

MANUEL ACUÑA, REPRESENTATIVE POET OF HIS TIME

A THESIS

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
PREFACE	iv
I. THE LITERARY AND POLITICAL BACKGROUND OF THE PERIOD	1
II. THE LIFE OF MANUEL ACUÑA	9
III. THE WOMEN IN THE LIFE OF ACUÑA	21
Rosario de la Peña	21
Laura Mendes	26
Soledad	29
IV. THE WORKS OF ACUÑA	32
V. LITERARY CLUBS AND SOCIETIES OF ACUÑA'S TIME	46
VI. INFLUENCE ON ACUÑA OF THE TEXTS OF VOLT, MOLESCHOTT, AND BÜCHNER	53
VII. CONCLUSIONS	58
BIBLIOGRAPHY.	62

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to Dr. Minnie W. Miller, my teacher and advisor during these last five years, whose wise counsel and unselfish gift of herself beyond the call of duty have made its preparation and completion possible.

P. C.

PREFACE

In the summer of 1960, the investigator decided to study the life and works of Manuel Acuña as the subject for a master's thesis. A number of other writers had been considered previously, including Manuel Gutiérrez Nájera. After consultation with Señor Lorenzo Arellano of Mexico City, who has had much experience in research in the libraries of Mexico, it was decided that, since the life and works of Gutiérrez Nájera had just been made the subjects of quite exhaustive studies, a study of Manuel Acuña would be preferable. Señor Arellano also noted that Manuel Acuña's life had been short and his literary production limited, so that this could be better handled within the scope of a master's thesis.

The investigator had some familiarity with the poetry of Acuña whose Ante un cadáver frequently appears in anthologies and texts of Mexican and Latin-American literature. Señor Arellano provided a basic bibliography and reminiscences concerning his interview with Rosario de la Peña in the company of José López-Portillo y Rojas, biographer of this almost legendary feminine personality whose name is inseparably associated with that of Acuña because of the inspired and ever popular Nocturno a Rosario. Romantic literature and the romantic temperament has ever held an attraction for the writer of this thesis, and Manuel Acuña is an example par excellence of the Romantic poet. His life and death have long continued to capture and hold the popular imagination.

In July and August of 1960, the investigator spent many hours in the Hemeroteca Nacional, a library housing voluminous collections of Mexican periodicals. All the available newspapers published at the time of Acuña's death and immediately thereafter were consulted, also those newspapers and magazines published on the fiftieth anniversary of his death (1923) yielded further material. On the hundredth anniversary of his birth (1949) numerous further articles were published throughout the year. This material cannot be said to have been exhaustively researched since there were many other things published at other times and in provincial newspapers to which there were no clues. Nor was all the material found pertinent to the study, and much was discovered to be a repetition of what had already been published. This in itself, however, attests to the continued interest of the public in anything concerning Acuña. Many other writers of even greater importance and renown in their time are no longer material for newspapers and popular magazines, whereas articles on Acuña continue to appear and are read with interest in spite of the relative dearth of much new material.

Further research was done in the Biblioteca de México which, along with its other collections, houses the Colección Besave, which has become the property of Mexico and is particularly rich in rare and perishable pamphlet material. The Biblioteca Cervantes and the Biblioteca de la Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México at the Ciudad Universitaria also proved valuable. Unfortunately

the building of the Biblioteca Nacional de México was undergoing major repairs at this time, so what probably would have proven to be the most valuable source of research material after the Hemeroteca was practically closed to investigators. There were other possible sources of Acuña material which were not investigated, either because of the limitations of time or lack of more definite information. A number of books which had been on the preliminary bibliography were found to be out of print and unavailable both at booksellers and in the libraries. The Archivos Nacionales and El Instituto Nacional de Investigaciones y de Historia with the aid of the expert investigators working in them would also have turned up important items of information had there been time to make the contacts and carry out the preliminary investigations so important for working in institutions whose collections are not fully classified or are not available to the general public.

In this study an attempt has been made to give a picture of Acuña, both as a personality and as a poet, and to situate these two aspects in an adequate historical and social setting. To have done this exhaustively would have required more time, talent, and experience on the part of the investigator, and perhaps the lucky uncovering of material not heretofore available. However, this investigation has been found to be personally rewarding and instructive and it is hoped that it will prove to be provocative to those who find the subject of this study of interest and who may be moved to pursue it further.

CHAPTER I

THE LITERARY AND POLITICAL BACKGROUND OF THE PERIOD

Manuel Acuña, the Mexican Romantic-materialist of the second half of the nineteenth century, may be considered one of the most representative Mexican poets of that turbulent period that followed upon the war with the United States and came before the long period of peace during the dictatorship of president Porfirio Díaz which began soon after Acuña's death in 1873. In an age when all gente de razón of Mexico were swayed in one direction or another by the stormy struggles which were taking place in the political field and on the battlefield, Manuel Acuña could not have failed to be affected by these events. This social and political turmoil was reflected in the life and spirit of Acuña.

Most of the actual struggles were centered in and around Mexico City; but the capitals of the various states suffered repercussions on the local level and their citizens were engaged actively or followed with interest through the newspapers of the day the political events that were taking place in the capital of the nation. As a general rule, life in provincial cities such as Saltillo, where Acuña grew up, was relatively quiet, pacific, and slow to change. The countryside tended to be conservative, especially in the matter of religion, which exercised a large measure of social control. The Independence movement had thrown off the hated Spanish yoke, but the social structure as a whole

had not been materially affected. The class system continued to follow what would seem to correspond to a racial line, although economic and cultural backgrounds were the main determinants of social status. Since the Independence from Spain, those of pure Spanish descent continued as the dominant element of the population. The position of the various elements of the mestizo population varied widely, from those in high administrative and social position in a society largely aristocratic in tradition and ideals, down to those who were confused with the large mass of inarticulate Indian proletarians who had little to say concerning the conduct of affairs. There was no real social revolution until almost a century after Independence.

In 1846, United States' troops were sent into Chihuahua, and in 1847 invaded Mexico via Vera Cruz. As an outcome of these engagements Mexico lost over half of her national territory and suffered from wounded pride, hardly knowing whom most to blame, her own traitors or the foreign invader. This laid the basis for much of her continuing internal conflict as well as for the sporadic anti-American feeling that flares up from time to time. On March 10, 1848, the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo was ratified by the American Senate and the last soldiers were withdrawn from Mexico in July of that year.¹ In August, 1849, Acuña was born.

¹Henry Bamford Parkes, A History of Mexico (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1960), p. 221.

The most outstanding man of the epoch was Benito Juárez, although much of the cult rendered to him is the result of the Liberals' passion for creating or inflating national heroes. Under the government of President Comonfort, he functioned as Ministro de Justicia y de Relaciones Eclesiásticas. The open struggle between the Church and the State broke out with the promulgation of the Ley Lerdo on June 25, 1856. This provided for the sale of all rural ecclesiastical property although the public, because of religious sentiment, did not support this and succeeding decrees which led to the expropriation of many urban properties of the various religious orders. The politicians in the main were personally honest, but a number of private persons of means laid the foundations for what became fabulous personal fortunes on the basis of these ecclesiastical properties which were bought up at a fraction of their real value.²

The public reaction to the persecution of the church by the civil authority eventually brought about the fall of Comonfort. Benito Juárez was proclaimed constitutional president in 1858 although it was not possible to maintain his government in Mexico City, which by then had fallen into the hands of the Conservatives. Armed conflict between the Liberals and the Conservatives continued on until 1861, and it was fraught with all the bitterness and bloodshed which usually characterizes a political-religious war.

²Ibid., p. 235.

Juárez finally entered the capital on January 11, 1861, and took extreme measures against the Catholics. This triggered the Conservative plan to go to France and negotiate the setting up of a European-style monarchy on Mexican soil under the headship of the Austrian Archduke, Maximilian of Hapsburg. The monarchy thus set up was doomed to failure, and those who were instrumental in bringing it about and who supported it were often accused of being traitors.

Many of the Conservatives were enraptured by the brief episode of empire with Maximilian and his empress, Carlota, seated on the Mexican Imperial throne. Those in the charmed circle of the court either enjoyed its prestige or basked contentedly in its reflected glory. It might be said that this attraction for an European-style court was a manifestation of Romanticism among the Conservatives, just as the over-enthusiasm for the ideals of liberty derived from the French Encyclopedists was another kind of manifestation of Romanticism on the part of the Liberals.

On June 19, 1867, after a brief reign full of personal vicissitudes for himself and bloody turmoil for the country, Maximilian was shot in Querétaro. In July, 1867, Juárez entered the city of Mexico after an absence of five years, and constitutional government for the country was resumed. At this time Acuña had been studying in the capital for almost two years. Juárez died after beginning his third term as president in 1872, and was succeeded in office by Sebastián Lerdo de Tejada who, after three

years of enforcing the radical provisions of the Constitution of 1857, was finally forced to flee by the Military. This Revolution was headed by General Porfirio Díaz, who later was to become president and dictator and to give Mexico the first long period of peace since colonial times. This Pax-Porfiriana lasted from 1877 to 1908, and during that time any interruption of it was put down by force.

Romanticism, which was so strongly to influence Acuña and his fellow Romantics, arrived in Mexico by way of France and Spain. It must be understood as an ideological movement as well as a literary movement. As a world-wide phenomenon it belongs chiefly to the last part of the eighteenth century and the first half of the nineteenth century. Its origins are to be found in England and in Germany.³

At first, Romanticism was a reaction against French neo-Classicism of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and the rigid rules literature was expected to follow.⁴ Romanticism retaliated by exaggerating the value of the individual and proclaimed liberty, in all its aspects, as the highest ideal and

³María del Carmen Millán (Prólogo y selección de), Antología de la poesía romántica mexicana (México: Libro Mex. Editores, S.de R.L., 1957), p. 7.

⁴Guillermo Díaz-Flaja, Historia de la literatura española (México, Editorial Porrúa, 1955), p. 274.

the conquest of liberty as the reward of all the efforts expended in achieving it.⁵

Mexican Romanticism, of course, stemmed from this same movement, although it had its own special characteristics because of social, racial, geographical, and historical circumstances. The Romantic ego is characterized by idealism and melancholy, and the creative artist expressed sincerely his dreams without giving importance to surrounding reality. Romanticism is profoundly subjective. Romantic fantasy idealizes reality, and the Romantic temperament suffers when it sees reality as quite different from the dream. This is the cause of the Romantic despair often called mal de siècle by the French. The hatred of reality gave rise to the desire to spiritualize, or show indifference to material things. In the field of fashion, there appeared the elongated silhouette and the pale forehead. The artist lived passionately and exalted those heroes who, like Werther, sacrificed their lives on the altars of their feelings. Love, either impetuous or nostalgic, was the prime objective of its poets, who also identified themselves with landscapes imbued with grandeur and melancholy, which was in contrast to the Classicist's taste for geometrically laid-out gardens. The Romantic loved shady and mysterious woods, the infinite horizon, and wild and broken terrain. Old ruins symbolized for him the sad passage of time; tombs stood out as mute reminders

⁵Millán, op. cit., p. 7.

of that which was gone forever. All of these things were woven into the characteristic themes of Romanticism. Fleeing from common everyday reality, the Romantic looked for a background which would fit in well with his fantasy. He either retreated into the Middle Ages where the traditions of religion and chivalry held forth amid the Gothic architecture of its churches and castles, or he went far afield and sought out the exotic or the Oriental, to him a subject filled with color and fantasy.⁶ In the time of Acuña, the popular writer, Guillermo Prieto (1818-97) looked for Romantic inspiration in the traditions and folklore of the Mexican people and in the exaltation of the movements for national liberation. It would be correct to say, in the case of Mexico, that the Reform movement was a subject utilized by the young Romantics of the day of Acuña.

