THE PHILOSOPHY OF AMADO NERVO AS REVEALED IN HIS NOVELS

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By

CLYDE THOMAS JETTON

Bachelor of Arts

Northeastern Teachers College

Tahlequah, Oklahoma

1939

Submitted to the Department of Foreign Languages

Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

1940

APPROVED:

A H Arnold
In Charge of Thesis

A H Arnold
Head of Department of Foreign Languages

D. G. W. Intosh
Dean of Graduate School

PREFACE

The aim of this study is to point out the philosophy of Amado Nervo as it is revealed in his novels. Material is abundant for placing Nervo in almost every school of philosophy. It would hardly be fair to him, however, without a complete and thorough investigation of his works, to attach any classification to his ideas. I therefore propose to show only that in Nervo's faith in God and religion, and in his great universal love, lies the essence of his philosophy.

The assistance, in the preparation of this work, of Professor A. A. Arnold, under whom my graduate work in Spanish has been a pleasure, is gratefully acknowledged. Thanks is expressed, also, to Dr. Anna Ourzler for her kind criticisms, and to Professor Fannie A. Baker, of Tahlequah, Oklahoma, for her helpful suggestions.

C. T. J.

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THE PHILOSOPHY OF AMADO NERVO AS REVEALED IN HIS NOVELS

Introduction

To gain an accurate knowledge of the philosophy of Amado Nervo, one must have a clear understanding of the events in his life which directly influenced him, and helped materially in the formation of his ideas.

This "Monk of Poetry," as he was called by his companions was born on August 24, 1870, in the small Pacific Coast city of Tepic. "The date of Nervo's birth makes us think about Juarez, of the ephemeral empire, and the pleiad of writers that cemented the triumph of the Republic: Guillermo Prieto, Vicente Riva Palacio, Juan A. Mateos, and Ignacio Ramirez."[1] Nervo's true name was Ruiz de Nervo. His father, however, gave the young Nervo his own name, Amado, and by this name he became known in the literary world. Evidently Nervo approved the change whole-heartedly, for in a most interesting auto-biographical note, he wrote:

> "I resulted, then, Amado Nervo, and this name that seemed pseudonymous--as many people in America believed it--and that in any case was dear, was perhaps worth no little

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1. Francisco Monterde, Amado Nervo, p. 1.

> to my literary fortune. Who knows what might have been my fate with the ancestral Ruíz de Nervo, or if I had been called Pérez y Pérez![2]

When Amado Nervo was quite young, he demonstrated his poetic talent in verses which were privately written and kept concealed. On one occasion a sister found some of these verses, and read them aloud to the members of the family as they were seated around the dining table. Perhaps Amado did not enjoy the meal, for he sought refuge in a corner.[3] Fortunately, however, he was not reprimanded, and no one sneered at him. Unfortunately, he was not encouraged, for his father only frowned. Concerning Nervo's early life and environment, Alejandro Quijano wrote this interesting paragraph:

> "Paternally he inherited a spirit calm, like backwater. His father was a just man. His mother, sweet and kind, wrote from time to time, almost privately, verses; this Amado tells us in a certain brief autobiographical note. By inheritance, then, he was good and he was illustrious; by inheritance, perhaps, he was a poet. . ."[4]

Thus we see how Nervo, by nature and inheritance, was endowed with poetic faculties and talents which he

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2. Alfred Coester, Anthology of the Modernista Movement in Spanish America, p. 309.

3. Carlos González Peña, Historia de la Literatura Mexicana, p. 419.

4. Alejandro Quijano, Amado Nervo: El Hombre, p. 5.

showed from his infancy. Nevertheless, he was unknown in the field of literary composition until he was twenty-two years of age. At that time, in 1892, he gave to the world his first literary compositions in El Correo de la Tarde of Mazatlán.

When he was fourteen years old, he entered the seminary of Jacona, near Zamora. He began his studies in that institution with the intention of following the ecclesiastic career. His life in the seminary is very interesting. I believe that the underlying principles of the philosophy that is exhibited in so many of his books, were formulated from his experience and life at Jacona. Likewise, I feel that the material and the intrigues of a number of the works themselves, are a culmination of his seminary experiences. Perhaps no other period of Nervo's life, with the exception of his trips abroad, wrought an influence on his works greater than that of his days at Jacona. It was here, for example that because of the profound interest that he manifested in his studies, he was given a position in the library, of the college. What could have been more pleasing to him? What greater opportunity could have been offered him? Nor did he neglect this opportunity, for as he carefully performed his duties in the library, he did not decline the chance to read volume after volume. His eager eyes scrutinized the pages. As he studied the classic humanities and Latin, he, again, was studying courses and authors that

were later to influence his philosophy and his works. Curiously, he explored, page by page, the work of theologians. Does this not, at least to some degree, account for the mystic tinge that impregnates his works? Was he, as he may have thought, called by the will of God to become a mystic? In writing about Nervo's life in the seminary, Francisco Monterde makes the following comment:

> "What (motive) took him to the Seminary of Jacone, or did he acquire there the piety that appears in his works? Who knows; but it is certain that Nervo kept, throughout his life, the memory of those days in the seminary, and, in spite of his aberrations, he always turned his view toward a 'dream convent'--where there might not be monks, but much silence."[5]

Carleton Beals has made an interesting remark relative to the same period of Nervo's life:

> "There, reading the works of the church fathers, under the spell of dim--storied windows and fragrant incense, he became inculcated with a mysticism, a melancholy, and a reverence that later suffused itself over the pages of his poetry in rich, colorful harmony, breathing into it a sorrowful, at times too anemic, search for religious fundamentals."[6]

As an example of a work in which Nervo was directly influenced by his life in the seminary at Jacona, we cite El Bachiller, published in 1896. This was the author's first attempt in the "Novela Corta." In this tale he utilized his knowledge of life in the Mexican semi-

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5. Francisco Monterde, op. cit., p. 1.

6. Carleton Beals, op. cit., p. 57.

nary. "Perhaps," as Coester suggests, "his keen analysis of the mystic mood of adolescent men is autobiographical. But the ending of the tale, self-mutilation of the protagonist, shocked his readers, hardened even as Mexicans are to horrors in prose fiction, and it was universally condemned as inartistic."[7]

For about four years, Nervo remained in the seminary, reading extensively--making his investigations of religious works. At that time he was a "young man about sixteen or eighteen years of age, with wings open, ready to receive the caress of all the breezes, ready to live life."[8]

Then happened one of those misfortunes that were so prevalent in Nervo's life. His father died, and he was forced to leave Jacona. On his shoulders fell the burden and the task of supporting the family. The world to him was a great battlefield. Nor was there anyone to crown his head with laurel wreathes or deck his coat with medals; his sword, was yet unsheathed, and his stalwart enemy, Poverty, was closing in on him. There was no retreat! Nervo found himself face-to-face with an angered Goliath. He had no shepherd's sling, he had not five stones. But he did have a pen. He utilized that pen, and emerged in victory. He immediately went to Mazatlán where he began the editing of El Correo de la Tarde, in which he published his own works. Necessity demanded

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7. Alfred Coester, op. cit., p. 310.

8. Alejandro Quijano, op. cit., p. 7.

that the life be modest. "To his hands came occasionally, along with the paper of the capital, "Azul," the magazine in which Manuel Gutiérrez began the literary movement that later was to make Rubén Darío triumph. Amado Nervo read and wrote. His poems appeared, and his name, repeated in criticisms and commentaries, arrived before him, to the city of Mexico."[9]

Nervo moved to Mexico City in 1894. Among the works that he completed there, was a poem dedicated to Gutiérrez Najera on the first anniversary of the latter's death. It was highly praised and added to Nervo's prestige which had already been affirmed by the "Revista Moderna", which he and Jesús E. Valenzuela founded.

As I have previously indicated, one of the most fruitful periods of Nervo's life consists of the years that he spent abroad. In 1900, he left Mexico City and traveled through Europe. It was a most welcomed event in his life when he was sent to Paris as a correspondent for El Mundo Ilustrado. Again misfortune appeared. Nervo was scarcely settled in Paris, when the assistance upon which he depended was withdrawn as a result of controversy and jealousy between the editors of El Mundo Ilustrado. Francisco Monterde writes:

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9. Francisco Monterde, op. cit., p. 2

> "In spite of the efforts made by his friends, Amado Nervo fought with misery, like other artists isolated in Paris. There he knew Ruben Dario, and from that period is the poetry in which the latter dedicated to him "La Perla de Paz," written on account of a dispute in which Nervo, his patriotism wounded, wanted to use his fists in a coffee-house dispute."10

This time spent in Paris was worth all the misery that Nervo suffered, for it was here that he met many writers--men who were well-known in the literary world. Not only did he form an intimate friendship with Rubén Darío, the great Nicaraguan poet, but he also met such other outstanding writers as Guillermo Valencia, the Colombian poet; Jean Moreas, Edurado Talero, Oscar Wilde, and a host of literati and aspiring painters.

