

THE CAUSES OF TRAGEDY IN THE VALENCIAN NOVELS
OF VICENTE BLASCO IBÁÑEZ

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INTRODUCTION

Valencian novelist Vicente Blasco Ibáñez disclaimed professional, literary merit as a writer. He was a keen-eyed, outspoken adventurer who fulfilled a variety of roles as revolutionary, editor, statesman, fugitive, prisoner, colonizer, correspondent, historian, traveler-lecturer, and novelist. His own life was as colorful and dynamic as the stories he wrote. Too restless to limit his career to writing, nevertheless, a "physiological force" and an "imperious necessity of his brain" compelled him to record what he observed and thought.¹

Though born in Valencia, January 29, 1867, Vicente's durable, vigorous temperament reflected his Aragonese parentage. Typical of many Valencian merchants, Gaspar Blasco Teruel and Ramona Ibáñez Martín migrated from Aragón to the more prosperous Levantine capital where they operated a small grocery and dry goods store. Gaspar hoped his son would go into business with him and Ramona hoped he would enter the priesthood.² Vicente was their only child and they provided him with a good education and encouraged him to read widely. His father, an avid reader himself, kept many books in the house, including some given by don Gaspar's uncle, Mariano Cabrerizo, who was an editor and bookseller.

La lectura había llegado a convertírsele en una especie de sed insaciable; devoraba libros de todo género, y leía indistintamente obras religiosas, de historia, de filosofía y de física ... todo cuanto caía al alcance de sus manos ... En su casa había muchos libros, muchísimos; unos, regalados

¹Vicente, Blasco Ibáñez, "Carta a Cejador," Bulletín Hispanique, 1928, p. 17.

²Ramón, Martínez de la Riva, Blasco Ibáñez; su vida, su obra, su muerte, sus mejores páginas (Madrid: Editorial Mundo Latino), pp. 17-18.

por su pariente Cabrerizo, y otros, adquiridos por don Gaspar, que fue siempre gran lector.¹

As a young man, Blasco was too distracted by his enthusiasm for literature and politics to excel in his studies.² By the time he was fourteen he was writing verses and stories. One of his poems, a satirical sonnet against kings, netted him a six month jail term.³ His first published work, which appeared in a Valencian almanac in 1883, was "La Torre de la Boatella."⁴ When he was seventeen, Vicente entered the University of Valencia to study law, but he dropped out when he was nineteen to serve the Republican Party.⁵

Threatened again with political imprisonment in 1889, Blasco exiled himself to Paris, where he edited Historia de la revolución española.⁶ After his return to Spain, he founded El Pueblo, a Republican daily. It was in this publication where the Valencian novels first appeared, written in installments, and printed in serial form. The first of the series was Arroz y tartana, published in 1894, followed by Flor de mayo the next year. In a preface prepared later for Flor de mayo, the author explained:

Flor de mayo es mi segunda novela. La produje en 1895, cuando dirigía en Valencia el diario republicano El Pueblo, fundado por mí. Lo mismo que en mi primera novela, Arroz y tartana, fue escrita Flor de mayo para el folletín de dicho periódico. La barraca, Sónnica, la cortesana y Entre naranjos también se publicaron por primera vez en El Pueblo. Algunas de

¹Emilio Gascó Contell, Genio y figura de Blasco Ibáñez, agitador, aventurero y novelista (Madrid: Afrodiseo Aguado, S. A., 1957), p. 31.

²Martínez de la Riva, Blasco Ibáñez, p. 22.

³Blasco Ibáñez, "Carta a Cejador," p. 10.

⁴Gascó Contell, Genio y figura de Blasco Ibáñez, p. 36.

⁵Martínez de la Riva, Blasco Ibáñez, p. 22.

⁶Ibid., p. 24.

estas novelas las escribí fragmentariamente, dando a la imprenta, día por día, la cantidad de cuartillas necesarias para llenar el folletín. Mi vida de periodista no me permitía un trabajo asiduo y concentrado.¹

Blasco Ibáñez fled to Italy as a political refugee in 1895. He escaped from the country in a fishing boat after hiding out several days in seacoast towns. While in hiding, he wrote "Venganza moruna," a story which he later amplified into La barraca.² Upon his return, he was arrested and sentenced to four years in prison. However, he was released after one year, because he was elected to represent his district in the Cortes.³ During his six terms in the Spanish parliament, Blasco continued publication of El Pueblo. The daily, which contained no advertising, was never a financial success and was sustained at considerable personal loss to the editor.⁴ Nevertheless, the revolutionary paper continued for fifteen years until its founder stepped out of politics following a duel which nearly cost him his life.⁵

Blasco's retirement from politics marked the beginning of a new epoch in his literary endeavors. His writings broadened from regional topics to those of national and international concern. On a tour which took him eastward through Europe and Asia Minor he submitted articles for newspapers in Madrid, Buenos Aires, and Mexico. Later the material was compiled into a single volume entitled Oriente.⁶ In 1909 Blasco traveled to South America and was inspired

¹Vicente Blasco Ibáñez, Preface: Flor de mayo (Barcelona: Editorial Planeta, 1958), p. 6.

²Gascó Contell, Genio y figura de Blasco Ibáñez, p. 76.

³Martínez de la Riva, Blasco Ibáñez, p. 22.

⁴Blasco Ibáñez, Preface: Flor de mayo, p. 6.

⁵Martínez de la Riva, Blasco Ibáñez, p. 58.

⁶Ibid., p. 27.

to write La Argentina y sus grandezas and to found colonies in Patagonia. After three years, his colonization venture was discontinued as a financial failure. Upon his return to Europe in 1913, he wrote Los argonautas, first in a proposed series of novels based on Spanish-America. With the outbreak of World War I, Blasco broke off the series in order to begin the weekly publication of Historia de la guerra europea, an effort which totaled nine volumes. During this period he corresponded from battle zones and also wrote war novels including Los cuatro jinetes del apocalipsis, Mare nostrum, and Los enemigos de la mujer.

A controversial and unpopular figure in neutral Spain, Blasco went to the United States in 1916 where he was warmly received. He sold articles to leading magazines for fabulous sums. The University of Washington conferred upon him the rare title of doctor honoris causa. From the United States he went to Mexico and reported on Mexican militarism.¹ Following the war, Spain was ready to welcome home her celebrated author.

España recibió al novelista con todos los honores que merecía quien acababa de poner tan alto nuestro nombre y el de las letras hispanas. Olvidáronse tendencias políticas, de las que, por otra parte, Blasco se había separado por completo, y primero Valencia, Madrid después, rindiéronle el entusiasta homenaje a que se había hecho acreedor.²

The novelist took another transoceanic trip in 1923 which he recorded in a three-volume work headed La vuelta al mundo de un novelista.³ His last and most ambitious undertaking was a series of great historical novels. He penned El Papa del Mar, A los pies de Venus, and En busca del gran Khan, before

¹Ibid., p. 29.

²Ibid., p. 30.

³Ibid., p. 31.

his death terminated the project in 1928.¹

The Valencian novels reveal the naturalism and materialism characteristic of the author's style. His mundane personalities are dominated and often vanquished by their environs and physical drives, to which they are inseparably related. This predestined attachment is especially portrayed in Flor de mayo and Cafías y barro. Cesar Barja described Blasco's style as

filosofía que empieza y acaba en una elemental concepción materialista del mundo, como un mecanismo, como una necesidad de fuerzas, como un mundo de hechos, de materia ciega y de plena animalidad. Dentro de ese mundo, a él unido y de él dependiente, muévase el ser humano como un mecanismo más de pasiones, apetitos e instintos, como la bestia humana sometida al influjo del ambiente, a las leyes de la naturaleza y a las leyes de su material, fisiológico destino.²

The result of such earthy characterization is a spiritual hollowness which lacks ideals, values, psychological complexity, and humor. Personalities appear in bold relief as types unlikely to intrigue the reader. With hardly a trace of comedy or humorous irony, the narration somberly depicts struggling lives destined for tragedy.

En cuanto a psicología, no pasa de la elemental de las más inmediatas y más ordinarias reacciones. De lo cual resulta que el autor no es novelista de almas ni creador de caracteres.³

La gracia, el natural encanto en la expresión, no es tampoco cualidad de este escritor. Lo que en él sobresale y lo que lo distingue es, no la ironía y humorismo de la comedia, sino la seriedad y violencia de la tragedia.⁴

Blasco Ibáñez' forte was description, and his Valencian novels are

¹Ibid., p. 31.

²Cesar, Barja, Libros y autores modernos (Los Angeles: Campbell's Book Store, 1933), p. 399.

³Ibid., p. 395.

⁴Ibid., p. 402.

foremost examples of his excellence as a regional descriptive novelist. His pan-sensorial portrayal of the milieu are revelations of nature which supply complete data for the reader's imagination. The Levantine literature, with its baroque, impressionistic prose, parallels the painting of Joaquin Sorolla, his compatriot.¹ Even dialog is treated descriptively by lengthy narration in the third person.

In Arroz y tartana he graphically represented city and social life. Flor de mayo developed after he visited the Cabañal on the Mediterranean and worked with fishing crews on the high sea. His experiences included a smuggling expedition to Argel on the North-African coast.

Recuerdo a veces las aventuras a que me arrastró mi entusiasmo juvenil de novelista, ansiando ver de cerca y no de oídas las cosas que pretendía describir. ... Dejando confiada momentaneamente la dirección de El Pueblo al grupo de jóvenes que me reconocía por maestro y director--a pesar de que sólo nos separaba una diferencia de cuatro o cinco años--, navegué en las barcas del Cabañal, haciendo la vida ruda de sus tripulantes, interviniendo en las operaciones de la pesca en alta mar. Como ya van transcurridos cerca de 30 años, hasta me atrevo a decir que también navegué en una barca de contrabandistas, yendo a trabajar con ellos en la costa de Argel.²

Blasco himself regarded Cañas y barro as his most picturesque and best developed Valencian story. The novel recorded his experiences and observations on and around Lake Albufera, and is filled with scenery, local color, and unforgettable types.

The paradox of Blasco Ibáñez is that although sedentary work stifled him, he wrote prodigiously. His quest for action was coupled with an intense desire to share his observations with the world. The Valencian novels were not

¹Joaquin, Ortega, "Vicente Blasco Ibáñez," University of Wisconsin Studies, No. 20 (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1924), p. 215.

²Preface, Flor de mayo, p. 8.

directly aimed toward social reform as were later works. However, the need for reform was apparent as he revealed lives enslaved to nature, society, and passion.

In the following resumes, each story proves unique, with a completely different milieu and set of circumstances. Yet, the novels reduce to the same common denominator: life is a grim, tragic experience. Inasmuch as the tragedy of human existence is the message common to all five Valencian novels, this study endeavors to sort through events and to categorize the sources of the travail depicted therein. The approach is not psycho-analytic. The material is treated in the way it was written--non-technically, as descriptions of life as it appeared on the surface. Each resume closes with an analysis of the factors which spelled out the tragedy set forth. The conclusion outlines significant parallels and contrasts in the causes of the tragedies surveyed. The final distillate of the regional novels evinces a universal and timeless quality.

CHAPTER I

ARROZ Y TARTANA

In Arroz y tartana (Rice and Carriage), a novel of social conflict, Blasco Ibáñez delved into a popular paradox of Spanish society: pretentious poverty of the sort described by Pérez Galdós in El abuelo. In his home town of Valencia he had observed that the distinctions between the gente luciente and the gente vulga produced a divided, artificial society and personal frustrations. In such an atmosphere is set Arroz y tartana. The family portrayed therein struggles to preserve its image of social superiority; one of its members is obsessed with the desire to climb socially and to preserve the exterior trappings of a long-since vanished wealth.

The first verse of a popular Valencian copla provides the title of the novel and testifies to the decadence in society.

Arros y tartana,
casaca a la moda,
¡y rode la bola...
a la valensiana!

The sentiment contrasts the desire to appear wealthy (symbolized by the tartana) with the reality of ruin (symbolized by the arroz).

Ya el título es bien valenciano, pues constituye el primer verso de una copla popular que significa "querer y no poder," deslumbrar a la gente con discursos, modales y lujo no basados en la realidad. Poseer una tartana para no ir a pie, aunque el mantener ese lujo represente tener que comer sólo arroz en el secreto de la casa.¹

Las tres rosas was the most popular clothing store of the Valencian Market. The founder, Eugenio García, would beam with pride when he told his success story:

¹Gascó Contell, Genio y figura de Blasco Ibáñez, p. 72.

--Nada debo a nadie--exclamaba al regañar a sus dependientes. --A mí nadie me ha protegido. Los míos me dejaron como un perro en medio de esa plaza. Y, sin embargo, soy lo que soy. ¡Hubiera querido veros como yo, para que supierais lo que es sufrir!--1

His father, an Aragonese peasant had left him in the big city when he was ten years old to earn his living by his own ingenuity and efforts. From errand-boy he became clerk and finally owner of his store.

Eugenio García's success was paralleled by Melchor Pena, another Aragonese youth who had been abandoned in the city. Don Eugenio hired the ragged lad, and he grew up to be his most trusted employee. One of his frequent duties was to purchase materials from the silk factory of don Manuel Fora. Melchor became a friend of the family and fell in love with Manolita, daughter of the wealthy silk executive. The two were married as soon as don Eugenio retired and passed ownership of Las tres rosas to Melchor.

Their marriage was blessed with prosperity and the birth of a son, Juanito. Manolita, or doña Manuela as she was called, enjoyed complete freedom and control of the family money. She could not be happy, however, as long as she had to walk rather than ride down the streets. Also, her husband's informality with everyone vexed her.

Tenía en su vida motivos de sobra para ser feliz; pero a pesar de esto, dos cosas la entristecían: el andar a pie por las calles, signo, según ella, de pobreza y degradación, y la vulgaridad de su marido, que se revelaba en sus maneras, en su modo de vestir, en la facilidad con que bromeaba con las criadas, como hombre acostumbrado a estos floreos de mostrador con que se halaga a las parroquianas, no pudiendo ver unas faldas lisas sin soltar cuatro requiebros inocentes y sin consecuencias.²

Dona Manuela's discontent increased when she inherited seventy thousand

¹Vicente Blasco Ibáñez, Arroz y tartana, Austral Collection (Buenos Aires: Espasa-Calpe Argentina, S.A., 1961), p. 28.

²Ibid., pp. 40-41.

duros. She determined to rise above the lowly rank of those outcasts who had to work and to become una persona decente. She felt that society was divided into two distinct classes and that she had to gain entry into the upper bracket.

Para ella, la sociedad estaba dividida en dos castas: los que van a pie y los que gastan carruaje; los que tienen en su casa gran patio con ancho portalón y los que entran por estrecha escalerilla o por oscura trastienda.¹

Parecía existir una barrera invisible e infranqueable entre la gente que paseaba a pie y aquellas cabezas que asomaban a las ventanillas, contrayéndose con una sonrisa siempre igual cuando recibían el saludo de las personal conocidas.²

With command and conciseness, doña Manuela removed her husband and herself from the despised level of merchants and joined the dignified rank of the idle rich. Their senior clerk, Antonio Cuadros took over the store, and they moved into a large two-story mansion. Melchor now did nothing except to take rides with doña Manuela in their new carriage and to tag along with her on tiresome social calls.

¡Pobre don Melchor! ¡Cuán cara le costaba ser esposo de una mujer hermosa y rica! Aburríase con el trato de unas personas a las que no podía entender, su esposa solo le hablaba para proporcionarle nuevos tormentos, y únicamente se sentía feliz cuando, puesto de veinticinco alfileres, huía de casa, buscando en el Mercado a sus antiguos amigos.³

Life became hell for the energetic merchant whose only relief was occasional visits with old friends at the Mercado. During one of these visits, don Eugenio warned Melchor that his wife would kill him with her way of life; as the proverb said, "jaula nueva, pájaro muerto."⁴ After a miserable year of

¹Ibid., p. 41.

²Ibid., p. 174.

³Ibid., p. 42.

⁴"New cage, dead bird."

pomp and puttering, the submissive spouse died of some unknown malady which had affected his heart, liver, and stomach. His widow ceremoniously mourned him with masses and a funeral with a full orchestra.

Doña Manuela's social lustre was dimmed by her second marriage with Doctor Pajares. He squandered most of her fortune on pleasure trips and gambling. When he died of his debauchery, her fortune had dwindled to twenty thousand duros. Her brother, don Juan, settled her financial affairs and warned her to live economically. The widow followed his advice until her two daughters by Dr. Pajares became young ladies. Having daughters of marriageable age restored her eagerness to shine in high society.

Pero llegó el momento en que las niñas se convirtieron en unas señoritas, y doña Manuela sintió el afán de ostentación de toda madre que tiene hijas casaderas. Removió su mobiliario, abandonó las modistas anónimas, y en su afán de no andar a pie, si no tuvo berlina y tronco como en buenos tiempos, compró una galera elegante y ligerita y tomó como cochero a Nelet, ...¹

Doña Manuela resumed her exorbitant spending in order to display wealth which, in truth, did not exist. She mortgaged property and borrowed heavily to purchase new furniture, new dresses for herself and her daughters, and a new carriage. To complete the image of a distinguished family, she mortgaged a hundred acres of productive riceland to purchase a summer chalet where she could entertain friends.