Romanticism proclaimed the freedom of the artist to produce his work as he felt it, since a work of art was the vehicle of the feelings of the artist and not an instrument of education. In the political field this was paralleled by the substitution of the national will, or liberalism, for the absolute power of kings. Díaz-Flaja cites the doctrine of Lessing, which teaches that a work of art must be expressive. Violent contrasts, expressions of a stormy feeling either violent or pathetic, brilliant or picturesque evocations, unpitying satire or exaggerated eulogy are

⁶Díaz-Flaja, op. cit., pp. 275-76.

used in order to impress rather than to convince.⁷ Examples of the above may be found in the work of Acuña, since Acuña utilized exalted patriotic themes in his poems. These, however, are among the least valuable of his works.⁸

In the matter of the language used by the Romantics the expression is energetic and picturesque. More than new words, we find such typical phrases as the following which are taken from the Spanish Romanticist, Espronceda: Lúgubre viento, súbito rumor, lóbrega nube, vana ilusión, vago fantasma, noche sombría, melancólica luna, fétido fango, medrosa aparición, moribunda lámpara in which the adjective is usually placed before the noun to give greater expression to the phrase.⁹ Acuña and other Mexican contemporaries were all influenced by Espronceda.

The Romanticism of exaltation, passion, and rebellion in the tradition and manner of the Spanish poets Zorrilla (1817-93), Espronceda (1810-42), and Bécquer (1836-70) reached its culmination in Manuel Acuña (1849-73), who is the exemplary Mexican Romantic not only in his poetry, but in his life as well.¹⁰

⁷Ibid., p. 276.

⁸Jeannine Elizabeth Hyde, Manuel Acuña, Positivista romántico (México, 1957), unpublished thesis of the Universidad Nacional Autónoma, Escuela de Verano, pp. 133-35.

⁹Díaz-Flaja, op. cit., p. 276.

¹⁰Carlos González Peña, Historia de la literatura mexicana (México: Editorial Porrúa, S.A. 1958), p. 302.

CHAPTER II

THE LIFE OF MANUEL ACUÑA

Manuel Acuña Narro was born in Saltillo, Coahuila, Mexico, August 26, 1849. His first schooling was received at home from his parents, Francisco Acuña and Refugio Narro de Acuña, after which he attended the Colegio Josefino. In 1865, when he was sixteen years of age, he arrived in Mexico City where he became a boarding student at the Colegio de San Ildefonso. Here he studied Latin, mathematics, French, and philosophy. In January, 1868, he began his medical studies at the Escuela de Medicina. José Luis Martínez says that he was a distinguished, though inconstant, student.¹¹ The humble room which he occupied at the school was often the gathering-place of many young writers among whom were Juan de Dios Peza, later to achieve a world-wide literary reputation, and who is the source of much of what we know about the school life and personality of Acuña; Manuel M. Flores, whose erotic poems, *Pasionarias*, have made him stand out above all other Mexican poets of this genre;¹² and Agustín F. Cuenca, a poet and newspaper writer interested in social problems.

¹¹Manuel Acuña, *Obras*, Prólogo de José Luis Martínez (México: Editorial Porrúa, S.A., 1949), p. xvii.

¹²José Castillo y Piña, *Mis recuerdos* (México: Imprenta Rebollar, 1941), p. 217.

The contrast between the life of a provincial capital and that of the metropolis, Mexico City, must have had a stirring effect upon the young poet. It may in all reasonableness be supposed that new friends and new ideas meant for him the opening up of a whole new world. The atmosphere must have been heady with the events which led up to the triumph of the Liberal party in 1867 and the return of Juárez to full power in June of this year. Nothing has been found showing Acuña's involvement in political conspiracies of the time.

In 1868, Acuña began his literary career by writing an elegy on the death of his friend, Eduardo Alsúa,¹³ which along with a composition entitled El Génesis de mi vida, was stolen from among Acuña's papers on the day he died.¹⁴ These probably would have been of great value in the study of the poet's life.

A group of young writers, mostly disciples of the writer and teacher, Ignacio Altamirano, formed themselves into the Sociedad Netzahualcóyotl and sought to follow the great teacher's aspirations to create an original, national literature. Acuña participated in the foundation of this organization as well as in that of the Sociedad Filioátrica y de Beneficencia.

Juan de Dios Pesa in his Memorias gives an interesting sketch of student life at the Medical School which may shed some

¹³Acuña, op. cit., Prólogo de José Luis Martínez, p. xvii.

¹⁴Ibid., p. xxiii (cited from Juan de Dios Pesa).

light on the life of the times and on the personality of Acuña. The scene is the famous room number thirteen in which Acuña lived and which not so many years before had been occupied by another unfortunate poet, Juan Díaz Covarrubias (1837-59).¹⁵ Juan de Dios Peza describes the room with its iron cot covered with an old and beautiful Saltille sarape and its old and worn-out chairs upon which those seated had to study the laws of equilibrium in order to maintain their balance. On the night table was an enormous coffee pot. There was a dresser which contained more papers than it did clothing and a rough pine table, without a table cover, on which amid a bottle of ink, a row of books, and a miscellaneous pile of papers there was a human cranium. This cranium was a particularly beautiful specimen and had been prepared for Acuña by El Pelón, the servant of the Medical School whose job it was to deliver the corpses for dissection from the hospital to the school, and later take the remains to the cemetery. On a rainy day in the month of June, 1872, Acuña showed it to Juan de Dios

¹⁵Luttrell, Estelle, Mexican writers, A Catalogue of Books in the University of Arizona Library with Synopses and Biographical Notes (Tucson, Arizona: University of Arizona Press, 1920), p. 14. The note on Covarrubias reads: "Born in Jalapa in 1837; died in Mexico City in 1859. Poet and novelist. Was a victim of the outrages perpetrated by Márquez at the battle of Tacubaya in 1859. With several medical students who were attending the wounded he was seized and dragged off to a place where the prisoners were being shot and there immolated with the rest. In the opinion of Obregón, had he lived he would have merited a place beside Sir Walter Scott as writer of historical novels."

Peza and commented that the skull would be his best album, and that within two months many would be envious of it.¹⁶

A few nights later, during the month of July in 1872, various intimate friends of the poet came together in Acuña's room. They drank coffee from the two or three thick cups, the very strong black coffee spiked with drops of the aguardiente, which the students called el néctar blanco de los sueños negros, just as they called the coffee itself el néctar negro de los sueños blancos. Their imaginations excited by the beverage, Acuña produced the white and perfectly clean cranium and announced that no one would leave the room without having written on its surface an appropriate sentiment. The students insisted that Acuña himself begin the inscription and within ten minutes the forehead bore the following quatrain:

Página en que la esfinge de la muerte,
 Con su enigma de sombra nos provoca;
 ¡Como poderte descifrar, si es poca
 Toda la luz del sol para leerte!

The group broke into strident applause which Acuña interrupted by saying that the tone was too serious and that the funereal monotony should be broken. Agustín Cuenca suggested that Acuña take up the pen another time to initiate the festive style for the book of bone. Acuña, letting out a puff of smoke, took up the cranium and wrote on the border of one of the eye cavities: Dios y Compañía, ópticos. That night they improvised verses, made extravagant

¹⁶Juan de Dios Peza, De la gaveta íntima; memorias, reliquias, y retratos (Paris: Bouret, 1900), pp. 106-08.

speeches, spoke of glory, the future, and many other things. When the group broke up, it was after midnight. Juan de Dios Peza and Acuña were alone together, and the latter poured a little sodium borate into the alcohol lamp, lighted it, and set it beside the cranium. In the resulting light the whiteness of the skull stood out and the recently made inscriptions seemed to dance and oscillate in the greenish light.¹⁷

Student life in the time of Acuña was not a smooth easy-going matter. Along with the political turbulence within the school itself, Acuña had his own problems of pecuniary, scholastic, and emotional nature. In his letters home, aside from the heartfelt expressions of longing to see his family from which he had long been separated, he at times expressed concern over the progress of his studies and the need for books, since he lacked the money with which to obtain them. He told his mother in one letter that the director of the school, Ríe de la Loza, had strongly recommended that he not try to study two years of subjects in one year, since it was more important to be a healthy man than a wise one. He said that he was almost sorry to have started on a medical career rather than to have become a mulster. He was tired of this life of boredom and isolation in which there was no one who really cared for him. The only thing he could do, however, was to wait and be

¹⁷Ibid., pp. 108-10.

resigned.¹⁸ In another letter, undated, he mentioned the fact that he had not written because he did not even have the paper on which to do so.¹⁹ The lack of things needed to carry on his studies must have been painful in the extreme, and the knowledge that his family, after his father's death, was anxious for him to finish his studies must have added to this burden. In the main, Acuña's letters home expressed strong filial affection which was one of the main sources of his poetical inspiration.

In April, 1871, his father died, and he was moved to write his Lágrimas: a la memoria de mi padre, in which he recalled, as he also did in a letter written to his mother, his father's last words to him: "valor y esperanza", and the emotions which years before he had felt upon leaving the paternal roof.²⁰ He said in stanza twelve of this poem that he did not know if love had a place in the tomb in which his father slept, but that he knew that in his own heart he suffered deeply because of the loss of his father:²¹

Yo sé que es el más dulce de los nombres
el nombre que te doy cuando te llame,
y que en la religión de mis recuerdos
tu eres el dios que amo.

The idea of a personal God had been suppressed in the thought of the poet as a result of the Positivist ideas inculcated into his

¹⁸Castillo Nájera, op. cit., pp. 138-39. Reproduces Acuña's letter to his mother dated October 1, 1873.

¹⁹Acuña, op. cit., pp. 368-69.

²⁰Ibid., p. 59.

²¹Ibid., p. 65.

thinking by the materialistic texts and teachings of the Escuela de Medicina. There is sincere emotion expressed in these lines, but it is tinged with despair and anguish. He had no faith that his father had an immortal soul, for in a Positivist religion there was only room for proven certainties.