In referring to this period of Nervo's literary career, Carleton Beals writes:

> "There he lived, for the first time, a Bohemian life, and many are the anecdotes told by him; of his enthusiasm, his sincerity; of his obvious intoxicated enjoyment of all he saw and heard and experienced; of how, one night, he quarreled with Jean Moreas; how, on another night, he slapped a French count across the face for insulting Mexico, his beloved Patria; how he roamed about Europe, but always returned to Paris, that great Magnet of literary life."11

"Amado Nervo wrote Latin and French with the

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10. Francisco Monterde, op. cit., p. 3.

11. Carleton Beals, op. cit., p. 57.

same ease that he wrote his own language."[12] At least a part of this vast knowledge of French that Nervo frequently employs in his novels, was gained by his visit to Paris. There is also reflected in his works the influence of French writers. In France he became acquainted with Victor Hugo, Chateaubriand, Lamartine, Verlaine, and others. Nervo must have been especially fond of Hugo, for he mentions the French writer in many of his works. Nervo also met Francis Jamme, Maeterlinck, and Samain. In his novel, En torno a la guerra, Nervo mentions Victor Hugo, Shakespeare, H. G. Wells, Maeterlinck, and Balzac. Likewise he makes mention of many famous European writers in other books. This reveals two things: First, Nervo was endowed with the gift of meeting people and forming friendships, and second, he had a very extensive scope of reading.

The influence on Nervo of his travels through Europe was tremendous. Inspired by the beautiful countries he had visited, and the intimate friendships he had made, he published work after work, rapidly augmenting his literary output.

> "The direct literary result of this trip was that vivid book, El Exodo y Las Flores del Camino, written in beautiful verse, interspersed with short melodious

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12. Francisco Monterde, op. cit., p. 7.

> prose--the first book in which he arrives at Maturity."[13]

Other works that were published after his return to Mexico City include Poemas, Otras Vidas, Los Jardines Interiores, Misticas and A las Almas que Pasan. The patriotic anniversaries that were being celebrated in Mexico after his return also afforded Nervo the opportunity to write two epic poems: "Raza de Bronce" and "Canto a Morelos."

"In 1905 Amado Nervo returned to Paris, as he had promised in some poem--Oh, sí, yo volveré, París Amado![14] He left Paris to assume his duties as secretary of the Mexican legation in Madrid. He retained this post for thirteen years, despite the turmoil and uprisings caused by the Mexican Revolution. He never viewed the misery of the people in his beloved Patria. He never saw those burning homes, shrieking mothers struggling to protect their infants, or the flaming villages. He was not present to witness the hell of the Mexican Revolution and the waning years of Porfirio Diaz. Had Nervo viewed this sad event in Mexican history, his literary productions might have assumed a different angle. He might have written, not those

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13. Carleton Beals, op. cit., p. 57

14. Francisco Monterde, op. cit., p. 2.

masterpieces that are characterized by interspersed mysticism, profundity, and philosophy, but, devoting his efforts to keen and biting satire, he might have assailed the horrors and violences of the revolution. Many times the political conflicts in Mexico left him without support, but he continued to carry out his duties. He became well-liked by all those with whom he came in contact, because of the affability that he displayed in the performance of his official duties. Nor did he let his pen lie idle, either, for at this time he wrote a noteworthy poem on the marriage of King Alphonso XIII. We should remember, too, that he still had to support his family, and the greater part of his salary went for that purpose. Consequently, when he found himself without funds, his friends came immediately to his aid. The writer Luís Antón del Olmet succeeded in getting a grant of money for the poet who had written so beautifully about the betrothal of King Alphonso XIII. "The situation in which Nervo was thus placed, between material need and patriotic, if not personal pride, as well as the necessity of not offending friends, was difficult."[15] Nervo courteously declined to accept the money, but he did not forget to thank his friends for their kindness. In a letter to

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15. Alfred Coester, op. cit., pp. 311, 312.

Antón del Olmet, he wrote:

> "I will not accept, however, the gift; because even when my pecuniary situation is sufficiently modest, I, like 'Azorín,' am 'a small philosopher,' and we small philosophers live on very little. . .
>
> There are intentions that, for brothers, have plenitude in themselves and do not have to be interpreted in acts. This intent, my beloved friend, is one of them, and the impression that it produces on me will be one of those that with sweetest avarice is kept in that sanctuary hidden where, tremulous, we deposit the harvest of love and of kindness that was given us to reap in life."[16]

Nervo returned to Mexico, and in 1918 he was sent by Carranza on a good-will tour through Argentina and Uruguay. Throngs of people gathered about him to give him a warm reception and a hearty welcome. In the midst of the gaieties of his reception, Nervo suffered a sudden attack of uraemia, which confined him to his bed. The doctors disclosed that the case was of great seriousness. On learning of Nervo's illness, Zorrilla de San Martín, author of "Tabaré," rushed to his bedside to see that his friend should receive the help of "Nuestra Santa Religion."

The attack proved too much for Nervo's weak resistance, and he died in Montevideo on May 24, 1919.

Enrique González Martínez in his work entitled Amado Nervo: el Poeta, well demonstrates Mexico's love for the immortal poet and novelist:

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16. Ibid.

"Let us not look today for the secret of his inspiration nor the methods of his act; let us not become excited about the depth of his philosophy that was naught but an anxiety of definitive affirmation of an eternal serenity. It is enough for us to repeat his song, impregnated with subtle melancholy and embellished with the ineffable smile of his optimism.

Let us not delay now the marble tribute. The forest awaits his ascetic figure, which on the emerald turf will resemble a white flower of sanctity. But before, let us thank those noble neighbors that across the seas brought us enclosed in their glorious flags the sacred remains of our great dead brother."[17]

Monterde discusses the return of Amado Nervo's remains in this manner:

"His bier made, by return, the same voyage: like a hero of other ages, he was moved over the friendly seas, until he arrived at his native land, and here we know that they paid him honors that, before him had never been paid to a poet."[18]

What words more appropriately describe Nervo's death than those addressed to another great inaugurator whose heart, too, was with the common people, and whose light, like Nervo's was shattered before he reached the zenith of his career?

"And when he fell in whirlwind, he went down
As when a lordly cedar, green with boughs,

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17. Enrique González Martínez, Amado Nervo: el Poeta.

18. Francisco Monterde, op. cit., p. 3.

Goes down with a great shout upon the hills,
And leaves a lonesome place against the sky."[19]

19. Edwin Markham, "Lincoln, the Man of the People."

Nervo's Philosophy of Life and Religion

> "There exist poets that believe it more serious to find out if Cervantes wrote with blue or black ink, and if Shakespeare in Stratford smoked three or four pipes daily, than to publish a beautiful, excellent, noble, and original poem."[1]

There may be, like the poets to whom Nervo refers, certain critics who think it more important to search out the abstruse and intricate details affecting every minute phase of Nervo's philosophy rather than to speak of it, in a general sense, as it is reflected in his novels. This, we agree, might make an interesting study, but it would require considerable time, and an intense examination of Nervo's works in their entirety; this we leave to more brilliant minds. We do not propose to penetrate the depths of those underlying elements that influenced Nervo's philosophy. We propose, on the other hand, to examine a number of his novels, and by so doing, to get an insight into his conception of life and religion.

It is not necessary to give a complete history of philosophy, but a knowledge of the meaning of the word, and something of its origin is essential. The term "philosophy" comes from the Greek Philos, and sophia, wisdom. It was known first to the Greeks. The epoch

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1. Amado Nervo, En torno a la guerra, p. 46.

of ancient Greek philosophy extended to about 500 A.D., or during eleven hundred years. It was divided into three minor periods. The third of these periods is characterized by the systems of Plato and Aristotle, whose theories were more idealistic than those of their predecessors. It was Plato whose theories averred that the one eternal reality consists in a unity of ideas in an all-embracing and entirely good Idea, or God. Aristotle deviated from Plato's teachings, and, treating philosophy as an inductive science, proceeded from known facts to general truths. This period is also characterized by Cynicism, Stoicism, and Epicureanism. It is this third period of Greek philosophy in which we are primarily interested.

