance to erase the years and recapture a beloved memory from the past. They prepare to take Adelita to a costume ball, as they had taken Adela to one many years before. Adelita wears her grandmother's gown, a gown Julián once considered indecent but which the passing years have made acceptable, and the old men happily bring out the furniture that they once had known so well and that long since had been replaced by modern pieces. For a brief moment, 1900 lives again. It is but the illusion of the past, but the illusion brings happiness to Pedro and Julián.

The sequel play begins immediately following the dance. Adelita may be wearing Adela's dress and the old furniture may be back in its place, but times have definitely changed since grandmother was a girl. Instead of coming immediately into the house, Adelita lingers in the hallway to kiss her boy friend. Surely Adela would not have conducted herself in such a fashion!

By now time is closing in on Pedro and Julián. Julián has caught cold at the dance, and death--la dama gris--comes for him. In the third act, she returns for Pedro, who is now living with Adelita, her husband, and his memories. Like Don Gabriel in Plaza de Oriente,

Pedro can dream about and communicate with his loved ones whom death has already taken. Julián often comes to see him, and now Adela, like María Luisa, comes to take

her husband back with her to what López Rubio has called la otra orilla. Not only do Neville's two plays maintain the same tone of tender, sentimental humor as Calvo-Sotelo's Plaza de Oriente, but his second play ends on the same note: the death of the old man who has been living with his memories of the past and his reunion in death with his beloved wife. The transition from past to present is vividly shown, and, as Leacock has suggested, we smile sadly at what the lapse of time has done.

Plaza de Oriente and Neville's two plays deal with fictitious characters; they evoke a moment from the past, but they are not historical comedies in any sense. The same nostalgia and sad smile aroused by these plays are also found, however, in two historical comedies of Juan Ignacio Luca de Tena: ¿Dónde vas, Alfonso XII? (1957) and ¿Dónde vas, triste de tí? (1959). Beginning in 1870, the action of these two plays is also episodic--estampas románticas, the author terms them--and presents high points from the reign of a well-remembered king of Spain. The author is faithful to history, even quoting from authentic letters and documents in much of his dialogue, but he envelops his characters in a warm robe of romance and poetry with which many historians doubtless could not completely agree. Intermingled with the historical figures are the legends that have grown around them, particularly concerning the fairy tale like love of Alfonso and his first bride, Mercedes.

Luca de Tena has managed to give continuity to his plays in spite of their episodic structure. The structure and the tone of the plays themselves, as well as their historical nature, call to mind similar plays of recent years from England and America, for example Laurence Housman's Victoria Regina (1935) and Emmet Lavery's The Magnificent Yankee (1946), the biography of Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes. The episodes themselves, like the episodes in Plaza de Oriente or El baile, are sometimes very comic and sometimes very sad. The most amusing scene of ¿Dónde vas, Alfonso XII? takes place when the supporters of Alfonso XII, who has lived in exile most of his life, are attempting to take over the Spanish government by force. The governor has taken Alfonso's chief advisers and holds them captive. At first he is cold to them, but as news of the progress of the battle comes to him, he gradually reverses his attitude. First he invites the men to remain in his office where they will be more comfortable; finally he invites them to join him and his wife for dinner. Then the news arrives that Alfonso has been declared King of Spain. The palace is no longer under the governor's control; it is Alfonso's representative who now invites the governor to dinner. Each stage in the change in the governor's attitude helps build up to the final comic climax of the complete reversal in the situation.

There are other comic moments and comic elements in this play. In one scene Alfonso, now King of Spain, is wandering alone in the streets of Madrid. He asks directions of a pedestrian, explaining that he was born in the city but had been away for a number of years. The two talk about the new King, but the pedestrian does not recognize his companion. There is excellent comic irony in their final exchange of comments when they part in front of the palace:

Alfonso: Y yo le quedo muy agradecido por haberme acompañado. (Presentándose.) Alfonso XII Aquí, en Palacio, tiene usted su casa.

Transeúnte: (Sin inmutarse.) ¡Muchas gracias, hombre! Yo, Pío Nono, En el Vaticano, a su disposición.††

Luca de Tena evokes laughter at many points throughout the play, but he is also interested in bringing a tear or two to the eyes of his spectators. The final scene of the play is, in particular, a small masterpiece of careful staging intended to arouse a sense of poignancy and sadness. Alfonso has been very much in love with his young bride, and the audience as well has come to think of Mercedes with fondness. Now the young queen is dead, and Alfonso is left alone. The deaths of María Luisa in Plaza de Oriente and Adela in El baile affect the audience, but in those plays there is no scene so obviously touching as this closing one in which the author makes use of a ballad for his only dialogue:

Inmediatamente vuelve la luz, una luz extraña, de ultratumba, que ilumina el forillo que está detrás del balcón. Casi todo el primer término está a oscuras. Sólo un foco de luz amarilla se proyecta sobre la parte del sofá donde estuvo sentada Mercedes. El Rey, como una sombra, está en pie ante el balcón.

Coro de niñas: (Dentro.)

¿Dónde vas, Alfonso XII,
dónde vas, triste de tí ... ?

Alfonso: (Contesta hablando, en un susurro.)

Voy en busca de Mercedes,
que ayer tarde no la vi

(Se sienta en el sofá y contempla el sitio vacío de la Reina.)

Coro de niñas: (Dentro.)

Tu Mercedes ya se ha muerto,
muerta está, que yo la vi.
Cuatro Duques la llevaban
por las calles de Madrid,
por las calles de Madrid.

El telón ha ido bajando lentamente. La última nota del coro de niñas debe coincidir con el golpe del telón en el suelo.¹²

The sequel to this play, like the sequel to El baile, does not seem to reach the same level. ¿Dónde vas, triste de tí? does, however, contain the same poignancy and tender humor of the earlier work. In this play Alfonso's role is subordinate to that of María Cristina of Austria, his second wife. Still in love with Mercedes, Alfonso remarries reluctantly, only for the sake of the state. He is unfaithful to his wife, and María Cristina is always aware that her husband does not love her. Nevertheless she fulfills her duties as wife, mother, and queen with great dignity and love. When the king dies from tuberculosis, she willingly assumes the responsibilities of the government.

The choice of Alfonso XII as a subject was a very wise one for the type of treatment that Luca de Tena has given the characters in his plays. Far enough removed from the present for the historic figures to have been idealized somewhat by time, the period, on the other hand, is close enough to our day that it can be remembered with nostalgia.

Other authors have chosen the late nineteenth century as settings for plays but with intentions far different from those of Luca de Tena. In an earlier chapter we have already discussed to some extent Ruiz Iriarte's La guerra empieza en Cuba. The action here takes place in the 1890's, a period apparently selected for no other reason than the comic value of the costumes and the customs of the recent past. Most of the humor centers around the characters, the conflicts among them, and the confusion resultant from a double set of twins. To a very large extent the comedy could be transplanted to another time and another setting without being altered in the least. True, the dishonor that has fallen upon Juanita, the stern gobernadora's fun-loving twin, is more typical of the nineteenth century code of morality than our present day's, and the gobernadora's unsmiling outlook on life and morality is what an Anglo-Saxon would quickly term Victorian, but Ruiz Iriarte does not seem so intent upon evoking the atmosphere of a bygone era as

was Luca de Tena or Calvo-Sotelo in the previously mentioned plays. The one scene that is really a satire on an aspect of the last century is the rehearsal in the opening act of a stilted nineteenth century melodrama.

A number of years earlier, Jardiel Poncela wrote an entire play as a parody of just such nineteenth century theatre in Angelina, o el honor de un brigadier. The setting here is the 1880's. The humor results from the antiquated costumes and the exaggerated stereotypes of the nineteenth century heroes and heroines. In the prologue each character introduces himself so that there will be no doubt about the role that he is to play: the villain clearly indicates that he is the villain. There is a good deal about this play that is reminiscent of the humor in the early silent movies; time has increased the humorous content of those movies for us, just as the passing years made more obvious the exaggerations that Jardiel Poncela is parodying in his comedy.

Also set in the late nineteenth century is Miguel Mihura's ¡Sublime decisión!, a satire of life in 1895. Not surrealist comedy in the same sense as Tres sombreros de copa or Ni pobre ni rico, sino todo lo contrario, ¡Sublime decisión! nevertheless has many moments in which the actions of the characters are exaggerated far beyond the bounds of realism. While most critics probably would not consider ¡Sublime decisión! to be Mihura's

best work, the play has received considerable praise and is even mentioned by one critic to be, along with La otra orilla, one of the two most important comic works of recent years.¹³

A number of aspects of life in 1895 Spain are satirized in the comedy. Mihura has his comments to make on the sudden changes in the government, on the inefficiency of the government offices, on the hypocritical attitude of nosy neighbors. But his prime target is the role of women in the society of the period. Women simply did not work for a living; therefore, the young girl had the moral obligation to herself and to the financial well-being of the family to find a prospective husband. Even at risk of pneumonia in cold weather, she daily posted herself on the balcony to entice young gentlemen callers; then the family presented the merchandise in the best possible light to convince the young man that the girl in question was indeed a bargain. Florita, heroine of ¡Sublime decisión!, refuses to take part in the husband-trapping farce. She decides to find a job and learns in secret to manipulate a new and devilish machine--the typewriter. By the end of the play, after being temporarily fired because she has unwittingly taken the men employees' minds off their work by her feminine presence, Florita is busily training other young women for office work. As the curtain falls, Mihura gets in one last

laugh at the expense of emancipated femininity, for women working together are bound to chatter incessantly, and the noise of their talking increases to a roar as the play ends.

Mihura's choice of period and topic is inherently comic to modern audiences. We are, from the perspective of the 1960's, amused that Florita's desire to work should be considered a major social revolution and that it should be necessary to call in a priest for consultation before her decision can be made. We are equally amused by the necessity of the whole family's working together in order to marry off the daughters. But Mihura is not content to let us smile gently at these situations from bygone days; he distorts them to the point of comic absurdity.

In one scene, Florita's sister Cecilia, their father, and their aunt Matilde entertain Manolo, a prospect for Cecilia's hand. Cecilia has a new hat which Manolo finds attractive--Florita suggests that the young man loves the hat and not the wearer--so she wears it in the house when he is coming to call. The aunt has borrowed a piano and a cat for the visit, because she feels that all respectable homes should have a piano and a cat. At great financial sacrifice, the aunt has also bought some fine pastries to serve Manolo; later we learn that the prospective suitors who come to call always claim to be wealthy but are really hungry and only make visits for the sake of

the pastries. Fulfilling her obligation to make Cecilia appear as valuable as possible, the aunt lies to Manolo about Cecilia's abilities: Cecilia made the pastries, the liqueur they are drinking, even the furniture in the room. Anything visible in the room that Cecilia did not make, Florita did. What talented young ladies! The repetition of the aunt's exaggerated claims is, of course, comic.

The absurdity of the aunt's comments is only surpassed by the complete empty-headedness of Cecilia. Feeling obliged to make polite conversation and yet having nothing to say, Cecilia has apparently memorized a few statements which she always uses whenever it seems to be her turn to say something. When Manolo is talking about Cecilia's hat, the young lady interjects, "Pues a mí me han dicho que Santa Cruz de Tenerife es muy majo."¹⁴ When her father is discussing his daughter's excellent education, daughter confesses, "A mí antes me gustaban mucho las muñecas, pero ahora ya me gustan menos"¹⁵ Each time Cecilia makes one of her unexpected remarks, Manolo remembers that she said the same thing the last time they were talking. As the aunt quickly points out, Cecilia has a reputation for being ingenious and original.

While Mihura exaggerates the efforts of Aunt Matilde and Cecilia to be socially gracious, he achieves a comic

effect quite differently with Pablo, a friend of Manolo's who has accompanied him for the formal visit. He strips Pablo's speech of all social pretense when the young man asks about Florita: "Me dijo que Cecilia tenía una hermana, y he venido porque, si está libre, a lo mejor me conviene y me la quedo"16 When Florita does appear, she is as blunt to Pablo as he has been about his intentions. He assures her that his father is a successful merchant and that he has simply adopted the same business technique, but later we learn that he is a poorly-paid clerk in the same office where Florita goes to work.

Again employing the technique of comic exaggerations, Mihura pokes fun at the inefficient way governmental offices are run. The men in the office are astonished to learn that Florita is capable of doing anything constructive; they expected her to bring along some sewing to do during office hours. Each of her accomplishments is met with a surprise completely out of proportion with the simplicity of the task. For example, we learn that one man has been working for two or three days at the difficult job of addressing fourteen envelopes; six of the envelopes are still undone. The man very carefully explains to Florita how she should go about the task of addressing the remaining envelopes. Much to his amazement, she finishes all six of them in only a minute or

two. Florita's industry and ability create a revolution in the office.

¡Sublime decisión! is a highly amusing play, filled with many good comic moments. Nevertheless, behind all of the exaggerations and unbelievable situations, there is a real satire of nineteenth century Spain and a vivid portrayal of the atmosphere of the close of the past century.

In a number of other comedies of recent years from many countries, history and legend have been used as the background for purposes other than creating nostalgia or satirizing a particular period. These comedies rely to some extent on anachronisms for their humor and are modernizations or adaptations of legends from the past or great moments in history. In writing a new version of an old story, the playwright may well intend to achieve humor by exploding the old myths, by showing what the situation was "really" like in contrast with what we have come to believe over the years. He may decide to show us, for example, that the great hero was really a coward or that the beautiful heroine was quite unattractive. Or the humor may result because the hero from antiquity worries about contemporary problems and even wears modern dress. Greek tragedies have been particularly popular for this kind of comedy, although they have also served in recent years as the plots for

a number of tragedies as well. Among the comedies one could cite Jean Cocteau's La machine infernale (1934) in which Oedipus turns out to be a rather stupid and unheroic young man, Jocasta is a vain older woman with a noticeable interest in young men, and Teiresias is more a psychiatrist than a priest; or André Gide's Oedipe (1930) in which Oedipus is an atheist combatting organized religion and Gide's own puritan background. But the playwright who has probably had the greatest influence on Spanish authors for his reworkings of Greek legends and other historical settings is Jean Giraudoux. Giraudoux's comedies are marked by great originality, humor, and poetry; his style, often labeled as précieux, is unmistakable, and it is not surprising that other playwrights, consciously or unconsciously, have copied certain aspects of his theatre. There are three contemporary Spanish plays in particular which we shall discuss as examples of plays related to Giraudoux humor: Paso's Preguntan por Julio César (1960), José María Pemán's Electra (1949), and El amor es un potro desbocado (1959) by Luis Escobar and Luis Saslawski.

Paso's Julius Caesar play is amusing and appears to be related closely to the Giraudoux tradition; there is a certain parallel between some of Paso's characters and those that Giraudoux created two decades earlier.