La viuda había empeñado y perdido para siempre un centenar de hanegadas de tierra de arroz que le producían muy buenos cuartos para adquirir aquella ratonera brillante y frágil, ... Creía que una villa para el verano es complemento de una familia distinguida que tiene coche; y en las tertulias al dirigirse a sus amigas, llenábanse la boca hablando de su lindo hotelito de Burjasot y de las innumerables comodidades que encerraba.²

¹Blasco Ibáñez, Arroz y tartana, p. 46.

²Ibid., pp. 124-125.

The widow steered her daughters, Conchita and Amparito, away from friends of the common class. She taught her daughters to feel ashamed of having a boy friend who was a member of a working family. With little effort she broke up the engagement of Amparito with Andresito, the son of don Cuadros. Later, after don Cuadros, proprietor of Las tres rosas, had made a small fortune playing the stock market, doña Manuela invited his family to her summer villa in order that the young pair could be together again.

Bien sabía hacer las cosas aquella señora. Al ver al pobre muchacho solo y gesticulando como un imbécil, había llamado a la niña para que lo llevara abajo con la gente joven, lo mismo que dos meses antes le había mandado que rompiera con él toda clase de relaciones. Era asombroso este cambio de conducta; pero también lo era que el señor Cuadros, que antes media telas en su tienda sin ambición alguna, tuviera ahora carruaje y todo el empaque pretencioso de un aspirante a millonario.¹

Doña Manuela's indebtedness increased at Carnaval time. To pay the French dressmaker and cover other expenses she needed three thousand pesetas. If she failed to pay soon, she feared the dressmaker would tell other customers about her lack of money.

Había que pagar a la modista: la idea de que ésta podía decir la verdad a sus parroquianas, todas señoras distinguidas, horrorizaba a la viuda, a pesar de que no tenía la menor amistad con ellas.²

Her economic situation grew steadily worse. She owed thousands of pesetas to demanding creditors and her funds were exhausted. Again, she panicked at the threat of being publicly disgraced by the money lenders.

La situación era más grave de lo que él imaginaba. Ya no eran diez o doce mil reales los que ponían a su mamá con el agua al cuello: ahora se trataba de miles de pesetas, de miles de duros, y era preciso pagar o resignarse a que la situación de la familia se hiciese pública, pues los acreedores, gente grosera y sin entrañas, sin otra pasión que la

¹Ibid., p. 129.

²Ibid., p. 81.

del dinero, eran capaces de desacreditar por dos cuartos a una señora decente.¹

Desperate, she begged her brother for money, but he refused her. Only one source of help remained. For the first time in Juanito's life, she began to show him affection, so she could borrow on his good credit. Previously, she had shown little interest in Juanito, since he was the son of Melchor Pena and, like his father, was employed as a clerk. In spite of his mother's indifference toward him, Juanito had turned over his salary to her and had cared for the children of her second marriage. He idolized his beautiful mother, even though he did not share her social interests. Suddenly she began to smother him with carresses. These were followed by pleas for money and for his signature on loans. When the youth agreed to sign for fifteen thousand pesetas, she begged him to raise the figure to sixteen thousand.

--Mira, hijo mío: quince mil pesetas justas no han de ser. Puedes firmar por dieciséis mil. No digas que no, rico mío. Completa tu sacrificio. Necesito algún dinerillo para pagar ciertas cuentas, y, además, las Pascuas vamos a pasarlas en nuestra casa de Burjasot; vendrán amigos, y hay que quedar bien. Ante todo, el decoro de la familia y no caer en el ridículo. Conque no tuerzas el gesto, niñito mío; quedamos en que serán dieciséis mil. ¡Ay, qué peso me has quitado de encima!--²

By this time Juanito had fallen deeply in love and was planning his future with Tonica, his bride-to-be. Even though he considered his mother's plea a threat to his own dreams, he surrendered to her.

Pero todos sus propósitos de enorgía desvaneciéronse ante las miradas suplicantes de su madre. ¡Qué hermosa estaba! Con sus ojazos lagrimeantes y tiernos, parecía la Virgen que tiene el corazón erizado de espadas. El no la abandonaba; sería un mal hijo si correspondía con el desdén al cariñazo maternal que le mostraba la buena señora tan pronto como

¹Ibid., p. 111.

²Ibid., p. 124.

se veía en apuros de dinero.¹

Juanito discovered that in spite of his mother's display of affection for him, he was still an outcast, a stranger of inferior stock, and a merchant's son. He sadly realized this when he revealed his engagement to Tonica, a seamstress. The mother who had carefully mediated the courtship of her daughters showed no concern over his love for Tonica.

Pasó aquel día y pasaron muchos sin que doña Manuela dijese una palabra sobre el noviazgo de su hijo. Este silencio entristecía a Juanito en ciertos momentos. Veía una vez más hasta donde llegaba el afecto de aquella madre a la que idolatraba. Era una paria, un advenedizo de procedencia inferior que el azar había introducido en la familia. Para Rafaelito y las hermanas, todas las alianzas eran mediadas, pero tratándose del hijo de Melchor Pena, el tendero del mercado, todo resultaba bien. Podía casarse con una criada de la casa, sin que doña Manuela sintiera un leve roce en aquella susceptibilidad tan despierta para los otros hijos.²

He could marry anyone without disturbing her class sensitivity; her other children who were of more noble paternity could not.

Tonica was aware of doña Manuela's attitude toward her. She would have married Juanito readily were it not for his mother and sisters. She knew that she would never be accepted by Juanito's family.

Ella agradecía el ofrecimiento del señor Pena, pero no podía aceptar. Era el hombre honrado y modesto que deseaba; si no fuese más que un dependiente de comercio, tal vez aceptase ... ; pero ¿es que ella ignoraba quien era su familia? Estaba enterada por una parroquiana amiga de su mamá y de sus hermanitas. Eran unas señoras de las que viven con verdadero lujo, sin apelar a costurera ni adornos caseros; tenían carruaje ... y no era justo ni legal que ella, una pobre jornalera, aspirase a tanto.³

Tonica had learned to "keep her place" as a seamstress accustomed to the abuses

¹Ibid., p. 123.

²Ibid., p. 152.

³Ibid., p. 108.

of the señoras. However, she could not endure becoming the object of family scorn.

Ella no era nadie: Una pobre costurera que, acostumbrada a sufrir las impertinencias de las señoras, no podía permitirse el lujo de mostrar susceptibilidad ni amor propio...; pero eso de casarse para ser la víctima resignada y humilde sobre la cual cayeran los desprecios de la familia, estaba fuera del límite de su paciencia.¹

However, Juanito insisted they could be happy and continued to plan for the future. Since he could not pay his mother's debts and fulfill his own plans, he decided to sell his orchard in Alcira. Hoping to strike it as rich as don Cuadros had done, he invested the proceeds of the sale and Tonica's life savings in stocks. In spite of the warnings of don Eugenio and of his tio Juan, Juanito was dazzled by the prospect of becoming rich.

El, tan metódico y cuidadoso de cumplir sus obligaciones, abandonaba la tienda para ir a la Bolsa en compañía de su principal, o a los lugares donde se reunían sus compañeros de explotación financiera. ... Ya no quería ser dueño de la tienda. Las primeras ganancias, adquiridas con dulce facilidad, le habían cegado, y sólo pensaba en ser millonario, en esclavizar la fortuna, riéndose ahora de aquellos tiempos en que soñaba con Tonica la existencia monótona y tranquila de rutinarios burgueses, ...²

Don Eugenio, the retired founder of Las tres rosas, was outraged by don Cuadros' neglect of the store and by his financial caprice; now he was grieved to see Juanito make the same mistake.

Siempre que Juanito se encontraba en la tienda con el viejo comerciante, éste le lanzaba miradas tan pronto de compasión como de desdén. Algunas veces hasta llegaba a murmurar con tono de reproche: --¡Ay, Juanito, Juanito!...Te veo perdido. Ese demonio de Cuadros te arrastra a la perdición... No le defiendas, no intentes justificarte. Ahora te va muy bien para que puedas convencerte; pero al freír será el reír.³

While Juanito was absorbed with building his own fortune, another

¹Ibid., p. 109.

²Ibid., p. 186.

³Ibid., p. 187.

crisis threatened to topple the family image. Their horse died and not even Juanito would help his mother purchase another. If they missed the paseo or if they walked, someone might suspect their ruin. This prospect terrified the widow and her daughters. Blasco Ibáñez described their feelings in the paseo episode:

El día era magnífico; pero no, no saldrían; primero monjas que el mundo se enterase de su decadencia, de sus privaciones, tan hábilmente ocultas. Pero las tres no podían resignarse a pasar un día dentro de casa. ... ¡Qué tardecita pasaron las de Pajares! Exteriormente fueron las de siempre; las niñas contestaron con mohines graciosos a los saludos de los amigos, y la mamá, altiva y majestuosa, cobijándolo todo con su mirada de protección. Pero en su interior, ¡cuántos tormentos! Si alguna amiga las saludaba desde su carruaje con expresión cariñosa, las tres creían adivinar cierto asomo de lástima, y enrojecían bajo la capa de blanquete que cubría sus mejillas.¹

They felt certain that everyone knew of their circumstances and that the ladies in the passing carriages were smiling at them disdainfully as though they were maids in disguise, and that behind their backs they were pointing their finger at them contemptuously.

Doña Manuela resigned herself to an honorable poverty until don Cuadros insisted on finding her another horse so that the public would not make degrading remarks about her as she passed by afoot instead of in her carriage. Rather than be socially disgraced, she accepted his offer with all of its other implications.

Ella no tenía carácter para sobrellevar con resignación la miseria. Estaba decidida. Había que sostenerse en la altura, empleando todos los medios, y después, que viniera todo, hasta aquello que sólo al pensarlo tanto rubor le producía. Y la vanidosa señora, para afirmarse en su resolución, buscaba ejemplos y recordaba lo que tantas veces había oído en las murmuraciones infames de las tertulias: los innumerables casos de señoras tan decentes como ella, bien consideradas por la sociedad y que habían hecho sacrificios iguales para salvar el prestigio de sus casas. Y sostenida por el pernicioso ejemplo de aquellas mujeres, a

¹Ibid., p. 175.

las que tanto había censurado, miró a su antiguo dependiente con ojos en que se revelaba impudor razonado y tranquilo.¹

One afternoon Juanito accidentally discovered his mother's illicit relationship with don Cuadros. His mother's determination to remain among the burguesa portenciosa shocked the youth. He felt like a stranger who had nothing in common with the rest of the family.

El pobre muchacho se sentía sin fuerzas para seguir viviendo con la familia. Un obstáculo invisible se levantaba entre él y los suyos. Decía bien su tío don Juan. El era de otra raza. Formaba aparte en el seno de la familia. Todos estaban ligados por la vida común; pero los otros eran la burguesía pretenciosa, corrompida prematuramente por la ambición de brillar, por el ansia de mentir, encaramándose penosamente a una altura usurpada; y él era un intruso, el resultado de un encuentro de la fuerza, candida y sumisa, con la corrupción moral, hermosa y deslumbrante.²

Juanito began to see himself clearly. He really did not want to be rich. In fact, he despised the wealth and vanity which don Cuadros and his mother represented. He decided that Eugenio and tío Juan were right about the value of honest toil and the folly of "get rich quick" schemes.

Aun había remedio. ... pagaría las deudas importantes que había contraído para salvar a su madre, y con lo que le quedase se establecería modestamente, sería el dueño de Las tres rosas o de una tienda más pequeña, casándose en seguida con Tonica. Esta era la verdadera solución. Nada de buscar millones; la lección había sido dura. Comerciante rutinario y cachazudo, buen marido y padre virtuoso; ésta era la felicidad, lo que el ambicionaba para lo por venir.³

The remedy was too late. Juanito and don Cuadros were notified that don Ramón, their trusted banker and financier, had disappeared with their money. Tonica's eight thousand reales were also lost. The news of the swindle and the knowledge of his mother's penchant for luxurious living were too much for Juanito to

¹Ibid., p. 184.

²Ibid., p. 198.

³Ibid., p. 205.

endure. He suffered a fatal cerebral stroke.

Don Juan prescribed doña Manuela's future. Her punishment for her neglect of Juanito, and for her dishonor would be a life of bitter remorse.

Ese será tu castigo; ése será tu remordimiento... Vivirás intranquila. Hasta ahora, el pobre Juanito apenas si ha merecido tu atención; pero la muerte despertara en ti los instintos de madre; pensarás en él a todas horas, le verás en sueños, y la sospecha de que tu hijo pudo conocerte tal como eres amargará tu existencia...¹

Her manner of life would be modest, sensible and honorable. He would help them in order to protect the girls from following their mother's example and experiencing the misery common to girls of ruined families.

Quiero que viváis, pero sin desórdenes, como personas juiciosas y honradas. ... podréis vivir como viven esas personas honradas y modestas a las que llamáis cursis despreciativamente... Seréis cursis, ¿lo entendéis? Más os prefiero así que convertidas en señoras tramposas, que pierden hasta su honor por engañar al mundo.²

Doña Manuela could no longer be sustained in luxury by don Cuadros. He disappeared as mysteriously as had his money. He fled the country rather than face his creditors and the public. Don Eugenio, who lived alone in the back of Las tres rosas, watched the Tribunal and the sheriff enter the store to take inventory of the assets which now belonged to the creditors. The old man headed straight for the door and staggered down the street blindly, his mind in a whirl.

¡Ay, mi pobre tienda!... ¡Te has lucido, Eugenio! Sesenta años de honradez inquebrantable, llegar a una edad a que pocos llegan, ¿y todo para qué? Para ver desmoronarse en un día lo que tanto me costó edificar... Pero ¿en qué tiempos estamos? ¿Qué hombres son éstos que se juegan el porvenir, la tranquilidad de la familia, que pierden la honra y huyen tan frescos? La maldita ambición de subir y salirse de la esfera los

¹Ibid., p. 221.

²Ibid., p. 222.

pierde a todos... ¹

He collapsed on the sidewalk, in the same place where his father had left him seventy years before.

Arroz y tartana glows with examples of success, fortune, love, and opportunity; yet the novel is predominantly tragic. Each of the main characters had prospects for a bright future. Eugenio García, Melchor Pena, and Juanito Pena had much in common: each had the energy and drive typical of Aragonese merchants; each started his career as errand boy and worked his way to success. Doña Manuela married a prosperous merchant and inherited a fortune. Don Cuadros had a thriving business thrust into his hands. Juanito and Tonica were deeply in love.

Unfortunately, catastrophe or great unhappiness awaited each of these persons. Like Augusto Pérez of Unamuno's Niebla, Eugenio, Melchor, and Juanito all died of despair. Doña Manuela's life was reduced to poverty tainted with guilt. Don Cuadros lost his wealth and sentenced himself to a dishonorable exile. Tonica lost her savings and her sweetheart.

Doña Manuela was to blame for Melchor's death. She was not satisfied to be the wife of a prosperous proprietor and to have inherited a fortune. She wanted to be in the upper strata of society. The requirements were wealth and leisure. She was rich but her husband was a merchant which disqualified her as a bona fide aristocrat. She insisted that Melchor give up his business to become a social butterfly. The soft, easy life ran counter to his nature; after a year of misery, he became ill and died.

Juanito died after he discovered the extent of his mother's hypocrisy

¹Ibid., p. 226.

and the extent of his ruin which she had caused. His tragic death was caused by her false pride which demanded that she hide her decadence and preserve her superior social status regardless of the cost.

Doña Manuela was a pitiable victim of her own vanity. Even when she was rich, the common mannerisms of her husband mortified her. After her ruin, she was tortured by the fear that her decadence would be discovered. Tío Juan dictated her future misery--to live remorsefully and modestly before the eyes of the world.

Much of the tragedy in the novel was created by the false pride or pundonor¹ which compelled doña Manuela to be ostentatious. When she had wealth, she pursued an artificial social life designed to impress people. When her money failed, her pundonor drove her to pretend a wealth which no longer existed.

Minor causes of tragedy in the novel were greed and lust. The broker, don Ramón, showed greed when he ran away with his clients' funds. Don Cuadros was to blame for his own downfall. He neglected his business because he was more interested in getting rich quick and in chasing women. It was his folly which hastened the death of don Eugenio. The old founder and builder of Las tres rosas could not go on living after his store went defunct.

Arroz y tartana provides a behind-the-scenes look at a serious defect in Spanish society. The desire to dazzle people with a luxury not based on reality was not peculiar to Valencia or to the nineteenth century. In 1626 Francisco Quevedo satirized the penniless, hungry hidalgos who cherished their visage of nobility. Prior to Quevedo, a similar ostentation was satirized by

¹"Point of honor." Pride in one's honorable image which must be kept untarnished at all costs.

the author of Lazarillo de Tormes. The contrast of pompous pride and decadence still prevailed in Blasco's day. He created doña Manuela to typify both the social climber and the socially ruined. In either role, her motive was to remain aloof from the common, working mass of humanity.

Social status based on wealth and leisure was such a matter of pride that it generated contempt for the simple life and for labor. Society was infested with paupers who pretended to be affluent. Rather than become productive, working citizens, they chose a life of misery and sham. Doña Manuela did not become immoral when she submitted to don Cuadros; she was already immoral because she was living a lie. Blasco Ibáñez wanted society to recognize the tragedy implicit in the social lie and to find the freedom of truth. He wanted to shake society from its pride which sustained itself by hypocrisy and disdain for those of lesser rank. He hoped his readers would be inspired by Juanito whose ambition was "not to be seen of men," but to do a job well, to be a virtuous husband and father, and to be true to himself.