On the night of the ninth of May, 1872, the Teatro Principal was the scene of the first presentation of his drama El pasado in which Pilar Belaval, a famous actress of the time, took the role of Eugenia. This was repeated on the eleventh of June and the poet honored enthusiastically and presented with four laurel wreaths by various literary organizations. This occasion was a veritable triumph for Acuña. He in turn was to offer these tokens of the public esteem to Rosario de la Peña, who figures prominently in the life and legend of the writer and who was the pasión e inspiración of Acuña as well as of so many other writers of the time.²² It is to Rosario that Acuña dedicated the greater portion of his last poems, and the history of their relationship now belongs to legend.

It seems that Acuña was obsessed by the idea of suicide. In a letter addressed to Ramón Espinosa written in January, 1873, he said that if it were not for the fear "de caer entre las garras del cornudo" he would already have ceased to exist.²³ In the poem, Resignación, he suggests to the woman to whom he addresses his lines

²²Ibid., Prólogo, p. xviii.

²³Castillo Najera, op. cit., p. 140.

(probably Laura Méndez) a suicide described in poetic terms.

Rosario claims that on one occasion he said to her:²⁴

"Mire Vd. Rosario: hagámonos célebres, apuremos vd. y yo una copa de veneno" y le enseñaba una botella de cianuro que llevaba en su bolsillo.

Rosario, possibly unjustly, appears as the cause of his tragic decision, occasioned by her disdain. The efforts to disentangle the truth from hearsay gave rise to many discussions. The fact is Acuña took his own life on the sixth of December, 1873, at the age of twenty-four.

No one has written more beautifully and informatively concerning Manuel Acuña than has Juan de Dios Peza (1852-1910), the poet's intimate friend and contemporary who long survived him.²⁵ Juan de Dios Peza wrote about twenty-four years after the death of Acuña, and from memory; but he captured the spirit of the poet and the friendship which existed between them in an inimitable style of reminiscence. He remembered him with his dark unruly hair smoothed back from his brow by an indolent hand, arched dark thick brows which were over the large eyes that seemed to escape from their orbits, small sharp nose, and a small mouth with mustache. He walked quickly and was somewhat difficult in speech. As to his spiritual portrait, Juan de Dios Peza says that he was inwardly

²⁴José Castillo y Piña, Mis recuerdos (México, Imprenta Rebolgar, 1941), p. 228.

²⁵Juan de Dios Peza, op. cit., p. 411.

sad, but jovial in manner of expression. He was as sensitive as a child and as loyal as a gentleman of the old school. The sufferings of others tormented him, and no one was more given to visiting and helping the friend who was poor and sick. He was always surrounded by a group of friends who loved him sincerely without envying his genius or censuring his extravagances and who were always the first to praise his work. Juan de Dios Peza also remarked on his love for his parents.²⁶

Juan de Dios Peza and Acuña were together most of the day on December 5, 1873. In the afternoon they went to the Alameda, where the wind was carrying away the leaves from the trees. Acuña watched them sadly as they fell at his feet. That afternoon they were reading Les Feuilles d'automne of Victor Hugo. Acuña recited his poem, El génesis de mi vida, which disappeared from among his papers the next day. While they were seated on a stone bench, Acuña dictated to Juan de Dios Peza the sonnet, A un arroyo, which is the last thing he composed, although many have erroneously supposed it was the Nocturno. Juan de Dios Peza said the latter was known by his friends by heart as long as three months before the day of the suicide. The friends left the Alameda at sundown and parted from each other at the door of the house on the street of Santa Isabel, which was the residence of Rosario de la Peña. The friends

²⁶Ibid., pp. 65-66.

were to see each other at one o'clock the following day. Their last conversation is succinctly given by Peza:²⁷

Mañana, a la una en punto, te espero sin falta.

¿En punto? — le pregunté.

Si tardas un minuto más . . .

¿Qué me sucederá?

Que me iré sin verte.

¿Te irás adónde?

Estoy de viaje sí . . de viaje lo sabrás después.

Juan de Dios Peza said that these words fell upon his soul like drops of fire. He wanted to ask him more, but Acuña went into the house and left him sad and bad-humored. Juan de Dios Peza only knew that that gigantic spirit was sick and passing through a crisis.

That night Acuña arrived somewhat late to his room at the Escuela de Medicina. He tore up and burned many of his papers, and wrote several letters on paper edged in mourning. The following day it is said that he got up, arranged his room, then went to take a bath. After returning he must have penned the following note, which was written in a firm, determined hand:

Lo de menos era entrar en detalles sobre la causa de mi muerte, pero no creo que le importe a ninguno; basta con saber que nadie más que yo mismo es el culpable. Diciembre 6 de 1873. Manuel Acuña.

Afterwards he went out into the corridors and conversed with school friends on subjects of no particular importance, until he returned to his room at twelve-thirty.

²⁷Ibid., p. 69.

Juan de Dios Peza did not arrive at the room until a few minutes after one o'clock, having been detained at the door of the school. Upon entering the room he found a candle burning on the night table and Acuña lying on the bed with the natural expression on his face of one who sleeps.

Guided by a strange presentiment, Juan de Dios Peza touched his head and found that it was warm. Upon lifting one of the eyelids, he was terrified by the expression of the pupil; and upon looking around he saw a glass with the forementioned note propped up against it. While he was leaning over to read it he caught the acrid odor of bitter almonds, and this lifted the veil from the mystery.

Stunned, Juan de Dios Peza called the medical students who lived in the next room. Oribe, a friend and fellow student, tried mouth-to-mouth insuflation to revive Acuña while one of the others moved the thorax in an effort to produce artificial respiration. It was all in vain. Acuña had swallowed a strong solution of cyanide, and Oribe himself was overcome with the fumes and had to be revived.²⁸

Peza continues his narrative with a description of the consternation caused among those of the medical school and the public in general by the news, which spread almost instantaneously. A death mask was taken. As a possible result of the embalming,

²⁸Ibid., p. 73.

tears were constantly falling from the eyes of the cadaver. He wept, as he had written in the fourth stanza of the second canto of his poem, La Gloria:²⁹

Como deben llorar en la última hora
Los inmóviles párpados de un muerto.

On the tenth of December he was buried in the Campo Florido Cemetery. The funeral procession and the graveside ceremony were attended by representatives of the various literary organizations and a great multitude made up of all classes of society. Outstanding funeral orations and elegiac recitations were delivered; and those given by Juan de Dios Peza, José Rosas Moreno, and Justo Sierra were especially worthy of note. The latter expressed the general feeling of painful loss felt by those who were present:³⁰

Palmas, triunfos, laureles, dulce aurora
de un porvenir feliz, todo en una hora
de soledad y hastío
cambiaste por el triste derecho de morir, hermano mío.

His remains were later removed to the Rotunda de Hombres Ilustres. Many years later, in October, 1917, the State of Coahuila claimed the remains and after a suitable ceremony honoring them held in the National Library, they were taken to Saltillo, where the sculptor, Jesús E. Contreras, has carved a notable marble group to mark his final resting place.³¹

²⁹Acuña, op. cit., p. 223.

³⁰News Article in El Correo del Comercio, December 14, 1873.

³¹Acuña, op. cit., p. xx (Cited by José Luis Martínez in his prologue to the collected works of Acuña).

CHAPTER III

THE WOMEN IN THE LIFE OF ACUÑA

A. ROSARIO DE LA PEÑA

After the Guerra de la Reforma and the triumph of the Republic over the French interventionists, life in Mexico was neither quiet nor peaceful. The voices of the Liberals were heard everywhere, while the Conservatives appeared to be submissive and hurt. Because of this situation ladies went out very little, and the home became for them a temple, a school, a place of amusement and a center for publicity. The only place a poet could see his muse was in her home—if he were welcome there.

Beginning with the year 1870, the home of Rosario de la Peña was the gathering place of the outstanding literary figures of the time. She exercised a charm over them which attracted Mexicans and foreigners alike. The evening gatherings at which she received her friends usually turned into discussions of literature and politics. Those who attended were all members of the outstanding literary organizations of the period and they brought along with them the unfinished debates which had been started at their meetings, or initiated future discussions. Important literary questions were discussed and critical opinions of worthwhile authorities were heard. All those who frequented Rosario's salon, whether young or old, were either filled with

literary ambitions or had achieved literary fame. Among them were Altamirano, who by that time had become the leader and teacher of the new generation made up of Acuña, Manuel Flores, and Juan de Dios Pesa; and Guillermo Prieto, who functioned as the counsellor of Rosario. Others who attended were Gustavo Baz, secretary of the Liceo Hidalgo; Ignacio Ramírez (El Nigromante) who presided over the sessions of the Liceo Hidalgo and was one of the unhopeful admirers of Rosario; and Jose Martí, the Cuban patriot, who was famous for his heated discussions at the Liceo Hidalgo during his stay in Mexico City in 1873 and who rendered poetic homage to the much-admired Rosario.³²

Rosario de la Peña at the age of eighteen had been presented to society along with other debutantes in a ceremony which took place at one of the official receptions offered by her cousin, Pepita de la Peña, who was married to Marshal Bazaine, the head of the invasion forces and of the Imperial army during the reign of Maximiliano. On this occasion people were greatly charmed by her manner and beauty. Three years later, in 1868, when Rosario was only twenty-one years old, her novio, Colonel Espinosa y Garostiza, challenged another Mexican colonel to a duel because of words reflecting on his honor spoken in his absence, but in the presence of Rosario. Espinosa y Garostiza was killed, and

³²Alicia Perales Ojeda, Las asociaciones literarias de México, siglo XIX (México: Facultad de Filosofía y Letras de la Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1951), pp. 92-93.

Rosario was in mourning for three years. Rosario met Acuña about two years later, when she was twenty-six and he not quite twenty-four.³³

Rosario de la Peña was the daughter of Juan de la Peña, a lukewarm Liberal land-owner, and the Catholic and aristocratic Margarita Ilerena de la Peña. The family occupied a residence on the street of Santa Isabel. As for Rosario, López Portillo said that her portraits do not favor her. She had harmonious features and was tall, thin, and statuesque. She carried herself with distinction. Along with her physical charms she had good manners, culture, and talent. She fascinated and attracted with disquieting enchantment. Castillo Nájera further states that she combined Spanish gracia, Parisian charme, and Yankee sex appeal.³⁴

This social intercourse with men of letters was of long-standing in Rosario's home. The mother used to relate in a seigneurial manner anecdotes concerning her friendship with Fernando Calderón (1809-45), who was outstanding in the field of romantic drama, and Manuel Eduardo de Gorostiza (1789-1851), who was noted for his comedies. She had also known Guillermo Prieto (1819-97) in his younger days. Her daughters from the

³³Castillo Nájera, op. cit., pp. 48-49.