Preguntan por Julio César takes place in Egypt when the Roman general first arrives to take over that country

from Cleopatra's control. The first myth Paso explodes is that of Cleopatra herself. The great amorous beauty of history turns out to be a skinny girl who hates men and reluctantly seduces enemy generals for political reasons. Her servant Cribila, an expert on attracting the opposite sex, prepares Cleopatra for her romantic interviews: she provides padding to turn the young queen's boyish figure into a provocative one, she scents the room with perfume and arranges the background music and drinks. Cleopatra plays the game unwillingly and not very well, but the men who come are so blinded by the legend that, except for Caesar, they do not see the reality of the girl, even when her padding slips out of place. Cleopatra is particularly noted for her mouth that remains invitingly half open and her eyes that remain invitingly half closed. Only Caesar is shrewd enough to realize that these conditions do not indicate passion; the former is caused by respiratory trouble and the latter by near-sightedness.

Paso's Cleopatra reminds one of Giraudoux's Helen in La guerre de Troie n'aura pas lieu. (1935). Helen, too, is a great legendary beauty, but the other women of the play realize, as do the intelligent men, that she is neither very bright nor very beautiful. The old men are blinded by the myth, as is Paris, but Paris is a conceited, empty young man who lacks both character and good sense.

Paso has somewhat paralleled Paris and his infatuation for Helen with Mark Antony and his infatuation for Cleopatra. Mark Antony is just as blinded by the myth and just as vain as Paris. If anything, however, he is even less intelligent. Paso presents him as an athlete with false pretensions of aristocracy, a social climber whom Caesar wisely does not trust very much.

Cleopatra is surrounded by advisers who are, in their inadequacies and their eccentricities, similar to the great minds of Giraudoux's Troy. The three Egyptian leaders are Formion, a general; Ivonhep, the high priest; and Blinis, the secretary of state. All three are comic characters, but Ivonhep is perhaps the most amusing, for the high priest has pronounced atheistic tendencies. Caesar nicely outwits them, playing a game of poisoned cups with them, and all three die; but Caesar is wise enough to realize that they will only be replaced by another group of advisers who will prove to be equally unfit for the task.

Another of Paso's comic characters is a spy who always whispers everything he says. At first he works for Formion, whispering his messages to the general so low that the general cannot hear. Later becoming a servant of Caesar, he continues to whisper although he is no longer a spy. Naturally Caesar cannot understand him either.

The main character of the play, and the one that brings any serious point to the comedy, is Caesar himself. Paso prefaces his work with a quote from the historian Toynbee:

La Historia sólo maneja hechos. Hay pocas veces personalidades. Así habla de un César héroe, porque ser héroe es ser histórico. Desde luego tal concepto es equivocado. César era sólo un hombre distinto, a cien codos sobre su época.¹⁷

Following Toynbee's concept, he presents Caesar as a man of intelligence and forceful personality, but merely a man. Giraudoux likewise showed Hector to be a man who hated war and really wanted nothing more than to stay home in peace with his wife. Caesar, too, would prefer peace; he admits that he is not even a good general. He is a balding man who suffers from epilepsy and loneliness; he is a coward, and admittedly so, but he is also shrewd. He only appears to gamble when he is sure of being able to control the outcome, and he does not keep his word. However, he has a tremendous capacity for work and for dominating other people. He belongs, he says, to the stars, and, like many of the heroes in modernizations of legends, he is curious to know what history will say about him. As he tells Cleopatra:

¿Sabes en qué pienso desde mi estrella? ¿Cómo contarán los historiadores nuestro encuentro? Cuántos desatinos dirán de ti. Cómo llamarán también lujuria vivente a una pobre chica enamorada. Y héroe a un hombre que no es de este mundo. Serán capaces de decir algo de tu boca entreabierta o de tus ojos ... o de esa naricilla por la que no logras respirar nunca bien. Y de mí que fui un

experto militar, cuando lo único que he hecho es nacer con talento en una época de borregos tontos.¹⁸

Caesar, in his sharp contrast with the portrait history has given us of him, in his extreme cowardice, in his blunt realism, is a comic figure, but he is also pathetic. He is a lonely human being, a man like any other. As he leaves Egypt, we find that he does love Cleopatra, as she has come to love him and has tried to kill him because he has rejected her. Caesar, however, is a man with a destiny, and he cannot permit himself the luxury of this love. With a final touch of anachronistic humor, he gives Cleopatra his address in Rome and suggests that she write.

In this technique of exploding myths and showing the great legendary figure to be nothing more than a weak mortal, there is a similarity to other historical plays that do not belong to the group of modernizations of old legends. One such play is Pemán's farce Los tres etcéteras de don Simón. Historical fiction, the play is set in Spain in 1810 at the time of the Napoleonic invasion. Don Simón is the official representative of the new French regime; he has the reputation both of being a cruel conqueror and a Don Juan. But in truth he turns out to be a mild-mannered man, given to hard work like Julius Caesar, willing to treat the Spanish guerrillas with leniency, and much happier when he does not have to go through all the romantic lies necessary to maintain

his reputation as a Don Juan. His romantic success, like Cleopatra's in Paso's play, is due more to myth than merit. This period of Spanish history is usually used to show the great heroism and nobility of the Spanish, but in Pemán's farce, we find that the Frenchman is much more civilized and the Spanish are not overly heroic. The one rebel of the play is fighting the French invaders, not so much because of political conviction and patriotism, as because of an unhappy love affair. The local junta is as inept as the Egyptian council. One member is a French sympathizer and will not come to meetings for fear of meeting a patriot member, who does not come for fear of meeting the French sympathizer; a third member is neutral and does not wish to contact either of the other two. So the official junta meetings are comically held with only two people. Much of the humor of Los tres etcéteras de don Simón is slightly on the risqué side-- "alegría sensual a lo Arcipreste de Hita"¹⁹--but some of it resembles techniques also found in Preguntan por Julio César.

Ruiz Iriarte also uses similar devices in a historical farce-ballet that is not a modernization of a legend, El gran minué. Here Ruiz Iriarte portrays all the spectacle and glamor of the eighteenth century court in a country that remains unnamed but strongly resembles France. Behind the spectacle, however, he shows the basic weakness

and immorality of human beings and the corrupting influence of the court. The all-powerful king, the superman who rules by divine right, is a weakling, called "Carlitos" by his mistress and made fun of by his pages. The "wise men" of the court, the tutor and music master of the king's favorite, are caricatures, much like Paso's Egyptians. With a touch of Giraudoux-type humor, the minister of war, "el bravo Mariscal," is a man who hates war because it destroys gardens. The only character unmoved by the general corrupting influence of the court is Nicolás de Gravelot, the brains behind the throne. Nicolás is a philosopher, but, like Julius Caesar, he is a realist and has found ways and means of achieving his goals because he can see the true characteristics of the people and situations with which he must deal.

Another modernization of an ancient legend is Pemán's Electra. Although it did not meet with great popular success, the play, along with Los tres etcéteras de don Simón, has been selected by the noted critic Torrente Ballester as "lo más logrado y perdurable de su obra."²⁰ The play differs from Pemán's other adaptations of Greek legends in that it does not attempt to retain the dignity and atmosphere of Greek tragedy; rather it interjects notes of humor and often shows the characters in a new light. Cassandra, for example, is treated as a fortune teller who automatically expects payment when she refers

to the future. Electra, like many of the characters in similar comedies, is aware of her role as a tragic heroine to be remembered by history. Aegisthus, like Caesar and Don Simón, is not a monster but a simple man. He is an administrator and tries hard to win the affection of the people, but is unsuccessful. When Agamemnon comes home, he is more concerned about the formalities of building an arch of triumph and having flowers ready than about his love affair with Clytemnestra. Like Giraudoux's Hector, he is opposed to war, thinks that Helen was a flirt not worth fighting over, and believes that the poets have distorted the whole picture; and, like Ruiz Iriarte's "bravo Mariscal," he deplures the effects that war has had on agriculture. The plot development of Pemán's play is essentially original, but there are many little notes of ironic humor throughout the play that make one think that he was familiar with Giraudoux's earlier version of Electre when he wrote his own comedy.

Probably closer than Pemán's Electra to Giraudoux humor is El amor es un potro desbocado, although the subject here is one that the French playwright never treated--the love of El Cid and Jimena. Many critics, even ones who praised the play like Marquerite, have mentioned the resemblance to Giraudoux.²¹ Another critic, who found nothing at all original in the work, also suggests that the heroine was modeled after Anouilh's

and Cocteau's versions of *Antigone*.²² Virtually no one has overlooked the current French influence on contemporary Spanish comedy.

El amor es un potro desbocado is an interesting and amusing version of the old Spanish legend. The authors have introduced many comic touches and characters. Completely new to the legend are three aunts of Jimena: Sinesia, Emerencia, and Fulvia. These lovely old ladies put in their appearance after the funeral of Jimena's father and take blood-thirsty delight in the prospect of vengeance. They dote upon tragedy and murder. Another comic character is Jimena's maid. When Rodrigo continues to pay visits to the house--nocturnal visits at that--even after killing Jimena's father, the aunts feel they must find a good explanation for this conduct, so they fabricate the story that he is really visiting the maid. The maid is most expressive in her righteous indignation!

The authors have also provided a new reason for conflict between Jimena's father and El Cid. The Count belongs to an older school of thought on fighting the Moors. His method is to make yearly raids on the Moorish territory and scavenge; of course the war never ends and the Moorish threat goes on, but he sees no sense at all in Rodrigo's new-fangled ideas about taking over the Moorish strongholds and gradually reconquering the land.

The essential addition to the old legend, however, is a character who might also have been influenced by Giraudoux. The major force in the play, she is the Ama, a quick-witted old woman who loves Jimena and encourages the lovers when all the others are against them. She virtually pushes them into fleeing together to save their happiness rather than let themselves be trapped by the vengeance-mad old aunts or by the worry of what history will say.

El amor es un petro desbocado, like Preguntan por Julio César and Electra, derives its humor from new twists on the old legends, the addition of new comic characters, and "la gracia oportuna del anacronismo."²³ All three represent a type of comedy that has become widespread in various countries during the twentieth century. It is only one of the several forms of historical drama to appear frequently on the contemporary stages of Europe and America, but, in view of the works of Giraudoux, Anouilh, and Cocteau in particular, it is certainly one of the most popular.

NOTES

¹Emilio González López, "Spanish Literature" in The New International Year Book: A Compendium of the World's Progress for the Year 1957 (New York, 1958), p. 485.

²Alardyce Nicoll, World Drama from Aeschylus to Anouilh (New York, 1949), p. 855.

³Ibid., p. 857.

⁴Leacock, Humor and Humanity . . ., p. 71.

⁵Ruiz Iriarte in Teatro español, 1949-50, ed. Sainz de Robles (Madrid, 1951), pp. 305-06.

⁶José Antonio Bayona in Teatro español, 1949-50, p. 307.

⁷Calvo-Sotelo, María Antonieta (Madrid, 1952), p. 77.

⁸Medardo Fraile, "Twenty Years of Theater in Spain," tr. Mildred Boyer, Texas Quarterly, IV (1961), 100.

⁹Pérez Minik, op. cit., p. 280.

¹⁰Marquerfe, Veinte años . . ., p. 137.

¹¹Luca de Tena, ¿Dónde vas, Alfonso XII?, p. 172.

¹²Ibid., p. 181.

¹³Sergio Nerva in Teatro español, 1954-55, p. 345.

¹⁴Mihura, ¡Sublime decisión! in Teatro español, 1954-55, p. 370.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 372.

¹⁷Paso, Preguntan por Julio César (Madrid, 1961), p. 90.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 159.

¹⁹Torrente Ballester in Teatro español, 1957-58, p. 203.

- ²⁰Torrente Ballester, Panorama . . . , p. 337.
- ²¹Marqueríe, Veinte años . . . , p. 228.
- ²²Ricardo Domenech, "El amor es un potro desbocado,"
Acento cultural, No. 4 (1959), p. xxi.
- ²³Marqueríe, Veinte años . . . , p. 230.

CHAPTER FIVE

SATIRE OF THE PRESENT

One of the most frequent criticisms of the contemporary Spanish theatre is that it has avoided the realities of the present. It is true that the comedies in particular do not often attempt to paint a portrait of modern Spain or to criticize the Spanish government, but there are aspects of twentieth century life that do appear in them. The cold war, the economic difficulties of the Spaniards, the contemporary faith in psychiatry, the state of matrimony in Spain all come in for their share of satire in the comedies of the past few years.

It is difficult with the present state of world affairs to ignore the conflict between East and West, the rivalry between the Soviet Union and the United States. At least a few of the contemporary Spanish comedies do treat the cold war. As discussed in the chapter on character and caricature, there are several plays in which Russian agents and American diplomats are satirized, as are their efforts to get control of new scientific discoveries or to gain influence over the rulers of smaller countries. In one of these plays, Paso's Una bomba llamada Abelardo, there is a commentary on the

search for new and improved ways of destroying mankind. Both the Russians and the Americans are courting Abelardo, who has already invented a fantastic bomb but is still working to perfect its destructive potential. The more people it will kill at one time, the better. Obviously both sides in the cold war are eager to gain control of such a powerful weapon. Abelardo, as the mastermind behind the magnificent invention, is highly regarded by his countrymen as well as by the Soviet and American representatives. Although he is extremely ugly, he has inspired a great love in his fiancée, María Luisa, who declares, "Entre la belleza insípida y el talento, me quedo con el talento."¹ Abelardo's talent, which is much less apparent to the audience than to María Luisa's comically prejudiced opinion, is enough to compensate for his physical shortcomings even when it is discovered that he is a gorilla, not a man. She is still willing to marry him. Only her brother Manuel, the voice of reason in the play, realizes how ridiculous Abelardo is and how insane the international cult of the big bomb is. There is much of farce in Paso's comedy, and he exploits every opportunity for humor in the gorilla masquerading as a man, but the author nevertheless seems to have a serious point to make through Manuel in his criticism of the misplaced values of the modern world. Manuel believes that what is worthwhile in this life is

love--not bombs and "talent" and the destruction of mankind. He finds the salvation of the universe in the love of his friend the chorus girl or his new romance, the piano teacher.

Si todo pudiera ser tan sencillo como ver en tus ojos el Paraíso. Si todo pudiera ser tan inteligente como las pantorrillas de Violeta o tus labios ... pero más allá ... mucho más allá, tras las montañas ... hay tanto gorila.²

Unfortunately, the world is populated by too many gorillas, animals bent on destruction who are unmoved by beauty and love. Gorillas here are taking over the world as do animals in Ionesco's Rhinocéros (1960). Abelardo is so tied up in his scientific triumphs that he is almost oblivious to María Luisa and has to check his engagement book to verify the date of their wedding. Even before we know that he is a gorilla, he has so regimented his life that he does not seem quite human. Except for Manuel and his lady friends, the whole world seems to have gone mad and all human values have been lost.