CHAPTER II

FLOR DE MAYO

With his own Mare nostrum, Blasco Ibáñez' Flor de mayo ranks high among novels of the Mediterranean. Herein, he created literary frescoes of marine activities which he had witnessed: the embarking of a fishing fleet, the loading of smuggled cargo, the raging of a sea storm, the haggling of vendors in the Valencian fish market.

The tone of the novel is dark and foreboding. There is no humor and only traces of idealism. Life is a miserable struggle with a tragic ending. Passions reflect the unpredictable violence of the sea, and ignorance matches the destitute surroundings. Flor de mayo sustains Cesar Barja's comment that Blasco presented man as a "beast subdued by the influence of his environment."¹

Tío Pascualo, veteran fisherman of the Cabañal, had been missing for twelve days when his storm-beaten boat was pulled onto the beach, a huge coffin enclosing the sailor's body. Since the craft was the only fortune left to Tona, his widow, and her two boys, she converted it into a tavern and cabaña. Because she was always busy tending the tavern, Pascualo, her oldest son, looked after little Tonet. After Pascualo was hired as gato² on his uncle's boat, Tonet became incorrigible.

... aquel Tonet de piel de diablo, había salido un bohemio incorregible, que sólo regresaba a su casa acosado por el hambre...juntábase con la pillería de la playa, tropel de chicuelos que no sabían más de sus padres que los perros vagabundos que los acompañaban en sus correteos por la

¹Barja, Libros y autores modernos, p. 399.

²Sailors' helper.

arena.¹

Pascualo, who was called el Retor because of his pious appearance, was following in the footsteps of his father, who was an industrious, skilled fisherman. Tonet, on the other hand, became a petty thief without the slightest attraction for work.

Unable to control her delinquent son, Tona sought help and sympathy from Siñor Martínes, a handsome young guardsman who frequented the tavern. She fell in love with him and lavished upon him food, money, and affection. Not long after she asked him to marry her, he vanished, leaving her pregnant and penniless.

Tona's daughter by Siñor Martínes, named Roseta, was neglected just as the boys had been.

La pequeña Roseta, la chicuela caída en la barca por obra y gracia del pillo carabinero, apenas si merecía la atención de su madre. Criábase como una bestezuela bravia. Por la noche, Tona había de ir en su busca para encerrarla en la barca, después de darle una terrible zurra. Durante el día únicamente se presentaba cuando sentía hambre.²

Because Roseta was lazy and careless, her mother preferred that she run wild on the beach. At home she was no help at all. She broke the crockery and burnt the food. The two of them, living together in diffident hostility, agreed only in their hatred for men. Tona had loved two men: one, an unromantic fisherman whose work had killed him, and who had left her in squalor; the other a flattering romeo who had lied to her and abandoned her. Roseta was convinced that her mother's appraisal of men was right since she saw living proof in her two brothers: Tonet was un pillo and Pascualo was una bestia.

¹ Vicente Blasco Ibáñez, Flor de mayo (Barcelona: Editorial Planeta, 1958), p. 61.

² Ibid., p. 76.

¡Los hombres! ¡Vaya una gente! Ellos eran los culpables de todo. Lo que decía su madre y ella: el que no era pillo resultaba imbécil. Ellos, solamente ellos, tenían la culpa de que las mujeres fuesen como eran. ... Unos, por pillos, las pervertían, arrastrándolas a imitar su mala conducta; otros, por tontos, eran ciegos y no aplicaban a tiempo el remedio. ... Lo dicho: todos los hombres eran unos pillos y unos brutos.¹

The town was amazed by the pretty girl's refusal to become any man's sweetheart.

... los aborrecía, y causaba la admiración de todo el Cabañal rechazando a los que le proponían noviazgos. No quería nada con los hombres. Y retonaban en su memoria todas las maldiciones que había oído a su madre en momentos de desesperación, cuando los apostrofaba a solas en su barcaza.²

Tona's bitterness toward men and her increasing poverty affected her health and appearance. As other taverns opened and she grew old, ugly, and cynical, her business declined.

De la obesidad bien conservada había pasado bruscamente a la vejez. Bajo la luz cruda y azulada de la luna, veíase su cabeza escasa de pelos. ... El rostro, arrugado, tenía las mejillas flácidas y colgantes; y sus ojos negros, de los que tanto se había hablado en la playa, asomaban ahora, tristes y mates, por entre las abotagadas carnosidades, que pretendían sepultarlos. Esta decadencia era ocasionada por los disgustos. ¡Lo que los hombres la habían hecho rabiar!³

Tona hoped Tonet would marry Rosario, an orphan who had inherited three or four thousand duros, and was displeased by his interest in Dolores, a prettier girl than Rosario. Not only was Dolores a poor girl, she was the daughter of tío Paella, the town drunkard. With his battered tartana, he hauled commuters by day and sailors and prostitutes by night. The old procurer gave Dolores a liberal education in vice.

When Tonet joined the Navy, Pascualo gradually usurped his brother's place with Dolores and they were married. Tona believed that Dolores married

¹Ibid., p. 179.

²Ibid., p. 159.

³Ibid., p. 158.

Pascualo in order that she could have his money and enjoy her freedom while he was away fishing.

Aquella señora de la herradura se había empeñado en meterse en la familia, e iba a conseguirlo. Bien sabía lo que hacía la tunanta. Un marido bobalicón que se matase trabajando era lo conveniente para ella. ¡Ah, ladrona! ¡Cómo había sabido coger al único de la familia que ganaba dinero!¹

When Tonet returned from the service, he paid scant attention to his brother's marriage. He played the role of hero and decided to wed the wealthy Rosario so that he could mix with the elite who were exempt from degrading labor.

¿Casarse con Rosario? Conforme: era un buena chica. Además, tenía un capitalito que podía crecer mucho en manos de una persona inteligente, y esto era lo que él deseaba. Un hombre, después de servir en la Marina real, no podía dignamente descargar sacos en el muelle. Todo antes que esto.²

Rosario was proud to become his wife and the envy of the other girls who idolized the gallant, aristocratic ex-navyman.

After a year of marriage, the extravagant Tonet had spent all of Rosario's inheritance. She was forced to become a lowly pescadera like her neighbors and carry baskets of fish to sell in the Valencian market.

De su fama de rica descendió a la vida embrutecedora y fatigosa de pescadera de las más pobres. Levantábase poco después de medianoche; esperaba en la playa con los pies en charcos y el cuerpo mal cubierto por el viejo mantón, que ondeaba muchas veces bajo un viento de tempestad. Iba a pie a Valencia, abrumada por el peso de las canastas, y volvía, por la tarde a su casa, desfallecida de hambre y cansancio.³

Rosario worked and sacrificed in order to keep her husband a member of the leisure class. She walked to the market with the heavy baskets of fish to save carriage fare; she did not permit herself the luxury of taking refreshment in

¹Ibid., p. 83.

²Ibid., p. 85.

³Ibid., p. 86.

the chocolatería with the others. Only by maintaining Tonet's image as a member of elite society could she feel superior to the other wretches of the pescadería.

... pero se tenía por feliz si lograba mantener al señor en su antiguo boato. ... A la pobre mujercita, cada vez más flaca y derrotada, le parecían insignificantes sus miserias, siempre que al señor no le faltase la peseta para tomar el café y el juego del dominó, la comida abundante y las camisetas de franela bien vistosas. Algo caro le costaba; ella envejecía antes de los treinta años, pero podía lucir como exclusiva propiedad del mejor mozo del Cabañal.¹

Tonet turned to his brother for money and to Dolores, his former sweetheart, for affection. A fierce jealousy developed between the sisters-in-law. In the market they exchanged glares and insults, which were accented by occasional blows and scratches. In one of their affrays, the frail Rosario tore an earring from Dolores' ear. This fight climaxed their rivalry for the attention of Tonet. Dolores boasted of her power over Tonet and taunted Rosario about her poverty. The coup de grace for Rosario was the striking resemblance between Tonet and Pascualet, Dolores' small son.

Meanwhile, Tonet showed no love or gratitude for Rosario, although she was killing herself in order to provide him with fancy clothes and spending money. Many nights he came home late, and sometimes he did not appear for several days. If Rosario complained of his conduct, he beat her brutally.

A altas horas de la noche llegaba a su barraca para acostarse, ceñudo y jurando entre dientes, dispuesto a contestar con bofetadas la menor protesta de Rosario. Esta pasaba sin verle dos o tres días muchas veces, pero no así en casa de su hermano, adonde iba con frecuencia.²

The entire district was aware of the scandal between Tonet and Dolores

¹Ibid., p. 87.

²Ibid., p. 154.

except el Retor. He was certain he had an honorable wife and a happy home. He believed that Rosario's jealousy resulted only from a mean disposition, and he would not consider shutting his brother out of his house. Pascualo had even included him in a successful smuggling operation in the hope that it would make a man out of him.

With the money received from his smuggling venture, el Retor fulfilled his dream. He had built for himself a sailboat which, when completed, was larger and better than any of the others. The name chosen for it was Flor de mayo. This was appropriate for it was also the name of the tobacco which the fishermen smuggled.

The christening of the Flor de mayo was a grand occasion. The ringing of the church bells beckoned everyone to the beach to see the ceremony. Expense was no consideration to el Retor who asked the priest to wear his best capa, and to sprinkle not only the outside but the deck and interior of the boat as well. Everyone was in a festive mood except Tona, who suddenly realizing that she did love her older son after all, cried as if she were attending his funeral.

Sentía miedo por su hijo, al que amaba de pronto, como si acabase de encontrarle después de larga ausencia. Nada significaba que fuese un gran marinero; también lo era su padre y se burlaba de las olas. ¡Ay!, se lo decía el corazón. El mar se la tenía jurada a la familia, y se tragaría la nueva barca, como había destrozado a la otra.¹

She was haunted by memories of her husband, and felt that the vengeful sea was mocking this moment of felicity.

The proud owner hoped that his brother would sail with him on Flor de mayo's maiden fishing trip. However, Tonet and Dolores had already conspired

¹Ibid., p. 171.

to take advantage of Pascualo's absence. At sailing time, Tonet pretended to have an injured hand and did not join the crew. Rosario finally convinced Pascualo that the gossip about his wife and brother was true. She pointed out the close resemblance between Tonet and Pascualet. He fainted from fury; when he regained consciousness, he was torn by conflicting emotions.

Dentro de él existían dos seres; ahora lo comprendía. El uno era el de siempre: el trabajador bondadoso y crédulo, penetrado del afecto a todos los suyos; el otro la bestia que él presentía al pensar en la posibilidad de ser engañado, y que ante la traición estremecíase con un delirio de sangre.¹

His initial surge of anger was followed by self-reproach. He was to blame because he had married the daughter of the disreputable tío Paella, and had stolen Tonet's sweetheart. He could not kill the brother who was like a son to him. He would forgive, just as the priest had often exhorted. Then he chided himself for this sentimental notion which was only an excuse for his lack of courage. He could forgive if he lived in a desert; but he lived in town where everyone knew him. Again, anger swept over him and he was ready to kill anyone who stood in his way. El Retor knew that Tonet was with Dolores at that moment, but he did not want to create a disturbance and be mocked by his neighbors. He decided to wait for a better opportunity for his vengeance.

When el Retor arrived at the beach the next morning, Tonet greeted him from the deck of the Flor de mayo. He had come early in order to avert his brother's suspicion. The sight of Tonet increased Pascualo's desire to flee from the sight of the gossips on shore. In spite of the menacing sky which signaled an approaching storm, he called his men to their stations. They respectfully obeyed in accord with the saying, "Donde hay patrón no manda

¹Ibid., p. 226.

marinero.¹

The patrones covetously watched the departure of Flor de mayo.

Aquel lanudo se había vuelto loco. El muy ladrón iba a hacer un negocio, y ellos, por cobardes, se quedarían con las manos en los bolsillos. Esta suposición los irritó, como si el Retor fuese a apoderarse de toda la pesca que había en el mar. Los mas codiciosos y audaces se decidieron. Ellos eran tan hombres como el que más y podían ir a donde fuese otro. ¡Barcas al agua!²

They feared that their rival would haul in a good catch, and that they would be left empty-handed. Their greed overruled their precautionary instincts.

Grimly they set sail as their wives screamed out their fears and cursed el Retor for the exodus he had started. Tona ran to the beach and vainly shouted toward the distant boat which carried her two sons and her grandson, Pascualet, who was a gato. She feared that the sea would swallow them up just as it had once devoured her husband.

On the high sea, el Retor stood at the helm, scarcely noticing that the storm was almost upon them. His dishonor and the memory of the malicious laughter of his acquaintances blinded him with anger. He sailed on into the tempest, feeling hatred for the sea, the boat, and the men; he wanted to destroy himself and all of his work.

Y el patrón, según se iba convenciendo de su deshonra, arañábase el pecho y lanzaba miradas de odio al mar, a su barca y hasta a los marineros, que a hurtadillas le examinaban con inquietud, creyendo que esta ira se la causaba el mal tiempo. ¿Por qué deseaba trabajar? No mantendría más a la perra que por tanto tiempo le había puesto en ridículo. ... Nada deseaba ya en el mundo; morir, y que pereciese con él toda su obra.³

When the storm raged around them el Retor was beset by pangs of remorse.

¹"Where there is a skipper a sailor does not command."

²Blasco Ibáñez, Flor de mayo, p. 237.

³Ibid., p. 241.

His fury had caused him to imperil not only his own loyal crew but many other fishermen as well.

¡Loco! ¡Miserable! Se avergonzaba de si mismo. Era más criminal que los que le habían hecho traición. Si estaba cansado de la vida, podía haberse atado una piedra al cuello para arrojarse de cabeza al mar en la escollera de Levante. Pero ¿con qué derecho su locura había llevado a la muerte a tanto hombre trabajador? ¿Qué dirían en el Cabañal, viendo que por su culpa medio pueblo se había arrojado en medio de la tempestad? ... Pensó en las muchas embarcaciones que seguramente habían perecido a aquellas horas. Miró avergonzado a sus compañeros de tripulación, amarrados, azotados por las olas y lanzados en el peligro por obedecerle. Había obrado como un criminal al arrastrarlos por su testarudez hacia la muerte.¹

Although the other boats were able to return to the safety of the shore, the Flor de mayo had sailed too far out. El Retor desperately tried to guide his crippled boat towards the harbor. He left the helm, however, when he saw Tonet emerge from the hold with a life-jacket; he could not let Tonet escape. In the brief struggle, el Retor stabbed Tonet twice. Then he fastened the life-jacket around Pascualet and threw him overboard.

Dolores, Tona, and Rosario watched the Flor de mayo flounder, capsize, and sink. Then they spotted the boy, and watched helplessly as he was dashed against the rocks. Tía Picores, the wise old lioness of the pescadería, had been shaking her fist at the angry sea; now she turned her back on the sea and shook her fist at the distant city of Valencia. The city people who haggled over the price of the fish had caused this tragedy.

Allá estaba el enemigo, el verdadero autor de la catástrofe. Y el puño de la bruja del mar, hinchado y enorme, siguió amenazando a la ciudad, mientras su boca vomitaba injurias. ¡Que viniesen allí todas las zorras que regateaban al comprar en la Pescadería! ¡Aun les parecía caro el pescado?... ¡A duro debía costar la libra!²

¹Ibid., p. 248.

²Ibid., p. 265.

In Flor de mayo, Blasco Ibáñez ran the gamut of dark passions, and barely touched on the brighter side of life. Tender love is absent; joy is superficial and overshadowed by gloom; and self-control crumbles before the onslaught of fury. The three areas of human depravity which are listed by Saint John, the lust of the eye (greed), the lust of the flesh (sensuality), and the vain-glory of life (pride),¹ interact to create sinister passions with their tragic consequences.

Greed motivated three persons to get married. Siñor Martínes married Tona in order to steal her savings. Dolores married Pascualo because he earned more than anyone else. And Tonet married Rosario because of her inheritance.

Sensuality accompanied greed in Siñor Martínes' dealings with Tona. He took her affection as well as her money. In return, he left her with a broken heart, an illegitimate daughter, and a life-long bitter hatred for men. The adulterous love between Tonet and Dolores caused Tonet's wife, Rosario, to be tortured by jealousy and hatred.

Rosario's pride, as well as Tonet's sensuality, was to blame for her misery. She was aware of his irresponsible nature before she married him; however, she considered the handsome young man to be a prize catch, especially after he returned from the Navy. She felt proud that her husband was a man of distinction and leisure. After he spent all her inheritance, she suffered hardship in order to maintain her husband in the company of those who were considered wealthy.

The wounded pride of el Retor was the primary cause of the grim sea tragedy which climaxed the novel. Secondary causes were the greed and

¹I John 2:15

sensuality of his wife and brother. Calm, trusting Pascualo became passionately jealous when Rosario convinced him that Tonet and Dolores were lovers. His anger subsided, however, and he considered his own guilt. He would have forgiven his wife and brother had their affair not been the talk of the town. Pascualo's pundonor banished his noble sentiments and produced in him such insane fury that he sent his crew to watery graves as well as himself, his brother, and the boy.