³⁴Ibid., p. 51.

time they were born breathed an atmosphere saturated with the harmonies and rhythms of literature.³⁵

At the gatherings in the house of Rosario they recited, sang, played the piano, talked of philosophy, of art, and of the latest books from Spain.³⁶

Rosario had an album in the front of which Ignacio Ramírez had penned the famous distich:³⁷

Ara es este álbum: esparcid cantores,
A los pies de la diosa, incienso y flores.

Ignacio Ramírez (1818-89), called El Nigromante, was among those who loved Rosario. He wielded an immense influence on the youth of his time as a teacher, writer, and Liberal politician. Hidden within the classical precision in which he expressed himself was a senile love for Rosario. In the following sonnet he ironically revealed the jealousy he felt for her:³⁸

¿Por qué, Amor, cuando expiro desarmado
de mí te burlas? Llévate a esa hermosa
doncella tan ardiente y tan graciosa
que por mi oscuro arilo has asomado.

En tiempo más feliz yo supe, osado,
extender mi palabra artificiosa
como un red, y en ella, temblorosa,
más de una de tus aves he cazado.

³⁵Luis G. Urbina, La vida literaria en México (México: Editorial Porrúa, 1946), p. 113.

³⁶Hernán Robleto, "Los enamorados de Rosario" (México: Revista de Revistas; April 4, 1937) This number of the magazine is dedicated to Marnel Acuña.

³⁷Urbina, op. cit., p. 111.

³⁸Ibid., p. 112.

Hoy de mí mis rivales hacen juego,
cobardes atacándome en gavilla;
y libre yo, mi presa al aire entrego.

Al inerte leon, el asno humilla;
vuélveme, Amor, mi juventud, y luego
tú mismo a mis rivales acudilla.

Rosario did not love him in turn, since there was too great a difference in age. Ramírez and Acuña saw each other on more than one occasion at the house of Rosario and there was an occasion at which Acuña laid at her feet the flowers and garlands with which he had been honored upon the success of his play, El pasado.³⁹

Rosario said that upon seeing this demonstration of Acuña's esteem for her, El Nigromante got up and left without taking formal leave.

It was then that Acuña was supposed to have made his famous quip:

. . . nunca se había visto un brajo con Rosario (There had never been seen before a sorcerer with a rosary).⁴⁰

The man Rosario really loved was Manuel Flores (1840-35), whose love poems, Pasionarias, still have much popular appeal.

Urbina remembered seeing him sick, blind, long-haired, with a Bohemian hat, immaculately dressed, being led along the street by a lazarillo. A few months later he died in the arms of Rosario.⁴¹

Urbina characterized Ignacio Ramírez as sad, Flores as sensual and voluptuous, and Manuel Acuña as chaste in his love for Rosario.⁴²

It is very difficult to disentangle all of the complicated strands

³⁹Cf., p. 15.

⁴⁰Castillo Nájera, op. cit., p. 50.

⁴¹Urbina, op. cit., p. 121.

⁴²Ibid., p. 114.

of her relationship with Acuña because of the contradictory things which Rosario said on various occasions in which she was questioned. Urbina remembers the dark eyes of the mature Rosario and the majestic and matronly figure of the somewhat faded beauty which still exerted its fascination. Her profile showed the delicate features of a fine Roman coin. The intelligence and heart of this woman were of more worth than her beauty. Around her were woven legends and fables, and the Romantic poets of her time had loved her to the point of delirium. All the poets of the time were her friends and visited her.⁴³ Castillo Nájera said that it was a species of collective psychosis. After the suicide poets considered that they must irrevocably continue idolizing Rosario. Aside from Acuña, Ignacio Ramírez, and Manuel Flores, there were Vicente Riva Palacio (1832-96), Javier Santa María (1843-1910), Juan de Dios Peza (1852-1910), Luis G. Urbina (1869-1934), and Angel del Campo (1868-1908), called Micros. However, Rosario preferred adoration to matrimony, and she never married.⁴⁴

B. LAURA MÉNDEZ

Aside from Rosario de la Peña, two other women figure in the life of Acuña. The first of these is Laura Méndez, the postess. There has been much conjecture as to the nature of Acuña's

⁴³Ibid., p. 113.

⁴⁴Castillo Nájera, op. cit., p. 55.

relationship with her. Laura remained silent in the matter of her connection with Acuña, and this alone helped to weave a spell of mystery.

Laura Méndez was born at the Hacienda de Tamaris, near Amecameca, in 1853. This is not far from Nepantla, birth place of the great Mexican poetess of colonial times, Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz. After Acuña's death, Laura married the friend and school companion of the poet, Agustín F. Cuenca, who died in 1874. Laura Méndez de Cuenca travelled widely, and after her husband's death lived for a while in San Francisco. A number of her short stories are laid in California, and the leading characters are descendents of the early Mexican settlers of the state. Among her best-known writings are Simplezas, a collection of stories for children; El hogar mexicano; and Nociones de economía doméstica, in which she tries to teach the Mexicans sanitation and scientific cookery as practiced and taught in the United States.⁴⁵ One may note from these activities of Señora Méndez de Cuenca that she was a capable woman engaged in many activities and that she was completely articulate.

Laura may be the one who is addressed in the following:⁴⁶

¡Cómo quieres que tan pronto
olvide al mal que me has hecho
si cuando me toco el pecho

⁴⁵ Estelle Lutrell, op. cit., p. 36.

⁴⁶ Acuña, op. cit., p. 209.

la herida me duele más!
 Entre el perdón y el olvido
 hay una distancia inmensa:
 yo perdonaré la ofensa;
 pero olvidarla . . . ¡ Jamás!

"Te amo--dijistes--y jamás a otro hombre
 le entregare mi amor y mi albedrío;"
 y al quererme llamar buscaste un nombre,
 y el nombre que dijiste no era el mío.

It would be difficult to believe that these stanzas refer to an imaginary love, since the emotion seems too real and the sense of having been offended is strongly expressed. Acuña's attitude, however, is one of resignation in the face of circumstances.⁴⁷

The poem, Resignación, which refers to the breaking of a love relationship, is generally supposed to be addressed to Laura.⁴⁸

The poem entitled A Laura is an earlier poem and it expressed not only love, but great admiration for the poetess.⁴⁹ Julián Montiel wrote verses reproaching certain acts of Acuña, and these gave credence to the rumor that Acuña had fathered a child.⁵⁰

Garmen Toscano, whom Castillo Nájera considers well documented, thinks that Laura Méndez could have been the mother of the child

⁴⁷Castillo Nájera, op. cit., p. 78.

⁴⁸Acuña, op. cit., p. 83.

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 67.

⁵⁰Julian Montiel, "Verses", El Torito: periódico para el pueblo (Mexico: December 11, 1873), pp. 2-3.

of Manuel Acuña which was supposed to have died not long after it was born.⁵¹

López-Portillo y Rojas was the first to shed any light on the loves of Manuel Acuña other than Rosario, whom he loved ideal y poéticamente. It is he who first mentions in writing la hermosa e inspirada poetisa who was unfaithful to the poet, and whom all supposed to be Laura.⁵² Laura read, according to Castillo Nájera, what López-Portillo y Rojas wrote concerning an infidelity and she herself admitted being the sweetheart and later the mistress of Acuña. Most of the details concerning their relationship are now inextricably obscure, but undoubtedly Laura exercised considerable influence in the life of Acuña.

G. SOLEDAD

The last of the three women with whom we have to deal is Soledad. Benjamín Jarnes dedicates his biography of Acuña to her:⁵³

Dedicado: a Soledad, La Lavandera
Porque, desde la sombra, sin ninguna gloria,
pero con amorosa pena, supo noblemente desempeñar
su papel en este amargo drama de la vida de Acuña,
tan breve como intenso.

⁵¹Castillo Nájera, op. cit., p. 48. The author cites Carmen Toscano, Rosario la de Acuña, published by Talleres Gráficos de la Nación, 1948.

⁵²Ibid., p. 144.

⁵³Benjamín Jarnes, Manuel Acuña, Poeta de su siglo (México: Ediciones Xochitl, 1942), dedication page.

Probably Soledad or "Celi," as Acuña called her, would have lived and died in complete obscurity if Juan de Dios Pesa had not written a little panegyric praising the humble women of Mexico who earn their living honestly by washing and ironing. He describes their existence as sad, their work hard, their pleasures as ephemeral and their social condition as worthy of pity. Even though their general situation is as unhappy as that of slaves, in their inmost being there is a capacity for pity, compassion, self-denial, and tenderness, which is worthy of praise.⁵⁴

Acuña was poor and his outer clothes were a demonstration of this. In the matter of shirts and undergarments Acuña was always irreproachably attired.

Acuña expressed in confidences made to Juan de Dios Pesa that he owed a debt of gratitude to this woman, Celi, since she served him for long periods of time without asking for her pay until Acuña was able finally to pay something of what he owed her; and, if he did not pay, she never asked for a cent. She was punctual, and when she knew that the poet was to speak at some theatre, she did his laundry with perfection. On occasions she left in the laundry basket handkerchiefs which did not belong to him and, when he tried to return them, she insisted on leaving them with him in case he might need them.

⁵⁴Juan de Dios Pesa, op. cit., pp. 75-79.

The funeral of Manuel was what might be called sumptuous. The honors shown the dead Acuña were extensive, and people of importance attended. After the ceremony, however, there was only a mound of earth covered with tear-drenched wreaths which soon dried up. For a long time the only marker was a brick with the initials, M. A..

Peza went to the cemetery one day and was surprised to find the grave marked with a monument surmounted by a Gothic cross of iron and carved into the stone the name, Manuel Acuña, in letters of gold. The attendant at the cemetery, upon the discreet inquiry of Juan de Dios Peza, explained that Soledad, a laundress, who often visited the grave, had had the monument placed and had paid for it.

Later on this monument was replaced by a more pretentious and costly one, but the one that was really an undying tribute was that put up by Soledad at the cost of, who knows how much, silent, hard labor by this woman of the people. There is no evidence that Soledad's love for Acuña was anything more than a case of the self-abnegating love of a woman of the serving class for those whom she served, and this love was in large part maternal.⁵⁵

⁵⁵Ibid., pp. 76-79.

CHAPTER IV

THE WORKS OF ACUÑA

The entire body of the poetical compositions of Acuña consists of less than one hundred poems, including both his collected and uncollected works. His title to lasting fame, however, is based, for the most part, on two poems written within the last two years of his life, Ante un cadáver (1872) and the Nocturno (1873), dedicated to Rosario. In addition to the poetical work of Acuña, there is his prose drama, El pasado, and mention of two other theatrical compositions which are unknown. There are also a number of articles originally published in periodicals and a few letters which are included in the collection of his work edited by José Luis Martínez. The editor made an effort to bring together all the known work of Acuña possible, and this edition is the most complete which has been made up to the present.

All of Acuña's literary works were written between the years 1868 and 1873; that is, from the time he was nineteen until he died by his own hand at the age of twenty-four. Although there are four known poems before this, they are of no special importance.