In an earlier play by the exiled Jacinto Grau, Las gafas de don Telesforo, o un loco de buen capricho, another inventor has perfected a bomb of great magnitude. This time Soviet and American agents do not vie for control of the bomb, but an American capitalist does wish to secure production rights for the destructive invention. Mankind in our modern age knows how to make money out of the means of annihilating mankind. There is, however,

a great deal of difference between the inventors in Grau's play and in Paso's. Don Telesforo is an idealist who runs a toy shop and has perfected rose-colored glasses. Although he is capable of inventing a bomb, he is quite the contrary of the inhuman Abelardo when it comes to marketing his invention. Abelardo is incapable of realizing the harm that he may be unleashing upon the world; he would never think about the matter from a humanitarian point of view. Don Telesforo, on the other hand, is sensitive to these possibilities and finally decides to keep the bomb's formula a secret. A similar outcome is reached in Mihura's Mi adorado Juan when the formula for a no-sleep drug is destroyed. There are, the playwrights seem to suggest, some inventions which do not further the progress of mankind and are, therefore, best left unexploited.

The state of unrest of the world, the remembrance of recent wars, and the threat of future wars do not appear often in the comedies, but they are occasionally mentioned. The heroine of Alvaro de Laiglesia's Amor sin pasaporte is a Hungarian refugee who has fled her country, lost her fortune, and is now forced into working in a hat shop. Certainly all of the Western nations are familiar with the problems of refugees who have fled from behind the Iron Curtain. Laiglesia does not make very much of Lili's situation as a refugee; he concentrates

more on her remarkable personality and her ability to make the most of her position. Lilí is a delightful comic character who has the ability to charm.

In Mihura's El caso de la señora estupenda much of the action is fanciful and far removed from reality. Nevertheless, the playwright does satirize modern war. The comedy takes place during wartime in the neutral country of Koridibra. As a neutral country, Koridibra is secretly negotiating with the two great powers that are at war--the South and the North. Finally the neutral signs an alliance with the South, but the South promptly breaks their treaty and attacks Koridibra. Then the officials and news commentators, who have been praising the South, must quickly change all that they have been saying as Koridibra joins forces with the North.

In another comedy, El cielo dentro de casa (1957), Paso gives us a glimpse of what the world, or at least Spain, will be like in 1969 after the next great war. Apparently Paso envisions a conflict between the Soviet Union and the United States, each no doubt joined by her respective allies. We can assume that the United States wins the war, for in 1969 the Spaniards in the play are speaking English. As a result of the war, everything is scarce and food is almost nonexistent. It takes talent on the part of Susanna to acquire an egg to fix for her husband and child. Although Paso is not

pessimistic enough to predict the total annihilation of civilization, his picture of post-World War III is not a particularly encouraging one.

Most of the contemporary comedies deal with the upper middle classes, with people wealthy enough that financial concerns never enter into their lives. The heroes of these plays are free to travel all over the world; they live in luxurious apartments or homes and lack for nothing. Occasionally the hero may appear to be poor, but seldom are his money troubles realistic. As an example, the hero of Paso's El canto de la cigarra chooses not to work for a living, and a series of minor miracles saves him and his brood from starvation. The lack of food in his house cannot be taken seriously. In a few plays, however, the action does take place in a household of limited financial means, and the characters come from the lower economic classes. These plays, although labeled as comedies by their authors, tend to be serious, and they do give a serious picture of the financial difficulties of the lower classes in Spain. In this way, they are comparable to contemporary dramas that make no attempt at humor, such as Buero Vallejo's Hoy es fiesta or Muñiz Higuera's El grillo.

El drama de la familia invisible by Alvaro de Laiglesia and Juan Vaszary is termed by its authors a "comedia de humor en tres actos." There is little of humor in the

play, however, with the exception of certain traits of several of the characters. The situation in which the characters live is anything but funny. As in El grillo, the action centers around a family of the lower middle class. The father, Ernesto, is a cashier in a small industry. He considers himself capable of holding a more responsible job; the promotion never comes. The mother, Cecilia, has learned to live on her husband's income. She darns socks that should long since have been replaced, she salvages broken dishes that are still usable, and she regards any possible change of fortune with a comically persistent scepticism. Their daughter, Luisa, works and is engaged to Gerardo, who, like Cecilia, is practical to the extreme. He is miserly, and his repeated references to thrift offer a large part of the comic relief of the play. He considers it extravagant when Luisa pays nine pesetas to buy herself a bouquet on her birthday as no one else has bought her a present. But Gerardo's miserliness loses some of its humor when the reader realizes that he has good reason for counting every peseta. As it is, he and Luisa must save for another two years to have enough money to get married. At the end of the play, when the dreams of Ernesto and Luisa about the good fortune her wealthy boy friend will bring them have vanished, it is obvious that practical Cecilia and Gerardo have been right all

along. While all the near-tragedies of the play have been avoided, the "happy" ending still raises the question of how the family will survive with its low income and no hopes for improvement. For a brief period the family had been raised to a level of luxury thanks to the interest of Luisa's wealthy friend and benefactor. Fortunately, Luisa was neither dishonored nor murdered, as was the daughter of the "invisible" family across the hall whom the same Don Alfonso had previously "helped," but now the family must return to its former level, and Gerardo and Luisa must still save every peseta for two years if they are to be married. The only relief from their depressing lot in life proved to be a false hope. The playwrights seem to be saying that no change is possible for the lower income groups.

Similar economic difficulties and lack of hope confront the characters in Paso's Los pobrecitos (1957). There is a similarity between Paso's work and Gorki's play The Lower Depths (1902). In both cases a group of comparative strangers are forced into living together in close quarters. In Gorki's drama the scene is a night-lodging; in Paso's, a boardinghouse. All of the characters are poor but manage to escape some of the harsh realities of their existence by taking refuge in dreams. In Paso's play the boarders include a prostitute, an unsuccessful playwright, a retired army man, a little

clerk, a woman and her misfit son who cannot succeed in selling illegal cigarettes when they resort to this as a last effort to earn money. As in El drama de la familia invisible, these characters are eager to believe in any miracle that will release them from the lives they now lead. In Laiglesia's play a wealthy man suddenly brings prosperity to the family. In Paso's, each of the boarders receives an envelope of money from an anonymous source. Most of them expect that the first envelope will be followed by others and that their financial troubles are over. In fact, however, one of the boarders has robbed a bank to give this money to her friends. In the end she must go to jail, and they are no better off than before the miracle. Again there seems to be no escape for the poor; they can do nothing to improve their lot. Although there are moments of poetic humor in the play, the end is more tragic than comic.

The boardinghouse again serves as the background for action in Ricardo Rodríguez Euded's La madriguera (1960). The boarders include prostitutes and men without work. One family living here tries to keep up the pretense of having money because of the shame of being poor, but the grandmother steals the other boarders' food from the kitchen, and the father eventually has to beg wealthy relatives for a job. Although Sainz de Robles terms the play "un drama para reír,"³ there is comparatively little humor

in the work. There is one comic character, Clementina, who appears to have led a less than moral life and is now worried that young lovers who show their affection in public will shock her innocent cat. Also, there is irony in the relationship between Ramón and his son Julio. Julio has fallen in love with the prostitute María Luz, who runs away when Ramón's opposition makes their marriage impossible. Ramón, himself, however, marries Nati, another prostitute, who turns out to be a shrewish wife. There is also some humor in the characterization of the gossip Petra, who is overly interested in the affairs of the other tenants. The play ends with the pathetic scene of some newlyweds who have just moved in and try to improve their social status by inviting the other tenants to dinner, ironically not realizing that the situation of their new neighbors is worse than their own. The atmosphere of the boardinghouse is depressing, and the only help that comes to the characters brings humiliation with it.

The sad plight of the poor in Spain is indicated in a much different way in Calvo-Sotelo's Milagro en la Plaza del Progreso. Claudio, under the influence of Scotch whisky and heavenly inspiration, turns himself into a Robin Hood, robbing the rich to give to the poor. In this case, he takes one million pesetas belonging to his employer and gives the money away instead of banking it

for his employer as he should. When the money miraculously is all returned, freeing Claudio from possible imprisonment, his personal angel inspires Claudio to give away what he has and does not need and to open his home to the homeless. As the angel explains to him, "Hay dinero y bienes para todos, pero mal repartidos. Y tú puedes corregir algunas de esas desigualdades."⁴ This is socialistic doctrine, as well as Christian philosophy.

The plays just mentioned show Spanish characters in financial difficulties ranging from extremely modest incomes to abject poverty. Other financial situations of a less serious nature are shown in contemporary comedies. In another play of Calvo-Sotelo, La visita que no tocó el timbre, the author gives a picture of the life of government employees of modest means. The two main characters of the play, Santiago and Juan, are middle-aged brothers who both work as clerks in the customs office. They live a comfortable existence, but, as they point out to the nurse who comes to look after the baby left on their doorstep, they are not wealthy by any means. Current financial problems are also considered by Neville in Alta fidelidad. Neville wrote the play, he says, in answer to the criticism that his comedies avoid contemporary problems, and one critic finds in the work a satire of several government agencies:

Se critica con la burla a la Telefónica, a la Renfe, Obras Públicas, etc.; pero principalmente a la persecución que sufre el ciudadano por la Inspección de Renta.⁵

Neville's comments on the income-tax inspectors are geared toward the wealthy and cannot be taken as a serious criticism of the economic problems of the majority in Spain. The comedy may deal with the realities of the present, but it is not the kind of reality that most anti-escapist critics would probably like to see on the Spanish stage.

The world situation and current economic problems in Spain do appear in the comedies, but infrequently. The facets of contemporary life that appear often are much less political in nature. The field of psychiatry, for example, comes in for frequent satire in the contemporary Spanish theatre and seems to be a very safe source of humor. Making fun of psychiatry may be the basis of action for an entire comedy, but the psychologist is the butt of humor even just in passing in plays unrelated to the topic. In the rapid dialogue between Elena and Alberto in Guillermo Hotel (1945), Tono has his characters introduce the subject briefly to create a joke at the psychologist's expense:

Elena: Y usted me está resultando un psicólogo.
 Alberto: ¡No, por Dios! ¡No me diga usted eso!
 Elena: ¿Le molesta que le llame psicólogo?
 Alberto: Tengo una opinión muy personal de los psicólogos. Para mí, un psicólogo es algo así como el que mira por el ojo de la cerradura el carácter de los demás.⁶

Alberto's unfavorable opinion of psychology and psychologists is shared by several of the contemporary Spanish playwrights.

The whole concept of modern psychiatry is satirized in Mihura's El caso del señor vestido de violeta. As an intellectual, the bullfighter Roberto has read a great deal on the subject of psychiatry. Above all, he wants to be in style, and, to be in style, he must develop psychological problems and have his own analyst. Because he has read so much on the subject, he can easily develop a serious complex. Roberto's particular complex is a "complejo de viejecita." Roberto's grandmother is missing, so Roberto develops a split personality in order to replace the missing old lady. He keeps a locked room in his home where he may take refuge when he feels his grandmother personality coming over him. The doctor who is helping him is the ultra-modern Doctor Montijo. Doctor Montijo is so busy studying in his field that he never sees the patients who sit in his office waiting for him to examine them. Mihura injects a humorous note when one of these patients declares that he has now been waiting three months to see the doctor and already he feels much better! Finally, when Montijo alone cannot cope with the rare complex Roberto has, he calls in the world renowned and very old-fashioned Doctor Romosky. Romosky literally shames Roberto back to normalcy by telling him that his "rare" complex is really very common and very insignificant. Now cured of all his affectations, Roberto can fully appreciate his fiancée, who has deliberately remained

simple and unsophisticated for the day when the intellectual bullfighter would realize the need he had for a woman who could boil eggs instead of mix martinis. While maintaining a light comic note throughout the play, Mihura manages to get in a serious comment or two on the exaggerations of the pseudo-sophisticate, the pseudo-intellectual, and lo cursi in general.

In Tono's ¡Qué "Bollo" es vivir! another character develops a split personality because she has read about them. Aurora, a shrewish wife, almost never content with what her husband does, is only occasionally pleasant towards him. She finally explains away her sudden streaks of irritability and her annoying habit of hiding her husband's things by asserting that she has an "otro yo" who does these things. It is her other personality that is to blame for her ill temper and any disagreeable things that she might do. She finds a doctor finally who helps her to understand her psychological problems, and she naturally believes in what he says. "A los médicos hay que creerlos con los ojos cerrados, a menos que sean oculistas."⁷

As in Mihura's El caso del señor vestido de violeta, in Paso's El cielo dentro de casa there is a distinction made between the good doctor and the bad. Julio has the reputation of a great psychiatrist and is treated throughout the comedy as a sympathetic character. Daniel,

his young associate, on the other hand discredits Julio's methods but reveals himself to be far less competent as a psychiatrist. Daniel does, for example, discuss in detail the case of a girl whom he terms a "desarrollo genotípico cómico." Later Julio comments, "En confianza, muchacho. Se la he enviado a usted porque todo lo que hablaba me parecía de los más razonable."⁸ Daniel is so entrenched in his textbooks that he can find abnormalities in everyone. Julio, on the contrary, is inclined to make fun of psychiatry; he is not so quick to condemn the "abnormal" or "crazy." As he says to Daniel, "Hay que darle una ocasión a los locos. A lo mejor resulta que nos encierran a todos nosotros,"⁹ recalling the Spanish proverb, "Muchos son y no están, muchos están y no son."

The question of who is crazy and who is sane is raised again in Buero Vallejo's Irene o el tesoro. Here the psychiatrist is shown in a highly favorable light. When Dimas, who is a miserly man whose domination of his household makes everyone's life miserable, decides to have the sympathetic if somewhat dreamy Irene committed to an insane asylum to save the expense of her meals, the psychiatrist comes to realize that it is Dimas, not Irene, who should be committed. When the men come from the hospital, they take Dimas and leave Irene behind. Irene may be "abnormal," an ausente, but she harms no

one. Dimas, who suffers from a persecution complex, manages to persecute everyone who comes near him.

Telepathy, hypnosis, and supernatural means of foreseeing the future also come in for their share of treatment in the contemporary Spanish theatre. Telepathy is the whole basis of action in López Rubio's Diana está comunicando. Again one of the characters is a doctor, Gonzalo, and he is a sympathetic character. His office, however, is a bit strange. One of the patients sitting in the outer office is a woman who comes there, not to see the doctor, but just to sit and talk to a captive audience. Gonzalo is interested in telepathy, and it is for that reason that Diana appears. She is a very sensitive receiver, and Gonzalo has the ability to dominate her. Much of the humor of the play is purely mechanical and has already been discussed in Chapter One--the freezing into position of the receiver whenever the controller begins to communicate with him, and the incongruity of one person expressing his thoughts through another. Before meeting Diana, Gonzalo had had another medium, Helenio, but he proved unsatisfactory because whenever his mind was on food, he lost his sensitivity as a medium. Like Sancho Panza, Helenio's mind was always on food.