Several other crews barely survived the tempest that day. Their skippers chose to sail rather than to stand by and let their rival show them up as cowards. Because of their greed and pride, they risked the lives of many men.

In Flor de mayo Blasco depicted the injury, passion, adultery, and homicide which result from man's selfish, carnal nature. The Spanish Jesuit, Baltasar Gracián, followed the same theme in his moral novel El criticón. Herein, Critilo warned Andrenio, the animal-boy about the evils of civilized man:

¡Qué de engaños, qué de enredos, traiciones, hurtos, homicidios, adulterios, envidias, injurias, detracciones y falsedades, que experimentarás entre ellos! Todo lo cual no se halla ni se conoce entre las fieras. Créeme que no hay lobo, no hay león, no hay tigre, no hay basilisco, que llegue al hombre: a todos excede en fiereza.¹

However, man's perversity and passion were not entirely to blame for the tragedies in the novel. The people Blasco described were also victims of impersonal forces of environment. Tona was typical of women in the fishing villages who lived with the fear of losing a son or husband at sea. They came to regard the sea as a hypocritical friend who could not be trusted. Other

¹Baltasar Gracián, El criticón in Antología general de la literatura española, Vol. I, ed. Angel del Río (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966), p. 759.

forces of tragedy, in addition to the sea, were poverty and ignorance. The poor became enslaved to their poverty, and some resorted to indecency. Children received little or no formal education. Like Dolores and Tonet, they learned to steal, cheat, and live promiscuously. For such children, tragedy was their only inheritance. They would some day agree with Segismundo who rattled his chains and declared, "The greatest crime of man is to have been born."

¡Ay, mísero de mí! ¡Ay, infelice!
 Apurar, cielos, pretendo,
 ya que me tratáis así,
 que delito cometí
 contra vosotros naciendo;
 aunque si nací, ya entiendo
 qué delito he cometido.
 Bastante causa ha tenido
 vuestra justicia y rigor,
 pues el delito mayor
 del hombre es haber nacido.¹

¹Pedro Calderón de la Barca, La vida es sueño in Ibid., p. 768.

CHAPTER III

LA BARRACA

The simple, dramatic story of La barraca unfolds in the farm belt of Valencia called la huerta. In Blasco Ibáñez' time, the district was divided into small farms, many of which were owned by city landlords. For centuries some of the rented farms had been passed from father to son. Blasco commented on this practice in an essay titled "Alma valenciana."

... no hay provincia española que tenga tantos propietarios como Valencia. La agricultura esta subdividida hasta lo infinito. Cada labriego es dueño del pedazo de tierra que cultiva. Unos son propietarios por la ley, los más tienen la tierra en arrendamiento, transmitiéndose su posesión por herencia, dentro de la familia, desde hace siglos, sin que el verdadero dueño, que reside en la ciudad, ose intervenir en estas donaciones ni aumentar el arriendo que aun se cuenta por libras y sueldos, como en tiempos de los reyes de Aragón.¹

The farmer felt that the land belonged to him, even though he paid rent. He resented the unseen proprietor who had never worked a minute on the land, and in turn, the owner chafed at the tenant's independence. In his prologue to La barraca, Blasco pointed to this discord between tenant and landlord as the basis for the plot.

Era la historia de unos campos forzosamente yermos, que vi muchas veces, siendo niño, en los alrededores de Valencia, por la parte del Cementerio; campos utilizados hace años como solares por la expansión urbana; el relato de una lucha entre labriegos y propietarios, que tuvo por origen un suceso trágico y abundó luego en conflictos y violencias.²

The integrity and courage of the protagonist give the novel a universal

¹Vicente Blasco Ibáñez, "Alma valenciana," in Costumbristas españoles, edited by Evaristo Correa Calderón (Madrid: Aguilar, S.A., 1951), p. 932.

²Vicente Blasco Ibáñez, La barraca, Austral Collection (Buenos Aires: Espasa-Calpe Argentina, S.A., 1957), p. 7.

appeal, in spite of its provincial setting. He attains the stature of a great person as described by Angel Ganivet in his Idearium español: "el de haber trabajado en silencio; el de poder abandonar la vida con la satisfacción de no haber recibido el premio que merecían sus trabajos."¹ Miguel de Unamuno described men of his caliber as "intrahistórico," that is, worthy men who do not make the headlines or history books.

Esa vida intrahistórica, silenciosa y continua como el fondo del mar, es la sustancia del progreso, la verdadera tradición, la tradición eterna, no la tradición mentira que se suele ir a buscar al pasado enterrado en libros y paples y monumentos y piedras...²

The virtue of the principal character accents his tragedy because he deserves the respect rather than the hatred of his neighbors.

Tío Barret, the venerable patriarch of the huerta, was also an exemplary character. He was happy to toil long hours in order to provide for his family, and he was proud to work on the same land which had been cultivated by five or six generations of Barrets before him. His greatest fear was that his landlord might rent part of his beloved heritage to someone else.

His landlord, don Salvador, a rich miser who lived in Valencia, was meddlesome and oppressive. The farmers felt sorry for tío Barret who worked desperately and exhausted his small inheritance in order to pay his rent on time. However, the farmer's willingness to pay and the productiveness of his farm only prompted the landlord to demand higher rent.

De todos sus colonos, el mejor era Barret, aunque a costa de grandes esfuerzos, nada le debía. Y el viejo, que lo citaba como modelo a los otros arrendatarios, cuando estaba frente a él extremaba su crueldad,

¹Miguel de Unamuno, En torno al casticismo, in Antología general de la literatura española, vol. II. ed. by Angel del Río, (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1966), p. 464.

²Ibid., p. 464.

se mostraba más exigente, excitado por la mansedumbre del labrador, contento de encontrar un hombre en el que podía saciar sin miedo sus instintos de opresión y de rapiña. Aumentó, por fin, el precio del arrendamiento de las tierras, Barret protestó, y hasta lloró recordando los méritos de su familia, que había perdido la piel en aquellos campos para hacer de ellos los mejores de la huerta. Pero don Salvador se mostró inflexible. ¿Eran los mejores? Pues debía pagar más, y Barret pagó el aumento.¹

The harder tío Barret worked to satisfy don Salvador, the weaker he became. He had already fallen behind in his rent when his horse died. Don Salvador loaned him the money to purchase another horse, and required him to sign a note which listed all his possessions as security. Tío Barret's indebtedness increased to such a point that don Salvador ordered him to vacate the farm. However, the proud tenant refused to leave the land which he regarded as his own. Were it not for neighbors who restrained him, he would have shot the magistrates who locked his house and deposited his clothes and small tools outside the door.

That night the evicted farmer destroyed his crops, and only respect for his ancestors prevented him from setting fire to the old hut. The next morning tío Barret encountered don Salvador on a country road. The enraged Barret ignored the pleas of the landlord and viciously slashed him with his sickle.

¡Pero Barret!, ¡hijo mío! ¿Qué es esto?... ¡Baja esa arma, no juegues...! Tú eres un hombre honrado..., piensa en tus hijas. Te repito que ha sido una broma. Ven mañana y te daré las lla... ¡Aaay! ... Fue un rugido horripilante, un grito de bestia herida. Cansada la hoz de encontrar obstáculos, había derribado de un solo golpe una de las manos crispadas. Quedó colgando de los tendones y la piel, y el rojo muñón arrojó la sangre con fuerza, salpicando a Barret, que rugió al recibir en el rostro la caliente rociada. Vaciló el viejo sobre sus piernas, pero antes de caer al suelo, la hoz partió horizontalmente contra su cuello, y... ¡zas!, cortando la complicada envoltura de pañuelos, abrió una profunda hendidura, separando casi la cabeza del tronco.²

¹Blasco, La barraca, p. 23.

²Ibid., p. 32.

After the murder of don Salvador, the Barret family dissolved: the father was sent to prison in Ceuta where he soon died; his wife succumbed in a hospital, and his four girls scattered in Valencia to survive as best they could.

The farmers tacitly agreed that the Barret place should remain vacant. The leader of the conspiracy against don Salvador's heirs was Pimentó, a lazy bully who spent hours loafing at the tavern or at home. He forced his wife, Pepeta, to work like a slave--the price she had to pay for being married to such a strong, important person.

Al amanecer y estaba de vuelta del Mercado. Levantábase a las tres, cargada con los cestones de verduras cogidas por Toni al cerrar la noche anterior entre reniegos y votos contra una pícara vida en la que tanto hay que trabajar, y a tientas por los senderos, guiándose en la obscuridad como buena hija de la huerta, marchaba a Valencia, mientras su marido, aquel buen mozo que tan caro le costaba, seguía roncando dentro del caliente estudi, bien arrebujaado en las mantas del camón matrimonial...Después de esta venta corría otra vez hacia su barraca, deseando salvar cuanto antes una hora de camino. Entraba de nuevo en funciones para desarrollar una segunda industria después de las hortalizas, la leche.¹

As Pepeta was returning from Valencia one morning, she was astonished to see a family with a wagon-load of possessions turn into the fields of Barret. She ran to inform her husband, who immediately dashed away to witness the incredible event. The news, which spread rapidly through the community, was received with alarm and indignation.

Pero a lo lejos sonaban voces y llamamientos: la noticia se transmitía a grito pelado de un campo a otro campo, y un estremecimiento de alarma, de extrañeza, de indignación, corría por toda la vega, como si no hubiesen transcurrido los siglos y circulara el aviso de que en la playa acababa de aparecer una galera argelina buscando cargamento de carne blanca.²

The newcomer to the huerta, Batiste Borrull, was not worried about the

¹Ibid., p. 12.

²Ibid., p. 20.

failure of others to farm the Barret place. The tale of the old feud between tío Barret and don Salvador would not prevent him from earning a better living for his family. The opportunity to farm the land rent-free for two years, provided that he repair the house and put the fields into production, seemed like a dream come true. Ten weeks after the arrival of the Borrull family, the condemned property was in better condition than it was during the days of tío Barret. The restoration enraged the offended farmers who had been critically observing the transformation of the land and of the barraca.

Devoraban los vecinos su rabia en silencio. ¡Ladrón, más que ladrón! ¡Vaya un modo de trabajar!... Aquel hombre parecía poseer con sus membrudos brazos dos varitas mágicas que lo transformaban todo al tocarlo. Diez semanas después de su llegada, aun no había salido de sus tierras media docena de veces. Siempre en ellas, la cabeza metida entre los hombros y el espinazo doblegado embriagándose en su labor; y la barraca de Barret presentaba un aspecto coquetón y risueño, como jamás lo había tenido en poder de su antiguo ocupante.¹

Pimentó assured his angry neighbors that the newcomer would not be there to harvest the first crop.

He encountered Batiste one day and counseled him to move elsewhere. Batiste's resolute intention to remain angered Pimentó, who expected people to cower before him. The bully felt humiliated and swore to get revenge.

Al quedar solo, Pimentó recobró su soberbia, "¡Cristo! ¡Y cómo se había burlado de el aquel tío!" Masculló algunas maldiciones, y cerrando el puño senaló amenazante la curva del camino por donde había desaparecido Batiste. --¡Tú me las pagarás! ...¡Me las pagarás, morral! --En su voz, trémula de rabia, vibraban condensados todos los odios de la huerta.²

Pimentó's first act of vengeance was to have Batiste summoned before el Tribunal de las Aguas, on a charge of having irrigated at the wrong hour. Batiste objected loudly to the false accusation, with the result that the

¹Ibid., p. 42.

²Ibid., p. 44.

Tribunal assessed the defrauded farmer four sueños for "contempt of court," as well as two libras for the violation. The fines hurt Batiste, but the grins and applause of his foes from the huerta distressed him more. Pimentó's victory over Batiste before the Tribunal encouraged open hostility toward the Barrull family.

¡Cómo le odiaba la gente! La vega entera alzabase ante él a todos horas, ceñuda y amenazante. Aquello no era vivir. Hasta de día evitaba el abandonar sus campos, rehuyendo el roce con los vecinos. De noche dormía con zozobra, y muchas veces, al menor ladrido del perro, saltaba de la cama, lanzándose fuera de la barraca, escopeta en mano. En más de una ocasión creyó ver negros bultos que huían por las sendas inmediatas.¹

Even the children were not exempt from persecution. Roseta, the oldest daughter, was regularly hazed by girls from the huerta who worked with her at a Valencian silk factory. Roseta suffered especially cruel treatment one Sunday afternoon when she went to a cistern which was a favorite meeting place for the local girls. As she approached the ancient well with her pitcher, she was greeted with scornful silence.

La ruidosa tertulia de la fuente callose al verla. Causó estupefacción en el primer momento la presencia de Roseta: algo así como la entrada de un moro en la iglesia de Alboraya en plena misa mayor. ¿A qué venía allí aquella "hambrienta"? Saludó Roseta a dos o tres que eran de su fábrica, y apenas si le contestaron, apretando los labios y con retintín de desprecio. Las demás, repuestas de la sorpresa, siguieron hablando, como si nada hubiera pasado, no queriendo conceder a la intrusa ni el honor del silencio.²

Roseta ignored the rude reception until Pimentó's niece began to repeat lies about Batiste which she had heard from her uncle. A fight broke out between the two girls which provoked the others to fall upon Roseta. The abuse ended abruptly when Roseta fell down the slippery steps of the well, and struck her

¹Ibid., p. 52.

²Ibid., p. 71.

forehead.

Desapareció Roseta bajo los amenazantes brazos. Su cara cubrióse de rasguños. Agobiada por tantos golpes, ni caer pudo, pues las mismas apreturas de sus enemigas la mantenían derecha. Pero empujada de un lado a otro, acabo rodando por los resbaladizos escalones, y su frente chocó contra una arista de la piedra.¹

Frightened at the sight of blood, the girls scattered like birds. Roseta returned home alone, with her clothes torn and her face smeared with dirt and blood.

Three of her brothers attended a one-room school, which was conducted by a stern teacher named don Joaquin. Frequently, the boys returned from school dirty and ragged after fighting with their schoolmates. One afternoon, two of the Borrull boys rescued Pascualet, their five-year-old brother, from a stagnant pool where some rascals had tossed him. The child became critically ill with fever caused by his exposure.

Misfortune now poured down upon the Borrull family. The oldest boy, Batistet, received head injuries and facial scars from a fight with some boys who ganged up on him. The younger boys dropped out of school to avoid the inevitable clashes on the way home. Roseta was broken-hearted because her sweetheart was forbidden to see her.

Even worse calamity was presaged by the death of Batiste's reliable workhorse. The beast was jaded from pulling the plow through the packed, neglected soil and from hauling fertilizer from the city. Batiste borrowed money from his landowners to buy another horse. The first day the new horse was hitched to the plow, a sniper wounded the animal.

At the time of the shooting, Batiste was with his wife, Teresa, at the

¹Ibid., p. 73

bedside of Pascualet, who was dying. Daily visits by the physician had failed to pull the lad through his crisis. The helpless parents were grief-stricken.

La madre lanzaba gemidos desesperados, aullidos de fiera enfurecida. Su hija, llorando silenciosamente, tenía necesidad de contenerla, de sujetarla, para que no se arrojase sobre el pequeño o se estrellara la cabeza contra la pared. Fuera lloriqueaban los pequeños sin atreverse a entrar, como si les infundieran terror los lamentos de su madre, y junto a la cama estaba Batiste, absorto, apretando los puños, mordiéndose los labios, con la vista fija en aquel cuerpecito, al que tantas angustias y estremecimientos costaba soltar la vida. La falsa calma del hombretón, ... ofrecían una expresión aun más dolorosa que los lamentos de la madre.¹

Although Batiste blamed the entire community for the death of his little boy, he especially blamed Pimento, the very one who had probably shot his horse. The anguished farmer loaded his shotgun and headed for Pimento's barraca, where he called and pounded on the door. When no one responded, he roared insults at his enemy until his strength was spent. Frustrated, he sat down and wept.

¡Cuán desgraciado era! ¡Solo contra todos!... Al pequenín lo encontraría muerto al volver a su barraca; el caballo, que era su vida, inutilizado por aquellos traidores; el mal llegando a él de todas partes, surgiendo de los caminos, de las casas, de los cañares, aprovechando todas las ocasiones para herir a los suyos; y él, inerme, sin poder defenderse de aquel enemigo que se desvanecía apenas intentaba revolverse contra él, cansado de sufrir.²

The death of Pascualet pierced the conscience of the district. Neighbors who never before had made a friendly gesture to the Borrull family, now poured into their house to offer condolence and help. Pepeta was especially sympathetic and helpful. As Pimentó's wife, she understood the misery of being the victim of another's oppression.

Batiste hasta se estremeció viendo como la pobre Pepeta abrazaba a Teresa y a su hija, confundiendo sus lágrimas con las de ésta. No; allí no había doblez; era una víctima; por eso sabía comprender la

¹Ibid., p. 96.

²Ibid., p. 99.

desgracia de ellos, que eran víctimas también.¹

Don Joaquín was among those who visited the grieved family. He apologized to Batiste for the persecution which the community had heaped upon them. The dedicated maestro remarked that education offered the remedy for such brutish behavior.