Miss Hyde⁵⁶ found that the themes utilized by the poet may be reduced to three: love, death, and social concern. The love theme is often filial love, and centers around his mother and his

⁵⁶Hyde, op. cit., p. 48.

father. This love for parents is of importance in the psychological understanding of the poet. In the poems addressed to various women he showed passion rather than sensuality. Unfortunate in love, he searches for a relationship which is ideal, spiritual, and therefore unattainable. The unconscious motivation behind this search must be, in part at least, the need to fill the vacuum which had been formed in his life by his loss of religious faith. Love for country also figures in his work, but the poems thus inspired are of lesser literary importance.

The death theme encountered would include all of those natural preoccupations concerning life and death, and the meaning or meaninglessness of the universe. The source of this concern must be the conflict between his earlier upbringing in a devout, middle-class, provincial home and the materialistic philosophy he has learned in his classes and social contacts in Mexico City.

Acuña was incapable of feeling an emotion without putting into it all the energy of his being. As a consequence, his poems utilizing the theme of social concern are marred by exaggeration.

José Luis Martínez singles out in his prologue a number of the poems for mention or discussion. Since it is not the purpose of this thesis to discuss and analyze all the poems, the discussion will be limited to these.⁵⁷

⁵⁷Acuña, op. cit., Prólogo, pp. i-xxviii.

Among his first poems are San Lorenzo, which dates from 1868, and Historia de un pensamiento. The first is mainly a descriptive poem, and the poet calls it a paisaje. The latter is a simple lyric fable with autobiographical allusions. In these and several occasional and dedicatory poems, Acuña shows the great facility he has for writing.⁵⁸ Acuña frequently got into areas of subject matter that were beyond his depth and the capacity of his years, but in these compositions he shows himself as spontaneous rather than belabored.

The poem entitled Ocampo was written in 1870 in memory of the great Mexican Liberal, Melchior Ocampo, who was shot by the Conservatives in 1861. In this, as in other poems of a patriotic nature, the poet expresses fierce Liberal party spirit. Ocampo is seen as a prophet, and is compared to Christ as an example of one who is the martyr to an idea. Acuña utilizes religious terminology in glorifying the hero who was one of the most important figures in the struggle of the State against the Church. *> Filioátrica*

In his Himno a la Sociedad Filioátrica, a social group which the poet helped to found, Acuña uses a softer touch but he continues to condemn fanaticism, tyranny, and the crimes of society, exalts progress and reason, and affirms his belief in social redemption through education. He proclaims the cult of science which will substitute in the conscience of mankind for the worship of God. This poem is simple and clear in its structure and presentation

⁵⁸Ibid., Prólogo, p. xiii.

of ideas and less exalted and confused in its rhetoric than the one entitled A la Sociedad Filioátrica en su instalación, written in 1868, and which appears at the beginning of all editions of his collected works.

The four poems called Doleras are imitations of Campoamor, and were composed before he took on the harsh and impassioned tones which are the distinguishing marks of much of his poetry. After the early experimental period in which the poet was trying his wings, he seems to have taken the following poets as his models: Nuñez de Arce, Espronceda, Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda, Ignacio Ramírez, Victor Hugo, and Byron.⁵⁹

La Ramera is perhaps the most important Acuña poem showing his concern for social problems. José Luis Martínez writes:⁶⁰

Su poema La Ramera, apenas defensible como poesía por sus recursos efectistas y sus claroscuros primitivos, debió producir en su tiempo una comoción social por la tremenda energía con que un joven de veinte años toma la defensa de la mujer caída.

Even today many readers would find the theme and the way it is handled somewhat startling. The poet points out the guilt and hypocrisy of humanity which insults and laughs at the prostitute just as they insult the gypsy and the beggar. He accuses humanity of paying lip service to Truth, to Charity, and to the teachings of Christ and, at the same time, of being responsible for the social downfall and the loss of religious belief of the streetwalker.

⁵⁹Ibid., Prólogo, p. xv.

⁶⁰Ibid., Prólogo, p. vii.

He describes her former condition as one of snow-like, flower-like and child-like innocence, later to be cast into filth. He compares her sufferings to those of Mary Magdalene and says that in the end she will hear the words of Christ: "Levántate, mujer, yo te perdono." Pimental sees traces of true poetry in this composition.⁶¹ Modern readers, however, will find that it is more a social tract than an authentic poem.

In the Oda: Ante el cadáver del Doctor José B. de Villagrán and in Ante un cadáver, both written in the year 1872, Acuña is concerned with the enigma of death and with the idea of immortality through fame and glory.⁶² The materialistic ideas which he has learned from the teachings of Ignacio Ramírez, a man of extraordinary oratorical, intellectual, literary, and political talents,⁶³ and from the physiological and anatomical texts of Moleschott, Vogt, and Eichen, led Acuña into a violent scepticism. His scepticism was only of the sentimental kind, but it led him to search for a solution within the materialist framework to explain the world and man's destiny. His answers to this problem are inconsistent, as would be expected from a young man of twenty-three years of age.⁶⁴

⁶¹Francisco Pimental, Historia de la poesía en México (México: Oficina Tip. de la secretaría de fomento, 1892), pp. 862-63.

⁶²Acuña, op. cit., Prólogo, p. ix.

⁶³González Peña, op. cit., p. 228.

⁶⁴Marcelino Meréndes y Pelayo, Historia de la poesía hispano americana (Madrid: Librería General de Victoriano Suárez, 1911), p. 161.

In the Oda Acuña asks himself if the tomb is the conclusion of man's life. At times he affirms that from the tomb, where the statue of life disappears, there arises for the illustrious man, another statue, that of fame.⁶⁵ In Ante un cadáver he expressed his theories concerning the renewal and transmutation of life. He did not believe in the immortality of the soul; but paradoxically, conceives matter, which changes its forms but never dies, as immortal. Some of these ideas he may have gleaned from the famous Coplas of Jorge Manrique (1440-78), written upon the death of his father. Benjamín Jarnes makes an interesting comparison of the translation made by the Spanish writer Francisco de Quevedo y Villegas (1580-1645) of the writing of the fourth century San Gregorio de Nysa on a similar theme, and the ideas of Acuña concerning death as expressed in Ante un cadáver.⁶⁶ Acuña's attitude is one of rebellion and pride, while that of San Gregorio de Nysa is borne of tradition and humility. It is also of interest to note here Lavoisier's famous Law of the Conservation of Matter: nothing is lost, nothing is created. These ideas had concerned Acuña for some time. In the Oda: Ante el cadáver del doctor José B. de Villagrán and in Ante un cadáver there is a repetition of many of the same ideas used in previous poems, but one may note a great improvement here being

⁶⁵Acuña, op. cit., p. 112.

made in his handling of the poetic language to express his ideas and feelings.

Ante un cadáver and Nocturno a Rosario are Acuña's finest poems by both popular and critical acclaim. Both were written during the last year of the poet's life. The Nocturno may be looked upon as the sentimental testament of the poet. Popular opinion believed that this was the last work of the poet, but we may accept Juan de Dios Peza's affirmation that the verses were known and recited as long as three months before Acuña's death on the sixth of December, 1873.

Castillo Nájera⁶⁷ observes that in spite of grammatical mistakes and errors in syllabic count, the Nocturno will always meet with popular approval, both with readers and with those who can neither read nor write but know the lines by heart. Berta Singerman has recited it innumerable times during her many tours throughout Spanish-speaking America. In doing so she uses a tone of voice which is higher pitched than that used in most of her poetic declamation, but lower than that used by singers of the lines set to music. This pathetic poem closes:⁶⁸

Esa era mi esperanza . . . mas ya que a sus fulgores
se opone el hondo abismo que existe entre los dos,
¡adiós por la vez última, amor de mis ancores;
la luz de mis tinieblas, la esencia de mis flores;
mi lira de poeta, mi juventud, adiós!

⁶⁷Castillo Nájera, op. cit., p. 25.

⁶⁸Acuña, op. cit., pp. 190-92.

This poem is one of the most intense and passionate expressions of Romantic love in all Spanish literature.

Among the patriotic poems of Acuña are Hidalgo, 15 de septiembre and Cinco de mayo. These poems merely repeat the conventional topics of patriotic poetry without attaining vigorous or original utterance.⁶⁹ In El giro, however, he sings the story of a little-known hero of the War of Independence and effectively interspersed in the epic narrative are peaceful landscape sketches which contrast with the heroic action.⁷⁰ Although Acuña's exalted, passionate, and serious temperament did not as a rule lend itself to light, humorous composition, this is not altogether lacking. In Rasgo de buen humor he praises beautiful women in terms which humorously set them above the light of glory and the pleasures of science.⁷¹

La vida del campo is an example of Acuña's anti-Romantic satire. Here he pokes fun at Horace's classic praises of country life by contrasting the ideal as expressed by the Roman poet, and the real life of the country as experienced by himself.⁷²

In Letrilla Acuña satirizes ironically the misanthropic critic he calls Don Gregorio, by repeating his criticisms hurled

⁶⁹Ibid., Prólogo, by José Luis Martínez, p. xii.

⁷⁰Ibid., pp. 170-76.

⁷¹Ibid., pp. 54-6.

⁷²Ibid., pp. 116-25.

at young writers, and agreeing with him in the letrilla which is repeated four times after the beginning statement of it.⁷³

Sí mi amigo don Gregorio,
tiene usted mucha razón,
ese mismo que usted dice,
ese mismo digo yo . . .

A la Luna ridicules the poetry addressed to the moon and other conventional themes of Romantic poetry. He makes reference to the poetry of Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda, José Zorrilla, and several Mexican writers of the time, and shows his familiarity with their poetry and poetical themes.⁷⁴

Acuña continues in the same satirical vein in Nada sobre nada, making fun of various Romantic poets and their topics. Here is wit and satire; however, in spite of the humor he shows his preoccupation with death and religious matters.⁷⁵ It is a psychological truism that a person often makes fun of things which in reality cause him deep concern.

La Gloria is the longest of the poems and in a lightly disguised manner he tells the story of his love for Rosario de la Peña and her disdain for the laurel wreath he had won along with the public acclaim he had received through the successful staging of his drama, El pasado.⁷⁶

It has been remarked by Menéndez y Pelayo that Acuña could not have been familiar with the works of Gustavo A. Bécquer (1836-70),

⁷³Ibid., pp. 196-201.

⁷⁴Ibid., pp. 153-59.

⁷⁵Ibid., pp. 135-41.

⁷⁶Ibid., Prólogo, p. xiii.

in spite of the similarity to his Spanish contemporary revealed in Hojas secas. José Luis Martínez, however, thinks Acuña may very well have been familiar with the Rimas. Hojas secas is among the last of Acuña's compositions, and they refer in the main to his love for Rosario. Here is displayed an interior anguish never quite resolving itself into resignation, and an unworldly aloofness which seems to be written by a man in the very shadow of death. An example is:⁷⁷

Oye, ven a ver las naves,
 están vestidas de luto,
 y en vez de las golondrinas
 están granando los buhos. . .