One person's thought being expressed through another person is also the basis of action in Alvaro de Laiglesia's play El escándalo del alma desnuda, written in collaboration

with Juan Vaszary. Like El drama de la familia invisible, this play is termed a "comedia de humor" by its authors, but it tends to be more serious than comic. In Diana está comunicando the medium involuntarily expresses the thoughts that the telepathist is deliberately communicating. In El escándalo del alma desnuda the medium expresses the controller's ideas involuntarily, but the controller cannot control the line of communication; it is involuntary on his part as well. As a parlor game, Miguel hypnotizes the new maid Laura at his tenth anniversary dinner, attended by several influential friends who may be able to save Miguel's bank from possible ruin. Before being hypnotized, Laura had surprised Miguel by sensing what he wanted and bringing it to him before he asked. Now that she is under hypnosis, she expresses all of his thoughts without his saying them. Thus, through Laura, Miguel insults his dinner guests by saying what he actually thinks of them. When the guests have all left angrily, he tells his wife what he thinks of her. The truth of their superficially happy marriage is that he does not and never has loved her. Without being able to wake Laura, Miguel manages to transfer her powers to his wife, whose innermost thoughts thus are now revealed. He learns that Beatriz has never loved him either. Perhaps the only real moment of horror in the play comes when Miguel tells Beatriz that he had hypnotized once before;

that time he hypnotized a hen. Had he been able to wake the hen? No, so he had killed it and eaten it. Laura poses a graver problem than the hen. Finally they send her out into the night, hoping a doctor or hospital will get hold of her and be able to end the hypnotic trance. Laura is a monster that Miguel, like Dr. Frankenstein, has unleashed upon the world. She is a monster who can express subconscious thoughts and lay bare the human soul.

The subconscious, modern psychiatry tells us, also may express itself in dreams, but the contemporary Spanish playwrights seem to prefer to use dreams for their time-honored function of predicting the future. This supernatural ability of dreams is seen in several plays. In Mihura's El caso de la mujer asesinadita Mercedes dreams that she visits her own home after she has been murdered by her husband and his girl friend and he has remarried. Because of her desire to be united in death with the man she loves, Mercedes helps her husband to make the dream come true. This comedy also includes other supernatural elements. In one scene several spiritualists gather in Mercedes' home and hold a séance. In another the couple Trinidad and Llopis visit Mercedes and the man she loves, Norton; their visit proves to be unusual for they have been dead for five years and know all about Mercedes' death, which has not yet taken place. They recommend a love potion to Mercedes, but she misunderstands the

instructions; she thinks the potion will prevent love, not cause it, and she puts it in her husband's tea by mistake.

Mercedes' vision of the future in her dream is clear; she actually sees the people she later meets and the events in reality closely coincide with those that she had seen in her sleep. In Paso's El cielo dentro de casa, a similar situation exists. Here the wife, who is leaving her psychiatrist husband, returns a few minutes after leaving the house to get her passport and finds that a number of years have passed. Like Mercedes, she finds that her husband has a new wife and a new life and no longer needs her. There is humor in her bewilderment at the changes that have taken place. It is never clear in the play whether Laura dreamed this encounter, whether it was a trick that Julio planned for her to persuade her to stay with him, or whether she has actually seen a glimpse of a future that could be. At any rate, the woman who was Julio's new wife in Laura's vision of the future does appear soon afterward to apply for a job.

In Claudio de la Torre's La caña de pescar Adriana is gifted with certain supernatural powers and can also foresee the future from dreams that she has had. She dreams that her great uncle, whom she has never seen, will return to Spain from America. The very next day an old man, who fits the description in Adriana's dream,

presents himself as a friend of her uncle's and brings her the fishing pole as her legacy from the deceased relative. Later another representative of the great uncle comes and brings news of a more significant inheritance. In the meantime, the old man has disappeared and no one knows just who he is or why his stories of Adriana's relative do not agree with what his friends knew of his life. As in El cielo dentro de casa, the mystery is never clarified.

Like the case of the theme of the big bomb, the techniques of predicting the future through dreams was also previously used by Jacinto Grau. In Destino (1945) the main character, Edmundo, is a psychiatrist who has a vivid dream one night of an attractive young lady. The next day the same girl appears in his home as a servant. She is, however, really a spy and arranges the murder of Edmundo's father, who is a minister in the government. The love that has grown between them cannot continue, and the girl commits suicide.

In each of these cases where a dream is used to foresee the future, the comic element of repetition is introduced when the dream comes true. The same comic element is used in Neville's La vida en un hilo, but here there is no dream of the future. Instead, one of the characters has the ability to look in a person's eyes and see, not the past that actually took place, but

the past that might have been. When Doña Tomasita tells Mercedes what her past could have been like, Mercedes determines to recapture that past and search for the man she should have married instead of the one she did. She succeeds in finding him, and the scene that Doña Tomasita found in Mercedes' eyes repeats itself. Of the several plays just mentioned that use this repetition device, Neville's play is probably the most comic, although both Mihura's and Paso's plays are better works.

Another topic that avoids political implications and is always of interest is matrimony. In a surprising number of plays the theme is the marriage that is about to disintegrate because of marital infidelity, often treated quite humorously. A number of years ago an observer for an American magazine reported that because of censorship in Spain, the theatre considered sex a taboo subject and marriage a matter to be treated seriously.¹⁰ Either times have changed or the American reporter did not understand Spanish very well. Marriage is often taken lightly in these plays, and sex is often mentioned with vivid references.

In Tono's ¡Qué "Bollo" es vivir! marital infidelity is the subject of much of the play's comedy. The wife is upset that her husband gave up no great love for her and has not been tempted to be unfaithful to her. To please her, he arranges a little farce to make her think

that there is another woman in his life. She is delighted with the farce, and even more so when she learns that "the other woman" is really her husband's secretary helping him out with the joke. The final laugh of the play comes, however, when the audience learns that the secretary is really the husband's mistress.

In another Tono play, Un drama en "El Quinto Pino," the husband, who has left on a business trip, returns to find his wife with another man. But the wife is not unfaithful; the man is a friend of the husband. The husband has asked his friend to keep his wife busy so that she will not suspect her husband's infidelity. When he learns that his wife is pregnant, the husband forgets a trip he had planned with his mistress and remains with his wife. Marital infidelity has, at least temporarily, been pushed from his mind by the thought of the unborn child.

In Paso's El cielo dentro de casa the wife is on the verge of leaving her husband to go off with another man. She is persuaded to stay when she realizes that one illicit affair leads to another and that eventually no one will want her.

In Usted puede ser un asesino, another of Paso's plays, the two husbands plan to take advantage of their wives' leaving on vacation by inviting over a couple of girl friends. The final note of humor in the play is the

arrival of the two girls after the wives have unexpectedly returned. The curtain falls as the audience is left to imagine what will happen when the wives meet their summer replacements.

In López Rubio's Celos del aire (1950) a situation comparable to that in ¡Qué "Bollo" es vivir! exists. Here again two people pretend an adulterous affair to cure a wife of her suspicions only to have the audience later learn that the pretended adultery does, in fact, have a basis in reality. Cristina is extremely jealous of her husband Bernardo. She constantly expects to uncover a mysterious letter or a beautiful mistress. To cure her of her suspicions, their playwright friend Enrique suggests that Bernardo and his own wife, Isabel, pretend to be lovers. When Cristina learns that the "truth" she has uncovered is just a joke, she wants Enrique to pretend to be her lover. Bernardo shows that he really loves his wife when he becomes jealous. Isabel, aware that she is just a passing interlude for a man who will always return to his wife, reveals the truth of their relationship for pure spite. There are many moments of delightful humor in the comedy as the double triangle develops, but López Rubio is more profound in his commentary on marriage than are Tono and Paso in the plays previously mentioned.

Infidelity is again the theme of Ruiz Iriarte's Juego de niños. Here the husband is not just indulging

in one amorous fling. Ricardo is a chronically unfaithful husband. His wife, Cándida, pretends not to care in order to keep her sons from feeling her anxiety. However, she does care, and she lets her young niece persuade her to try to win her husband back by pretending to be in love with the niece's French tutor. The game that Cándida and Marcelo play proves to be a dangerous one, for soon neither of them is sure where the line is drawn between the reality of their feelings and the love that they are pretending for the husband's benefit. Eventually the husband and wife are reunited and the tutor leaves. How long the husband will remain reformed is another question, and one not answered in the play.

In Quando ella es la otra Ruiz Iriarte satirizes marriage and man's ideal of a wife. Here the wife is a very modern woman while the mistress retains traditional ideas of what the Spanish woman should be. The husband returns to his wife in part because the mistress also has another admirer, and the final result of the comic "rectangle" is a pairing off of the husband with his wife and the mistress with her other admirer.

In yet another play Ruiz Iriarte centers his comedy on a wife who changed her mind about leaving her husband for another man; in the same work, the author introduces several other situations in which sex plays a part. Esta noche es la víspera (1958) is the drama of several people of varied backgrounds being thrown together for a night.

In this case an airplane has made a forced landing and the survivors have taken refuge in a nearby house. Thus the characters of the play are given an extra evening in which to think about the trip they have undertaken and decide whether or not they want to continue. Elvira, who is abandoning her sick husband to run away with another man, decides to return to her husband. A woman who has been following her former lover and his bride decides to turn back and let the young couple begin their marriage without the wife's knowing of her husband's past indiscretions. Another woman, who is approaching middle age, decides also to turn back and not continue to Paris where her last love fling awaited her. A boy who has been going to meet a male "friend" to continue what appears to be a homosexual relationship decides to reform, perhaps because of the influence of an attractive young girl he meets on the plane. Marital infidelity and sex certainly do not seem to be taboo subjects in this play. The humor in the play, however, stems more from the characters themselves than from sex.

The marriages that do not work may be in trouble because the husband is more interested in his career than in his wife. He is the modern businessman who worries too much about money and material success to make a success of his marriage. In ¡Qué "Bollo" es vivir! the wife's chief complaint is that her husband has no time for her; he spends all of his time, or so she thinks, in his office.

We soon learn, however, that he does have time to be unfaithful to her. In Neville's Adelita the young husband is again overly concerned about his job. In this case the marriage is in danger because the wife seeks companionship outside the marriage. Adelita's grandfather can only die in peace when the husband promises him that he will take his wife on a trip and end her friendship with another man while that relationship is still platonic. Even in this marriage, which was a love match between two young people who chose each other as mates, there is a distinct possibility that the wife will go off with another man.

Infidelity is such an expected part of marriage that Pilar in Carlos Llopis' Nosotros, ellas ... y el duende can readily believe that her husband is carrying on an affair with another woman when they have been married only two months. While Llopis ends his play on a happy note and maintains an atmosphere of light comedy, almost farce, throughout, he does make fun of marriage and the battle between the sexes. The wives want to make their marriages a long series of concerts and costume balls, while the husbands would rather stay at home. No matter what the men do to outwit their wives, they never succeed. Women rule their husbands, Eduardo explains to his son-in-law, because there is an elf who aids them from his invisible vantage point:

¿Tú por qué crees que la mujer, siendo más débil, menos inteligente y tan variable, siempre manda y domina sobre el hombre? Porque tiene un aliado sobrenatural, enemigo del sexo masculino, que la protege, y la ampara, y la defiende, contra el que es inútil enfrentarse. 11

The two marriages in the comedy are saved by an eloquent lawyer who, instead of handling the divorces as requested, gives a brilliant speech on the unborn generation to encourage the couples to stay together for the sake of the children they may someday have. Ironically he himself is divorced from his wife.

While most of these plays use marital difficulties only for comic effect, in their totality they do paint a discouraging picture of the state of matrimony in twentieth century Spain. Nowhere is the indictment of marriage and women in particular stronger than in Paso's No hay novedad, doña Adela. Doña Adela, the landlady in the play, is an idealist who refuses to recognize the existence of any catastrophe. Her husband has been deceiving her for years, but she pretends not to believe that he is unfaithful and she pays no attention to those who would wish her to see the reality of her wretched marriage. She is also determined to keep the marriages of her tenants intact, and she succeeds in doing so in spite of the scepticism of Enrique, who betterly declaims against the loss of morality in modern Spain. He is upset by laws that protect the wife, even though the wife herself may be unfaithful to her husband. In the

three marriages of Doña Adela's tenants, it is found that each of the wives is either currently unfaithful to her husband or had a lover before marriage and let the husband believe that she was a virgin. In contemporary Spain, Enrique complains, nothing is what it seems to be. The innocent young bride is not that; she does, in fact, bring ridicule to her unsuspecting husband. Even the furniture in Doña Adela's apartments is so modern that none of the pieces are what they appear to be; the phonograph opens up into a bed. To Enrique the modern furniture is an outward symbol of the decadence of Spanish society.

The recurrence of the theme of divorce and marital infidelity does not surprise the American reader, who is accustomed to discussions of the high percentage of marital failures in the United States. Perhaps more surprising to the American is the number of plays in which the marriages are between middle-aged men and young girls. Although in Spain this kind of marriage is normal, these plays seem to reflect the wishful thinking of the older playwrights: as Neville says in his notes on Rapto, "Una chica joven se enamora de un hombre maduro; eso es lo que los hombres maduros queremos que ocurra, ahora que no es muy seguro que suceda siempre, pero bueno es dar la idea."¹² None of the comedies in which this theme appears is among the better works of the period.

In Felipe Sassone's Yo tengo veinte años a middle-aged man marries his young niece after saving her from marrying a worthless young man. In López Rubio's Veinte y cuarenta a young movie fan marries an established film director; their marriage finally works out after she gives up the idea that her husband should continue his former life and continue seeing his old girl friends so that they do not settle down into middle-aged complacency. In Neville's Rapto the young girl decides she loves the father, not the son to whom she had previously been engaged. She virtually abducts the father to marry him, preferring the separate bedrooms that he has described to her rather than the physical love the son would offer. The girl's decision is flattering to the older man's ego. In another play, Prohibido en otoño, Neville reverses the girl's decision and lets La Codos, whom Antonio, like Professor Higgins in George Bernard Shaw's Pygmalion, has created by rescuing her from the gutter and the life of prostitution her mother had intended for her, prefer a young and uncultured football enthusiast to her aging benefactor.

It is true that Spanish comedies often "escape" from reality. The themes discussed in this chapter do, however, reflect the worries, anxieties, and, at least to a limited extent, the living conditions and problems of contemporary Spain.