"Créame a mí que los conozco bien: en el fondo son buena gente. Muy brutos, eso sí, capaces de las mayores barbaridades, pero con un corazón que se conmueve ante el infortunio y les hace ocultar las garras... ¡Pobre gente! ¿Qué culpa tienen si nacieron para vivir como bestias y nadie les saca de su condición? ... Aquí lo que se necesita es instrucción. Templos del saber que difundan la luz de la ciencia por esta vega, ... "²

Although the Borrull family lived peacefully during the harvest season, the compassion of their neighbors gradually cooled. They were painfully aware that since the Barret lands were in cultivation again, they had lost their domination of the landlords. The laborers no longer could appease the landlord with chickens, cakes, fruit, and partial payments. In fact, proprietors were again warning their tenants that they must pay in full or be evicted.

Todos reconocían que sus amos habían cambiado al recordar los detalles de su última entrevista con ellos; las amenazas de desahucio, la negativa a aceptar la paga incompleta, la expresión irónica con que les habían hablado de las tierras del tío Barret, otra vez cultivadas a pesar del odio de toda la huerta. Y ahora, repentinamente, después de la dulce flojedad de diez años de triunfo, con la rienda a la espalda y el amo a los pies, venía el cruel tirón, la vuelta a otros tiempos, el encontrar amargo el pan y el vino más áspero pensando en el maldito semestre, y todo por culpa de un forastero, de un piojoso que ni siquiera había nacido en la huerta, descolgándose entre ellos para embrollar su negocio y hacerles más difícil la vida.³

One afternoon Batiste joined a crowd at the tavern to watch a drinking marathon

¹Ibid., p. 103.

²Ibid., p. 108.

³Ibid., p. 125.

which involved Pimentó and two other bullies. When someone remarked that Pimentó was not as rich as he once was, a sinister hush fell over the onlookers. Pimentó staggered to his feet and ordered his enemy to leave. Batiste understood that "to leave" meant to abandon his farm, so he shook his head defiantly. Pimentó then struck Batiste in the face and the crowd pressed forward. Batiste held back the mob with a heavy chair and then crashed it down on Pimentó's head.

After the tavern occurrence Batiste lost all hope of living at peace on his land. His neighbors grew so hostile that his family had to remain in the house like "frightened snails." The boys ceased attending school, Roseta quit her job, and the father never went outside without his gun. Teresa languished with anxiety every time that Batiste left the house.

Teresa estaba tan triste como al morir el pequeñuelo. Cada vez que veía a su marido limpiando los dos cañones del arma, ... pasaba por su memoria la imagen del presidio y la terrible historia del tío Barret. ... Y después venían las horas de inquietud por la ausencia de su marido, unas tardes interminables, de angustia, esperando al hombre que nunca regresaba, saliendo a la puerta de la barraca para explorar el camino, estremeciéndose cada vez que sonaba a lo lejos algún disparo de los cazadores de golondrinas, creyéndolo el principio de una tragedia, ... ¹

Batiste's aggressiveness against Pimentó and the mob at the tavern engendered in him a defiant scorn for his opponents. He continued to work in his fields, but in order to display his intrepidity, he often went hunting in various parts of the huerta. One day, when Batiste had been hunting, he failed to return before dark. As he approached his farm, those he passed showed increasing hostility. He had entered enemy territory, so he loaded his gun. Yet, even with his readied weapon, he felt vulnerable to ambush from the

¹Ibid., p. 130.

ditches or cane fields. He knew Pimentó would relish such an opportunity to blast him.

Batiste, para burlarse de su propia inquietud, exageraba el peligro mentalmente. ¡Magnífico lugar para soltarle un escopetazo seguro! Si Pimentó anduviese por allí, no despreciaría tan hermosa ocasión. Y apenas se dijo esto, salió de entre las cañas una recia y fugaz lengua de fuego, una flecha roja, que al disolverse produjo un estampido, y algo pasó silbando junto a una oreja de Batiste. Tiraban contra él... ¹

Two shots flashed in the darkness from the cane-brake. Batiste ignored the burning tear in his left shoulder and furiously pursued his assailant through the reeds into a shallow, mucky ravine. The chase was wild, desperate. Outraged by the waylay and by the long seige of terrorism upon his family, Batiste frantically plunged through the slough, careful only to keep his gun dry.

Y empezó una carrera loca en el profundo cauce, andando a tientas en la sombra, dejando perdidas las alpargatas en el légamo del lecho, con los pantalones pegados a la carne, tirantes, pesados, dificultando los movimientos, recibiendo en el rostro el bofetón de las cañas tronchadas, los arañazos de las hojas rígidas y cortantes. Hubo un momento en que Batiste creyó ver algo negro que se agarraba a las cañas pugnando por remontar el ribazo. Pretendía escaparse... ¡Fuego!²

Before the fleeing coward could clamber up the slimy creek bank, his irate pursuer fired two well-aimed shots at him. Just when Batiste was about to overtake his foe, he lost his footing and sprawled headlong into the mire. By the time he extracted himself, his wounded adversary had disappeared. The shots and the barking of dogs electrified the countryside. Batiste scurried like a hunted rabbit toward his distant barraca. His anxious family embraced him wildly; then they stood aghast at his ragged, bloody clothes and his mud-caked face.

¹Ibid., p. 133.

²Ibid., p. 134.

Teresa and Roseta dressed his wound and kept an all-night vigil beside their delirious loved one. The next day Batiste was well enough to note the flurry of people at Pimento's house. The gathering could mean only one thing. The rural leader was the one he had chased and shot, and now he was dead. Dread and remorse erased other thoughts from his mind. What would be his own fate? Would he die in prison like tío Barret? He knew the answer: Pimentó's comrades would take the law into their own hands in order to avenge the death of their leader.

That night Batiste went to bed with his crime heavy upon his heart. He never wanted to harm anyone; he only wanted to support his family and to live at peace with his neighbors. Even in his sleep he was tormented by a nightmare in which a monster with Pimentó's face was dragging him off into the flames of hell.

Tal era su dolor, que los estremecimientos, subiendo a lo largo de su espalda hasta la cabeza, erizaban sus rapados cabellos, haciéndolos crecer y enroscarse con la contracción de la angustia, hasta convertirse en horrible madeja de serpientes. Entonces ocurrió una cosa horrible. El fantasma ... le arrastraba con sobrehumana ligereza, lo llevaba volando o nadando...a través de un elemento ligero y resbaladizo, y así iban los dos vertiginosamente, desliziéndose en la sombra, hacia una mancha roja que se marcaba lejos, muy lejos.¹

Awakened by his nightmare, Batiste realized that although the phantom was gone, the fire and smoke remained. The infierno was his own house! The family barely escaped from the dwelling which had been ignited from all four sides. The stable and sheds were also burning. The oldest boy dashed along the paths, shouting and pounding on doors for help.

Su padre sonrió cruelmente. En vano llamaba. La huerta era sorda para ellos. Dentro de las blancas barracas había ojos que atisbaban curiosos por las rendijas, tal vez bocas que reían con un gozo

¹Ibid., p. 141

infernol, pero ni una voz que dijera: "Aquí estoy!"¹

No one came to assist them in any way. The hated family, clad in their night clothes, stood alone before their burning barraca. Now they would leave the huerta, more destitute than when they arrived, and begin again their struggle for existence. Here, in the tierras malditas, lied buried their possessions, their hopes, their success, and their youngest son.

La vega, silenciosa y ceñuda, les despedía para siempre. Estaban más solos que en medio de un desierto: el vacío del odio era mil veces peor que el de la Naturaleza.²

The misfortunes and calamities described in La barraca are born of a unique situation. The environment itself, unlike that of Flor de mayo, was not conducive to misery and catastrophe. In the fertile soil of the huerta, people could lead peaceful, prosperous lives. Nature was kind to her children and the hortelanos were not prisoners of poverty or slaves of sensuality. Two of the finest characters in Blasco's Valencian novels are tío Barret and Batiste Borrull. The idealism typified by these stalwarts was also demonstrated by their families. In spite of the favorable milieu and the integrity of some of the principal characters, the novel proceeds from one tragedy to another and has a grim ending. The intense tension and conflict can be appreciated only within the framework of the land ownership problem, and more specifically, that of the conflict between tío Barret and don Salvador.

Greed was a major cause of tragedy both in the feud between tío Barret and don Salvador and in the conflict between Batiste and the farmers of the huerta. Because of his greed, don Salvador ignored tío Barret's love for his land, his prompt payment of the rent, and the welfare of his tenant's family.

¹Ibid., p. 143.

²Ibid., p. 144.

The wealthy money-lender demanded higher rent from the already over-worked farmer. When he realized that his tenant could not pay more, he loaned him money with a chattel mortgage. He knew that after the borrower had fallen behind in his payments, he could legally evict him. Then, he would rent the farm to another. Tío Barret and his family could have lived happily on their farm for many years. Instead, don Salvador's insatiable lust for wealth obliterated their idyllic joy and honor. The ultimate consequence of the proprietor's covetousness was his own hideous death and the extinction of the Barret family.

Although the farmers who persecuted Batiste were not the wealthy, avaricious type as was don Salvador, they were, nevertheless, motivated by greed. It is important to note that their conspiracy to keep the Barret place unoccupied was more than a sentimental tribute to their martyred friend. The boycott afforded them a bargaining power over their landlords: the fate of don Salvador and the wasted land proved what could happen to a landlord who demanded his rent money. The farmers persecuted Batiste and his family because his success on the Barret place had terminated their ten-year dominion over the landlords. They preferred to see an innocent family encounter misfortune and failure rather than to see their landlord gain the upper hand. The fertile soil could have been a real economic boon for the Borrull family, or for any other industrious family which struggled for its bread. Such uncultivated land was vital to Spain for its potential productivity and for its employment opportunity for those in misery.

A less obvious cause of tragedy was uncontrolled anger. In tío Barret's case, pride combined with his passionate anger to bring about his disastrous end. As heir of the Barret holdings, he was too proud to permit anyone else to

rent a part of the land even though he could not farm all of it by himself. When he was notified that he had been evicted, his ancestral pride, his love for the land, and his love for his family which the land sustained, made him refuse to leave. His ultimate eviction unleashed in him a frenzy which led him to destroy his crops and to kill his landlord. A similar madness swept over Batiste when a hidden enemy fired at him. The noble farmer had already grievously suffered the effects of hostility. Hatred for him and his family had become so intense that it was not even safe for his children to leave the house. In desperation, Batiste reacted violently and killed his enemy. The tragedy of the two men, both noble and industrious, was that they were provoked to extremes of passionate anger. They lacked the greatest virtue of all which, according to Alonso de la Torre, is to control one's passions.

Y la mayor fortaleza que pueda ser en el hombre, e la mayor tranquilidad para vivir bien aventurado, es vencer si mismo e sujudgar las pasiones: ca ¿qué monta a un hombre haber sujudgado los indios e los mediterráneos septentrionales, y ser vencido de la ira e de las otras pasiones? Pues la primera fortaleza es supeditar e enseñorear las pasiones propias: e gran virtud es non ser hombre vencido de las cosas tristes, ni ser mudado por los infortunios o adversidades.¹

The main cause of the persecution heaped upon the Borrull family was the wounded pride of Pimentó. For him, Batiste's success connoted more than money lost in rent; it meant the loss of his personal prestige. The farmers looked up to him as a champion of their rights and expected him to rout any intruder who attempted to farm the tierras malditas. Hence, Pimentó regarded Batiste's refusal to leave the land as a personal affront. For vengeance, Pimentó launched a hate and slander campaign against Batiste. The persecuted

¹Torre, Alonso de la, Visión deleitable de la filosofía in Antología general de la literatura española, Vol. I, ed. Angel del Río (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966), p. 157.

farmer defied his challenger, who then turned to guerilla tactics.

Pepeta was also a victim of her husband's vanity. His death, the result of his own vindictive deeds, left her a childless widow. Even while he lived, she was a tragic figure. He assumed for himself the rank of señor in his district. He supervised the irrigation, shaped community policy, worked as little as possible, and spent many hours at the local tavern. While he lived like a man of distinction, she worked more than any other woman of the huerta. Her case was similar to that of Roseta of Flor de mayo except that Pepeta was not trying to feel superior to anyone. She was forced into excessive toil by her lazy husband who cared only about himself.

The immediate cause of the most grievous blow to the Borrull family, the death of Pascualet, was the cruel prejudice of the children of the huerta. Their meanness to Batiste's children is a vivid example of the way youngsters derive prejudices from their elders.

Pascualet's death shocked the whole community. They attempted to atone for their hatefulness by showering the grieved family with sympathy and help. Don Joaquín noted this reversal in their behavior. He commented that the people were good at heart, but that they lacked the education to avoid brutish conduct. He contended that education improved one's understanding of himself and of others and thus promoted peace among men. Perhaps Blasco wished to emphasize ignorance as a cause of tragedy. Therefore, he introduced the maestro don Joaquín, who was so anxious to see more "temples of learning which scatter the light of knowledge."

The vengeance of the huerta upon the innocent intruders was devastating. The reader is stunned by the tragic desolation thrust upon the courageous, hopeful family by those who did not know how to love their enemies, or how to

recognize good neighbors. Batiste had never been so poor as when he sat with his family before his burning house, surrounded by neighbors who did not care.

Non hay mejor riqueza
que la buena hermandad,
nin tan mala pobreza
como es la soledad.¹

¹Tob, Sam, Proverbios in Antología general de la literatura española, Vol. I, ed. Angel del Río (Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966), p. 88.

CHAPTER IV

ENTRE NARANJOS

Entre naranjos relates the life of a free-thinking liberal and romanticist who lived in a community bound by traditional conservatism. The setting is Alcira, located in the heart of the orange country thirty-five miles south of Valencia. There, most of the citizenry acquiesced to religious and political tyranny. Progress, initiative, and tolerance were precluded by ignorance and prejudice. In its rigid conservatism, Alcira paralleled the fictional Orbijosa of Pérez Galdós' Doña Perfecta.

Blasco Ibanez sketched the weaknesses of his country more clearly in Entre naranjos than in any of his other Valencian novels. He depicted the same five defects of Spanish society which other nineteenth century and generación de '98 writers blamed for Spain's lack of progress: abulia, caciquismo, catolicismo, españolismo, and analfabetismo.¹ Entre naranjos differs from the other Valencian novels in its psychological and sentimental emphasis. The tragic aspects of the novel are more emotional than physical.

... es una historia de amor cuyo clima sentimental se aparta un poco de las crudas tragedias que constituyen el armazón central de las novelas anteriores.²

At the time Blasco wrote the novel Spain was still divided into political provinces which hampered national unity. Reminiscent of the days of feudal barons, each district maintained a sort of inviolable lordship. For thirty years, Valencians who lived in the Ribera, an immense stretch of land

¹Weakness of will, political bossism, Catholicism, strong nationalism with disregard for non-Spanish influences, and illiteracy.

²Gascó Contell, Genio y figura de Blasco Ibáñez, p. 79.

covered with rice fields and orange groves, felt the political power of the Brull family. The protagonist, Rafael Brull, was the only son of the powerful cacique family of Alcira. His love for Leonora, daughter of the reputed heretic Doctor Moreno, threatened his assured political destiny. Similar to the love between Gloria and Daniel described by Galdós in Gloria, the relationship between Rafael and Leonora was doomed from the start.

The Brull reputation was founded by Rafael's grandfather, Jaime Brull, who amassed a fortune by exploiting the ignorant and poor. He first acquired wealth and property when he held key posts in the city government. Then he began a lucrative horse and loan business. Because it was more profitable and "honorable" not to make cash loans, he assumed the role of the intermediary who arranged to provide the horse and who pretended to borrow the money for its purchase. The grateful laborer would sign a note for a cash sum which he had never seen. Don Jaime doubled his capital in this way and often appropriated the property of a debtor. Thus, he became rich at the expense of poor farmers, who always blamed the "others" who were pressing don Jaime for their money. The usurer's wealth elevated him to social and political prominence.

However, it remained for don Jaime's son, Ramon, to achieve the undisputed post of cacique or quefe of the district. The youth's failure in law school did not hinder his political triumph. Ramon had a virile appearance, a brutish, violent disposition, and his father's wealth--all the qualities required to become a political boss. The cacique dominated every phase of community policy without officially participating in the activities of City Hall. He remained in his large patio like a Caliph and controlled both public and private affairs.

Allí administraba justicia, decidía la suerte de las familias, arreglaba la vida de los pueblos; todo con pocas y enérgicas palabras, como un rey

moro de los que en aquella misma tierra gobernaban siglos antes a sus súbditos a cielo descubierto. En los días de mercado se llenaba el patio. ... Don Ramón los escuchaba a todos, grave, cejijunto, con la cabeza inclinada, teniendo a su lado al pequeño Rafael, ... En la casa municipal no se movía una silla sin su permiso, pero le gustaba permanecer invisible como Dios, haciendo sentir su voluntad oculta.¹

The soul of the party was don Ramon's wife, doña Bernarda. Although she niggardly safeguarded the family fortune, she tolerantly permitted her husband to squander money in order to swing an election or to bolster the party cause. She was proud to be the wife of the powerful cacique who protected the people from liberals who advocated agrarian, religious, political and social reforms.