 ¿Ves? . . . en aquellas paredes
 están cavando un sepulcro,
 y parece como que alguien
 sollasa allí, junto al muro.

José Luis Martínez sums up Acuña's work by saying that in general it shows evidence of a vigorous poetic gift, though it lacks the maturity which it would have developed had the poet lived longer. However, Acuña is the ideal representative of the school-boy poet with his characteristic scientific and philosophical indigestion, his humor expressing disrespect for tradition, and his passionate and often only imaginary love affairs. He treats with exaggerated seriousness the problems of society, of the human spirit, and the destiny of mankind, and he comes to the defense of the unfortunate and those who have fallen in social esteem. He

⁷⁷Ibid., Prólogo, p. xiv.

flares with intense Liberal party spirit in the poems which have a political theme. He reveals great tenderness toward his parents and other members of his family. There is pathos verging on the pathetic in his poetry describing his amorous misadventures. His glory, great or small, consists in having been able to give expression to this school-boy mentality, and in having written from deep-felt experience instead of setting for himself artificial themes which merely followed the rhetorical conventions of the day. These are the reasons why his work has value as a human document.⁷⁸

The most important non-poetical work of Acuña is his drama, El pasado. The first presentation was an important event of the times and it contributed to the increasing popularity of the poet.⁷⁹ This work, and two other dramas, Letucina and Donde las dan las toman, which are unknown, were written by candlelight, quite in accord with the predilections and preferences of a romantic age.⁸⁰ El pasado was first staged at the Teatro Principal on the ninth of May, 1872.⁸¹

⁷⁸Ibid., Prólogo, xv-xvii.

⁷⁹Julio Jiménez Rueda, Historia de la literatura mexicana (México: Ediciones Botas, 1934), p. 195.

⁸⁰Julio Jiménez Rueda, "El centenario de Acuña" (México: Revista de Revistas, Agosto 28, 1949), p. 7.

⁸¹Francisco Monterde, Bibliografía del teatro en México (México: Imprenta de la Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, 1925), p. 12.

El pasado is one of the most extreme expressions of the Romanticism then in vogue. Armando María y Campos expressed surprise that the author of such realistic compositions as La ramera and Ante un cadáver and of such an expression of pathos as Nocturno a Rosario, should also have written an authentic melodrama composed of the purest and most transparent realism. María y Campos thinks it would make a fine libretto for an opera. All of the situations in which the characters find themselves seem to be asking for music. The asides and monologues would be arias, and the dialogues duets.⁸² The play is about a young couple which has lived happily in France and Italy. Upon the return to Mexico, where the action takes place, the shadow of the wife's past looms up. Don Ramiro, the rich man who has seduced her years before, insists upon renewing the relationship and forces his suit by both threats and promises. His motivation is at least in some part jealousy and a perverse sense of wounded honor. Eugenia, the wife who has achieved social acceptance and respectability through marriage to a man who loves her, wishes to protect her husband, David, who has gained social standing through his success abroad as a painter. Under the circumstances her only recourse is to leave her husband before he can frustrate her intention of doing her duty as she sees it, that is

⁸² Armando de María y Campos, Manuel Acuña en su teatro (México: Compañía de Ediciones Populares, S.A., 1952), p. 15.

to commit suicide. Eugenia is depicted as a martyr to unjust but inevitable social convention and to the evil instincts, both lust and pride, of Don Ramiro.

At the end of each act of the first performance Acuña was called out on the stage. The public was profoundly moved by the play and their frank enthusiasm constituted a veritable triumph for the young playwright.⁸³ The second staging of the play a year later was a failure, since the audience was made up of conservative aristocrats who resented the presentation of a play by a Mexican author.⁸⁴

María y Campos tells of a report of Altamirano in which the great master describes his relationship with Acuña and the rest of his literary group and which gives us a clue to what inspired Acuña to write El pasado. One evening the friends spoke of La Dame aux camélias and a similar French play in which Maset, its author, had imitated to some extent Alexander Dumas filis. On this occasion several comments were made upon the implacable severity of society toward the woman with a past and of the foolish passion of jealousy that men feel toward the object of a long-past love affair. Acuña said nothing but he listened attentively and was lost in meditation at the time he departed.⁸⁵

⁸³Ibid., p. 16.

⁸⁴Ibid., p. 29.

⁸⁵Ibid., pp. 37-41.

A few days later Acuña sought out Altamirano and requested him to listen to the reading of a drama which he had just written and which was based on the themes which had been discussed a few nights previously. The great Altamirano listened to the reading of the play, in which Acuña had dramatized a difficult social situation. As a philosopher and observer of the human heart, Acuña had no need to invent an unbelievable subject. The style was simple and the characters taken from living models. There was logical coordination, the outcome was sad, but it was the only solution possible. He had not resorted to the happy ending with the intent of currying the favor of the public which would be moved by the performance. He used instead all the dark colors required to paint life as it is.⁸⁶ The opinions of the critics and their readers change with the times. Jiménez-Rueda recognizes the importance of El pasado in the history of literature and as an expression of the poets creative talent, but he observes that at the present time both the theme and the way it is developed are quite naive.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ Ibid., pp. 41-42.

⁸⁷ Julio Jiménez Rueda, Historia de la literatura mexicana (México: Ediciones Botas, 1934), p. 195.

CHAPTER V

LITERARY CLUBS AND SOCIETIES OF ACUÑA'S TIME

In the Romantic Age various types of literary groups and organizations took the place of the literary salon of a more aristocratic Classicism. The litterati and intellectuals of Romanticism formed ateneos, cultural centers, where free courses were offered and literary subjects were discussed. The more informal tertulias, often held in cafés, also became popular.⁸⁸

The various associations in general, and especially those of a literary nature, answered a social need as well as a literary one. The atmosphere of the times, which was filled with political disturbances, disorganization, poverty, and lack of tranquility induced people to group themselves together in order to enjoy social fraternity. The literary associations especially provided a center for recreation, self-improvement, and comradeship and were truly literary schools. Because of the nature of the readings and discussions which took place, they were schools of advanced studies and helped the members to cultivate themselves. There were no other places in Mexico where this might be done. One of the principal activities of these organizations was free discussion of literary works which were read to the assembled members. The authoritative opinions which emerged from the discussions often

⁸⁸Díaz-Flajja, op. cit., p. 276.

constituted the most important influence in the literary formation of many Mexican writers.

From a sociological point of view the literary club was a safety valve for a society which was fearful and austere.⁸⁹ Perales Ojeda quotes Schucking:⁹⁰

...no hay gente que ansie más la compañía de sus semejantes como los artistas, está en la naturaleza de las cosas que el arte inspira al arte.

While it is true that the artist has a basic need for association with people who understand him, Schucking further comments that criticism is tolerable if it comes from a colleague, but not from a person outside the group. The sociability of artists is a universal characteristic, since where the formations of these groups is interfered with, artistic production suffers. This is the reason for the strong desire to make these literary corporations endure, in spite of the obstacles which often interfere.

Two of the most important personalities in these societies were Ignacio Ramírez (1818-79) and his former student and follower, Ignacio M. Altamirano (1834-93). In poetry, Ramírez was a complete Classicist; whereas in the field of politics, he was a liberal and implacable destroyer of tradition. His fiery personality and immense erudition impressed all who knew him. Altamirano, both as a writer and as a teacher, was looked upon almost with reverence

⁸⁹Perales Ojeda, op. cit., p. 13.

⁹⁰Ibid., p. 14 (quoted from Levin Schucking, El gusto literario, Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1950, p. 72).

by the youth of these literary circles. Manuel Acuña took a very active part in a number of these organizations and much of his inspiration and literary development must be attributed to them. Acuña is representative of his time in having come under the strong influence, like many of his contemporaries, of Ramírez and Altamirano.

One of these groups was the Sociedad Netzahualcóyotl. This society, whose name honors the Aztec post-king of Texcoco, was founded by a group of young writers in 1867, who wished to follow the nationalist directives of Ignacio Manuel Altamirano, whom they recognized as their master. In the Ensayos literarios de la Sociedad Netzahualcóyotl was published a number of the early poems of Acuña, as well as some works of Altamirano. The principal purposes of the society were to seek the development of a Mexican literature, reform the theatre, and encourage the writing of its members. The society also published a newspaper called El Anáhuac (name taken from Aztec word for the Valley of Mexico) in which the novelist, Manuel Payne (1810-94), played an important part. Acuña's La ramera and Amar y dormir were first published in this newspaper. These were sharply criticized by the editors of the Sociedad Católica. When the publication of El Anáhuac was discontinued, its writers became contributors to the literary publication called El Renacimiento, founded by Ignacio M. Altamirano.⁹¹

⁹¹ Perales Ojeda, op. cit., p. 59.

Ricardo Ramírez, son of the well-known Ignacio Ramírez, was president of the Sociedad Netzahualcóyotl. On May 9, 1872, the society, which had been allowed to lapse, was started up again, and Acuña was a member. Their intention was to renew the work of the society in the study, correction, and criticism of young writers. Little is known of what work was actually carried out then by the society. The death of the principal promoter of the group, Manuel Acuña, in December, 1873, spelled the end of the Sociedad Netzahualcóyotl, since it was not mentioned again in the newspapers of the day. Another organization of the same name was founded in 1875.⁹²

The Sociedad de Libres Pensadores was founded the fifth of May, 1873, by a number of writers of the Liberal party. Among them were Ignacio M. Altamirano, Justo Sierra, Agustín F. Cuencia, Manuel Acuña, and others of lesser note. The published organ of the group was El Libre Pensador, edited by José Batiza. In this magazine appeared articles attacking religious beliefs and conservative ideas. These gave rise to a polemical controversy sustained by the society, which was backed by the government, and the Sociedad Católica, backed by private persons. At the installation of the society Altamirano proclaimed that the principal concern of the society was to make war on religious superstition. The articles and poems published by the society strictly adhered to this intention.

⁹²Ibid., p. 60.

The society, however, did not prosper, and it soon disappeared. In its publications appear poems by Acuña and other poets of the time.⁹³

The most illustrious of the literary associations functioning in Mexico during the second half of the nineteenth century was the Liceo Hidalgo, whose main objective was the creation of a national literature. It celebrated each year on the anniversary of Mexican independence an evening session in honor of Hidalgo.⁹⁴ The meeting, held February 3, 1873, is important to our study because the members held a discussion of the poem, Ante un cadáver, by Manuel Acuña. Those who took part in the debate in the author's favor were Riva Palacio, Juan A. Mateos, Justo Sierra, Eduardo Zarate, Gustavo Bas, R. Manterola and Felix Romero. Those on the opposite panel were Arcadio Zentella, Ignacio Ramírez, García Pimentel, Rodríguez y Cos and Altamirano. The discussion broke up late at night before any conclusions were drawn. The important thing about this debate is that it constituted, in reality, a struggle between the Classic and Romantic schools. A few months later, June 30, 1873, a meeting was held to honor the Cuban poetess, Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda. Señora Josefina Ocampo de Mata presided over the meeting, which was held at the usual place, the meeting room of the Sociedad de Geografía y Estadística. The young Acuña read his poem, Oda a Gertrudis Gómez

⁹³Ibid., pp. 63-64.