No person with a dynamic philosophy can express his principles and beliefs in one dogmatic statement, and cling persistently to it throughout his entire life. No thoughtful person can say "This is my philosophy in my early life; it shall not change in the years of my decadence." Rather, as he meets greater thinkers, and enlarges the scope of his reading, his ideas and his philosophy undergo certain changes.

Thus it was with Amado Nervo. His entire life was a labyrinth--an unrestrained pendulum swinging back and forth between the two extremes of belief and doubt. His works reflect this perplexity to

such an extent that no critic can condense his philosophy to one statement. To attempt to do so would result in a paradox or a series of contradictions, for Nervo is a Whitman. Consciously or unconsciously he contradicts himself, and like Whitman, he views this contradiction with unconcern. Let us enter with this "mysterious monk" into a quiet room where he was wont to seclude himself, and note how he, with instantly changing moods, writes of his strange, mysterious moments in a solemn seminary, or, on the other extreme, relates his hilarious gaieties in the Paris that he so loved.

We have said that Nervo's life was a maze between belief and doubt; we have called him a Whitman who is unperturbed at saying, "Do I contradict myself? Very well, then, I contradict myself." Concerning these changing dispositions, Wellman writes:

> "Paradoxical as it may seem, 'Ya Todo Es Impossible,' dated May 31, 1912, is black despair. And two days later, 'Esperanza,' dated June 2, 1912, is the essence of hope. In 'El Don,' dated February 2, 1915, life, he says is drawing to a close, the hour of prayer has already sounded from the tower and he wonders if it must end without certitude. On the next page, 'Todo Yo,' dated February 9, 1915, is the ecstasy of faith. In La Amada Inmóvil, after a few pages of moral anguish, Nervo says that he is resigned, but turn the pages and he says: 'I'm not resigned. I lie if I say Thy Will. Either like Lazarus bring her back to me, or turn me into a phantom like her.' Material is vast for an entire study of grotesque contradictions in Nervo."[2]

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2. Esther Turner Wellman, Amado Nervo: Mexico's Religious Poet, pp. 191, 192.

On examining a number of passages relative to the optimistic and pessimistic angle of Nervo's philosophy, we can see the validity of this criticism. In Serenidad, for instance, Nervo says,

> "Nada en el fondo extingue mi tenaz optimismo."[3]

Again in En torno a la guerra, the book in which the optimistic spirit of Maeterlinck makes such a marked impression, Nervo expresses the same sentiment:

> "Yo soy un optimista incurable."[4]

At times his optimism is found in expressions of sweet lyrical passion:

> "Si eres pequeño, alégrate, porque tú pequeñez sirve de contraste a otros en el universo; porque esa pequeñez constituye la razón esencial de su grandeza; porque para ser ellos grandes han necesitado que tú seas pequeño, como la montaña para culminar necesita lazarse entre colinas, lomas y cerros.
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> . . . .
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> Si eres rico, alégrate, por toda la fuerza que el Destino ha puesto en tus manos, para la de derrames...
>
> Si eres pobre, alégrate, porque tus alas serán mas ligeras; porque la vida te sujectará menos, porque el Padre realizará en ti más directamente que en el rico el amable prodigio periódico del pan cotiano...
>
> Alégrate si amas, porque eres mas semejante a Dios que los otros.
>
> Alégrate si eres amado, porque hay en esto una predestinación maravillosa.

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3. Op. cit., p. 29.

4. Op. cit., p. 43.

> Alégrate si eres pequeño, alégrate si eres grande, alégrate si tienes salud; alégrate si las has perdido; alégrate si eres rico, si eres pobre, alégrate; alégrate si te aman; si amas, alégrate; alégrate siempre, siempre, siempre."[5]

In the midst of the horrible days of the great World War, Nervo did not become embittered. It was a hard blow to him, but things were not so dark as to extinguish every ray of hope. In a spirit of optimism he writes:

> "No, el mundo no yace en tanto desamparo como creemos en nuestro momentos de tristeza...El mundo, aunque ello se crea una paradoja, está ahora más cerca que nunca de la verdad porque, como dice el propio Bourget en su citado libro (y lo habían dicho ya tantos grandes místicos), 'cuando sentimos que Dios nos falta es cuando está más cerca de nosotros..!"[6]

At times, Nervo was not only a great optimist, but he tried to instill this optimism in the hearts of other people:

> "No temas nunca, en los casos angustiosos, decir una palabra optimista."[7]

Or,

> "Nade hay tan contagioaso come el optimismo. Vivir con un amigo optimista es encontar la clave de la felicidad."[8]

Observe how Nervo changes to the other extreme and becomes an apostle of pessimism:

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5. Amado Nervo, Plentitud, pp. 137, 138.
6. Amado Nervo, En torno a la guerra, p. 170.
7. Amado Nervo, Plentitud, p. 49.
8. Amado Nervo, Mis Filosofías, p. 19.

> "Yes, great poets, great artists, great philosophers; the world is bad...Life is pessimism."[9]

Sometimes he thinks about life. He is worried over its perplexities, and the "why" of existence. Buried in such thoughts, he emerges to give us such pessimistic philosophy as:

> "Life is a dry and arid path that leads from one garden to another more or less distant: from the garden that is found before the cradle, to the garden that is found after death..."[10]

Wherein can one find optimism in these words of Nervo? Are they not more reminiscent of an Ingersoll?

This changing of philosophy cannot be attributed to chronological factors, for, as Wellman stated, "Ya todo es imposible" and "Esperanza" were written the one within two days of the other, yet "Ya todo es imposible" is an expression of bitter despair, while "Esperanza" is the very essence of hope. To what, then, can we attribute Nervo's eccentric method of switching back and forth, first to an optimistic view of life, then to a pessimistic outlook? Wellman has suggested that the first change, when Nervo turned away from pessimism, came about as the result of the influence of Unamuno:

> "Have the holy courage of your sadness, Nervo wrote to another poet. But Unamuno

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9. Amado Nervo, Las ideas de Tello Téllez, p. 145.

10. Ibid., p. 178.

> retorted--do not poets rather need to be told that they should have the holy courage of their joy? This was a wholesome corrective for one who in his Modernista days drank too deeply from the Symbolists and the decadents. The reaction toward classicism after the debauchery of Verlaine and his followers was in the air. Amado Nervo drank it in from many sources. It was in France. It was in Spain. It was in Spanish America. Yet, is not possible that this criticism from Unamuno may have also been one of the many contributing causes to the great change that came over Nervo's writings?"[11]

No individual who has an intense love of nature, women, children, and humanity in general, can be called a pessimist. Nervo had such love; he loved life. Yet his writings often reflect pessimism and despair. At least a part of this gloominess, I feel, can be attributed, not to Nervo's enmity toward life, but to the fear of death that constantly haunted him in his early years. Probably the one great element that accounts for his shifting philosophy of life, is his colossal reading scope. He read Unamuno and Maeterlinck, for example, and ascended to realms of optimism. He read Schopenhauer and slid into the depths of pessimism. Thus we see why Nervo apparently accepted both a pessimistic and an optimistic philosophy of life. His speech at the University of Columbia in New York, would seem to indicate that his real philosophy was a happy medium between the two, for when he was asked to explain the philosophy that inspired his works, he replied:

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11. Esther Turner Wellman, op. cit., p. 132.

> "The world is neither beautiful nor ugly, neither sad nor gay; things are neither black nor rosy, neither big nor small, everything is as we wish to make it; all depends on the point of view from whence we judge it. A pessimist is inclined to make the worse of everything, and he reaches the end with a load which he is unable to support. On the other hand, the optimist looks at things from the best side and lives quietly and happily in hope and faith."[12]

Certainly, on the basis of the philosophy expressed in this excerpt from his speech, one could hardly call Nervo either a pessimist or an optimist. It is, I feel, likewise true of his novels. Concerning this particular phase of Nervo's philosophy, Concha Meléndez writes:

> "El bardo del misterio amó la vida. Su temperamento es sensitivo, que le llevaba con frecuencia a las márgenes del 'Gran Secreto,' le hacía comprender y gozar todas las bellezas de la tierra. Un simple hilo de agua inspira su mejor poema. La contemplación de una flor provoca en él suaves éxtasis, y en los árboles, en el viento, en el mar, en las piedras, escucha voces siempre interesantes y nuevas.
>
> La vida para él es un milagro perpetuo que sus ojos no se cansan de mirar. En esto difiere de casi todos los místicos de occidente, para quienes la vida era destierro doloroso."[13]

We do not intend to take issue with Dr. Meléndez, for we, too, think that the real Nervo loved life, and as to his profound love for nature, we reserve it for

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12. "Amado Nervo at the Columbia University," in Bulletin of the Pan American Union, Vol. XLVIII, p. 192.