¡Si no fuera por ellos, que ocurriría en el distrito! ... Triunfarían los descamisados, aquellos menestrales que leían los papeles de Valencia y predicaban la igualdad. Tal vez se repartirían los huertos y querrían que el producto de las cosechas, inmensa pila de miles de duros que dejaban ingleses y franceses, fuera para todos. Pero para evitar tal cataclismo allí estaba su Ramón, el azote de los malos, el campeón de la buena causa, que la sacaba adelante dirigiendo las elecciones escopeta en mano, y así como sabía enviar a presidio a los que le molestaban con su rebeldía, lograba conservar en la calle a los que con varias muertes en su historia se prestaban a servir al gobierno, sostenedor del orden y de los buenos principios.²

Doña Bernarda considered the money her husband spent to maintain his sovereignty over the district to be an investment which some day would pay off. She would be rewarded for her present sacrifices when her son, Rafael, launched his political career. She was also pleased with the power which she exercised over her husband and the authority which she displayed when he was out of town. Their collaboration to keep political power in the family was the only bond which united their marriage.

¹Blasco Ibáñez, Vicente, Entre naranjos, Austral Collection (Buenos Aires: Espasa-Calpe Argentina, S.A., 1961), p. 23-24.

²Ibid., pp. 22-23.

The political triumvirate of Alcira was completed with don Andrés, a long-time friend of don Ramón and the active lieutenant of the party. He was a bachelor who spent most of his time in don Ramón's house. To doña Bernarda he was confidential adviser and to don Ramón he was a "rustic and malicious" Sancho who counseled his quixotic superior.

As don Ramón approached old age he was consumed with an insatiable lust. He preyed upon young girls who worked in the orchards or in the warehouses, and visited married women while their husbands were at work.

Era un apetito loco, que, en su furia, se abalanzaba sobre la fruta verde, sin sazonar. Caían anonadadas y temblorosas ante su ardor senil, en las frondosidades de los huertos, en los almacenes de naranjas, o al anochecer, al borde de un camino, las vírgenes apenas salidas de la niñez, casi calvas, con el pelo untado de aceite, el pecho liso y los miembros enjutos, tristes, con una delgadez de muchacho, bajo las sucias faldas de la miseria. Por la noche salía de casa pretextando necesidades del partido, y le veían entrar en los arrabales buscando jornaleras de formas desbaratadas por la maternidad, a cuyos maridos enviaba con antelación a trabajar en sus huertos.¹

Doña Bernarda feared he would ruin the family reputation and jeopardize the future of her son.

After don Ramón's death, doña Bernarda was pleased to control the Brull political machine with don Andrés' assistance. She set two goals for her son: First, he would be deputized², and then he would marry a wealthy girl. However, Rafael did not aspire to be a politician; he participated in party activities only to please his mother. Following his formal education, Rafael began to read books which shook many of his beliefs and which turned his imagination to romance and adventure. He looked forward to his deputization when he could

¹Ibid., p. 29.

²Elected as a district representative to the Congress in Madrid.

leave home. His secret ambition was to live as a carefree gypsy to escape the bourgeois society afflicted by money fever and class mania.

Sentía la nostalgia de lo extraordinario, de lo original; le agitaba el ansia de aventuras de la juventud; ... ¡Cuánto hubiera dado por ser un bohemio como los que encontraba en los libros de Mürger, formando regocijada banda, paseando su alegría de vivir y el fiero amor del arte por ese mundo burgués agitado por la calentura del dinero y las manías de clases!¹

Rafael's role as the party chief who was obligated to settle the affairs of his constituents became unbearable to him. At the risk of provoking his mother, he escaped his responsibility by seeking solitude in the country. On one of his escapades, he climbed a small mountain near the city. He had paused at a hermitage to rest and to enjoy the panorama below when he noticed a lady and her maid ascending toward the clearing. Rafael was captivated by the beauty of the tall, blond stranger who spoke to her companion in a foreign language.

Rafael learned from don Andrés that she was Leonora Moreno, the daughter of a physician who used to live in Alcira. Doctor Moreno was noted for his ability to cure illnesses which other physicians could not. He treated the poor at no charge and sometimes helped them financially. Also, he was an avid music lover and spent hours playing the cello. In spite of this, Doctor Moreno was considered by doña Bernarda and others as the most evil person in the city because he read foreign books and magazines on medicine and science, and espoused liberalism. Also, he gave his daughter a non-Christian name. The clergy proclaimed him a wicked heretic and ex-communicated him.

¡Qué horrible fama la suya! Los curas de la población hablaban de él con terribles aspasientos. Era un impío, un excomulgado. Nadie sabía ciertamente que alta autoridad había lanzado sobre él la excomunión;

¹Blasco Ibáñez, Entre naranjos, pp. 33-34.

pero era indudable que estaba fuera del gremio de las personas decentes y cristianas. Bastaba para esto saber que todo el granero de su casa lo tenía lleno de libros misteriosos, en idiomas extranjeros, todos conteniendo horribles doctrinas contra las sanas creencias en Dios y en la autoridad de sus representantes.¹

Disillusioned by the fall of the First Republic in 1874, Doctor Moreno and his fourteen-year-old daughter left Spain for Milan, Italy. In the huge Galería of Milan, Leonora took voice lessons and learned the vicissitudes common to a theatrical career. She was surrounded by "excellent teachers"--former celebrities whose eroded youth and beauty had forced them to retire. They predicted a brilliant future for the youngster if she knew how "to get along."

Leonora's voice instructor, signor Boldini, gave her a rude introduction to the hazards of her career. Doctor Moreno had such great confidence in the old maestro that he left his daughter alone with him every day for hours at a time. One day, in a horrifying eruption of lust, the old man assaulted his pupil. Rather than inform her father who would become enraged, she resigned herself to Boldini's sticky caresses or passionate attacks.

Y Leonora seguía sus lecciones, acariciada por las manos ardorosas y húmedas del viejo cantante, permaneciendo horas enteras a solas con él, gracias a la inmensa confianza del doctor, hasta que una tarde, en mitad de una romanza, el tembloroso sátiro que todo lo hacía por el arte cayó sobre ella. Fue una escena odiosa; el maestro haciendo valer su derecho feudal, cobrándose a viva fuerza las primicias de la iniciación en el mundo del teatro.²

A lack of money forced Doctor Moreno to arrange local bookings for his daughter. During one of her performances, Leonora's talent was noted by a once renowned tenor named Salvatti, who persuaded her to abandon her father and to

¹Ibid., p. 47.

²Ibid., p. 110.

run away with him. Under the auspices of the experienced Salvatti, Leonora appeared in the top theaters of Europe. Her growing fame was matched by her growing dislike for her agent, Salvatti, who proved to be conceited, stingy, and cruel. She carried on "secret" affairs with various prominent men, only to realize years later that the affairs had been arranged by Salvatti himself.

Meanwhile, Doctor Moreno lived as an embittered recluse, heartbroken by his daughter's departure. Such depression soon brought about his death. With a flood of tears, Leonora berated herself for having caused his passing. Hating Salvatti more than ever for having taken her away from her father, she finally broke her relationship with him. She continued to give concerts, and her affection to various prominent men.

Era en su lecho como en la escena: de todos y de ninguno; y al quedarse a solas con sus pensamientos, comprendía que algo se ocultaba en ella todavía virgen, algo que se replegaba con verguenza al sentir los estremecimientos y apetitos monstruosos de la envoltura, y tal vez está destinado a morir sin nacer, como esas flores que se secan dentro del capullo. No podía recordar los nombres de los que la habían amado en aquella época de locura.¹

Her tempestuous love life ceased when she met Hans Keller, a famous orchestra conductor. Keller's devotion to music appealed to her yearning for a true love--a feeling concordant with her artistic temperament. The penitent Magdalena cast herself at his feet. When he left her for another actress, the disillusioned singer resumed her career and again found herself the desire of passionate men. One man in Naples killed himself because she spurned him; another in Vienna was killed in a duel over her. Leonora grew tired of her career which exposed her to constant storms of passion.

¡Ya había bastante! Estaba cansada de aquella vida, sentía náuseas ante la voracidad varonil que le salía al paso en todas partes. Se veía quebrantada por la tempestad de pasión que desencadenaba su nombre. Quería

¹Ibid., p. 116.

sumergirse, desaparecer, descansar entregada a un sueño sin límites, y pensó, como en un blando y misterioso lecho, en aquella tierra lejana de su infancia, donde estaba su único pariente, la tía devota y simple, ... ¹

She retired to her hometown of Alcira where she could live serenely with her tía Pepa.

Tía Pepa's casa azul, located in an orange grove a short distance from the city, could have been a perfect refuge for the distraught performer. However, her idyllic existence was shattered by Rafael's love for her and the community's hatred of her. After young Brull met Leonora at the mountain hermitage, he was determined to see her again. He would stroll into the country in order to pass by the blue house in the hope of catching a glimpse of her. His chance to meet her again came under dramatic circumstances. The spring rains had converted the Jucar into a swollen torrent which threatened to flood the whole city. In a romantic impulse Rafael and an adventurous friend set out in a rowboat to rescue the damsels in the blue house marooned by the flood. The deed was more foolhardy than necessary, but Leonora was impressed by Rafael's galantry and treated him kindly. Yet she was aware of his amorous motives and sternly warned him that they could be nothing more than friends. She shuddered at the thought of having another desperate suitor.

But Rafael was determined to win Leonora's love. Although election time was approaching, the young conservative leader spent his time thinking of her and visiting her. Doña Bernarda bitterly denounced her son's indifference to his deputation, which she had awaited for years. Now that the big moment had arrived, Rafael was risking his career by cavorting with la cómica who was despised by all the "decent" people of Alcira.

¹Ibid., p. 122.

Entonces ocurrieron las tormentosas escenas que habían de dejar en Rafael una impresión de amargura y miedo. La dureza del carácter de doña Bernarda quebrantó al joven, haciéndolo comprender con cuanta razón había temido siempre a su madre. La áspera devota, con su coraza de virtud y sanos principios, lo aplastó desde las primeras palabras. ¿Se había propuesto deshonrar la casa? Ahora, que tras muchos años de trabajos iba a alcanzar el fruto de tantos sacrificios, ¿quería, por su afición a una cómica, ponerse en ridículo, dando motivos de burla a los enemigos?

Furthermore, doña Bernarda wanted her son to marry Remedios, the daughter of the richest man in town. The matriarch was pleased at the prospect of the marriage which would unite the political power of the Brull family with the wealth of don Matías. Although Rafael disdained his mother's political ambitions and resented her interference in his personal life, he felt dominated by her stern, resolute character. He took detours to reach the blue house unnoticed so that his mother would not find out where he had been.

Leonora tolerated Rafael's visits, but reminded him that their relationship must remain on a friendly basis. She laughed at the irony of his feeble attempts to win her love. She showed him scrapbooks of her theatrical successes and related stories of her stormy love affairs. Rafael felt belittled by the array of great men who had sought the affections of this lovely opera star. However, like the many others who had preceded him, he was too fascinated by her beauty to leave her alone.

During the sessions of Congress in Madrid, Rafael daydreamed of Leonora and paid scant attention to the proceedings.

De repente, Rafael despertaba con los aplausos y el barullo. Había llegado el momento de votar, y el diputado, viendo todavía los últimos contornos de la casa azul que se desvanecían, preguntaba a su vecino de banco: --¿Qué votamos? ¿Sí o no?²

¹Ibid., p. 83.

²Ibid., p. 11.

After Congress adjourned, he returned to Alcira more determined than ever to win Leonora. She looked even more appealing to him now that she had discarded her jewelry and make-up and dressed as a campesina. She obviated his advances by changing the subject or by reiterating the futility of his quest.

Actually, Leonora had missed Rafael during the months he was in Madrid. But, she restrained the love which she was beginning to feel for him. To become the sweetheart or wife of Rafael would ruin his career and alienate him from his mother and from the community. Already their friendship was the scandal of the town. Moreover, she had broken too many hearts and had been hurt too many times herself to risk another romance. She was in a dilemma: if she broke their friendship, she would crush another suitor; if she responded to him, she would ruin his career and expose herself to possible heartache.

Rafael became impatient with this courtship which rewarded him with no signs of affection other than friendly words and an occasional extended hand to kiss. The men at the Casino envied Rafael his "conquest" which they assumed was total. He imagined how they would make fun of him if they knew the truth. Rafael decided he had to prove his manhood. He talked frankly and passionately to Leonora the next time he walked her home from town. He would give anything for her love and without it he would die. This time she did not deride his amorous appeals; rather, she was moved by his sincerity. Yet, when she felt the fever of his passion as he squeezed her arm, she instinctively resisted. Calmly, she outlined the reasons why she could not respond to his love: she had loved and lost too often in the past; she decried the scandal and scornful accusations which their love would provoke in the town. The solution? She would leave so that he could forget her. Leonora's poised rationality was interrupted by an impulsive embrace which knocked her to the ground. After a

brief struggle the amazona stood victorious over Rafael. She ordered the ashamed and frightened youth to go away and never to return. His behavior had reminded her of Boldini, her old singing teacher.

Y en el gesto de desprecio y rabia con que despedía a Rafael parecía marcarse el recuerdo odioso de Boldini, aquel viejo repugnante, el único en el mundo que la había tomado por la fuerza. Rafael quiso excusarse, pedir perdón; pero aquel recuerdo de la adolescencia evocado por la escena brutal la hacía implacable.¹

Doña Bernarda was delighted over her son's sudden change. He no longer went to the blue house; instead, he courted Remedios, daughter of a wealthy landlord. Although Rafael had no desire to marry Remedios, he did not resist his mother's plans for their wedding. At least, he was relieved to see peace restored at home and to have his mother's approval.

Allí estaba su madre, que lo arreglaba todo, que le imponía la voluntad, que aceleraba aquel afecto tenue y ligero, empujándole a Remedios... quería ser como de niño; que su madre se encargase de todo; él se dejaría llevar sin resistencia ni movimiento por la corriente de su destino.²

She was unaware of Rafael's depression when he was alone in his room, thinking of Leonora. His shame and self-contempt for his ridiculous behavior lingered in his mind.

Then spring arrived and the fragrance of orange blossoms stirred his passion for his true love. Unable to sleep, he slipped out of the house and headed for the orange groves and the familiar blue house. There, he was surprised to find Leonora sitting outside in the moonlight. He was further delighted when she forgave him for his infamy and invited him to stay. The tepid, moon-lit atmosphere and Leonora's loneliness crumbled her customary

¹Ibid., p. 136.

²Ibid., p. 142.

restraint. She no longer had the will to withhold her affection.

Si me resistí, es porque estaba en mi sana razón, porque veía claro. Ahora estoy loca y lo he echado todo a rodar. Dios sea con nosotros ... Pero aunque venga lo que venga, quíereme mucho, Rafael; júrame que me querrás. Sería una crueldad huir después de haberme despertado.¹

Doña Bernarda realized that the relationship between her son and the actress would spoil her hopes for political power and wealth. Hence, she used doña Pepa as a wedge between the lovers. Pious doña Pepa had ignored the rumors of her niece's adventurous career, until doña Bernarda recited her past history and her present involvement with Rafael.

Having lost her aunt's confidence, Leonora decided to leave in order to prevent further scandal. Rafael vigorously opposed her decision. Why should he be concerned about the city's respect for him or about his mother's plans for him? He hated the monotony of the city, and he served only as a hostage in his mother's plot for wealth. He would rather follow Leonora around the world as her servant than to remain in Alcira as a millionaire.

The two lovers agreed to flee together; they would rendezvous in Valencia and proceed to Naples where she owned a cottage. All went according to plan, until Rafael encountered don Andrés outside the hotel in Valencia. For hours, the crafty old politician tried to dissuade his protegee. Don Andrés flashed vivid scenes before the youth: His dying mother; his father's labors; his enemies' scorn; his lost wealth and ruined name. Then, the old man played his trump. He reviewed Leonora's past and taunted Rafael for disgracing his family and spurning his honor and fortune for the "leftovers" of other men.

¿Y por estos restos que aun sobrevivían milagrosamente después del loco derroche iba el a perderlo todo, a huir, dejando a sus espaldas el escándalo, el descrédito y tal vez el cadáver de su madre? ¡Ah,

¹Ibid., p. 156.

terrible don Andrés! ¡Y cómo después de herirle, metía los dedos en el sangriento desgarrón, agrandando la herida! La lógica llana y vulgar del viejo había desvanecido su ensueño.¹

For the first time, Rafael saw himself as a successor to many other lovers.

Leonora reacted hysterically to Rafael's hastily scrawled excuse for returning to Alcira. She would never trust another man after having been jilted by the one who had courted her so ardently.

¿Por qué me despertó cuando yo estaba allá abajo recogida, tranquila, insensible, en un egoísta aislamiento? ... otra vez a cantar, ... ¡A vivir! ¡A tratar a puntapiés al hombre! ... ¡Como el peor de los animales! Me río al pensar en mi estupidez; ¡qué locura creer en ciertas cosas!²

Subsequently, Rafael married Remedios and took up his political duties. In spite of his four children, his wealth, and his prestige, Rafael was unhappy. Remedios domineered him just as his mother had. Her virtue, cleanliness, and penuriousness were intolerable. After the honeymoon was over, she showed no interest in Rafael's affection, other than to bear children.

Eight years passed before he saw Leonora again. Although he took pride in his staunch defense of the Church, of Christian virtues, and of the sanctity of the home, he begged her to run away with him.

Todo lo olvidaría por ella: familia, porvenir, posición. El sólo la necesitaba a ella para vivir y ser feliz.³

The sight of Leonora recalled the happy love which he had once known and could have kept. When Leonora turned her back on him, he knew youth, love, and springtime had left him forever.

¹Ibid., p. 177.