⁹⁴José Luis Martínez, La emancipación literaria de México (México: Antigua Librería Robredo, 1955), p. 74.

de Avellaneda. Several young ladies recited poetry and the Señora Ocampo de Mata made a talk. Guillermo Prieto, Altamirano, Severo Campero, Gustavo Bas, José María Vigil, Js. Segura were among the men who spoke.⁹⁵

At the end of the year the dramatic death of Manuel Acuña took place on December 6, the very day on which the Sunday literary edition of the newspaper El Radical was being prepared. They were intending to publish his poem, A la luna. On receiving the news they decided to fill the pages of this edition with commentaries and eulogies of the dead poet. The principal contributors to this corona fúnebre were members of the Liceo Hidalgo who lamented the death of their fellow member and recognized the irreparable loss to the society.⁹⁶

La Concordia was the theatrical society organized by Alberto G. Bianchi on January 22, 1870. Among those who belonged to the society in January, 1873, were Ignacio Ramírez, Altamirano, Olavarría y Ferrari, Doctor Paredo, Juan A. Mateos, Luis Ortiz, Prieto, Riva Palacio, Anselmo de la Portilla, and Manuel Acuña.⁹⁷

On the night of December 20, 1873, an organization of young ladies called El Ramillete de Flores, arranged an evening session

⁹⁵José Sánchez, Academias y sociedades literarias de México (University of North Carolina Studies in Romance Languages and Literatures # 18, Mexico: Imprenta "Graphos" 1951; Chapel Hill: Publication of University of North Carolina, 1951), pp. 84-85.

⁹⁶Ibid., p. 125.

⁹⁷Ibid., p. 132.

in honor of Manuel Acuña who had been dead only two weeks. The members invited the intimate friends of Acuña and nearly a hundred persons were present. Elena Castro presided, and thirty persons in succession occupied the speaker's platform, among whom was Juan de Dios Peza.⁹⁸

The literary societies played an important part in the intellectual life of Mexico in the time of Acuña and much of his inspiration and incentive to write must have come from his association with these groups.

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 132.

CHAPTER VI

INFLUENCE ON ACUÑA OF THE TEXTS OF VOGT, MOLESCHOTT, AND BÜCHNER

Aside from the skepticism which stemmed from his contact with the thought and writings of Altamirano and Ignacio Ramírez, Acuña was affected by the texts studied at the Escuela de Medicina. Although the philosophical ideas held by Acuña were often poorly assimilated, it is important to know something about these ideas and their authors in order to understand not only Acuña, but also the ideological climate in which he lived. The philosophical ideas of Moleschott, Vogt, and Büchner are given little importance today, but there was a period of the nineteenth century in which they were quite influential. They are of particular importance to an understanding of Acuña's greatest poem, Ante un cadáver, which, along with the Nocturno, is the basis for the continuing fame of the poet. Vogt, Moleschott, and Büchner are examples of the philosophy of an age in which religious ideas were being challenged by new thought in the field of science. These new ideas must have had a revolutionary influence on Acuña who, before arriving in the capital, had been reared in a conservative Catholic family.

Charles Vogt (1817-95) was a German naturalist. In his physiological letters (1845-47) he developed the ideas of the French physician and philosopher, Cabanis (1757-1808), and argued that thought stood in the same relation to the brain as the bile

to the liver, or the urine to the kidneys.⁹⁹ Vogt, along with others in Germany in his time, opposed the Romantic and Idealistic trends in philosophy. In his writings he condemned the intrusion of religious beliefs of any kind into the field of science. He denied monogenesis, which is the anthropological system which says that mankind is descended from one single man and from one single woman. He denied the spirituality and immortality of the soul and the essential distinctions between man and animal. The moral order, for him, far from resting on absolute and immutable postulates, was not distinct in nature from the physical order. He maintained that there was no afterlife, the fear of which inspired religious sentiments. There was, however, one law and order which applied to all and which based duty on the need to respect other men.¹⁰⁰

Jacob Moleschott (1822-93) was a Dutch physiologist who conceived of life as a function of matter. This brought him into conflict with his superiors at the University of Heidelberg in 1854. As a result of being censured by the Ministry of Education he gave up teaching and confined himself to the laboratory. Later, in 1861, while teaching physiology at Zurich, Switzerland, he was called by his friend, Francisco de Sanstis, Minister of Public Education of Italy, to lecture at Turin. In 1878, he went to

⁹⁹Cited in the article on "Atheism," Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958), II, 178.

¹⁰⁰"Vogt," Enciclopedia universal ilustrada europeo-americana (Madrid: Espasa-Calpe, n.d.), LIX, 898-99.

teach at the University of Rome.¹⁰¹ In Der Kreislauf des Lebens (The Circulation of Life), which appeared in 1852, Moleschott maintained that all vital phenomena could be explained as a perpetual circulation of matter from the inorganic to the organic world, and then back again from the organic to the inorganic. This doctrine was later strongly criticised by Sir Oliver Lodge, who contended that the phenomena of organizations and life found their only satisfactory explanation in the assumption that a higher principle guided and controlled the elements of matter and energy, which Moleschott had denied.¹⁰²

The third and last of this triumvirate of materialistic philosophers and writers of medical texts is Friedrich Karl Christian Eichner (1824-099), a German philosopher and physician. In the work Kraft und Stoff (Force and Matter), published in 1855, he sought to demonstrate the indestructibility of matter and force, and the finality of physical force. The opposition aroused by the extreme materialism of this work obliged him to give up his post at the University of Tübingen. It should be remembered that Eichner was primarily a physiologist rather than a metaphysician. Eichner did not always make clear in his theory the relationship between matter and force, but in general he assumed that all natural

¹⁰¹"Moleschott," Ibid., XXXV, 1442-43.

¹⁰²"Atheism," Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics, loc. cit., II, 178.

and spiritual forces were indwelling in matter. Just as a steam engine produced motion, so the intricate organic complex of force-bearing substance in an animal organism produced a total sum of certain effects, which, when bound together in a unity are called by us as mind, soul, and thought. In this he postulated force and mind as emanating from original matter, which would be considered a materialistic monism. Büchner's main concern was to protest against the romantic idealism of his predecessors and the theological interpretations of the universe, rather than the establishment of a metaphysical theory. Nature to him was purely physical, and had no purpose, no will, no laws imposed by extraneous authority, and no supernatural ethical sanction.¹⁰³ In the work of Charles Darwin, whose Origin of the Species was published in 1859, Büchner professed to have found the chief support of materialism. He declared that the doctrine of Natural Selection had completely destroyed the force of the teleological argument. His general inference was that the evolution of matter, rather than God, is the cause of the order of the world; that life was a combination of matter which in favorable circumstances is spontaneously generated; that there was no vital principle, because all forces, non-vital and vital, are movements; and that movement and evolution proceed from life to consciousness. According to him there is no God,

¹⁰³Büchner, " Encyclopaedia Britannica (11th ed.), IV, 718.

no final cause, no immortality, no freedom, and no substance of the soul.¹⁰⁴

Acuña, in Ante un cadáver, analyzes the problem of life and death. He concludes that science has demonstrated that everything comes to an end in the tomb. However, immortality resides in matter, which transforms itself but never dies. This arid theme was dealt with masterfully by Manuel Acuña. Menéndez y Pelayo says that Acuña "pudo convertir en raudal de inmortales armonías la doctrina más áspera y desolada."¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴"Atheism," Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics, loc. cit.

¹⁰⁵Cited by Benjamín Jarnes, Enciclopedia de la literatura (México: Ediciones Kochitl, 1942), p. 50.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSIONS

Manuel Acuña in his poetry shows evidence of all the unresolved crosscurrents in the political and religio-philosophical thinking operative in Mexico during the second half of the nineteenth century, and this study has been focused on Acuña as a representative poet of his time. Manuel Acuña, student of medicine, was an inspired poet who poured forth in his compositions all that he felt and thought in his inmost being. This very passion and sincerity led him into errors in taste, logic, and composition which seriously mar the major portion of his work. He is excused and defended by most of the critics on the grounds that his death at an early age cut short the maturing of a poetical talent which gave promise of great things to come so that in promise, at least, he is ranked along with the décima musa, Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz.

Manuel Acuña during his lifetime was not the only popular poet. Guillermo Prieto, Manuel Flores, and others of a more conservative stamp also appealed to the popular tastes of the period. It was in part the poet's triumph in the theatre with his play, El pasado, and the circumstances of his dramatic death followed by a tremendous popular manifestation of enthusiasm at his funeral, which set the stage for the creation of a legend. The conjectures made by those who knew him and by those who were interested and curious brought out a series of rumors that have

become part of the legend and now are beyond the possibility of being either proven or disproven. Disdained by Rosario, he committed suicide on the sixth of December, 1873, and his most popular poem, Nocturno a Rosario, seems to be a cry from the very depths of a soul embroiled in the agony of an impossible love.

Manuel Acuña, unlike most of his longer lived and often equally popular contemporaries, is still living material for editorial and news copy. He lives today only because of his striking personality involved in the legend, and because of his two greatest poems: Ante un cadáver and Nocturno a Rosario. Ante un cadáver is remarkable in so far as the poet has succeeded in making of the most desolate and disconsoling of materialistic philosophies a raudel de inmortales armonías, as Menéndez y Pelayo has said of the poem.¹⁰⁶ These two poems are among the most frequently anthologized in all Spanish-American literature. Even Menéndez y Pelayo, who in them sees flashes of high genius which presaged the development of a poetic talent of the first order, finds many defects and imperfections in the language, form, and expression. But the force of the inspiration and expression outweighs any objections to them on this score. Both critical and popular taste concur that these are great poems and the greatest poems of Acuña.

¹⁰⁶Cf., p. 57.

In general, it may be said that Manuel Acuña lived a shorter time and wrote less than any other writer of importance of the period. Other writers reached their maturity. In the case of Acuña, there will always remain the great question--what heights would he have scaled had he lived?

Manuel Acuña clearly represents, in the body of his work, the political, intellectual, and spiritual concerns and confusions of his times. It was a time of much promise, though much of its promise remained unfulfilled. Acuña saw in the breaking of the old political and religious bonds and in a new emphasis on science and reason, a hope for the imminent fulfillment of all the aspirations of society, the ultimate solution of all problems which warp and twist the human individual and make for human misery. Like others of his generation, he was influenced by French and English Romanticism, at least indirectly, as well as that stemming from Spain. One may consider him as highly representative of the poetic talent of the period seeking individual expression, but at the same time living the ideas and events then current. Whereas there seems to be little evidence that Acuña took part in any political conspiracies of importance, all those who belonged to the Liberal camp seemed to share in the upsurging enthusiasm toward a better world, which was eventually frustrated and, in the case of Acuña, cut short by his own hand.