13. Concha Meléndez, Amado Nervo, p. 81.

a later chapter. Nevertheless, some of Nervo's works express a pessimistic philosophy of life. They reflect the vicissitudes of a man who, in his quest to find the best road from life to death, must have been at times perplexed with the question, "What philosophy shall I support?"

It was Pope who said:

> A little learning is a dangerous thing;
> Drink deep, or taste not the Pierian spring.[14]

But Nervo drank too deeply from the Pierian spring. He steeped too much on the philosophy of others.

Having examined Nervo's philosophy of life, let us discuss a very closely related subject, his religious beliefs. Here, again, one encounters difficulties, for Nervo, like John Dryden, varied in his religious principles. He had, at some time in his life, a Christian, a pantheistic, and a Buddhistic interpretation of existence, and its destiny. It is not our intention to cast any disparagement on Nervo's religious beliefs. Various religious organizations have different doctrines, and certain fundamentals and principles on which that doctrine is based. It would not only be dogmatic, but it would also be foolish to say "this is the only true religion," for there are many things relative to the Deity, as, indeed, there are things in the physical world, that man does not understand. Nervo, himself, says,

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14. Alexander Pope, An Essay on Criticism.

"Hay muchas cosas en los cielos y en la tierra que no comprende nuestro filosofía."[15]

And again,

> "Religion, of which Jesus is the divine founder, has such profundity that no one has as yet been able to understand it. Christianity has not yet directed the powerful leaven that there is in it. We have not yet penetrated the depth of the heart of Christ...But, in spite of all the aberrations of fanaticism, of all the supersititons of formalism, of all the traditional hideousness of hypocrisy, and in spite of all the childish fancies of Theology, the Gospel has modified the world and consolidated the earth."[16]

Nervo's entire life was more or less a preparation for death. He was constantly haunted by the fear of death in his earlier years. This is especially true of his days at Jacona. He confesses this dread of death in the preface to La amada inmóvil:

> "Todas las noches, al sentir la suave invasión del sueno, me digo: 'Quizá no despertaré.' Y me complazco en cruzar las manos sobre el pecho, con esa definitiva actitud de reposo...qué tanto ansio! y por las mañanas el alba que se cuella, con su insorportable tinte azul, por las rendijas, me produce desconsuelos insondables. Es esta la hora más terrible de las veinticuatro, que como dos docenas de puñales se me clavan a diario en el corazón."[17]

Thus it is seen that, although Nervo was deeply religious, he was somewhat superstitious. He tried to avoid the fear of death through his efforts to convince

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15. Amado Nervo, Las ideas de Tello Téllez, p. 81.

16. Amado Nervo, En torno a la guerra, p. 32.

17. Amado Nervo, La amada inmóvil, p. 47.

himself that death, in reality, does not exist, or if it exists it should be a pleasure to face it. Perchance his efforts were not in vain. Perhaps the fear of "shuffling off that mortal coil" had left him when he died, for in his last moments, he was serene and happy--ready to enjoy the beautiful dream that he had so often thought death to be.

There are evidences of stoicism shown in Amado Nervo's religious beliefs. In fact, he openly confesses his interest in the doctrine of the stoics:

> "I do not find anything more noble and more worthy than ancient stoicism, the ancient calmness before pain and death."[18]

To this belief he even attributes longevity:

> "The horse seldom gets to be thirty years old; he stops on twenty-five. The burro, on the other hand, nearly always lives to be thirty years old. To what can one attribute these extra five years? To his philosophy! The burro is a stoic philosopher."[19]

We again see a reflection of Nervo's interest in stoicism in his belief that everything that happens is justified, and no person should attempt to thwart his misfortunes or shape his own destiny. Let destiny fulfill itself! Listen while Nervo's writing unveils his stoicism:

> "Pero quizá la mejor, la más perfecta actitud del alma, cuando no puede lograr una cosa, es no orar, sino aceptarlo todo con amor; más bien dicho,

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18. Amado Nervo, El arquero divine, p. 46.

19. Amado Nervo, Mis filosofías, p. 36.

> orar continuamente por medio de esta aceptación, mas sin pedir merced alguna."[20]

And,

> "Lo que sucede debe suceder y esta bien que así sucede. Los designios de Dios se patentizan en los hechos inevitables, y todo lo inevitable es bueno."[21]

The philosophy of Epictetus, of whom Nervo was fond, no doubt had a great influence on the stoicism that is found in the philosophy of the latter.

Why love God? Nervo has given us the perfect answer to this question:

> "Si amas a Dios, en ninguna parte has de sentirte extranjero, porque El estará en todas las regiones, en lo más dulce de todos los países, en el límite indeciso de todos los horizontes.
>
> Si amas a Dios, en ninguna parte estarás triste, porque, a pesar de la diaria tragedia, El llena de jubilo el Universo.
>
> Si amas a Dios, no tendrás miedo de nada ni de nadie; porque nada puedes perder y todas las fuerzas del cosmos serían impotentes para quitarte tu heredad.
>
> Si amas a Dios, ya tienes alta ocupación para todos los instantes, porque no habrá acto que no ejecutes en su nombre, no el más humilde ni el más elevado."[22]

Nervo, then, was very religious. When his last moments came, his perplexities and his doubts cleared away. He was at peace with the world! As one critic

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20. Ibid., p. 215.

21. Amado Nervo, La amada inmóvil, p. 35.

22. Amado Nervo, La última vanidad, pp. 171, 172.

has said, "Glory came to this man,...because he saw God and told us of the vision, simply and with a tremor in his voice."[23]

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23. Colin, Verbo Selecto, pp. 21-27.

Mysticism of Nervo

Of the innumerable critics who have passed judgment on Amado Nervo's works, few have failed to notice the mysticism which permeates these works. They are more inclined to agree on this characteristic of the Mexican writer than any other, and Nervo's writings possess a unique variety and scope. There is contained in nearly all of the accounts of his life, and the various literary criticisms of his works, some reference to the mysterious and mystical element in which he was so deeply interested. One has only to read some of Nervo's productions, however, or even glance at some of their titles, to learn that the critics' interest in this mysticism is not without foundation or justification. This mystic tinge, or rather saturation, is, as we will show, revealed in many of Nervo's novels. At the present it is necessary to get some insight into the basis of Nervo's interest in mysticism, and to learn some of the underlying factors that affected this interest.

Nervo, as has already been mentioned, had a keen interest in religion and theology. He was educated for the priesthood in the Catholic seminary of Jacona. Beals, as I have previously quoted, refers to Nervo's early interest in mysticism at the seminary:

> "There, reading the works of the church fathers, under the spell of dim-storied windows and fragrant incense, he became inculcated with a mysticism, a melancholy, and a reverence that later suffused itself over the pages of his poetry in rich, colorful harmony, breathing into it a sorrowful, at times too anemic, search for religious fundamentals."[1]

It was at Jacona, then, that the seed of mysticism first germinated in Amado Nervo's heart.

It is interesting to note that Nervo wrote the only modern biography of Sor Juana Inez de la Cruz, the great colonial poetess and one of the most outstanding Spanish mystics. Nervo, too, was very fond of Fray Luís de León, another great Spanish mystic. As Concha Meléndez has pointed out, in that unusually interesting book entitled Amado Nervo, Nervo's works many times reflect the influence of Fray Luís de León. Inasmuch as Nervo was so interested in, and influenced by, these two great Spanish mystics, and principally because "mysticism" is a term often misunderstood, let us observe what certain writers have said concerning Spanish mysticism:

> "Castilian mysticism has its starting-point neither in the abstract idea of the One, nor in the world of representations whence it may rise to know the invisibilis Dei per ea quae facta sunt... It proceeds from the introspective knowledge of the self, the eyes being closed to the intelligible in order to reach the bare essence and centre of the soul, which is God, and to be united in 'substantial experience' with Divine Wisdom and Love."[2]

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1. Carleton Beals, op. cit., p. 57.