NOTES

- ¹Paso, Una bomba llamada Abelardo, p. 16.
- ²Ibid., p. 60.
- ³Sainz de Robles, ed., Teatro español, 1960-61 (Madrid, 1962), p. xv.
- ⁴Calvo-Sotelo, Milagro en la Plaza del Progreso, p. 68.
- ⁵Antonio de Armenteras in Teatro español, 1957-58, p. 22.
- ⁶Tono, Guillermo Hotel in Teatro español de hoy: Antología 1939-1958, ed. Fernando Díaz-Plaja (Madrid, 1958), p. 201.
- ⁷Tono, ¡Qué "Bollo" es vivir! (Madrid, 1952), p. 80.
- ⁸Paso, El cielo dentro de casa (Madrid, 1958), p. 17.
- ⁹Ibid.
- ¹⁰"What's Funny Isn't," Newsweek (Jan. 16, 1951), p. 73.
- ¹¹Llopis, Nosotros, ellas ... y el duende (Madrid, 1953), p. 34.
- ¹²Neville, Teatro, I (Madrid, 1955), 15.

CHAPTER SIX

FANTASY AND LUNACY

As the inventor of rose-colored glasses that allow the viewer to see the world in a new and favorable light, Don Telesforo firmly believes that life is livable only because of illusions. The protagonist of Jacinto Grau's Las gafas de don Telesforo, o un loco de buen capricho, this inventor shows his faith in his own philosophy by creating for his wife the illusion of a lover. Doña Violante is unhappy with her husband; when she is unsuccessful at having him declared insane, she fully intends to leave him. At first her anger is great when she discovers that her "lover" is really her husband in disguise, but finally she returns to Don Telesforo so that she need not lose the man she loves in fantasy.

Grau suggests that man cannot live without some daydreams, and his character quickly recovers when she is disillusioned by reality. In Casona's play Los árboles mueren de pie a heavily endowed organization exists for the sole purpose of creating illusions and making dreams come true, or appear to come true. Mauricio, the head of the organization, feels that he is helping people by giving them happy memories, but Isabel, whom he has saved

from suicide and who is now assisting him, comes to think that illusions are crueler than reality. Fantasy, she finds, is short-lived and the return to truth can be heartbreaking. Before she had lived in poverty and suffered from the cold, but at least the poverty and the cold had been hers and not just illusions. Don Telesforo believes that dreams make life worthwhile; and Isabel, that reality is better than destroyed illusions. Perhaps they are both right, for at its most effective, fantasy has no end.

In many of the most successful plays in the contemporary Spanish theatre, there is an element of fantasy. As in Grau's play, a character may consciously create an illusion for himself, to make his life more pleasant. This is what Paco does in Soriano de Andia's Ayer ... será mañana. Paco knows that he is living in the 1950's, but he keeps the world of 1909 alive so that he may escape occasionally from modern Spain and return to happier moments from his youth. In other plays one character may deliberately create an illusion for another to bring him happiness; thus Adelita in Ruiz Iriarte's El landó de seis caballos helps the old man to live in the past, and Tia Carolina and Tio Gerardo in López Rubio's La venda en los ojos (1954) go to great lengths to shelter their niece Beatriz from the truth that her husband has deserted her. In other cases, however, the

character who has sought refuge in illusion has protected himself from having his fantasy come to an end by crossing the thin line between sanity and insanity. Beatriz, like the protagonist in Luigi Pirandello's Henry IV (1922) pretends to be mad so that those around her will continue to pretend that she has not been deserted. Irene in Buero Vallejo's Irene o el tesoro has become so deeply involved in her fantasy that she cannot and does not want to return to the real world.

Where can the line be drawn between fantasy and reality, between lunacy and sanity? The answer is difficult to give, for often the two extremes begin to merge. In Paso's El cielo dentro de casa neither the wife nor the audience is ever sure whether her glimpse of the future is real, imagined, or a hoax. And, as her husband Julio points out in the same play, perhaps someday the "crazy" people will lock up the "sane" ones. Who can say what is madness and what is not?

Buero Vallejo deals with the question of madness in his play Irene o el tesoro. The author terms the work "la historia de la locura de una mujer buena en medio de la sinrazón de los llamados cuerdos."¹ Irene's life is so wretched that she takes refuge in her own world of fantasy. She has lost her husband, her child was born dead, and she now lives at the mercy of her in-laws. Her mother-in-law and sister-in-law treat her much as the

stepmother and stepsisters treated Cinderella. Irene is no more than a servant in the household. Her father-in-law, Don Dimas, is a miser; he makes everyone's life miserable with his desire to save every possible peseta. In the case of Irene, he gradually comes to begrudge her the food she eats at his expense, and he wishes to have her committed to a state insane asylum where he will no longer have to support her. Irene sinks deeper and deeper into her daydreams. She does not hear when someone comes to the door or speaks to her. She longs for a fairy tale land of fantastic creatures, fairies and monsters and enchanted donkeys. In particular she longs for a land of little elves. "Y por los túneles de las montañas, y en las casas corrían los duendes. Duendecitos chiquitines, que buscaban diamantes y monedas Y siempre eran amigos de una linda princesa."²

Finally an elf does come to befriend Irene. His name is Juanito, and he satisfies Irene's longing for her dead baby, as well as her desire for fantasy. His company cures her of her loneliness and makes her life bearable. His primary purpose in coming to the house is to hunt for treasure, for gold that is hidden in the walls, so he is dressed as a miner. But he wishes to bring happiness and laughter into Irene's life, and the mysterious voice that directs his actions gives him permission to be visible to her.

Juanito contributes many moments of comedy to the play, for he is mischievous and enjoys playing tricks. As only Irene can see and hear him, she and the audience get the opportunity to laugh at the other characters. Juanito may exist only in the imagination of Irene, but the others are able to hear and feel him. Thus he resorts to the old comic device of hitting someone who, as he cannot see him, accuses the wrong person.

Don Dimas, who is already obsessed by his love for money, hears the noises of the elf hunting for treasure and fears that someone is looking for his money; his obsessions have certainly reached the point of insanity when the psychiatrist, whom he has hired to examine Irene, decides to have Don Dimas committed to the asylum instead of the harmless dreamer. Irene now has the opportunity to return to reality and fashion a new life for herself. Daniel, a boarder in the house, loves her and wants to save her, but Irene cannot forsake her fantasy. As the mysterious voice tells Juanito, "Ella no puede ya vivir sin lo maravilloso. Y Daniel tiene que aprender a salvarse ... solo."³ The little elf has completed his mission and must return to the land from which he came. The treasure that he was seeking was Irene herself; she represents the gold of goodness. Rather than stay behind without Juanito, Irene chooses to go with him. Carrying the sleeping elf on her shoulder and singing a lullaby to him, Irene jumps out the window and kills herself.

The humor in Buero Vallejo's play is on several different levels. There are the obvious comic devices in the elf's pranks. There is likewise the mechanical humor resultant from the character of the miser. On a higher planer there is in this comedy, as in most to be discussed in this chapter, the humor from contrasts between two planes of reality, the juxtaposition of some sort of fantasy and what appears to be the truth. In Irene o el tesoro there is also humor on its highest level, the humor that brings tears rather than smiles. Irene is a pathetic figure who draws our sympathy. Juanito, in addition to being the physical manifestation of Irene's inner longings, is a delightful little creature. In combination they present a comedy that verges on tragedy, a mixture of what Sainz de Robles has called "suave humor" and "suave melancolía."⁴ If both audience and critical reaction to the play was less than wholeheartedly enthusiastic, we cannot help but agree with the critic who felt that Buero Vallejo's blend of fantasy and realism was highly underrated.⁵

Irene's fantasy becomes so real for her that she loses her grip on reality and cannot give up her dreams to return to sanity. If the only way she can keep her fantasy from coming to an end is to die, she is willing to commit suicide. The heroine of López Rubio's La venda en los ojos, on the other hand, is willing to reject

lunacy and return to reality. The difference between the two is that Irene sincerely believes in her elf, while Beatriz's supposed madness for ten years has been nothing but a pretense she has created in self-defense.

Beatriz's husband deserted her ten years before the action of the play begins. He had gone on a trip and had failed to return. Each day, however, Beatriz continues to go to meet him in a constant repetition of the day her illusions of her marriage collapsed. By pretending that the desertion never took place, she does not have to admit her failure. Her aging aunt and uncle, Carolina and Gerardo, build a world of fantasy around Beatriz to protect her from the truth. They introduce gadgets into the household, adopt disguises, and run outlandish advertisements in the newspaper, all as part of their efforts to humor their niece. At first the audience suspects that it is they, not Beatriz, who are insane, but all of their antics are comic.

In Irene o el tesoro the framework of the comedy itself is believable, although some of the characters belong to the world of fantasy. In La venda en los ojos a good part of the play is unbelievable. The aunt and uncle run advertisements in the paper supposedly to sell things, but really to bring visitors to the house. The buyer who comes immediately makes himself part of the household and remains to see the outcome of Beatriz's

drama. From time to time he calls his wife to explain his absence, and she unbelievably accepts his moving in with strangers for a period of days. For ten years Beatriz has been making phone calls to an imaginary friend, and the friend finally appears. When Beatriz meets a strange man and claims that he is her missing husband, he accepts the pretense. All of these characters, even those not related to Beatriz, are willing to enter into the spirit of her illusions.

Beatriz is forced into admitting her pretense when her real husband suddenly appears. He is sick and now wants to return to the home he deserted. Asserting her rights as a woman, Beatriz rejects him. Now that she has a new love, she readily discards the past and her fantasy to build a new life for herself. Unlike Irene, who is not interested in replacing the husband she lost, Beatriz is willing to embark on a new romance.

Again, as in Buero Vallejo's play, there are several different levels of humor in La venda en los ojos. There is the almost farcical humor of the old aunt's disguises and the old couple's hobby of running advertisements. There is humor from surprise when the "imaginary" telephone friend appears; even Beatriz did not realize that someone really was listening to her conversations and was interested in what happened to her. There is, as in Irene o el tesoro, humor from contrast when the real and imaginary

worlds meet. In the opening scene López Rubio also parodies a common technique of giving the exposition.⁶ López Rubio's comedy deserves the praise of Fernández Cuenca, who calls it one of the best contemporary Spanish comedies and finds that in it the author shows "indudable maestría que conjuga los planos reales y los imaginarios con tanta suavidad y delicadeza como una generosa invitación al ensueño y a la poesía."⁷

Madness, as we have previously mentioned, also appears as the central theme in Calvo-Sotelo's María Antonieta. Here the heroine, living in twentieth century Paris, believes that she is the eighteenth century French queen come back to life. Jaime, the man who befriends her and falls in love with her, creates for her the illusion that she really is Marie Antoinette. While the aunt and uncle in La venda en los ojos humor the fantasy of their niece to protect her, Jaime hopes to shock María Antonieta back to reality.

Buero Vallejo makes it clear that, no matter how real he may be to Irene, Juanito is just the figment of her imagination. Calvo-Sotelo does not clarify the identity of his heroine. The reader or spectator may believe what he wishes. The author draws no line between fantasy and reality to differentiate one from the other.

This technique, which is also used in several other contemporary Spanish plays in which fantasy is an important

element, is reminiscent of Pirandello's play Right You Are! (If You Think So) (1918). In this play the Italian author asks the questions "What is truth?" and "Who is mad?" He demonstrates that truth is relative and that it is sometimes impossible to tell what is fantasy and what is reality. An element of fantasy appears in other Pirandello plays, and doubtless the Italian playwright influenced contemporary authors in Spain and other countries.⁸ In another of his plays, Henry IV, Pirandello deals with madness. This time his protagonist, who has recovered from temporary insanity in which he believed himself to be the historical king, continues to pretend madness in order to enjoy his escape from reality and to make fun of those who humor him in his madness. Again the author makes the point that a situation is real if you think it is. In Pirandello's best known work, Six Characters in Search of an Author (1921), he established the autonomous character who is free from author and plot. The influence of Pirandello in this aspect of his work may also be found in contemporary Spanish plays according to at least one critic. Referring to similar characters as "illogical characters," Theodore S. Beardsley, Jr., finds examples of them in Calvo-Sotelo's María Antonieta and in Buero Vallejo's Irene o el tesoro and Casi un cuento de hadas, among other works.⁹

Although most of Buero Vallejo's works are serious drama, no study of humor in the contemporary Spanish theatre would be complete without mention of Irene o el tesoro and Casi un cuento de hadas (1953). In the latter of these two plays, based on a tale by Perrault, Buero Vallejo makes the point like Pirandello that reality is relative and that things are often the way we believe them to be. The central figures of the work are Leticia, a beautiful but stupid princess, and Riquet, an intelligent but ugly prince. Because of their mutual love, Leticia gains in wisdom and Riquet, in beauty. Because they do not see each other as the world sees them, they actually change to fulfill their vision of each other. The role of Riquet is played by two different actors, one to portray him in his ugliness and another, as the handsome man Leticia believes him to be.

Leticia resembles Irene in various ways. Her parents and sister are cruel to her, as Irene's in-laws are to Buero Vallejo's other heroine. There is no real indication that Leticia is stupid; she plays with dolls at an adult age, but perhaps she plays with them to escape from the realities of her life in the same way that Irene finds comfort in the elf. Leticia is stupid when her family believes her to be, but she is quite intelligent when Riquet thinks that she is. Before the two can marry, however, Riquet is forced to leave Leticia and her court

to return to his mother who is dying. In his absence Leticia falls in love with the handsome but empty-headed Armando. Under Armando's influence, she becomes stupid again. Riquet returns, kills Armando, and wins Leticia back, but the magic illusion of their love is gone, and Leticia can no longer transform Riquet's ugliness to beauty.

Although Casi un cuento de hadas borders on tragedy, it is written in a light tone and, with its fairy tale atmosphere, can easily be considered a humorous work. The author himself considers the work to be humorous and finds that humor can treat the same serious themes as tragedy:

Tragedia y humorismo son dos formas legítimas de afrontar un mismo hecho humano; quizá las dos mejores formas de conferirle sentido, si por humorismo entendemos una suerte de agudo y comprensivo buen temple ante los acontecimientos aciagos y no su escamoteo chistoso.¹⁰

Buero Vallejo has chosen a setting of fantasy to treat his theme in this case. The atmosphere is quite like that of an eighteenth century court, but the fairy tale background is retained by the introduction of Oriana, a very human fairy who looks out for Leticia and Riquet and eventually persuades Leticia's ugly sister to retreat to her tower and become her disciple.

Illusion, as we have seen, may be carried to the extreme of lunacy, but it may also be a well-intentioned means that one person uses to help another. This is the

case in Casona's Los árboles mueren de pie and López Rubio's La venda en los ojos. The same device appears in several other Spanish plays of the contemporary period.