²Ibid., p. 181.

³Ibid., p. 206.

Entre naranjos stands out among the Valencian series as a unique portrayal of the harmful consequences of two divergent characteristics of Spanish society--caciquismo and abulia. Caciquismo refers to the economic and political power structure by which the destiny of the masses was controlled by the district caciques, such as don Ramón of Alcira. The caciques were key members of the oligarchy which ruled Spain. Regardless of the monarch or the republic which supposedly governed the nation, the true power was exercised by the oligarchy which consisted of the clergy, professional officers of the Armed Forces and the upper class of society. These "chosen few" relied on mutual favoritism or "pull", known as the enchufe system, to achieve their aims. The origin of the Spanish oligarchy dates back to the days of Ferdinand and Isabel and continued under the Franco Regime following the Spanish Civil War.

The masters of Spain are the members of an oligarchy, a comparative few who have so distributed power among themselves as to insure permanent control of the State. Spain's oligarchy is old, so old that its members behave toward one another like members of the same family. Intermarriage within the oligarchy through the centuries has woven its leaders close together, so close that one who knows Spain well is inclined to think of the oligarchy as "the Spanish Family." ... The top layer of the Family numbers no more than five thousand persons ... These few owe their control of Spain to the events of four hundred and fifty years ago when the country was first united.¹

Entre naranjos shows the working of the oligarchy on the local level. The municipal officials of Alcira rubber-stamped the decisions of don Ramón, who ran the district without leaving his own patio. Such government, duplicated in districts throughout Spain, produced disastrous results: Competent leadership lagged; the common man had no voice in public affairs; the poor were exploited by the advantaged; and corruption in government was facilitated.

¹Charles Foltz, Jr., The Masquerade In Spain (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1948) pp. 8-9.

Alongside the tyrannical caciquismo prevailed flaccid abulia. Angel Ganivet chose the Greek term ἀσουλία to diagnose the illness which afflicted many of his countrymen. In his Idearium español he defined abulia as "extinction or serious weakening of the will" and described a common form of it in this way:

Hay una forma vulgar de la abulia que todos conocemos y a veces padecemos. ¿A quién no le habrá invadido en alguna ocasión esa perplejidad del espíritu, nacida del quebranto de fuerzas o del aplanamiento consiguiente a una inacción prolongada, en que la voluntad, falta de idea dominante que la mueva, vacilante entre motivos opuestos que se contrabalancean, o dominada por una idea abstracta, irrealizable, permanece irresoluta, sin saber que hacer y sin determinarse a hacer nada? Cuando tal situación de pasajera se convierte en crónica, constituye la abulia, la cual se muestra al exterior en la repugnancia de la voluntad a ejecutar actos libres. En el enfermo de abulia hay un principio de movimiento que demuestra que la voluntad no se ha extinguido en absoluto; pero ese movimiento actúa debilmente y rara vez llega a su término.¹

This indecision and inability to exercise free will was typified by Rafael. His perplejidad consisted of the conflict between his duty as the only heir of the Brull family and his personal desires. He turned aside from his dream which would have freed him from his mother's dominion and allowed him to pursue his own ambitions and ideals. His subsequent political career was a feeble attempt to conserve the glories and traditions of the past and to impress his colleagues. Rafael was a classic example of the abulia which, according to Ganivet, undermined the nation's stamina. He represented the indifference and debility of character which left the nation exposed to despotic, self-aggrandizing politicians.

The remaining causes of tragedy in the novel are those which frequently appear in the Valencian series: pride, sensuality, greed, and ignorance. The about-face on the part of Rafael, which tortured Leonora and set him on the

¹Angel Ganivet, Obras completas, Tomo I (Madrid: Aguilar, 1961) p. 287.

pathway to misery, was motivated by pride. The two most forceful arguments applied by don Andrés to persuade his young protege to leave Leonora were these: (1) The Brull name would be dishonored and mocked if he ran away with the disreputable celebrity; and (2) he would be only one of a long line of predecessors who had consorted with her. His pride was more egotistical than family-centered. He had already tarnished the family name by courting an outcast. Yet, the thought of being the last of many suitors disgusted him. The same pride of ego which prompted Rafael to jilt Leonora combined with his uncontrolled sensuality to produce his disgraceful assault which short-circuited their romance.

Sensuality played havoc with Leonora's life. Her experience as a pupil with Boldini was enough to give her a life-long trauma. As a concert singer, Leonora was flattered by her popularity with men off stage, as well as by her success on stage. When she tired of her role as a sex-object, she despaired of finding true love. Finally, Rafael restored her hope. However, Rafael's "love" was a sensual infatuation which could not hurdle his personal vanity. He lacked a mature love which would have prized her true character and would have sought her welfare. The most extreme example of sensuality was don Ramón, who gave free rein to his senile lust by flaunting his prerogative over young hortelanas.

Greed characterized don Jaime, don Ramón, and doña Bernarda. By exploiting the poor, don Jaime accumulated the wealth which led to the prominence of the Brull family. As cacique, don Ramón directed affairs to his personal advantage, and his occasional generosity was debited to political maneuvering. Doña Bernarda, whom don Ramón married for money, exhibited her greed through miserliness. Besides, she determined to marry her son to the daughter of the wealthiest man in town. Because of greed, therefore, the poor became more

destitute and don Ramón and doña Bernarda deprived themselves and their son of a home warmed by mutual love. Rafael's marriage was equally lacking in love.

Ignorance and prejudice caused the citizenry of Alcira to be intolerant of Doctor Moreno, in spite of his education and medical skill. The clergy encouraged the people to fear and to hate him as a dangerous heretic and liberal. The physician symbolized thousands in Spain who became victims of religious or political intolerance.

The uniqueness of Entre naranjos is its expose of caciquismo and abulia as major defects of Spanish society. The most tragic aspect of the novel is that although Rafael intimately understood the cacique system and loathed it, nonetheless, he yielded to it. He knew the effect of tyranny and intolerance upon Doctor Moreno and Leonora, and even upon himself. He craved freedom and was rankled by religious and political conservatism. Yet, rather than champion the causes of liberty and progressive government, he acquiesced beneath the pressures of tradition. When he should have stood up for his ideals and demonstrated initiative and leadership, he relaxed for the sake of personal security and glory.

CHAPTER V

CAÑAS Y BARRO

Blasco Ibáñez' final Valencian novel, Cañas y barro, took place in the Albufera Lake area of Valencia. As the title suggests, the lake was surrounded by marshes which were crisscrossed by canals that served as roads. Fishing and rice farming were the chief means of livelihood for local residents. Lake Albufera, south of the city of Valencia, was separated from the Mediterranean by the Dehesa, a narrow strip of forest. Although the Dehesa teemed with wild-life, and birds were abundant around the lake, the State permitted hunting only to a few wealthy individuals who had permits and leases. The local poor folk hunted at the risk of being arrested and fined by the Guardia Civil. Old-timers nostalgically recalled former days when the Albufera belonged to the king and there were no hunting restrictions.

Such an old-timer was tío Paloma, the best marksman in the village of Palmar. Like his father, tío Paloma had spent his life fishing and hunting on the Albufera. When the expansion of agriculture resulted in the clearing of forests and the filling of swamps, he bitterly resented the changes which threatened his way of life.

Todo cambiaba en aquel mundo del que jamás había salido el viejo. La Albufera la transformaban los hombres con sus cultivos y desfigurábanse las familias, como si las tradiciones del lago se perdiesen para siempre. Los hijos de los barqueros se hacían siervos de la tierra; en el lago se veían barcazas cargadas de carbón; los campos de arroz se extendían por todos partes, avanzaban en el lago, tragándose el agua, y roían la selva, trazando grandes claros en ella. ¡Ay, Señor! ¡Para ver todo aquello, para presenciar la destrucción de un mundo que el consideraba eterno, más valía morirse!¹

¹Vicente Blasco Ibáñez, Cañas y barro, Austral Collection (Buenos Aires: Espasa-Calpe, S.A., 1965), p. 37.

The most crushing blow for tío Paloma fell when his only surviving son, Toni, became a rice harvester and then a tenant farmer. The old man was so furious he would have beaten his son if he had not been a grown man. To become a labrador and especially an arrendatario was a crime against the name Paloma.

¿Cuándo se había visto un Paloma con amo? La familia había vivido siempre libre, como deben vivir los hijos de Dios que en algo se estiman, buscándose el sustento en el aire o en el agua, cazando y pescando. ... ¿Un hijo suyo arrendatario de una lechuguina de la ciudad y llevándola todos los años en metal sonante una parte de su trabajo? ... Los Palomas no servían a nadie mientras en el lago quedara algo que llevarse a la boca: aunque fuesen ranas.¹

The fact that Toni was the hardest working, most reliable man of the district did not offset the fact that he was a farmer. Tío Paloma hoped his son's venture would fail and applauded any setback. Toni, who always before had been submissive to his father, firmly defended his farm work as his only salvation from poverty.

The old patriarch now set all his hopes on his grandson, Tonet. He would train him to be a true son of the lake.

Aquel pequeño sería un verdadero hijo de la Albufera. Su educación corría a cargo suyo, para que no siguiese los malos caminos del padre. Manejaría la escopeta con asombrosa habilidad, conocería el fondo del lago como una anguila, y cuando el abuelo muriese, todos los que vinieran a cazar encontrarían la barca de otro Paloma, pero remozado...²

However, the old man's hopes of preserving the Paloma tradition through his grandson were short-lived. Although the youth eagerly learned to fish, hunt and boat, he avoided more menial tasks.

El barquero vio claro: lo que su nieto odiaba, con una repulsión instintivo que ponía de pie su voluntad, era el trabajo...El abuelo le amenazaba sin resultado. Intentó pegarle, y Tonet, como una

¹Ibid., p. 29.

²Ibid., p. 33.

bestiecilla feroz, se puso en salvo, buscando piedras en el suelo para defenderse. El viejo se resignó a seguir en el lago solo como antes.¹

Rather than grow up at his grandfather's side, young Tonet ran carefree with the village rascals. By the time he was big enough to assist his father he hated work and scorned those who labored for a living. He craved pleasure and coveted the non-working existence of the rich. The days he worked were separated by long periods of idleness spent in the taverns where he drank and played cards with other young vagabonds.

Había visto de cerca la existencia de los que viven sin trabajar y abominaba de su mala suerte, que la hacía permanecer como un anfibio en un país de cañas y barro, donde el hombre, desde pequeño, tiene que encerrarse en una barquichuela, eterno ataúd sin el cual no puede moverse. El hambre de placeres se despertaba en él, rabiosa y dominadora. Quería vivir, gozar de un golpe todas las dulzuras de la existencia. Se imaginaba que cuantos habitaban al otro lado del lago, en los pueblos ricos o en la ciudad grande y ruidosa, le robaban una parte de los placeres que le correspondían por indiscutible derecho.²

Shortly before Tonet's mother died, his father brought to their hut a six-year-old orphan girl who could help with the work. The timid, unattractive child, La Borda, submissively and eagerly responded to the needs of the family and remained loyal to it in spite of the ridicule and abuse which her spoiled and inconsiderate step-brother heaped upon her.

Era como un perillo vivaracho y obediente que alegraba la barraca con sus trotecitos, resignada a las fatigas, sumisa a todas las maldades de Tonet. Con un supremo esfuerzo de sus bracitos arrastraba un cántaro tan grande como ella, lleno de agua de la Dehesa, desde el canal hasta la casa. Corría al pueblo a todas horas cumpliendo los encargos de su nueva madre, y en la mesa comía con los ojos bajos, no atreviéndose a meter la cuchara hasta que todos estaban a mitad de la comida.³

¹Ibid., p. 37.

²Ibid., pp. 61-62.

³Ibid., p. 35.

Tío Toni also took in a neighbor girl named Neleta whose father was dead and whose mother was too feeble to take care of her. Neleta was the opposite of La Borda in every way. She was cute and capricious and spent her time frolicking with Tonet. The carefree pair became childhood sweethearts. However, Tonet soon took her for granted as a member of the family and was conceited enough to think she would always belong to him.

Tonet became wilder as he grew older. He ran with roving bands of delinquents who went on nightly sprees from tavern to tavern in various towns around the lake. Their drunken disturbances became so violent that they were sought by the Guardia Civil. Tonet's carousing was climaxed by a confrontation with his father in Cañamel's tavern which ended with the youth sprawled across a table.

After his public humiliation, Tonet joined the army and was sent to Cuba. Neleta never missed him. The petite, attractive blond turned her charms on Cañamel, Palmar's widowed tavern-owner. Years of smuggling and money-lending had made him the wealthiest man of the district. She worked fulltime in his tavern where she deliberately excited his passions. Finally he married her and made her his legal heiress. The news of her marriage to the sickly, wealthy entrepreneur stirred the village. Cañamel's former wife's sister, Samaruca, was outraged by Neleta's intrusion.

Todo el Palmar se conmovió con la noticia del matrimonio del Cañamel, a pesar de que era un suceso esperado. La cuñada del novio iba de puerta en puerta vomitando injurias. Las mujeres formaban corrillos ante las barracas... ¡La mosquita muerta! ¡Y qué bien había sabido manejarse para pescar al hombre más rico de la Albufera!¹

Aware that she was being watched and talked about by women who hated her, Neleta guarded her status jealously and determined to avoid a scandal which

¹Ibid., p. 66.

would jeopardize her security.

Neleta sonreía ante las murmuraciones. No amaba a su marido, estaba segura de ello; sentía mayor afición por muchos de los que visitaban su taberna, pero tenía la prudencia de la hembra egoísta y reflexiva que se casa por la utilidad y desea no comprometer su calma con infidelidades.¹

Tonet's return after six years of military service in Cuba made big news for Palmar. At night, when the townfolk filled the tavern to hear him relate his adventures, Neleta observed him from behind the bar, fascinated by his martial appearance.

In spite of his former delinquency and ingratitude, Toni urged his son to be his partner in farming. Toni's landlady in Valencia, impressed by her tenant's sincerity and industry, had given him a large expanse of lake-front property. The only drawback was that the land was covered by water and would have to be filled. Tonet, foreseeing himself as a wealthy proprietor, enthusiastically accepted his father's proposition. At first, converting the marsh into cultivable farmland appealed to him as a novel undertaking. However, to extract masses of mud, dry it, and haul it by boat proved to be a grueling, endless task. Thus, he pretended illness in order that he might loiter at the tavern while his father and La Borda worked.

During the hours Tonet spent at Cañamel's, customers observed the increasing affection between him and Neleta. However, Cañamel looked upon Tonet as a business associate rather than as a domestic rival. Tonet had won the community drawing for the choicest fishing spot on the canals which flowed into the lake. The avaricious tavern-owner had loaned Tonet the money for fishing equipment and expected rich returns on his investment. So, Tonet made

¹Ibid., p. 68.

himself at home in the tavern; he enjoyed free meals, drinks, and Neleta's caresses, all at Cañamel's expense.

Mientras tanto, Tonet viviendo en la taberna como si fuese suya, engordaba sumido en aquella felicidad de tener satisfechos todos sus deseos con solo tender la mano. Se comía lo mejor de la casa, llenaba su vaso en todos los toneles, grandes y pequeños, y alguna vez, con loco y repentino impulso, como para afirmar mas su posesión, se permitía la audacia de acariciar a Neleta por debajo del mostrador en presencia de Cañamel y estando a cuatro pasos los parroquianos, entre los cuales había algunos que no les perdían de vista.¹

Although the youth refused to help his grandfather, he demanded his share of the profits. By the time Cañamel realized how badly Tonet was taking advantage of him, the affair between him and Neleta had reached scandalous proportions. At times the lovers would rendezvous at a neighboring village to escape the ever-watchful eyes of Samaruca and her relatives.

When Cañamel no longer permitted Tonet to enter the tavern, the latter hunted illegally in the Dehesa and became a renegade who was feared by the Guardia Civil. At night he frequented cheap taverns in nearby villages. Occasionally Tonet sought the companionship of his father and step-sister, and helped them in their arduous earth-moving task. During such times Toni hoped that his son had reformed and had taken a sincere interest in the farm. La Borda was thrilled to be with Tonet whom she loved secretly.

Meanwhile Cañamel, immobilized by obesity and consumption, drank with his clients and grew increasingly weak and flaccid. The only force that budged him was his hyperactive carnality which was continually stirred by Neleta's alluring presence. She resigned herself to his excesses in the hope that she was hastening his death.

En este desaliento, con la voluntad muerta y el cuerpo agarrotado por

¹Ibid., p. 115.

el dolor, su instinto carnal parecía crecer, aguzándose de tal modo, que le atormentaba a todas horas con pinchazos de fuego. Experimentaba cierto alivio buscando a Neleta...Y ella cedía con resignación, brillando en sus ojos de gata una chispa de maligno misterio, como si en el fondo de su ser sintiera un goce extraño por este amor de enfermo que aceleraba el fin de una vida.¹

Neleta's object in life was two-fold: foremost, she wanted Cañamel's wealth; next, she wanted Tonet. She was well on her way to owning both when she met an unexpected obstacle. Cañamel became so ill that Neleta had to hospitalize him in a nearby town. While Neleta tended the tavern, Samaruca influenced Cañamel to draw up his will. When Neleta received word of the action she was enraged.