2. Miguel de Unamuno, En torno al Casticismo, p. 153.

To this discussion, Peers adds the following remarks:

> "All this is but another way of saying that Spanish mysticism is intensely fervid, realistic, and personal. Nothing could be less like pantheism, nothing farther from self-annihilation. St. Tereas's first mystical work is a book of her own life. Luis de Leon writes On Self-Knowledge. 'The soul's first step,' says San Juan de la Cruz, 'towards a knowledge of itself.' In truth, the Spanish mystic's primary care is to know himself, and this to him is an inseparable part of his great ideal--to know and be one with God. In the mysticism of any Christian there is much of this: it is almost inherent in any true definition of the word. But in Spain it has unparalleled force and intensity; we are never far away from it."[3]

R. A. Vaughan has rendered his definition of mysticism in these words:

> "Philosophers and monks alike employ the word 'mysticism' and its cognate terms as involving the idea, not merely of initiation into something hidden, but, beyond this, of an internal manifestation of the Divine to the intuition or in the feeling of the secluded soul."[4]

With these explanations in mind, let us ascend with Nervo into realms unknown, and see how he, after searching out mysterious elements, philosophizes on them in an interesting manner.

Nervo, like Fray Luís de León, was interested in the stars and other heavenly constellations. He was the "poeta astrónomo" of his age. "Both writers," as Dr. Melendez says, "attributed to the contemplation of the stars,

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3. E. Allison Peers, Spanish Mysticism, p. 42.

4. R. A. Vaughan, Hours with the Mystics, Vol. 1., p. 21.

the power of making the spirit serene."[5] Nervo expresses the idea in his "La paz que baja las estrellas."

> "The stars are the companions of the souls that thirst for light and hunger for love; and for this reason, when we contemplate them, our small anguishes vanish in an hour as by charm, and for this reason a divine peace descends toward the heart of man in the clear nights; the peace that descends from the stars."[6]

Meléndez, in a comparison of the two mystics, makes this statement:

> "Several critics, Nicholás Heredia among them, make note (of the fact) that in Fray Luis there is not observed the unbalance that characterized the mystics, and they see in him better a contemplative person whose serenity is disturbed at times by the anxiety to learn. For this reason his mysticism is of such sublime quality. Like the Nervo of Plentitud and Elevación, he knew how to reach his power and to search out ecstasy through the difficult path of knowledge."[7]

In a discussion of the mysticism of Amado Nervo, Meléndez says:

> "The development of Amado Nervo's personality is one of the most beautiful examples that literary history can give us of progress ascending into the intellectual and spiritual. Thus he himself could say in his declining years:
>
> 'Now you are approaching the end;
> Your lesson is learned
> And your gem was polished,
> And your rose bush bore roses
> Your life is, through its unity
> A sphere of crystal.'"[8]

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5. Concha Meléndez, Amado Nervo, p. 57.

6. Amado Nervo, En torno a la guerra, p. 164.

7. Concha Meléndez, op. cit., pp. 57, 58.

8. Ibid., p. 63.

We get a touch of Nervo's mysticism too, in his Crónicas where he is speaking of his mother's death:

> "Then the little ray of sun, entangling itself like a golden thread in my hair, told me:
> 'Unhappy one!...I am the look of your mother that caresses you from the sky.'
> And the harmonious echo, singing about me murmured:
> 'Impious one!...I am the voice of your mother that blesses you from eternity.'
> In regard to the breeze, it folded its impalpable wings above me and sighed:
> 'Silly!...I am the kiss that your mother places on your face in order to show you that even in the tomb she does not forget you.'
> I smiled with the ray of light, sang with the echo, and sighed with the breeze. Then I thanked God because he has for all unfortunate souls, a trill, a little breeze, and a ray of sunshine."[9]

"God and the soul." Myself and God." This true world of the typical Spanish mystic found a loyal inhabitant in the personage of Amado Nervo. In his efforts to be alone with God, he must have assumed the contemplative countenance that is so characteristic of many of his pictures. He must have allowed himself to be carried idly away in a drowsy sleep, and in that sleep, dreams of the mysterious and the unknown must have come to him. Sweet dreams they must have been too, for certainly the dream which he imagined death to be is beautiful:

> "I have imagined death as a delightful dream in winter. A very long dream, in a very soft bed--during a winter without end--at the side of those I loved...And I have thought that there, every million years, for example, an angel comes, touches me on the

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9. Amado Nervo, Crónicas, p. 133.

shoulders and asks me: Do you want to get up? I stretch myself; I feel the maternal softness of my bed, the delight of my sleep, the soft beat that emanates from those that I love and that sleep with me, the infinite comfort of having them so near, and turning on the other side, I reply to the angel, 'No, I implore, let me sleep.'"[10]

Rubén Darío whom Nervo met in Paris, and who became an intimate friend of the Mexican, reveals the mysticism in Nervo's character when the latter became lost in the Cathedral of Notre Dame on Good Friday:

"No olvidaré nunca la Semana Santa que pasaba en París, allá por el tiempo de la Exposición, en constante compañía del pintor Henri de Groux, de otro pintor mejicano, de un joven, gallardo aficionado al teatro, también mejicano, y de Amado Nervo. Una noche; este soñador se nos desapareció, y hartos de buscarle en los lugares que solíamos frequentar, se me ocurrió indicar que probablemente le encontraríamos en una de las iglesias en donde, por las sagradas celebraciones, se cantaba canto llano y se sonaban organos sabios. Le buscamos, pues, en varias de ellas, y por fin le encontramos, lleno de fervor místico-artístico, en Notre-Dame, adonde había llegado después de la Sorbonne, Val de Grace, Saint-Sulpice hasta que fué a recalar en la catedral."[11]

Nervo was very fond of Shakespeare, and read with interest the works of the Bard of the Avon. We see the influence of the English writer clearly reflected in Nervo's novels. His "Azrael" ends with the famous words of Hamlet's soliloquoy: "Now it is necessary that I sleep--To die--To sleep! To sleep? Perchance to dream." These

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10. Amado Nervo, El diamante de la inquietud, p. 82.

11. Rubén Darío, in Las ideas de Tello Téllez, p. 30.

Shakespearian quotations found in Nervo's works all refer to the mystery of dreams, of life, and of death. Nervo was especially fond of Hamlet. "He", Meléndez says, "On speaking of our century, confesses his thirst for progress, his nostalgia for faith, his shipwreck on the sea of theories that does not remove his doubts, suffers the same speculative fever that provokes the delirium of Hamlet."[12] When one compares their pensive moods, their "sea of troubles" and the agony and conflicts with which they were forced to contend, one does not wonder at Nervo's interest in a great character that so resembled him.

In La amada inmóvil Nervo laments the death of one of his intimate friends, Ana Cecilia Luisa Dailliez. He demonstrates in this book the intensity of his love for his friend. It is interesting to note that Nervo, sorrowful and grief stricken at Ana's death, sought comfort in the study of astronomy and in the inquisition of the mysterious. In these sad moments, he made his poetry and his prose a vehicle for the divulgation of consoling ideas. In his efforts to soothe the pains and griefs of other, perchance he found a comfort for himself, for he says:

> "It is very sweet to be consoled, but it is sweeter to console."[13]

Las ideas de Tello Téllez, a book written during Amado Nervo's declining years, gives us an insight into the

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12. Concha Meléndez, op. cit., p. 14.