In Neville's El baile there are several examples of fantasy used to bring happiness to a loved one. The setting of the play is realistic, as are the characters, but the characters themselves create illusions for one another. In the second act, when Pedro and Julián discover that Adela is ill and has only two or three months to live, they hide the truth from her and plan to devote their full attention to her. Both avid insect collectors, they throw out their collections so that Adela may be the center of attention. Julián, after twenty-five years of living with Pedro and his wife, has decided to get married himself, but when he learns of Adela's illness, he gives up all such plans so that he may accompany the couple on a trip and let Adela continue to believe in his undivided devotion to her. The illusion that the two men create, however, is two-sided, for Adela, too, knows of her impending death. Rather than spoil the happiness the two men will derive from sheltering her, she does not let them know that she is aware of what is to come. In this sense she is like the grandmother in Los árboles mueren de pie who does not let her husband, Mauricio, and Isabel know that their efforts have been to no avail as she has learned the identity of the real

Mauricio. Both women will die standing in order to shelter the loved ones they leave behind; Pedro and Julián will be comforted after she is gone by thinking that they fooled her and protected her from the truth during the last months of her life.

Fantasy again plays a role in the third act of El baile. Pedro and Julián are old now and would be lonely were the granddaughter Adelita not visiting them. The young girl so closely resembles her grandmother that they can pretend she is the Adela they both loved. When the opportunity comes for Adelita to go to a costume ball and wear the same dress her grandmother once wore, she is willing to go along with the old men's illusion of the past and be Adela for them. She is enchanted by the old furniture that the men have brought out once again, and she appreciates the happiness that their fantasy brings them, so she decides to remain with them, rather than return to Washington with her mother, and help them create their illusion of the past.

In Ruiz Iriarte's El landó de seis caballos there is again a juxtaposition of reality and fantasy and the situation of one character creating illusions to help those she loves. In El landó de seis caballos, however, the contrast between fantasy and reality is much more vivid than in El baile, and there is much more obvious comic exaggeration. Again the purpose of the fantasy

is to keep the past alive. Madness, too, is a theme here, as in López Rubio's La venda en los ojos or Calvo-Sotelo's María Antonieta. Chapete, now an old man, hit his head in an accident many years before while serving as coachman for a duke. As a result of his accident, he has suffered from certain delusions. The duke and his servants chose to humor Chapete, rather than force him to confront reality. For Chapete, the years have not passed. He still drives an imaginary coach; Adelita is still his sweetheart. Two other servants created the illusion of the past so well for Chapete that they, too, can no longer draw a line between their fantasy and reality. After the death of the duke, only Adelita knows what is fantasy and what is not. When she learns that she has only a short time left to live, she seeks someone to take her place and help the three old men continue with their illusions.

The play has many good comic elements: the imaginary coach and travels of the four old people, the rivalry of the three young women who have received identical letters from a mysterious duke inviting them to this house in the country, the orchestra leader who must play by himself because he has been deserted by all of his "boys," including his own father. There is also the more subtle, poetic humor of the fantasy itself and the happiness it brings to the characters.

Isabel, the young woman who decides to remain and take Adelita's place, well knows the value of fantasy. In her own life she has missed the romance that she has longed for, and thus she has created for herself an imaginary sweetheart to whom she can write love letters. Happiness for her comes only when she shuts her eyes to reality:

Yo creo que la felicidad es como una gran fiesta que tiene una víspera muy larga. Tan larga, tan larga es la víspera, que la felicidad llega demasiado tarde. Por eso la única felicidad está en la víspera. Así vivo, soñando en la víspera de la felicidad. Y cuando cierro los ojos, soy feliz.¹¹

With her own predisposition to fantasy, Isabel quickly becomes part of the illusions of the household. Like a child, she can pretend with the old people that their arrangement of chairs is really a coach and that they can make the trips they talk about. The house for her is "el reino de la imaginación, la casa de los sueños."¹² Because the old men accept their fantasy as truth, Isabel can too. Nor is she surprised when it is raining and the old people cannot go out that they bring the "country" inside, in the form of one small almond tree. Because they can play the game of illusion, she and Florencio, another of the duke's "guests," can sit under that little tree and fall in love.

Happiness, Isabel discovers, can be found in riding in a coach that does not exist. It is, as Adelita explains, the happiness that comes from bringing happiness to others.

In Los pobrecitos, one of the few contemporary Spanish comedies dealing with the lower economic classes, Alfonso Paso creates another heroine who creates illusions for others. Leonor is much like Irene in Irene o el tesoro and Isabel in El landó de seis caballos. She has taken refuge in her own dream world and is oblivious to reality. She is drawn into the real world once again only by love. Carlos, an unsuccessful playwright, has the ability to awaken her from her dreams by his love, just as Beatriz is willing to give up her fantasy because of a new romance in La venda en los ojos. All of the tenants of the boardinghouse in which Leonor lives have created dreams for themselves to escape from reality. Leonor's own dream is that she owns land covered with valuable orange trees. Once she comes out of her dream world long enough to meet the other roomers, she tells them of her wealth and of the paradise to which she will one day return. After meeting the others, however, and becoming aware of their problems and their poverty, she takes compassion on them. One day each of them receives an envelope containing enough money to make his dreams come true. All except Carlos and Julio, a roomer remarkable for his good sense, accept the event as a miracle that will be repeated. To Julio the miracle is that someone felt a love that enabled him to give, not to "the poor," but to concrete individuals. Eventually

the truth is learned that Leonor gave to her friends the money which she had stolen from a bank. She must pay for the crime she committed to create an illusion for those around her and bring them happiness. Like the protagonist in Milagro en la Plaza del Progreso, Leonor is motivated to steal in order to give to the poor. She is as unaware of the crime she is committing as Irene is of her suicide.

The lesson that many of these plays offer is that reality can be changed; if we are not content with things the way they are, through fantasy we can alter them to fit our dreams. In El baile Julián and Pedro are successful in reviving the past with Adelita's help. In El landó de seis caballos time has stood still for the three old men. The same process takes place with an even more noticeable effect in Mihura's Maribel y la extraña familia. Because the two old ladies do not recognize Maribel to be a prostitute, they create for her an illusion of the past that is so vivid that Maribel herself comes to believe that she has been a respectable seamstress. Fantasy can be contagious. Casona in Romance en tres noches (1938) shows a similar effect of fantasy when Elsa, captivated by Dan's idealism, quits working for a dope ring to start a new life at Dan's weather information station in the forest. Doña Adela in Paso's No hay novedad, doña Adela attempts to perform the same miracle. Things are what you believe them to be, she thinks, so

that if she ignores her own marital difficulties and refuses to recognize the existence of similar problems in other marriages, all of the couples involved will continue to be happy. Adela, through the illusions that she creates, is successful in saving several marriages, but she is not able to alter the truth of her own husband's infidelity in the same way that Maribel's future in-laws are able to change the young woman's attitude and way of life. The humor in these comedies springs in large part from the contrast between the idealistic viewpoint of some of the characters and the harsh realities as seen by the others.

The characters in López Rubio's Celos del aire also use illusion to convince themselves of the nonexistence of an unpleasant situation. Doña Aurelia and Don Pedro, an old couple who own a chateau in the country, are forced into renting their house during the summer for economic reasons. It is hard for them to accept their financial difficulties and to have strangers living with them, so they decide to ignore the presence of the renters, Cristina and Bernardo. They pretend that they are still alone, that their renters are invisible, and they do not speak to the young couple. Their servant Gervasio waits on the boarders but does not mention them to his employers. The situation offers great comic potential. In the opening scene, before the audience is aware of the game Doña

Aurelia and Don Pedro are playing, there are two tea services on stage. Doña Aurelia tells Gervasio to remove the tea service, and he asks which one. She assures him that this is only one tea service, and he must rephrase his question to, "Supposing that there were two tea services, should I remove both?" The poor servant has difficulty answering any question to his mistress's satisfaction. When she asks if any mail has come, he does not know what to reply until Don Pedro rewords the question to ask if any mail has come for them. As the play progresses, Gervasio, under the influence of the tips offered him by the renters and their guests, gradually loses his loyalty to the old couple. Finally the old people themselves break their ban of silence when they feel that they can save Cristina's and Bernardo's marriage.

Celos del aire contains more than just this one pretense. There is also the illusion of being lovers that Bernardo and Isabel create at the suggestion of Enrique, Isabel's playwright husband, in order to cure Cristina of her jealousy. But this illusion has two facets, for Isabel and Bernardo really are lovers pretending not to be. For years Isabel has been playing a game with her husband, letting him believe that she is a loving wife. Enrique is unaware of his wife's infidelity because he is so entangled in his own imaginary world from which he draws the material for his plays. He is willing to take

the role of Cristina's lover when she learns the truth of the game her husband has been playing and wants to play a trick on him, too. But through this illusion, Isabel learns that Bernardo really loves his wife and for revenge she destroys all of the fantasy to let Cristina know of her husband's marital infidelity. When confronted with reality, Cristina finds that the happiness of her marriage is gone until Doña Aurelia and Don Pedro break their silence to advise the young couple to forgive and forget; their own marriage survived such a crisis, and time will heal the wounds.

A similar theme of pretended marital infidelity appears in other comedies. In Juego de niños the wife pretends to have a lover in order to win back her unfaithful husband, only to discover that soon fantasy and reality begin to blend and neither she nor her pretended lover knows just how much of their love is real and how much is illusion. In ¡Qué "Bollo" es vivir! the husband also pretends to have a mistress in order to teach his wife a lesson, and the woman who pretends to be his mistress really is.

Just how real fantasy can become is shown in another play by López Rubio, Alberto (1949). As in the American play Harvey (1944) by Mary Coyle Chase, the title role is that of an imaginary character. Harvey is a man-sized rabbit, and Alberto is a generous young man of thirty-two.

The scene is a boardinghouse where the various roomers have been so content that they have come to think of each other as one family. Their landlady is going to leave; she has waited faithfully for years for her sweetheart who went to America and never returned. Now, after all this time, he has sent for her to replace his wife, now deceased, and take care of his three children.

Rather than hunt for rooms elsewhere, the tenants decide to stay together. None of them wishes to take the responsibility of handling finances and collecting rent, so, at the suggestion of the dreamy Leticia, they create the imaginary Alberto. Each one of the tenants has a close connection with Alberto. They are, respectively, his mother, his godmother, his uncle, and his administrator. Leticia herself is his secretary, and Javier, a young man who lives in the same building and loves Leticia, is his best friend. Alberto, of course, is never home. He has always just gone on a trip and will be returning soon.

Alberto soon becomes so real in the minds of the tenants that the fiction gets out of hand and the group is faced with financial disaster. Each pays his rent to Alberto, and Alberto, out of his native generosity, buys the things the household needs. Soon he is buying cigars for the men, candy for his godmother, the Marquesa, and even flowers for one tenant's girl friend. Because he believes Alberto to be lucky, his administrator invests

Alberto's money in a stock that fails; as he has always been bad at business, the man would ordinarily not have invested money at all had he not put his faith in the mythical Alberto. The one who takes Alberto most seriously is Leticia. She has never found a flesh and blood man who could match her ideals; she ignores Javier and his love for her; thus she creates for herself the imaginary Alberto to be her sweetheart just as Isabel in El landó de seis caballos creates an imaginary lover to whom she can write letters. Isabel does so because no man has ever paid attention to her; once she meets Florencio, she readily gives up her fantasy. Leticia is not willing to sacrifice Alberto for the imperfections of a real man. She is waiting for a miracle that will make Alberto come to life. The other roomers are shocked to find Leticia coming out of Alberto's room in the middle of the night. They are as scandalized as if Alberto existed. Actually, Leticia heard another tenant in the room trying to borrow a razor blade from Alberto, and she hoped to find Alberto himself.

Afraid of permanently losing Leticia to a myth, Javier stages a little play to disillusion her. Like Jaime in María Antonieta, he hopes to shock the woman he loves back to reality. He arranges to have the police come looking for Alberto, and he even sends his secretary to be the other woman in Alberto's life.

The illusion of Alberto has become so real for the people playing the game that the fantasy begins to destroy their lives and their friendship. They finally agree that they will have to kill Alberto, and his pretended mother is so grieved that she cries at the news of his death. Whether or not Leticia will ever value the real love of Javier more than the love she created for herself in her own mind is left undetermined in the comedy.

In the meantime their landlady, Doña Elena, has had her illusions destroyed also. Her old sweetheart's children are mulattoes, and nothing that she expected from her love turned out to exist in reality. With her dream shattered, she has returned to her boardinghouse.

¿Quién me mandaba a mí hurgar en la realidad de la vida, si tenía lo más hermoso del mundo, que era el sueño? Era mucha ganga que lo que yo había ido imaginando, poco a poco, día a día, en mi modestia, durante veinte años, resultase tal cual. Los sueños los paga la vida con descuento. 15

For Doña Elena, if not for Leticia, the imaginary love has proved to be more satisfying than reality. López Rubio, however, in this play does not clarify whether or not fantasy is beneficial. For Doña Elena her day-dreams made life worthwhile and she suffers from being disillusioned. On the other hand, he also shows the disaster that fantasy can bring when imagination is not carefully controlled.

A romance similar to that of Doña Elena is seen in Casona's delightful La casa de los siete balcones (1957).

In this work Tia Genoveva also waits for a letter to come from her sweetheart who has gone to America. When the letter finally arrives, it has been forged by her brother-in-law to trick her into leaving her home and giving him her fortune. The theme of the woman waiting for the sweetheart to return is likewise treated by García Lorca in Doña Rosita la soltera (1935).

The humor in Alberto comes in part from the characters themselves and in part from the juxtaposition of fantasy and reality. Among the roomers at the boarding-house are the Marquesa, an old woman who comically does not wish to admit her wealth and who wills to Alberto an imaginary finca; Rosalía, the Marquesa's inseparable and silent companion who is never allowed by her mistress to have opinions or any individuality; Doña Sofía, a widow who is comic in her over protection of her twenty-five year old daughter, who is, according to her mother, too young and innocent to hear many of the discussions in the household. In addition to the characters who are comic in many of their exaggerated traits, there is much poetic humor in the attitude the characters adopt in relationship to the imaginary Alberto. There are comic moments when the servant, Sebastián, tries to take advantage of Alberto's generosity in the same way that the tenants have. One of the men finds the servant helping himself to cigars that have been ordered in Alberto's

name; but both Don José and Don Pascual must also find excuses for their abuse of household funds by saying that Alberto has told them to help themselves. The humorous contrast between the two planes of reality becomes intense when the tenants begin to take their own fantasy so seriously that they are willing to condemn Leticia for immorality when they find her leaving Alberto's room in the middle of the night.

In many of the contemporary Spanish comedies in which fantasy takes a part, we find illusion built upon illusion as one character attempts to cure another of his escape from reality. Jaime stages several illusions to shock María Antonieta back to what he believes is her real identity. Enrique plans a little play to cure Cristina of her jealousy based on imagination in Celos del aire. López Rubio again uses the same technique in Alberto when Javier stages a play to convince Leticia that her imaginary sweetheart is not perfect. The use of a similar device becomes more sophisticated in Paso's El cielo dentro de casa when Julio wants to shatter his wife's illusions about herself, show her what she is like and what she can easily become, and at the same time keep her from leaving him for another man.