Ante esta noticia, Neleta se mostró tal como era. Su vocecita mimosa, de dulzonas inflexiones, se tornó ronca, brillaron como si fuesen de talco las claras gotas de sus ojos, y por su piel blanca corrió una oleada de verdosa palidez. ... ¿Y para esto se había casado ella con Cañamel? ¿Para esto aguantaba una enfermedad interminable, esforzándose por aparecer dulce y cariñosa? Vibraba en pie dentro de ella, con toda su inmensa fuerza, el egoísmo de la muchacha rústica que coloca el interés por encima del amor.²

Following Cañamel's death, Neleta sought to find out the disposition of the will. She was relieved to learn he had named her as sole heiress of his fortune. However, the inheritance had one string attached: if she remarried or became romantically involved with any man, his fortune would go to Samaruca and other relatives of his first wife.

Tonet soon frequented the tavern again, so Neleta's enemies spied on them in order to prove an illicit relationship existed. Neleta justified Tonet's presence in the tavern by pointing out her need for a servant. Although Neleta loved Tonet, she refused to marry him and thus forfeit her fortune. She

¹Ibid., p. 144.

²Ibid., p. 148.

would be capable of any dishonor or crime rather than relinquish her treasure.

La avaricia de la mujer rural se revelaba en Neleta con una fogosidad capaz de los mayores arrebatos. Despertábase en ella el instinto de varias generaciones de pescadores miserables roídos por la miseria, que admiraban con envidia la riqueza de los que poseen campos y venden el vino a los pobres, apoderándose lentamente del dinero. Recordaba su niñez hambrienta, los días de abandono, en los que se colocaba humildemente en la puerta de los Palomas esperando que la madre de Tonet se apiadase de ella; los esfuerzos que tuvo que hacer para conquistar a su marido y sufrirle durante su enfermedad; y ahora que se veía la más rica del Palmar, tendría, por ciertos escrúpulos, que repartir su fortuna con gentes que siempre le habían hecho daño? Sentíase capaz de un crimen, antes que entregar un alfiler a sus enemigos.¹

Neleta planned to become so wealthy that she could live in Valencia as a rich landlady. Then she would marry Tonet and give the tavern to Samaruca.

Even when Neleta found herself pregnant, she refused to marry her lover and surrender to her enemies. She resented the life within her and attempted abortion several times.

Neleta, sin hablar de ello al amante, buscaba el medio de deshacerse de la nueva vida que sentía latir en sus entrañas como una amenaza para su avaricia... Por consejo de su sobrina iba a Ruzafa o entraba en la ciudad para consultar a las curanderas que gozaban de obscura fama en las últimas capas sociales, y volvía de allá con extraños remedios compuestos de ingredientes repugnantes que volcaban el estómago. Neleta odiaba con furor salvaje al ser oculto que se movía en sus entrañas, y con el puño cerrado se golpeaba bestialmente, como si quisiera aplastarlo dentro de la calida envoltura.²

Pasaban los meses. Neleta tenía que hacer grandes esfuerzos, sufrir enmensas molestias para ocultar su estado a todo el mundo. Se apretaba el corsé por las mañanas de un modo cruel, que hacía estremecerse a Tonet. Muchas veces le faltaban las fuerzas para contener el desbordamiento de la maternidad.³

Neleta demanded that Tonet abandon the newlyborn somewhere in Valencia.

¹Ibid., pp. 154-155.

²Ibid., pp. 157-158.

³Ibid., p. 158.

Although stunned by the plan, he was unable to resist her indomitable will.

Besides, he had a personal stake in Neleta's inheritance.

Tonet la oía aterrado. Intentó resistirse, pero la mirada de Neleta impuso cierto miedo a su voluntad siempre débil. Además, también él se sentía mordido por lo codicia: todo lo de Neleta lo consideraba como suyo, y se indignaba ante la idea de partir con los enemigos la herencia de la amante.¹

Shortly after the birth of his child, he set out for Valencia with the unwanted bundle. As he pushed his small boat across the Albufera in the early morning darkness, the possibilities of being discovered terrified him. He panicked when the infant began to cry. Frantically, he turned the boat toward the carrizales where he crashed through the maze of tall reeds. When the boat became too entangled to penetrate further, he hurled its tiny cargo into the blackness.

Lanzó su barquito por dentro de los carizales, siguiendo los tortuosos callejones de agua abiertos entre las cañas. Iba a la ventura, pasando de una mata a otra, sin saber ciertamente donde se encontraba, redoblando sus esfuerzos como si alguien le persiguiese...Huía sin saber de quien, como si sus criminales pensamientos bogasen a su espalda persiguiéndolo. ... Pero al enredarse la barca en unas raíces, el miserable, como si quisiera aligerar la embarcación de un lastre inmenso, cogió el envoltorio y lo arrojó con fuerza, por encima de su cabeza; más allá de los carrizos que le rodeaban. El paquete desapareció entre el crujido de las cañas.²

In the days that followed Tonet drank heavily to blur the memory which haunted him. His misery was intensified by an episode which occurred while he and his grandfather escorted a hunter from Valencia on the lake. Instead of a fallen bird, his hunting dog retrieved the remains of his own child.

Tonet se irguió, con la mirada loca, estremecido de pies a cabeza, como si el aire faltase de pronto en sus pulmones. Vio junto a la borda de su barca un lío de trapos, y en el algo lívido y gelatinoso

¹Ibid., p. 162.

²Ibid., p. 176.

erizado de sanguijuelas: una cabecita hinchada, deforme, negruzca, con las cuencas vacías y colgando de ellas el globo de un ojo; todo tan repugnante, tan hediondo, que parecía entenebreecer repentinamente el agua y el espacio, haciendo que en pleno sol cayese la noche sobre el lago.¹

Tonet was overwhelmed by the remorse evoked by the ghastly specter from the lagoon. He felt crushed by the enormity of his crime, the climax of a selfish, dishonorable life. Momentarily, he blamed Neleta for his downfall. Her dominance and greed had caused him to commit the crime. She was the legendary serpent who killed her victim in an affectionate, but fatal embrace. Then, his own guilt feelings subdued his impulse to murder Neleta and urged his self-destruction. Resolutely, Tonet bent over his gun and triggered the blast with his toe.

La enormidad del crimen la abrumaba. Nada de excusas; no debía buscar pretextos, como otras veces, para seguir adelante. Era un miserable, indigno de vivir; una rama seca del árbol de los Palomas, siempre recto, siempre vigoroso, con aspereza salvaje, pero sano en medio de su aislamiento. La mala rama debía desaparecer.²

Tío Paloma discovered his grandson's body later the same day. He told Neleta if she wanted to know where her lover and son were she only had to look to the lake. He assured her that he would keep her secret. After all, he would not permit the time-honored name of Paloma to be ruined by a brat and a bitch.

El tío callaría. Lo afirmó golpeandos el pecho. Despreciaba a su nieto, pero tenía interés en que nada se supiera. El nombre de los Palomas, después de siglos de honrado prestigio, no estaba para ser arrastrado por un perezoso y una perra.³

Ironically, the land Toni had struggled for years to develop became his

¹Ibid., p. 197.

²Ibid., p. 200.

³Ibid., p. 203.

son's burial ground. The proud father contemplated the lonely, empty future. Unnoticed, La Borda passionately kissed the lifeless man she loved.

Y mientras el lamento del tío Toni rasgaba como un alarido de desesperación el silencio del amanecer, La Borda, viendo de espaldas a su padre, inclinóse al borde de la fosa y besó la livida cabeza con un beso ardiente, de inmensa pasión, de amor sin esperanza, osando, ante el misterio de la muerte, revelar por primera vez el secreto de su vida.¹

The most obvious source of tragedy in Cañas y barro was the milieu which dominated the lives of all who settled in its midst. Disease and death exacted a heavy toll among the impoverished residents because of the semi-tropical climate, the stale waters of the Albufera, and the unsanitary living conditions. In addition to the natural insalubrity, there were the spiritual plagues which heaped additional misery upon the Paloma.

The anguish which clouded tío Paloma's later years was the product of his arrogant pride. In the first place, he regarded the inroads of agriculture as an intrusion on his personal property and way of life. Furthermore, he disdained farming as a means of livelihood because he considered the laborers as lowly subjects of the landlords. He boasted that the Paloma's had always lived independently by fishing and hunting. His opposition to farming embittered his life and created a rift between him and his son.

Toni, a colossus of self-control and drive, was pummeled by adversity. All except one of his children died as infants and his wife succumbed to a fever common to the region. To add to his despair, he was denounced by his father because he farmed, and was rejected by his only son because he was of the lower, laboring class. Toni's lonely desperation was shared by La Borda, whose love for Tonet went unheeded.

¹Ibid., p. 209.

The leading cause of tragedy in the novel was the greed which corrupted the lives of Cañamel, Neleta and Tonet. Having filled his coffers with money extracted from the poor, Cañamel then dug his own grave by soft living. To add to his disgrace, he compromised his honor in order to cash in on Tonet's fishing boon, by closing his eyes to his associate's intimacy with Neleta.

Love of money motivated Neleta to marry a wealthy, but repulsive man whom she loathed. Then, after his death, she valued her inheritance more than honorable marriage to the man she loved and more than the welfare of her own child.

Aside from those rare occasions when Tonet behaved in a responsible manner, nothing can be said in his favor. The combined effects of those vices common to man--pride, lust, greed, indolence, intemperance, and cowardice--destroyed him. He bullied his step-sister who loved him, disregarded his father who needed him, threatened his grandfather who helped him, and mocked Cañamel who trusted him. He aspired to be numbered among the bourgeois elite and classified work as ignoble and degrading. His laziness and conceit precluded the love, honor, and security offered him by his father and La Borda, while desire for Neleta and for inheritance reigned supreme. When the enormity of his crime brought him to his knees, he lacked the courage and humility to face his family, his friends, and his future. Before committing suicide, Tonet admitted to himself that the real serpent which had constricted his life was not Neleta, but his own selfishness.

CONCLUSION

Blasco Ibáñez' novels are unsurpassed for their vivid portraits of Valencia. With no duplication of milieu, he painted urban, rural and coastal vistas of his native province. In his novels, he also provided the most informative descriptions of the prevailing social conditions of Valencia. Ibanez, counted among the critics of the generacion de '98, exposed the ills of Valencian society. This study has established that, in addition to natural and social settings, Blasco Ibáñez emphasized the tragic struggle of the individual against nature, society, and himself.

The devastating effects of the natural environment on lives are stressed in Flor de mayo and Cañas y barro. In the former, the sea is the dreaded foe which claims many lives. The latter describes a community plagued by disease which is transmitted by the tepid swamps of the Albufera. Other natural disasters which the author describes at length, but which are of secondary importance, are a sweeping fire in Cañas y barro and a flood in Entre naranjos.

Characters of the Valencian novels are crushed by conditions of society, as well as by nature. Poverty, lack of educational opportunities, and delinquency dominate the social scene of La barraca, Flor de mayo, and Cañas y barro. Entre naranjos features the religious intolerance of a whole community toward a Jewish physician and his daughter. La barraca shows the hostility of a rural district toward unwanted newcomers. Arroz y tartana reveals the false standards hypocritically imposed by the higher echelons of society.

In some instances, society is totally to blame for a tragic occurrence, such as the death of Pascualet in La barraca. However, the effect of social conditions on the individual is usually determined by his own character. In most cases, personal tragedy is caused by pride, greed, or lust, the three

evils common to humanity. Pride is the principal theme of Arroz y tartana. Pride and greed underlie the conflict in La barraca, with sensuality noticeably absent. All three evils permeate the remaining three novels.

Each of the five novels exposes a proud person who is shattered by the fear of losing status. Invariably, the individual's swollen pride results in tragedy for another, as well as for himself. In Arroz y tartana, doña Manuela's efforts to hide her economic decadence and to maintain her place among the elite reduce her to poverty and remorse and cause the death of her son. In La barraca, Pimentó's persecution of Batiste and his family to protect his prestige as leader of his rural district end with his own death. Flor de mayo describes El Retor who is enraged at being deceived and laughed at, and who sends himself along with his crew to watery graves. Rafael, of Entre naranjos, wins the love of Leonora, only to sacrifice their happiness on the altar of political and family prestige. In Cañas y barro, Tonet snuffs out his own life and wrecks his fathers dreams because he is too proud to face the judgment of his family and friends. Vindictive pride which incurs violence is the dominant theme of Flor de mayo and La barraca. Snobbish pride which expresses contempt for the working class is the central theme of Arroz y tartana and also appears in Cañas y barro.

Next to pride, Blasco Ibáñez' Valencian works delve deepest into the expressions and effects of greed. Arroz y tartana introduces a dishonest broker and a money-hungry speculator; Flor de mayo exposes those who married for money; an avaricious land-owner appears in La barraca; and political opportunists take the spotlight in Entre naranjos. However, Cañas y barro offers the most lucid description of avarice and its dire consequences in the persons of Cañamel and Neleta.

Lust plays a key role in the tragedies of four of the novels. Cañas y barro and Flor de mayo feature a heavy tone of sensuality, followed by Entre naranjos and Arroz y tartana. The latter avoids the topic except in the sad affair between doña Manuela and don Cuadros which is a major factor in the tragedy of the story.

A final cause of tragedy in the Valencian novels is debility of will which manifests itself in abulia, indolence and cowardice. In Entre naranjos, abulia, or chronic discouragement, spoils the protagonist's chances for self-determination and happiness. Laziness ruins both the Tonet of Flor de mayo and the Tonet of Cañas y barro. Also, both prove to be cowards in the time of crises.

In his regional novels, Blasco Ibáñez painted grim pictures of life. Behind the blue skies and green fields and orchards extended the somber horizon of catastrophe. The author cited nature itself as a brutal, impassionate source of struggle and grief. Too, he indicted society with its injustice, ignorance, and hypocrisy as guilty of reducing men to despair. Especially, he unveiled man's own selfish nature as his most formidable enemy.

The Valencian episodes with their variegated scenes of egotism and dismal failure emanate warnings which extend far beyond regional boundaries. In his pessimistic, humorless style, Vicente Blasco Ibáñez has furnished vivid object lessons in the unhappy effects of self-indulgence. Conversely, his novels verify that virtue is the real thing; all else is illusory.

No hay cosa amable sino la virtud, ni aborrecible sino el vicio. La virtud es cosa de veras; todo lo demás, de burlas. La capacidad y grandeza se ha de medir por la virtud, no por la fortuna. Ella sola se basta a sí misma: vivo el hombre, le hace amable; y muerto, memorable.¹

¹Baltasar Gracián, Oráculo manual y arte de prudencia, in Antología general de la literatura española, Vol. I, ed. by Ángel del Río (New York: Holt Rinehart and Winston, 1966), p. 755.

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THE CAUSES OF TRAGEDY IN THE VALENCIAN NOVELS
OF VICENTE BLASCO IBÁÑEZ

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Among the earliest and finest works of Vicente Blasco Ibáñez are his five Valencian novels which he wrote between 1894 and 1902. Four of the novels were originally written in serial form to appear in the weekly folletín of El Pueblo, a daily which Ibáñez edited and published for fifteen years. The author's descriptive artistry, both of his native Valencia and of human behavior, explains the success of the series.

Possessed of a restless and activist spirit, Ibáñez never produced polished literature. Rather, he felt compelled to record his keen observations about people and places. Thus, his novels, first regional, then national and international, reflect the theaters of life which his various careers and travels caused him to witness. However, his later works never surpassed the Valencian novels for vividness of detail.

Although the settings and events of the Valencian novels are varied, the same tone of despair dominates each one. The first of the series, Arroz y tartana, has an urban setting. The author describes Valencia with its markets, stores, and decadent bourgeois society. Doña Manuela, who is financially ruined, desperately strives to maintain her social prestige. Her vanity proves disastrous to the members of her family.

In Flor de mayo the action occurs in a Mediterranean fishing village. Aboard the newly launched Flor de mayo, veteran sea-dog Pascualo sacrifices himself and his crew to a stormy sea as he seeks revenge on his brother, Tonet, who is also aboard. Nature joins forces with greed, lust, pride, and ignorance to produce grim tragedy.

For the setting of his third novel, La barraca, Ibáñez chose a farming district near Valencia. Pimentó leads the district to reject Batiste and his family, newcomers who have ignored tradition to settle on condemned land. The

patience, courage, and hard work of the intruders fail to penetrate the hostile intolerance of their neighbors.

The scene changes in Entre naranjos to a small provincial town bordered by orange groves. Young Rafael, the only son of a powerful cacique family, struggles to escape his political destiny. However, his strong family ties and his flabby will-power nullify his hopes to be free and to marry his true love.

Cañas y barro exposes life in a poverty-ridden town on the swampy banks of Lake Albufera. The muggy climate and the muddy terrain symbolize the immoral quagmire which engulfs two young lovers, Tonet and Neleta. Neleta marries a wealthy widower for his money but continues to court the affections of Tonet, a playboy type who refuses to work. The story ends with the infanticide of the couple's illegitimate offspring and the suicide of the guilt-ridden father.

With abundant pessimism Ibáñez depicts characters victimized by nature, society, and self. Disillusionment and catastrophe result from natural disasters, poverty, ignorance, intolerance, hypocrisy, injustice, tyranny, abulia, indolence, cowardice, greed, lust, and pride. Even the most noble are stricken because of the selfishness of others. Thus, within an intensely regional framework, the Valencian novels reveal the universal causes of tragedy.