13. Amado Nervo, Mis filosofías, p. 204.

philosophy of a man who had read Novalis, William James, Maeterlinck, Emerson, and many other writers who had a philosophic or mystical gusto. Tello Téllez, who, in reality, is Nervo himself, discusses the mysteries of life, death, and dreams. He describes the spiritual evolution of man:

> "The bestial man loves no one. He does not even know how to love himself...we climb some stairs, and we find the man that knows how to love himself--the egoist...Some steps more and we find the man capable of loving a woman. We continue ascending, and we meet with the man that knows how to love his friends--that is prepared to serve them...We are now on very high plains...very high... But we ascend higher. Who is this resplendent figure, trembling with piety...this figure that wants to embrace all nature in the flame of his charity? It is San Francisco de Asis. Then, going higher, we find ourselves before Christ."[14]

Oriental philosophy and religion wrought a dominant influence on the mysticism of Nervo. Unfortunately this influence has been but slightly mentioned by most critics. We do know, however, that through the course of his literary career, the Christian mysticism and symbolism that had been the inspiration for so many of his works, ceased to exert a great influence on Nervo. In his later years "the sentimentality took on a pantheistic tone toward all living creatures and even toward inanimate objects. He found a mysterious presence even in the clouds, in running water, and in animals. His language became that of Buddhism, from which he drew the inspira-

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14. Amado Nervo, Las ideas de Tello Téllez, pp. 58, 59.

tion of his last volume of verse."[15] As one of the most visible instances of Buddhism in Nervo, we cite his belief in the theory of reincarnation that is explained in Las ideas de Tello Téllez. Meléndez makes this observation:

> "Chapter IV of the Ideas explains the objective of reincarnation: we are born again to pass through evolution; the spirit perfects itself, following laws resembling those discovered in the physical world by Darwin and Mendel."[16]

Nervo, like the Buddhists, worshipped God in nature. "The universe has nostalgia for God," he says, and he sought Him in the trees, the rose, the thorn. Like Dickens, he, during his optimistic moments, had a great belief in humanity. In every soul he could perceive a spark of the Divine. It is erroneous, however, to say that his love for oriental philosophy and the teachings of Gautama Siddhartha, caused Nervo to lose his profound love for Christ, for Jesus was for him "el más perfecto tipo de idealidad que se haya producido en el planeta."

Tello Tellez, in speaking on "Nuestro Pensamiento," gives Amado Nervo's theosophical conception of thought in this passage:

> "The men that have the habit of thinking harmonious and noble thoughts: the wise, the artists, the poets, the philanthropists, the shepherds of villages, finish by creating a

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15. Alfred Coester, Anthology of the Modernista in Spanish America, p. 308.

16. Concha Meléndez, op. cit., p. 74.

> court of 'forms of thought' serene, smiling, amiable, full of eurythmy and beauty."[17]

A similar conception of thought is shown in Nervo's novel, En torno a la guerra:

> "Beautiful thoughts are the emanations of the beautiful souls, that diffuse their own substances, as the perfumes are the particles of the flowers that are evaporated. A noble soul cannot breathe anything but nobleness as a rose cannot smell but like a rose."[18]

Beals was interested in comparing and contrasting the mysticism of Amado Nervo with that of Blake, the English mystic:

> "Though a Mexican of the transition era, Nervo lived in a realm of universals. In his mysticism he has more kinship with Blake than any other English poet. Both derived their rapt mysticism from a deeply religious source; both claimed to have been inspired by spirits... As with Blake, the mysticism of Nervo frequently disintegrates into sidereal vagueness or theosophical contemplation. Blake was more artistic in temperament. Nervo is more the philosopher. Both are individualists."[19]

Nervo had a great reverence for the mystic writers, Fray Luís de León, and Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz. The mysticism in his works was influenced in no small degree by these writers. He was definitely a mystic, and because of this fact, he wrote about the mysterious things in which he could see an internal manifestation of the Divine. "There is", he says, "I don't know where, per-

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17. Amado Nervo, Las ideas de Tello Téllez, pp. 123, 124.

18. Op. cit., p. 174.

19. Carleton Beals, op. cit., p. 57.

haps within me, myself, or in some higher plain, an admirable corner which is entered by a mysterious door... But I do not possess the key!" He did possess the key to the door of mysticism, however, and his writings so reflect this mysticism that such imminent critics as Enrique González Martínez have remarked "Nervo was always a mystic."[20] Like a lonely rose he existed--now turning its petals to the sun of Distrust and Incredulity, now kissed by the showers of Faith and Belief.

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20. Enrique González Martínez, in La última vanidad, p. 224.

Nervo's Love for Nature

Amado Nervo's works are imbued with expression of his love for nature. He frequently speaks of flowers, birds, and streams. Indeed, he seems to have found "a mysterious presence even in the clouds, in running water, and in animals."[1] Many of his works bear titles which are indicative of his love for nature. Among these might be mentioned "Pájaros Fritos", "Nuestro Amigo el Grillo", "Los jardines interiores", and El Estanque de los lotos. After reading a few of his works, an individual, though he knows nothing of Nervo's life, can get a number of impressions that will enable him to understand the writer. Among the impressions remaining to that individual, Nervo's love for all the manifestations of nature will stand out as one of the most striking. Should a person be asked, after examining a few of the Mexican's works, to give a description of the man himself, no doubt that person would describe him as a lover of solitary strolls into the country where he could behold the wild flowers, hear the birds chant their melodies, and see the blue streams flowing along the roadside. It would not seem strange, after making a more thorough examination of Nervo's works, to hear him cry out as he really does,

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1. Alfred Coester, op. cit., p. 308.

> "How is it possible to fear and suffer and cry when the sky is blue, and the day is pure gold, and nature seems in ecstasy before the sun, and the water sings, and the air speaks its mysterious fluttering stanzas?"[2]

Nervo's love of nature is revealed many times in figurative language in which he gives us striking similes. As, for example,

> "I consider the world as a simple garden, and I have the happiness of a plant in the sun. I do not ask human nature for more than it can give me. I am unconscious and happy like a primrose, a cauliflower, or a peach."[3]

Or,

> "Our lives are the rivers that lead to the sea which is death."[4]

Amado Nervo's love for nature is revealed very plainly in Pascual Aguilera. He knew nature thoroughly; he describes its many beauties, and he describes them so accurately that to read his descriptions is almost to see the things themselves. Let us observe his method of describing the month of May:

> "May stretched carpets of flowers over the plains and the hills. The harvesting of wheat was begun.
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> . . .
>
> The mornings were radiant and warm; then at dawn an impression of light rose filled the sky--a rose colored apotheosis; later, the rising of the sun was a high sea of mother-of-pearl, and, at last, the sun began to appear incandescent and enor-

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2. Amado Nervo, Mis filosofías, p. 19.

3. Ibid., p. 26.

4. Amado Nervo, Las ideas de Tello Téllez, p. 164.

mous, exhilarating with its torrid kiss all it created."[5]

If he succeeded in describing a sunrise accurately and vividly, he was equally successful in portraying a sunset:

> "The evening fell in the midst of a vomiting conflagration of colors, and a purpurate cloud projected its glowing red upon the carpet, across from the window panes."[6]

Nervo, mystic as he was, often let his mind and his thoughts drift to realms in which he himself seemed to be a part of nature. This he reveals in one of his works:

> "In the autumnal afternoons, when the sky is blue, and I wander to the bank of the ocean, the world seems bathed in a divine serenity and submerged in a mysterious expectation; the stars begin to appear, and my soul sways with the rythm of the ocean itself, over the peace of things...Only then I am not myself."[7]

Amado Nervo had a keen interest in the conservation of wild life. In "Pájaros Fritos" he satirized mankind for the consumption of an immense number of birds each year for food. He was interested in birds to the extent that, when he was in France, he compiled a group of statistics relative to the number of birds killed there each year:

> "The number of birds captured annually in Europe reaches startling figures. I have here a few statistics:

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5. Amado Nervo, Pascual Aguilera, p. 68.

6. Ibid., p. 132.

7. Amado Nervo, Mis filosofías, p. 183.

> For ten years people in France wanted to know how many birds had been exported from Gironde, and irrefutable documents gave the number as fifty million pounds, that represented a mass of seventy-five thousand birds dead in only a few months. Well, entomologists list two hundred as the number of insects, larvas, aphids, caterpillars, and flies that an insectivorous bird devours daily. Multiply two hundred by seventy-five thousand then, and you will thus know the quantity of injurious insects that the birds killed in Gironde have failed to destroy daily.
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> . . .
>
> All because the stupidity of men and women destroyed (the former in their foolish desire for profits, and the latter in their desire for ridiculous fashions) the flock of birds, glory, music, utility, and happiness of creation."[8]

In Ellos Nervo makes a touching plea for the protection of birds:

> "I have not seen anything more cruel than the torment of the little bird:
>
> Oh soul, you are similar to this little bird! Oh poets, oh artists, oh beings of thought and of illusion, oh men born for great things, you are like this lamentable little bird."[9]

From the clamor and noise of the large cities Nervo was wont to steal away and perceive the beautiful manifestations of nature, for as he says:

> "Nothing is more logical, more healthful, more opportune, then, than to escape each year from the large cities toward the beaches, toward the sea, father of our blood, restorer of all life and of all strength."[10]

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8. Amado Nervo, Crónicas, pp. 240, 241.