Laura has decided to leave Julio, and, much to her surprise, he accepts her decision calmly and does not try to force her to stay. After leaving the house, however,

she finds that she has forgotten her passport; on returning for it, she is bewildered by the changes that have taken place during her absence. There is a certain amount of resultant comedy from her bewilderment when she learns that a number of years have gone by, that she has been replaced in the house by another woman, that the somber colors she had used to furnish the house have vanished. The whole atmosphere has changed, and there is no longer a place for her in the home she thinks she left just an hour or two before. Her confusion is similar to that of Mercedes in El caso de la mujer asesinadita when she is not recognized by her servants and learns that she is dead and that her husband has remarried.

As a result of her glimpse of the future, which may have been a little farce planned by her husband or may have been some sort of supernatural look at her possible destiny, Laura decides to stay with her husband. At last she sees how false have been her pretenses at culture and her irritation at her husband's casual dress--in the first act of the play she has comically repeated a complaint about Julio's not being dressed in coat and tie at all times. She realizes that eventually no one will love her if she leaves Julio and goes from one man to another, but now Julio seems indifferent to having her back. Taking a clue from Julio himself, she stages an illusion for him to win back his love. She reconstructs

a scene from the past when Julio came home from the war and found his eager bride, all dressed in green, waiting for him. Julio is pleased by his wife's use of fantasy, her promise to be that eager bride once again, and her suggestion that his illegitimate son, born before they were married, come to live with them as their marriage never produced children. As a result of the two illusions, one of the future and the other of the past, their marriage is saved and Laura is cured of her pretensions.

Dreams revealing the future also appear in Cason's La llave en el desván (1951), where the author also introduces the theme, previously discussed in connection with Mihura's Mi adorado Juan, of an unscrupulous partner's stealing and selling scientific secrets.

One level of illusion in El cielo dentro de casa has been Laura's own glorified viewpoint of herself. In two other comedies, already discussed in previous chapters, we find that characters who have protected themselves by fantasy from an accurate opinion of themselves have been released from their self-deceptions as was Laura. In Mi adorado Juan, Juan eventually learns that his happy-go-lucky outlook on life, his determination to fish and talk instead of becoming involved in any serious work, have been a way of fooling himself. When he becomes disillusioned with his escape from reality, just as he had earlier in his life become disillusioned when reality did

not live up to his ideals, he gives up his humorous ne'er-do-well role to return to his profession as a doctor. In Ruiz Iriarte's Esta noche es la víspera several characters find release from self-deception and learn that they have been sheltering themselves in fantasy. Anita, an attractive middle-aged woman whose most obvious comic trait is her talkativeness, realizes that she is going to Paris to meet a man, apparently not because it is a great romance as she might like to pretend it to be, but because she wishes to believe herself to be younger than she is. A young girl who pretends to be French admits that she has been unfair when she runs away because her father has remarried, and she decides to return home. Elvira, the central character of the play, also has the illusion shattered that she has built around herself. She does not love the man with whom she is going to Paris; she is really only running away from the responsibility of caring for a sick husband who may never get well.

In another of Ruiz Iriarte's plays, La soltera rebelde, the main character goes through several pretenses before she discovers what she is really like and what she wants from life. At the beginning of the play, she is comic because of her fits of bad temper that scare her nieces and her sister, for she throws things at anyone who offends her, and she is offended very easily. Later the audience learns that the comic ill temper is perhaps

only a cover-up for Lupe's sensitive nature. After admitting to her nieces that she has never been kissed and after turning down the offer of marriage that her sister has arranged for her, Lupe goes through a complete change of appearance in an effort to be attractive to men. She establishes a romance with the Bohemian organist, Estebán, and finally rejects his offer of marriage as well. She has come to realize that her real character is that of the recluse she has always been, living in an old house near a convent in Montalbán. She decides to return to her home in the provinces where she can hear the nuns singing at mass and be free to enjoy the poetry of an imaginary love rather than confront the problems presented by a flesh and blood husband. Like Doña Elena in Alberto, Lupe believes that the dreams are superior to the reality of love.

In addition to the various facets of fantasy already discussed--fantasy carried to the extreme of lunacy, less extreme examples of illusion used to deceive oneself or to help others find happiness--a number of the contemporary Spanish comedies introduce elements of the supernatural. The dead return to communicate with the living, death and the devil appear on stage as characters, the worlds of the living and the dead are placed in juxtaposition for comic effect.

Ghosts appear on stage in several of the contemporary plays. Most commonly they represent the fantasy of the

living who still feel so close to the loved ones that they have lost that they are able to see and communicate with them. Very often the living person who can see the ghosts is old himself and will soon be able to cross the line between life and death.

In Neville's Adelita the aging Pedro is the only one left of the three characters who appeared in El baile, the first play of the two play series. His wife Adela died in the first play, and his friend Julián dies during the action of the sequel play. But Julián continues to appear on stage after his death. He is able to talk to Pedro and even knows where the sweets are that have been hidden from his diabetic friend. At the end of the play, when it is time for death to come for Pedro, too, Adela reappears to welcome her husband to the land of the dead. In Galvo-Sotelo's Plaza de Oriente Don Gabriel, too, in his old age is able to communicate with his loved ones who have died. The characters in this case do not appear on stage as they do in Adelita, but the fantasy of the ghosts does take place. Again, the ghost of Don Gabriel's wife is waiting for him. In Soriano de Andia's Ayer ... será mañana Don Paco is able to communicate with the ghost of his wife and, as he is the only one who can see her and others can hear him talking to her, the dead person's appearances create many comic moments.

Half of the main characters in López Rubio's La otra orilla are dead, but they do not communicate with the living. The poetic humor of López Rubio's play comes from the contrast between the reality of the world of the living and the author's fantasy of the world of the recently dead. The dead, all of whom were shot just a few minutes before, remain at the scene of their death. Following their humorous discovery that they are no longer alive, they make a number of discoveries about what the loved ones they left behind really think of them. They soon learn that there is little respect for the dead and much hypocrisy among the living. After seeing what the lives they led were really like, none of the four has any desire to return to the land of the living; they prefer to remain on "the other shore."

The dead also appear in Mihura's El caso de la mujer asesinadita, a comedy in which there is much poetic fantasy. In the opening scene of the play, Mercedes has a dream in which she discovers that she is dead, and in the dream she finds out what will happen to her home after she is gone. Later in the play she meets an elderly couple who give her advice on winning back her husband's love only to learn that her new friends have been dead for five years. In the closing scene of the play, when the fantasy reaches its high point, Mercedes is really dead, having intentionally urged her husband to murder her,

and she joins the man she loves, Norton, in eternity after he, too, has arranged his death. Like Mercedes, Norton arranges his death according to what he learned in a dream, and Mercedes comically grows impatient for him to join her in death, for it takes him longer to arrange to have a fire truck hit his car in a snowstorm than it took her to have her husband put poison in her milk.

Casona also introduces ghosts in La casa de los siete balcones. The mute boy Uriel can communicate with only one living person, his aunt Genoveva. Shut off from all other people, he finds solace in the visits of his mother's ghost, his grandfather's, and that of a childhood friend.

Less common in these contemporary Spanish comedies than ghosts is the figure of death itself. Death is the central figure in Casona's La dama del alba, and the figure of death also appears briefly near the end of García Lorca's poetic drama Bodas de sangre, but among the comedies written after 1945 in Spain death is seldom introduced as a character on stage. In Neville's Adelita death is La Dama Gris. The lady in gray first appears to Julián at the dance to which he and Pedro take Adelita. She appeals to Julián so much that he dances more than he should, catches cold, and dies. After the dance she comes to see him at his house and leaves behind a gray

glove. Later she returns to the house and once again leaves her trademark, a gray glove, to indicate to Pedro that she has come for him. He begs for more time on earth so that he can be sure that his granddaughter's marriage will not end in disaster, but death cannot long be stalled. Death in this play is depicted as a charming woman, and neither of the two men is unhappy to see her and accompany her once he knows that affairs on earth will take care of themselves after he is gone. Death is also a young woman in Enrique Suárez de Deza's interesting work El calendario que perdió siete días (1950). In this play a Don Juan succeeds in seducing death, and for seven days she is his mistress. During her love affair she neglects her duties, so nothing dies. Likewise, as life is merely the reflection of death, nothing that is scheduled to be born comes to life. At the end of the week, Juan is so enamored of death that he seduces her in a cemetery and dies.

Both death and the devil have been figures that have interested playwrights throughout literary history. In the contemporary Spanish theatre Neville creates examples of each. His portrayal of death is not very surprising, although she is not at all awesome. Neville's version of the devil, however, is an original piece of fantasy and differs greatly from the devil in earlier Faust plays, by which Veinte años is inspired. Pepe, Neville's

protagonist, like Faust, is willing to sell his soul to the devil, not for knowledge, but for a return to youth so that he may win the love of young girls. In Neville's work so many old men want their youth back that one devil cannot handle the innumerable transactions. The devil in this play, therefore, is only a vice-devil, and he does not at all resemble the legendary figure with horns and a tail. The vice-devil is described as an "officinista galdosiano." He has a cellucoid collar, wears glasses tied on a string, and looks like a clerk from the end of the nineteenth century. He can easily be summoned by picking up a copy of Faust and repeatedly appears whenever someone does just that, whether or not they want him. Times have changed since Faust sold his soul. Souls are no longer in demand, and the vice-devil is willing to restore the youth of Pepe, and later of his wife Faustina, because they give him items of value. Comically, Faustina tries to outwit the devil by paying for his services with a compact decorated by fake sapphires. Making a pact with the devil in Neville's play is not so much a frightening, supernatural event as a business deal made between two parties who are each trying to drive a hard bargain and are willing to resort to dishonesty. When Pepe and Faustina both decide to return to their real ages, Faustina is vain enough to wish for a face without wrinkles. The vice-devil is willing to grant

her request, but he no longer trusts her and will accept nothing but American dollars in payment for his services. Later the vice-devil's own dealings catch up with him, and, as he drops down from the chimney while Faustina is watching, we learn that he has been so bad that he has been thrown out of hell.

Neville's bit of fantasy here, his interpretation of the devil in a modern business world, is most amusing but seems to offer no profound philosophy as is to be found in earlier versions of the legend. Theology plays no part in Neville's farce.

At the opposite pole from Neville's devil is the angel who appears on stage in Galvo-Sotelo's Milagro en la Plaza del Progreso. Under heavenly inspiration--or so he says--Claudio has given away one million pesetas belonging to his employer. To save him from a jail sentence, the money must be returned. Claudio's wife, Eulalia, is convinced that the miracle is accomplished because of the intervention of San Cosme, to whom she has prayed for help. In this atmosphere in which the saint plays such an important part, it is not surprising to learn that there is an angel who has inspired Claudio to give away the money and who, at the end of the play, inspires him to open his home to the homeless. What is surprising is that this angel of good deeds is Claudio's niece Julita, or at least the angel acts through the form

of Julita, who may herself not be aware of her double role. The angel's appearance at the end of the play is humorous, for the audience now knows that, in spite of the money's having been returned, Claudio's troubles are just beginning.

All of the comedies mentioned so far are to some extent realistic in spite of the elements of fantasy that they contain. The settings are everyday scenes for the most part and the characters are usually believable, with the exception of the supernatural ones, in spite of any traits they may have that are exaggerated for comic effect. Even in Casi un cuento de hadas, with its fairy tale atmosphere, the setting could easily be a historical one instead of one of fantasy, and the characters, including the fairy Oriana, are quite human. In a play like El landó de seis caballos, with its imaginary coach and the imaginary travels of the old people, the unrealistic elements are "explained" by the insanity of the old men. Although such clear explanations of what has happened are not given in María Antonieta or El cielo dentro de casa, again the characters are realistic human beings and the stage settings are not fantastic.

Fantasy is used in the stage settings of Paso's El canto de la cigarra, where the author has let his imaginative powers run wild. A house that is falling apart, where the lights are turned on by throwing a book at the

wall, where it is possible to keep a lost alligator in the bathtub, where the whole house may be filled with bottles of milk, and where the inhabitants bear names like Aristóbulo, Bisbisiana, and Amaranta, can be described as fantastic. In the other comedies elements of fantasy are interspersed in an essentially realistic setting, but here the fantasy has complete sway.

Paso's play, however, does not reach the extremes of whimsy to be found in some of Mihura's works. Certain aspects of the fantasy to be found in Ni pobre ni rico, sino todo lo contrario and ¡Sublime decisión! have already been discussed in the section on humor from incongruity in Chapter One. The best example of surrealist humor among Mihura's plays and one of the best comedies in the contemporary Spanish theatre is Tres sombreros de copa. Mihura himself calls the play the comedy of the red-haired girls who do not have mothers and who adore gramophone music. The men are ridiculous because of their exaggerated beards and moustaches, but they do not realize this and always speak with great dignity. All of the characters, according to the author, have something strange, something crazy about them, but it is hard to say just what; this is especially true of Don Rosario, Don Sacramento, and the Hateful Gentleman. Only Paula, the heroine, is saved from this, for she lives her romance with a great truth and is immune to the ridiculous atmosphere that surrounds her.¹⁴ This play, Mihura concludes, is a comedy in which

everything seems to the audience to be a lie, an illusion, unlike most comedies in which everything seems to be true.¹⁵

Mihura's comedy in which a young man, Dionisio, on the eve of his wedding finds his Hotel room invaded by a troupe of dancing girls; their Negro manager, Buby; and their chaperone, a bearded lady, was inspired by Mihura's own encounter with a similar troupe of dancers when he was traveling in the provinces. Mihura has taken his own experience and blended it with large doses of fantasy. The fantastic atmosphere of the play is established early in the first scene by Don Rosario, the white-bearded hotel owner, who treats Dionisio as an overly affectionate father might a long-lost child. The atmosphere of unreality is implemented by a series of phone calls from Dionisio's fiancée, a young lady who never appears on the stage but seems to be most unpleasant and unattractive; because his room is soon filled with visitors, all of them uninvited, Dionisio either cannot speak to the girl or answers in a disguised voice that she has a wrong number.

The first guest who enters the room is Paula, one of the dancing girls. She is seeking refuge from her manager, the Negro Buby, who angrily pounds on the door. Dionisio lies to her, saying that he, too, is in show business; his name, he says, is Antonini and he juggles top hats. Dionisio creates this illusion for Paula, and

she is happy to accept it as truth. She hopes that Antonini will be her friend.