Manuel Acuña is representative of his time and there are a number of reasons to present him as being a more apt choice in this

respect than Manuel Flores, Guillermo Prieto, Ignacio Altamirano, or Ignacio Ramírez. The last two of these are probably the most influential men of their time. Without doubt, however, Acuña could also be considered as an ideal representative of the school boy poet, with his characteristic enthusiasms and dejections, his inspired hitting upon the felicitous phrase, facile fluency, and at times puerile expression. He was not a great poet, but one in embryo; certainly an inspired poet, a poet representative of his time--a time torn between matter and spirit, between dead authority and unbridled liberty.

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María y Campos, Armando de. Manuel Acuña en su teatro. México: Compañía de Ediciones Populares, 1952. Pp. 15, 16, 29-35, and 37.

Interesting material about Acuña's only known prose drama, El pasado, its writing, its success, and its sources of inspiration.

Martínez, José Luis. La emancipación literaria de México. México: Antigua Librería Robredo, 1955. 85 pp.

Good information on the work of Ignacio M. Altamirano and his inspired effort to work for the creation of a national literature.

Menéndez y Pelayo, Marcelino. Historia de la poesía hispano-americana. Madrid: Librería General de Victoriano Suárez, 1911. Pp. 159-63.

This leading critic's comments are quoted or commented on by all subsequent writers on the poetry of Acuña.

Millán, María del Carmen (ed.). Antología de poesía romántica mexicana. México: Libro Mex. Editores, 1957. Pp. 7-19.

In the editor's prologue there is a good discussion of Mexican Romanticism and writers of the nineteenth century.

Monterde, Francisco. Bibliografía del teatro en México. México: Imprenta de la Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, 1925. P. 12.

This book is indispensable to the student of the theatre in Mexico. Aside from material concerning Acuña's El pasado, it gives the name of an unpublished work of Acuña, Donde las dan las toman, and a translation made in collaboration with Javier Santamaría of a drama of E. de Girardin, El suplicio de una mujer.

Monterde, Francisco. Cultura mexicana; aspectos literarios. México: Editora Intercontinental, 1946. Pp. 184-7, 195-208, and 213-28.

This study by the eminent Mexican critic and investigator has much important material on Acuña and his contemporaries: Ignacio Ramírez, Guillermo Prieto, Ignacio Manuel Altamirano, Justo Sierra Méndez, and Agustín Cuenca.

Parkes, Henry Bamford. A History of Mexico. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1960. Pp. 221, 235.

A very fine brief history of Mexico.

Pattison, Walter T. Representative Spanish Authors. New York, Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1942. Pp. 32-38.

Contains the Coplas que hizo por la muerte del maestro de Santiago don Rodrigo Manrique, su padre by Jorge Manrique.

Pas, Octavio. El laberinto de la soledad. México: Ediciones Cuadernos Americanos, 1950. Pp. 125-26.

Interesting discussion of the religious ideas of the Liberals and of Ignacio Ramírez, El Nigromante, in particular.

Pesa, Juan de Dios. De la gaveta íntima; memorias, reliquias y retratos. Paris: Bouret, 1900. Pp. 65-79, 106-16, and 217-43.

One of the most important sources for the material used in this study.

Pimentel, Francisco. Historia crítica de la poesía en México. México: Oficina Tipográfica de la Secretaría de Fomento, 1892. Pp. 849-65.

This eminent conservative critic was one of the first to write on the work of Acuña, and his contemporaries. His bias and prejudice lessen the validity of his judgments but his opinions are worthy of study as revealing the conservative taste and point of view.

R. Arellano, Domingo (ed.). Versos de Manuel Acuña. México: Tip. Escalerillas, 1874. Prólogo, pp. v-xii.

This contains a good biographical sketch of the life and work of Acuña.

Rojas Garcidueñas, José. El antiguo colegio de San Ildefonso. México: Ediciones del Cuarto Centenario de la Universidad Nacional, Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas, 1952. 85 pp. and 40 plates. Pp. 24 and 25.

Contains interesting data with reference to the setting up of the National Preparatory School and the influences of French Positivism on Mexican education.

Rosenberg, Solomon Leopold Millard and Ernest H. Templin. A Brief Anthology of Mexican Verse. California: Stanford University Press, 1928. Pp. 42-46, and 121.

This book contains translations of Nocturno a Rosario and interesting comparisons in the notes.

Sánchez, José. Academias y sociedades literarias de México. University of North Carolina Studies in Romance Languages and Literatures, # 18. México: Imprenta Graphos, and Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Publications, 1951. Pp. 84, 85, 95, 97, 123-27, 133, 134, and 241.

This study has much important information assembled from primary sources and old newspaper files.

Sánchez, Luis Alberto. Historia de la literatura americana. Santiago de Chile: Ediciones Ercilla, 1937. Pp. 334-35, 407.

There are some mistakes in the dates in reference to Acuña, but the treatment of the subject is good.

Sosa, Francisco. Biografías de mexicanos distinguidos. México: Oficina Tipográfica de la Secretaría de Fomento, 1884. Pp. 5-10.

An early gathering of facts concerning Acuña. Other contemporary biographies.

Tirado Benedí, Domingo. "Educadores de México," Número 225, de la Biblioteca enciclopédica popular. México: Secretaría de Educación Pública, 1955. Pp. 62-68, 73-76.

The short articles on Ignacio Ramírez, Gabino Barrera and Ignacio M. Altamirano are of interest and show the influence of these men on public education in Mexico.

Torres-Rioseco, Arturo. The Epic of Latin American Literature. New York; London, Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1942. P. 79.

A good, brief general history of literary movements and production.

Torres-Rioseco, Arturo. New World Literature: Tradition and Revolt in Latin America. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1949. Pp. 75-76, 80-81, 121, and 222.

Torres-Rioseco points out an interesting parallel between the Romantic writers and the unknown authors of folkloric poetry. His remarks are pertinent to understanding of Acuña's popular appeal.

Underwood, Edna Worthley (trans.). Anthology of Mexican Poets from the Earliest Times to the Present Day. Portland, Maine: The Mosher Press, 1932. Pp. 291-98.

Translations of poems, including the Nocturno a Rosario and the Oda a Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda. Also contains biographical and historical notes.

Urbina, Luis G. La vida literaria en México. México: Editorial Porrúa, 1946. Pp. 97-125.

Urbina has much of importance to say concerning nineteenth century Mexican writers and Romanticism.

B. PERIODICAL ARTICLES

Anon. Revista de Revistas, December 9, 1923.

Contains numerous articles and a number of pictures and is dedicated to Manuel Acuña upon the fiftieth anniversary of his death.

Anon. Revista de Revistas, April 4, 1937.

This number of the magazine is dedicated to Manuel Acuña. There are articles by Xavier Sorondo, Roberto Núñez y Domínguez, Hernán Robleto, and others, commenting on many aspects of the life of Acuña, and especially upon his relationship with Rosario de la Peña.

Catalán, Francisco. "El amor, los poetas y la muerte: Manuel Acuña," Revista de Revistas, August 28, 1949, pp. 50-51.

Catalán discusses the criticisms on Acuña made by the Spanish critic, Menéndez y Pelayo. He also draws parallels of Acuña with other poets who committed suicide, such as Alfonsina Storni, José Asunción Silva, and Horacio Quiroga. He asks the rhetorical question: "¿Espíritus enfermos e espíritus superiores?"

Jiménez Rueda, Julio. "El Centenario de Acuña," Revista de Revistas, August 28, 1949, p. 7.

In this article the main events in the author's life are reviewed and also the main influences of the period which played on the thought and literary formation of Manuel Acuña.

C. ENCYCLOPEDIA ARTICLES

Jarnes, Benjamín (comp.). Enciclopedia de la literatura, México: Editora Central, n.d. P. 50.

Contains very good summary article on Acuña and his works.

"Atheism," Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958. II, 178.

Fine article brings together comments on work of Vogt, Moleschott and Bichner.

"Barreda, Gabino," Enciclopedia universal ilustrada. Madrid: Espasa-Calpe, n.d. VII, 910.

Biography telling of life and work of this Mexican educator.

"Bichner, Luis," Enciclopedia universal ilustrada. Madrid: Espasa-Calpe, n.d. IX, 1213.

Good biography and good treatment of Bichner's work and thought.

"Moleschott, Jacobo," Enciclopedia universal ilustrada. Madrid: Espasa-Calpe, n.d. XXXV, 1142-43.

Gives life and writings of this Dutch physiologist.

"Vogt, Carlos," Enciclopedia universal ilustrada. Madrid: Espasa-Calpe, n.d. LXXIX, 898-99.

Main facts of the life and works of this German naturalist.

D. UNPUBLISHED MATERIALS

Perales Ojeda, Alicia. "Las asociaciones literarias de México: Siglo XIX." Unpublished Master's thesis, Facultad de Filosofía y Letras. Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, México, D.F., 1951. 192 pp.

This has much important information not found elsewhere concerning Acuña's membership in various literary groups.

Hyde, Jeannine Elisabeth. "Manuel Acuña, positivista romántico." Unpublished Master's thesis, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Escuela de Verano, México, D.F., 1957. 135 pp.

This thesis brings together a wealth of material and succeeds in organizing it into an interesting picture of the life and times of Acuña.

E. NEWSPAPERS

Mateos, Juan A. El Correo del Comercio, December 16, 1873.

This number of the newspaper contains an article which criticizes suicide as an expedient, occasioned by the death of Manuel Acuña. This is representative of a considerable body of public opinion at the time, and also expresses in general the view of the Catholics on the subject of suicide.

Morales, Vicente. "Ante el cadáver de Manuel Acuña," El Eco de Ambos Mundos, December 6, 1873.

This article, written by a friend of Acuña, makes reflections upon the death of Acuña and memorializes their friendship.

La Nación; periódico universal. Issues of 7, 9, 10 and 14 of December, 1893.

In these issues there are news items giving accounts of the death of Acuña and of the funeral. Various poems dedicated to the dead poet are published as well as the funeral oratory.

Santa María, Xavier. "Manuel Acuña," El Siglo Diez y Nueve,
December 7, 1873, front page editorial.

The writer pays a heartfelt tribute to Acuña and conjectures on the reasons for his suicide. He mentions the exquisite sensibility of the poet who, like Byron, Moreau, and Bellini, found themselves to be exiles in this world.

El Torito; periódico para el pueblo., December 11, 1873, pp. 2-3.

This issue of the paper contains an article describing the funeral of Acuña, and publishes the verses written by Montiel reproaching certain of the dead poet's acts.

El Universal, September 2, 1949, p. 29.

This is the account of an interview with a sister of Acuña, in which she recalls the first verses composed by her brother at the age of eleven.