9. Amado Nervo, Ellas, pp. 188, 189.

10. Amado Nervo, Mis filosofías, p. 129.

He wanted to be alone with nature, to perceive the green wheat fields after they had been refreshed by a spring shower or when they stood in golden grain ready for harvest. He wanted to behold the beauties of the countryside--the fields, the trees, the animals. This desire to be alone with the marvelous creations of God was not a mere means of spending leisure hours. There was a true reason for it. Nervo, by perceiving the things that make life beautiful, was able to forget those trying moments that often make one become pessimistic and cynical. He found solace and comfort in the beauties of nature, for they enabled him to forget those struggles for existence that, after the death of his father, had taken him forever from his native mountain state of Nayarit.

In nature, then, Nervo found peace and a relief from the sorrows and misfortunes that were so numerous in his life. In his Mis filosofías, he writes:

> "We are sad! But on crossing the threshold of our dwelling place, a ray of a matutinal sun, that is a multitude of atoms, a small milky way in a turbulent whirlwind of life, tells us 'Good day', and in that same instant we feel all preoccupations vanish, all problems solved, every road open."[11]

Nervo, like all of the great mystic writers, was strongly devoted to nature. Like them, too, he found a spiritual interpretation of its manifestations and its beauties.

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11. Amado Nervo, op. cit., p. 19.

Nervo's Attitude Toward War

In 1910, when aviation had scarcely made its appearance, and men were still observing, half astonished, half doubting, the mysterious "flying machine" and its miraculous powers, Amado Nervo took his first airplane ride. Shortly afterwards, he wrote a tribute to the miraculous "bird." In this tribute to the airplane, Nervo, in an artistic and brilliant manner, voiced his profound love for peace and his bitter contempt for war. He implored the nations and countries to stain not the celestial bird with missions of war, for it was made, not to inflict suffering and humiliation upon mankind, but to sow the seeds of peace throughout all the land. Then, in 1914, when the World War broke out, and the airplane was used as a weapon of warfare, Nervo still, probably more in a spirit of optimism than in a spirit of belief, retained his conception of the airplane as being a symbol of peace.

Let us turn now, to another work by Nervo, an entire volume devoted to the discussion of war. It is a story of the horrors and evils of war written by a man that understood and hated it. In the book, <u>En torno a la guerra</u>, the writer states that a definite, everlasting, and universal peace will never be established except through the will and efforts of the mothers throughout the land. In a

philosophical spirit, and one that perhaps contains much truth, he says:

> "Mothers, without you there would never have been war. If you didn't want it, it would never have existed, even though all the rulers entered into conspiracy. Instead of the name of the father, teach your sons to say 'Peace!'"[1]

Many times, as has been the case in the past, a youth may be of sound moral character, and a member of a respectable home. Influenced by melliflous patriotic speeches, and the sound of drums, however, he enlists in the army to be taken to foreign fields. He fights, but he knows not the ultimate purpose for which he is fighting. When the call for mobilization is issued, he dons his brightly colored uniform, and, at the sound of bugle calls, marches off to the firing lines. Past training is forgotten, then, for here begin those underlying elements that make war hell. But let us see how Nervo, who, in a manner that cannot be improved realistically by a veteran soldier, describes the situation.

> "Now--all the legal and ethical aspects have changed. When you and your companions do not have means of firing at the enemy, you undress women and laugh at their blushes. You cut the necks of children, lash old men, steal whatever you come in contact with; you burn the humble houses of the farmers, destroy cities, rob banks, shoot an unfortunate person because he might be a spy, and all this (you do) before the pleasing smile of your leaders.

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1. Amado Nervo, En torno a la guerra, p. 11.

> When the war is over, they will give you a military medal, and bestow other honors on you; you will return to your home where you will be surrounded in admiration by your neighbors; and you will again carry packages of candy to the wife and children on Sunday, and buy little moral and instructional stories for the latter, being careful that they do not see movie shows of cunning violence."[2]

How appropriately these words reflect Amado Nervo's bitter contempt for war! What weary private, still unhardened by the bloody slaughter and the ghastly nature of war, could give a better account of its horrors? Had Nervo lived to view the present European conflicts, perchance he would have written another book on war. That book, though it could not have contained a more vivid account of international conflicts or more biting satire, than En torno a la guerra, would probably have related the greater evils that have been wrought by brilliant minds and modern weapons of warfare. It would have made Nervo's account of the tragedies of war during the day seem mild:

> "It is a good business. In order to settle it, one or two thousand men are sacrificed. One or two hundred thousand remain in misery; many become prostitutes; many commit suicide because of having reached the last limit of human resistance; infinite numbers of children die from rickets. Many countries are definitely ruined; others will become victims of the plague and hunger for several years. But ten or twelve generals, four or five trusts, or two or three kings will realize a brilliant operation. For them you, wise artists, industrialists, agriculturists, you go to fight; for them you have abandoned as much as is necessary for you in life; for them you will spend tortur-

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2. Amado Nervo, op. cit., p. 14.

> ous nights of uneasiness, lingering days of sun and rain, and they will stretch you out later on an improvised operating table, and if you have the good fortune of returning to your home as invalids or sick persons, comforts and smiles will have vanished forever from you."[3]

There are those who, because of their distance from the scene of fighting, view a controversy with indifference. To them we should direct this bit of Nervo's philosophy:

> "There is no nation that suffers without all human nature suffering, and even the most egotistic beings have to suffer the great conflagrations through force.
>
> It is vain that you pretend to shrug your shoulders before an European war, thinking that you are in America, many thousands of miles from the bloody scene. The confusion and cowardice of money will reach you in the most distant refuge."[4]

Thus we see Nervo's recognition of the far-reaching effects and evils of war. Almost three decades ago, during the turmoil of the World War, he wrote his En torno a la guerra. He violently attacked war; he assailed its horrors--its evils. He was not afraid to publish his thoughts or voice his sentiments, and in those publications and these expressions, there is one statement that casts a crown of thorns at modern dictators:

> "One man invested with the human

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3. Ibid., p. 15.

4. Ibid., p. 20.

> idiocy of formidable powers, can, with a declaration of war, hurl fifty thousand beings into extermination."[5]

In El arquero divino Nervo offers no defense of war. It seems a disease, a pain that at regular intervals attacks mankind:

> "War does not have the explanations nor the political, economic, or religious motives that the philosophers and publicists attribute to it. It is a simple infirmity of the species; an immense organism subject to periodical crises as all organisms. The remedy is always victory, and death is always defeat."[6]

In Las ideas de Tello Téllez we get another expression of Nervo's attitude toward war:

> "I desire that the frontiers may disappear; that the sons of mankind may understand each other in one language; that the ultra-modern weapons may orient themselves in the museums of future cities; that soon it may not be thought necessary for the rational beings on this side of the river or of the mountain to kill those on the other side in order to maintain a balance of power.
>
> I desire these things with all my heart, and their appearance will illuminate my old age with glory."[7]

Nervo's own inner nature may have been one of the principle factors in his abhorrence for war. He enjoyed solitude. He liked silence. Many of what he considered to be his most pleasant hours were spent in some obscure room or library where he could study, or engage in profound meditations. His pictures often show him in a

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5. Ibid., p. 15.
6. Amado Nervo, El arquero divino, p. 88.
7. Amado Nervo, Las ideas de Tello Téllez, p. 88.

pensive mood as he sits with his chin in his hand, his eyes lowered, and a serious expression on his face. In these contemplative moods, he passed the hours. Paradoxical as it may seem, he loved people, too. He had the gift of winning friendships, and in Paris he seems to have lived a rather gay and carefree life. But the real Nervo, if his works reveal his true character, enjoyed solitude, calmness and serentiy. This, I feel, coupled with his own better judgment, is one of the principal reasons why he hated world conflicts. With this avowed hatred for war, and his intense love of his native land, Nervo's works, as I have suggested, might have assumed a different angle had he viewed the terror of the Mexican Revolution.

Calmness, serenity, and peace--a yearning for peace--perhaps these desires enveloped Nervo's mind when he wrote:

> "There is something as necessary as the bread of each day, and it is the peace of each day; peace, without which bread itself is bitter. We ought to add to our Paternoster, 'Give us, Lord, peace each day.'"[8]

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8. Amado Nervo, El arquero divino, p. 210.