Eventually the other girls from the troupe and the men they have paired off with also enter Dionisio's room. His visitors include the Astute Hunter, a man who fishes for rabbits and from time to time throws a dead rabbit under Dionisio's bed; an Old Soldier, who one by one gives his medals to the girl with him; and the Hateful Gentleman, who unsuccessfully tries to buy Paula's favor with garters, stockings, flowers, candy, sandwiches, and money, all pulled from the numerous pockets of his coat.

After Paula has rid herself of the Hateful Gentleman and his unwanted attentions, she tells Dionisio just how miserable her life is. People, she feels, are evil, but she cannot flee from people, for they satisfy her craving for champagne and bracelets. Then Paula fashions for them a dream of happiness, based on the lie that Dionisio has told her previously so that they might have something in common. Paula will be Dionisio's partner in his juggling act. And tomorrow, because they are good friends, they will go together to the beach to catch crabs and to build castles and bridges and stairways and volcanos and lions in the sand. Together they will escape from Negroes and Hateful Gentlemen by building for themselves a childhood world of fantasy from sand. Dionisio is tempted by Paula's dream, but tomorrow he must be married.

Buby interrupts the couple and hits Paula over the head. Thinking her to be dead, he puts her body under the bed. While Paula sleeps, Dionisio's future father-in-law, Don Sacramento, comes and tells Dionisio that he must reform now that he is getting married; he must learn to do the things that decent people do. He must hang family portraits wherever he goes, even in a hotel room; he must always eat fried eggs for breakfast, even if he detests them. Dionisio becomes increasingly unhappy with the prospect of his decent middle-class marriage. When Don Sacramento detects the smell of decaying flesh, however, and finds the dead rabbits he thinks are rats, he happily takes the dead animals as presents for his small nephew, leaving Dionisio to ponder just what decent people do consider proper.

Paula, who has heard the conversation, knows now that Dionisio has lied to her. He is not a juggler at all, and he is going to be married and cannot be her friend. For her all illusion is destroyed, and she suffers the same disappointment of Casona's Isabel or of Leticia in López Rubio's Alberto. Paula looks at Dionisio's fiancée's picture and decides the girl is horrible looking with her sad eyes and her dozen moles. Dionisio is inclined to agree; he does not want to get married and raise ugly children and would rather stay with Paula. But Paula realizes that Dionisio does not belong with

her; she helps him get ready for the wedding and even lends him a hat because his three top hats have been ruined during the course of the evening. When Dionisio leaves, Paula begins to juggle the three top hats to keep herself from becoming sentimental. Neville uses a similar device at the end of Prohibido en otoño when the elderly Tomasa dances with a modernistic statue on her head to keep her nephew from being sad at having lost the girl he loves.

Mihura is right when he says that his comedy seems to be an illusion. Nothing in the play is believable; everything belongs to fantasy and not to reality. The hotel room and all the characters are products of surrealist imagination. Hunters do not fish for rabbits and then throw their catch under beds. Nor do respectable men take home dead rats to their nephews. Everything in the comedy is topsy-turvy and ridiculous, except, as Mihura suggests, Paula. Paula somehow is real in her unhappiness and loneliness; she is almost pathetic. Within this strange world of surrealism, Paula and Dionisio take refuge for a moment in illusion. Dionisio creates a new identity for himself, and then comes to regret that his fantasy is not reality. He would like to be a juggler and build sand castles with Paula; he wants the lies he has told to become true. Paula has believed the lies; she has accepted the illusion Dionisio created and was

happy with the illusion. The return to truth saddens her, and she cannot hide her disappointment. But she is wise enough to realize that Dionisio cannot make the illusion come true even though he thinks he wants to. He cannot really be a juggler and remain Paula's friend; his wedding is inevitable. All that Paula can do is try to forget her sorrow by concentrating on the hats she has tossed in the air. Dionisio leaves to meet his bride, and were it not that he wears Paula's hat, one might think that the night's fantastic events were but a dream, the unconscious apprehensions of a man about to sacrifice his freedom at the marriage altar.

Tres sombreros de copa, with its constant atmosphere of unreality, is less subtle in its use of illusion than the other comedies we have studied. With its obvious stage effects, Mihura's play probably gets more laughs when it is staged than do works such as El baile, Irene o el tesoro, Celos del aire, or Alberto. The tragedy of Paula's existence, the apprehensions of Dionisio on the eve of his marriage are almost lost among the exaggerations of character and action. The pathos one might feel for Paula in a more serious play is diminished here simply because nothing is real. Fantasy is so dominant that it is hard to distinguish the borderline between it and truth. It is obvious that Dionisio's lies are an illusion he is creating, but are not the people to whom he is lying illusion too?

Plays such as El baile or Alberto are different in their approach to fantasy. The fantasy in such plays is born in the imagination of the characters themselves. They use illusion to make life more pleasant for themselves or for those they love, but they are conscious of reality and can recognize fantasy as being fantasy and not truth. Because the characters seem real, the audience can easily sympathize with them and be touched by the tenderness of the comedy. The same is true with such comedies as Irene o el tesoro and El landó de seis caballos in which the fantasy stems from lunacy and a line can still be drawn between fantasy and reality, lunacy and sanity.

These comedies in which fantasy plays such an important part are among the best works that have been produced by the contemporary Spanish theatre. Tres sombreros de copa and El baile, in particular, are usually recognized as outstanding. Both have achieved recognition outside Spain, the former having been produced in Washington, Paris, Brussels, and London;¹⁶ and the latter, in the United States, England, France, Germany, and Finland.¹⁷ Valbuena Prat considers El baile to be "el triunfo de un 'tono menor' lleno de encanto, y de una gracia y emoción pocas veces tan sabiamente logradas,"¹⁸ and Sainz de Robles has praised Tres sombreros de copa most highly:

No me atrevo a pensar los motivos que tuvieron las empresas para negar la representación de esta comedia excepcional, que suma a su vivísimo enredo y a su desbordante gracia, la alta calidad literaria, el ingenio más original, la humana ternura y la expresividad de un diálogo lleno de fortuna paradójica.¹⁹

Medardo Fraile lists both of these comedies, along with another play of fantasy, Celos del aire, among the six best works of the contemporary Spanish theatre,²⁰ while Sainz de Robles includes Celos del aire, Los árboles mueren de pie, El caso de la mujer asesinadita, and El baile in a similar list of six plays.²¹ Edwin J. Webber, who finds Spain suffering from a crisis in the theatre, foresees an improvement in the future because of the hopes held out by El baile, El landó de seis caballos, and El caso del señor vestido de violeta.²²

These plays, as well as others discussed in this chapter, often achieve the highest plane of humor; the main characters are usually sympathetically portrayed, and their plights may as readily evoke a tear as a smile. While the character himself, in his desire to escape from reality, may no longer be able to perceive the limits of the illusion that he or someone else has created for him, the spectator as well often cannot clearly discern the real from the unreal. The best of the comedies in this group create the poetic atmosphere of a never-never land where fantasy and reality, lunacy and sanity, coexist and even overlap.

NOTES

¹Buero Vallejo, Irene o el tesoro in Teatro español, 1954-55, p. 187.

²Ibid., p. 199.

³Ibid., p. 261.

⁴Sainz de Robles, ed., Teatro español, 1954-55, p. 15.

⁵Cyrus C. DeCoster, "The Theatrical Season in Madrid 1954-55," Hispania, XXXIX (1956), 183.

⁶Carlos Fernández Cuenca, "La venda en los ojos, comedia de José López Rubio," Teatro, No. 10 (1954), p. 12.

⁷Ibid., p. 11.

⁸See J. Chicharro de León, "Pirandelismo en la literatura española," Quaderni Ibero-Americani, II (1954), 406-14. Chicharro mentions a possible influence of Pirandello on Grau and Jardiel Poncela, among others.

⁹Theodore S. Beardsley, Jr., "The Illogical Character in Contemporary Spanish Drama," Hispania, XLI (1958), 446-47.

¹⁰Buero Vallejo, Casi un cuento de hadas (Madrid, 1953), p. 78.

¹¹Ruiz Iriarte, El landó de seis caballos in Teatro español, 1949-50, p. 326.

¹²Ibid., p. 337.

¹³López Rubio, Alberto (Madrid, 1952), p. 76.

¹⁴Mihura, Tres sombreros de copa in Teatro español, 1952-53, p. 91.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 92.

¹⁶Guerrero Zamora, op. cit., p. 179.

¹⁷Fraille, loc. cit., p. 100.

¹⁸Valbuena Prat, Historia del teatro español, p. 682.

¹⁹Sainz de Robles, ed., Teatro español, 1952-53, p. 16.

²⁰Fraile, loc. cit., p. 97.

²¹Sainz de Robles, ed., Teatro español, 1955-56 (Madrid, 1957), p. xi.

²²Webber, "The 'Problem' of the Spanish Theater Today," Hispania, XXXIX (1956), 67.

CONCLUSION

In the period from 1945 to 1960 many comedies were produced in Spain. As some of these may be considered among the best works that the Spanish stage has had to offer during the period, it is worthwhile to examine the various bases of humor to be found in them.

Several aspects of the humor found in these contemporary plays may be traced back to traditional or stock devices of the comic stage. The comic device of repetition, for example, is an ancient laugh-getting technique and is still used for comic effect in such plays as Paso's Una bomba llamada Abelardo, Neville's Adelita, or Mihura's A media luz los tres. Twins were used for humorous purposes on the Roman stage, and they still prove to be comic in Ruiz Iriarte's La guerra empieza en Cuba. Character types as well as comic devices have carried over to the contemporary theatre from the tradition of the past. Foreign and dialectical types, talkative wives, and bobos are seen in the earliest Spanish comedy as well as on the twentieth century stage. Themes from the past are also adapted to contemporary settings. Neville, in particular, has used the Faust legend in Veinte años and the Pygmalion legend in Prohibido en otoño.

On the other hand, several of the bases of humor in these contemporary plays belong exclusively to the twentieth century. Paso's Una bomba llamada Abelardo and Mihura's Mi adorado Juan satirize the modern world where technological advances may get out of hand because man has become dehumanized. The Russian Communist is caricatured in Paso's play and in Ruiz Iriarte's La cena de los tres reyes. The American capitalist likewise receives his share of criticism. A satire of modern psychology is another common theme in such plays as Mihura's El caso del señor vestido de violeta and Paso's El cielo dentro de casa. Also typical of the twentieth century is a type of "absurd" humor, related to the French theatre of such playwrights as Ionesco. This absurd humor, "la nueva comicidad," is particularly prevalent in the works of Mihura, especially in Tres sombreros de copa.

A common type of comedy found in the Spanish theatre in the period under study is the satire of mystery stories. Paso and Mihura are the two playwrights who use the technique most frequently. Paso has done so in such plays as Receta para un crimen and Usted puede ser un asesino, and Mihura utilizes such satire in Carlota and Melocotón en almíbar. Titles of several of Mihura's comedies are reminiscent of mystery stories, whether or not they belong to this group of satires: El caso de la mujer asesinadita, El caso de la señora estupenda, El caso del señor vestido de violeta.

As in other periods of theatre history, the contemporary playwright often gives his comedies a historical setting. Sometimes the author will pick a moment in the recent past and treat it with humorous nostalgia, as in Luca de Tena's plays about Alfonso XII, Calvo-Sotelo's Plaza de Oriente, or Neville's El baile. In other cases the author may choose to criticize certain aspects of the past. Mihura satirizes the role of woman in society at the end of the nineteenth century with his ¡Sublime decisión!. In El gran minué Ruiz Iriarte displays the defects of the eighteenth century monarchies. A setting based on history or legend may also be chosen, as in some of the works of Giraudoux, Cocteau, or Anouilh, to develop a certain kind of anachronistic humor as seen in Pemán's Electra, Paso's Preguntan por Julio César, and Luis Escobar's El amor es un petro desbocado.

By far the most prevalent characteristic of these comedies, however, is the juxtaposition of planes of reality and fantasy. The fanciful and whimsical are important elements in the theatre of Alejandro Casona, Jacinto Grau, and Jardiel Poncela, and they continue to be significant in the works of the playwrights in Spain during the 1945-60 period. Illusion is introduced through lunacy, through metaphysical phenomena, or through efforts to make the harsh realities of life more bearable. When Buero Vallejo, usually a serious writer, decided to enter

the realm of humor, he chose to write plays of fantasy. Irene o el tesoro introduces the imaginary world of Irene and her little elf. Casi un cuento de hadas takes place in a fairy tale atmosphere. Neville introduces fantasy to his comedies in El baile, when Adelita helps her grandfather and his friend to create an illusion of the past; in Adelita, when the dead return to communicate to a sick old man; in Veinte años, where one of the characters is a vice-devil.

Mihura likewise makes use of an element of illusion. Tres sombreros de copa is, he says, a comedy where everything appears to be illusion. All but two of the characters are fantastic, and even these two, Paula and Dionisio, try to escape from the reality of their lives. Illusion is also evident in El caso de la mujer asesinadita where a dream is used to prophesy and death does not deter the characters from continuing to appear on the stage. In others of his plays, such as Maribel y la extraña familia or ¡Sublime decisión!, while the element of illusion is not so obvious, Mihura is still fanciful in his portrayal of character or situation.

Among the playwrights studied, the two who have made the widest use of fantasy in their comedies are Ruiz Iriarte and López Rubio. Ruiz Iriarte, sometimes considered a follower of Casona, often presents a situation in which a character creates an illusion

deliberately to achieve a certain effect. In Juego de niños, for example, the wife pretends to have a love affair to win back her errant husband; but the illusion she creates is so strong that neither she nor the man who acts the role of her lover is sure whether or not their love is real. In El pobrecito embustero a professor pretends to be dying to gain sympathy and finds that those around him are disappointed when he does not die. Fantasy is most dominant, however, in El landó de seis caballos, where some of the characters keep the illusion of the past alive for others so that the latter will not suffer from the passage of time.

In the theatre of López Rubio we find that four of the author's best plays contain planes of reality and fantasy. In Alberto the characters create an imaginary friend who soon becomes so real that they are forced to destroy him. In Celos del aire pretended adultery and real adultery are found to overlap and a marriage is almost ruined. La otra orilla offers a situation where four recently murdered characters are temporarily able to see and hear what is going on in the real world; they are visible to the spectators, but not to the other actors. And in La venda en los ojos, similarly to Ruiz Iriarte's El landó de seis caballos, several characters are willing to carry on an illusion for the happiness of someone else.

In summary we may say that the contemporary Spanish writers of comedy have made use of a variety of humorous elements, the most prevalent of which is fantasy. For the most part the playwrights under study, although future generations may not consider them great literary figures, are skilled craftsmen who can put comic devices and theatrical techniques to good advantage. While some of the devices, characters, or themes in their comedies may be traced to traditional Spanish theatre or even to ancient Greek and Roman comedy, primarily these Spanish playwrights show a closer connection to the contemporary authors of comedies in other Western nations, particularly France.

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