The Patriotism of Nervo

If Amado Nervo's people and his country loved him, and one has only to consider the homage and reverence paid to him at his death to understand their affection for him, he did not fail to return this affection. This he demonstrates in his novels. Nervo was very patriotic, and he showed this spirit of patriotism, not only in his novels and his poetry, but in his daily actions, also. We read, for example, in Monterde's account of Nervo's life that the latter, because of a coffee-house dispute in which he was offended by some insulting remark about Mexico, was at the point of striking the offender.[1] This may have been the same dispute to which Carleton Beals refers in enumerating the many anecdotes told by Nervo himself concerning his life in Paris. Beals says, "He slapped a French count across the face for insulting Mexico, his beloved Patria."[2]

During his days as a diplomat in the Mexican Legation at Madrid, too, Nervo revealed the depth and intensity of his patriotism. When he found himself without resources necessary for existence, he did not impose upon the kindness and generosity of his foreign friends. After they

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1. Monterde, op. cit., p. 2.

2. Carleton Beals, op. cit., p. 57.

succeeded in getting a pension approved for him, he refused to accept it. He courteously declined the offer, because he believed that what he earned with his pen was enough to provide the necessities of his simple existence. Nervo's respect for his native land, however, probably accounted for his refusal to accept the money. He would do nothing that might cast an unfavorable reflection on Mexico! In the concluding pages of his Crónicas, he has a short account entitled "Patria". In this account Nervo says:

> "But you?' I said to my friend, 'Are you not in sympathy with the misfortunes of the native land'?
>
> 'I', he answered sententiously and muffling his voice, 'Do not believe in this stuff about the native land. I am living in a more advanced atmosphere.'
>
> But in what atmosphere are you living? In England, where a Rudyard Kipling, with heated discourses, awakens the village and kindles its love for the land, making it see the apparition of a German invasion? Or in Germany, where a Gerardo Hauptmann, the most highly intelligent man of the upper Rhine, defines his patriotism in such a beautiful manner? Or in France where the greatest thinkers would not scorn to take the gun in order to defend the terre douce et triste of which the grand sire Hugo speaks?"

And later,

> "A person might affirm in any cafe that he was in Mexico by chance, and perhaps four boys would applaud him."[3]

In a discussion of the events that occurred during his thirteen years in the Mexican Legation, Nervo writes:

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3. Amado Nervo, Crónicas, pp. 265-267.

"I remember about three years ago, two sisters of Charity presented themselves in the Legation in order to ask for some recent information relative to Mexico. They said that they had a house near there and one of them, tall, white, and distinguished by her long pale hands, told me:

'I am a Mexican. My father was Francisco González Bocanegra, of whom, without doubt, you have heard mention.'

'What Mexican', I replied, 'Has not heard mention made of the author of the National Hymn?'

And we talked a long time on things concerning the native land."[4]

Nervo again voices his love and sympathy for the Mexican people in the following:

"Our brothers, the poor people, are insupportable in Madrid (may God pardon me for this uncharitable expression) they are nearly more insupportable than the poor people in Mexico."[5]

To think of the unfavorable conditions that exist in Mexico and to write about them, was almost beyond Nervo's power, and surely it must have given him great pain.

Not only did Nervo love and defend Mexico and its people, but he even reverenced and defended the language. He even devotes a chapter of his Crónicas to the "Triumph of our Language in the World." He discusses the Spanish language in an interesting manner:

"Who are the elegant people in Paris? Many Parisians, many Spanish-Americans, some Spaniards, some Englishmen, and some Russians.

. . .

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4. Ibid., pp. 254, 255.

5. Ibid., p. 61.

> We hear, then, the sweetness of our language on the lips of the most beautiful and elegant women of Madrid, of Buenos Aires, of Mexico, or of Santiago.
>
> We hear it everywhere, all the time.
>
> In all the luxurious shops Spanish is spoken.
>
> In London, the valet and the waiter that served me, in order to be grateful to me, learned during the night and rapidly recited to me on the following day, the Spanish sentences:
>
> 'The bath is prepared!'
>
> Or better:
>
> 'It will not rain today!'"[6]

The Mexico of today is different from the Mexico of Nervo's day. It does not have those bloody revolutions or bandit raids that were so characteristic of the country during Nervo's time. If he might have lived and written during the present age, probably no one would have questioned his defense of Mexico. One wonders, however, how the writer could have had a thorough knowledge of the illiteracy, backwardness, and revolutions that were so predominant in Mexico at the time that he was writing, and still defend the country. Perchance it was merely a whimsical spirit of patriotism influenced by the author's optimistic aspirations of what the country might some day become. I do not believe this to be the case, for I feel that Nervo has defended his patriotism in a brilliant manner:

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6. Ibid., pp. 248, 249.

> "There is no human activity inferior to another and above all there is no mental activity that is worth less than another mental activity. Likewise, there is no nation of inferior quality to another nation. All are admirable pieces of the universe."[7]

Mexico, along with many other countries, is proving today the veracity of Nervo's words.

Nervo frequently encouraged the Mexican people to work for the welfare and promotion of their country. For instance, he says:

> "We ought to work with soul and mind and mouth and hands in order that the stature of Mexico may be increased more and more."[8]

He continues:

> "Let us affirm our Mexican personality without arrogance, but without timidity, serenely, calmly!
>
> Let us not be as those poor beings whose only and sad ambition is to pass for Parisians in Paris, for Londoners in London, or for New Yorkers in New York."[9]

Amado Nervo's patriotism was not a whimsicality or a fantasy. He did love his country, and by working for the glorifying and expansion of it, he felt that he would be helping himself at the same time. This fact he expresses in the following lines:

> "I want Mexico to become great, through altruism and through egoism: for it and for me. Do you not see that the greater Mexico is, the greater I will be?"[10]

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7. Amado Nervo, Las ideas de Tello Téllez, p. 97.
8. Ibid., p. 92.
9. Ibid., p. 97.
10. Ibid., p. 96.

This, then, is the keynote--the essence, of Amado Nervo's patriotism. His love and his loyalty to his country did win him distinguished honor, and certainly, through the quality and quantity of his literary productions, he has been an honor and a great asset to Mexico.

Nervo, too, loved Mexico because that was the country in which he was born, and

> "Nature, on making us be born in a determined place has indicated to us in a precise manner that that place is the one that we ought to choose as the objective of our work."[11]

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11. Ibid., p. 93.

Conclusion

Amado Nervo stood out in his century as a striking and significant figure. He was a brilliant man and a prolific writer. So varied is he in his moods that one can arrive at an infinite number of conclusions concerning his philosophy. Embodied in his works one can find, almost at will, mysticism, contradictions, and various eccentricities. These contradictions and eccentricities make the study of Nervo difficult. It is too easy to come to erroneous conclusions. For this reason, his works must be examined thoroughly and patiently.

Sometimes he lets his pen glide unrestrained, and we get clarity and preciseness. When that one enthusiastic moment passes, he lapses into a pensive mood, and we get vagueness and contradiction. Influenced by such a variety of writers as Maeterlinck, Emerson, Poe, Schopenhauer, Wells, Shakespeare, Bergson, and Unamuno, how could he assemble his philosophy in a single unified principle? His true philosophy never stretches out its hands to us. Rather, we often have to pursue it through the pages. It is like a golden ray of sunlight shining in a nebulous sky. Sometimes it is revealed rather obscurely; sometimes it is almost completely concealed. Always there is revealed one phase of Nervo's philosophy: his universal

love.

Carleton Beals, in a discussion from Nervo from which I have frequently quoted, remarks that Nervo is a "twilight expression of a world fast settling into oblivion." Perhaps he is right. But the people of Mexico continue to read with interest Nervo's philosophical lines. Nor are his encomiums sung in Mexico alone, for his work has met with approval and praise in foreign countries. Perchance the world of Nervo is a dying world. But when its last twilight fades into darkness, there will remain, as a memorial, one bright constellation to illuminate the heavens: Nervo's sweet philosophical thoughts that are expressed in his novels. What, briefly, is his philosophy? We have said that it is difficult, if not impossible, to condense his attitudes and his principles to one statement. No general conclusions can be drawn from the beliefs of his school, because, as he says, he supports no school except the school of sincerity. We feel, however, that the essence of his philosophy is contained in his religious beliefs and his universal love. His novels reflect the ideas of a man who was a devout believer in God, and who thought that for all unfortunate souls, God has "a trill, a little breeze, and a ray of sunshine." In reality, he was a Dickens with his universal love, and his great faith in humanity. Life, his philosophy contends, is worth living; it has happiness to spare.

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TYPIST: Lenore Brown
302 Maple Street
Stillwater, Oklahoma
Phone, 1139-J